

BRAND COMMUNICATION IN THE ONLINE ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract: *The term "brand" is becoming more and more popular among consumers, due to their growing desire to buy a reliable product, which has created a history around it and whose reputation ensures guaranteed comfort, utility and satisfaction. A brand emphasizes social status and increases the image of a product on the market. In this paper we will focus on the important brands in the online environment in the home appliance industry. In this respect, we conducted a quantitative marketing research to understand the behaviour of consumers and their predisposition to purchase appliances through online resources.*

Key words: *Brand, Online environment, Marketing research.*

1. Introduction

Under the current market conditions, which are highlighted by strong competition, modernity, technological progress, etc. any enterprise strives to promote its products as best as possible, for the purpose of informing the public, aiming first and foremost. At the loyalty of its customers. At present, the activity of a company, irrespective of its field of activity, is impossible without involvement in the online environment. This statement proves to be very true worldwide, as this is a period in which commerce acquires new values, passing in a very large proportion in the online environment. This situation is due to the Covid-19 (Covid-19 Crisis) pandemic that forced people to communicate more in the online environment, to shop online, to carry out many activities in the virtual space in order to protect themselves from this very dangerous virus.

The brand, which is the element of differentiation for both the company and its products, must be promoted and positioned in the mind of the buyers more than ever, so that even when it comes to purchasing products that require research and direct visualization, the buyer does not face any doubts, have displays confidence and does not give up on this ideas, when he wants to buy them online. Thus the brand offers quality assurance, especially in the case of products with complex characteristics, which were normally purchased after a very careful assessment. Only the companies with history wick have created a strong image in the minds of buyers have benefited from such

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confidence, regarding the quality, safety and performance of their products. The brand is a name, which together with the brand, is a classic example of branding in its most rudimentary form: the brand as a guarantee of authenticity and a promise of reliable performance. Consumers perceive the brand as an important part of the product, and the branding success adds value to the product. Consumers attach a certain meaning to the brand and develop relationships with it. The brand has a meaning that goes beyond the attributes, the physical characteristics of the product (De Chernatony and Riley, 2006).

More than 65 million firms leverage online brand communities to connect with customers and achieve key benefits such as increased online reputation, brand patronage, and customer spending. (<https://www.ama.org/2019/05/02/how-to-extinguish-an-online-brand-firestorm/>)

Chris Hackley believes that the most visible aspects of organizational communication for consumers are likely to be ads placed on various media platforms, such as television, outdoor advertising, press or commercial radio. But organizations know that consumers' brand experience is strongly integrated: consumers will not normally distinguish between different communication channels when thinking about a brand or an organization. Thus, organizations need to be aware of how their different messages can be interpreted and how consistent, appropriate, these interpretations are compared to those from other communication sources. (Hackley, 2005). It is also important to emphasize that e-commerce is marked by the same thorny issues related to ethics, political and social facets. Given its expression, these issues enhance the behavioural aspects of the participants to the sequence, especially regarding consumers. More specifically it is likely that relational characteristics between consumer and retailer, as well as the social ones, associated to the purchasing act counterbalance the purely economic aspects related to price, for example (Drumea, 2015).

During this period, it is necessary to rethink communication with consumers, as well as the messages and actions taken for brand communication in the online environment.

2. General Characteristics of the Online Trade with Household Appliances in Romania

The Romanian market for durable goods, namely electronic and household appliances, reached 3.4 billion euros in 2018, representing a growth of 13% compared to the previous year. However, the main engine of this growth is the telecom sector, with an advance of 23% in value up to 1.4 billion euros. The fourth quarter of 2018, compared to the same period of 2017, registered an increase of almost 7%, the main engines being the large home appliances sector (12%), the office equipment sector (13%), as well as the IT sector, expansion that was mainly due to promotional events such as Black Friday or Christmas. (<https://temax.gfk.com/ro/EUR/reports/>)

The growth of the Romanian household goods market can be easily observed, analysing the increasing sophistication of the new products, as well as the demands of consumers, which the producers are trying to satisfy or even anticipate. Even if the appliances are considered durable goods, the data show that there is a reduction in the

operating time of these products, due to the technological progress and, thus, the consumers' desire to keep on trend.

Most of the online stores in Romania that sell home appliances have physical stores in the largest and most economically developed cities in the country. Through this form of trade, they also aim at optimal sizing of the cost-benefit ratio in carrying out the activity, reflected in a fiscal reconciliation with the entity's accounting (Anton, 2011).

Starting with 2019, more and more Romanians have wanted to simplify their lives. Romanian consumers want to get rid of the surplus, and the desire to receive what they want as quickly as possible is related to the desire to save time. Both behaviours give the consumer the chance to focus more on himself. It is very important and necessary for brands to consider this desire of consumers in 2019 and to meet their need with clear, short, objective and relevant messages. Consumers have begun to increasingly avoid brand communication and prefer short and objective online content.

