




# The Role of Integrated Marketing Communications in Building a Brand and Improving Business Performance

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**Abstract:** Organizations through various forms of marketing communications strive to increase brand awareness and create a brand image in the market. Through these communications, relationships between consumers and companies are developed, to build customer loyalty. Correlation relations showed that there is a great dependence between the variables of marketing communication and the variables of brand building and business performance. The regression model found that marketing communications have the greatest impact on brand recognition in the market, highlighting the impact of public relations and direct marketing. It has been confirmed that economic propaganda, sales promotion and internet marketing are the best predictors of market participation as business performance of an organization. The results of the research indicated that the impact of marketing communications on brand building is greater if the organization is ready to conduct adequate marketing research and to the greatest extent satisfies the needs and requirements of consumers.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The role of consumers in modern business is changing significantly. In the communication process, the consumer is the one who takes control and decides whether and when to receive the message (Kitchen & Schultz, 2009). The effectiveness of marketing communication has a significant contribution to building a strong brand (Keller, 2009) and a key role in achieving business success (Prasad & Dev, 2000). Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) has an important role to play with building and maintaining relationships with stakeholders, and leveraging those relationships in order to create brand value based on customers (Baidy & Maity, 2010; Kerr & Drennan, 2010).

For brands that have obvious and relevant values in the market, they require different ways of communication in order to maintain the perception they have with customers. The use of consistent messages of different levels has different consequences on the structure of brand knowledge depending on how well we know the brand (Delgado-Ballester, Navarro & Sicilia, 2012).

Marketing communication plays a key role in creating and maintaining relationships among those who have a common interest, but certainly also in relations in terms of marketing and brand management (Amiri, Dastourian, Foroudi & Nankali, 2017). Greater competitiveness is ensured through integrated marketing communication (Brunello, 2013). The goal is to raise awareness and knowledge about products and services, create an image and tendency to buy products (Damarjati, Kusumavati & Mavardi, 2016). Brand loyalty represents a positive customer perspective towards the brand (Buil, Martinez & De Chernatoni, 2013).

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## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the research (Elliott & Boshoff, 2008), the impact of business orientations on integrated marketing communications was analyzed, whereby it is realized a positive impact of market orientation and proactive orientation of competitors on the application of IMC. The research (Šerić & Gil-Saura, 2012a) confirmed the existence of a positive correlation between the application of integrated marketing communications, information and communication technologies and brand value from the customer's perspective. This research established a positive relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty.

Perceived quality has a positive impact on customer loyalty, with quality perception created in the minds of consumers helping to increase satisfaction and leading to brand loyalty. Companies through the means of marketing communication should present a real picture of products and services in the market, providing numerous and effective details to their customers, while ensuring their complete loyalty (Ahmed, Rizwan, Ahmad & Haq, 2014). The efficiency of communication channels contributes to achieving customer loyalty more than the quality of communication, which only indicates that it is crucial to make efforts in a combination of customer-specific channels, according to his preferences (Hänninen & Karjaluoto, 2017). According to research (Buil, Martínez & De Chernatony, 2013) it was found that a strong and valuable brand could be effective in company performance and achieving organizational goals, which is achieved by its effects on consumer reactions and responses. Research (Amiri et al., 2017) confirmed that IMK has a positive and significant impact on brand image, quality perception and brand loyalty, while a significant effect was achieved on business performance and competitive advantage in the market.

It has been confirmed that integrated marketing communications have a positive effect on the brand's financial performance, affecting the communication campaign and market performance (Luxton, Reid, & Mavondo, 2015). Stronger integration of marketing relationships and brand management research contributes to the analysis of customer identification and satisfaction (He, Li & Harris, 2012). Marketing efforts are a key condition for providing quality, including customer feedback, in preparation for future product and service development. The effects of interaction of services and promotional activities have a positive impact on customer satisfaction, thus enabling the maintenance of a competitive market position (Ramanathan, Subramanian & Parrott, 2017). Organizations must make continuous efforts to build comparative advantage, by improving brand reputation, positive thinking, and meeting consumer expectations. Adequate brand management contributes to improving the competitive position in the market (Vranješ, Jovičić, & Drinić, 2016).

