

INFLUENCE OF MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS ON THE PROCESSES OF CONSUMERS' DECISIONS

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ABSTRACT

The article covers the essence and the key role of marketing communications in the market and business of nowadays, the trends of development of marketing communications – the growing popularity of the Internet, changes in the consumers' communications, the increased importance of direct marketing, as well as the selection of marketing communications based on the stages of product life cycle. Attention is devoted to the types of marketing communications at a particular stage of buyers' behaviour. The authors availed of the results of their piece of research of 2011 where they used data of companies, polled consumers with the sample totality of 417 respondents, as well as performed an examination.

KEY WORDS: *marketing communications, current trends of development, buyers' behaviour in the market.*

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Introduction

One of the key problems in selling goods and services is efficient marketing communications with the buyers and the society in general to entail interaction with all participants involved in the process of selling and buying, thus promoting feedback.

The goal of marketing communications at the first stage is to attract the buyers' attention by stirring interest in the products offered and the company, whereas at the second stage marketing communications are supposed to help the company achieve that the buyers make a repeated purchase and become regular consumers of the product or loyal customers of the particular company.

In order for the company to build its image and promote its products in the market, a variety of types of marketing communications – advertising, sales promotion, public relations, personal selling and direct marketing – are engaged. These days, companies frequently implement marketing communications inconsiderately, without prior market research and analysis of the target audience and its needs. Due to not analysing the efficiency of marketing communications they make mistakes in selecting the type of marketing communications with the buyers, which result in a reduced competitiveness, a negative public attitude towards the company and losses in the long term. Such a situation in the market stems not only from the lack of funds, but also from poor professional knowledge and skills of the management of marketing specialists. The purpose of the article is to explore the development of marketing communications and to assess the influence of marketing communications on the buyers' behaviour in the market. The authors investigated a variety of objects of marketing communications – advertising, sales promotion, public relations, personal selling and

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direct marketing – as methods of promoting products in the market. The tasks of research were to analyse and assess the trends of development of marketing communications, to draw up a questionnaire for polling respondents and evaluating the influence of marketing communications on the stages of buyers' behaviour in the market using common quantitative and qualitative research methods of economics – survey, comparison, grouping. The study is based on scientific papers by Latvian and foreign scholars, general and special literature and periodicals. The authors conducted evaluation, market research, comparative analysis, survey and used SPSS and MS Excel for the processing and analysis of data.

1. Current trends of development of marketing communications

Marketing communications can be defined as: “Means for directly and indirectly notifying, persuading and/or reminding people” (Praude, 2011: 188). There are multiple types of marketing communications or methods of product promotion in the market, namely advertising, sales promotion, public relations, personal selling and direct marketing.

In order for the process of marketing communications to be efficient, it is crucial to determine the desired target audience, i. e., whom to address the message or, from the market point of view, who the potential buyers will be. In order to succeed, it is important to understand what the company expects from the potential buyers after communication with them. When selecting the communication channel, an analysis of media efficiency and target audience is recommended. It should be kept in mind that not every channel of information delivery is available to the target audience.

The objective of marketing communications is to attract the potential buyers' attention by arousing interest in the product offered. If the communication has been comprehensible and the idea has been perceived, it should arouse a need for the product, and the potential buyer will most probably act and purchase it. After the first time of purchase, the next step must be taken – to achieve via marketing communications that the buyer makes a repeated purchase of the product and becomes a regular consumer or loyal customer. For that purpose, all the afore-mentioned types of marketing communications are used. The types are not interchangeable, hence it is important to know that, for instance, “the tasks of direct selling cannot be fulfilled via advertising, just as public relations cannot be replaced by sales promotion. Promoting a product in the market means conveying information on the product to the buyer and consumer as efficiently as possible” (Blaits, 2004: 175). Thus, when it comes to promoting products in the market, all types of marketing communications are used by joining them in a variety of combinations and practically applying them as a complex of marketing communications.

Based on an analysis of scientific literature, the authors concluded that the following trends of development are present in marketing communications:

1. The rise in popularity of the Internet as marketing communication environment.
2. Extensive communication possibilities among consumers.
3. The increasing role of direct marketing.
4. The selection of marketing communications based on the stages of product life cycle.
5. The strengthening of link between marketing communications and the stages of buyers' behaviour in the market (Praude, 2011: 192–194; Egan, 2007: 150; Smith, Zook, 2011: 175).

1.1. The rise in popularity of the Internet as marketing communication environment.

One of the most popular types of marketing communications is advertising. It is: “A paid and non-personalized way of marketing communications, implemented by identified advertisers by using various techniques of development and means of distribution to influence the buyers' behaviour in the market and reach the goals of communications” (Praude, 2005: 20).

