



Integrated Marketing Communication Strategy: Case of the brand X

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Abstract

In today's highly competitive market, a business organization must make strong efforts to establish successful marketing communication. Marketing communication, also known as promotion, is one of the key elements of strategic marketing, as it has a significant impact on the visibility and success of a company or brand. It is worth emphasizing that in the era of information technology, information saturation, and increasing consumer demands, the concept of marketing communication is much more complex than merely informing target customers about the existence of a product or service. In a globalized and highly dynamic market, a brand must continually strive to establish successful marketing communication to attract the attention of its target customer and thereby strengthen its path to greater recognition and, consequently, a larger market share. As part of the research, three main research questions guided us, namely: (1) how the company the company currently communicates with the target audience of the brand X, (2) who the target audience is and what their needs and desires are in terms of marketing communication, and (3) how the brand X can reach its target audience and stand out from the crowd. The obtained results were our key guidance in shaping the marketing communication plan for the brand X, alarm systems.

Keywords: integrated marketing communication, marketing communication strategy, home alarm system, the brand X, the company.

1 INTRODUCTION

In today's highly competitive market, every business organization must make significant efforts to establish successful marketing communication. Marketing communication, also known as promotion, is one of the key elements of strategic marketing, as it has a profound impact on the visibility and success of a company or brand. It is worth emphasizing that in the era of information technology, information saturation, and increasing consumer demands, the concept of marketing communication is much more complex than merely informing target customers about the existence of a product or service. Primarily, it requires the integration of various communication tools, which is known as integrated marketing communication (IMC). Kotler (2000, p. 542) defines IMC as "the concept under which a company carefully integrates and coordinates its many communications channels to deliver a clear, consistent and compelling message about the organization and its products." IMC goes beyond integration; it is a long-term and controlled process based on a holistic approach, researched data, interactivity, and creativity. Its purpose is to provide a clear, consistent, and persuasive message about the organization, its products, and/or services.

The goal of IMC is to to ensure cost efficiency, stand out from the crowd, engage the target audience, and create and strengthen long-term relationships with customers and other stakeholders in the business-sales process. Such an approach leads to a larger market share, and consequently, greater business profit. Managing all aspects of IMC is highly challenging, and success can only be achieved if a company has a well-structured plan that includes an effective IMC strategy, comprehensive implementation, and measurement and evaluation of marketing communication activities.

1.1 Literature review

Marketing communication, also known as promotion, is one of the seven elements of the marketing mix carried out by organizations to increase brand awareness among consumers and, subsequently, to increase market share and profitability (Prachi, n.d.; Percy, 2018, p. 11). Companies use various communication tools to communicate with target groups. The selection of these tools depends on communication objectives and other factors (Vukasović, 2023, p. 117). Based on fundamental literature, there are five communication tools: advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, public relations, and direct marketing (Armstrong et al., 2017, p. 394). In addition to these, Seitel (2022) adds a sixth tool: word-of-mouth marketing (Seitel, 2022, p. 37).

The origins of marketing communication date back to the late 1980s. Rapid expansion of this field progressed and led to the idea of IMC, which has fully established itself in the mid-1990s. The concept of IMC has evolved significantly over the years (Jerman & Završnik, 2013, p. 56). Marketing communication is an ever-changing field, adapting to customer values, technology, and other trends (Eagle et al., 2020). Many contemporary authors suggest that the traditional approach of integrating different communication tools is no longer sufficient in the modern environment. Due to high competition and increasingly turbulent conditions, there is a need for a more refined IMC system focusing on all segments of communication and synchronizing them (Založnik, 2018, p. 12; Prachi, n.d.).

The first segment involves the synergistic interaction of individual communication tools. The essence here is to use multiple tools simultaneously, as they support and complement each other, ensuring a more significant impact compared to using them separately (Jerman & Završnik, 2013, p. 51). In other words, IMC advocates delivering the same message through various media, such as TV, radio, the internet, mobile phones, social media, etc. (Armstrong et al., 2018, pp. 346-347).

The second segment of IMC emphasizes that both the message and the medium must be tailored to the target recipient, their needs, desires, and lifestyle (Blakeman, 2018, p. 4). Armstrong and colleagues emphasize that the customer is at the center of all marketing activities. To win customers over, a company must continuously gather relevant data about its target customers and carefully analyze them to understand their expectations and serve them effectively (Armstrong et al., 2017, p. 80). The message as a crucial component in strengthening and establishing brand recognition must deliver clear and cohesive information, incorporating elements of creativity in its textual and visual presentation. Indeed, in an era of information overload, creativity plays a key role, as only this allows the message to stand out from the multitude of messages and captivates the selected audience (Armstrong et al., 2018, pp. 346-347; Čebulj, 2021, p. 20).

