New Concepts of Marketing Communication as the Answer to Challenges Resulting from Changes in the Area of Consumer Information Behaviors

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Abstract

Purpose: The main purpose of this paper was to analyze the information behaviors of modern consumers from the perspective of companies' activities in the sphere of marketing communication, taking into account new concepts which had emerged in this field.

Design/methodology/approach: The analysis was based on a critical literature review in the areas of information behaviors and marketing communication.

Findings: The author described the challenges of marketing communication and discussed its new concepts. The analysis led to the conclusion that because of the changes in ICT and consumer information behaviors, modern communication activities of companies must be based on the concept of customer-driven communication, which combines insights from marketing communication and customer logic-driven communication.

Research limitations/implications: As the paper is based only on a literature review, the findings should be confronted with research results conducted in the field of customer-driven communication. Particular attention should be given to the area of targeting the marketing messages to specific groups of consumers with account being taken of their information behaviors patterns and their determinants.

Marketing communication managers should implement the concept of customer-driven communication and take into consideration dynamic changes in information behavior as the key success factors in executing marketing communication strategies.

Originality/value: The challenges of marketing communication in modern society were analyzed from both perspectives – receivers and senders in the process. Moreover, recommendations are given on which new concepts that emerged in this field should be implemented in communication strategies.

Keywords: integrated marketing communication, information behaviors, omni-channel communication, customer-centric marketing communication, ICT.

JEL: D11, D83, M31

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Nowe koncepcje komunikacji marketingowej jako odpowiedź na wyzwania wynikające ze zmian w sferze zachowań informacyjnych konsumentów

Streszczenie

Cel: analiza zachowań informacyjnych współczesnych konsumentów z perspektywy działań przedsiębiorstw w sferze komunikacji marketingowej, z uwzględnieniem jej nowych ujęć koncepcyjnych.

Metodologia: artykuł bazuje na krytycznym przeglądzie literatury z zakresu zachowań informacyjnych i komunikacji marketingowej.

Wyniki: omówiono wyzwania komunikacji marketingowej oraz nowe koncepcje, które pojawiły się w tej dziedzinie. W świetle prowadzonych analiz ustalono, że ze względu na zmiany w sferze technologii informacyjno-komunikacyjnych oraz zachowań informacyjnych konsumentów, nowoczesne działania komunikacyjne przedsiębiorstw muszą opierać się na koncepcji komunikacji zorientowanej na klienta, łączącej dotychczasowy dorobek naukowy z zakresu komunikacji marketingowej i komunikacji opartej na logice klienta.

Ograniczenia/implikacje badawcze: analizy opierają się wyłącznie na przeglądzie literatury, dlatego należy je skonfrontować z wynikami badań prowadzonych w obszarze komunikacji zorientowanej na klienta. Szczególną uwagę należy zwrócić na aspekty związane z kierowaniem przekazów marketingowych do określonych grup konsumentów, z uwzględnieniem wzorców zachowań informacyjnych oraz ich uwarunkowań. Menedżerowie ds. komunikacji marketingowej powinni wdrażać koncepcję komunikacji zorientowanej na klienta i uwzględniać dynamiczne zmiany zachowań informacyjnych jako kluczowe czynniki sukcesu w realizacji strategii komunikacji marketingowej.

Oryginalność/wartość: wyzwania komunikacji marketingowej we współczesnym społeczeństwie analizowano z perspektyw obu uczestników procesu – nadawców i odbiorców. Dodatkowo sformułowano rekomendacje odnośnie do uwzględnienia w strategiach komunikacji marketingowej jej nowych ujęć koncepcyjnych.

Słowa kluczowe: zintegrowana komunikacja marketingowa, zachowania informacyjne, komunikacja omnikanałowa, klientocentryczna komunikacja marketingowa, technologie informacyjno-komunikacyjne.

