

EFFECT OF MARKETING COMMUNICATION ON CONSUMER PREFERENCES AND PURCHASING DECISIONS

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Abstract: Since the relation between marketing communication and consumer behaviour is interactive, the current global trend is to explore marketing communications in connection to consumer behaviour. Marketing communication influences, shapes and changes consumer behaviour. And vice versa, changing consumer behaviour makes companies modify their marketing communication by implementing new forms and tools to gain the trust of customers and to influence purchase. In order to build long-lasting customer relations, marketing communication, as a tool of influencing consumer behaviour, is applied. The paper deals with the impact of marketing communication on consumer preferences and purchasing decisions in selected target groups. We will point at marketing communication tools that influence buying behaviour. We conclude that the digital communication has a growing impact on consumer way of acting.

Keywords: Consumer behaviour, marketing communication, online marketing communication, preferences.

1 Introduction

The issues of consumers and their behaviour represent one of the most dynamic areas in marketing and belong to the most important activities in marketing strategic decisions-making process.

Doing research into consumer behaviour helps to understand the needs of customers, maps the capacity and trends that support efforts to better understand individual markets and the subsequent development of marketing strategies. Considering the number of controllable factors and their tendency to interact and their mutual interaction, it is a relatively complex process. (Kusá, Hrabáčková, 2012, compare with: Fašiang, 2012; Suchanek, Kralova, 2018). Therefore, in relation to this phenomenon, it is questionable how particular product categories change across segments, with which brands consumers get older and what their approach to marketing communication will be.

Thus, consumer behaviour and their development are influenced by various dynamic global changes, mainly of business, trade and marketing (Bialynicka-Birula, 2018; Horecký, 2018; Olczyk, Kordalska, 2018; Ajaz Khan, Çera, Nėtek, 2019), as well as by new qualitative and quantitative methods of research, technological opportunities of interactive information search, increase in digitization and artificial intelligence, along with changing approaches to marketing communication, especially online. Digital technologies are therefore the main phenomenon is shaping today's society, and since 2010, they have essentially changed the world we live in. (Musová, 2015; Ključnikov, Belás, Smrčka, 2016; Tomčík, Rosenlacher, 2018).

The digital technology boom is largely reflecting the changes in marketing and marketing communication, and bringing brand new opportunities and ways to reach consumers. Since its inception, marketing communication has been subject to a continuous alternation, whereas its changes are so frequent that many companies find it difficult to maintain current trends in this area of marketing (Vašítková, 2014).

One of the main principles of marketing communication today is synergy and interaction. When creating and implementing a marketing mix, it is very important that the tools work consistently, synergistically and interactively. In the practice of marketing communication, these instruments should be as closely as possible linked to achievement of all synergies and, inter alia, to the purpose of saving funds. According to Tuten and Solomon (2015), marketing communication is evolving and has so far gone through three stages - traditional, traditional and

currently is undergoing a socio-media stage. These stages depend on the overall nature of marketing in a given period.

The issue of digital marketing communication was addressed in their current publication *Marketing 4.0* by Kotler, Kartajaya, Setiawan (2016), who contributed significantly to the latest knowledge of the development of marketing communication from traditional forms to digital forms. Subsequently, in *Principles of Marketing* (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018), we see a fundamental change in understanding of marketing communication when defining the communication mix that the authors say is a "specific mix of advertising, public relations, personal selling, sales promotion and direct marketing that companies use to engage consumers, convincingly communicate customer value, and build customer relationships" (Kotler, Armstrong, 2018, p. 99). This is a change that includes consumers into the communication process, i.e. we are talking exclusively about bidirectional communication. Another alternation is that tools that ensure short-term marketing communication goals (advertising goals) are turned into tools that are aimed at building customer relationship, and hence, to ensure the long-term strategic goals of companies. Particular concepts of communication mix composition vary depending on the authors. At present, in the time of very dynamic development of new technologies and with them the emergence of new tools and forms of marketing communication, individual forms become interdisciplinary and cannot be strictly assigned to individual tools. Media, as means of communication, should be able to help us find a successful solution to a marketing problem; they also provide a space for implementation of the measures which have been adopted within the sphere of advertising. (Krajčovič, 2015, p. 25).

