

THE INFLUENCE OF COMMUNICATION PRACTICE CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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ABSTRACT

Communication serves as a mold that shapes social and moral values of the viewer and therefore, due attention should be paid to ensure that the content is healthy, that it positively affects the viewer and the values that inspires represent an ethical improvement of society health. This paper presents a research based on a semi-structured interview and the applying of a questionnaire. The purpose of this research is to reveal the extent to which respondents acknowledge the influence of communication in decision-making. It can be said that in order to protect society from the harmful effects of communication, we can create a model with a series of measures that communication is socially responsible and even beneficial for the society.

KEYWORDS: *social responsibility, communication, commercial responsibility.*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: *M14*

1. INTRODUCTION

Modern and contemporary generations of the society have become skilled at communication and make use of it to identify problems (Olien et al., 1989). It is still considered by critics that communication because of its status wields great power over us (Pollay, 1986). This influence can be seen in every sphere of our life: thoughts, actions, decisions, beliefs, values and behaviour also. Research is designed to cover a variety of topics and interrogations regarding the relationship between advertisers and consumers and to meet the respective issues. Communication, besides making known functional benefits of products and services, calls the emotions that often are directed to the subconscious to produce an effective commercial action.

2. THE STATE OF RESEARCH

Through a review of relevant studies conducted over the past two decades we have tried to understand the problems that we face in communication. Based on data that were investigated, one can deduce that researchers are mainly concerned with ethical issues of communication directed at children, ads that use sex appeal, communication stereotypes, negative psychological effects of communication, communication of alcohol / tobacco, communication that promotes materialism and misleading communication.

As early as 1991, Haefner conducted a study that approached values of those advertisers who deliberately or accidentally aimed at children with their messages. The study found that the effects

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of communication on children were critical, involving a change in behaviour and their opinions, and led to the values described in ads (Haefner, 1991). As a means of introducing ethical values into a corporation on communication and children, it is recommended model proposed by Robin and Reidenbach. In a similar study conducted by Conna, strong concerns relating to communication to children have been expressed and concluded that the content of advertisements aimed at children has an overriding need for regulation (Conna et al., 1994).

Moreover, some researchers have dealt with specific issues related to communication directed towards children. Childs and Maher examined the use of gender in communication baby food and found that gender preference was significantly more present in advertisements. The boys were presented as figures of dominant models. The study also suggested that girls were consuming the wrong food, which somehow contributed to the existence of eating disorders, affecting more young women with a higher prevalence than young men (Childs & Maher, 2003).

Tamburro studied the presentation of violence and other dangerous behaviours in communication to children and found that children who had seen a significant amount of violent and dangerous conduct, were negatively influenced in their behaviour and value system (Tamburro et al., 2004).

In a study conducted by Pollay in 1986, it was found that the effects of excessive use of sex appeal in communication, manifested as sexual concerns and rising crime against women each of them damaging morality and society (Pollay, 1986).

Also, in a study conducted by Henthorne and Latour in 1994, it was pointed out that some unintended consequences and reactions may result from the use of a powerful communication obvious sex appeal. It was suggested that advertisers need to recognize the complexity of moral / ethical use of using sex appeal and incorporate this understanding into their strategic thinking (Henthorne & LaTour 1994).

Stereotypes in Communication are another reason why ads have been heavily criticized. In a study conducted in 2000 by Coltrane and Messineo, were studied race and gender stereotypes in communication. It was found that the characters in television commercials have enjoyed greater importance if they were white or men (Coltrane & Messineo 2000).

Five years later, Chatterji stressed that gender stereotypes were presented in ads that perpetuated a lifestyle oppressive for women (Chatterji, 2005).

A study with a similar conclusion was made by Schaffter in 2006, which revealed that the representation of women in advertisements was not just stereotypical, but also unethical and too offensive, helping to deter women (Schaffter, 2006).

Richins pointed out that the comparison with images taken in communication raised the standards of attractiveness for young women and decreased the satisfaction with their attractiveness (Richins, 1991).

Lavine revealed by a study that the TV ads depicting women as sex objects have increased the discontent of women to their body (Sinha, 2005). Pollay argues that for many women, such announcements led to a loss of confidence / self-esteem.

