

THE INFLUENCE OF MARKETING TOOLS ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR AND ITS ASSESSMENT

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Abstract. The article aims to analyse and evaluate the influence of marketing tools on consumer behavior. In order to investigate the topic, a thorough analysis of scientific literature was performed and followed by systematization and generalization of different theories and academic sources. The research revealed that the use of various marketing tools such as advertising and online communication through social media or blogs allows to gain exposure for businesses and have a positive impact on consumer behavior. On the other hand, it is important to note that both micro and macro environment have to be taken into account, as individuals might make different decisions based on the surrounding cultural, social and market contexts. Based on the proposed theoretical model of the influence of marketing tools on consumer behavior, there is a positive correlation between sociological variables, external stimuli and marketing communications. The holistic model should be empirically validated and revised once investigated in practice.

Key words: *the influence of marketing tools, marketing communications, consumer behavior, consumer decision-making process, consumer behavior assessment.*

Introduction

Relevance of the article

Constantly increasing market competition requires each organization to undertake certain actions that would help to attract the attention of consumers. Marketing actions and the use of marketing tools are often targeted directly at the consumer therefore, it is important to know the factors that influence consumer behavior.

In marketing literature, it is often mentioned that loyalty, as part of consumer behavior, is the main goal not only for marketing but also for each organization (Sheth, Parvatiyar, & Sinha, 2012). According to Zikienė, & Bakanauskas (2007), entrepreneurs agree that long-term business success is not based on acquisition of new users. Attraction needs to be matched with consumer retention and loyalty formation – building relationships with consumers. It is believed that when consumers receive incentives from the organization (through marketing tools) that meet their needs, their trust, dedication and satisfaction are formed, resulting in customer loyalty.

Level of problem investigation

Despite the high number of consumer behavior research, conducted by Kotler, & Keller (2009), Christ (2012), Bagdoniene, & Hopeniene (2015), Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hoog (2016), East and others (2017), studies on the use of marketing tools in consumer behavior remain highly relevant. The selection of inappropriate marketing tools and ineffective communication may lead to consumers not being well informed about the organization's product and their preference to use the output or service provided by competitors. Additionally, different scientific literature investigates advertising and marketing tools (Kotler, & Keller, 2009; Išoraitė, 2013; Payne, & Frow, 2013), as well as their impact on consumers (Sirtautienė, & Sirtautas, 2012). However, there is a lack of scientific analysis regarding the impact of marketing communication tools on consumer behavior and its assessment.

Scientific problem

How do marketing tools influence consumer behavior?

Object of the article – Influence of marketing tools on consumer behavior.

Aim of the article – To analyze and evaluate the influence of marketing tools on consumer behavior.

Objectives of the article:

1. To reveal the essence of using marketing tools to influence consumer behavior.
2. To analyze empirical studies about the impact of marketing tools on consumer behavior.
3. To introduce a model on marketing tools that can have a positive impact on consumer behavior.

Methods of the article: a general scientific research method – analysis of scientific literature sources, systematization and generalization of information was used to reveal the topic of the article.

1. Theoretical Background

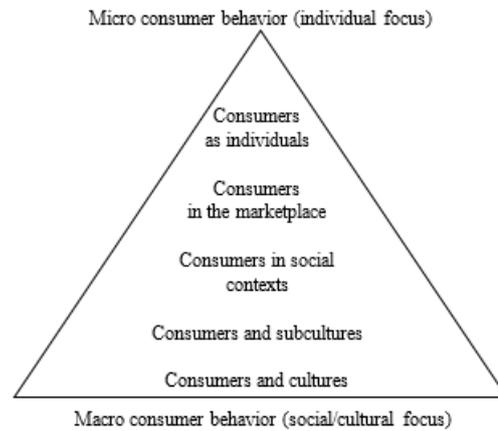
Marketing is a term that is used in everyday parlance, but its technical definition tends to vary according to whether it is treated as an independent discipline or as a managerial process (Kimmel, 2018). According to Macinnis, & Folkes (2009), the independent discipline of marketing was given impetus during the late 1950s when business schools began to shift their emphasis from a vocational teaching orientation to more of a scholarly approach to business research.

Traditionally, organizations made use of marketing communication print media such as pamphlets, posters, local newspapers and business cards to promote their businesses. These marketing communication tools allowed the business to communicate its product offering to the consumer and gain exposure for the business. The major development in technology has, however, led to various technology enabled marketing communication tools that businesses can utilize to communicate and interact with their customers (Koekemoer, 2014).

