

The Identification of Innovative Research Methods and Techniques Utilized in Marketing Research in the Digital Era

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Abstract

The current technological advancement and the mass utilization of information and communication technology create a milestone in the way marketing research is conducted. The presented scientific contribution focuses on the identification of innovative research methods and techniques, which have the highest degree of applicability in the process of marketing research in the near future. The aim of this paper is also to predict the changes that are going to affect the development of marketing research in the near future, based on an analysis of the current status in comparison with the results of an own scientific study.

Key words

Marketing research, research methods and techniques, innovations

JEL Classification: M31, O31

Introduction

For more than two decades, there has been a continuous and significant technological advancement and a mass utilization of information and communication technologies, which create a milestone in the way marketing research is conducted. The emergence of social media and the shift in the communication towards mobile devices changed the way people communicate as well as the instruments they use for communication. This has caused rapid and significant changes in the area of marketing research. Research agencies focus their view less on the methodology and they put more emphasis on being a strategic partner and an advisor for their clients. The central area of their interest are the consumers, the monitoring and listening to them, the measurement of their emotions and the synthesis of existing knowledge about consumer behaviour and decision making. Currently, it is important to know how and where the consumers talk spontaneously, how willing they are to exchange information with others and what are the real and not only the declared reasons for the behaviour of a consumer. It is also important to be able to attract the interest of the consumers in order to encourage them to participate in research activities. The internet, social media and social networks, smartphones, the digital convergence of communication media and many other innovative technologies and applications change not only the consumer behaviour, but they enable also the expansion of classic methods of marketing research as well as the creation of new innovative methods and techniques, which are going to be implemented in the upcoming digital era.

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1 Methodology of the paper

The aim of this scientific paper is to identify innovative research methods and techniques, which have the highest degree of applicability in the process of marketing research, based on the comparison of knowledge from available information sources, on the results of global research studies and on the findings obtained from the research conducted by the author. The ambition of the author is also to predict the changes, which are going to influence the development of marketing research in the near future, based on the analysis of the actual status and the results of his own research study.

The main method used in the paper was the comparison between the results of global research studies with the findings of the research study *Digital era of the marketing research – DEMR 2013*, which was conducted by the author of this paper in the second half of the year 2013, on a sample of 251 Slovak and Czech research agencies and research clients, utilizing the method of electronic questioning. The mentioned research study focused on the utilization of new information and communication technologies in the process of collecting, processing, analysis and the interpretation of data within marketing research. The sample consisted of 18 research agencies and 149 research clients from the Slovak Republic and 32 research agencies and 49 research clients from the Czech Republic. The aim of this research study was to determine the influence of particular attributes of the digital environment on the process of marketing research and to identify innovative research methods and techniques with an emphasis on the prerequisites and limitations of their real applicability (Žák, 2014). The study simultaneously analysed the status of the marketing research market in the Slovak and Czech Republic and it defined the predictions about the future development in the area of marketing research.

2 Results and discussion

The comparison between the theoretical knowledge and the results of the scientific studies conducted by institutes, which are global authorities in the area of marketing research, led to the division of the elaborated field into four parts, which consecutively analyse the current marketing research market, characterize the innovativeness of research agencies, identify innovative methods and techniques and predict the changes in marketing research in the near future.

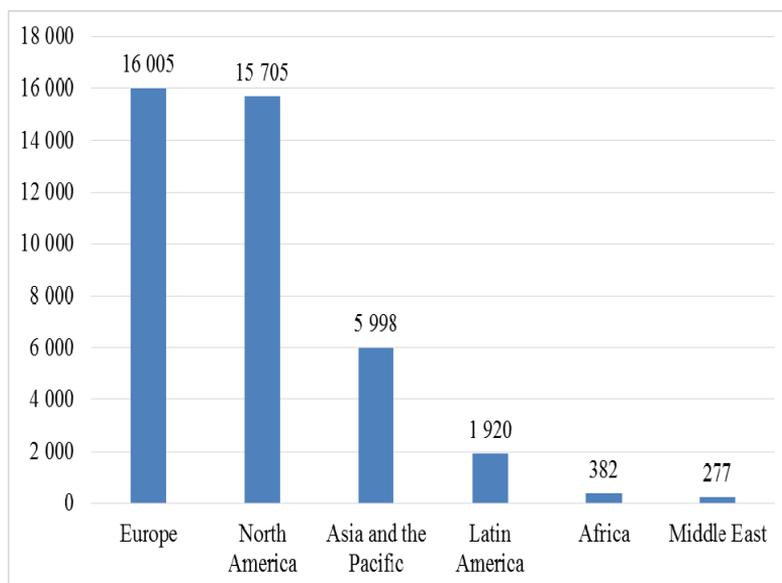
2.1 Indicators of the current marketing research market

