

INTEGRATED COMMUNICATION IN THE MARKETING OF LIFELONG LEARNING PROGRAMMES

Simona Roxana ULMAN¹, Krisztina Melinda DOBAY²

¹Dissemination expert, PhD, „Apollonia” University of Iași

²Scientific researcher, PhD, Romanian Academy, Iasi Branch, “Gheorghe Zane” Institute for Economic and Social Research

Corresponding author: simonaulman@yahoo.com

Abstract

The aim of the paper is to present a case study on the marketing of lifelong learning programmes. The first part explores the concept of Integrated Marketing Communication from a theoretical perspective. In the second part, some general aspects regarding lifelong learning are analyzed. Finally, we illustrate how these two concepts were materialized in an implemented project.

Keywords: *Integrated Marketing Communication, Lifelong Learning, PECAFROM project, assessing needs, Individualized Career Development Plan.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Facing a continuous increase of complexity of products, services, lifestyles, to market fragmentation, competition growth, to people's feeling that time is more and more precious, if considering the increased segmentation of consumer tastes and preferences and also the progress of customers requirements, who become more and more interested in quality, communications in marketing strategies become of central importance for the achievement of all institutional objectives had in view. This challenging environment involves a more difficult task for marketing specialists, that of fulfilling customer needs and of developing strong positive relationships with the internal and external publics. In this respect, all organizations, regardless of their object of activity, use different marketing communication tools in order to promote their products/services and to achieve their general and specific goals. In accordance to the American Marketing Association, on its official web page (American Marketing Association, 2016), marketing communication is an all-encompassing term, as it covers marketing practices and tactics including

advertising, branding, graphic design, promotion, publicity, public relations and so on. Its fundamental purpose is to build up and consolidate the brand, being considered to be the only way to create and sustain its competitive advantages (Mihart 2012, 122).

2. EVOLUTION OF INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION (IMC), ACTUAL PERSPECTIVES AND ITS MAIN FEATURES

The concept of integrated communication in marketing, emergent in the late twentieth century, registered a significant evolution, including aspects of understanding and acceptance of its basic principles and gaining its notoriety among theoreticians and practitioners. Kitchen *et al.* (2008, 531) sustained that “the concept is still in academic and professional development” and this statement can be assumed even now, especially referring to the practical business area. This continuous progress is given by the fact that the concept has all the necessary characteristics to be in the center of the academic research area, but also in the business zone, where the research results are put into practice.

As Kitchen and Schultz (1999, 2000) sustain, “IMC is undoubtedly the major communications development of the last decade of the 20th century”. In the early 1980s, the concept of integrated marketing communications was an unrecognized paradigm, the theory and practice of advertising, sales promotion, publicity etc., being always approached in a separatist manner or as individual disciplines (Kitchen *et al.* 2004). Integration of the marketing communications

was first seen as a simple coordination of promotional tools. This perspective was later on enlarged, the concept being now viewed as a complex strategic process which contributes in a profound way to the achievement of the objectives of an organization. In this respect, Kitchen *et al.* (2004) sustain that integrated marketing communication has evolved from a simple inside-out device that brings promotional tools together up to a strategic process associated with brand management. Its complexity is given by the relatively recent approach from literature, according to which integrated marketing communication works specifically through all the four classic elements of the marketing mix: product, price, placement and marketing communications (Mihart 2012, 121). This approach reveals that the integrated position must be adopted not only for the last element (*i.e.* marketing communications), but also for the entire marketing mix. In this way, the integrated marketing communication appears as a holistic concept that includes the product, price, placement and promotion policies in order to offer an unified image, with complement and uniform messages or, in other words, communicating with the same voice in all circumstances under which the organization meets its targeted audience. On this line, the four important components of the marketing strategy support each other, "providing clarity, consistency and maximum communications impact" (Schultz 1993, 17) and, in this way, create better results in a cost-effective manner. It seems obvious that this strategy determines a correct understanding of the punctual messages and of the general image of an organization, while also creating easier paths to obtain the desired reaction of the target group. This means that an integrated marketing communication creates the premises for an effective marketing strategy, "becoming standard for marketing organizations, agencies, and the academic community" (Kitchen *et al.* 2008, 531). Accordingly, the integrative model should replace or diffuse with limited focus promotional tools in order to develop a complex strategy initiated and maintained by the implication of the upper-management, using the continuous dialogue with customers through all the points of contact for enhancing relationships.

