

THE ENIGMA OF MARKETING INFORMATION

'Man can embody truth, but he cannot know it' (W. B. Yeats)

Teresa Brannick¹

Introduction

In today's intensely competitive global business environment managers believe that the effective use of information can lead to competitive advantage. In this ever-changing environment the dynamic essential core of any business enterprise is its interaction with information and its ability to collate and analyse "relevant" information. From this perspective, where information is the key dynamic force, the marketing function can be viewed as a conduit that operates at the boundary between two information processing organisms: the business enterprise and society.

Marketing is at the interface between the firm and its markets. Marketing information is a critical element in this management process and is seen as the basis for effective decision making. It has been referred to as the fifth critical resource of the firm; the other four being money, materials, machines and men (Kotler, 1994: 124). Marketing practitioners within an organisation are the key actors in this exchange process between the organisation and its business environment. An essential aspect of a marketing practitioner's job is to monitor environmental changes and to facilitate the putting in place of correct strategic options. Information is the key force in this monitoring process.

The utilisation of market intelligence (long term focus) and marketing research (relatively immediate focus) has become a central issue for corporations who are striving to become more market oriented (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990). The marketing concept is evidenced

¹Business Research Programme, The Michael Smurfit Graduate School of Business, University College Dublin, Blackrock

by the existence of a marketing orientation which is defined by Kohli and Jaworski (1990) as intelligence generation and dissemination and responsiveness to information. Some marketing academics would argue that good information is a facilitator of successful marketing and that marketing management is first and foremost an information processing activity (Christopher, McDonald and Wills, 1980). The priority that a company affords to information concerning its markets, its competitors and its environment appears to be a key barometer of its marketing orientation. This view is reflected in the Marketing Science Institute's (1990) compilation of research priorities for the 1990s. Their ranking scheme gives top position to "improving the utilisation of market information".

Scientific and Narrative Information

As a linguistics term, information is used interchangeably with such terms as 'news', 'knowledge' and 'data'. The Oxford dictionary defines information as the act of informing or telling. The term, knowledge, is also used as a way of defining information. Synonyms like material, data, facts, news or figures are also used interchangeably with the word information. The information scientists' perspective concludes that conceptually, information can be both distinct from and interchangeable with data and knowledge Martin (1988). The theoretical and conventional way in which the word information is interchanged with other such terms as fact, knowledge or data and specifically defined as the act of telling or informing suggests that the term information is intrinsically linked to the whole process of knowing. From an interpretative user orientation information is the meaning or inward-forming of a person that results from an engagement with any stimuli. Hence it is not a purified and homogenised commodity or a resource that can be stockpiled. It is a skilled human accomplishment (Giddens, 1979).

This debate on the process of knowing, namely epistemology, goes on in many academic disciplines. The core issues at the very heart of this debate concern the ways in which we come to believe and accept some ideas and arguments as true, how we come to know what we know and how we act on that knowing. This debate about the nature of knowledge and reasoning has a very long history and can be traced back to differences between Aristotle and Plato. Aristotle believed that sense-experience was the only source of knowledge and in this way it was possible to discover the essence of things. Plato believed that mind, not matter, was fundamental and rejected ex-

perimentation as a scientific method in favour of rational argument. Aristotle was the first philosopher to formally identify these two forms of knowledge or reasoning, technical and practical.

Dunne (1993) in his seminal philosophical work, 'Back to the Rough Ground', discusses the historical and philosophical underpinnings of this debate on the nature of knowledge/reasoning. In Dunne's discourse, by adhering to Aristotle's language, the two traditions are referred to as 'Phronesis' and 'Techne' and he examines these in great detail. Dunne by drawing on the work of many philosophers (Aristotle, Newman, Collingwood, Arendt, Gadamer and Habermas) exposes the limits of technical reason ('Techne') and develops a philosophical context for analysing practical knowledge ('Phronesis'). According to Aristotle "many of our most obstinate and reasonable certitude depend on proofs which are informal and personal, which baffle our powers of analysis and cannot be brought under logical rule" (Dunne, 1993: 34). In Aristotle's words, Phronesis, which is practical wisdom, "is concerned with . . . particulars, which become familiar from experience" (Dunne, 1993: 35). The individual has a capacity for insight and judgement and this capacity is embedded in practical wisdom. Newman argues that experience and judgement are crucial, unsubstitutable qualities of a person who knows his way around an area. "Instead of trusting logical science, we must trust persons, namely those who by long acquaintance with their subject, have the right to judge . . . We must depend on practice and experience more than on reason". (Dunne, 1993: 35)