Currently there is a lot of ways of placing advertisement in the media. The question is which of them is the most efficient, as the medium chosen by the company for conveying their advertising message will be a key condition of its success or failure (see Table 1). As shown, over the period from 2006 thru 2011, the share of Internet advertising in the total advertising costs grew from 4.3 % to 13.3 %.

This is most probably due to the Internet being a cheaper way of communication distribution than television or newspapers and magazines. Moreover, in the circumstances of economic globalization, with e-commerce and other services having become a prominent branch of business, the Internet is an integral part of business rather than merely a way to spend one's spare time.

Table 1. Shares of media groups in the Latvian advertising market by years (turnover ths, %, LVL)

Medium	2006		2007		2008		2009		2010		2011	
	Amnt.	%	Amnt.	%	Amnt.	%	Amnt.	%	Amnt.	%	Amnt.	%
Newspapers	18 927	24.9	20 669	22.0	17 654	18.2	7 542	14.3	5 154	11.2	5 154	10.8
Magazines	11 189	14.7	16 264	17.3	15 557	16.0	5 809	11.0	4 078	8.9	4 078	9.9
TV	27 112	35.7	32 783	34.9	34 684	35.7	20 752	39.2	20 536	44.7	20 536	45.9
Radio	8 531	11.2	9 764	10.4	10 606	10.9	6 520	12.3	5 294	11.5	5 294	10.9
Outdoors	6 535	8.6	8 076	8.6	9 470	9.8	5 881	11.1	4 607	10.0	4 607	8.7
Internet*	3 263	4.3	5 889	6.3	8 491	8.7	6 019	11.4	5 906	12.9	5 906	13.3
Cinema	453	0.6	494	0.5	635	0.7	355	0.7	317	0.7	317	0.5
Total	76 010	100	93 939	100	97 097	100	52 878	100	45 892	100	45 892	100

*Includes advertising data of foreign internet resources

Source: created by the authors according to data of Mediju reklāmas tirgus dati (online). Accessed on 08.05.2012. Available from <http://www.lra.lv/main.php?item=134>

Not only mass advertising, but also other types of marketing communications are developing on the Internet. For instance, many new websites designed to offer various coupons have emerged. This is most probably due to the economic situation and the importance of price nowadays, as well as the idea that "Latvia follows the European trends, as in Europe the collective bargaining sites saw an audience increase by 162 % in 2010" (Bērziņš, 2011). Considering the overall decline of consumers' purchasing power, the price or an opportunity to get more for the same money becomes the primary factor during the buying decision. There already exist groups of consumers who regularly shop on the Internet and follow the news about discounts and coupons on the specialised websites with a view to save as much as possible on all their needs. However, it should be noted that such websites are unlikely to make the buyers loyal to a particular product. The distribution of coupons implies a high risk that the buyer will take advantage of the special offer and then keep looking for coupons offered by other companies.

1.2. Extensive communication possibilities among consumers

Taking into account the development of information technologies and the Internet as a mass communication medium, there is an increasing popularity of such social websites as *facebook.com*, *twitter.com*, *draugiem.lv* etc. in public relations. These are virtual communication networks where members can exchange with both information and experience, and, with the growing public interest, companies also pay more attention to communication with the society via these means. They provide information on products, events,

campaigns etc. in a brief form for the site users to be able to notify their friends, relatives and acquaintances, and the information is by all means passed further as recommendations to other people resulting in an exact delivery to the desired target audience. It enables the company to save resources and time and build a positive image, whereas the buyer can learn and follow any relevant information from anywhere in the world, discuss it with friends, seek for opinions, comments, complaints.

Figure 1 reveals the communication between a company (the message sender) and customers through an opinion leader in a classic variant where companies choose a publicly known person, adviser etc. as the opinion leader. Figure 2, for its part, demonstrates the stage of communications among consumers when they communicate with each other rather than rely only on an opinion leader.