For Keller (2001, 823), "marketing communications represent the voice of a brand and the means by which companies can establish a dialogue with consumers concerning their product offerings". Consequently, the integrative aspect applied to the marketing communications represents "one sight, one voice" of a brand, including the complementary means which transmit constant, consistent and homogenous information about the company and the offerings to its publics. This does not mean that an organization should only work with a single message or with a single unifying brand. An integrated approach encourages multiple targets and enables to achieve synergy of different brands, communication messages, and functions within one company (Kitchen and Burgmann 2010).

The main features of the integrated marketing communications identified in the literature (Shimp 2000; Kitchen *et al.* 2004; Shimp *et al.* 2010; Kitchen and Burgmann 2010; Mihart 2012) can be synthesized as:

1. The process is an outside-in approach, so it is recommended to start with the customer or prospect information about the customers, their wants and needs, while other background data related to them should be obtained during the planning process.
2. IMC uses all forms of communication and all sources of brand or company contacts as prospective message delivery channels.
3. The concept is the advocate of the need for synergy or the principle of *one sight, one sound or one voice* to achieve a strong brand image.
4. IMC requires that successful marketing communications need to build a relationship between the brand and the customer.
5. The final aim of integrated marketing communications is to affect behavior through directed communication.

3. LIFELONG LEARNING - GENERAL ASPECTS

Lifelong learning is a central socio-political concern and has been a focus of European educational policies since 2000 (Lüftenegger 2012, 27). The concept is not new. In the 1960s, the discourse about lifelong learning has already

begun (Klug *et al.* 2014, 120). Frequent changes in occupational and technical processes from the labor market affect and complicate individuals' work requirements, imposing permanent adjustments and further qualification (Schober *et al.* 2007). Thus, the notion of lifelong learning becomes a social and institutional reality and begins to figure prominently in the concerns and problems of organizations (Tuijnman and Schuller 1999).

Lifelong learning refers to "all learning activities undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills, and competence within a personal, civic, social, and/or employment-related perspective" (European Commission 2001, 9). These activities are based on the correlation between the learning act and the labor market. Taking this principle into consideration, the continuous professional development represents an additional chance for the access to employment or for the advancement into career. A response to the necessity of lifelong learning is the access to training by means of organized programmes that assure through their thematics the competencies to improve the professional work.

The need for lifelong learning programmes can be discussed from three perspectives:

1. Personal perspective - Lifelong learning is the way of putting into practice the individual aspirations of progress and self-exceeding. From this perspective, participating in training programmes has been shown to improve life satisfaction, well-being and self-confidence (Hyde and Phillipson 2014, 4).

2. Institutional perspective - The human capital is assumed to be one of the most important resources of a company. In this line, the continuous formation of the employees is necessary in order to create a team of professionals able to give proper responses to the more and more difficult labor requirements.

3. Legal perspective - The access to employment is sustained by certificates of competencies, in certain domains being mandatory conditions for the occupation.

On these lines, lifelong learning programmes have a positive impact on the development of

individuals, institutions and on the entire economy, enhancing the level of individual, institutional and national competitiveness.

4. LIFELONG LEARNING PRINCIPLE AND INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION PUT INTO PRACTICE - PECAFROM PROJECT

The "Promoting Equal Opportunities in University and Academic Career for Women in Romania" Project (PECAFROM - SOP HRD/144/6.3/S/127928) was co-financed by the European Union, from the European Social Fund through the Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007-2013, Priority Axis 6 Promoting Social Inclusion, Key area of intervention 6.3: Promoting equal opportunities on the labor market. It had a 19 month implementation period, with the initiative belonging to the Romanian Academy, Iași Branch, as the beneficiary of this project, and to other four partners: Apollonia University of Iași; Romanian Academy, Cluj-Napoca Branch; Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu; University of Bucharest and Cluj-Napoca Technical University - Baia Mare Northern University Centre.

The project aimed at increasing access to employment opportunities and career paths for 550 women with higher education that intended to work within universities and/or research institutes in Romania, or to advance in their career.

Some of the problems that these women are facing with, such as the need for continuity in the academic career, the need for opening up the geographic mobility, the need for balance between the professional and private/family life, the need for recognizing the self-problem solving potential, were identified in the initial phase and the project was designed to overcome them.