In addition, alcohol and tobacco communication was also heavily criticized in past research. It is believed by critics that they serve to attract and alcohol and tobacco consumption and to enhance their target audience (Sinha, 2005). In a study conducted by Pechmann and Shih was stressed that smoking scenes in the public curiosity aroused young viewers, and improved their intention to smoke, and their perception has increased the social status of the smoker (Pechmann & Shih, 1999). It was suggested that these effects can be reversed by anti-smoking ads. Previous data are also indicative of circumvention ban tobacco communication by many cigarette companies.

The researchers were particularly interested in the influence of communication on materialism and consumerism. Richins stressed that repeated exposure of idealized images in communication has raised consumer expectations and influenced their perception of how their lives should be, especially in terms of material goods (Richins, 1995). The result of these processes, for some consumers, has been increasing consumer dissatisfaction and desire for more. Other researchers, such as Rumbo in 2002, Roy in 2006 and Chan together with Cia in 2009 provided also evidence of

how communication and consumerism stimulates materialism in society. In a recent study by Drumwright and Murphy, the current state of the communication value system was studied and it was found that, in fact, misleading communication was allowed publicly (Drumwright, & Murphy, 2009).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Study of opinions among students of the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration will highlight whether communication is an information tool for commercial or subconscious manipulation.

Based on the identified problem, the present study sets itself the following objectives:

- √ providing theoretical concepts addressed by the authors and specialized people on this topic
- √ demonstration of the use of manipulation techniques in communication
- √ achieve a critical analysis of manipulation in communication
- √ construction of ethical considerations in communication practice

Assumptions departing from research based on other studies on the subject, and the observations of authors.

- H1. Women renounce easier at a preferred product, than men.
- H2. Students from specializations more familiar with the concept of communication and what it entails, are less influenced than those concerned with the financial and banking system, respectively statistics.
- H3. An advertisement does not require paying attention to have the desired effect.
- H4. After viewing an advertisement, students who come from a family with a better financial situation are turning more on improving their image.
- H5. Fast-food restaurants such as Mc. Donald's, create the need of belonging to different social groups.

In terms of information, we have created a chart that contains four variables, each of them giving him a note which signifies the degree to which agrees with the respective statement.

The first statement refers to the importance given to ads about what is good to eat and what you should avoid. It can be seen that 45% say they are aware of these messages, while only 10% fully agree with this statement. Correlating the following two statements, it appears that respondents attach greater importance to information on product features, benefits than the advertised product. 51.7% agreed that gives importance to the characteristics of products viewed in an advertisement, while less than 10 percent say it is important Understand the benefits of the product. These percentages are based on the positive position of the respondents. With the last statement, it raises a question concerning the contradiction between the first three statements, from which respondents seem to give importance to information in communication, but they are placed in a specific situation - to read the nutritional information on the back of a tablet of chocolate - at the rate of 38.3% agree that it is rare. This finding is the first step in developing the following assumptions about manipulation by communication.

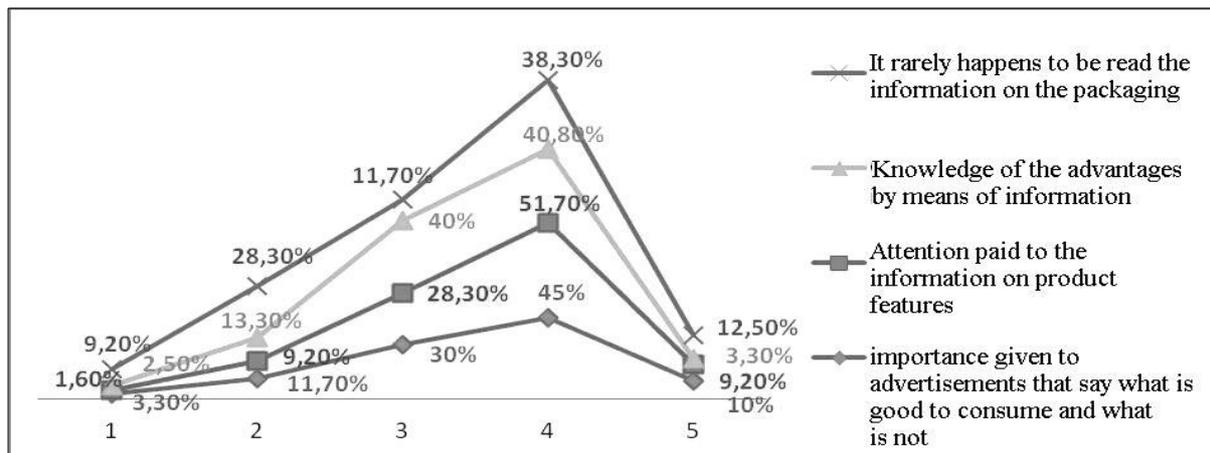


Figure 1. The importance given to information

H1. Women give up easier to a wishlist item than men.