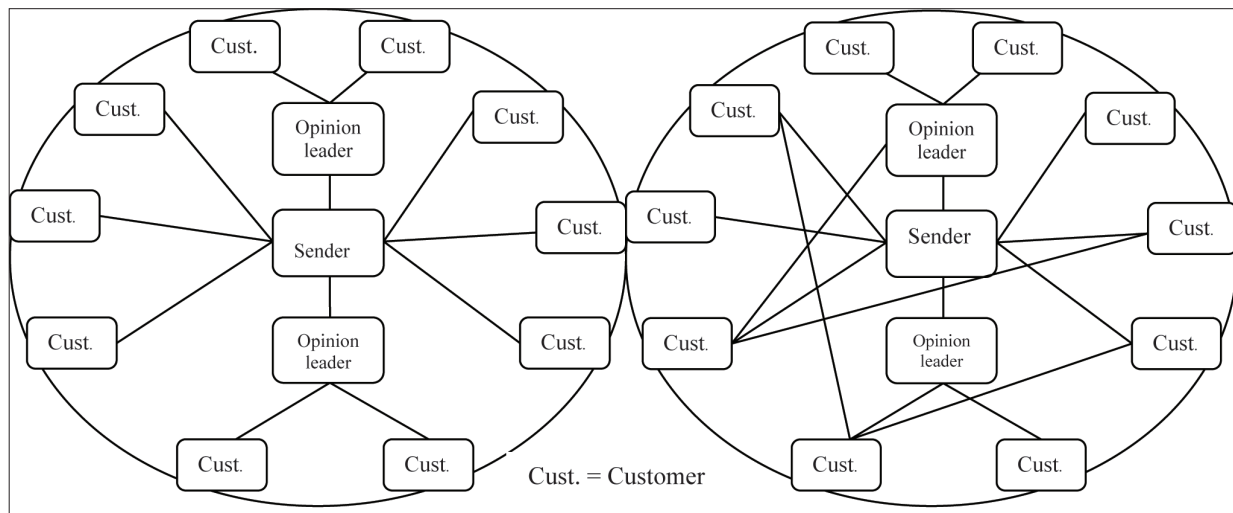


Figure 1. Communication of company with customer through opinion leader
Source: Smith, Zook, 2011: 175–176

Figure 2. Communication among consumers regarding company's products
Source: Smith, Zook, 2011: 175–176

Comparing the Figures 1 and 2, the authors conclude that:

- when communicating with the consumers, the companies should reckon with the fact that the consumers will communicate among themselves, so both successes and failures of the companies will be discussed. Information should be unambiguous, with no room for varied interpretations;
- the consumers are able to establish interest groups, while the companies should know that insiders, interested persons or competitors may comment on a company's failure or offer and distribute the news further;
- the companies should be aware that information regarding them and their products will quickly spread over large masses of consumers. Incorrect product or service information provided by a company may affect its image and reputation.

The authors agree with the well-known communications researcher D. Watts that “influential opinion leaders do not manage communication. We all do it” (Gleizde, 2012: 27).

1.3. The increasing role of direct marketing

In literature, direct marketing is defined as: “Direct connections with carefully targeted individual consumers to both obtain an immediate response and cultivate lasting customer relationships” (Armstrong, Kotler,

2009: 447), Direct marketing means sending messages to a customer (direct mail, telemarketing, interactive marketing) and impelling for action, including the use of positive customer feedback in marketing activities. This means that any technology used in business nowadays – the Internet, e-mail, mobile phone, mail etc. – can be used as a channel for conveying information. In order to communicate with the buyer, it is necessary to segment the market and arrange buyers by target groups, thus facilitating a positive influence on a particular consumer.

“Direct marketing is beneficial to customers in multiple ways:

- shopping at home can be pleasant, convenient and care-free;
- it saves time and acquaints consumers with a broader assortment;
- consumers can do comparative shopping by exploring mail-in catalogues and online shopping sites;
- consumers can order goods for themselves or other persons;
- business customers benefit from obtaining information on the available products without spending time on communication with sales personnel” (Kotler, 2006: 604).

Apart from the advantages mentioned, companies benefit from direct marketing with the possibility to compile lists and databases of customers, sorting them by various criteria, for instance, the level of income, gender, education etc., thus automatically composing target audiences. Consequently, it is possible to work with particular customers individually. Moreover, direct marketing activities are less apparent to competitors, thus enabling companies to be individual in their operation as far as sale is concerned.

The authors conclude that direct marketing techniques are of good use when a company already possesses information on the range of buyers because it is necessary to conduct a market study and compile a marketing database where the buyers would be sorted by certain criteria, thus composing the target audience. On that basis it becomes possible to attract buyers and work with them in a personalized way. For instance, if a company develops databases of customer service and relation management, it is possible not only to serve a particular target audience, but also to attract loyal buyers by offering a system of volume discounts, flexible terms of delivery etc.

1.4. The selection of marketing communications based on the stages of product life cycle

In literature, marketing communications are frequently related to the product life cycle. Therefore, different stages of product life cycle require different types of marketing communications. Figure 3 is an illustration with a relevant example.

Figure 3 shows that at the first stage of life cycle of a product it is necessary to inform the potential buyer via advertising in the media. At the second stage when the objective is to remind the buyer of the product, its features and quality, personal selling is a good choice, whereas at the stage of maturity advertising should be used to remind the buyers of the product's existence and sometimes the product should be sold, e. g., for a lower price, as if to attract both the consumers' and the potential buyers' attention. At the last stage of the product's life cycle, it is useful to opt for sales promotion techniques. The authors would like to stress the importance of selecting marketing communications depending on the stage of product life cycle since there is a vast assortment of products and many alternatives in the market, with new products and services entering the market every year.