According to the GPeC E-Commerce Romania 2019 report, the e-commerce sector exceeded the threshold of 4.3 billion euros at the end of 2019, 20-22% more than in 2018 when the value of online commerce was estimated at around 3, 6 billion euros. 2019 growth rate 2018 was lower compared to 2018 vs. 2017, when the growth rate from one year to another was about 30%. The value of over 4.3 billion euros refers to all transactions generated in Romania both to domestic traders, as well as to online stores outside the country's borders. (<https://www.researchromania.ro/2020/02/cercetare-piata-e-commerce-din-romania-a-depasit-43-miliarde-de-euro-in-2019/>)

3. Research Methodology

The topic of this marketing research considers "Attitudes and opinions of Romanians on the influence of the brand in the decision to purchase appliances in the online environment"

The objectives of the research are to determine the most important aspects and behaviours of Romanians related to the purchase of household appliances; determining the attitudes of Romanians regarding the online purchase of household appliances as well as determining the attitude regarding the purchase of a certain brand of household appliances online.

A questionnaire consisting of 21 questions was used to conduct the research, the first 14 including aspects related to buyers' behaviours regarding the purchase of household appliances, attitudes regarding the online purchase of household appliances in general, but also the impact that the brand has on making the purchase decision. The other 7 questions deal with the characterization and representation of the respondents.

The basic population of this research is made up of the total number of Romanian citizens living in Romania, both men and women, who according to the last census of 2011 (https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demografia_Rom%C3%A2niei) count 20 121 641 inhabitants (of which 52.7% are women, and 47.3% - men). Thus, a sample of 1080 people was chosen, taking into account the age structure of the population: under 20 years - about 17.5%, between 20-29 years - 15%, between 30-39 years - 16%, between 40- 49 years - 14.5%, between 50-59 years - 14%, between 60-69 years - 13%, over 70

years - 10%. There was no restriction on the sex, level of education, occupation or income of the respondents. The sampling method selected was the non-random one, the respondents being interviewed online. The questionnaire made in Google Docs was placed on social networks, from where potential respondents had free access and were able to complete it independently, without the involvement of the researcher.

After collecting the information with the help of the questionnaire, the statistical data processing was done by the SPSS system (Statistics Social Sciences Package). (Constantin, 2012).

4. The Research Results

Following the analysis, very interesting information was obtained on the attitudes and opinions of Romanians regarding the influence of the brand in the decision to purchase appliances in the online environment.

At the question regarding the influence of the brand on the decision to purchase appliances in the online environment, the brand was considered by the majority (420 people - 43.3%) as an important factor in the purchase decision process, but not enough. It is important to note that the value 5, which is of great importance, has an advantage over the other values, measuring 28.87% of the respondents. The brand was considered unimportant by only about 5% of the respondents. The percentage of invalidation made up 10.2%, corresponding to the number of 110 respondents (Table 1).

Table 1

The importance of the brand in making the purchase decision

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2,0	50	4,6	5,2	5,2
	3,0	220	20,4	22,7	27,8
	4,0	420	38,9	43,3	71,1
	5 (very important)	280	25,9	28,9	100,0
	Total	970	89,8	100,0	
Missing	88,0	20	1,9		
	99,0	90	8,3		
	Total	110	10,2		
Total		1080	100,0		

Source: *Author's own research*

The results of the measurement regarding the impact of the brand on the buyers are highlighted in the following table (Table 2).

The defining elements of a brand were highlighted by 990 people (91.7%) out of the total of 1080. We noticed that a special attention was paid by the Romanian citizens for the logo, being selected by 410 people (41.4%), a close percentage was calculated also for the element - values promoted, with 33.33% (330 respondents). The colours

accumulated a relative value of 11.11% in the respondents' appreciation, and the font and the text were appreciated by 14.14% of the respondents.

The brand element with the greatest impact on consumers

Table 2

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	The colours	110	10,2	11,1	11,1
	Font and text	140	13,0	14,1	25,3
	Logo	410	38,0	41,4	66,7
	The values promoted	330	30,6	33,3	100,0
	Total	990	91,7	100,0	
Missing	99	90	8,3		
Total		1080	100,0		

Source: *Author's own research*

Also, regarding the question related to the brands of appliances purchased by using the online environment, the answers were the following: (Table 3)

Brands of home appliances purchased online

Table 3

	Case Summary					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
\$V8 ^a	690	63,9%	39	36,1%	108	100,0%
a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.						
\$V8 Frequencies						
		Responses		Percent of Cases		
		N	Percent			
Brands purchased ^a	8.1 Bosch	300	16,9%	43,5%		
	8.2 Electrolux	140	7,9%	20,3%		
	8.3 LG	250	14,1%	36,2%		
	8.4 Panasonic	120	6,8%	17,4%		
	8.5 Philips	210	11,9%	30,4%		
	8.6 Samsung	430	24,3%	62,3%		
	8.7 Beko	100	5,6%	14,5%		
	8.8 Tefal	160	9,0%	23,2%		
	8.9 Daewoo	30	1,7%	4,3%		
	8.10 Others	30	1,7%	4,3%		
Total		1770	100,0%	256,5%		
a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.						