'Phronesis' emphasises the personal and experiential way of knowing while 'Techne' relies on a theoretical way of knowing. Technical reasoning ('Techne') involves distinctions between end and means, form and matter, end product and raw material, planning and execution. The technician escapes from the ambiguity of ordinary language by creating new words or by freezing existing words into technical terms with fixed precise meaning. There is an alternative to technical knowledge (Techne) which is referred to by Dunne as practical knowledge (phronesis). Practical knowledge (Phronesis) is an intuitive sense of the nature and texture of a practical engagement. Practical knowledge is like a fruit which can grow only in the soil of a person's experience and character and apart from the cultivation of this soil, there is no other way of acquiring this knowledge (Dunne, 1993: 358). One's practical knowledge is inseparable from one as a feeling, expressing and acting person and is an extension of oneself. One always carries the weight of one's past and one's community past which becomes part of the present and projections of the future.

Phronesis accepts the kind of buoyancy that language gives to thought (Dunne, 1993: 361)

Any discussion on the status and acceptability of different forms of information leads inevitably to the current philosophical debate between modernists and postmodernists. Modernism stands for the 'scientific' virtues of objectivity, rigour, detachment, logic and rationality whereas postmodernism acknowledges such 'artistic' attributes as intuition, creativity, speculation, emotion and involvement. In general, postmodernists argue that knowledge is bounded and "that our capacity to establish meaningful generalisations is limited and, rather than seeking the impossibility of universal truths, we should rejoice in the ephemerality, contingency and diversity of the physical and human worlds as we experience them, be comfortable in the absence of certainty, learn to live without definitive explanations and recognise that the objectives of the Enlightenment project are utopian and unattainable" (Brown, 1994: 81).

Dunne's two philosophical traditions of 'Phronesis' and 'Techne' closely mirrors Lyotard's (1986: 15) postmodernists distinction between Narrative and Scientific knowledge (see Figure 1). Both believe that our society has come to accept that truth lies in the area of scientific knowledge or information, in the form of empirical evidence and objective analysis. There is a commonly held view in western society that this scientific type knowledge is needed to guide man in all areas of practice. This particular mode of rationality, 'technical reason', is seen as a central problem of modernity.

FIGURE 1: LYOTARDS DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristics	Scientific Knowledge	Narrative Knowledge
Language Games	Denotative only (true/false)	Denotative (true/false) Prescriptive (just/unjust) Evaluative (beauty) Performative (efficient)
Social Bond	Indirectly a component of the bond by developing into a profession and professional class	Direct and shaped component of the bond
Competence	The competence required concerns the sender alone	Competence required by the sender, addressee and referent
Delivery	Gains no validity from the act of being reported	The act of narration validates
Time	Time is cumulative and linear, past is past and leads to present	Past is present, all in the here and now

In summary, Lyotard and other philosophers (as outlined by Dunne) argue the existence of different approaches to knowing, or to becoming informed, which are referred to as scientific knowledge (technical reasoning) and narrative knowledge (practical reasoning). While both are considered worthwhile and valuable, their legitimacy and validity are supported by and are a derivative of two very distinct philosophical temperaments. The Enlightenment temperament valued man's unequalled rational intellect and power to comprehend and exploit the laws of nature. In contrast, the Romantic valued man for his imaginative and spiritual aspirations, his emotional depths, his artistic creativity and his powers of individual self-expression. The scientists seek general laws about a single objective reality while the romantics see multiple realities as an extension of subjective awareness and they value the uniqueness of each object, event or experience. The romantics argue that the rational intellect cannot achieve objective

truth and that every fact is an interpretation of some sort. They assert that truth is not something which can be proved or disproved and is instead something that one creates. One genius celebrated by the Enlightenment temperament is Einstein while for the Romantic it is Nietzsche

A Marketing Perspective on Information

This section attempts to document how information is approached and understood in the marketing literature. In line with the user perspective on information, a marketing management approach will be adopted. This section begins by reviewing the treatment of marketing information systems in seven recent marketing textbooks (including European and American editions). In addition the marketing academic and applied research literatures in the following areas will be reviewed and collated:

1. Marketing textbooks treatment of marketing information
2. Practitioner attitudes toward marketing information systems,
3. The utilisation and the effectiveness of computerised information systems,
4. The utilisation of market research findings, and
5. Alternative approaches to information.