In order to verify this hypothesis we used the SPSS software, applying a parametric test to compare the differences between two population groups. In this case, in order to test the difference between the means of the variables for the two groups – women and men – it was necessary to use metric scales. There is a difference between the means of the two groups, namely women obtained a score of 2.814 while men 2.5152. The fact that women register a higher average denotes that they have agreed to a greater extent with this statement than men. In order to determine whether there are significant differences between the two groups, we start from the following hypotheses: the null hypothesis implies the absence of a difference between the means of the two groups, while the alternative hypothesis states that there is a difference between the two means.

Table 1. Independent Samples Test

| I gave up a product that I used to buy in favour of a product promoted in a commercial. | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | |
|---|---|------|------------------------------|--------|-----------------|---|---------|
| | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| Equal variances assumed | .724 | .396 | 2.78 | 117 | .000 | -.72835 | -.13075 |
| Equal variances not assumed | | | 2.29 | 54.152 | .000 | -.74958 | -.15198 |

Source: SPSS 20 Output

For the situation reviewed calculated $t = 2.78$ is greater than the theoretical value $t_{0.05;117} = 1.98$, so we can guarantee with a probability of 95% that the means corresponding to the ones giving up a product for another, in the two groups are different in the total population.

We can take the same decision also based on the minimum significance level for that one can accept H1, which is in the column Sig. (2-tailed). This level has the value 0, so less than 0.05 there is accepted hypothesis H1, meaning that the two means are different in the total population, too, and

this possibility can be accepted even with a greater probability than 99%. Therefore, we can say that the hypothesis is correct.

H2. Students in majors more familiar with the concept of communication and all that it entails, are less influenced than those concerned with the financial and banking system, or statistics.

In the table below one can see a difference between the averages of the two groups – students in management, marketing, Economics of commerce, tourism and services and students in finance and statistics – the latter having a greater tendency to be influenced by commercials with children, which might even lead to product purchase.

Table 2. Group Statistics

| | Major: | N | Mean |
|--|--------------------|----|--------|
| Commercials with/for children give me a positive mood, really making me buy that specific product. | Mg+Mk+ECTS | 62 | 2.5806 |
| | Finance+Statistics | 58 | 2.9655 |

Source: SPSS 20 Output

Proceeding similarly, as in the previous hypothesis, we concluded that the resulting difference between the two groups is significant. We can observe this by comparing the calculated significance level 0.029 to the theoretical level 0.05. It is noticed that the calculated level is lower, so the hypothesis is accepted.

Table 3. Independent Samples Test

| | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|------|------------------------------|-----|-----------------|---|---------|
| | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| Equal variances assumed | 1.880 | .173 | -2.212 | 118 | .029 | -.72939 | -.04035 |
| Equal variances not assumed | | | -2.215 | 117 | .029 | -.72901 | -.04073 |

Source: SPSS 20 Output

H3. An advertisement does not require paying special attention to have the targeted effect.

Based on the fairly high percentage of those who stated they watched commercials, but with a certain detachment (28%), further on, we will show you why we originally said that they are subject to manipulation techniques at the subconscious level.

Although they said they watched commercials with a certain detachment, they obtained the highest score of all categories, that is 4.0435. Indeed we can say that they were not satisfied with the product they had purchased, but in order to show their dissatisfaction, they bought the product they had initially visualized in an advertisement.

Table 4. Descriptives

| | N | Mean |
|---|----------|-------------|
| I avoid them by changing the TV channel | 70 | 3.5857 |
| I watch them but with a certain detachment | 25 | 4.0435 |
| I always watch them with interest | 2 | 2.5000 |
| I temporarily leave the TV for another activity | 23 | 3.8800 |
| Total | 120 | 3.7167 |

Source: SPSS 20 Output

The significance level (Sig. = 0.006) shows us that the originally established hypothesis is accepted.