Stage of product life cycle	<i>introduction</i>	<i>growth</i>	<i>maturity</i>	<i>decline</i>
Goal of product promotion	to inform	to persuade	to remind	
Activity of product promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings and exhibitions at specialized shops • Advertising in mass media • Sales promotion with free samples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal selling at shops • Advertising on individual product features and advantages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reminding advertisement • Sales promotion with discounts and coupons • Limited personal selling • Sponsorship of events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction of funds for market purposes and low sales promotion costs

Figure 3. Company's marketing communications at the stages of product life cycle

Source: Berkowitz, Kerin, Rudelius, 1989: 442

1.5. The strengthening of link between marketing communications and the stages of buyers' behaviour in the market

When planning and implementing marketing communications, companies should take into account at what stage of behaviour in the market the target audience currently is. Figure 4 presents the level of efficiency of various marketing communications depending on the buyers' behaviour in the process of purchase.

As shown in Figure 4, each stage of buyers' behaviour has a different order of priority of marketing communications, but there is a persistent tendency of direct marketing being the most universal at all stages of buyers' behaviour, reaching high efficiency. Although advertising is also effective at every stage of buyers' behaviour (except for buying), its role has become less prominent, as it follows from Figure 4 that advertising reaches a high level of efficiency only at the stage of emergence of need when a lot of information regarding the product is necessary.

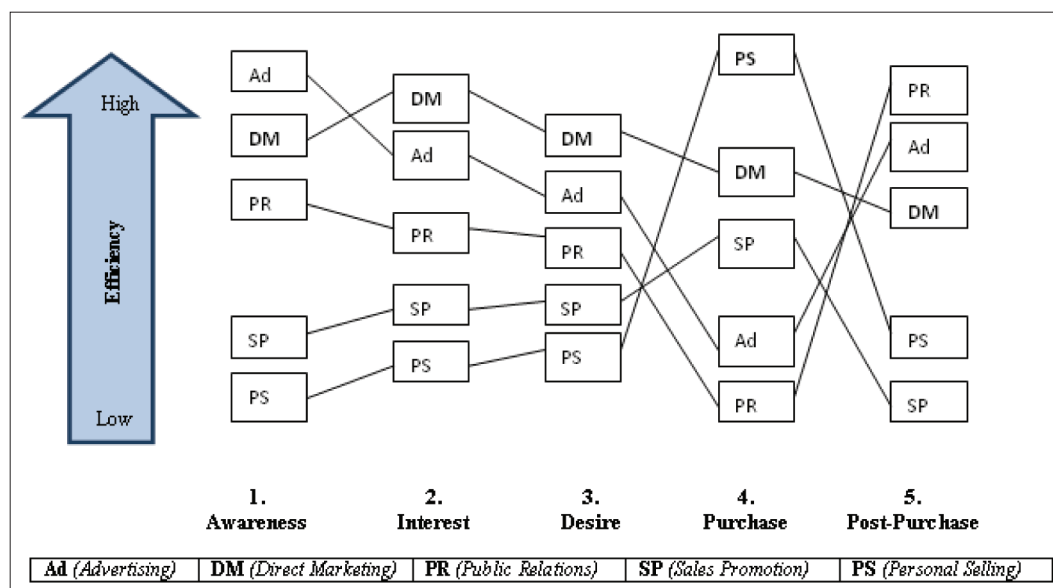


Figure 4. Efficiency of marketing communications depending on the stage of buyers' behaviour in the purchase process
 Source: Egan, 2007: 150

2. Study of marketing communications at the stages of buyers' behaviour in the market

Essentially agreeing with the conclusions on the peculiarities of marketing communications in the present conditions, the authors proposed a hypothesis that the peculiarities show as a tendency, but in a particular situation one must reckon with the factors of external environment and the specific character of communication objects – the industry, the company, the product. In order to either approve or reject the hypothesis, the authors researched marketing communications in the market of construction supplies in Latvia.

In order to evaluate the influence of marketing communications on the behaviour of buyers in the market – the emergence of need for construction supplies, the search of information on construction supplies and assessment of alternatives, the making of decision upon buying construction supplies and the purchase – a questionnaire for consumers was drawn up. The usage of products as a stage of buyers' behaviour in the market was not researched because it is considered a post-purchase action and would thus require a different target audience. The questionnaire was distributed to consumers on the Internet by sending invitations to participate in the poll. The inquiry took place in December 2011, and people from all major cities of Latvia were invited. Overall, 417 respondents – 183 women and 234 men of different ages, education levels and occupations – were polled. Such computer software as MS Excel and SPSS was used in the summarization and analysis of poll data. The goal of the survey was to explore marketing communications in particular stages of buyers' behaviour.

The respondents' assessment of the influence of marketing communications on different stages of buyers' behaviour has been summarized in Tables 2 to 5, with the numbers of types of MC representing the following: 1 – advertisement on television, 2 – advertisement in newspapers and magazines, 3 – advertisement on the Internet, 4 – advertisement on radio, 5 – environment advertisement, 6 – direct marketing, 7 – advertisement stands, 8 – competitions and lotteries, 9 – price discounts, 10 – coupons, 11 – souvenirs, 12 – personal selling, 13 – sponsorship and support in public events.