1. Introduction

In an era dominated by communication, consumers have to cope with the excess of received messages on the one hand and with the difficulties in finding information they need on the other. Moreover, changes in the technological and social spheres have transformed patterns of consumers information behaviors and, as a consequence, communication activities of companies. Therefore, it seems reasonable to consider whether the well-recognized concepts of marketing communication are applicable to current conditions or whether major changes are needed in order to be successfully used by companies to communicate with their audience.

The main purpose of these deliberations is to analyze the information behaviors of modern consumers in order to reflect on the so-called receivers of marketing messages. At the same time, companies' activity in the sphere of marketing communication will be investigated as a reflection on the

traditional sender in the marketing communication process. The author is going to describe the challenges of marketing communication in a modern society and discuss the new concepts which have emerged in this field as an answer to social, technological and informative changes. The analysis is based on a critical literature review in areas of information behaviors and marketing communication.

2. Issues of Information Behaviors in the Context of Marketing Communication

The ways in which people search for information that interests them, what they do with such information, how they analyze and categorize it, but also what happens to information obtained unintentionally or by accident are the subject of inquiry of representatives of various scientific disciplines. Information behaviors are studied, among others, by researchers from the fields of librarianship, information sciences, psychology, sociology, media studies, consumer behaviors, marketing or health communication. However, on the grounds of each of the above-mentioned disciplines, information behaviors are defined similarly, with possible differences in the emphasis placed on their individual components. In addition to the term "information behavior" in the literature, we also come across the term "human information behavior", which is used by scientists highlighting the fact that what is being studied is not the behavior of information but rather the behavior of people in relation to information (Sonnenwald & Iivonen, 1999; Spink & Cole, 2006; Wilson, 2000).

According to Bates (2010), the concept of information behavior covers every human interaction with information, and therefore both the search for information and its use, as well as its avoidance, the management of information or a serendipitous encounter with information. In turn, Niedźwiedzka (2002) emphasizes, that information behaviors already occur at the stage of identification of information needs, and therefore the research also covers the way in which information needs are formulated by the user, as well as the internal and external factors influencing information behavior.

One of the most popular definitions of information behavior is the one presented by Wilson, who described it as follows: "Information Behaviour is the totality of human behaviour in relation to sources and channels of information, including both active and passive information seeking, and information use. Thus, it includes face-to-face communication with others, as well as the passive reception of information as in, for example, watching TV advertisements, without any intention to act on the information given" (2000, p. 49). Information behaviors in this case are defined very broadly and include many different aspects.

Basing on the most popular models of information behaviors analysis, Robson and Robinson developed a list of factors determining the information activity of individuals. Apart from psychological factors, motivating and inhibiting factors, information actor's demographics and expertise, context and features of the information-seeking process, there are three areas especially related to the marketing communication management process (Robson & Robinson, 2013):
– information user's needs, wants and goals, prompting the user to seek information;
– information provider's needs, wants and goals, prompting the provider to communicate information;
– characteristics of information and sources (utility – usefulness, relevance, timeliness, accessibility and ease-of-use of information or of a source; and credibility – trustworthiness, authority, reliability and lack of bias in the information source and the information provided).

In the light of technological and social changes, the in-depth analysis of the above-mentioned factors is crucial for planning and implementing marketing communication strategies, as those factors decide about their effectiveness.

Apart from their significance when it comes to marketing messages, targeting and positioning, information behaviors are also important in regard to segmentation. Taking into consideration the fact that information-sharing (e.g. opinion leaders, gatekeepers) and information-seeking behaviors can be used as variables in consumer segmentation (Hooley et al., 2008), information behaviors is the field worth further exploration. Therefore, marketing communication strategies should be formulated on the basis of knowledge about information patterns and actions of their addressees, as well as on the changes occurring in these fields.

3. Challenges of Marketing Communication in the Light of Technological, Social and Information Behaviors – Related Changes

The important features of contemporary information and communication processes include: information overload, multi-channel communication, multiplicity of tools as well as the growing importance of the virtual space in communication processes. The information behaviors of individuals are influenced by such phenomena as the progressive virtualization of life, the development of a network society, the return to a newly construed tribalism or the democratization of the media (Rogala, 2015). The technological progress has led to the development of communication techniques and methods, significantly accelerated the process of retrieving information, increased the possibility of verification of information in various sources.