Source: *Author's own research*

Of the most purchased brands, one can easily notice the one from Samsung, which was indicated by 430 respondents (24.3%), followed by the one from Bosch with 300 answers (16.9%). In the top 3 there is the LG brand with 14.1% of the references made by 250 respondents. It is worth mentioning that only 690 people answered this

question, out of a total of 1080, as 36.1% omitted the question due to the filter type questions.

Other interesting results showed that reviews regarding the quality of the products and services offered are very important for 36.17% of the respondents, and the number of respondents who consider the name of the producing company as a decisive factor for the purchase was of 800 people, that is, 74.1%.

Analysing the connection between the net monthly income held by the consumer and the annual budget allocated by him for the purchase of household appliances, it was found that in the case of the respondents who record incomes between 1501 and 2500 lei monthly, the most frequent option (230 times or 57.5 % of those with such incomes) indicates the budget of 501-1500 lei allocated to the purchase of appliances, measuring the largest number of selections both horizontally and vertically. Therefore, in this case, the connection between the monthly income level and the amount allocated annually to the purchase of household appliances is strong. People who have a monthly income between 2501 and 5000 lei (approx. 41.9%), prefer to spend between 1501 and 2500 lei annually for purchasing purposes. At the opposite pole, respondents with incomes of over 5001 lei per month, did not indicate the variant below 500 lei, which points out that when the incomes are higher, the level of the budget dedicated to the purchase of household appliances also increases (Table 4).

Table 4

Analysis of the connection between the net monthly income held by the consumer and the annual budget allocated by the consumer for the purchase of household appliances

Crosstabulation							
			Net monthly income				Total
			Between 1501-2500 lei	Between 2501-5000 lei	Over 5001 lei	Under 1500 lei	
What is the annual budget allocated by you for the purchase of appliances?	Between 1501-2500 lei	Count	40	130	30	20	220
		Expected Count	10,0%	41,9%	33,3%	11,8%	22,7%
	Between 501-1500 lei	Count	230	100	40	9	460
		Expected Count	57,5%	32,3%	44,4%	52,9%	47,4%
	Over 2501 lei	Count	0	40	20	0	60
		Expected Count	0,0%	12,9%	22,2%	0,0%	6,2%
	Under 500 lei	Count	130	40	0	60	230
		Expected Count	32,5%	12,9%	0,0%	35,3%	23,7%
	Total	Count	400	310	90	170	970
		Expected Count	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Source: *Author's own research*

In the case of analysing the connection between the brand element with the highest impact and the age of the respondents, we obtained the following answers: The logo is mainly selected by young people (under 20 years old or between 20 and 29 years old). The values promoted are ranked 2nd with 33.3%, and it is the brand element indicated

by the mature people (30-39 years), which intends to accentuate their status and to be associated with the values and culture of the preferred brand. The font and text come in the options of all age groups, in equal proportion. Colours attract more middle-aged people, but this brand element has a relatively homogeneous distribution.

As the research was conducted between September and December 2019, we believe that due to the Covid-19 crisis, which has determined and will cause significant changes in offline commerce, but especially online, it is possible that the results regarding the preference of purchasing from the online environment have changed. That is why we considered here only the results that, in our opinion, have been maintained in this context of preferences for a particular brand.

This approach opens the way for further research in which to highlight the changes that have occurred during this time in online and offline trading with home appliances.

5. Conclusions

The benefits of this trade are multiple, including the fact that consumers can buy or make transactions at any time of the day, from anywhere, in order to receive relevant information within a few seconds, thus eliminating the inconvenience of travel (Neacsu, 2016). Moreover, the online purchase process involves many risks, from the level of product quality (presented on the site and the real one, which may or may not coincide), to the security of personal data. This is further accentuated in the case of home appliances, which, being long-lasting products, require a thorough selection process, and the sites cannot offer total certainty, which leaves no doubts or fears among buyers.

Thus, the image already created in the minds of consumers about a particular brand, helps them to make the final decision, based mainly on previous experiences. In the case of the online environment, the positioning of the brand is, we suppose, the most important component. In addition to this, the site itself should have a good reputation, which inspires confidence and quality, and the design, the aesthetic side, should be designed in such a way that any detail or information might hypothetically interest the visitor and determine him to act.

The existence of brand communication in the online environment determines manufacturers and retailers to implement various modern technologies, which involve interaction with customers. In order to make communication more efficient, the creation of a platform / applications based on various comparison criteria (the guarantee, the price, the functions performed, the technical characteristics, previous opinions of buyers, the wishes of the client, the budget that he wants to invest, the delivery process, etc.), will become a useful tool for buyers when they want to understand why buying one home appliance is more convenient than the other. And thus, it will be able to detect the brand differences and the advantages that it has to its competitors.

In order to make buyers more receptive to the offers of the manufacturing companies or those of the retailer, but also to create a personalized offer, there is the suggestion of creating an application that involves the use of augmented reality.

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