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Professional paper
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THE IMPACT OF INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION ON CUSTOMER BEHAVIOR

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Abstract:

The application of integrated marketing communications has become an imperative nowadays. Companies try to impose themselves on the market and win over customers and also keep them. Integrated marketing communications are a key element in the company's modern efforts to build long-term customer relationships. The company estimates which tools and forms of the promotional mix it will use before delivering adequate messages to its customers. In fact, integrated marketing communications are the answer to how companies can be competitive in their operations by establishing good communication relationships with customers in the long run. In this paper, special emphasis is placed on the research of how Macedonian companies are aware of the impact of integrated marketing communications on customer behavior. From the research we can see that it is necessary to approach the use of a larger number of communication tools, using a sophisticated coordination mechanism. IMC strives to cover all the communication tools of the company for the target audience to receive a consistent message that will influence customers behavior.

Keywords: Integrated marketing communications, customers behavior, companies, competitive advantage.

JEL classification: M30; M13

INTRODUCTION

The competition between the companies is drastically increasing, as in the domestic market, as well as in the international market. Today, the central problem that companies deal with is not the lack of products or services, but the lack of consumers. It is in these conditions that integrated marketing communications are the ones that can make companies competitive in their operations by establishing long-term relationships with consumers (Descotes, and Delassus 2015). Companies do not wonder whether to

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communicate with consumers but how to communicate, how to differentiate themselves from others and how often to communicate with the target group.

To differentiate themselves from other companies they have to create messages that will target the target group. The main purpose of communication is to convey the message and to gain and retain consumers (Malthouse et al. 2004).

Communication is a complex process, and the quality of the communication largely depends on the quality of the business relationship between the company and the consumers. The goal of the company is to build long-term relationships with consumers, and for that it needs clear communication, both in the traditional way and in the electronic product. The concept of the IMC helps managers to cope with the demands imposed on them by the environment.

1. CONCEPT OF INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS TO BUILD CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS

The concept of integrated marketing communications represents different forms of communications with existing and potential customers over a period of time. The aim is to influence the behavior of the selected audience, using all forms of communication that are considered acceptable (Mikolon, et al. 2015).

Features of this concept are (Calvert 2008):

- Influence on consumer behavior
- Need to combine messages and media in order to achieve the goals
- Building long-term relationships with consumers

The effective concept of integrated marketing communications requires the conception and implementation of a set of coordinated and synchronized action on most of the forms of IMC.

The basic forms of IMC are (Fulgoni, and Lipsman 2014):

- Economic propaganda
- Sales promotion
- Public relations and publicity
- Personal sales and
- Direct marketing.

It is characteristic that the company can control them (with the exception of publicity which is an unpaid form of promotion). In addition to the new ones, there are secondary forms of IMC, such as: shaping, packaging, additional services that can not be programmed and controlled by the company (Pozzi 2012).

IMCs are the basis for establishing contacts and creating business relationships with consumers. The company should apply different marketing strategies by communicating with its customers in order to build a positive attitude towards them, which leads to loyal consumers (Susskind, et al 2000).

2. CREATIVITY OF INTEGRATED MARKETING CONCEPT

Creativity means the best way to convey the message to consumers. Creativity is a quality possessed by individuals, which enables them to create new approaches in certain situations, new, better and more perfect solutions to the problem. The role of creativity in integrated marketing communications is crucial for gaining an advantage over a company in the market, and thus greater sales of its products.

Creativity in communication is recognized by (Meyer, Gremler, and Hogreve 2014):

- the interesting content of the message that is aimed at the target group;
- presenting the messages that should be original, recognizable, inspiring, unusual, impressive;
- the impact on the change of attitude among consumers;
- increasing sales effects.

