

Communication in Marketing Promotion

Adrian GHERASIM, Daniel GHERASIM, Mihaela VASILOAIA
George Bacovia University in Bacau, ROMANIA

adrian.gherasim@ugb.ro

daniel.gherasim@ugb.ro

mihaela.vasiloaia@ugb.ro

Abstract: *The markets available to companies almost always prove either insufficient, or insignificant enough in size. Most times, on the one and the same market there are several suppliers of products of the same type (or similar), which are alternatives to meet the same needs, each seeking to attract customers to its side in order to attract general and specific objectives on sales and profit. The competition between them is not necessarily in the advantage of those who offer higher quality products at most attractive prices.*

In modern marketing, the promotion's aim is not only to sell what the company has produced in accordance with the expected demand of consumers, but to sell what the company aims to produce (more than required with no effort to promote). There is a great difference between what you want (how much you want to produce) and what you can (produce). One thing is absolutely certain: without promotion, the company's life becomes very uncertain. It is probably because of this that, quite often, the information cost exceeds the actual costs involved in the production of supply to customers.

Keywords: *promotion, sales, message, sender, receiver, communication, feed- back*

Introduction

Promotion is the third component of the marketing mix, being defined as “*all activities having in view the information, attraction and keeping of potential and traditional customers for a specific offer, the stimulation of the buying decision, by raising awareness and creating the belief that that specific offer meets certain necessities at the highest level*”. [3, p. 346]

In short, it can be defined as a *set of communicational activities through which one has in view the gradual transformation on non-buyers of a product into buyers (first potential, and then effective buyers)*.

The vast content of promotion is revealed not so much by the definitions that have been given, but especially by its **objectives**. Following a natural way from *simple to complex*, they are reflected in:

1) *the initial information* of the public (be it very reduced) on:

- *the company* that promotes (objective frequently encountered in new businesses or at those essentially changing the field of activity);
- the occurrence or existence on the market of a particular *offer* (which, without promotion, could remain unknown);
- the launch on the market of *a new product* whose supply is limited in time (to inform buyers on its characteristics and benefits and to be the first to attract clients);
- certain *new performances of some known products*; certain *facilities* offered in the buying process, etc.;

2) the systematic *re-information* of the public on the same items on the company and its offer for easy *memorizing* (or *remembering*), and for the prevention of *forgetfulness*;

3) *the individualization of supply* (to be noticeable by targeted customers – otherwise there is the risk of being lost in a flood of products with the same destination), which can be achieved by: emphasizing the external elements of the product: design, packaging; ways and places of exposure; characteristics that render them superior in comparison with competing products, etc.;

4) *the awareness of the need* to be addressed by the company's offer and the utility of its coverage by the respective offer;

5) *arousing public curiosity* by focusing on certain comparative advantages of the company's tender;

6) *influencing the public* (internal and external) through specialized public relations activities in order to induce it a favourable attitude towards the company;

7) *the stimulation of demand* by finding the means to convince buyers that the company's offer has the greatest benefits for them, by *changing the consumer's tastes and preferences*, by finding solutions to get them interested in buying the company's products (giving discounts, payment facilities, additional services, promotional gifts), by positioning or repositioning the product or brand, by supporting distributors, by educating clients (to help them know how to use the product in order to capitalize its utility) etc. ;

8) *the weakening of competition* (through actions meant to retain old customers and attract new customers – among those initially oriented towards its offer);

9) *the annihilation of unfavourable information and attitudes* supplied by competitors, media, dissatisfied customers, some state bodies (responsible for consumer protection, unfair competition screening, etc.).

According to the situation, the company may propose further targets for promotion. The fact is that, nowadays, “true competition does no longer revolve around market share. We compete for attention, for the share of thoughts and feelings’. If you fail to capture the customers’ attention, you are eaten up. Indeed, we probably need to start to pay for attention” [4, p. 106].

1. The Components of the Communication System for Promotion

The fact that promotion is, in essence, a communicational activity, has become more than well-known. This does not mean that there is equality between communication and promotion, the relationship between the two concepts is one of *inclusion* (promotion having a much larger content than communication).