1. A Review of Recent Marketing Textbooks

The various definitions of marketing information systems (MIS) provided by marketing textbooks have the following four characteristics in common; the system stores and integrates marketing information (sometimes referred to as data) from many sources, it provides for the distribution of such information, it is likely to be computerised and it supports marketing management decision making. (Boone and Kurtz, 1995; Dibb et al., 1994; Jobber, 1995; McCarthy and Perreault, 1990; Kotler, 1994; Bradley, 1995; Baker, 1992b). These definitions focus on the objective form and content of the message/stimuli while ignoring the subjective, interpretative nature of information. This view or understanding tends to consider information essentially as a somewhat static, unchanging, sterile, objective entity. This latter perspective fails to take into account the dynamic and ever changing quality of

information when it is regarded as an ongoing, interpretative process rather than some end product.

The standard textbook approach to marketing research always incorporates the identification of three types or approaches to research; exploratory, descriptive and experimental. It sometimes incorporates the categorising of research into quantitative and qualitative traditions. Qualitative research is characterised as exploratory, uses small samples, and is useful before the 'real' research is undertaken. Group discussion, in depth interviews and observational techniques are usually classified as qualitative techniques. Consultation with experts is also relegated to the qualitative tag and can 'also help in exploratory research' (Jobber, 1995: 172). There is a consistent hierarchical pattern evident, moving from qualitative to quantitative type research and from exploratory through to experimental design. Baker (1992) differs from the other authors in so far as he acknowledges the more balanced approach which has recently emerged whereby both qualitative and quantitative research techniques are considered valid research approaches and both make an equal contribution. Qualitative research is considered more appropriate when addressing questions of what, how (process) and why, while quantitative research is more appropriate when dealing with who, where when or how (explanatory) questions (Baker, 1992: 284).

The textbook approach to categorising research is a reflection of one particular epistemological tradition, logical positivism. The value that is given to each of these types of research is derived from this particular tradition. The commercial value is also derived from this tradition, hence some types of research are labelled as more worthwhile than other. Thus we have the interesting question as to why consultation with experts is used only to provide background information. This approach to marketing research practice has dominated marketing thought for the past three decades (Hirschman, 1986).

The review of the most up-to-date marketing management textbooks, which focused on the treatment of marketing information systems, shows that there is an embedded scientific rationality approach to information with little or no attention being given to the more subjective, hermeneutic or narrative approach.

2. Practitioner attitudes toward marketing information systems

There is little published research on marketing information systems. The few studies that exist are very particularistic in so far as they have been conducted in different countries, over different time periods and

use different theoretical approaches. Stone and Good surveyed American marketing managers about their information systems and concluded that the managers perceived marketing information as very important but that marketing information systems were under-utilised (Stone and Good, 1989: 26). In 1988 Jobber and Watts reported that the UK manufacturing companies who responded to their survey were satisfied with their marketing information system. They found favourable attitudes towards the quality of the information with respect to 'usefulness, up-to-dateness and width of information' (Jobber and Watts, 1988: 34). They also found that the system was user friendly and that a high level of technical knowledge was not required to understand the system. Overall, the attitudes were very favourable with a minority of the companies reporting that some of the information was unreliable and on occasions, at peak periods, it was difficult to access information quickly. The UK based study by Oasis (1991) found that while the majority of organisations were aware of the importance of information to marketing, less than 1% of organisations had achieved success in using information as a core business resource. In addition, only a minority of the marketing managers recognised that the management of marketing information was a key factor underpinning marketing success. Furthermore, a majority of the computer systems used in support of marketing were not well integrated and 40% had a 'stand alone' system. Finally, a majority of the marketing managers reported that their information systems personnel did not understand the needs of marketing.

Overall, the Oasis study presented a very negative evaluation of management practice with regard to marketing information and they concluded that marketing information was under-utilised. However, it must be recognised that this study has a normative perspective. The companies were evaluated against the following three criteria: 1) the degree of market orientation, 2) the importance assigned to information as part of the marketing process and 3) the type of computer system which the company had in place for managing its marketing information resource (Oasis, 1991: 5). This normative perspective is very different from the descriptive analytic approach adopted by Jobber and Watts. Because of the differing theoretical approaches, the two sets of results cannot be compared or juxtaposed.

