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**Gender Roles in Marketing Communications in Real
Estate Markets**

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Gender Roles in Marketing Communications in Real Estate Markets

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Abstract

Research background: The real estate market has attracted a lot of public interest due to its significant economic role. Changes are, however, going to abound in the nearest future as a result difficulties in accessing housing loans and amendments to the building construction laws, amongst others. This will call for even greater involvements of tenderers in the marketing communication process. Gender-related differences in the purchasing decision making process is growing in significance and should be reflected in marketing communications.

Purpose of the article: The aim of the article is identify contemporary activities undertaken in marketing communications in the real estate market. The specific objective is to analyse the use of one of the most significant tools of marketing communications namely, the internet in the real estate market. The specific objective also includes seeking answers to the question if the sex of recipients of marketing messages concerning the real estate market is taken into consideration by their broadcasters.

Methodology/methods: The study involved the use of literature analysis and criticism, analysis of web contents provided by tenderers of real estate as well as telephone interviews with representatives of both property developers and real estate agencies.

Findings: Online marketing communications are the most important in real estate markets. Websites of real estate agencies and property developers vary a lot. Real estate tenderers, very often, make use of social media in marketing communications undertaken by them. One of the most common trend is to the use of images and not texts in marketing communications, thus creating new possibilities for communication. Very few property developers and real estate

agencies exploit the knowledge of gender-related differences in the reception of marketing messages. Only few communication activities take cognisance of sex. The need for marketing communications in real estate to be directed at young customers has necessitated the engagement of new media sources in such activities.

Introduction

The real estate market arouses considerable social interest in many countries due to its significant economic role. Intense competition and macro-economic changes calls for even greater involvement of bidders in marketing communications processes. Marketing communication as a specific corporate dialogue with other actors in its market environment stimulates demand and shapes consumers' needs. The exchange of information and the relationship between a company and its customers is of value for both parties (Fill, 2006, pp. 8). The composition of the set of marketing communication tools is not clearly defined, but it usually includes advertising, personal communication (sales, personal sales), sales promotion, and public relations (Meffert, 1986).

Real estate is a very complex product. It is rarely acquired and needs the engagement of huge financial resources, hence the immense importance of interpersonal communication between bidders and buyers. Gender differences are becoming increasingly important in the purchasing decision making process (Feingold, 1994, pp. 429-456; Fischer & Arnold, 1994, pp. 163-182; Barletta, 2006, pp. 15-33). This should be reflected in marketing communications, especially since women have a strong influence on the purchase of property.

The Internet has been of significant importance for marketing communications in the real estate branch. According to Ren (2015, pp. 220-223), the Internet can change the way information is acquired, including the aggregation and integration of effective information. He has shown in his article, through the analysis of the impacts of the Internet to the real estate industry, that the Internet has changed the consumption trend, which is a key link between marketing and consumer demand. A broad research on the impact of information and communication technologies in the real estate industry was conducted by Kummerow & Chan (2005, pp. 173-190). It argues that consumers were the main beneficiaries of technological change.

The research objectives discussed in the foregoing paper include the following:

1. To identify relevant, contemporary activities in the area of marketing communications in the real estate market.

2. To determine the gender of the real estate agents (seller, agent, broker, agent, sales representative) and the recipient of this offer.
3. To determine whether the gender of the recipient of real estate marketing message is taken into account by their broadcasters (bidders).
4. To analyze the use of the Internet as one of the most important marketing communication tools in the real estate market.

Research Methodology

The critical literature review, telephone interview and the web content analysis methods were applied to accomplish the three research objectives.

The telephone interview was conducted with employees of 12 real estate agencies and developers located in Rzeszow, a provincial capital city in south-eastern Poland. The interview focused on the most commonly used office communication tools and their differences in approaches to women and men. The interview was conducted from 6-10 March 2017.

The web content analysis method is an objective, systematic and quantitative description of the apparent content of the messages. The research difficulties included:

1. If the websites of real estate agencies contain information that is relevant for the recipients?
 2. Identifying what the way to present real estate offers on the Internet is.
- 30 web pages were selected for the analysis of the content. These were the first results in the most popular Google search engine (97% of users) listed under the entry "Rzeszów real estates". The content analysis was carried out 13-17 March, 2017.