The third segment in IMC is the two-way communication process. Feedback received from customers serves as a vital indicator of the success of marketing activities. Feedback forms the basis for further improving product or service development and communication, leading to good, strong, and long-term customer relationships (Jerman & Završnik, 2013, p. 52).

Integrated marketing communication always looks at other areas of the marketing web, adapts to them and intervenes with suggestions for improvement where necessary (Turza, 2022). For optimal results in marketing communication, the entire marketing mix must be consistent. The product's appearance, pricing, packaging, store or sales personnel, and more all convey messages to customers (Armstrong et al., 2017, p. 395; Smith & Zook, 2020). Even the best promotion cannot achieve desired results if distribution does not provide adequate access to the product, if the price is unacceptable to consumers, if the product packaging does not align with customer preferences, and so on (UKEssays, 2021).

Managing all aspects of IMC relations is very challenging, and without a well-structured plan, it is impossible to prosper in the target market (Oblak, 2016, p. 1). A well-structured plan enables a company to simplify many challenges and achieve marketing communication goals. There is no single common approach to IMC planning, but there are essential elements that each plan should include (Smith & Zook, 2020, p. 264). According to a review of various literature, the plan can be divided into three main areas: strategy (Založnik, 2018, pp. 11-28), strategy implementation, and marketing communication control (Smith & Zook, 2020, pp. 280-292). Planning IMC is an ongoing process that requires continuous updates (Prachi, n.d.). Smith also recommends a ninety-day planning cycle and adds that the cycle's duration depends on the success or failure of the marketing campaign. If the plan is not working, it should be changed immediately (Smith & Zook, 2020, pp. 291-292).

1.2 Research problem

Market analysis in the smart home alarm system sector in Slovenia indicates that despite moderate competition, there are no intensive or innovative promotional activities from many brands. This represents an ideal opportunity to capture a leading market share in the industry. Additionally, the Markets & Markets study found that demand for home security solutions has been increasing in recent years, and market projections suggest that this trend will continue in the future (Markets And Markets, n.d.). Hence, the growing demand trend potentially leads to more competition, with market players likely to seize the opportunity. In the center of this challenge, following a thorough review of smart home alarm systems from the most prominent brands available in the Slovenian market, is the brand X. It boasts a professional and highly efficient home alarm system, as evidenced by the innovation award given to the developers of this solution by the Chamber of Commerce of Dolenjska and Bela Krajina (GZDBK, n.d.).

Within the framework of the study, three main research questions guided our research, namely: (1) How is the company currently communicating with the target audience of the brand X? (2) Who is the target audience, and what are their needs and desires regarding marketing communication? (3) How should the brand X reach its target audience and stand out from the competition? To answer these questions, we conducted marketing research, which included a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, and a review of relevant secondary data that is publicly available. The purpose of this study was to develop a comprehensive plan for IMC that would enable the brand X to gain recognition and achieve a leading market share in the smart home alarm system industry in Slovenia.

In the following sections of the paper, we will present the methodology and key findings of the qualitative research and outline the IMC strategy for the brand X. All results of quantitative and qualitative research, along with the comprehensive IMC plan with a focus on strategy planning for the brand X, are presented in the master's thesis by Rajer Jasna.

2 METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH SAMPLE

2.1 Methodology and qualitative research sample

In developing the IMC plan for the brand X, we relied on primary and secondary data. Secondary data were obtained from the latest public research and other relevant publicly available sources. Data that couldn't be obtained through secondary sources were gathered through primary research (primary data) using both qualitative and quantitative research methods. To answer the research questions, we conducted two in-depth interviews with the director of the company, and the sales director of the company. The interviews were structured with predefined open-ended questions, and additional follow-up questions were asked as needed. We utilized a case study. A case study is a research method that relies on the detailed analysis of an individual case, event, group, or situation with the purpose of understanding its key characteristics, processes, and causes. This method enables an in-depth investigation of a specific case within a real context and provides a deeper insight into complex phenomena or issues. The main goal is to gain an understanding of the causes, processes, context, and consequences of the specific case, which can serve as a basis for theory development, strategy formulation, or problem-solving in practice.

3 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH RESULTS

3.1 Results of the individual interview

In this section, only the questions and answers relevant to this paper have been included.