There is little research on the Irish marketing research industry or on the acquisition and utilisation of marketing research information by Irish based firms. However, there is limited applied type research on general marketing information systems. In the early 1990s two studies investigated marketing information practices in Irish companies. In

1991 Co-Operation North commissioned a study of marketing practice in small and medium enterprises in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The extent and quality of information gathering and use was seen as a key indicator of a firm's approach to the business of market analysis and decision making. The 200 companies, all employing less than 200 employees, were asked to identify their main sources of information. A large number of the companies relied on word-of-mouth and sales representative contacts as their main source of information. This study distinguished between formal and informal information sources. Information that was gathered and filed in a manner designed for classified access was labelled formal and information that was not filed in such a manner but was 'kept', 'remembered' or 'known' was termed informal. This study found that about one fifth of the surveyed companies did not gather information on a continuous formal or informal basis. Smaller companies tended to be less formal in their approach to databases (Co-Operation North, 1991: 27). Many companies reported that 'at best' information was gathered on an ad-hoc basis. In conclusion, the study reported that company practice was almost uniformly poor with the notable exception of companies having a marketing management function. These were also the only companies tending to have formal information systems. The overall conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that narrative or informal, personal type information rather than the formal or scientific type is more likely to be used when making marketing decision

A 1993 survey of the head of marketing in a sample of companies drawn from the Top 500 companies in Ireland found a high level utilisation of various type of formal information. Approximately 70% of the firms reported using marketing research (both bought in and internally produced), customer database and about 40% reported having direct links to customers (e.g. EDI, EFT) and having a product/service database. An analysis by industrial sector showed that the FMCG sector was more likely than other sectors (distribution, other manufacturing and services) to utilise marketing research and to have direct links to customers via EDI and EFT. A small number of obstacles to putting in place information systems to support marketing/sales were identified by the marketing managers. An inability to identify and quantify the benefits to be gained from such a system was the major obstacle and this was followed by the cost factor. Staff resistance and lack of management support was considered an obstacle by a minority of the top marketers, less than 25%. Little or no difference in the response pattern was evident across industry sectors.

In summary, this research suggests that while information and marketing information systems are considered very important by marketers, they are under-utilised because the benefits that accrue from information are not well understood. Furthermore informal personal type information is preferred by the marketing decision-makers.

3. The utilisation and the effectiveness of computerised information systems

A survey of sixty-five organisations in the north-east of England by Palihawadana and Delfino (1994) found that the use of IT for marketing was in its infancy and still quite limited. They also investigated the extent to which IT was perceived as having affected marketing practice and reported that about half of their sample stated that marketing practice had altered 'a little' or 'not at all' as a result of IT.

The most recent and comprehensive investigation on the impact of information technology on marketing activities in British companies was carried out in 1994 by Leverick et al. They reported that the majority of respondents believed that:

- IT has resulted in an increased volume of and 'more accurate' information,
- IT shapes the way marketing activities are carried out, increased credibility is given to results of analysis simple because it comes from an IT system ,
- IT enhances the status of marketing departments,
- IT increases the demands made on marketing by other organisational areas.

A minority of the respondents stated that:

- IT lead to over emphasis of quantitative over qualitative data,
- An increased reliance on IT is at the expense of intuition and judgement, and
- IT implementation has led to marketing staff reductions.

Overall, this study found that information technology is seen as a positive force within the marketing function. The increased use of technology does not lead to a corresponding decline in the importance and utilisation of narrative, subjective forms of information. The very small number of studies which recount marketing practitioners' views and behaviours do suggest that both formal and informal sources of information are legitimate and useful. This research also argues that the increased use of information technologies does not

lead to a corresponding decline in the usefulness or importance of narrative/subjective forms of information.

4. The utilisation of formal information and market research findings

After reviewing marketing and related literatures on knowledge utilisation, Menon and Varadarajan (1992: 54) conclude that the terms "knowledge utilisation, information utilisation, research utilisation and knowledge use" are used interchangeably. They assert that these terms signify the same phenomenon; an assertion suggesting that this literature is only accepting scientific type information as valid knowledge. There are a number of studies which specifically have investigated market research information use in organisations and their approach concurs with Menon and Varadarajan's conclusions (Deshpande, 1982; Deshpande and Zaltman 1982, 1984, 1987; Sinkula, 1990; Sinkula and Hampton, 1988; Schlegelmilch, Diamantopoulos and Katy Tse, 1993). In this literature there is great diversity in the way information utilisation is defined, measured and categorised. Terms or categories such as knowledge use, research utilisation, information utilisation are used interchangeably to signify the same phenomenon. Thus the dominant approach in marketing theory to understanding knowledge/information utilisation is confined to 'research findings' i.e. the scientific/quasi scientific type of information to the exclusion of the narrative/subjective mode. This conceptualisation does not adequately acknowledge the independent existence of the experiential and informal modes; it tends to equate knowledge with the "scientific" enterprise. The real tension and conflict that exist between these modes of information/ knowledge is not acknowledged or considered. After all, it would seem that the degree to which market research information is used, by an organisation or a marketing practitioner, is a function of the credibility and legitimacy given to scientific information and on the value that is placed on the more informal, narrative sources of information. Furthermore this narrow perspective, is surprising given that other research which included the views of marketing and sales managers, has shown that personal observation, work experience and dialogue with colleagues are the three most important sources of the information manager's use and value (McKinnon and Burns, 1992)