The information environment in which information behaviors occur is extremely important for communication processes, including those of a marketing nature. Nowadays, the information environment is changing dynamically and is shaped by the following factors (Wallis, 2005):
– the commodification of information,
– the fragmentation and proliferation of forms and channels of communication,
– the global media market,
– the predominance of digital content in the English language and from the United States.

From the above mentioned, the fields which are evolving the most and at the fastest pace are fragmentation and proliferation of forms and channels of communication, which benefit from the development of modern information and communication technologies.

Modern communication channels and tools based on new technologies, which have been quickly adopted by both the creators and recipients of the message, radically change the reality surrounding the consumer. In particular, thanks to the development of the internet, the ways of obtaining information and communication in all aspects of life have changed significantly (Jaskiernia & Gajlewicz-Korab, 2016). The practice of using numerous modern fast-working, interactive, simple and easily accessible tools and channels is especially visible in the field of virtual communication. Thanks to these tools and channels, the customer is able to communicate using them simultaneously, may choose or reject some of them, receive and send messages, and at the same time stay active or passive in others (Finne & Grönroos, 2017). Additionally, new technologies, in the form of hardware or software developments, for instance wearable technology or intelligent systems, will shape the information behaviors in the future, as will the necessity of handling increasing amounts of data in professional and private life. Another important factor influencing the shape of information behaviors will also be ubiquitous access to information (Greifeneder, 2014).

In the communication process, the role, significance and involvement of the recipient have been strengthened, as have links between individuals and their mutual interactions (cf. Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010; Rogala, 2017). This state of affairs is primarily the result of the ability to produce and distribute content by recipients, which results in disturbances in the traditionally understood division of roles into sender and recipient in the process of marketing communication. Moreover, it is even said that the so-called new media even out the roles of consumers and producers in creating messages, and consequently lead to a loss of control over the message from the company's perspective (Jaskiernia & Gajlewicz-Korab, 2016).

The social and technological changes have led to the creation of virtual communication platforms, which are becoming a place for the development of opinion-forming communities playing various roles in information

behaviors. In fact, people trust peers more than organizations (Greenberg, 2010a, 2010b). As part of socialized network structures, internet users create their own content (user-generated content) and have the ability to immediately publish the content on the internet. In turn, technology allows this content to mix together, for cooperating in its creation, and permits easy sharing of knowledge, as well as joint assessment (collective intelligence) (Kowalik, 2016).

It is worth noting the risks associated with the dominance of the internet as a source of information for individuals and the use of modern technologies in communication. They are mainly associated with the information independence of consumers, who are limiting their efforts in the context of the undertaken information behaviors, who are satisfied with the first information they obtain, who are not looking for other sources and who do not assess the credibility of the information they already found. One such threat is technological gatekeeping associated with the search for information through internet search engines. These engines are not neutral technologies, but merely another selector of messages and they have a significant impact on what information reaches the recipients. A similar role is played by social media (Helberger, Kleinen-von Königslöw, & van der Noll, 2015). Therefore, in the analysis of information behaviors, special attention should be paid to issues relating to information passivity and an uncritical approach to information obtained on the internet.

Another threat is so-called audience gatekeeping, which indicates the key role of users in the process of redistribution and production of content and the transfer of content to other recipients (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). The ubiquitous information overload may discourage individuals from attempting to look for the information they need and may lead to a situation where they rely mostly or exclusively on information that was passed on to them by the selectors of virtual communities. Meanwhile, the latter will mostly be guided by their own interest and a subjective assessment of the contents they communicate, e.g. by categorizing the content, giving it priority and a specific meaning within social platforms (Rogala, 2018). The benefits and opportunities given by social media resulted in social media becoming an integral part of marketing communication (Barnes, 2010), however its implementation requires a significant modification of existing IMC framework (Valos et al., 2016).