The marketing research market consists of subjects, who offer marketing research services and of subjects, who use these services. This means that apart from specialized research agencies and companies, which realize research just as a part of other business activities, there are also research clients on the market, i.e. companies, which use marketing research services to obtain knowledge necessary to make successful decisions. According to the annual *Global Market Research* report published by the association *ESOMAR* (Esomar, 2014), the "worldwide turnover of the traditional

market research for the year 2013 was 40,287 billion \$, which represents the historically highest amount so far. If we also include the turnovers of consultant companies (for example Gartner, Forrester, IDC), which have been included for several years into the so called extended definition of market research according to ESOMAR, then the global turnover exceeds 60 billion \$". Figure 1 shows the turnovers of specific geographic regions. Europe (40 %) has the biggest share on this turnover, followed by North America (39%). Asia and the Pacific have a 15 % share on the global market research turnover, Latin America 5 %, Africa 1 % and the Middle East 1 % as well.

According to the quoted report of the ESOMAR association (Esomar, 2014) "the year over year net growth rate of the market research sector was (inflation adjusted) in the year 2013 worldwide 0,7 %. The highest year over year net growth of 2,9 % was recorded in North America. On the other hand, the highest year over year decrease of 1,4 % was in Europe, which was caused mainly by the subsidizing effects of the economic crisis".

Figure 1 The worldwide turnover of the market research sector in the year 2013 (figures are in millions of \$)



Source: Esomar. (2014). *ESOMAR Global Market Research 2014*. Amsterdam: ESOMAR.

The marketing research market in the Slovak Republic stabilized during the years 2011 to 2013, with an estimated turnover of 20 million € per year. In this calculation are included research agencies which operate in the Slovak Republic (approx. 13 million € in total) and the rest is a qualified estimation for agencies, which do not provide any information. The biggest research agency in the Slovak Republic in terms of turnover is GfK Slovakia, followed by the agencies *Ipsos*, *2Muse*, *Median SK* and *United Consultants*. The market has recently "benefited from a slightly increased interest of the clients in the feedback from the users, the customers, in a more detailed knowledge about them and in the monitoring of their behavioural changes, therefore in projects, which offer added value and real help in making decisions within the con-

text of a bigger picture. The pressure of clients regarding the quality, the speed and the price manifests too" (Môciková, 2014).

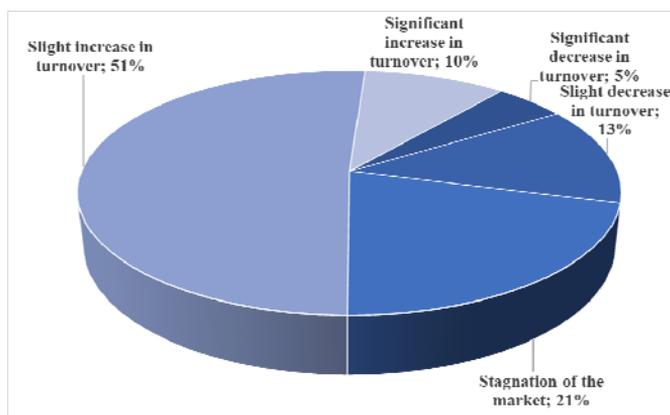
According to the Czech Association of Market and Opinion Research Agencies (Simar, 2014) "during the past 10 years, the turnover of the marketing research market stabilized and the estimated turnover in the year 2013 was 2,370 billion Czech crowns (approx. 86 million €). Into the calculation of the estimated overall turnover were included 12 member agencies of the SIMAR association and 9 cooperating agencies, which had a total turnover of 1,960 billion Czech crowns (approx. 71 million €). The other 17 % represent a qualified estimation for other subjects on the market."