Table 2. Consumers' evaluation of marketing communications upon emergence of need for construction supplies

Type of MC	Number of respondents, %				
	Significantly influences	Influences	Indifferent	Does not influence	Negatively influences
1	15.5	42.0	21.1	15.8	5.7
2	8.8	45.4	30.3	13.2	2.2
3	12.6	41.6	28.4	13.2	4.1
4	12.3	32.5	31.2	18.9	5.0
5	9.8	41.6	31.2	14.5	2.8
6	12.6	46.4	26.2	12.3	2.5
7	10.1	38.5	36.9	12.3	2.2
8	22.7	33.8	26.8	14.5	2.2
9	56.5	35.6	5.0	1.6	1.3
10	36.6	34.1	21.8	6.0	1.6
11	25.2	24.3	34.1	14.2	2.2
12	40.1	39.1	14.2	6.0	0.6
13	25.2	28.4	31.9	13.2	1.3

Source: created by the authors

As shown in Table 2.92 % (the aggregate percentage of both ratings) of the people polled have admitted being influenced and positively influenced by price discounts at the moment of emergence of a need for construction supplies. 5 % are indifferent to price discounts, and as little as 2.9 % of the respondents consider there is no or negative influence of price discounts during the emergence of a need for construction supplies. Price discounts as a factor is the most influential upon the need for construction supplies.

Coupons also show good indices upon the emergence of a need for construction supplies, as 70 % of the respondents have admitted being influenced or significantly influenced by coupons. 20 % are indifferent to coupons, while 7.6 % of the people polled are either not influenced or negatively influenced. This mostly likely stems from the fact that coupons are informative materials that need to be read, reviewed and studied, but consumers frequently do not wish to spend time on it, hence, for instance, price discounts are rated higher due to not requiring time, reading and searching. According to Table 2.79.2 % of the respondents believe that personal selling either influences or significantly influences them when there is a need for construction supplies. 14.2 % have marked that they are indifferent to personal selling. Consumers are not always interested in the opinions or knowledge of vendors regarding certain products. Such consumers choose construction supplies on their own and search for relevant information themselves.

The summary of results indicates that direct marketing has a positive influence during the emergence of a need for construction supplies, as 59 % of the respondents have admitted this. A relatively small number of people consider direct marketing being of no influence, hence the authors conclude that direct marketing is important right at the moment of emergence of a need for construction supplies.

Competitions and lotteries either influence or significantly influence 56.5 % of the respondents (the aggregate percentage of both ratings). Only 16.7 % of the respondents consider that competitions and lotteries have no or negative influence during the emergence of a need for construction supplies. 26.8 %, i.e., less than a third of the respondents, are indifferent to competitions and lotteries. This stems from the fact that the essence of competitions and lotteries is the possibility for consumers to obtain additional benefit from what they as if intend to buy.

Table 2 shows that advertisements on television, in newspapers and magazines still have a prominent role. Companies trading construction supplies still use specialized magazines and newspapers to discuss new products, new technologies and topical issues.

Table 2 also shows that 54.2 % are influenced by advertisements on the Internet during the emergence of a need for construction supplies. Indifference is probably the case with those respondents who note at the beginning of the survey that they have neither seen nor heard advertisements on construction supplies merchants and the products offered in the market, and have not purchased construction supplies this year.

Radio advertisements are less influential on the people than other types of advertisement during the emergence of a need for construction supplies. This probably relates to the fact that a radio advertisement is limited to hearing, whereas a televised advertisement is both heard and seen, thus reinforcing emotions and the message the advertiser intends to convey. Hence, the importance of radio is lower than that of television upon the emergence of a need for construction supplies.

31.9 % of the people polled are indifferent to sponsorship, while 14.5 % believe it has no or even negative influence. This is probably linked to the way a company communicates with the society and renders support to publicly significant events. Such kind of marketing activity will only promote a positive attitude towards and remembrance of construction supplies merchants, but will not necessarily arouse a need for construction supplies.

Overall, the results of the poll suggest that sales promotion measures (price discounts, coupons etc.), personal selling, direct marketing and advertisements on television, the Internet and in press have the most influence on consumers during the emergence of a need for construction supplies.

The next stage of buyers' behaviour in the market involves the search of information and the assessment of alternatives. The study is conducted with a view to find out which of the marketing communication is the most influential upon buyers at the moment when they already have a need for construction supplies and it is necessary to choose a particular product and obtain additional information thereon.