Research (Slotegraaf & Pauwels, 2008) has shown that average sales growth is achieved with promotional efforts for low value brands, while marketing communication provides continuous cumulative sales effects when it comes to higher value brands with a tendency to innovative development. Brand building develops a strong connection with customers and creates opportunities for interaction with them, which opens the possibility of creating new market positioning strategies (Gligorijević, 2011). The research (Bakator, Đorđević, Čočkaló & Bogetić, 2020) found that there is a positive relationship between the relationship with consumers and the brand, the relationship between consumers and products, and trust in the brand and the quality of the relationship with the brand.

Advertising on a website and selling over the Internet also affects the achievement of a better financial result. Marketing strategy varies according to the frequency of advertising. When it comes to sending messages, social media sites are the most popular and cost-effective distribution channels. Promotional activities create strong brands that can maintain the negative aspects of lower product quality (Bakator & Petrović, 2016). Research (Cvjetković, Jovanović, Stepanov & Cvjetković, 2020) found that the quality of digital marketing communications affects better positioning of products and services in the market, as well as further strengthening of the brand, with visible effects on gaining competitive advantage in the market. The impact of innovative marketing in the Industry 4.0 framework increases the competitiveness of companies (Ungerma, Dedkova & Gurinova 2018), with an emphasis on the use of various tools to build relationships with customers, which results in competitive advantage (Weru & Mbugua, 2017).

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research presented in the paper was conducted at the beginning of 2021. The subject of the research was the application of integrated marketing communications in the company's business. The research sample included 307 managers from companies operating in the territory of the Republic of Serbia. The surveyed companies are mostly privately owned (74.9%), which have a domestic national origin (83.7%). According to the size of enterprises, the percentage of medium-sized enterprises was the highest (38.7%), slightly less of small enterprises (34.9%), while large enterprises were the least represented (26.4%).

The presented research proves the following hypotheses:

- H1:** Variable marketing communications show statistically significant relationships to the variables brand building and business performance.
- H2:** Variable marketing communications show statistically significant relationships to brand building variables with a moderating effect of marketing research.

The research aims to point out the importance of marketing communications of companies for building a brand on the market and improving the business performance of the organization. Marketing communication of the company was analyzed through the variables used to communicate with consumers and the environment. Variables were analyzed through the efficiency of the application of various instruments of integrated marketing communications. The marketing orientation of the company was analyzed through the evaluation of the application of economic propaganda, personal sales, sales promotion, events and experiences, direct marketing, public relations and internet marketing. The mentioned variables were evaluated based on claims where the respondents expressed themselves on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 – I do not agree at all, while 5 – completely agree. The organizations evaluated the variables that indicate the position of the brand of their products and services on the market and the level of achieved business performance. Variables of the brand building were analyzed through the achieved image, identity and reputation of the brand in the market, but also through the loyalty that consumers have to it and its recognizability. The business performance of the organization was assessed through variables that indicate profitability, sales growth, market share, productivity and competitiveness of the organization. These variables were rated on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 indicates a very low value and 7 a very high value. Data were collected from a methodologically created online questionnaire. The collected data were processed using the statistical program IBM SPSS Statistics 25. The methods used for data analysis are descriptive statistics, correlation and regression analysis.

#### 4. RESEARCH RESULTS

Descriptive statistics were used to evaluate the analyzed variables. Table 1 shows the values (minimum, maximum and average) and standard deviation for each analyzed variable of marketing communication, brand building and business performance.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics of variables marketing communication, brand building and business performance

Variables	N	Min	Max	Mean value	Standard deviation
Economic propaganda	307	1	5	3,94	1,114
Personal sales	307	1	5	4,01	1,139
Sales improvement	307	1	5	3,58	1,440
Events and experiences	307	1	5	3,65	1,342
Direct marketing	307	1	5	4,00	1,190
Public relations	307	1	5	4,08	1,149
Internet marketing	307	1	5	4,22	1,081
Brand image	307	1	7	5,53	1,410
Brand identity	307	1	7	5,82	1,356
Brand reputation	307	1	7	5,78	1,320
Brand loyalty	307	1	7	5,78	1,318
Brand recognition	307	1	7	5,78	1,364
Profitability	307	1	7	5,37	1,323
Sales growth	307	1	7	5,47	1,380
Market share	307	1	7	5,32	1,444
Productivity	307	1	7	5,23	1,502
Competitiveness	307	1	7	5,49	1,339