Table 5. Test of Homogeneity of Variances

| Levene Statistic | df1 | df2 | Sig. |
|-------------------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| 4.395 | 3 | 116 | .006 |

Source: SPSS 20 Output

H4. After watching an advertisement, female students who come from a family with a better financial situation focus more on improving their own image.

As a result of the ANOVA test, conducted using the SPSS software, the variance component expressing the deviation from the linear form is not significant, since for the F test the null hypothesis is accepted, the minimum significance level for that the alternative hypothesis can be accept, in terms of significant differences (Sig.=0.207), being higher than 0.05.

Following this observation, it appears that female students, regardless of their financial situation, have a greater interest in raising attractiveness standards, the same thing being observed in the total average obtained. There are differences between the income categories, but as we have shown, they are not significant in the total population. In conclusion, the hypothesis is not accepted.

H5. Fast-food restaurants, such as McDonald's, create the need of belonging to different social groups.

We want to demonstrate that lower family incomes, coupled with McDonald's image – family, warmth and friendship – subject people to an increased need to meet the need for socialization, friendship and membership of a particular group.

For this, we applied the ANOVA test, with the Post Hoc option, which helped us in ranking groups based on the means resulting from giving grades. It is noticed that those who have a higher income level don't feel the desire to integrate into this kind of group. At the opposite end are those with low income who show a greater willingness to accede to groups they deem at a higher level than their own.

Table 6. Waller-Duncan

| Frame your family monthly income in one of the following ranges: | N | Subset for alpha = 0.05 |
|--|----|-------------------------|
| | | 1 |
| over 3000 lei | 19 | 2.1579 |
| 2000 - 3000 lei | 29 | 2.2979 |
| 0 - 1000 lei | 23 | 2.4783 |
| 1000 - 2000 lei | 47 | 2.8621 |

Source: SPSS 20 Output

The test's null hypothesis states that there are no significant differences among the frequencies studied. The chosen significance level of the test is 0.05. The calculated significance level 0.038 (Sig.) indicates that the test is relevant, so that the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, we will accept the alternative hypothesis, namely that there are significant differences between respondents with high income and the rest of the groups, which means that the determined hypothesis is verified.

Correlating the statement "Beer commercials induce me the idea of a night out with friends/fun." with the time intervals when men spend their time watching TV, we emphasized that within the time frame 17.00-22.00 – an interval with a larger advertisement frequency and number – the score obtained 3.7059 is rather close to the position of agreement with the statement.

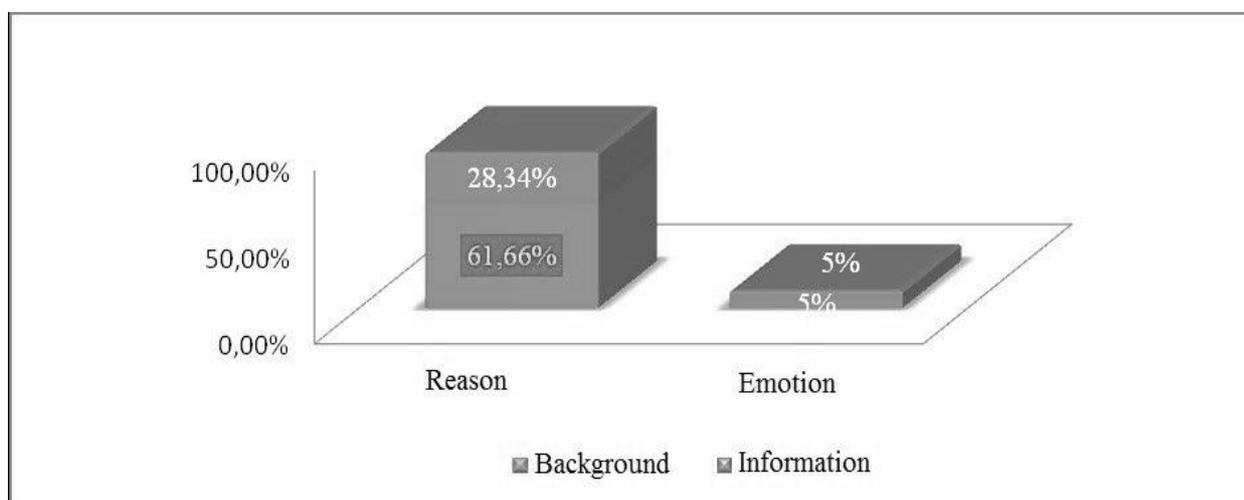


Figure 2. Influencing the public through pictures

In order to get the most relevant results we correlated this variable with another one regarding the underlying principle when decisions are made – reason or emotion.