Q1: Through which media are you currently advertising the brand X alarm system?

To this question, the interviewees responded that they are currently advertising the alarm system exclusively through Google Ads. We asked a follow-up question: "Have you ever advertised on any other media in the past? On which media? For how long? Why did you stop?" The response was: "We advertised through various media in the past, including (1) three radio stations for three months, (2) the local newspaper for three months, and (3) Facebook for six months. We stopped advertising through these channels mainly because we didn't see any response from the target audience."

Q2: Do you believe that your advertising message and the advertising medium have been adapted to the target audience? How did you define the target audience and what are its characteristics?

"Our target audience is mainly male, aged 30 to 55, who own a house, have jobs, and families. We know this based on years of experience working with existing customers of the brand X alarm system. We always adapted the advertising messages to the target audience, and we selected advertising media based on their popularity. For example, we know that a significant portion of our target audience listens to the radio every day. When choosing radio stations, we relied on audience reach research and selected those with the highest reach. Television media also has high reach, but advertising on TV is very expensive, so we didn't choose it. Instead, we chose Facebook, which is also considered a popular medium."

Regarding the question "Have you delved into all the settings available for Facebook advertising?" we received the following answer: "We set only the basic parameters for Facebook advertising, and we didn't go into detail."

Q3: In your opinion, do you invest enough in communication with the target audience? Why do you think so?

"In August 2022, we redesigned the appearance of the website and added to its content. We have been continuously advertising through Google. In addition, we are always available to customers and potential customers for additional questions, whether through online chat, email, phone call, or in person at our company or at the customer's home. Based on our experiences with other communication methods where

the return on investment was negative, we believe that we are currently investing adequately in communication with the target audience, but we are also open to solutions that yield better results."

Q4: What is the maximum monthly amount you would be willing to invest in communication with the target audience?

"We are entirely flexible regarding the amount for communicating with the target audience, provided that we achieve the desired financial results."

Q5: Have you ever measured the results of your marketing efforts regarding the alarm system?

"We have never paid specific attention to measuring marketing efforts. Occasionally, we monitor the website analytics and have found that shortly after the release of the redesigned website, organic traffic to it increased."

Q6: What message do you convey to potential customers of your alarm system?

"Our mission is to provide professional and reliable home or property security. Therefore, we have developed a professional multi-purpose alarm system that safeguards against burglaries, floods, fires, and enables easy emergency calling. In promoting the alarm system, we have focused on burglary protection and its reliability."

Q7: What feedback do users of the alarm system provide? Are users satisfied? Do you receive many complaints?

"The majority of our users are very satisfied with all our services. We know this because we often ask our customers for their opinions. Some customers even call us on their own to express their gratitude for the kindness and the quality of the product. Complaints are very rare and are mostly related to an expired battery or false alarms caused by incorrect installation. In such cases, we replace the battery as soon as possible and eliminate false alarms by ensuring the proper placement of sensors."

3.2 Answers to research questions

In the qualitative research, our main research question was, "What advertising campaigns have been conducted for the brand X alarm system, and what was their effectiveness?" Our primary focus was to understand the characteristics of the target audience that the company addresses in advertising for their alarm system and whether the target audience was appropriately identified. In an in-depth interview with the company's directors, it was stated that advertising for the brand X alarm system primarily targeted males aged 30 to 55, living in houses as homeowners, with jobs and families. When comparing this information with the data from our quantitative research, it can be concluded that they completely align. Therefore, it can be concluded that the target audience was appropriately identified in terms of demographic characteristics.

Furthermore, we were interested in the key message in advertising for the brand X alarm system and whether it was appropriate. In an in-depth interview with the directors of the company, it was revealed that the emphasis was on the reliability of the alarm system, which effectively protects against break-ins. This key message aligns with the needs of the target customers since in the survey, 83% of the target audience indicated that the most important feature of an alarm system for them is reliable operation, and more than half of the target audience aims to protect against break-ins and theft of valuable items.

Finally, we delved into the question of which media outlets the company used to advertise the brand X alarm system, what the response of the target audience was for each medium, and the reasons for such responsiveness. It was found from the interview that the company consistently paid Google for better placement in the Google search engine. In the past, the company also advertised on popular radio stations, Facebook, and in the local newspaper. Advertising on these media outlets lasted for three months, except for Facebook, where it ran for six months. The company believes that Google advertising had positive results, while other advertising methods did not perform well as there was no response from consumers. It's worth noting that this assessment is subjective since the company did not precisely measure the success of their advertising. Additionally, it should be emphasized that the evaluation of unresponsiveness from the target audience is not without basis, as the quantitative research showed that none of the surveyed individuals who were aware of the brand X alarm system mentioned hearing about it on Facebook or the radio.