The following issues were, in respect of the first difficulty, identified regarding the websites offering real estate:

1. Company presentation:
2. Information that make a company reliable:
3. Seller/Buyer Department
4. Current offer base
5. Search engine offer
6. Registration forms
7. Social media
8. A service added value: tutorial texts, market data (statistics, summaries, etc.), credit calculator, useful links, search information in the real estate market, etc.
9. The use of audiovisual technology
10. Contact

As for a way of presenting the estates offer on these websites, the following factors were identified:

1. Property information - scope, content, form
2. Graphical presentation - photos, maps, signs
3. Data about the area
4. Contact with an advisor
5. Charges calculator

The role of the tenderer's gender in the real estate market

More than 60% of people employed in real estate services in Poland are women (GUS, 2016). An interesting research on gender composition of the real estate market was conducted in Sweden, where about 40% of employees are women (Staffansson, 2014, pp. 5). It follows that men are more often in higher and technical positions, while women remain in supporting positions and not as often in positions such as a real estate manager (Staffansson, 2014, pp. VI). Similar results were obtained from studies in Australia (Dimovski et al, 2016, pp. 18-28.). The study revealed that of all the Financials Sub Industry sector groups, Real Estate Management and Development (REMD) companies have the lowest proportion of female directors on their boards - eight women on each of the 35 analyzed company boards compared to 159 men on these 35 boards in 2011.

In Poland, women in the real estate market are doing very well representing both the sellers and buyers. Women as sellers prepare more scrupulously for real estate transactions than men. Scrupulousness is already evident at the stage of sales announcement drafting. Women are well prepared to show detailed elements of an apartment, which for men is often reduced to the location, size, number of rooms and price per square meter space. For women, however, aspects such as the layout of the apartment, its geographical positioning, the view from the window or illumination are important. Buyers were able, in the case of re-sale flats sold by women, to negotiate an average of 4.3% discount. Men agreed to make some more generous concessions by decreasing the price by 5% on average. Women are also quicker at finding buyers for their apartments.

The gender of an agent in the real estate market is important, especially in price negotiations. The evidence suggests an interesting alternative to agent performance namely, that buyers and sellers with different reservation price and time on market expectations, such as those selling foreclosure homes, tend to select agents along gender lines (Seagraves & Gallimore, 2012, pp. 600-631).

The gender role of a buyer (s) in the real estate market

Although women earn less than men in Poland they, however, move out of their family homes much faster. According to Eurostat data (2013), women move away from their parents 12 months earlier than men. Polish women in the pre- 35 age group leave the family homes on average at the age of 27.3. For men, the average age is 28.3, which is the average level for the "new EU" countries. Women are, for this reason, increasingly looking for real estates.

Gender significantly differentiates approaches to limiting risks associated with acquiring real estate. Women pay more attention to the limitation of this type of risk than men do. According to a survey of over 1,000 Home Broker clients, up to 58% of women consider it as important to avoid the risk of non-completion of building constructions compared to 51% for men (Turek, 2012). As a result, men are more likely to use the primary market. The desire to own a new home is at least moderately important for 90% of men and 80% of women. Women in Poland pay more attention to the interior finishing in accordance with their taste - this is important for 87% of women, but only for 78% of men. The studies conducted in Slovenia and Japan on the expectations of potential acquirers of residential real estate rights show that the participants are more expressive than men (see Grum & Salaj, 2010, pp. 501-516).

Gender, a key variable in marketing segmentation and research often indicates different responses from males and females in using the Internet for online shopping, communication and relationship management (Chan et. al., 2015, pp. 182 -206.). Significant differences in the perception of Internet messages by women and men are also analyzed and described by Perju-Mitran & Budacia (2015, pp. 567- 573).

Gender-related marketing communication in the real estate market

An analysis of secondary sources and interviews conducted with real estate agency employees shows that the Internet is of great significance in the communications of real estate agents. Internet advertising as a type of promotion aimed at informing and inducing the purchase of certain real estate or services is conducted most often on their own web sites and in the form of web-based advertisements (in advertising services). Advertising activities involves the application of various channels such as newspapers, radio, television, magazines, posters, advertisements, and inscriptions. The most popular types of channels in Rzeszów's local market include advertising banners located on the property sold and classified ads. Press releases and leaflets are, however, less popular.

When choosing real estate women are guided by feelings and they pay more attention to the aesthetic appeal of the apartment and its location. For them the arrangement of children's room, access to a kindergarten or school, kitchen area and its functionality, a view from the window and the cost of living are important. In Poland, there is a belief that women are more emotionally driven than men. However, in the process of buying a home, which in itself is an emotional act, women do not only rely on emotions, they are also increasingly exploring knowledge about the techniques and materials being used. It follows from the observation of developers that women are, in a sense, the driving force behind the dream of building a home. It can be concluded from the telephone interviews with real estate agents and developers that two thirds of the apartments are purchased by women.