The boom of interactive technology shifts marketing communication from a mass monologue to an interactive dialogue. Interactive marketing enables customers to participate in the process of building brand image (Szwajca, 2018; Bartok, 2018) on a specific market or in a distinct target group. However, the resulting effectiveness of marketing strategies depends on correct identification of the specific segment, on the form and content of the communication throughout the purchasing and decision-making process, and ultimately, on the product attributes that determine the choice of the appropriate medium. Knowing the credibility of the source of information as well as the impact of each marketing communication tool can reveal consumer preferences and the ways in which they want to receive relevant information. Taking into account consumer expectations, an organization can use the integrated marketing communication in a way that is most efficient and cost-effective for it (Oancea Olimpia, 2020). Consumer behaviour research is thus a key factor for areas, such as, analyzing changes in consumer trends, segmenting and identifying the target segment, or analyzing the effectiveness and response of marketing campaigns (Benda-Prokeiová et al., 2017). The development of technologies also inherently affects consumers themselves. As consumers adapt to today's digital technologies and use them in everyday life, new consumer segments are emerging across generations. A new segment is, e.g., Generation C, (Connected Generation), which is not defined according to the year of birth of individuals, but according to psychographic segmentation features, such as, lifestyle, attitudes to brands, connection to digital technologies, etc. (Kusá, Piatrov, 2019 by Solis, 2012., Harris, 2012; Almeida, Almeida, Mota, 2019).

2 Purpose and Methods of Research

The purpose of the paper is to point at changes in consumer behaviour in the context of corporate marketing communication transformation and subsequently examine the impact of marketing communication on consumer preferences and purchasing decisions in selected target groups. In order to accomplish the purpose of the paper, the research into the

credibility of marketing communication tools and the research into understanding the impact of marketing communication on consumer buying behaviour preferences were conducted. Each part of research was focused on a different target audience and both parts were carried out in 2019. In order to evaluate the research into consumer behaviour, it was necessary to identify the basic target groups of consumers.

The identification of target groups is based on multi-attributive comparison of research indicators evaluated through cross-analysis.

The basic indicators are the demographic data of the respondents interviewed compared according to the attributes of the selection of the type of retail operation from the viewpoint of the main purchase made. In the first part of research, the identification of target groups was carried out according to the demographic structure of respondents on the sample from the perspective of indicators selected. On the basis of random probability sampling, the sample of respondents was calculated at 95% confidence estimation, tolerable error margin +/- 3.5%, and the standard deviation was estimated at 0.5, as it was not possible to carry out a pilot survey for our purposes. The sample of respondents was 784, which was also collected - a total of 788 respondents from Slovakia.

The research was evaluated by means of factor analysis, which is based on the assumption that the dependencies between the monitored variables are the result of the action of a certain number of background non-measurable quantities, which are referred to as common factors. The aim was to know and utilize (based on the dependencies of observed variables) the structure of common factors, which are considered as hidden causes of mutually correlating variables (Hebák et al. 2007). Thus, the factor analysis allowed the generation of basic parameters, which can be used to interpret phenomena that are not directly measurable (Mura, Marchevska, Dubravka, 2018).

In the second research, focusing on Generation C, a sample of respondents was deliberately selected within the set time period of 2 months of 2019, and the sample consisted of all respondents who were involved in the research at the time of the questionnaire distribution. 302 surveyed participated in the research.

Processing of collected data was realized in the environment of SPSS statistical program. The obtained data were evaluated by one-dimensional statistical analysis, while some selected data were evaluated by multidimensional statistical analysis. The results were visualized through different types of graphs and pivot tables, showing the percentage of each response.

Both researches were of a broader nature, in the paper only some selected results, copying the aim of the paper, are presented.

