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The Mechanism for the Formation of Attitudes, Opinions and Behaviors of Consumers

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Abstract

The purpose of this work is to show mechanisms shaping attitudes, opinions and behaviors of consumers. Paper shows the impact of the system of communicating specified value on the decision-making process of the consumer. Attention was drawn to system interaction and communication in the context of changes in consumer opinion. The communication process aims to create and strengthen attitudes among buyers, leading to a favorable reception of products / services as well as a change of attitude from neutral to positive – creative. The basis for the preparation of the paper was the conduction of an in-depth and comprehensive study on the effectiveness and efficiency of communicating customer value. This included the analysis of available secondary data from various institutions involved in marketing communications, both in scientific and commercial applications. Reflections contained in the paper do not have definite characteristics and should be treated as an opinion in the discussion.

Keywords: Effective Communication, Behaviors Of Consumers, Attitudes, Relationships With Clients

Introduction

Marketing communication can influence the decision to purchase a given product or be loyal to a particular brand, but the effect does not need to emerge during the advertising campaign. Often the effects are deferred and appear only during the use of other marketing activities such as the provision of samples, postal advertising, price cuts and the presentation of a given product.

The communication process brings tangible value and benefits to consumers. There is a decrease in the distance between the seller and the buyer. In addition, it shortens the decision-making process for the purchase of a specific product, as the consumer knows what he needs. The level of education in society about changes in the products on offer, prices, new trends, etc. also improves.

As the experience of many international companies show, only properly prepared, efficiently integrated systems of communicating customer value allow for companies to stay in business and to raise funds for further development. It should also be noted that integrated marketing communication means conducting all business communication activities in a consistent way connected with one another. Its main principle is mutually supported

messages appearing in various media and creating a single image of the company and its products to customers. The result of such an approach to communication is a company's growth in quality and efficiency.

Flow of Information and Knowledge and Effective Communication

There are many factors determining the effectiveness and efficiency of marketing communications. One of them is the transmission of information through advertising. The purpose of information is to increase the amount of resources a consumer has in order to complete a specific action, usually to make a purchase. The market, which previously was the starting point of business activities, is now becoming a mechanism for verifying the effectiveness of promotional instruments.

A company may, within a given system of communication, increase the amount of information provided to consumers. Customers who have more positive information about a specific offer are more likely to purchase a particular product. However, too much information can impede a purchasing decision. Consequently, too much information given to customers does not bring about a growth in sales results, and can even cause sales to decrease.

In the case of too little information and advertising targeted at consumers, the effects of communication may be limited. Too little information is not able to start up the cognitive processes.

It should be noted that the flow of information can take place in the opposite direction, i.e. from the customer to the company. Important values supplied by the client to the company are recommendations. This allows information about the company's offer to reach potential customers through the use of informal channels of communication. If the recommendations are initiated spontaneously by customers, the acquisition of customers or the promotion of the company image may be completed without incurring costs for this purpose. It should be remembered that the company does not have full control over the content of these messages, which may also have a negative nature and contribute to the deterioration of the image or increase the cost of customer acquisition.

Another important issue in terms of the effectiveness of marketing communication is the value and usefulness of information. J. Cypriański (Cyprianski, 2005) lists five reasons which cause difficulties in assessing the value of information:

1) Information as value requires the consideration of the concept of exchange value, which refers to information as a resource in a very limited extent.

2) A multitude of applications: the same information can be simultaneously used by multiple customers, and for each, its value may be different.

3) The asymmetry of information: this feature of information, in conjunction with its subjective interpretation, causes objective difficulties in estimating *a priori* the value of information.

4) The quality of information: the concept of quality is difficult to objectively define, because this feature is clearly dependent on the subjective assessment of each consumer; the specific characteristics of quality vary depending on the opinion of the recipient of information.

5) The amount of information: the greater the degree to which information reduces uncertainty, the greater its value; the less expected an event is, the greater is the value of relevant information.

The degree of usefulness of information depends on the usefulness of the information relative to the needs of the decision-making process. It is low when the information allowing one to make the right decision is limited in scope and the risk of making the wrong decision is high. Usefulness is high when the information provided allows the user to make the right decision, and the risk of a wrong decision is small.