Table 3. Consumers' evaluation of marketing communications upon searching information and assessing alternatives

Type of MC	Number of respondents, %				
	Significantly influences	Influences	Indifferent	Does not influence	Negatively influences
1	15.8	38.2	26.8	15.8	3.5
2	11.0	39.4	31.2	15.5	2.8
3	15.8	46.4	24.3	10.7	2.8
4	11.0	30.9	33.4	21.5	3.2
5	9.8	35.0	37.9	14.8	2.5
6	17.0	47.9	24.0	8.8	2.2
7	13.2	38.2	32.5	14.8	1.3
8	22.7	33.4	26.2	16.1	1.6
9	55.8	34.7	6.0	2.8	0.6
10	35.0	34.4	18.6	10.7	1.3
11	21.8	25.2	32.8	18.3	1.9
12	39.4	40.1	14.5	5.7	0.3
13	22.7	30.3	30.6	15.5	0.9

Source: created by the authors

The data of Table 3 show that 53.9 % of the respondents are influenced or significantly influenced by advertisements on television while searching information on products and assessing alternatives (calculated by summing up the percentages of both evaluations). 15.8 % are not influenced by televised advertisements, and 3.5 % of the respondents admit negative influence during the search of information on products and the weighing of alternatives. 26.8 %, for their part, are indifferent to television advertisements when looking for information. This might be related to the tendency of consumers searching information on the products of interest in the market themselves, on the Internet or in catalogues.

For 50.5 % of the respondents, advertisements in newspapers and magazines have influence or significant influence on their behaviour while searching information on construction supplies and assessing alternatives. The percentage is slightly lower than in the case of television, which is indicative of the reduced popularity of newspapers and magazines. The authors addressed this popularity rating among the trends of development of marketing communications.

The data suggest that one can opt for cheaper means of marketing communications to inform consumers of products and features, giving them sufficient information to compare the product alternatives available in the market. For instance, various product descriptions in specialized magazines might cost for the company much less than an advertisement on television, besides the target audience of such magazines is direct and unambiguous as those are only read by people for whom the issue is topical because the specialized magazines are relatively expensive.

62.1 % of the people polled have marked the Internet as a means of communication with influence or significant influence on their behaviour in the market (the aggregate percentage of both ratings). This stems from the increased popularity of the Internet among consumers over the recent years as far as searching for information is concerned. For companies it means a much cheaper means of communication to inform consumers of products, merchants etc. 10.7 % who have marked that the Internet does not influence them in the search of information on products are probably those without regular access to the Internet as such. 24.3 % of the respondents have stated indifference to the Internet. The authors would attribute the latter group to either infrequent access to the Internet, insufficient skills or the lack of resources, for instance, computers. It is also possible that these respondents have not had a need for construction supplies and are unlikely to have one soon, therefore they do not look for information on this matter.

According to Table 3, the popularity of radio advertisements as far as searching for product information is concerned is much lower than, for instance, that of the Internet. It is equal to the respective indices concerning the emergence of a need for construction supplies. This suggests that radio is behind other mass media in terms of popularity. 33 % of indifferent respondents is the higher percentage so far with regard to the importance of mass media in the search of product information.

As can be seen in Table 3.65 % of the respondents are influenced (47.9 %) and significantly influenced (17 %) by direct marketing while searching information on products. The result is higher than for the Internet suggesting that the role of direct marketing in providing information on products is prominent and even necessary for consumers.

Price discounts, just as at the stage of emergence of a need for construction supplies, have substantial influence on the buyers' behaviour in the market, as 34.7 % are influenced and 55.8 % are significantly influenced by price discounts when weighing alternatives, resulting in a total of 90.5 %. This suggests that sales promotion would be efficient in the cases when the buyer already has a need for construction supplies and is looking for options in terms of products, pricing and quality.

Coupons are also popular and influential on searching alternatives and product information, still they are slightly behind price discounts, as 34.4 % of the respondents have admitted influence and 35 % have admitted significant influence of coupons. Curiously, there are three times more indifferent respondents than in the case of price discounts, amounting to 18.6 %. This illustrates the trend that only certain groups of consumers use coupons, although the influence is considerable against the background of other means of marketing communications.

Competitions and lotteries influence or significantly influence 56.2 % of the respondents when information is sought for and alternatives are assessed. Both price and gain are important factors for consumers, and competitions and lotteries may affect their selection among alternatives. At this stage of buyers' behaviour, there are almost twice less indifferent respondents than upon emergence of a need for construction supplies, approving the conclusion that, when looking for alternatives, consumers need an incentive, for instance, a competition or lottery.

A relatively large share of respondents (32.8 %) are indifferent to souvenirs in the search of products and assessment of alternatives. 18.3% consider that there is no influence, which is the second highest percentage

behind radio among mass media for product information searches. Consequently, the use of souvenirs would be less efficient if consumers only searched product information or assessed alternatives.