Source: Author's own research

The results of the research of descriptive statistics show that the activities of marketing communication of companies are very well evaluated. Among the best assessed variables of marketing communication are internet marketing and public relations. This indicates that organizations recognize the importance of applying internet marketing in creating a brand in the market and communicating with increasingly demanding consumers. In the conditions of modern business and online environment, the role of consumers is changing. Communication control is in his hands, and he chooses when he will receive the message, where he will receive it and whether he even wants to receive messages from the organization that comes into contact with him. Also, public relations enable the organization to build good relations with all stakeholders in business and are an effective means of creating good public images and building a brand in the market. Among the lowest rated variables of marketing communications were the improvement of sales and events and experience. Sales improvement is a significant tool whose effective application can greatly contribute to organizations increasing their market share and gaining more customers. Through further activities, they strive to build long-term relationships and loyalty with their customers. Also, the results indicate that organizations do not pay enough attention to various events and experiences as a purposeful method for creating a reputation in the market and building a brand.

High values were also noted for brand building variables. The brand identity was among the best-rated variables. With the identity of their brand, the companies strive to contribute to the most efficient experience with consumers with striking symbols. By building brand identity, organizations seek their place in the market and the minds of their consumers. Originality in

creating a brand contributes to creating the best possible brand image among competing products on the market. Brand image is the variable that respondents rated the worst. This indicates that organizations need to invest much more effort to contribute to a better image of their brand in order for users to experience it as well as possible.

By evaluating the business performance variables, the organizations indicated that they were satisfied with their business with high values. The best rated variable is competitiveness. These values indicate that organizations are satisfied with their position in the market, which only points to the fact that by effectively applying marketing communication and improving business performance, they achieve their recognition in the market and the brand that has its loyal customers. Among the weakest rated variants of business performance was productivity. This points to the fact that organizations need to improve their business and improve and reduce business costs over time, making their brand more accessible to their consumers.

The interrelationships and relations between the analyzed variables were examined through correlation analysis. Table 2 shows the values of the achieved correlations.

**Table 2.** Correlation between marketing communication variables and brand building and business performance variables

Variables	Economic propaganda	Personal sales	Sales improvement	Events and experiences	Direct marketing	Public relations	Internet marketing
Brand image	,399**	,387**	,353**	,285**	,356**	,386**	,413**
Brand identity	,326**	,388**	,306**	,205**	,320**	,349**	,355**
Brand reputation	,404**	,375**	,355**	,273**	,453**	,393**	,276**
Brand loyalty	,445**	,485**	,427**	,331**	,431**	,394**	,389**
Brand recognition	,494**	,469**	,346**	,372**	,449**	,462**	,384**
Profitability	,521**	,475**	,451**	,372**	,408**	,477**	,510**
Sales growth	,455**	,342**	,301**	,289**	,258**	,321**	,363**
Market share	,589**	,503**	,374**	,394**	,434**	,440**	,417**
Productivity	,508**	,386**	,346**	,354**	,260**	,376**	,330**
Competitiveness	,314**	,308**	,321**	,245**	,352**	,289**	,346**

\*\* Correlation is significant at 0.01.

**Source:** Author's own research

The results of the research show that the variables marketing communication and the variables brand building and business performance have established strong and statistically significant correlations. All correlations that have been established are positive and indicate a moderate and significant correlation between the analyzed variables.