Men, buying real estate pay attention to the infrastructure, first the service points, the garage or parking space and technical parameters such as the possibility of rearranging the purchased apartment, the TV access, and the acoustics of the apartment. It must be emphasized, however, that any advertising aimed at men should not be created on the basis of gender-based discrimination.

Analyzing the use of the Internet in real estate market

Real estate agents use the Internet primarily through their own websites, advertising services and social media. One of such key tools are the Internet advertising services. Agents have a huge number of sites to choose from, so the decision of who to patronize is not easy. Research on this issue was undertaken by PBS Agency, that carried out the CAWI study in March and April 2015. 268 Real Estate Agency employees from all over Poland participated in the survey. Most of them (95%) used the Otodom service the previous year. The next highly rated services were Gratka and OLX.pl with 81% and 73% respondents respectively.

The results of the survey indicate that the most important argument for agents using a particular site is the number of property-related requests from potential customers that use the site. Visits Statistical data relating to visits and portal popularity are other elements that mediators pay particular attention to. They were successively followed – by the matching of listings to the needs of the office, costs of posting notices , an ease of use of the user account, customer support and access to industry-related analyses .

The core of any PR activities should be the website of the real estate agency or a developer. It should fulfill a number of tasks, including: attracting as many visitors as possible to the site, maintaining interest in the site, and establishing a two-way communication with Internet users.

The content analysis concerned 30 websites (of real estate agencies and developers), linked with the searched phrase "real estate Rzeszów" after Internet advertising services from real estate had been eliminated.

Table 1 presents the content of the analyzed web pages in both quantitative and percentage terms.

Table 1. The content of analyzed web pages (quantitatively and in percentage)

Elements of websites	No. of websites	Share (in %)
1. Company presentation: - company as an organization: mission, goals, successes - company as a team: presentation of the board and employees - company as a business partner: standards and principles of cooperation, benefits for the customer - company as an advisor: information about services other than sales (credit counseling, etc.)	24 6 28 22	80% 20% 93% 73%
2. Information that makes a company trustworthy: - awards, successes, affiliation, social and charitable activities, etc. - recommendations of satisfied customers - recommendations of famous people/companies - partners: consulting companies, organizations and associations, media, etc. - company in the media (press articles, radio speech and TV)	6 6 5 15 4	20% 20% 17% 50% 13%
3. Sellers/Buyers Section (basic information for each of these groups - why should they entrust the transaction to this company?)	15	50%
4. Up-to-date offers database	28	93%
5. Offers search engine	22	73%
6. Registration forms (real estate to buy and sell, customers' and journalist's applications)	15	50%
7. Social media	8	27%
8. Service added value: - guide texts - data about market (statistics, summaries, etc.) - credit calculator - useful links - information search engine about the real estate market, etc.	16 8 14 15 4	53% 27% 47% 50% 13%
9. The use of audiovisual technologies	6	20%
10. Contact	30	100%

Source: Own research

The analysis shows that the presentation of a real estate office or a developer is usually a brief description of the company as an organization, a business partner and/ or a consultant. Very rarely do such companies represent their team (6%). Most real estate agencies (50%) cite their business partners as respectable sources of information concerning them.

Recommendations from satisfied customers and information about awards, successes, etc are contained on every fifth page of the real estate and developer's website. The vast majority of companies have their current base of offers on their websites. Due to the fact that a part of the analyzed companies were real estate offices while the other were developer's offices only half of the analyzed sites had sections for sellers and buyers and registration forms for purchases and sales. References to social media have only been identified on 8 websites. The most often occurring added value of the site are its pop-up guidance texts (53%), useful links (50%) and a loan calculator (47%). It is somewhat surprising that audiovisual technology is applied only to one-fifth of each page.

All analyzed web pages in their real estate presentations contained information about the property, graphic presentation, locational data as well as contact details to the advisor. Not all analyzed sites (73%) had a fee calculator included.

Conclusions

The research has confirmed that the Internet exercised the greatest importance in marketing communications in the real estate market. The fact that awareness of gender differences in marketing communications is still low was confirmed by interviews conducted with employees. Some of them stressed the existence of differences in personal communication, but in no other form of communication did they notice such a need. The content analysis of websites has shown that companies located in medium-sized provincial cities have websites that could be much more technologically advanced, such as how to present real estate using audiovisual technology. However, the results cannot be generalized, as primary testing was performed on a small sample. An additional limitation was the conduct of the research among companies located in only one city. It would certainly be worthwhile to conduct further studies with a larger number of responding companies and on a wider territorial scale.

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