3 Marketing communication and consumer preferences - results

In the first part of the research carried out in early 2019 the sample of respondents in terms of the demographic distribution consisted of 51.1% of women and 48.9% of men in the total number of 788 respondents from Slovakia. The Table 1 shows the age and income margins, with meritorious questions.

Table 1: Demographic structure of respondents in terms of age and income

Age span	%	Income span	%
to 20 y.	13.2	Up to 400 €	14.7
21 -30 y.	18.0	400- 599 €	21.2
31 - 40 y.	23.8	600- 799 €	25.4
41- 50 y.	17.3	800- 999 €	21.0
51 - 60 y.	16.2	over 1,000 €	15.3
Over 60 y.	11.6	No income	2.4

Source: Own processing, 2019

The smallest representation was constituted by age groups up to 20 years of age (13.2 %) and over 60 years of age (11.6 %),

whereas most respondents fell within the age range of 31 to 40 years of age (23.8 %). As income is relevant to making purchases, it's been found out that the highest percentage of the respondents had stated that their monthly income ranges from 600 to 799 euros (25.4 %), the option over 1,000 euros was chosen by 15.3 % of the respondents, which shows the average salary conditions of the respondents, which are appropriate to their education and the region they live in. When considering the geographic breakdown of the respondents in terms of their residence, more than 60 % live in the city. The majority of the surveyed have attained secondary education (68.1 %).

The conducted research focused on identifying the hidden relationships between the variables that explain the connection between marketing communication and consumer preferences. In order to identify the key factors, factor analysis was used. The analysis was based on the assumption that several measured variables are closely connected. For the purpose of deeper understanding and explanation of the key factors, the following areas had been chosen to explain the connection between marketing communication and the perception of consumer preferences by the concerned groups:

- parameters affecting the purchase of everyday consumer goods,
- parameters affecting the credibility of communication tools,
- parameters affecting the impact of communication tools on purchasing.

From the point of view of perceiving the preferential values by consumers when purchasing consumer goods, the following attributes are decisive. Based on the factor analysis, they influence the choice of consumer goods.

Table 2: Attributes affecting the purchase of consumer goods

Attribute	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Packaging		0.279	0.392
Packaging size		0.677	
Good price	-0.213	0.717	0.182
Discount when buying more pieces	0.227	0.653	
Environmentally friendly product	0.533		
Product quality	0.494	-0.192	0.121
Product made in Slovakia	0.654	0.15	0.124
Product content	0.709		-0.134
Brand	0.29	-0.366	0.348
Country of origin	0.787		
Possibility to return goods			0.415
Affected by point-of-sale advertising		0.128	0.767
Gift with purchase		0.39	0.686

Source: Own processing, 2019

Table 2 shows that the decisive influences affecting Slovak consumers when purchasing consumer goods are:

- factor 1 – product origin and quality;
- factor 2 – advantageous purchase;
- factor 3 – the effect of point-of-sale marketing communication.

These factors imply that the Slovak consumer prefers the quality of the goods and they care about the origin of the goods. We can assume that the Slovak consumer prefers the choice of Slovak goods as they find them good quality (this statement applies mainly to purchasing everyday foods). The second factor implies that the price level is very important when shopping and that the

consumer prefers goods that are financially advantageous. The third factor emphasises the fact that the Slovak consumer often decides to buy a product at the moment of doing their shopping and is subject to the impact of communication activities at the point of sale, advertising in the shop, sales promotion, etc. From the point of view of examining the process of making a purchase, it is important to point at the parameters affecting the credibility of communication tools. The aforementioned factor matrices make it clear that when purchasing everyday consumer goods, not every form of marketing communication is trusted by the consumer to make a purchasing decision. From the perspective of credibility perception of communication tools, the following forms are decisive.