The variables economic propaganda, personal sales and sales improvement have achieved a significant correlation with the variable brand loyalty. This relationship indicates that organizations can build a loyal relationship with their customers by effectively conducting personal sales and maintaining that relationship by improving sales and providing various benefits to their customers. With these variables, primarily economic propaganda, organizations strive to attract as many consumers as possible, and then various methods and techniques of personal sales and sales promotion strive to ensure that these consumers are satisfied and remain loyal to the brand. This certainly affects the increased sales volume, which is confirmed by the established high values of the correlation between the mentioned variables of marketing communication and the variable of profitability. The marketing communication variable that has established a significant correlation with the profitability variable is internet marketing. This indicates that

organizations, in order to meet the needs and requirements of the modern consumer, must conduct their promotion and sales activities in the digital environment through the site as a starting basis for communication and social networks and e-mail. In addition to increasing profitability, the variables economic propaganda and personal selling have made a significant correlation with the variable market share.

Statistically significant correlations were achieved between the variables economic propaganda and public relations with the variable brand recognition. Economic propaganda is the most important means by which companies can promote their product on the market and build a brand that will be recognizable. Investments in economic propaganda enable the organization to improve its place in the market and in the consciousness of consumers and thus be in front of its competition. Public relations also play an important role in the fight against competition and building recognition on the market. Through various activities, organizations can show their socially responsible business, while highlighting their brand and thus contribute to its greater recognition. Direct marketing is a variable that has established a significant correlation with variable brand loyalty, while a slight correlation has been achieved with variable productivity. The direct marketing activities of the organization have the opportunity to achieve a loyal relationship with its customers, because in this form of communication it makes personal contact with the consumer, and therefore there is a possibility to meet his needs and requirements in full. This form of marketing communication does not have significant effects on productivity, but its effects are significant in the area of improving profitability. This once again points to the fact that loyal consumers increase the profitability of the organization.

Correlation analysis confirmed the positive relations of high value, which proved hypothesis 1. It was confirmed that the variables of marketing communication showed statistically significant relations to the variables of brand building and business performance, which proved their impact.

These correlations were determined once again from the aspect of the application of marketing research in the organization. The aim was to indicate whether the intensity of correlations between variable marketing communications and brand building variables changes if the organization effectively conducts marketing research, considers the needs and requirements of its customers and measures their satisfaction with a given brand. The results are shown in Table 3.

The results of the research show that there are statistically significant differences in correlation relations between those organizations that conduct marketing research and those organizations where this is not the case. Namely, the organizations that conduct marketing research, have already confirmed statistically significant relationships between variable marketing communications and variables of building a brand, have now achieved even greater values. This only indicates that by effectively applying marketing research and considering the needs and requirements of consumers, a brand can be created on the market that will enable greater customer satisfaction and loyalty to a given brand. This claim is supported by the high values of correlations between the variables of economic propaganda, personal sales, public relations and internet marketing, with the variables of brand loyalty and brand recognition in the market.

The importance of marketing research for building a recognizable brand in the market and gaining the loyalty of customers has been confirmed through the establishment of insignificant and negative correlations between analyzed variables those organizations that do not conduct this research. The results of the research showed that mostly insignificant and negative correlations

were recorded, while only the variant of direct marketing achieved a low correlation with all variables of brand building. Negative correlations were established between the variable an event and experience and the variability of loyalty and brand recognition and the variable of public relations and the variable of brand loyalty. This indicates that activities and events that are not in line with the needs and requirements of consumers and purposeful action of the organization, cause dissatisfaction among consumers and the public and lead to consumers not remaining loyal to the brand. This is also influenced by the struggle of competing brands that invest great efforts in marketing research and direct their activities towards the demands and needs of consumers that they have really expressed, and thus improve the recognition of their brand in the market.

**Table 3.** Correlation between the variables marketing communications and the variable brand building depending on the conduct of marketing research

Variables	Economic propaganda	Personal sales	Sales improvement	Events and experiences	Direct marketing	Public relations	Internet marketing
Companies which conduct marketing research							
Brand image	,456**	,489**	,340**	,339**	,349**	,416**	,472**
Brand identity	,364**	,532**	,277**	,220**	,235**	,402**	,461**
Brand reputation	,457**	,428**	,289**	,324**	,445**	,504**	,355**
Brand loyalty	,531**	,627**	,475**	,439**	,491**	,538**	,515**
Brand recognition	,565**	,596**	,370**	,459**	,478**	,571**	,490**
N	226	226	226	226	226	226	226
Companies which don't conduct marketing research							
Brand image	,176	,162	,315**	,061	,308**	,240*	,236*
Brand identity	,046	,046	,224*	,041	,362**	,099	,049
Brand reputation	,087	,142	,291**	,033	,346**	,040	,009
Brand loyalty	,114	,186	,250*	-,050	,239*	-,081	,053
Brand recognition	,168	,157	,183	-,004	,306**	,024	,046
N	81	81	81	81	81	81	81

\*\* Correlation is significant at 0.01.,

\* Correlation is significant at 0.05.