The biggest research agency in the Czech Republic was in terms of turnover the agency *AC Nielsen*, followed by the agencies *Ipsos*, *GfK Czech*, *Millward Brown* and *TNS AISA*. Agencies, which have recorded recently a growth in their turnover, reached their results due to the fact that international networks established in the Czech Republic a center, which processes data from other countries. This fact appreciates also the qualities of the Czech researchers. A further stabilization or a slight increase can be expected in the upcoming period of time, depending on the development of the economy and on the optimism or the pessimism of the business sector. The trends in the marketing research in the Czech Republic are influenced by the fact, that research clients look for fast and cheap solutions and that big research projects are replaced by a higher number of smaller orders.

It can be stated, based on the presented overviews for the Slovak and Czech Republic, that the marketing research market has been stabilized in both countries during the previous period of time, whereas the turnover in the Slovak Republic reaches 20 million € and the turnover in the Czech Republic 86 million €. The significant disproportionality between the Slovak and the Czech marketing research market is caused by the fact, that the majority of international companies with business activities in both countries have their headquarters in the Czech Republic and the realization of research activities is connected to the Czech branches of global research agencies. It can be also assumed that the positive worldwide development, where the marketing research market recorded in the year 2013 the highest turnover in history, is going to reflect gradually also on the Slovak and Czech markets.

This is also indicated by the results of the research study *Digital era of the marketing research – DEMR 2013*, which was conducted by the author of this paper. According to this research study, Slovak and Czech research agencies and research clients expect in the next 3 years a positive trend in the development of the marketing research market (61 % of the respondents stated that they expect a slight or even a higher increase in the turnover related to the provision or the use of marketing research services). A decrease in the turnover during the next 3 years is expected by 18 % of the respondents and 13 % out of them assume a slight decrease. Stagnation on the marketing research market is predicted by 21 % of Slovak and Czech research agencies and research clients. The predictions regarding the development of the turnover of the marketing research market in the Slovak and Czech Republic are displayed in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Predictions regarding the development of the marketing research market according to Slovak and Czech market research agencies and clients (n=251)



Source: processed on basis of the author's own conducted research: research study "Digital era of the marketing research – DEMR 2013"

A significant part of the offer of marketing research services consists of research agencies, which are able to conduct research studies in accordance to the principles of a systematic, objective and ethical approach, thanks to their methodological background, personal and technical resources. In the current digital era, *"the driving force behind the development of companies are innovative activities and the possibilities of information and communication technologies as information intermediaries"* (Kubičková & Benešová, 2007), which is of major significance especially for research agencies.

2.2 Innovativeness of research agencies

Every business sector is assessed from the viewpoint of various criteria and based on them, teams of experts create rankings of the most successful companies. This is also the case in the field of marketing research, where rankings of research agencies and other subjects active in this sector are created regularly. Due to the fast development of technologies and new approaches used to collect and analyze data, the creation of a ranking with the most innovative companies focused on marketing research is very useful. Such a ranking is presented in the annual publication *GreenBook Research Industry Trends Report* (Murphy, 2014). The authors of this ranking contacted in the year 2013 in total 2 229 specialist from the field of marketing research (research agencies and research clients) and they asked them, to name 3 marketing research companies they consider to be the most innovative and then put them in order from the most to the least innovative, stating the reasons, why they consider a specific company to be the most innovative. The aim of this ranking is the ambition to determine, what makes these companies so innovative and how successfully do they utilize innovations in the creation of their brand awareness. The list with the 50 most innovative companies in the field of marketing research is shown in Table 1. What makes a research agency innovative is the applied methodology of data collection, the technological infrastructure, creativity, but also trust, speed and size.

Table 1 List of the 50 most innovative companies in the area of marketing research according to the GreenBook Research Industry Trends Report

Companies active in the field of marketing research					
1.	BrainJuicer	18.	iTracks	35.	Survey Monkey
2.	Vision Critical	19.	Toluna	36.	Research Through Gaming
3.	Ipsos	20.	Vocatus	37.	iModerate
4.	GfK	21.	uSamp	38.	Hall & Partners
5.	Google	22.	GIM	39.	Anderson Analytics
6.	TNS	23.	Kantar	40.	RIWI
7.	Nielsen	24.	Mesh	41.	Harris Interactive
8.	Millward Brown	25.	Revelation Global	42.	Affectiva
9.	InSites Consulting	26.	Gongos	43.	ideo
10.	Research Now	27.	Decipher	44.	Schlesinger Associates
11.	Communispace	28.	Face Group	45.	IBM
12.	Lieberman Research	29.	Synovate	46.	Maritz Research
13.	20/20 Research	30.	QualVu	47.	KL Communications
14.	Affinnova	31.	Forrester	48.	ComScore
15.	Qualtrics	32.	Dialego	49.	Added Value
16.	Hotspex	33.	GutCheck	50.	Blauw
17.	GMI Lightspeed	34.	Dub		