The term *promotion* comes from the Latin *promoveo*, which means *to move forward, to submit, to develop, to progress*. *To communicate* means *to make known, to inform, notify*. [1, p. 205].

Marketing communication is a part of communication that helps the company achieve its marketing objectives, while *promotional communication* is only a subcomponent of communication and a component of marketing communication, which is in the service of promoting the company and its businesses.

Formal communication is based on rules, conventions and conventional aspects well-mentioned at institutional level, being realised through special channels and dedicated to a controllable interaction. It provides easy access to identify positions and hierarchical authority or that obtained by a certain status. It is like a play where we know who plays what role since the rise of the curtain.

Informal communication is more extensive and (often) more efficient than the formal one, being spontaneous (as it is found in all institutional activities of documentation, research and building partnerships and social networks, in the direct conversations between two people, the discussions of small groups of colleagues or representatives from other hierarchical levels, etc.). It is based on unwritten rules, which allow the transmission of open and comprehensive messages, involving the speakers’ emotions, attitudes and expectations which imply a mechanism ensuring a schematic exchange, a communication system as presented in Figure 1.

Therefore, its main components are: sender, message, receiver, communication channels, feedback and disturbances.

1) **The broadcaster** (also called **the sender**) is the “engine” of the communication process, that entity or person interested in designing promotional messages, in the transmission to the receiver and the reception and interpretation of the latter’s reactions. He/she is planning the entire promotional activity, setting also its modalities of implementation (directly or through specialized agencies). Therefore, he/she must have clearly defined objectives and be familiar with the particularities of the addressed audience. More specifically, the broadcaster has to:

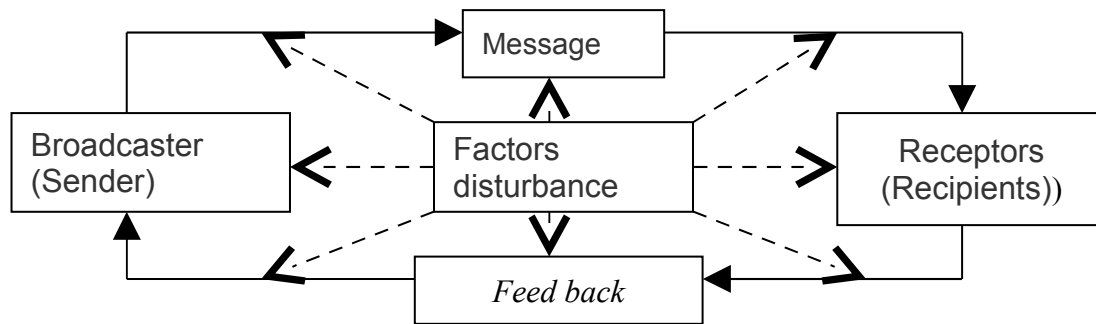


Figure 1 Communication system

- identify the aimed recipients and their characteristics (physical, mental, economic etc.) choose the best message (one to capture the *attention* of the recipient, and to arouse his/her *interest*, stimulate his/her desire to purchase and to generate the action –purchase);
- select the channels of communication (personal or impersonal);
- make sure that he/she has succeeded in making the receiver (listener, reader) understand and assimilate that information;
- base the promotional budget;
- establish the promotional mix;
- receive feedback.

The broadcaster's action may be assessed as effective or not only in the degree of meeting the objectives and the used means. However, it must be assessed as being ethical or not (because it has an impact on others – what creates some responsibility).

2) **The message** is the key element of communication, its content and form being the result of a creative process conducted under the general principles of semiotics and semantics. Its elements are implemented through a process of coding in various types of symbols: visual (colours, shapes, motion, brightness), written (slogans, advertisements, posters), sound (music, dialogue, etc.) – or their combinations.

To achieve the desired goal, it is necessary to meet the following requirements regarding the message:

- 1) to be designed and sent so as to *capture the attention* of the recipient;
- 2) to use symbols that are common both to the transmitter's and the receiver's experiences, so that it can be well received, decoded and understood;
- 3) to determine in the receiver's mind the awareness of needs, as well as the means to satisfy them.