**Source:** Author's own research

Results of correlation analysis confirmed that the positive correlations between the analyzed variables of marketing communications and the variables of building a brand were achieved by those organizations that conduct marketing research, while organizations that do not conduct these surveys recorded slight and negative correlations. Hypothesis 2 was confirmed by these relations, actually it was determined that the variables of marketing communication achieve statistically significant relations to the variables of brand building with the moderating effect of market research.

The influence of marketing communication on brand building and improvement of business performance was confirmed by the establishment of statistically significant values of correlation relations. Regression analysis determined the individual contribution of independent variants of marketing communications to the dependent variables of brand building and business performance.

The results of regression analysis showed that marketing communication activities were the best indicators of brand recognition ( $R^2=0,321$ ). This indicates that the organization influences the recognition of its brand in the market by conducting marketing communications activities, actually these activities explain 32.1% of variations in brand recognition. When it comes to the individual contribution of the analyzed variants of marketing communications, the greatest influence on brand building was achieved by the variables public relations and direct marketing.

Regression analysis determined that the variables of marketing communication were the best predictors of market share of the organization ( $R^2 = 0.381$ ). These results indicate that organizations are increasing their market share through the efficient implementation of marketing communications activities, actually these communications explain 38.1% of variations in the market share of organizations. Based on statistical significance, the largest individual contribution was made by the variables economic propaganda, sales promotion and internet marketing, with economic propaganda having a statistically significant impact on all analyzed values of business performance, except competitiveness.

These results indicate that organizations can use integrated marketing communications to improve their business and build a brand in the market. Public relations and direct marketing activities mostly contribute to build brand recognition in the market. Acceptance of the brand by consumers and the creation of loyal customers open the possibility for greater market participation. Activities that contribute to the expansion of market share are economic propaganda that strives to constantly remind the brand and keep it in the minds of consumers. By improving sales, organizations strive to improve relationships with their customers and keep them loyal to the brand. Internet marketing includes activities that the organization must effectively manage in order to meet the needs of the modern consumer.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The impact of effective application of marketing communications on brand building has been confirmed by previous research (Keller, 2009; Šerić & Gil-Saura, 2012a; Amiri et al, 2017). Marketing communications have also confirmed their contribution to improving business performance (Brunelo, 2013; Lukton et al., 2015; Amiri et al, 2017; Cvjetković et al, 2020). The presented research in this paper confirms the influence of marketing communications on brand building and improvement of business performance, emphasizing the individual contribution of the analyzed activities of marketing communications of the company.

Research has confirmed the importance of economic propaganda, personal sales and sales improving to create loyal customers and improve business profitability. Brand recognition in the organization's market is built by creative economic propaganda and efficient public relations. The results of the research confirmed the importance of public relations and direct marketing in the successful presentation of a brand on the market and differentiation in relation to competing brands. The application of marketing communications influences the acquisition of greater market share, with research confirming the importance of economic propaganda, sales improving and internet marketing. Effective application of marketing communications in the organization's business can significantly contribute to build a brand in the market, primarily through its recognizability. The role of these communications is to create loyal consumers, based on which organizations take greater market share and achieve greater profitability. Each of the analyzed activities of integrated marketing communications has its contribution to creating and building a brand in the market, while special attention should be paid to economic propaganda, sales improvement and internet marketing, while the importance of public relations in creating positive public images is inevitable. The presented research in the paper can be the basis for some future research that will be based on the analysis of creating a strategy of market performance based on marketing activities that have proven to be significant in this research.



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