Table 3: Identification of factors that induce consumer's trust

The form of marketing communication	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
TV advertising	0.18	0.683		0.231	
Point-of-sale advertising	0.411	0.488		0.624	
Sales promotion - discount, multipack, etc.	0.156	0.176	0.13	0.703	
Consumer discussion forums on the Internet	0.384		0.757	-0.116	
Blogs on the Internet	0.155	0.214	0.691	-0.314	
Press – magazines, newspapers	0.29	0.617		0.161	
Posters, leaflets, catalogues	0.46	0.532		0.143	
Recommendations and references	-0.221		0.624		
Billboards, city lights and OOH carriers	0.577	0.331		0.221	0.197
Facebook, social networks, social media	0.602	0.348	0.178	-0.113	
Product presentation, tastings		0.143	0.481	0.328	0.147
Advertising on the Internet	0.671	0.174		0.271	0.127
Shop employees	0.343	0.184		0.316	0.264
Company website	0.678			0.104	0.112
Direct branding through the media	0.19	0.563			0.461
Teleshopping, direct sale		0.606			0.304
WOM	-0.118		0.482	0.217	
Other forms of mark. communication - creative	0.309	0.25	0.163	0.122	0.809

Source: Own processing, 2019

Table 3 shows that the Slovak consumer most often trusts the following forms of marketing communication:

- factor 1 – online communication;
- factor 2 – ATL communication;
- factor 3 – reference groups;
- factor 4 – point-of-sale communication;
- factor 5 – non-standard/creative forms of marketing communication.

As the amount of the time consumers spend on the internet grows each year, it is possible to identify the impact of digital technologies and online communication on their behaviour. The stated fact relates mainly to purchasing consumer goods, in which consumers consider online communication as the most trusted communication channel. The second factor implies that the standard communication channel, through advertising in

mass media, is still up to date and consumers trust it. The third factor identifies the significant impact of reference groups on shopping behaviour. When purchasing everyday goods (especially goods of ecological nature), the consumer searches for references that relate to the satisfaction parameter in alleviating post-purchase dissonance. Another factor is the point-of-sale communication. The stated factor suggests that the consumer is subject to communication activities directly while making the purchase (this applies mainly to everyday goods). The last factor indicates that creativity in marketing communication significantly affects the consumer's trust. It can be assumed that non-standard forms of marketing communication affect consumer behaviour at the subliminal level, while spontaneous acquisition of the communicated message and subsequent natural influence in the purchasing process take place.

In our research we also examined the impact of marketing communication on the purchase, as trust in a communication tool does not necessarily affect the purchase directly in the store, or on the Internet.

In relation to impact parameters, we have identified three key factors that influence consumer purchasing behaviour:

- factor 1 – point-of-sale communication;
- factor 2 – presentation of the sales offer;
- factor 3 – creative form of communication aimed at direct addressing.

The factors suggest that marketing communication aimed at affecting purchasing behaviour should act at the point of sale as the consumer often decides at the moment of making a purchase (the stated applies mainly to purchasing everyday goods). In the process of choosing the retailer, on the contrary, the presentation of the offer based on leaflets or outdoor advertising plays the key role. Lastly, there's another significant, and currently creative, form of communication based on addressing the consumer directly via social networks.

Other research focused on the Generation C subsegment in which we examined the influence of marketing communication on purchasing behaviour. 201 respondents took part in the research. The gender of the respondents was roughly balanced, with women constituting 51.7% of the respondents and men 48.3%. More than 60% of the respondents fell within the age range of 15 – 45 years of age. Only 32.3% of the respondents were university educated, mostly living in cities in Slovakia.

Following the previous research, there was also carried out investigation of notions about consumer behaviour of the Generation C (Generation Connected) in relation to marketing communication. Fundamental questions were of closed character and were evaluated by the form of a simple or multiple choice or assessment in the form of Likert scale.