It should be noted that in a difficult, turbulent market, only companies that are able to collect information, select what is important for them, and use it to make the right decisions, will gain a competitive advantage (Dabrowska, 2010). Of special importance is information about consumers (clients), because they are the recipients of the products put on the market by the company.

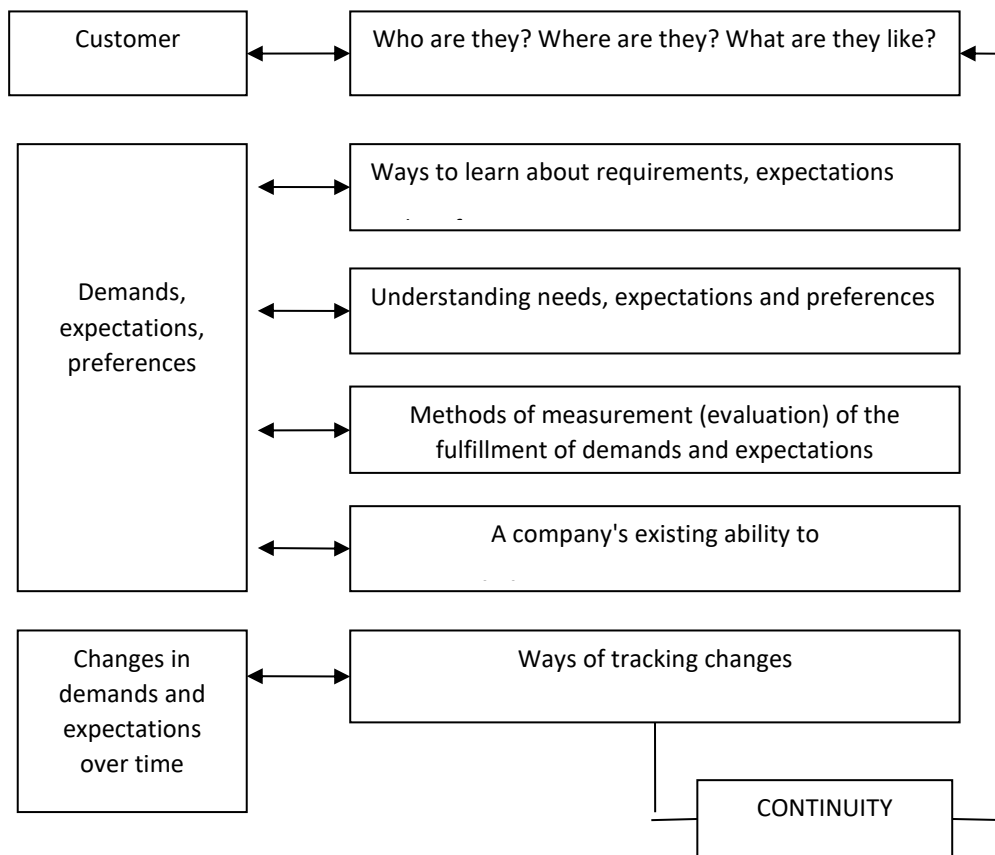
Understanding the composition of customers and their characteristics, within the criterion of relationships, is a prerequisite for understanding the real impact of the actions taken by customers on the enterprise and the effectiveness of the system of communicating customer value. When re-thinking the role of the client, the company should consider:

- the requirements and expectations of the customer-learning, understanding; perceiving change;
- the ability and competence to satisfy customer requirements;
- the actual aptitude of the company to satisfy customer requirements and expectations;
- continuity - adapting to change in the requirements of different segments of customers in the long term.

The actions that should be taken in order to gain information about the client, and at the same time improve the process of value creation for the customer, are shown in figure 1.

For businesses today, understanding the customer, their needs, and their values, has become a requirement whose fulfillment enables companies to survive in the highly competitive markets that currently exist. This is why knowledge about customers, knowledge about products and services, knowledge about the mechanisms of actions taken, knowledge about relationships and knowledge about information resources are growing in importance (Evans, 2005). Knowledge about the client has become a key resource that allows companies to compete, causing an increase in investment in databases, which makes it possible to collect large amounts of information.