According to Feldman and March (1981: 174) the organisational theory literature about the acquiring and use of formal information can be summarised by six main conclusions:

1. Much of the information that is acquired by individuals and organisations has little decision relevance.
2. Much of the information that is used to justify a decision is collected and interpreted after the decision has been made.
3. Much of the information gathered in response to requests for information is not considered in making the decision for which it was requested.
4. Regardless of the information which is available when a decision is first being considered, more information is requested.
5. Complaints that an organisation does not have enough information to make a decision occur while available information is ignored.
6. The relevance of the information provided for the decision being made is less obvious than is the insistence on information

These conclusions appear to be incompatible with the central tenets of formal, rational choice theories. These theories suggest that information about the possible consequences of alternative actions will be sought and used only if the precision, relevance, and reliability of the information are compatible with its cost. Feldman and March (1981: 177), in attempting to explain this anomaly, argue that information is a symbol and a signal. They separate symbolic actions, which are portrayed as representations of competence, from instrumental actions.

The analysis so far shows clearly that all the reviewed marketing authors concur, that an efficient and effective marketing information system is one that uses formal, scientific procedures. There is limited acknowledgement of the concurrent existence and validity of subjective informal type information. This suggests that the only type of evidence that has real legitimacy is objective data that can be reduced, in most situations, to a numeric quantity that can be stored in some computer system and be manipulated by the use of some computer spreadsheet or statistical package. This unquestioning acceptance of the instrumental value of scientific information appears not to accommodate the concerns that Feldman and March have about traditional rational choice theories.

5. Alternative approaches to marketing information.

The alternative historicist perspective outlined by Nevett argues for a 'duality of vision' where some marketing problems can be addressed

by scientific analysis and others require an approach that is impressionistic and intuitive. According to Nevett(1991: 13) 'The marketing practitioner frequently must make decisions that cannot be justified scientifically within the general accepted meaning of the term. Lack of reliable information, particularly on competitors' likely strategies, sometimes leaves no alternative but to make judgements based on experience, a feel of the situation, and a measure of imagination.

Marketing practitioners are frequently confronted with situations where they must proceed pragmatically rather than in accordance with a scientific (as currently understood) methodology (Brannick 1998). Nevett argues that the purely scientific method should be supplemented with research methods used by historians. Marketing practitioners, like historians, are frequently confronted with a situation where the precise conditions and circumstances are unlikely ever to have existed before, and any attempt to predict behaviour would be pointless and misleading. Marketers generalise in order to be able to formulate solutions to specific problems. This understanding is not like the scientists' position where generalisation is seen as a step toward establishing more general propositions. Marketing practitioners use past experiences to generalise e.g. an advertising agency will draw on its collective experience when designing a new campaign but cannot predict that it will increase brand awareness.

The user perspective which incorporates a 'duality of vision' approach sees information as that which alters a mental representation. It is the changes in the beliefs, values or behaviours in a person from an encounter with any stimuli (formal written reports, numeric quantities, dialogue, non-verbal behaviours, and personal reflections) which are significant. Nevett, Lyotard and other philosophers argue that there exist different approaches to knowing or to becoming informed which are referred to as scientific knowledge and narrative knowledge. Both are considered worthwhile and valuable but their legitimacy and validity are supported by two very different philosophical temperaments. Scientific type information is formal and systematic in structure, frequently in written form and values objectivity and generalisability. Conversely, narrative type information is subjective, personal, informal, particular and frequently in oral form.

Methodology

Embedded in marketing tasks, marketing decision making and general sense making is an understanding of and an attitude toward information. This research is solely concerned with how marketing

practitioners get to know and understand their world and is firmly based within a marketing management perspective. The work by Feldman and March suggests a link between the information environment of an organisation and the credibility and reliance on different forms of information. The legitimacy and use of information is embedded in social norms, such as rational reasoning, or the culture of the organisation. The general working hypothesis underpinning this research is that information is problematic, contextual and situational in nature. This paper focuses on the nature and usefulness of marketing information and investigates marketing practitioners' perceptions and understanding of the problematic nature of information. Two core informational issues are examined in detail, 1) the nature of information, its legitimacy and usefulness and 2) how the information environment, as measured by the acquisition of formal information, relates to information legitimacy.