The message ability to change the receiver's representations on things is called *relevance*. It supposes, on the one hand, an ethical obligation of the sender, and on the other hand, a moral obligation of the receiver to accept the other's valid arguments.

The transmitter should consider the main impact factors of the message: Who delivers it? What is said? How is it transmitted? To whom is it sent? With what result? etc.. Hence, the main components of a promotional message are: title, text, slogan, illustration and colour.

a) **The title** of the message (which usually appears in the written message structure) is reflected in a word or phrase placed before the text, having two purposes:

- to attract attention (by: form, content, form and colour of letters, the item referred to – product, auxiliary services, quality characteristics, mode of distribution, etc.);
- to stimulate the interest (or desire) for further information (but it should provide only partial information about the element which is being promoted so that he who received such information is urged to browse the entire message to reach complete information).

The great importance of this message element results from the fact (shown by specialists in written communication) that *80% of readers follow only headers, and decide to read the content only if their interest is awoken.*

b) **The text (content)** is the basic component of the message, which provides the bulk of information to the receptor. To achieve its objectives, it must meet two contradictory conditions:

- on the one hand, to be sufficiently comprehensive to achieve a more complete receptor information;
- on the other hand, to be short enough so as not to tire or bore the receiver.

In other words, it must convey *maximum information with minimum words*. However, the message content must be as clear, precise, attractive and suggestive.

If the message needs to be longer, it is recommended to be divided by using *subtitles* so as to be easily read, understood and memorised.

The *style* of writing the message is chosen so that it better meets its contents (to assure it, both informative and emotional character).

In designing and writing the message it is necessary to start from the premise that *it should not tell people* what to believe, but rather to enable them to form their own opinion on its significance [5, p. 24-25].

By its content regarding the potential customers, the text should:

- *attract attention;*
- *stimulate interest;*
- *be as credible as possible;*
- *generate to purchase desire;*
- *determine the purchasing decision.*

c) **The illustration** is often essential to the message, serving to draw attention, to beautify, to move, to persuade, to supplement or even replace the text, presenting the most varied forms: drawings, photos, figures, maps, music, natural sounds, famous voices, video animation etc. Between text and illustration there should be established an optimum relationship, the two elements complementing each other. A particularly inspired design, which renders the image of the product or some effects of its use, may replace pages of text. To attract attention and increase confidence, there are inserted suggestive images that stand out more clearly and do not require a special effort to perceive them.

The *colours* corresponding to the illustration (but also the colours of letters or different parts of the text) are the element that renders beauty and attraction to the message, also triggering some psychological effects on the buyer. Everyone agrees that a colourful poster draws attention quickly, increases the information and emotional value of the message, making it easy to remember.

A series of researches have shown that individuals have almost the same preferences for certain colours or their combinations, which allowed the identification of associations of ideas that arise in contact with an image. For example, yellow is associated almost automatically with sunshine, red with the warmth of fire and blood, green with nature and freshness of vegetation, blue with the serenity of the sky, etc.

Regarding the significance of colours, there can be seen significant differences between countries (or populations). Thus, if in African countries black is the spirit of good white of evil, for Europeans black is the colour of sadness and mourning (while for Chinese and Japanese these emotions are expressed in white).

Colours may also have *physiological effects* (not just psychological), which are considered in advertising, as well. They are manifested by creating the sensation of hot or cold, by increasing blood pressure, creating optical illusions to increase or decrease the volume, etc.

d) **The slogan** is nothing but a linguistic formula with great significance in expressing the essence of a message. Usually, it takes the form of a very intuitive and concise sentence or phrase (as rhythm, wordplay, etc.) To prove the effectiveness of promotion, the slogan must be short, enjoyable, memorable and able to draw attention to the key features of the company, product or service concerned.