E. Constantinides (2014) suggests two possible marketing strategies specific to social media: a passive approach in which social networks are seen as means of analyzing customer reactions, namely of marketing environment analysis, and a second active approach, where social media is used as a direct marketing and public relations channel, as a tool for customizing the products offered and, not in the least, as a platform facilitating the cooperation with clients to create value and generate new ideas for the development and improvement of products provided. From this approach we can draw the conclusion that social media, as a marketing tool, may be used both for the communication and promotion of value, as well as the creation of value, respectively in the marketing research. These technology-enabled marketing tools include social media such as Facebook and Twitter, mobile media such as short message services (SMS), multimedia messaging services (MMS) and voice messages, and websites, blogs and email (Kallier, 2017).

Of all the various specialties of psychology, consumer psychology is the area that has the most direct relevance for marketing; in fact, the study of consumer behavior also is considered to be an essential subfield of the marketing discipline (Kimmel, 2018).

Consumer behavior has been defined as “the processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use, or dispose of products, services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy needs or desires” (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2016). In other words, consumer behavior involves the thoughts and feelings people experience and the actions they perform in consumption processes. It also includes all the things in the environment that influence these thoughts, feelings, and actions. These include comments from other consumers, advertisements, price information, packaging, product appearance, blogs, and many others. This definition suggests that consumer behavior is dynamic, involves interactions, and exchanges (Peter, & Olson, 2010). According to Kimmel (2018), it is these processes (selection, consumption, and disposal) that serve to link consumer behavior to the various institutions within a society, including marketing institutions. Researchers may approach the study of consumer behavior from various perspectives, ranging in scope from a micro focus on individual behavior to a macro focus on social behavior and cultural influences (see Fig. 1).

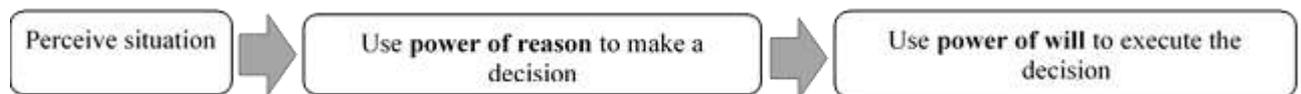


Source: Kimmel (2018).

Fig. 1 A pyramid of consumer behavior

The picture shows that consumers dominate both in the microenvironment and in the macro environment. In the microenvironment, consumers are seen as individuals. In the macro environment, consumers are associated with culture. Consumers can also be in the market and are associated with social aspects and subcultures. It should be noted that both the macro and the microcosm are connected by the users together. However, it is very important to study all macroeconomic and microeconomic impacts on the consumer.

Customer behavior is a general concept used in different academic disciplines such as sociology, psychology and marketing. It consists of three basic steps. First, people perceive a situation. Second, people use the power of reason to calculate whether taking a certain action will benefit to their long-term interest. Third, people use the power of will to execute the decision (Brooks, 2012). The process of consumer decision-making is illustrated below (see Fig. 2).



Source: Viksne, Salkovska Gaitniece & Puke (2016).

Fig. 2 Customer's decision-making process

The model suggests that human behavior depends on perception, reason and will. It is important to know which factor to focus on most, when human behavior is explained on the basis of this model and to predict how it may be influenced or changed. For instance, in the 19th century Victorians emphasized the third step – the willpower. They preached that passions were the wild torrent, and humans had to tame and control them by their iron force of will (Brooks, 2012). As a result, it may be concluded that in a situation the client uses his/her will to make the decision and acts in the manner prescribed by the circumstances. In order to make a decision, the client uses social and cultural aspects that together determine the impact of the micro and macro environment. The microenvironment and the macro environment make the relationship between the client's choice and his behavior in the situation.

To summarize, the academic literature reveals that consumer behavior is determined by different varying factors which affect the way the consumer makes a decision in terms of acquiring products or services. The marketer's goal is, therefore to identify the means of increasing consumer's willpower to execute the decision to make a purchase. As a result, further research will look into the empirical evidence of influence of marketing tools on consumer decision-making process.

2. Empirical level of analysis of the influence of marketing tools on consumer behavior and its assessment

The influence of marketing tools on consumer behavior is a subject that has been studied by different scholars in various countries for at least twenty years. Many authors have explored and

assessed the impact of different marketing tools on consumer's decision-making process and identified cases in which specific marketing communication methods were successful.

Researchers Stašys, & Ziborova (2009) conducted a study on the use of electronic marketing tools in Lithuania, whose survey interviewed 297 marketing and management specialists from various companies in Lithuania. The results of the quantitative survey revealed that most companies used periodical press as one of the marketing tools in 2009. However, the survey found that both the supply of goods and services increased tendentiously when the company started to use electronic marketing tools. Accordingly, it may be assumed that electronic marketing tools have an impact on the consumer's self-determination to buy.