In the light of changes and challenges analyzed in this section, companies have acknowledged the need to pay attention to their customers' needs and engage in conversation with them. Furthermore, they are aware that communication must be transparent, showing openness and empathy. As a consequence, marketing communication specialists are no longer the senders of messages, nowadays their role is to bring the content together, in order to enable collaboration and participation in communities (Karjaluoto, Mustonen, & Ulkuniemi, 2015).

4. New Concepts of Marketing Communication as a Response to the Challenges of the Modern Communication Environment

Changes in the social and technological sphere have their consequences for activities in the field of marketing communication. Recent years saw an increase in the popularity of the concept of omni-channel integrated marketing communication as a natural successor to integrated marketing communication (IMC). Omni-channel marketing requires a unification of the total collection of available tools and platforms into a single-choice environment (Cummins et al., 2016). According to P.C. Verhoef et al. (2015, p. 176), omni-channel management is the *"synergistic management of the numerous available channels and customer touchpoints, in such a way that the customer experience across channels and the performance over channels is optimized".* This means that marketers need to provide a seamless experience for the customer, regardless of channel or device, because each piece of the consumer's experience should be consistent and complementary.

At the same time, it is necessary to remember that information consistency (and inconsistency) across customer touchpoints in an omni-channel environment affects customer satisfaction, engagement, and loyalty (Manser Payne, Peltier, & Barger, 2017), while a unified customer experience is not linked to, or dependent on, any one channel, but related to a holistic brand experience (Hansen & Sia, 2015). Therefore, the people managing omni-channel marketing communication must know the answer to the question of how customers get the information (Bell et al., 2014) and how they deal with it. As a consequence, there is a need to explore user-generated content and information sharing in omni-channel environments, as well as consumer-brand vs. peer-to-peer touchpoints and earned media (publicity) as a touchpoint, in order to better understand appropriate methods for tracking touchpoint perceptions (Manser Payne, Peltier, & Barger, 2017). Consequently, a shift in examining information behaviors of consumers is needed – from focusing on searching for and processing information to its gathering and usage.

A slightly more detailed perspective on the contemporary marketing communication is presented by Finne and Grönroos (2017, p. 446) in their concept of customer-integrated marketing communication (CIMC), centered on communication-in-use. According to the definition adopted by the authors, communication-in-use is *"the customer's integration and sense making of all messages from any source, company-driven or stemming from other sources, the customer perceives as communication, forming value-in-use for him/her for a specific purpose"*. Therefore, the message can be anything that the consumer considers to be a message, and the content analyzed by the consumer can come from various sources, since the consumer may have searched for this particular information in the past or may search for

it at present or in the future. This is a different approach to traditional planning and implementation of marketing communication activities, it is an approach adopting an inside-out perspective. The concept of communication-in-use adopts a 360º view, where the time and situation dimension are the key factors which are crucial for identification of the sources influencing a customer's communication-in-use and corresponding value-in-use.

In the proposed model (cf. Figure 1), it is the consumer who, within his individual ecosystem, based on the integration of various messages from various sources, gives meaning to the information he received. The CIMC concept therefore establishes the active attitude of the consumer in communication, where the consumer makes use of the sources of his choice and prioritizes messages at his own discretion.
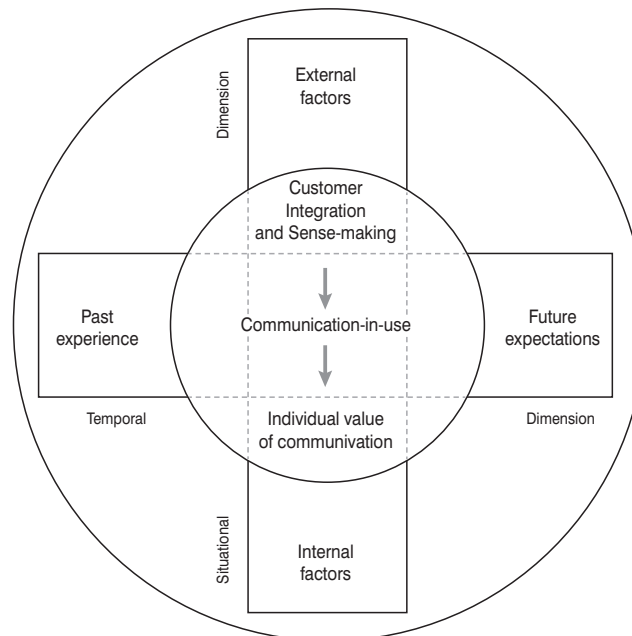