3. PROCESS FOR CREATING EFFECTIVE IMC STRATEGIES DEPENDING ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

To create effective IMC strategies, the following should be approached (Amenc, Goltz, and Lodh 2012):

- **Identification of the target audience.** The company should start its activities after it has clearly identified the target audience. The target audience can be potential buyers, existing users, those who make the purchasing decision and those who have a say in the impact (Koushiki 2015). The target audience has a great influence on the company's decisions about the forms of the IMC, the creation of the message and its frequency.
- **Determining the goals of communication.** Since the target audience has already been defined, the reaction of consumers to the purchase should be seen. The purchase itself is a consequence of the process of making a decision on the part of the consumer. The marketing manager needs to see if the consumer is willing to buy or not.
- **Determining the stages of the purchasing decision process.** This includes the stages through which the consumer goes through the process of purchasing a particular product, including knowledge, preferences, approvals, persuasions and purchases.
- **Creating the message.** After the marketing manager defines the desired and expected reactions of the consumers, he will focus on creating a message on the table. The ideal created message should attract attention, retain interest, provoke desire and encourage action - a frame that is known as AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action). When they start composing the message, the marketing manager has to decide what to say (content of the message) and how to convey it.
- **Media selection.** The marketing manager has the task of selecting the communication channels (Lewes 2010). Personal communication channels

include mutual communication of two or more people in person, by phone, by mail, Viber etc. These channels of communication are efficient because the reaction of the consumer is immediately visible. We have impersonal communication channels when messages are transmitted without direct or personal contact and in this case we have no feedback. These channels include the following media: print media (newspapers, magazines, direct mail); broadcast media (radio, television); display media (billboards, graffiti, posters) and online media (online services, websites).

4. IMC MEDIA AND FUNDS

When choosing the most suitable medium for placing the promotional message from the decisive influence we need to focus on the budget planned for marketing, choosing the right place and time, the characteristics of the message. You should also have a clear understanding of the visibility or readability of certain media, which depends on the success of marketing communications.

The factors that influence the choice of the optimal medium are usually numerous, diverse and changeable, so the rational choice is based on (Lipsman et al. 2012):

- Types of media that are available,
- The types of products that are promoted through the media,
- Characteristics of consumers,
- Distribution of media in the internal and external environment,
- The quality, the image, that is, the reputation of the media among the consumers,
- Marketing opportunities and segmentation of markets,
- Promotional offer by competitors,
- The goals that are planned for realization,
- Existing marketing goals and their compliance with the promotional mix, etc.

The trend „media multitaskers“ is widely known – where consumers use different medias at the same time. In that way, the modern consumer more and more reads a newspaper or listens to a radio, or reads a newspaper and watches TV, or even, surfs the Net, listens to the radio and watches promotional messages on TV. Exactly for those reasons, a choice is made and a combination of several media with which the maximizing effect of marketing communication is maximized (Fulgoni, and Lipsman 2014).

Marketing communications enable the communication process between the company and the consumers through the physical shape that they have and the visual-aesthetic content (Coviello, Winklhofer, and Hamilton 2006). Therefore, it is of great importance for the communication to be a properly formed message. The message should be short, interesting, attractive, friendly, communicative to draw the attention of the consumer (Papazolomou, and Yioula 2012).

The means for marketing communication are divided into (Ries, and Ries 2004):

Graphic means for promotion:

- Poster

- Flyer and prospectus (catalog, brochure)
- Photography: postcard, photo album and photo monograph
- Report and article
- Other means of external promotion (bulletin board-billboard, light advertising, wall painting, canopy, shop window, movable means).

Arrangements for promotion:

- Fair
- Exhibition
- Manifestation

Contact means for promotion:

- Propaganda lecture
- Press conference

Interactive means of promotion:

- Website
- Social networks
- Web advertising
- Referral system
- Smartphone application
- Other interactive means of promotion (chat, carrying technology, etc.).

7. REASERCH

In order to perceive the impact of integrated marketing communications on consumer behavior, a survey was conducted which included 75 companies from small and medium business in the Republic of Northern Macedonia from different areas. The aim of the research was to understand the use of integrated marketing communications and the forms of integrated marketing communications that they use. The sample included 90 respondents, employees in managerial positions - marketing managers. Data collection was done based on a survey questionnaire.

Only a part of the questions that are crucial for this research are singled out from the conducted survey.