One more study of connection between marketing tools and consumer behavior was conducted in Norway. Authors Halvorsen et al, (2013) conducted research to examine the impact of fashion blogs as a marketing tool on consumer behavior. The investigation revealed that advertising on blogs is rated positively and appreciated by international companies. Such marketing tool can act as a traditional advertisement. Moreover, authors discovered a positive connection between fashion blogs and consumer behavior in terms of customer acquisition and loyalty, as blogs help to develop a strong personal connection with readers.

Another research focused on impact of advertising as a marketing tool on consumer behavior. Authors Malik et al. (2013) found out that brand image had a positive influence on the consumer's desire to purchase goods. It has also been discovered that the greatest benefit was received from the image of a quality brand or the use of appropriate advertising to the target audience. Consequently, the authors concluded that advertising could be recognized as one of the most effective marketing tools.

Different study of relations between marketing tools and consumer behavior was conducted in Malaysia. Rahbar (2011) analyzed the impact of green marketing tools on consumer behavior. The results showed a higher level of consumer confidence and consumer interest in eco-friendly products and eco-friendly brands much more than in others. In conclusion, the study revealed a positive relationship between green marketing tools and consumer behavior.

A similar study about the effects of social media marketing on consumer purchase behavior was accomplished in Malaysia. According to Barhemmati, & Ahmad (2015) the key issue of study was related to consumer purchase and social media as a marketing tool. This study was aimed at examining how social media marketing would influence consumer purchase behavior between people who often used social media. A quantitative survey was conducted to investigate relationships between social media marketing activities, customer engagement and consumer purchase behavior. The survey examined fifty students of National University of Malaysia. As analyses showed, people who spent more time on social media platforms were more prone to engage with brands through social media websites. The study indicated that there was a positive relationship among customer engagement of social media and purchase behavior.

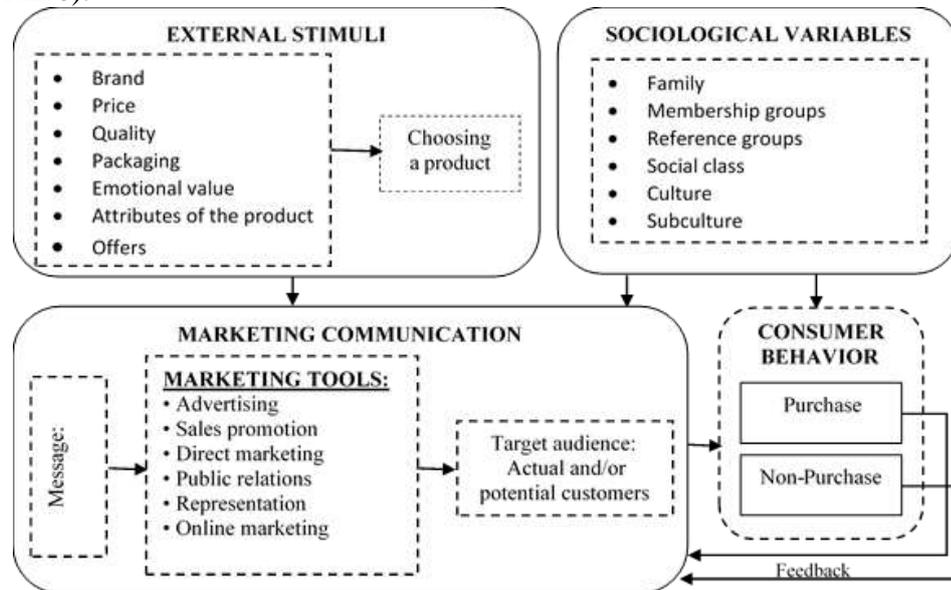
In conclusion, several empirical research papers were conducted in terms of relations between marketing tools and consumer behavior in different countries such as Lithuania, Norway or Malaysia. Studies focused on various marketing tools, such as advertising, fashion blogs, social networking websites, as well as green marketing tools. The authors investigated customer acquisition, brand recognition, consumer confidence on brands or purchase as consumer behavior perspectives. As results showed, there is a certain positive connection between specific marketing tools and consumer behavior. On the other hand, the influence of marketing tools on consumer behavior is still a relevant subject that needs to be examined more thoroughly.

3. Theoretical model of the influence of marketing tools on consumer behavior

The introduced theoretical model (Fig. 3) is holistic, based on the correlation between a series of factors which may influence consumer buying behavior in a favorable way:-

- Sociological variables (the family, membership groups, reference groups, social class, culture and subculture);

- External stimuli (the brand, price, quality, packaging, emotional value, attributes of the product, offers);
- Marketing communication (Message → Communication tools, such as: Advertising through mass-media, Sales promotion, Direct marketing, Public relations, Representation, Online marketing → Target audience).



Source: created by authors.