This paper is based on the responses to a postal survey of a large cross-sectional sample of marketing practitioners. Eight hundred marketing practitioners, representing a broad range of a) job levels and titles, b) industrial sectors, and c) company sizes, were mailed a structured questionnaire and there was a good response rate of nearly fifty percent (Brannick, 1996: 65-75). The response sample of 390 marketing practitioners work in different types of organisations, hold different marketing positions, have extensive marketing related work experience and have different age, gender and education profiles (Brannick, 1996). Hence, it can be argued that all the different marketing work experiences are represented in this research.

Research Findings

The following analysis describes the various facets of information and uses regression analysis to tease out the interrelationships between the information factors.

Formal Information Sources

The companies represented in this study use a large variety of information sources; seven of the eight sources are used by nearly seventy percent of the firms and the eighth source, direct links to customers, is used by nearly 40% of the firms (see Table 1). A survey of Irish marketing directors in 1992 shows a similar pattern with about seventy percent using a customer database and market research, both in-house and external, and a smaller proportion (36%) using direct links to customers (EDI, EFT) (Top Marketers Attitude Survey, 1993).

TABLE NO. 1: MARKETING INFORMATION SOURCES USED BY FIRMS

Source	% YES
Computerised Marketing Information System	73
Data Index	
Customer (End user) Database	69
Customer (Trade) Database	71
Product/Service Database	64
Direct Links to Customers (EDI, EFT)	39
<i>Score 3 or 4 on data index</i>	51
Interpret Index	
Market Research (Bought in Service)	71
Market Research (Using Own Staff)	79
Consultancy Reports	67
<i>Score 3 on interpret index</i>	47
<i>Score 6,7 or 8 on source index</i>	48

In summary there are three measures of company information sources, 1) the existence of a computerised information system, 2) 'data', a composite index of customer, product and service databases and direct links and 3) 'interpret' a composite index of marketing research (in-house and external) and consultancy reports. Overall firms acquire a large variety of information sources.

The Nature of Information, its Legitimacy and its Usefulness

The belief in and reliance on information was ascertained by assessing how useful information was to marketing practitioners and their ongoing quest for it. Overall the marketing practitioners see information as an important company resource; nearly 90% of them considering it as important as finance or personnel. The responses to ten information related items were factor analysed and a three factor structure emerged. These were labelled as 1) Symbolic Usefulness of Formal Information, 2) Action Oriented Adequacy of Formal Informa-

tion Sources and 3) Action Oriented Usefulness of Informal Information.

The symbolic usefulness of any activity depends on the social norms within which it takes place. In modern western societies scientific formal information is significant symbolically because of a broad commitment to reason and rational discourse.

TABLE NO. 2: SYMBOLIC USEFULNESS OF FORMAL INFORMATION

Statement	SA	A	U	DA	SDA
Formal reports gives information credibility ¹ .	13.8	58.2	18.2	9.0	0.8
Formal research reports have too many tables/ graphs/statistics.	6.2	21.0	46.4	24.9	1.5
More reports are produced than are really needed by the company.	13.6	29.5	23.8	29.5	3.6

SA: Strongly Agree, A: Agree, U: Undecided, DA: Disagree, SDA: Strongly Disagree. 1 Item Reversed

Symbolic usefulness is derived from the aura of competence bestowed on scientific information by the social norms of rationality and logical reasoning. The marketers in this study recognise the symbolic usefulness of formal information (Table 2) e.g. its very formality gives it a certain status. Over 70% believed that formal reports gives information credibility, 33% stated that all the reports produced are needed by the company and only 27% believed that formal research reports need to have many tables, graphs and statistics.

TABLE NO. 3: ACTION ORIENTED ADEQUACY OF FORMAL INFORMATION

Statement	SA	A	U	DA	SDA
I often have insufficient re- search information on which to base my decisions.	6.7	43.8	27.7	20.0	1.8
Other people in the company often "sit" on the information that I need.	5.1	25.1	25.9	38.2	5.6
Great effort is usually neces- sary to locate simple mar- keting data that is dispersed throughout the company.	4.9	29.0	23.3	36.4	6.4

SA: Strongly Agree, A: Agree, U: Undecided, DA: Disagree, SDA: Strongly Disagree

Consistent with the symbolic significance of formal information is a continuing quest and demand for more information. Decisions that are viewed as legitimate within an organisational context tend to be information intensive. In this study (Table 3) nearly 50% of the marketers stated that when making marketing decisions they had insufficient research information. As many as 34% experienced great difficulty when attempting to locate marketing data within their firms and a similar percentage believed that other company personnel hoard information. These findings show that a majority of marketing practitioners believe in the action oriented usefulness of formal information and highlight an eternal quest for more company related formal information.