One of the key questions was: Do integrated marketing communications influence consumer behavior? According to the answers, the following data were obtained:

Do integrated marketing communications influence consumer behavior

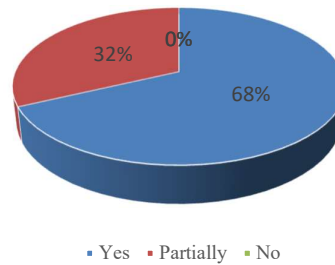


Figure 1. Percentage overview of the impact of integrated marketing communications on the behavior of consumers

According to the obtained taxes, 68% of the respondents think that integrated marketing communications have an impact on the behavior of consumers and 32% of the respondents believe that they partially have an impact on the behavior of consumers. This shows that a large number of respondents face the need to use integrated marketing communications and establish communication with their consumers.

When asked which types of integrated marketing communications you most often use to communicate with consumers, the following taxes are obtained:

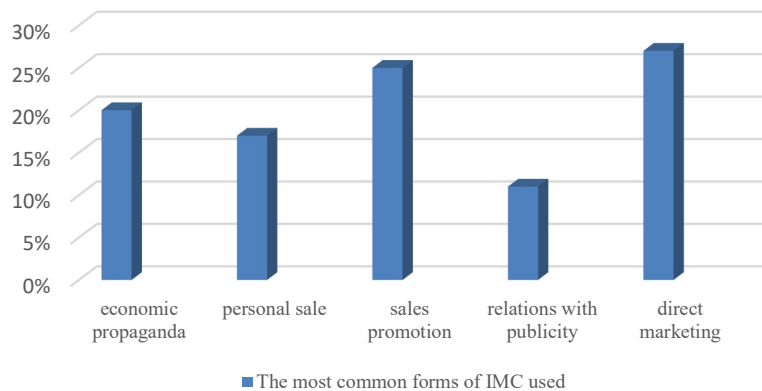


Figure 2. Percentage view of the most frequently used faces of IMC with consumers

Based on the obtained taxes, we can see that the most useful image of IMC is direct marketing with 27%, then sales promotion with 25%, economic propaganda with 20%, personal birth with 17%, public relations with 11%. The survey found that companies use a combination of several IMC features.

When asked what types of integrated marketing communications do you have the most influence on the behavior of consumers, the following taxes are obtained:

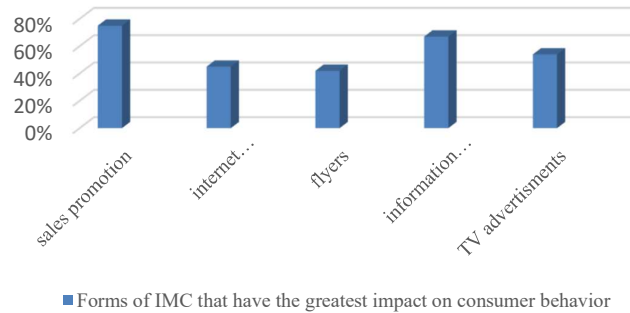


Figure 3. Percentage overview of the forms of integrated marketing communications that most affect consumers

According to the obtained data, the biggest influence on the behavior of the consumers has the promotion of the sale and 75% of the respondents stated about this form of IMC, more precisely the discounts that are given to the consumers and encourage them to buy. The research shows that other forms of IMC that affect consumer behavior are: 67% of respondents answered that it is information from friends, 54% of respondents said that the form that affects consumer behavior is TV commercials, 45% of respondents opted for online ads and 42% of respondents opted for flyers.

When asked which products are most often purchased with integrated marketing communication ads, the following data were obtained:

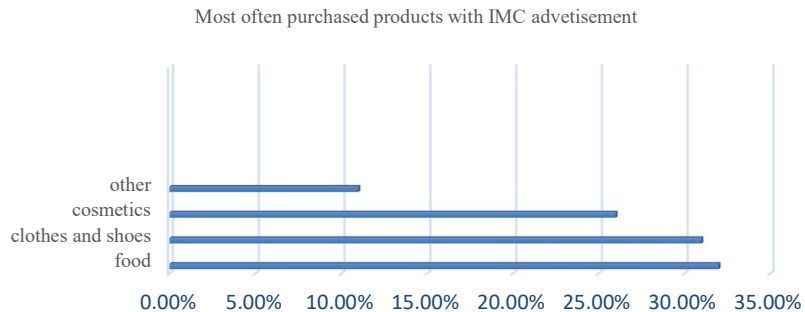


Figure 4. Percentage view of the most frequently purchased products with IMC advertisement

Based on the obtained data, it can be noticed that the most purchased products as a result of IMC advertisements are food products, 32% of the respondents answered food products, then with 31% of the respondents answered that they are clothes and shoes, 26% of the respondents think that these are cosmetic products and 11% of respondents answered that they are other products. From these gifts we can conclude that IMC ads have the greatest effect on food products and clothing and footwear, where consumers use the discounts that are given over a period of time. However, this does not mean that other products should not be subjected to forms of advertising that will inform consumers about the existence of a product and encourage and persuade them to buy it.