Types of messages. There are several ways to systematize the promotional messages, starting from various criteria (followed objectives, consumers' psychology, their lifestyles, habits and traditions, etc. Thus, depending on the item that focuses, we find:

Thus, according to *the emphasised element*, there are:

- *functional messages* that focus on product performance (related to price), are recommended to companies that register significant success (proven and already recognized) in quality or for those who can afford significant reductions in prices without compromising quality;
- *contemplation messages*, which are derived from the functional ones, their characteristic being that, after highlighting the outstanding performance of products, are intended to interest prospective buyers in a somewhat neutral way, without direct reference to competing products so as not to place them on inferior position (the lack of their presence annuls the feeling of manipulation, the targeted ones being convinced of acting independently in their choice);
- *explanatory messages* centred on scenes of everyday life and ideal opportunity to use the promoted products;
- *educational messages*, which, after presenting a certain behaviour model to the a potential consumer, suggest them to follow it;
- *messages highlighting the brand*, recommended when additional arguments to support an already established brand (brand recognition and appreciation by certain bodies, for example) can be brought;
- *narcissistic messages*, cultivating "self love", trying to stimulate (in the tenderer's interest) the narcissists' tendencies to snobbery or imitation;
- *fantastic messages*, aiming at the consumer's transshipment in a surreal environment, able to assure satisfaction and unimaginable pleasure, etc.

Starting from the so-called *promotional axe* (also called *theme* or *call*), respectively from the most important content element related to consumer's interest to purchase product, we can distinguish among:

- *rational messages*, aiming to persuade potential customers with specific arguments on outstanding product performance, the competitive price and other advantages of the offer;
- *emotional messages*, focusing on emotional factors, as certain positive emotions (joy, pride, love, pleasure) or negative (fear, shame, discontent, guilt);
- moral messages, based on social arguments (mutual help, mutual respect and environmental protection.).

There are, obviously, other promotional messages, as well.

3) **Communication channels** are composed of all elements by means of which information is transmitted from sender to recipient. Here are envisaged:

- information support (all material elements of the marketing mix – products, labels, logos, packaging, posters, channels of distribution, etc.);
- means of *transmitting information* (classical mail, newspapers, magazines, telephone, radio, television, internet, etc.).

Each of the items listed above can influence to a greater or lesser extent, the effectiveness of communication for promotion.

Marketing communication is achieved through two main categories of channels: personal and non-personal [2, p. 771].

Personal channels provide direct communication between two or more persons – through direct discussions or speeches, telephone, postal services etc. These are:

- *mediating channels*, based on the issuing company's sales agents in contact with customers;
- *expert channels*, based on independent professionals able to make assessments (favourable or unfavourable) on the producer and its products;
- *social channels* based on family members, friends, neighbours, colleagues etc. that connect with people who are part of the audience.

Non-personal channels used to send messages without using direct contact or interaction on a personal level between sender and receiver, such as media, prints, display, promotional events, electronic media (CDs). The answer is represented by the receiver's reactions after exposure to the message.

4) **The receiver (recipient)** of the message is usually a group of people targeted by advertisement for different purposes (those embodied in objectives of promotion we have just referred to) and from whom certain reactions are expected. He/she is the recipient of the message, his/her life being affected by what the transmitter sent (in another measure, however, than that desired by the sender – the message being filtered by the problems, needs, values, expectations and their own communication skills).

Knowing that, as the old Latin saying, *is not the same when two say the same thing*, for the desired reactions to occur, it is necessary for recipients to receive the message, **decode** it (decipher), understand it and be aware of its information content. All these depend on:

- the motivation to get the message (a recipient interested in a specific offer is more sensitive to the message aiming it than an uninterested one);
- the relationships between the sender and receiver (from an already known sender – based on previous commercial relationships, the receiver's sensitivity being greater than that of an unknown one);
- the heterogeneity (economic, political, educational, etc.) within the receiver's components (being necessary to adapt the content of the message to each of these characteristics);
- the intellectual and sensorial ability of receivers (given by their psychological and physiological features), etc.

Promotional messages have in view the following receptor's **approach levels**:

- *the cognitive level* – the focus must be on its information;
- *the emotional level* – communication aims to create a favourable attitude to the promoted object passed;
- *behavioural level*.