The principle "learning to live together" stated by Nesbit *et al.* (2007, 37) is based on three pillars that offer the main components for a successful individual in society:

1) Learning to know (broad general education correlated with practice on a specific number of subjects);

2) Learning to do (necessary competencies to deal with different, often unforeseeable situations, and ability to work together in teams);

3) Learning to be (personal independence and judgment, combined with a sense of personal responsibility for the attainment of common goals) (Nesbit *et al.* 2007, 37).

Being aware of these important pillars in achieving the final objective of learning to live together, the project aimed at giving responses by its main object of activity, that of offering to the target group proper lifelong learning programmes. The main activities consisted in providing training programmes certified by The National Qualifications Authority for career development, information concerning labor market developments in Academia and university, employment opportunities and entrepreneurial career development and career path through the on-line Newsletter and direct support for starting a business. On long term, the advantages assured by the certifications obtained, for the target group are: advance in academic position; participation in projects on a higher position than the latest attained; transition to a superior level of studies; gaining a doctoral/postdoctoral fellowship or research grant or scholarship; occupying a better position in domains related to Academia, that contributes to a future academic career etc.

Taking into consideration that the first step of the marketing strategy proposed by IMC is to start with customers' needs and requirements, the PECAFROM project developed a training assessment needs questionnaire comprising 20 topics. The questionnaire was applied to all persons from the target group (557 women with higher education). The outcome was the Individualized Career Development Plan for each woman as a guideline towards a responsible professional path for an upward and stable career.

The questionnaire revealed the following training required fields, besides the main qualification programme of the project (Table 1) (Qualification in ICT - Data Introduction, Validation and Processing):

Table 1. Demand on the qualification programmes

<i>Programme</i>	<i>Demand</i>
Project Management	337
Project Appraisal	215
Programme Manager	79
Trainer (of trainers)	194
Gender equality	127
Entrepreneurial skills	223
English - A1-A2	128
English - B1-B2	231
English - C1-C2	67
French - A1-A2	68
French - B1-B2	51
French - C1-C2	17
German- A1-A2	131
German - B1-B2	39
German - C1-C2	5
Italian- A1-A2	81
Italian - B1 - B2	30
Italian - C1-C2	8

As anticipated, the most demanded programmes were Project Management, Entrepreneurial Skills and English - from the list of foreign languages.

In order to satisfy the identified demands, the following training courses were organized: Project Management (8 groups), English (6 groups), Entrepreneurial skills (5 groups), Trainer of trainers (5 groups), Gender equality (4 groups), Italian (3 groups), German (2 groups), Project Appraisal (2 groups), French (1 group). 96% of the participants graduated.

Another step of the IMC strategy is related to the forms of communication and sources of brand or institutional contacts, seen as prospective message delivery channels. In this regard, considering that the PECAFROM project focused on gender equality in Academia, all elaborated promotional tools - leaflets, logo, banners,

posters, diplomas, badges, training manuals, brochures, books etc. -, respected the principle of *one sight, one sound or one voice*, as illustrated in Fig. 1:



Fig. 1. The IMC concept in the PECAFROM Project

These aspects were considered when the PECAFROM Project's communication strategy was put into practice during the implementation phase, especially when the most important events were organized: the inauguration workshop, the International Conference *Social and Academic Policies for Women*, and the final workshop. Other important events were launching and finalization of the training courses which needed attention in terms of communication.

During all implementation phases of the project, special attention was given to the relationship with the media that supported the communication process. There were organized 4 press conferences, 24 press releases, 5 TV interventions, 2 radio news, 6 presentations within international and national conferences and workshops.

Last but not least, it must be mentioned that the main communication tool was the website of the project, designed as a user-friendly platform, where all useful information was structured on sections and sub-sections (<http://proiectpecafrom.acadiasi.ro/>), following the same IMC principle.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Lifelong learning is a principle that should not be neglected in a competitive society because the

human capital is assumed to be one of the most important resources of an organization. Integrated communication with its definite benefits has to be placed at the core of lifelong learning programmes' marketing management. On long term, this principle is able to offer clarity and consistency to the institutional image, communication being made with the same voice in all aspects related to the target group.