TABLE NO. 4: ACTION ORIENTED USEFULNESS OF INFORMAL INFORMATION

Statement	SA	A	U	SD	SDA
I often make decisions on the basis of "gut feel".	7.7	50.0	24.4	16.2	1.8
Informal chats/discussions with colleagues about the market are often more insightful than formal reports.	19.0	61.8	15.1	3.8	0.3
When I am making marketing decision , past experience is often more useful than formal research information	7.2	53.6	26.7	10.8	1.8

SA: Strongly Agree, A: Agree, U: Undecided, DA: Disagree, SDA: Strongly Disagree

This examination (Table 4) of the problematic nature of marketing information shows clearly how reliant marketers are on informal sources of information. As many as 81% expressed the view that informal chats with colleagues about the market is more insightful than formal reports. Nearly 58% often make decisions on the basis of 'gut feel' and a similar percentage believed that past experience is more useful than formal research information when making decisions. These findings strongly suggest the action-oriented usefulness of informal and subjective sources of information. Similar findings were reported in a 1991 Irish study of practitioners "two thirds of respondents relied on word-of-mouth and sales representative contacts"(Co Operation North, 1991: 24).

In summary the research findings on the nature of information, its legitimacy and its usefulness show a definite majority position. A majority of marketing practitioners 1) believe in the usefulness of formal information, 2) display an eternal quest for more company related formal information, 3) recognise the symbolic usefulness of formal

information, and 4) have a preference for informal and subjective sources of information when taking decision.

The Rational Choice Approach.

Rational choice is appropriately informed when the best available scientific, formal information about future consequences of present actions is sought and acquired. Marketing practitioners preference for informal, subjective, personal type information while at the same pursuing an eternal quest for more formal information could best be described as an enigma or a mystery. This paper's central research hypothesis links the information environment of an organisation and the marketing practitioner's reliance on different forms of information. This investigation might help to unravel the enigma. Following the logic of the rational choice model it is argued that when large amounts of formal information, via databases, research reports and computerised information systems are available, that this scenario will encourage practitioners dependency on such sources and consolidate a belief in the symbolic power of scientific information. According to Feldman and March the dynamic force of the rational choice model is the symbolic power of scientific information. The availability of information sources may be, in part, a reflection of the marketers' beliefs about information because they may be responsible for the commissioning and acquiring of such systems and databases.

The following analysis uses the OLS regression technique to ascertain the independent effects of the contextual formal information variables on the action oriented usefulness factors. The information orientation of organisations is assessed/investigated at the organisational level. There are three measures of formal company information sources, 1) the existence of a computerised information system, 2) 'data', a composite index of customer, product and service databases and 3) 'interpret' a composite index of marketing research (in-house and external) and consultancy reports. The three information factors, formal, informal and symbolic, measure different aspects of the behavioural usefulness of information.

TABLE NO. 5: MULTIPLE REGRESSION OF ACTION ORIENTED USEFULNESS INFORMATION FACTORSⁱⁱ WITH ORGANISATIONAL INFORMATION SOURCES

Information Factors	Dependent Variables		
	Standardised Beta		
	Informal	Formal	Symbolic
Organisation Information Sources			
Computerised Information System	.024	.089	-.005
Data	.165*	.049	-.016
Interpret	.002	-.164*	-.182*
Multiple R	.18*	.17*	.19*
R Square	.03	.03	.04
* = P<.05 ** = P<.10			

The R squares for the three models is about 3%. These statistical parameters which are statistically significant at the .05 level show that the models adequately fit the data. Table 5 shows the standardised beta coefficients and their associated measures of significance.

The marketers' views on the three information factors are independent of and not influenced by either the existence or non-existence of a computerised information system within a company. A computerised information system is now an integral rather than an optional part of all business information systems

The 'data' source variable has a direct influence on the 'informal' factor and the 'interpret' factor has a direct influence on the two formal factors. The existence of none or a few marketing databases within a company leads to a situation where the marketing practitioners have a preference for informal information sources, such as discussions with colleagues and personal 'gut feelings'. On the other

ⁱⁱ A Low Score, Low on symbolic value

B Low Score, An inadequate level of formal research sources

C Low Score, High on action oriented usefulness of informal information

hand, when there is a large number of databases available, practitioners tend not to have a preference for informal, personal information sources when making decisions.