Fig. 3. Model of the influence of marketing tools on consumer behavior

In this model the sociological variables (respectively, family, membership groups, reference groups, social class, culture and subculture) contribute to changing consumer buying behavior. A **family** consists of two or more people living together who are related by blood or marriage. It is a part of a household which consists of individuals living on their own or together with others in a residential unit. Consumer behavior is influenced by the relationships within families. The family has a strong, most immediate and most pervasive influence on decision-making (Yakup, & Sevil, 2012). Therefore, a certain structure of communication and the interactions between family members means that there is a system of buying and consumption well contoured which must be brought to the attention of researchers in the field of marketing communication (Catoiu, & Teodorescu, 2007).

The reference groups can be defined as any person or group of people who significantly influence an individual's behavior (Sakpichaisakul, 2012). The beliefs, values, attitudes, behaviors, and norms of the group are perceived to have relation upon the assessment, behaviors, and aspirations of another individual (Bednarik, & Pakaine Kovats, 2010). Individual's behavior is strongly influenced through numerous groups. Individual reference groups are those groups that have a direct or indirect influence on the person's attitudes or behavior. Groups that have a direct influence on a person are called **membership groups**. These are groups to which the person belongs and interacts. Some are primary groups with which there is fairly continuous interaction, such as family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers (Burnsed, 2009).

The social class refers to grouping of people who are similar in their behavior based on their economic position in the marketplace, because every society stratifies its members into social classes according to their values to the society. The members of social class share common values and ways of thinking, speaking and behaving (Abraham, 2011). Also, knowing the specifics existing between various social categories allows achieving a market segmentation particularly useful for the development of marketing communication programs (Catoiu, & Teodorescu, 2007).

Culture is the most fundamental determinant of a person's wants and behavior (Pandey, & Dixit, 2011). Courses on culture and behavior of individuals with similar values forms smaller groups which are called **sub-cultures** (Yakup, & Sevil, 2012). The marketer must determine whether the beliefs, values and customs shared by the members of specific sub-groups make them desirable candidates

for special marketing attention (Tyagi, & Kumar, 2004). Careful study and consideration of their particular behavior can bring great benefits to marketing communication activities in the organization (Catoiu, & Teodorescu, 2007).

The external stimuli (respectively, price of a product, quality, packaging, brand, emotional value, attributes of the product, offers) can account for key factors in designing a message, thus influencing the consumer to choose and purchase a product. Therefore, any organization before designing and implementing a marketing communications program, should identify and analyze the external stimuli that contribute significantly to changing the purchase behavior of consumers in a favorable way.

The tools of marketing communications (respectively, advertising through mass-media, sales promotion, direct marketing, public relations, representation, online marketing) represent means through which the advertising message reaches the target audience which it is addressed to therefore, the potential customers.

In this model, the use of different marketing tools determines an actual behavior, more precisely the purchase of a product and/or service by the consumers. Where consumers have manifested a purchase behavior to the product and/or service, the marketing tools model will be maintained or improved, and if this behavior was of the non-purchase, the marketing tools model will be reviewed and modified, so that it generates a positive effect on consumer purchasing behavior.

Future Research Directions

Step 1: taking into account the fact that the conceptual model proposed is very complex, it should be empirically tested on diverse consumer groups in order to identify sociological variables, external stimuli and integrated marketing communication tools that influence the consumer buying behavior. Moreover, the relationships between variables suggested in the model should be tested empirically, as well as its validity.

Step 2: the conceptual model should be improved based only on those sociological variables, external stimuli and tools of integrated marketing communication, which have a strong impact on the consumer buying behavior.

Step 3: the relationships between variables of the revised model of the influence of marketing tools on consumer behavior should be tested and validated.

As a result, the future research should focus on the impact of marketing communication tools on consumer behavior in order to find a connection to encourage them to buy. We would recommend quantitative surveys. The suggestion is to interview large companies which use the widest possible range of marketing communications tools, and have large target audiences that react to the marketing communications tools used by these companies.

Conclusions

As mentioned by different scholars, the use of various marketing tools allows to gain the exposure for the business and influence the consumer behavior. When reviewing factors that have a positive effect on consumer decision-making process, both micro- and macro environment have to be taken into account as individuals might make different decisions based on the surrounding cultural, social and market contexts. The marketer's goal is, therefore to identify the means of increasing consumer's willpower to execute the purchase.

The empirical evidence of research performed in Lithuania, Norway and Malaysia proves the positive relationship between consumer buying decision process and the impact of different marketing tools, such as advertising and online communication through social media or blogs. On the other hand, the influence of marketing tools on consumer behavior is still a relevant subject that needs to be examined more thoroughly and on a larger scope.

The theoretical model of the influence of marketing tools on consumer behavior was introduced. It suggests that there is a correlation between sociological variables, external stimuli and marketing communications, hence a combination of these factors might influence consumer buying behavior in a favorable way. However, the holistic model should be empirically validated and revised once examined in practice.

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