As shown in Table 3, personal selling influences the majority of respondents upon searching product information and assessing alternatives. 40.1 % have selected influence and 39.4 % have selected significant influence, resulting in a total of 79.5 %. This indicates that personal selling, which includes consultations by salesmen, is the second most important means of communication behind price discounts. Consequently, companies should pay attention to how salesmen communicate with buyers, how much and how professionally they can tell about the products offered and how to present their company in general.

Sponsorship and public relations influence and significantly influence 53 % of the respondents (calculated as the aggregate percentage of both ratings), while 30.6 % are indifferent. 15.5 % of the respondents consider that sponsorship and public relations are of no influence and 0.9 % – that they are of negative influence. The indifferent and those with no influence and negative influence together make 47 %, i.e., for almost half of the people polled sponsorship or support of public events does not affect the process of product assessment.

Overall, we can conclude that at the stage of buyers' behaviour featuring the search of information and the assessment of alternatives the major marketing communications are price discounts, personal selling, direct marketing and advertising on the Internet.

Further we will analyse how the same marketing communications affect the buyers' behaviour when they make decisions of buying construction supplies.

Table 4. Consumers' evaluation of marketing communications upon buying decision

Type of MC	Number of respondents, %				
	Significantly influences	Influences	Indifferent	Does not influence	Negatively influences
1	11.4	32.2	30.9	22.4	3.2
2	8.2	30.9	35.3	23.7	1.9
3	12.9	36.3	28.7	19.6	2.5
4	9.1	26.8	37.2	24.3	2.5
5	7.6	27.1	39.7	23.7	1.9
6	13.2	41.6	28.7	15.5	0.9
7	10.1	30.6	37.2	20.5	1.6
8	19.9	30.6	29.7	18.3	1.6
9	51.1	34.7	8.2	5.4	0.6
10	30.9	35.3	19.9	12.9	0.9
11	17.0	24.6	35.0	22.4	0.9
12	36.6	39.1	13.9	9.8	0.6
13	19.6	24.0	31.5	23.7	1.3

Source: created by the authors

Televised advertisements influence or significantly influence 43.5 % of the respondents upon buying decision, whereas almost twice less or 22.4 % feel they are not influenced by advertisements on television. Since 56.5 % of the respondents are indifferent to or unaffected by televised advertisements, we can conclude that the influence of television as a mass medium on making the decision of purchase is less substantial than, for instance, on the search of information and the assessment of alternatives.

The same trend at this stage of buyers' behaviour applies to advertisements in newspapers and magazines. Only 39.1 % of the people polled admit possible influence of advertisements in newspapers and magazines on their decision of a purchase of construction supplies. Accordingly, for 60.9 % the buying decision is unaffected by advertisements in these media. Consequently, there is not much sense for companies to spend funds on advertising unless it is designed to simply inform consumers.

As indicated by Table 4, the influence of advertisements on the Internet is merely by 10% higher than that of newspaper and magazine advertisements and does not even reach a half of the respondents. 37.2 % are indifferent to radio advertisements at this stage. These indices again suggest that radio, television, newspapers and the Internet are useful for a general notification of consumers, the promotion of recognisability, the building of attitude, confidence and a company's image, whereas, in order for the consumers to decide upon a purchase of construction supplies, other means of marketing communications are required.

The influence of environment advertisements on buying decisions is not higher than that of advertisements in other media analysed afore. 65.3 % of the respondents (the aggregate percentage of the three ratings) are indifferent to, not influenced or negatively influenced by environment advertisements, and such a high percentage testifies to the low popularity of this type of marketing communications among buyers. Thus, companies should be cautious as to the significance of environment advertisements, as those were not rated high at the previous stages of buyers' behaviour either.

In comparison with the earlier analysed types of marketing communications, direct marketing shows a positive tendency, as 54.9 % (the aggregate percentage of both ratings) have been influenced or significantly influenced by this type of marketing communications during the buying decision.

Advertisement stands, just as advertisements in mass media, are not very popular at this stage of buyers' behaviour, as 59.3 % of the respondents are either indifferent to, not influenced or negatively influenced by this means of marketing communications when it comes to a buying decision. Since at the previous stage of buyers' behaviour 51.4 % of the respondents considered advertisement stands influential, this type of marketing communications is obviously more efficient on those buyers who are yet only searching product information and analysing the alternatives available in the market.

Competitions and lotteries have influence for 30.6 % and significant influence for 19.9 % of the people polled as to their buying decisions, thus can be considered rather influential. Price discounts, for their part, retain their prominent role gained at the previous stages of buyers' behaviour, as 34.7 % of the respondents have marked influence and 51.1 % have marked significant influence, resulting in an aggregate of 85.8 %, which makes price discounts the main factor of influence on the buyers' behaviour at this stage.

According to Table 4, coupons are more influential than, for instance, advertisements in mass media. The total percentage of respondents admitting the influence of coupons upon their buying decisions is 66.2 %, surpassing that of competitions and lotteries even though coupons are usually valid for a limited period of time. For companies it suggests that, considering the popularity of this means of marketing communications, the number of buyers within a certain timeframe can be predicted.