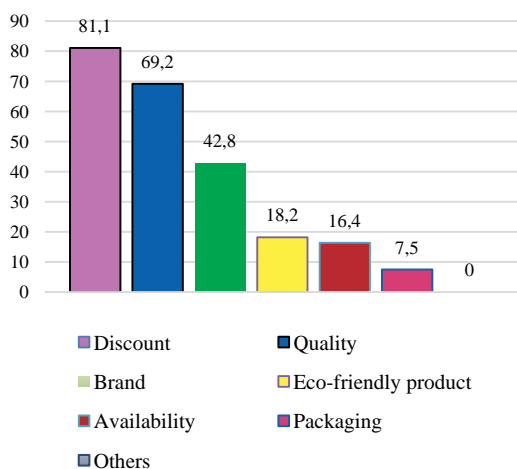
The aim of the research was to find out following:

- if marketing communication has an impact on purchasing decision-making of respondents;
- what factors influence most often their purchasing behaviour;
- which tools of marketing communication have a significant impact on purchasing behaviour.

The results showed that more than 90% of the respondents believe that marketing and marketing communication have an impact on purchasing decision-making process, while out of that 62.7% of respondents denoted this impact as partial and almost 30% expressed an absolutely affirmative stance to the perception of the impact.

Picture 1 refers to the fact that respondents denoted as the most important factor discount, or price appeal, followed by the quality of the product and the next position was taken by the factor of the brand. An interesting finding is that the factor of

ecological suitability of the product appeared in higher frequency than the factor of availability of the product. On the basis of the result we may state that the price is still a key factor in influencing decision-making process, and at the same time quite clearly cast doubt upon the paradigm that the packaging can sell.



Graph 1: Factors influencing purchasing decision-making
Source: Own processing, 2019

Through further investigating we wanted to find out which communication tools and to what extent have an impact on consumers of the Generation C in the purchasing decision-making process. After having evaluated the frequency of occurrence of individual levels of the scale we may state that respondents have still been influenced in a significant way by techniques of the sales promotion tool, thus gifts to the purchase together with presentation of the products and degustation and advertising at the point of purchase. These were proved also in the previous research. From the tools of PR an important impact have websites and the lowest influence can be seen at traditional forms of advertising (print, radio and outdoor advertising). The lowest extent of impact is represented by direct addressing by means of a phone or e-mail. We can suppose that this state is caused by certain distrust of consumers towards these forms, which is a result of common unpleasant experiences coming exactly from these communication channels. However, what we found amazing was that we expected that majority of these respondents would be influenced by communication on social networks just because these are “connected consumers”. Research on the given sample did not prove this and it pointed to appropriate impact on purchasing decision-making on the basis of advertising on social networks and in the online environment.

Table 4: Impact of marketing communication tools in decision-making process

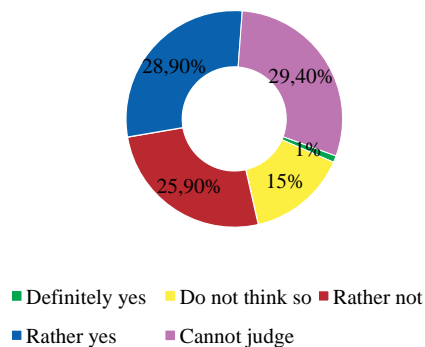
	No impact	Low impact	Appropriate impact	High impact	Total impact
Advertising on TV (commercials, teleshopping)	16.9 %	23.4 %	46.8 %	6 %	7 %
Advertising in cyberspace	11.4 %	27.9 %	38.8 %	14.9 %	7 %
Advertising on social networks (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube)	19.9 %	27.4 %	33.3 %	12.9 %	6.5 %
Outdoor advertising (billboards, panels)	36.3 %	30.3 %	17.9 %	15.4 %	0 %