Source: Murphy, L. F. (2014). *GreenBook Research Industry Trends Report*. Retrieved March 26, 2014 from <http://issuu.com/researchshare/docs/grit-winter-2014>

A similar comparison of research agencies according to their perceived innovativeness was also presented in the research study *Digital era of the marketing research – DEMR 2013*. The respondents were asked to determine the order of 5 research agencies, which they consider to be the most innovative in their respective countries and they were also asked to state the reasons, why do they consider a specific research agency to be the most innovative. Table 2 shows the ranking of research agencies in the Slovak and Czech Republic based on the perceived innovativeness, together with an overall ranking for both states.

Table 2 The ranking of the most innovative research agencies in the Slovak and Czech Republic according to the research study DEMR 2013

The ranking of research agencies according to the perceived innovativeness		
Overall rank	Slovak Republic	Czech Republic
1. GfK	1. GfK Slovakia	1. Ipsos
2. Ipsos	2. Ipsos	2. GfK Czech
3. TNS	3. 2Muse	3. TNS AISA
4. Millward Brown	4. TNS Slovakia	4. Millward Brown
5. 2Muse	5. DICIO Marketing	5. AC Nielsen

Source: processed on basis of the author’s own conducted research: research study “*Digital era of the marketing research – DEMR 2013*”

The results are not significantly different from the previous worldwide ranking. On the first places are research agencies, which offer their clients innovative methods of data collection and complex services. Moreover, they provide also consultant services

to their customers. Simultaneously, these are also research agencies, which are the branches of global research agencies and networks.

2.3 Innovative research methods and techniques

New information and communication technologies offer further options how to approach more directly the customers and their way of thinking and decision making. These new technologies enabled the creation of several innovative methods and techniques, which are utilized in marketing research in order to collect, process and analyse data. Several realized research studies identify new innovative methods, techniques and approaches, which are going to be implemented now or in the next years into the offer of research agencies and which are going to be subject of an increased demand by research clients. The findings of several global, Czech and Slovak research studies are specified in the next part of this paper. They serve as a basis for a comparison regarding the future direction of the development of marketing research methods.

An interesting view on the future methods and techniques of marketing research is presented in the *The 2013 Confirmit Annual Market Research Technology Survey* (in further text only CONFIRMIT).

Table 3 Research methods and techniques which are going to represent the biggest technological advantage in the year 2023 according to the study by CONFIRMIT 2013 (n=166)

Research method/technique	Respondents, who indicated the specific method
Real time/live date collection/analysis	14 %
Mobile data collection	13 %
Big data analysis	11 %
Social media mining	8 %
Augmented Reality	7 %
Data/text mining/analysis	7 %
Online/web-based research/reporting	7 %
Thought/emotion/behaviour monitoring	6 %
Automated analysis/reporting	5 %
Geolocation research/technology	4 %
Biometrics	3 %
DIY based reporting	3 %
Photo/video analysis	3 %
Neuroscience	3 %
Voice analysis	3 %
Gamification	3 %

Source: Macer, T., & Wilson, S. (2013). *The 2013 Confirmit Annual Market Research Technology Survey*. Retrieved March 2, 2014 from <http://www10.confirmit.com/rs/confirmit/images/2013%20Confirmit%20MR%20technology%20report%20%282%29.pdf>

The authors of the study asked 240 representatives of global research agencies to find out, which method is going to offer the biggest technological advantage for the researchers in the year 2023. 69 % of the respondents were able to answer such question and it is clear from the obtained findings, that the future efforts of research-

ers are going to focus on methods which allow the collection and analysis of data in real time, the questioning via smartphones, the analysis of social media and texts, as well the analysis of big data (Macer & Wilson, 2013).