The 'interpret' variable, which looks at the availability of both market research and consultancy reports, has an impact on the marketers' views on the availability of formal information and on the symbolic usefulness of formal information. However, the 'interpret' factor is not statistically related to the informal factor. Marketers who work in companies which commission and make available a large number of research reports tend to believe that they have insufficient formal information available for making decisions. In addition, they experience great difficulty in accessing marketing information which is dispersed throughout a company because other company personnel hoard the information. The availability of research or consultancy reports tends to encourage marketers not to believe in the symbolic value of formal information. The availability of research reports does not influence or is independent of the marketer's views on the usefulness of informal sources of information.

In summary, marketers who work in companies that commission and make available a large number of marketing research reports and data bases have a preference for formal scientific information, tend not to believe in the symbolic usefulness of formal information and also report that insufficient formal information is available when making decisions. Conversely, practitioners who work in companies that purchase only a small number of marketing databases and research reports tend to depend and prefer informal, subjective information sources, they do acknowledge the symbolic usefulness of formal information and they also assert that they have sufficient formal information when making decisions. These conclusions appear to be somewhat incompatible with the central tenets of Feldman and March (1981: 177) argument that the anomaly between the constant demand for information and the inadequate use of information can be understood by seeing information as a symbol and a signal portrayed as representations of competence. These research findings show that those marketers who adhere to a rational choice model do not see symbolic usefulness as a significant power. Marketers who accept the problematic and subjective nature of information acknowledge symbolic usefulness is an aura of competence bestowed on scientific information by the social norms of rationality and logical reasoning.

Conclusions

The dominant normative perspective on marketing management, as exemplified by Kotler (1994), defines the roles and responsibilities of marketing managers in terms of analysis, planning and decision making. This model has an embedded scientific rationality and tends not to adequately acknowledge the presence of a high level of ambiguity and uncertainty in all marketing activities. How marketing information is understood, legitimated and acquired is inextricably linked to the particular approach adopted to general marketing management. The rational choice model lays emphasis on formal analysis and planning which incorporates the application of sophisticated marketing technology to the collection and processing of information. There is little or no attention paid to the more hermeneutic approach. Consistent with this approach, marketing literature on information utilisation is confined to 'research findings' or scientific information to the exclusion of the narrative mode. The exclusion of narrative information leads to an over simplification of a rather complex issue.

Information, that force which enables marketers to carry out their organisational tasks effectively, is a complex and ephemeral entity. Hence, one of the more interesting features of this research, at the descriptive level, is the acknowledgement of the existence and legitimacy of both the narrative/subjective and scientific/objective forms of information. This general acceptance, to varying degrees, by the marketers of both scientific and narrative forms of information mirrors the postmodern (Lyotard, 1986) and historicist (Nevett, 1991) epistemological traditions. This study, concurring with other research, shows that there is extensive usage of a large variety of formal marketing information sources. Computerised information systems shape and determine the form and content of information and embody a scientific orientation to information. A majority of respondents viewed computerised marketing information systems as an essential, integral element of a marketing intelligence system. The majority of surveyed marketers, when making decisions, prefer to rely more on informal sources of information; they recognise the symbolic usefulness of formal information and they believe that they have insufficient formal information available. Embedded in these findings is what appears to be a contradictory assertion. There is a continual quest for more research information while at the same time there is a preference for informal /subjective type information.

Marketers who work in companies that commission and make available a large number of marketing research reports and data have a preference for formal scientific information, tend not to believe in the symbolic usefulness of formal information and they also report that insufficient formal information is available when making decisions. Conversely, practitioners who work in companies that purchase only a small number of marketing databases and research reports tend to depend and prefer informal, subjective information sources, they do acknowledge the symbolic usefulness of formal information and they also assert that they have sufficient formal information when making decisions.

To conclude it can be argued that some practitioners appear to adhere to a pure rational choice form. They accept the substantive rather than the symbolic value of scientific formal information. This perspective is accepted and perpetuated by marketing academics and researchers. Conversely, a majority of practitioners accept the central importance of narrative information. They tend to depend and prefer informal, subjective information sources, they do acknowledge the symbolic usefulness of formal information and they also assert that they have sufficient formal information when making decisions. These conclusions appear to be somewhat incompatible with the central tenets of Feldman and March (1981: 177) argument that the anomaly between the constant demand for information and the inadequate use of information can be understood by seeing information as a symbol and a signal portrayed as representations of competence. These research findings show that those marketers who adhere to a rational choice model do not see symbolic usefulness as a significant power. Marketers who accept the problematic and subjective nature of information acknowledge symbolic usefulness is an aura of competence bestowed on scientific information by the social norms of rationality and logical reasoning

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