Although The PECAFROM Project had a short period of implementation (19 months), and taking into consideration all its particularities, induced by the characteristics of the target group (550 women with higher education), the integrative model was put into practice through the synergetic approach of all project's components, and with management involvement. This enlarged concept was operationalised to project's beneficiaries through continuous dialogue, in order to offer feed-back and well-established points of contacts (web page, target group experts - e-mails, face-to-face meetings, questionnaires, workshops) to enhance relations. Thus, IMC and the lifelong learning principle were successfully correlated in the implementation of the PECAFROM Project.

References

- American Marketing Association (2016) *Marketing Communications*. Available from: <<https://www.ama.org/Pages/default.aspx>>. [02.02.2016].
- ARTELT, C., BAUMERT, J., JULIUS-MCELVANY, N. & PESCHAR, J. (2003) *Learners for life: Student approaches to learning. Results from PISA 2000*. Paris: OECD.
- EAGLE, L. & KITCHEN, P.J. (2000) IMC, brand communications, and corporate cultures: client/advertising agency co-ordination and cohesion. *European Journal of Marketing*. 34(5/6). p. 667-686.
- European Commission (2001) *Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality*. Brussels: Commission of the European Communities.
- KELLER, K.L. (2001) Mastering the Marketing Communication Mix: Micro and Macro Perspectives on Integrated Marketing Communication Programs. *Journal of Marketing Management*. 17 (7-8). p. 819-847.
- KITCHEN, P. J. & SCHULTZ, D. E. (1999) A Multi-Country Comparison of the Drive for IMC. *Journal of Advertising Research*. 39(1). p. 21-38.
- KITCHEN, P.J., BRIGNELL, J., LI, T. & JONES, G.S. (2004) The emergence of IMC: a theoretical perspective. *Journal of Advertising Research* 44(01). p. 19-30.

- KITCHEN, P.J., KIM, I. & SCHULTZ, D.E. (2008) Integrated Marketing Communications: Practice Leads Theory. *Journal of Advertising Research*. 48(1). p. 531-546.
- KITCHEN, P.J. & BURGMANN, I. (2010) Integrated Marketing Communication. In *Wiley International Encyclopedia of Marketing*, eds. J.N. Sheth and N.K. Malhotra. John Wiley & Sons Ltd, London.
- KLUG, J., KRAUSE, N., SCHOBER, B., FINSTERWALD, M. & SPIEL, C. (2014) How do teachers promote their students' lifelong learning in class? Development and first application of the LLL Interview. *Teaching and Teacher Education*. 37. p. 119-129.
- LÜFTENEGGER, M., SCHOBER, B., VAN DE SCHOOT, R., WAGNER, P., FINSTERWALD, M. & SPIEL, C. (2012) Lifelong Learning as a goal - do autonomy and self-regulation in school result in well prepared pupils? *Learning and Instruction*. 22(1). p. 27-36.
- MIHART, C. (2012) Impact of Integrated Marketing Communication on Consumer Behaviour: Effects on Consumer Decision - Making Process. *International Journal of Marketing Studies*. 4(2). p. 121-129.
- NESBIT, T., DUNLOP, C. & GIBSON, L. (2007) Lifelong Learning in Institutions of Higher Education. *Canadian Journal of University Continuing Education*. 33(1). p. 35-60.
- ROSE, P.B. & MILLER, D.A. (1994) Merging advertising and PR: Integrated marketing communications. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*. 49(2). p. 52-63.
- SHIMP, T.A. (2000) *Advertising, Promotion, and Other Aspects of Integrated Marketing Communications*. South-Western: Thompson Learning.
- SHIMP, T.A. (2010) *Integrated Marketing Communication in Advertising and Promotion 8e. International Edition*. South-Western: Cengage Learning.
- SCHOBER, B., FINSTERWALD, M., WAGNER, P., LÜFTENEGGER, M., AYSNER, M., & SPIEL, C. (2007) TALK - a training program to encourage lifelong learning in school. *Zeitschrift für Psychologie*. 215(3). p. 183-193.
- SCHULTZ, D.E. (1993) Integrated Marketing Communications: Maybe Definition Is in the Point of View. *Marketing News*. 27(2). p. 17.
- SCHUNK, D. H. (2005) Commentary on self-regulation in school contexts. *Learning and Instruction*. 15(2). p. 173-177.
- TUIJNMAN, A. & SCHULLER, T. (Eds.). (1999) *Lifelong learning policy and research*. London: Portland Press.