Fig. 1. The core of the CIMC model. Source: Finne and Grönroos (2017, p. 457).

From the point of view of marketing communication management, it is therefore necessary not only to locate the so-called touchpoints, but also to understand consumers' information behaviors in the context of acquiring and responding to information. In particular, analysis requires activities such as active, purposeful search and collection of information, as well as routine collection of information and dissemination of acquired information, sharing the information, or the so-called taking mental note ('just in case').

Also Bruhn and Schnebelen (2017) call for a change in the approach to IMC and a transition from instrumental perspective to customer-centric perspective. In the proposed approach, IMC is balancing between the inside-out perspective (i.e. communication sovereignty) and the outside-in perspective (i.e. integration of user-generated content) (Bruhn & Schnebelen, 2017). According to the authors, we can distinguish three most important fields that should be considered as key components of the customer-centric IMC. These are: relationship orientation, content orientation and process orientation. Relationship orientation stands for conducting such communication activities that will lead to maintaining and managing long-term relationships with all groups of stakeholders (Shin, 2013). Content orientation means that the IMC objective is not to promote the company's offer in a consistent and orchestrated way, but to tell a story inducing active participation of the customer in the story-telling process. The last component, process orientation, means that IMC should focus on both – internal processes and processes between the company's communication activities and its customers. Therefore, the field of cross-functional processes and management of communication contact points are particularly important (Bruhn & Schnebelen, 2017).

According to the authors, the main problem in managing IMC is currently the growing role of consumers, which weakens the ability to control messages affecting the perception of the organization and its offer, and significantly hinders ensuring the consistency of messages which relate to the organization and with which current and potential customers may have contact. Providing appropriate content of messages that will evoke active attitudes of consumers and initiate the informational behaviors that are related to the transmission of interesting content to other recipients is particularly important. In addition, managing consistent interactions with all stakeholders will be necessary for the successful implementation of the IMC goals. Communication processes based on the customer-centric concept are to be the answer to the challenges mentioned above.

5. Conclusions

The analysis of the concept of marketing communication appearing in the latest literature on the subject leads to the conclusion that nowadays the management of communication processes must take into account and try to integrate various variables. What is particularly difficult is the fact that some of them are beyond the control of the organization, such as the information behavior of consumers, who have now gained a great deal of independence in the context of obtaining and using information.

Individuals spend their free time on the internet and encounter various types of content in an unplanned and unintentional manner. From the

customer perspective, in times dominated by modern communication and information technologies, it is necessary to pay more attention to issues related to education in the field of information competences and information behaviors, and to the shaping of attitudes which allow for an independent and thoughtful selection and a critical interpretation of the internet contents that are of interest to the user.

Taking into consideration the stake of the companies, they constantly have to face challenges which at this moment result in integrating new communication instruments and channels, managing and affecting all levels of the company's organization, as well as all communication contact points (Bruhn & Schnebelen, 2017). For communication managers, the efficient adaptation of information technologies and the use of new communication opportunities with stakeholders (Hajduk, 2019), implementation of the concept of customer-driven communication, which combines insights from marketing communication and customer logic-driven communication (Finne & Grönroos, 2017) and taking into account dynamic changes in information behavior will become the key success factors.

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