Similar conclusions were drawn also by the authors of the global study *Green-Book Research Industry Trends Report* (in further text only GRIT) realized in the last quarter of 2013 on a sample of 2 229 respondents from the area of marketing research (research agencies and clients), which shows the extent of the current utilization of new technologies and research methods. According to the results of the study (Murphy, 2014), the most frequently used new research methods and techniques, which have been currently utilized by almost a third of research agencies and clients, are online research communities (monitoring of an online community to determine, how the members of the community react to specific topics, brands or products, they also serve for the purpose of generating new ideas), questioning with the help of smartphones, analysis of social media (monitoring and the analysis of spontaneous discussions on social networks) and the text analysis (assessment and analysis of any text in an electronic form in the company, for instance data from call centers, e-mails, reclamations, social networks, etc.).

Table 4 The utilization of new research methods and techniques by research agencies and research clients according to the GRIT study (n=2 229)

Research method/technique	Utilized by	Thinking about the utilization
Online communities	49 %	33 %
Mobile surveys	41 %	41 %
Social media analytics	36 %	40 %
Text analytics	33 %	35 %
Big data analytics	31 %	38 %
Webcam-based interviews	27 %	30 %
Eye tracking	26 %	25 %
Mobile qualitative research	22 %	39 %
Mobile ethnography	21 %	38 %
Micro-surveys	19 %	32 %
Prediction markets	17 %	27 %
Research gamification	16 %	38 %
Crowdsourcing	14 %	33 %
Virtual environments	14 %	28 %
Facial analysis	13 %	23 %
Neuromarketing	11 %	25 %
Biometric response	8 %	19 %

Source: Murphy, L. F. (2014). *GreenBook Research Industry Trends Report*. Retrieved March 26, 2014 from <http://issuu.com/researchshare/docs/grit-winter-2014>

The mentioned research studies indicated qualitative and quantitative methods of marketing research together. A view on the methods of qualitative research is offered by the study *Analysis and trends in market research in the years 2006-2012 in the Czech Republic*, which follows the current development and future trends in market research in the Czech Republic. The research assessed the position of professional as-

sociations and it analysed and quantified the field and the whole sector of market research. It specified also the decisive criteria of research agencies in their work with clients and it dealt with the development of quantitative and qualitative research methods from the viewpoint of research, media and advertising agencies. The respondents expressed their opinion on the expected growth of specific qualitative methods and it is clear from their answers that *"there are expectations of high growth regarding progressive methods. The results of this research point out the expectation of a stronger stagnation and a decrease in traditional group and individual interviews and a faster development of managed discussion forums (for instance online communities) and the utilization of eye cameras"* (Ševera, 2012).

Table 5 The anticipated future development of qualitative data collection methods (n=177, information in %)

Type of research	Strong decrease	Slight decrease	Stagnation	Slight increase	Strong increase	Not specified
Individual interviews - telephone	0	3,7	18,5	14,8	3,7	59,3
Group interviews - telephone	3,7	7,4	7,4	0	0	81,5
Group interviews - video	0	0	11,1	11,1	3,7	74,1
Individual interviews - video	0	0	14,8	7,4	0	77,8
Online chat	0	0	22,2	11,1	0	66,7
Studio tests	0	25,9	33,4	3,7	0	37
Group interviews - traditional	3,7	25,9	33,4	11,1	0	25,9
Individual interviews - traditional	0	11,1	63	11,1	0	14,8
Group interviews - online	0	0	22,2	33,3	3,7	40,8
Individual interviews - online	0	0	14,8	29,6	0	56,6
Monitoring of blogs	0	0	7,4	37,1	7,4	48,1
Eye camera	0	0	14,8	37,1	7,4	40,7
Monitoring at the point of sale	0	7,4	33,3	22,3	0	37
Discussion forums / online communities	0	0	3,7	44,5	7,4	44,4
Combination of various methods	0	0	22,3	29,6	18,5	29,6
Ethnography	0	7,4	14,8	22,3	11,1	44,4
Neuromarketing	0	0	7,4	44,5	7,4	40,7

Source: Ševera, M. (2012). *Analýza a trendy ve výzkumu trhu v letech 2006-2012 v Česku*. Retrieved November 23, 2014 from <http://www.vyzkumy.cz/clanky/365-analyza-a-trendy-ve-vyzkumu-trhu-v-letech-2006-2012-v-cesku>

The research about Slovak marketers realized by the research agency *TNS Slovakia* at the end of the year 2013 on a sample of 164 employees on marketing positions pointed out the fact that all asked respondents have an experience with the use of marketing research. The highest degree of satisfaction was, according to the managers, expressed *"with individual and group interviews and online researches. Slovak marketing managers have the biggest experiences with online researches (88 %) and they are furthermore planning to use them mostly also in the future"* (Böhmerová, 2014). Online research is attractive due to the ratio between invested funds and the high quality of the results, in combination with the speed of processing. The least used method in the future is going to be according to this research the questioning by telephone and in person.