When asked what are the reasons why consumers buy products for which IMC ads are used, the following data were obtained:



Figure 5. Percentage overview of the reasons why consumers buy products for which IMC advertisements apply

Based on the processed data, 38% of the respondents make the purchase for savings, 28% of the respondents make the purchase of the products to satisfy their needs, 18% of the respondents make the purchase of the products due to the fact that those products will be needed at a certain time in the future and 16% of respondents make the purchase for other reasons. Other reasons include the brand, product packaging and additional value offered by the company.

When asked if your company is building effective customer relationships through IMC, the following data were obtained:

Does your company build customer loyalty through IMC?

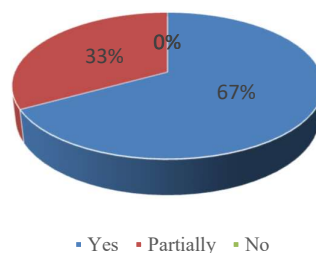


Figure 6. Percentage overview of building effective customer relationships through IMC

According to the obtained data, 67% of the respondents believe that integrated marketing communications build effective relationships with consumers and 33% of respondents believe that they have a partial impact on building effective relationships with consumers.

When asked what are the most important components of an IMC for building effective customer relationships:

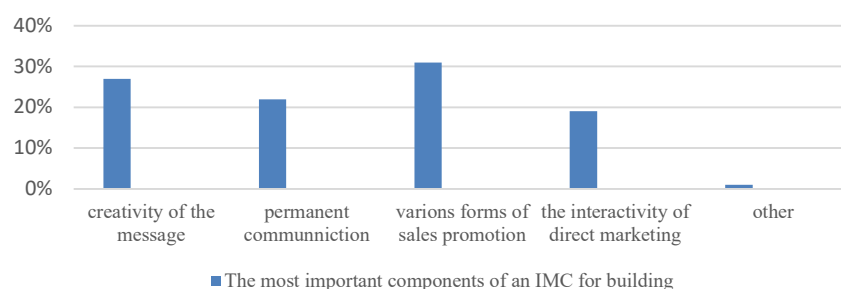


Figure 7. Percentage overview of the most important components of the IMC for building effective customer relationships

Based on the processed data, 31% of respondents believe that the most important component for building effective customer relationships are the various forms of sales promotion, 27% of respondents believe that the creativity of the promotional message is an important component, 22% of respondents consider it important component is permanent communication, 19% of respondents think that the interactivity of direct marketing is an important component and 1% of respondents answered with something else.

CONCLUSION

The companies in the Republic of Northern Macedonia are aware of the opportunities offered by the integrated marketing communications. In conditions when the competition is expressed on the market, the main factor for the success of the companies is the use of a combined model of communication. IMCs are a combination of forms that are used to inform consumers about the existence of the product, to remind them of their existence and to make them buy the product. The communication of the companies with the market should be part of a carefully planned and controlled communication program. With the correct combination of the forms of IMC, the company should create and permanently maintain communication with the final consumer. In order to be able to develop communication with consumers, the first thing that needs to be done is to determine for whom the message is intended. Once the target group to which we are targeting is determined, it is necessary to create a promotional message.

Some costumers when deciding what to buy, worry about the brend, some about the price, the color or the package, some react instantly and buy the product right at that time and some want lower prices and sales, some compare the product with the competitors, everything is important for making a right profile to the communication activities. It should be known that consumers are exposed to a large number of promotional messages, so the messages that are created should be long-lasting.

Based on the research, it is recommended to take full advantage of the possibilities for the application of IMC to establish long-term relationships with consumers. Each company, depending on the budget, should prepare a combination of different forms of IMC in order to be able to successfully target its target group.

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