Many companies have gathered and collected a variety of data on customers and service users, but have great difficulty with the conversion of these data to information and knowledge that enable the making of important decisions, include those connected to the proper communication of value to the customer. The problem is usually not the technology, but the lack of knowledge about how to manage certain processes which utilize accumulated facts and figures to create information and knowledge. As practice has shown through the many implementations of CRM systems, the problem is not software, but the practical ability to use the full capacity of the system (Stachowicz-Stanusch, Stanusch, 2007). Having adequate knowledge about the client is becoming increasingly important, since in today's market, achieving competitive advantage is more and more the result of being able to offer value that is attractive to them (Dobiegła-Korona, 2006). Competing on the base of price or quality has stopped being effective, since clients/service users have higher demands and expectations.

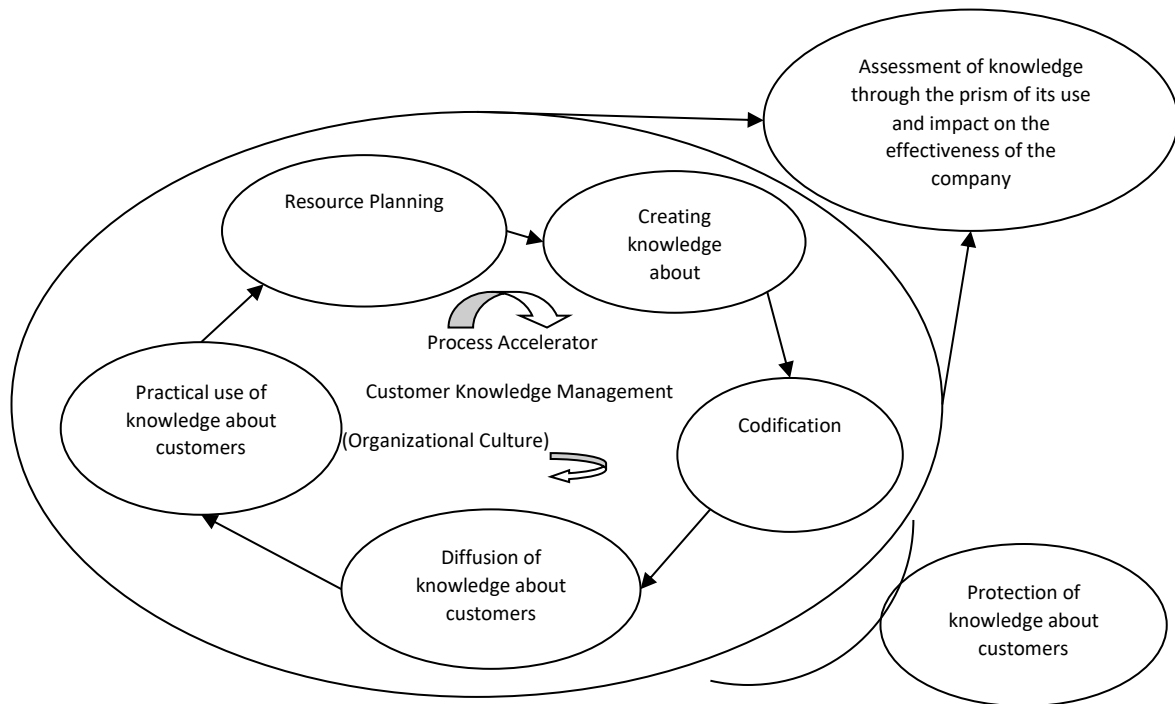


Source: own research

Figure 1. Organizational factors of knowledge about customers

The process of customer knowledge management is executed differently in each company, but it seems that a number of key elements can be extracted, such as the assessment, planning, creation, codification, absorption, practical use, organizational culture and protection of knowledge (figure 2.). The starting point is to assess knowledge from the point of view of the objectives and strategies of the company. Further elements of the model indicate the need for resource planning, as well as the specific nature of knowledge creation, which is crucial to building lasting relationships with customers.