Advertising at point of sale (in shop)	10 %	23.9 %	29.4 %	35.3 %	1.5 %
Print advertising	23.9 %	40.3 %	16.4 %	17.9 %	1.5 %
Radio advertising	46.8 %	17.9 %	22.4 %	12.9 %	0 %
Information brochures	22.4 %	34.8 %	27.4 %	10 %	5.5 %
Gift to purchase	8.5 %	23.4 %	21.9 %	26.9 %	19.4 %
Presentation of products and degustation	9.5 %	18.4 %	29.4 %	25.4 %	17.4 %
Loyalty programmes	16.9 %	23.9 %	31.8 %	18.9 %	8.5 %
Catalogues, leaflets	9.5 %	22.4 %	33.3 %	22.9 %	11.9 %
Direct addressing (phone, e-mail)	51.9 %	21.4 %	15.4 %	8.5 %	3.0 %
Website	18.9 %	24.4 %	19.4 %	31.8 %	5.5 %
Events	28.9 %	22.4 %	22.9 %	11.4 %	14.4 %
Bloggs, reviews, customers fora	24.4 %	16.9 %	26.4 %	17.9 %	14.4 %
Employees in shop	8.5 %	23.4 %	28.9 %	27.9 %	11.4 %

Source: Own processing, 2019

In one of the questions we found out that the most important advantage for respondents is the possibility to search information on the Internet, because the cyberspace is for Generation C in majority of cases communication means and source of information. A significant value reached factors related to the possibility of comparing prices, the option to return a product and possibility to purchase online from the comfort of the home. Less important factors showed a choice to have a look at a product before its purchase on a video and monitoring the state of order after having bought it.

A relevant question of the research was the monitored attitude of the respondents to the perception of changes in their consumer behaviour due to the impact of marketing communication activities. We were interested in the opinion if marketing communication activities alternate decision-making of consumers when buying products.



Graph 2: Impact of marketing communication activities on decision-making process in purchasing
Source: Own processing, 2019

The results are relatively identically laid out. Almost 30 % of the respondents cannot say if marketing communication activities change their purchasing decision-making, however, nearly further 30 % of respondents believe that these activities have an impact. More than one quarter of the respondents have a more sceptical view on this influence and they say that communication activities rather do not affect them. It is interesting that only 1 % have an opinion that communication activities do not exert any influence on their decision-making process.

4 Conclusions

The results of the research, out of which only several data were selected for this paper, showed that the influence of marketing communication on consumer behaviour is significant. Over the last years, forms and tools of marketing communication, along with preference attributes in retail, stay practically unchanged, which was for example proven by both researches that the price discount and the origin, or composition of the goods reach the highest preferences.

When we monitor changes in consumer behaviour in interaction with marketing communication, then we find out that especially the generations of millennials (Generations Y and Z) are affected to a large extent by marketing communication carried out on the Internet and social networks (Lampropoulos, Siakas, Anastasiadis, 2019). Although they use these media more than just a source of information, they realize their purchases in physical shops, while monitoring online brands or retailers, at which they buy in person.

Changes in marketing communication, which are also caused by technological progress, take a significant part in forming consumer behaviour. It is undisputable that continuity of changes provokes new alternations not only in marketing, but also in purchasing and decision-making processes. In our times, consumers are hard to please, demanding from the brands to be constantly innovated and be exposed to creative communication (Mura, Slezia, 2015; Lewandowska, Stopa, 2019), which is especially true for the Generation C.

A trend of marketing communication in online space is to arouse a controversy based on the conviction of the consumer to buy a product, which can be obtained on the basis of 4 phases. According to Piatrov (2019), this model is denoted as STDC, (See – Think – Do – Care). The stage of “see” ensures presenting the product to a potential customer; the phase “think” supports the consumer thinking about the product, e.g., looking for information on the product, comparing prices; the stage “do” has to convince the consumer to buy a product, to which online forms of marketing communication significantly contribute. The final phase “care” represents repeatedly addressing of existing customers in the endeavour to ensure positioning and creating loyalty. This stage is important because it makes a value of customer for the company. Basically, this approach is innovative, because it shows the right view on the communication with customer, who expects from a brand more than just an active sale, however, at the same time, they calculate with the fact that it is multiply cost-effective to address and maintain already existing customers that to build relations with new ones.

Trends in purchasing behaviour represent for marketing experts several challenges to face. The first one is to monitor ongoing changes, the second one to make products and services corresponding with alternating consumer values and the third one is to create communication which is a reflection of values of people on different target markets and on these values to build a brand.

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