When seeking reasons for the lack of response from consumers to advertising in specific media, we relied on the results of the questionnaire. We found that over 80% of the target audience listens to the radio more than three times a week or even daily, and the most frequently selected radio stations for advertising are precisely those on which the company advertised. However, the quantitative research also revealed that only 6% of the target audience that radio advertising would most likely attract, and similarly, only 6% of the target customers could be encouraged to purchase the product through radio advertising. The key reason why the company did not achieve the desired response from the radio advertising may be precisely because the target audience is not receptive to radio ads.

The company also advertised on Facebook, where, according to the results of our quantitative research, the target audience is present in a much smaller percentage compared to the radio (47% of the target audience uses Facebook more than three times a week or daily), but they are more receptive to advertising. This finding is not surprising, as on Facebook, ads can be displayed in the form of (1) graphics or images, which attracts 54% of the target audience, (2) videos, which attract 41% of the target audience, and (3) text, which attracts 27% of the target audience. Moreover, 25% of such target audience can be convinced to purchase a product through advertising on social networks. Based on this, we assume that the reason for the lack of response from Facebook users may not lie in the choice of the advertising medium or the receptiveness of consumers to advertising but in the absence of advanced settings in Facebook advertising. The company's directors mentioned in the interview that they used only basic settings for Facebook advertising, which may indicate that it was not enough for the ads to be displayed to the entire target audience. To confirm this reason with certainty, we would need to closely examine the settings of past Facebook advertising, focusing on the questions of (1) whether all necessary data were entered into the available settings (e.g., specifying the demographic characteristics of the target audience) and (2) whether the entered data matched the data obtained in the quantitative research. The brand X alarm system was also advertised in the local newspaper. Looking again at the survey results, it can be observed that 12% of the target audience reads the local newspaper, which is a relatively small percentage considering that the majority of respondents are from the region that the newspaper covers. Therefore, the lack of response to advertising by readers is likely due to the small proportion of the target audience on this media.

3.3 Integrated marketing communication strategy

We recommend that the company constantly maintains a well-optimized SEO presence on the brand X website and adjusts the settings for Google advertising based on the research results. The goals of these actions are (1) to increase website traffic and (2) optimize the costs of Google advertising. The website should also feature a blog with interesting and relevant original or curated content.

Consistent activity on social media is equally crucial and should not be limited to specific periods. A continuous presence on social media expands audience reach, brand visibility, a positive brand image, and audience loyalty (Steuer, n.d.). We suggest making posts on Facebook and YouTube at least once a month. When it comes to sharing video content, the same content can be posted on both platforms. On Facebook, various types of content can be posted, including a call to read the blog. Regardless of posting frequency, user activity on these platforms should be monitored daily, and immediate responses should be provided in case of inquiries. By actively engaging on social media, a company demonstrates its interest in and commitment to its customers and potential customers. This approach helps establish a strong customer relationship and build trust in the brand. Satisfied customers are more likely to return for further purchases and share positive experiences with others. Research has shown that user opinions and word-of-mouth recommendations are the most powerful advertising channels. In other words, consumer experiences are crucial for building a brand's reputation and product. When customers or potential customers share positive experiences, the likelihood that the brand or product will be perceived as reliable, high-quality, and trustworthy increases, attracting new customers (Gavin, 2022; Szyndlar, 2023).

Strengthening customer relationships and building an excellent reputation involves communication through various channels, including in-person interactions, phone, email, and forums. Regardless of the communication medium, it is essential that the company consistently ensures continuous and effective communication, especially reliable and quick responses to customers, especially when addressing any issues or complaints.