The factor influencing the stability of relationships with clients is undoubtedly knowledge. The greater the amount of this resource, the easier it is for the company to develop, provide and communicate value to the customer, and this, in turn, effectively prevents customers from getting involved with a competing firm. The company itself creates new solutions and new elements of communication as a response to customer needs and demands (Noga, 2009).



Source: own research

Figure 2. Model of customer knowledge management

The Internet significantly influences the acquisition of knowledge about customers and recipients of services. The use of web analytics in the form of a system that gathers statistics on website viewership allows for the collection of detailed information about customer behavior on the website. Such information can be collected on a regular basis. This allows for the identification of customer behavior on the website, which is particularly important in the context of optimization of activities in the field of customer acquisition (Doligalski, 2010). Optimization of these actions may help to reduce the budget allocation for methods of customer acquisition, which is characterized by the highest efficiency in the short or long term. Optimization can be related to the communication tools used (graphic communication, e-mailing, sponsored links etc.). Thus, the system of communicating customer value can be made - from the point of view of companies offering specific products or services - more effective and efficient. Interesting possibilities for enriching traditional products with information emerged with the development of augmented reality.

This technology is based on adding information or meaning to objects or places (Educause. Retrieved December 17, 2012, from <http://educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ELI7007.pdf>). In the framework of augmented reality, information is applied to the image of an object coming from the camera or other device, all of which the user can see on a computer screen or mobile phone.

According to P. Pardel, many uses for augmented reality can be found. These include: enhanced navigation (hints are levied on the actual image); enhanced exploration in hydrology, geology; visualization of architecture (the ability to see a full visualization of the building on your mobile phone while exploring the ruins); and entertainment applications (Pardel, 2009).

Currently, an important issue is the creation of interdependences, which facilitate the emergence of innovation and result in an increase in value added through the use of ties between business partners. The gradual strengthening of ties is particularly important in

relation to key customers. There is no doubt that Customer Relationship Management (CRM) creates the possibility of maintaining these relationships with a wide range of different customer groups (table 1.).

Customers often participate in the development of enterprise experience. Businesses and customers play a leading role in jointly exploring and shaping expectations and creating market acceptance of products and services. An important issue is maintaining an active dialogue with customers who shape expectations and create interest in the company, as well as multi-level access to information and communication.

Table 1
Creating knowledge-based relationships with clients

Description	Relationship with Clients		
	loose	average	close
Social Capital	Infrastructure and Interactions	Infrastructure personalization and of interactions	Infrastructure, personalization of interaction and trust
Knowledge flowing to customers	Allowing customers to check suitability of the product and the use of the service 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.	<p>Personalization of the product line offer to the needs of customers.</p> <p>Ensuring the provision of knowledge processed in accordance with the interests of customers.</p> <p>Educating clients according to the principle that the more knowledge people have about products and services, the greater the utility of the products.</p>	<p>Arranging and supporting a virtual community of customers, creating value and creating trust strongly associated with the brand.</p> <p>Sharing knowledge regarding new products prior to their full implementation.</p> <p>Providing customers sufficient knowledge to enable them to make their own innovations to the product.</p> <p>The use of customer references in advertising campaigns, strengthening the brand and the perception of the organization among its surroundings.</p>
Knowledge flowing from customers	Using data collection to help determine trends and patterns.	Creating a feedback loop via the Internet	Using local clients to test products before introducing them on the market.

	<p>Using data to make changes in the product or service.</p> <p>Paying attention to trends that occur among customers in order to form closer business ties.</p>		
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Source: own research based on Rokita, 2009, p. 198.

The use of multiple marketing channels, including the Internet, results in the enhanced capacity to collect and use knowledge about customers, and thus improve the matching of values to customer needs. Multi-channel companies have greater bargaining power in negotiations with suppliers, resulting from servicing a larger number of customers (Jelassi & Enders, 2005, pp. 174-176). They are characterized by large benefits in the economies of scale, resulting from the need to maintain a consistent distribution structure. The possibility for multi-channel customer service is also significant. Various marketing channels differ in the potential of delivering value to customers. An example of this is the ability for customers to order a product through the Internet, and make a refund at the physical facilities of the company.

