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M. Velmuradova

► **To cite this version:**

M. Velmuradova. To What Extent Do the Local SMEs value the International Support in Transitional Countries and Why ?. The Joint ISMD / MacroMarketing Society Conference on MacroMarketing and Development : Building Bridges and Forging Alliances, ISMD / MacroMarketing Society, 2-5 juin, Jun 2007, Washington DC, United States. hal-01582281

**HAL Id: hal-01582281**

**<https://hal.science/hal-01582281>**

Submitted on 5 Sep 2017

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# To What Extent Do the Local SMEs value the International Support in Transitional Countries and Why?

Maya Velmuradova, University of Occidental Bretagne, France

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The current research objective is to investigate the concept of *Perceived Customer Value* (PCV) as applied to the domain of international SME Support in developing communities.

Following the incitation of the leading Social Marketers, the above Consumer behaviour concept is confronted to the context of the social goods of International Development Aid, particularly as it relates to the Economic reform sector (SME Development support). Indeed, this latter one is still almost unexplored in regards to the Social marketing concepts application, with the rare research in this direction having been done within the recent World Bank's "Bulldozer Initiative" project in Bosnia Herzegovina (Andreasen & Herzberg 2005).

While there is a clear deficit of corresponding theoretical literature, the author's interest in this particular field has emerged from earlier empirical participative observations of the weak/absent demand problem faced by the SME support programs in some post-soviet transitional countries (Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan). Thus, despite the low/absent Tariff ("Costs") and "Benefits" augmenting efforts (for ex., through CRM), local SMEs often show little interest in provided services – resulting in cutting off the project's respective activity components (in this case, advising services).

Why wouldn't the local SMEs value the social services proposed? That is, as Andreasen (1997) puts it, *can we generalise the Consumer behaviour models on the frequent situations of the negative/absent demand in the social context?*

This research attempts to provide some elements of reply to this question, based on the critical examination of the literature on the CV concept compositional structure and on the empirical explorative observation results.

## METHODOLOGY

The theoretical body of literature concerning CV has been examined using two different data collection and analysis techniques, aiming to reply to the following question:

*What* do we know about CV (what is the advancement of knowledge) and *How* do we know about it (what different approaches/paradigms are used)?

The habitual procedure of theoretical literature exploration realised initially, resulted in the conclusion that the vision of the CV concept within the Consumer Behaviour and Management Sciences research would be multi-paradigmatic: several, conceptually very different, approaches seem to be used simultaneously depending on the underlying explicit or implicit psychological paradigm assumptions.

Therefore, a second procedure was used for verifying and reinforcing this statement, with the aid of what could be considered as a representative sample of bibliographic records dealing with CV within the Management Sciences.

For examining the divergences within the research explicitly treating the concept of CV, the *BSP* textual/bibliographic database was searched for records, e.g. the article references (1900 - November 2006) in peer-reviewed journals containing in title: "Customer" AND "Value" (266 records); or "Consumer" AND "Value" (178 records).

After downloading and screening for irrelevant references, 384 records were retained for analysis. They were encoded under several broad categories: by *object* ("PCV" (demand side) or "Created CV" (offer side)); by transaction *clientele* ("B2C" or "B2B", self-reported); by transaction *goods* ("products" or "services", self-reported); by transaction *finality* ("for-profit" or "non-profit", self-reported).

Two types of analysis were then conducted: frequencies analysis (under bibliographic managing software Bibloscape 6.6); and Titles/Abstracts content analysis (style, concept groups, concept relations – under QDA software Tropes 7.01).

Prior empirical exploration included a four-month emersion as a "complete participant" in above cited context, involving participating observation and open informal interviews of various actors, combined with some intervention techniques.

## RESULTS

The results drawn from the literature exploration confirm the initial conclusions on multi-paradigmatic vision of CV construct, with a frequently existing confusion or a sort of mixture among several divergent paradigms. A simple look at the Keyword frequencies can illustrate this statement (Appendix 1); other supportive results from descriptive statistics and content analysis are presented in the paper.

However, a closer examination of related economic and psychological literature permits a clearer picture of the underlying assumptions of different approaches and a more precise positioning in this regard.

Thus, in author's mind, the CV construct might be first re-inserted in its historical economic context, bounded to the economic (inter-)subjective Theory of Value (von Neuman & Morgenstern 1947; Debreu 1959).

Yet, its evolution within the economic theory and afterwards within the Cognitive Psychology is influenced by (neo-)behavioral paradigm viewing Perceived Value from the Utility point of view (Simon (1955); Lancaster (1966); Kahneman & Tversky (1979) and others).

On contrast, Dynamic & Personality Psychology paradigm is used to characterise CV from the instinct based Attitude-affect point of view, differing from the interactionist Gestalt & Social Psychology paradigm of constructive goals-based Attitude point of view (Allport (1935) and others).

Finally, the Integrationist positioning attempts to integrate *cognitive* VS *affective* evaluative judgements and/or their *deep-instinctive* VS *functionally autonomous* motivational bases (Katz (1960), Fishbein & Ajzen (1975), Ajzen (1991) and others). Nevertheless, a prior belonging to one or another paradigm makes such efforts not neutral, and the attention should be made, in the author's mind, to *what* we integrate and *how* we integrate it.

Basing on these theoretical conclusions, the author finalizes the paper by proposing for discussion some conceptual adjustments in the recent integrationist models of Perceived CV. The empirical experience is used to illustrate the difficulty of bypassing such adjustments when the CV concept is applied to the negative/absent demand situations within the sector of social goods.

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