Table 6 The presence and future of research according to Slovak marketers (n=164)

Type o research	Experience	Utilization in future
Online research	88 %	55 %
Individual interviews	59 %	35 %
Telephone research	59 %	20 %
Group interviews	48 %	26 %
Interviews via personal questioning	48 %	13 %
None	0 %	11 %

Source: Böhmerová, T. (2014). *Slovenský marketér*. Retrieved April 3, 2014 from http://www.tns-global.sk/sites/default/files/files/tns_slovakia_report_o_slovenskych_marketeroch.pdf

These findings can be compared with the conclusions drawn from the research study *Digital era of the marketing research – DEMR 2013*. According to this research study, the trends in the development of marketing research from the viewpoint of innovative data collection methods are going to be oriented mainly on the monitoring of social media, the creation of online research communities and the use of mobile devices in the quantitative and qualitative research. According to the respondents, the use of these innovative methods and techniques is expected to grow within the next 5 years.

Table 7 Innovative research methods and techniques with the potential for the highest growth in terms of their use in the next 5 years (n=251, data in %)

Research method/technique	Respondents, who specified the given technique		
	Total	SK	CZ
Social media monitoring	17,00	17,17	16,67
Online research communities	13,94	15,97	9,92
Mobile surveys	13,01	14,37	10,32
Mobile ethnography	13,01	12,57	13,89
Mobile qualitative research	11,95	11,18	13,49
Eye tracking	11,02	8,58	15,87
Big data analytics	7,04	6,79	7,54
Text analytics	5,05	4,59	5,95
Neuromarketing	2,92	3,59	1,59
Facial analysis	1,99	2,79	0,4
Crowdsourcing	1,07	1,4	0,4
Research gamification	1,07	0,6	1,98
Virtual environments	0,93	0,4	1,98

Source: processed on basis of the author's own conducted research: research study "Digital era of the marketing research – DEMR 2013"

The global research study *GreenBook Research Industry Trends Report* (Murphy, 2014), realized on a sample of 2 229 respondents from the field of marketing research, delivered analogical results. Online research communities, questioning with the help of smartphones and the analysis of social media were among the most often utilized new research methods, respectively techniques that have been used already by approximately one third of the research agencies and research clients. It can be therefore stated that the trends in the implementation of innovative data collection methods in

marketing research within the Slovak and Czech Republic copy the development in the world and that there is a significant orientation of research agencies and research clients towards the area of social media and mobile technologies. In the next years, a significant role in the development of marketing research is going to be played mainly by *the monitoring of social media, the creation of online research communities, the application of mobile technologies in quantitative and qualitative research, the mobile ethnographic research and eye tracking*. A great potential for a further development and a wider application has also the *analysis of big data, the measurement of brain reactions in neuromarketing and the research gamification*.

2.4 The future of marketing research in the digital era

Similarly to other scientific fields, several authors try to predict the direction of the future development of marketing research as well. The development in this area is significantly influenced by the technological advancements in the current digital era, which enabled the creation of social media and networks and changed the traditional behaviour within consumer segments. In the prediction regarding the status of marketing research in the year 2021, Micu (2011) refers to 3 assumptions:

- The volume of the data (the main source for marketing research) is going to increase dramatically and they are going to be less expensive than today.
- The utilization of social media analysis, online research communities and neuromarketing is going to spread fast, resulting in a decrease, but not in the elimination of the use of classic methods of questioning.
- Research agencies are going to try to integrate the data obtained by these methods into a holistic approach.