The Shaping of Attitudes and Behaviors of Consumers

Attitude can be defined as a permanent, general evaluation of people, objects, advertisements and problems. Attitude is permanent and rarely changes. Consumers adopt a specific attitude towards different kinds of products, from attitudes towards specific brands, to more general attitudes relating to broadly defined consumption.

Attitudes are determined by motives that direct consumers. If consumers expect to have to deal with certain situations in the future, they begin to form attitudes about these situations. Individual consumers may have a completely different attitude to a particular product for completely different reasons. Therefore, marketing specialists need to know why a consumer has a specific attitude before they try to change it.

Lifestyle is in many cases the main motivator for shopping and a source of various forms of activity (behavior) of consumers in the market. Lifestyle is one of the most important criteria for customer segmentation, because having knowledge of customers' lifestyles makes it easier to adjust values and any communication to potential customers (Sobolewska, 2009).

The choice of brands has become an important issue for the consumer because, through communication activities, they have become convinced that the brand identifies with both their lifestyle and beliefs. Enterprises today are not only providers of products, but also representative of certain beliefs, manifestos of views, creators of culture. This directs the consumer's attention away from thinking about consumption, leaving them only to pick the choice of brands that match their lifestyle. For example, Polish youth declare that they select brands that express their personality. Their favorite brands are commonly global brands

(Nike, Adidas, Reebok), but there are more and more niche brands associated with subcultures or pastimes (Sowa, 2008).

Currently, an important task of communication systems is to maintain appropriate relationships with customers and suppliers. In research by Colton et al. relating to resources and orientation of e-commerce, companies operating in foreign markets show that the main resources of companies that contribute to financial success are brands and relationships with suppliers (Colton et al., 2010). The influence of market orientation (the company's ability to increase the value to the customer), business skills (the company's ability to take on new challenges) and international orientation (knowledge of foreign markets) had an indirect effect on finances, which resulted from the impact of these factors on the brand and relationships with suppliers.

The attitude of consumers is often affected by their assessment of the advertising of the product. The assessment may depend on how the product is presented in marketing communications. The feelings aroused by advertising affect consumer attitude towards the brand presented. Ads can cause a wide range of emotional reactions. More and more companies have taken specific actions towards the development of systems that track the attitudes and behavior of customers (Fatuła, 2010). This system consists of analyzing trends in consumer attitudes over a long period of time, resulting in greater predictability of their behavior.

Consumers often observe the behavior of other customers/service users. Learning by observation causes a change in behavior based on actions, or their consequences, of other consumers, without knowledge of their motivation. In online shopping, consumers learn through observation by analyzing the most frequently purchased products or products purchased together with the product they are interested in (Chen et al., 2011). The benefits of branding, associated with observational learning, occur when the company strengthens its image by relying on cooperation with selected customers. This situation occurs frequently on the market of institutional clients, where the potential and credibility of the company are often assessed in terms of the list of clients supported.

Value for the customer is the sum of the partial values (benefits) provided to the customer less the price and the customer's non-financial costs. Taking into account a customer's non-financial costs in the model of customer value is important, as it allows for a fuller understanding of the decision-making criteria by the customer, especially on the Internet, where the exchange of value is frequency non-monetary.

A company can increase final value for the customer by increasing the benefits provided to him by reducing the price, or reducing non-financial costs. What's more, while maintaining the same level of value for the customer, the company can sometimes increase price, if it will be able to reduce non-financial costs. This correlation is observed at online auction sites where sellers of higher reliability, expressed by positive opinions of existing customers, often offer products at a higher price (Obloj, 2006).