The process of increasing brand visibility, fostering a positive brand image, and acquiring new customers can be expedited through advertising and reward programs. In addition to Google advertising, we recommend advertising on Facebook and YouTube, as these platforms offer extensive reach, microtargeting, and display ads in various formats (Flamingo Marketing Strategies, 2022). To effectively convey advertising messages on Facebook and YouTube, a well-defined target audience is crucial. To reach the right audience, appropriate demographic data such as age, gender, location, and other segmentations should be set. If this data is not defined or not correctly defined, the ad will not be displayed to the right audience, rendering the advertising investment ineffective. The message and format of the ad are equally important, as they must be engaging enough to prompt the audience to click on the ad. Clicking on the ad should lead to a landing page in the form of a pop-up before accessing the main website. The landing page's role is to convert visitors into potential customers, so it should include a concise and clear message about the benefits visitors can expect and a call to action (CTA). For the brand X, the CTA could be signing up for newsletters with special offers and discounts exclusively for subscribers. The landing page should also be supported with data from the research, specifically positive reviews from current the brand X alarm system users. Social proof helps establish trust in the product or brand (Moore, 2023). When a company collects a visitor's email address, it means they have acquired a potential customer contact, offering an excellent opportunity to convert that potential customer into an actual customer through email marketing. While primary research suggests that consumers may not be receptive to email marketing, subscribers who sign up for newsletters anticipate receiving them in their inbox; otherwise, they would not have subscribed. Additionally, consumers are highly receptive to special offers and discounts, making them more willing to make a purchase (Hoffman, 2021). When creating such newsletters, we recommend offering a limited-time discount or an exclusive offer for the first 10 customers to encourage potential customers to act promptly. Just like with social media communication, it's important to conduct email marketing regularly, even if not all subscribers read or respond to each message. The essence of regular email sending is to maintain the presence of the brand X in subscribers' minds. Such an approach increases the likelihood that a potential customer will make a purchase when they feel the need for such a product.

Within the landing page, it's essential that the visitor, whether they've provided their email address or not, continues their journey to the main website (Steinbrinck, 2023). The main website should also include two strong marketing elements that the company has in place, which are (1) testimonials from satisfied customers, allowing potential customers to make more informed purchase decisions and (2) multiple calls to action (CTAs). CTAs should encourage visitors to read the blog, explore the product's features, subscribe to newsletters, follow the Facebook page, follow the YouTube channel, or make a purchase. Which CTA to present depends on the content the visitor is currently engaged with. With strategically chosen CTAs, visitor interest in the product is maintained, potentially converting them into potential or actual customers.

We also recommend creating promotional materials such as flyers, brochures, and bags. Using branded bags with a logo, slogan, and website address is an excellent way to increase brand visibility. Customers will carry these bags around, allowing the brand's image to be seen by a wider audience. This can lead to increased brand awareness and more potential customers. The bags should be visually appealing and of high quality, and each customer should receive one when purchasing a brand X product. All potential customers should receive a free printed flyer or brochure, either during an in-person visit to the company or by mail upon request. The flyer or brochure should include attractive graphics or photos and a clear message to pique the potential customer's interest. Additionally, the promotional materials have another advantage. When a potential customer receives a flyer or brochure, there is a chance they will share it with others. For instance, they may show it to their friends, family members, or coworkers. There's also a chance they may leave the flyer or brochure in a public place where others can see it. This increases the likelihood that information will spread and reach a larger target audience.

4 CONCLUSION

Comprehensively managing all aspects of IMC is highly demanding. Moreover, this field evolves and changes rapidly. Within the proposed marketing communication strategy for the chosen brand, we have focused on the use of digital channels, such as the website and social media. We recommended the introduction of a blog with content that might be interesting to the target audience and regular improvements to content SEO on the website. We also suggested regular posting of engaging content on Facebook and YouTube, as these two social media platforms are the most popular among the target audience. In doing so, we emphasized the need to monitor user activity on these media and various forums every day and respond promptly to inquiries. With such an approach, the company demonstrates its interest to its target audience, builds trust, and contributes to positive word-of-mouth marketing, which, according to research findings, is the most powerful channel for increasing brand recognition. To expedite the brand recognition process, we recommended that the company, engage in paid advertising on Facebook and YouTube and maintain Google advertising with keyword optimization. We also detailed an email marketing strategy that converts potential customers into customers.

The 2024 marketing communications strategy for Brand X deliberately excludes traditional channels such as radio, television, and print media. This decision is supported by both qualitative and quantitative research, as well as secondary data. Considering this, we are confident that the proposed strategy has the potential to significantly enhance the visibility and sales performance of the Brand X alarm system.

At this point, it is important to note that when making decisions based solely on quantitative research, a certain level of risk should be considered, as our sample is opportunistic and limited to a specific geographical area, and therefore cannot be generalized to the entire population. For precise and reliable results, it would be advisable to repeat the research using a probability sampling method.

Additionally, the success of this strategy will depend on the consistent implementation and monitoring of the strategy according to the guidelines outlined in the master's thesis by Jasna Rajer.

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