Several experts assume that marketing research has reached a turning point and the speed and number of changes is experienced by researchers already in the presence. According to Murphy (2012) *"the year 2020 is not going to be marked by a breakthrough, but changes that are going to significantly influence marketing research are going to happen within the next years."* As the most important changes can be considered mainly:

- *Questionnaires are going to be "more intelligent".*
- *The significance of qualitative research is going to increase.*
- *Marketing research is going to be focused more on the measurement of real emotions.*
- *Mobile phones are going to be the dominant technology in the future.*
- *The significance of text analysis as an important research method is going to increase.*
- *New companies in the field of data collection are going to strengthen their market positions.*
- *The focus of marketing research is going to be increasingly "glocal".*
- *The higher utilization of automated research reports.*
- *The use of the so called "gamification" in marketing research is going to increase.*
- *The so called "DIY marketing research" is going to expand.*

The perception of the future development of marketing research from the viewpoint of Slovak and Czech research agencies and research clients was also the subject of the research study *Digital era of the marketing research – DEMR 2013*, which was conducted by the author of this paper. Within this study, the respondents were asked the question “*What most significant changes do you expect in marketing research in the next 10 years?*”. Based on the obtained answers, it is clear that we can expect in 10 years:

- a significant dominance of qualitative research,
- the transformation of research agencies into consultant companies,
- the preference of research via mobile phones,
- a strong orientation of clients on the studies in the field of neuromarketing and the measurement of emotions,
- the increase in the offer of sophisticated online research applications,
- a significant share of companies such as Google, Facebook and Twitter on the offer of marketing research services.

The presence can be also characterized “as a period of the creative economy, which has developed as an increasing globalization trend in modern society at the turn of the millennia” (Hvizdová & Miklošik, 2012). Research agencies can accept the threads of the creative economy and the digital era also as challenges and turn them into a competitive advantage. In the future, research agencies are going to have to focus more on the intensive use of modern technologies and software solutions, or they are going to establish strong partnerships with companies oriented on technologies. There are many sources of information in the digital environment, from social networks and media, online communities, to data available for instance from call centers. Without investments into technologies, big volumes of relevant data cannot be collected in real time in the future. Even though the digital environment is going to expand, “brick and mortar businesses” are going to be still present on the market. Supermarkets, cafés, restaurants, banks, travel agencies are still going to be visited by customers. Therefore, it is not going to be real to rely solely on information collected from internet pages and social networks. It is going to be more relevant to collect data directly at the point of the interaction between the customer and the product, which can be supported by mobile technologies.

Technologies and software are going to be necessary in order to collect the required data, but they will not replace the human mind, which is able to create suggestions based on several sources of data and transform them into knowledge needed for decision making. Consultancy and a complex, in-depth view on the solution of a problem are going to be the most important sources of added value that can be offered by research agencies to their clients.

Conclusion

Technological innovations contribute significantly to the changes in society and they create the conditions for the shift from information to knowledge society. The driving force behind the development of knowledge society and a requirement of its intelligent growth is currently the sector of the digital economy, which has a major in-

fluence on the realization of marketing activities in companies. The collection of information and their transformation into useful knowledge becomes important. Marketing information systems help to obtain relevant information for the effective decision making in accordance to the requirements of the marketing management. The most important element of these systems is marketing research, which has become an integral part of the entrepreneurial process and it represents a strong management tool, with innovative research methods and techniques at its disposal.

The paper identified these innovative research methods and techniques and it documented that the monitoring of social media, the creation of online research communities, the application of mobile technologies in quantitative and qualitative research, the mobile ethnographic research, eye tracking, the analysis of big data, the measurement of brain reactions or the research gamification represent innovative approaches, which help to better understand the thinking and decision making of the consumer. The more complex is the knowledge of a company about its customer, the better it is able to adjust and to create successful strategies regarding brand awareness, product development, pricing, the creation of the communication mix and the design of distribution channels. The future is going to test, if research agencies were able to implement the mentioned innovative approaches into practice and offer them in a wider range to their clients.

This contribution determined on basis of several research studies also the challenges created for marketing research by the current digital era. Marketing research is going to be characterized in the near future by a significant dominance of qualitative research, by the preference of research conducted via mobile phones and tablets, by the increase in the offer of sophisticated online research applications and by a strong orientation of research clients on studies in the field of neuromarketing and emotion measurement. Research agencies are going to change into consultant companies and a complex, in-depth view on the solution of a problem is going to be the most important added value for their clients.

It can be also concluded that marketing research is changing significantly. The period, when marketing research was focused on the asking of questions or on the statistical data collection and analysis, is changing towards a period of listening to the customers, the measurement of their emotions and the acquisition of knowledge. The era of asking is being replaced by the era of listening. Technological innovations support significantly this change.

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