Table 2

Customer Value Model

The level of customer value	Characteristics	Value creation tools
Primary Values	Specifies the basic benefits the customer receives for a given price. Competition at this level is met with less and less frequently, such as on bulk goods markets.	The price of the product
Secondary Values	Additional customer benefits result from additional features of the product. Competition is quite strong at this value level in most markets. Price plays a smaller role in competition, as companies try to adjust their value propositions to the diverse needs and expectations of customers.	Customers can choose various functions, design, packaging, complementary products and services, terms of warranty, terms of payments etc.
Expanded value of customer service	This includes primary and secondary levels of value, enriched with customer service. These services accompany the product throughout its life cycle with the customer, being a source of additional benefit, but the customer must incur the cost of taking advantage of such an option.	Services occurring pre-sale, and with complementary sales and subsequent sales, such as design, consulting, delivery, service.
Value based on relationships and cooperation	This is the level of values in which there are benefits and costs associated with the relations that bind the customer with the company, intermediaries in the distribution channels, and other clients.	Product brand, image and reputation of the company, the relationship of the customer with the company, image and reputation of distribution channels, customer relationships with commercial intermediaries.

Source: own research based on Szymura-Tyc, 2006, pp. 80-83.

Table 2 presents a model of customer value. It presents the four levels of customer value where rivalry between companies and their networks currently take place. These levels include primary values, secondary values, the value of expanded customer service, and value-based relationships.

Distinguishing these four levels of customer value allows the company to focus their activities on areas that relate to the creation of value at the secondary level with expanded customer service and the development of relationships between the customer and the company and its partners. As a consequence, the company can effectively build their competitive advantage on a given market.

Increasingly, customer value can be delivered through the use of modern technology. An interesting system of values offered to customers in e-business is presented by J. Joo (Joo, 2007). He distinguishes such values as savings, convenience, speed, personalization, community, excitement and trust. This system properly reflects the values delivered by e-business ventures, although it lacks the dimension that states the satisfaction of customer needs. There is also the question of whether trust is a value for the customer, or just the state in which the client is in, as a reflection of the perceived low risk of the relationship with the company.

The general attitude towards traditional communication depends on demographic (age, gender), social (education, place of residence) and psychological (evaluation of the financial situation of the family) factors. They in turn have an impact on the behavior of the consumer on the market.

Research conducted among consumers in 2009 show that most people accept advertising. More than 35% of respondents declared a positive attitude to advertising, 11.3% more than respondents who were apathetic towards advertising. There are, however, more people with a very negative attitude towards advertising (8.7%) than those with a very positive attitude towards advertising (7.5% of the total). The majority of people that were fully accepting of advertising were male, between 15 and 34 years of age, with higher education, living in a large city. A neutral attitude towards advertising was declared by more than 41% of respondents (Radziukiewicz, 2011).

Table 3

Characteristics of the consumer and their impact on their attitude towards advertising (based on research conducted among consumers in 2009)

Selected characteristics of respondents	Attitudes towards advertising → from positive to negative	
	The correlation coefficient	the level of significance of the correlation
Age → Increasing	0,083	0,05
Education → from primary to higher	-0,120	0,01
Financial situation of the family → from very good to very bad	0,125	0,01
Place of residence → village → big city	-0,181	0,01

Source: own research based on Radziukiewicz, 2011, p. 162

Table 3 presents attitudes towards advertising and highlighted characteristics of respondents. A higher level of acceptance of advertising is noticeable with increasing education (the more educated the consumer, the greater acceptance of advertising), place of residence (the larger the city population of the respondent, the more positive evaluation of advertising), and better financial situation (the better the financial situation of the family of the respondent the more positive attitude toward advertising). An overall negative attitude towards advertising increases with the age of the consumer - the older the respondent, the more negative attitude they had towards advertising.

Conclusions

Currently, it is not enough to produce goods and deliver them to the place of sale. The client must receive information about the product that convinces them of the advantageous qualities of the purchase for them. Without such action, the company's products "disappear" among the masses of advertised products by the competition.

Marketing communication does not rely on a single technology, but adapts to the needs of many products, companies and marketing strategies. The process of communicating customer value is often a controversial piece of everyday life. Its opponents claim that it forces consumers to buy useless products. It is alleged that marketing communication is an unnecessary expense incurred by consumers, in other words - if not for advertising, product prices would be much lower.

Firstly, the share of communication costs in the price of the product is not that high. Secondly, if the form of communication is indeed effective, it results in increased sales of the promoted product, which allows for the achievement of higher production efficiency, and therefore effective marketing communication can actually lead to somewhat lower unit costs of the product being sold.

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