90% of the respondents say they are rational people, what demonstrates us that they don't realize they are influenced is when they had to choose between the information image – underlying reason – and landscape – which creates excitement – they chose the background in a proportion of 61.66%.

4. THE MODEL OF MEASUREMENT FOR ETHICAL PRACTICES IN COMMUNICATION

To perform the analysis, it was used SPSS 20. Based on the variables that were loaded for each factor, the factors have been given names.

Table 7. Factors

| Factor's no. | Factor's name |
|---------------------|---|
| F1 | Maintaining a values system and eliminating social problems. |
| F2 | Empowering communication control bodies and restricting unhealthy products. |
| F3 | Editing advertisement content by the authorities. |
| F4 | Improving self-control. |
| F5 | Repressing social irresponsibility. |

Source: SPSS 20 Output

In this time of decreasing community values, the public expects communication to be designed keeping in mind the culture and tradition of the country where it is broadcast and expect it to support fundamental moral and religious values. Respondents support communication as an effective medium for the protection of basic values and fighting against problems prevalent in society.

In Romania, the main regulatory body in communication is the National Audiovisual Council (CNA). Other institutions that may exercise control over compliance with the rules on communication are: the National Authority for Consumer Protection, Ministry of Health. Communication regulatory bodies play an essential role in the economy sterilization against the negative effects of communication, and therefore they must become strong.

This factor also claims that communication for products that are harmful such as cigarettes, alcohol, tobacco, and products that have been declared unfit for human consumption, such as Coca Cola, Pepsi, should be prohibited. Communication of such products encourages the masses to use them and improves their consumption, thereby harming the individual in particular and the society in general.

Finally, respondents are also in favour of highlighting the negative effects of the promoted products so that viewers are not fooled and knowingly make decisions.

Communication agencies have a strong belief in the phrase "sex sells" and therefore this topic is extremely exploited in order to sell anything. Moreover, respondents have also expressed their concern regarding the violation of ethics in television communication. As it can be seen, both problems can be approached if the communication regulatory bodies are effective or not. This draws thus our attention on the essential doubts that respondents have in terms of communication regulatory bodies' effectiveness in Romania.

First, respondents suggest that if an advertisement is unfit for the public, a warning must be presented at the beginning of the commercial. Second, respondents are also willing to start campaigns to reverse the harmful effects of some of them. For example, the negative effects of communication that promotes tobacco and cigarettes can be cancelled by effective campaigns fighting against smoking. Eventually, it was proposed that in terms of communication for children, parents should be part of the auditing committee. Nobody knows the impulses of their children and how they think and contemplate problems better than their parents and therefore they are the best judges of meanings that children can draw from the communication directed to them.

Previous research indicated that early exposure of children to such matters unnecessarily increases their curiosity and encourages their experimenting. Children are more vulnerable to communication and are assumed to be less able to assess commercial persuasion and therefore communication among children has profound consequences. As already discussed, most of the people encourage children to defy their parents and create conflicts for purchasing the advertised products. Communication for children also promotes among them unsafe behaviour and the use of unsafe products. Therefore, respondents are not in favour of communication intended for children under the age of 12.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Communication is often seen as the embodiment of consumers' freedom and choice. Despite this important role, when the choice is placed "between a candy or another, the last tasty snack, cereal breakfast or fast food restaurant" is anything but a healthy alternative.

When not complying with the values system, communication harms society and this is certainly a moral dilemma. When making tough moral choices, there are many places where you can return for guidance, including: personal conscience, company policy, industry standards, government regulation or law. Most of these approaches have been studied in the current research and have been offered as solutions to the current problem.

It is not true that if we save communication, we save all, but it seems reasonable to assume that if we don't save communication, we might lose everything.

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