According to the general theory of communication, the receipt of the message by recipients is influenced by three main factors: selective attention, selective distortion and selective retention.

a) *Selective attention* is explained by the huge amount of information which it is addressed to the same individual at a certain moment, which can not be fully taken into account [5, p. 8]. He/she is simply forced to adopt an attitude of selection, being (somewhat) careful only to:

- the information that he/she is interested in ((due to its current most pressing needs – or those already projected);
- information relating to facts or events that deviate from normal;
- information presented in very attractive forms, etc.

b) *The selective distortion* is a process that is manifested by changes in the content of the message in a way that it corresponds to a pre-existing image in the mind of the one receiving it.

c) The selective retention (as well as attention) of those to whom messages are addressed, is manifested by retaining only a (small) part of them. We know from experience that we retain more easily (than others) information supporting our attitudes and beliefs, those which are expressed by cleverly coloured images (and not only in words and figures), the sound-based ones (and not written), those covered in slogans (rather than simple descriptions), the most strident, more contrastingly coloured etc.

Therefore, in its way from sender to receiver, the message is subjected to the action of a set of **disturbance factors** which need to be known and taken into account.

5) **The feed-back** (retroaction). Promotional activities are assessed in terms of their effects on the target buyers who need to be known. If they do not correspond with those set out by the objectives of promotional activities, it is necessary to conduct special marketing research in order to obtain additional information from the company's external environment and to adapt its promotional activities appropriately.

The **feedback** is the component of the communication system that allows the sender of a message to determine whether it reached the recipient and the impact on them (i.e. that part of the receiver's response that reaches the sender.)

By means of feed-back, we may find the following:

- *the message has not reached its destination*; in this case, any deficiencies in communication channels, should be identified and removed;
- even if it reached its destination, *the message is not received*, by reasons that need to be known (the recipient's incapacity of reception – due to physiological or psychological weaknesses, for example);
- although it is received, *the message is not understood* (and it should be changed);
- even if it is perceived and understood, *the message raises no reaction* (a sign that it was found uninteresting, that it was not received at the right moment, that the object of promotion simply does not interest the receiver etc.)
- *the message generated expected positive reactions* (proving effective – like the entire communication system);
- *the message stirred negative reactions* for reasons such as: it was considered offensive, it is obviously lying, it proved too annoying, it reinforces a past negative belief (or upset), still unuttered;
- *the message has not been memorised* (when it must be returned – in original or in modified form).

The feed-back should not be confused with the **effect** or the receiver's **response** to the company's promotional activities, as it is only *the part of the response to the message that the receiver sends, in his/her turn, to the transmitter*. It is important for the company that the feedback takes as much as possible of the total reaction.

Whatever the signals that the feedback would reveal, they need to be followed by concrete steps to increase efficiency.

In another manner of synthesis (belonging to the Ph. Kotler) of the elements to which we have referred to, the scheme of a communicational system includes nine components: the means of transmission of the message, decoding, receiver, reply. The message effectiveness depends on a number of factors such as:

- the ingenuity of the promotion specialist;
- the style used in writing the message;
- the way of combining its content elements;
- the characteristics of its transmission means;

- the time and frequency of transmission;
- the category of persons to whom it is addressed;
- the type of target needs and their satisfaction level etc.

References

- [1] *Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române (Dictionary of the Romanian Language)*, Univers Enciclopedic Publishing House, Bucharest, 1998
- [2] Kotler, Ph., (1997), *Managementul marketingului*, Teora Publishing House, Bucharest
- [3] Maxim, E., Gherasim, T., (2000), *Marketing*, The Economic Publishing House, Bucharest
- [4] Ridderstråle, J., Nordström, K., (2007), *Funky Business*, Publica, Bucharest
- [5] Steel, J., (2005), *Adevăr, minciună și advertising. Artă Accaunt Planingului*, Brandbuilders Grup, Bucharest
- [6] Zyman, S., (2000), *The End of Marketing as We know It*, Harper Business, New York