Souvenirs enjoy less acknowledgment than other types of sales promotion, as the percentages of influenced and significantly influenced respondents are 24.6 % and 17 % respectively.

There is a persistent tendency, with Table 4 indicating the significance of personal selling at this stage of buyers' behaviour – it has influenced or significantly influenced 75.7 % of the people polled (the aggregate percentage of both ratings). Only 13.9 % of the respondents are indifferent to personal selling, and 10.4 % believe it is of no or negative influence on their decision of buying construction supplies. At the previous stage of buyers' behaviour, less than 10% rated personal selling as non-influential. Hence, personal selling tends to be substantial at almost all stages of buyers' behaviour.

Sponsorship and support for public events, just as environment advertisements and advertisement stands, are less influential as far as buying decisions are concerned. Less than 43.5% of the respondents admitted influence or significant influence of sponsorship and support for public events, most probably due to the fact that public relations are single events and might not be memorized by buyers at the time of buying decision. The role of public relations, as note before, is the promotion of communications and positive attitude rather than influence on the buyers' behaviour. However, public relations could be one among several factors influencing buyers, therefore companies should consider joining public relations with some other means of marketing communications to reach their goals in communicating with the audience.

Overall, following the trend of the previously analysed stages of buyers' behaviour, such types of marketing communications as sales promotion, including price discounts and coupons, personal selling, including

consultations by salesmen, and direct marketing take the leading roles. These types of marketing communications can be used both individually and jointly.

Further we will analyse the influence of means of marketing communications on the next stage of buyers' behaviour – the purchase at the place of sale.

Table 5. Consumers' evaluation of marketing communications upon the stage of purchase

Type of MC	Number of respondents, %				
	Significantly influences	Influences	Indifferent	Does not influence	Negatively influences
1	12.9	30.6	27.1	25.6	3.8
2	7.9	32.5	30.6	26.5	2.5
3	11.7	34.7	26.2	24.9	2.5
4	10.1	24.6	33.1	29.3	2.8
5	7.3	27.8	34.1	28.7	2.2
6	13.2	42.6	23.3	19.6	1.3
7	11.0	29.3	33.1	24.6	1.9
8	18.9	27.1	26.5	25.6	1.9
9	34.7	34.1	12.9	17.7	17.7
10	22.1	31.9	21.8	23.0	1.3
11	15.8	22.1	29.3	30.9	1.9
12	34.7	39.4	12.6	12.3	0.9
13	19.2	23.7	30.0	25.2	1.9

Source: created by the authors

The data of Table 5 show that 30.6 % of the respondents are influenced and 12.9 % are significantly influenced by televised advertisements during the process of product purchase. However, overall less than half (43.5 %) feel influenced by television advertisements upon product purchases. There is only 2 % of difference between those who are not influenced by television advertisements and those who are indifferent.

A similar trend of not much influence applies to advertisement in newspapers and magazines. While televised advertisements significantly influenced 12.9 % of the people polled, newspaper and magazine advertisements have significant influence on as little as 7.9 %, i.e., less than a tenth of the respondents.

Advertisements on the Internet influence 46.4 % of the respondents, surpassing the percentages of television and radio by 3 % and 6 % respectively. However, these indices do not deserve very much attention as they are relevant to less than a half to the people polled.

Radio advertisements have less influence on consumers than the other types of advertisements in the mass media, with the total percentage reaching 34.7 % or barely above one third of the respondents. This once again testifies to the reduced popularity of radio as mass medium.

Direct marketing influences the product purchase for 42.6 % of the respondents and significantly influences for 13.2 %. Overall, direct marketing could be regarded as a substantial means of communication at this stage of buyers' behaviour, as 55.8 % or more than a half of the respondents admitted being influenced by direct marketing. This suggests that a marketing data base is useful as assistance for home-based buyers and has become relatively popular.

Advertisement stands, similarly to mass media advertisements, have had less influence on buyers during product purchases. Competitions and lotteries have influenced less than a half of the people polled, i.e., 46.1 %. Thus, at this stage of buyers' behaviour the analysed means of marketing communications split into groups, and they do not yield the expected efficiency at all stages of buyers' behaviour. Quite logically, 68.8 % of the respondents have admitted having been influenced by price discounts in product purchases. The role of coupons,

according to Table 5, is also prominent. The authors conclude that, just as with price discounts previously, it is a result of positive contentment, with the buyer thinking that he/she has purchased products for a good price. Perhaps coupons have enabled the respondents to buy more products for the price of single or obtain other bonuses resulting in positive emotions upon purchase. Hence, more than a half of the respondents (53.9 %) admit that coupons have influenced them in the process of purchase of construction supplies.

Personal selling has influenced 39.4 % of the people polled and their behaviour upon purchase, and 34.7 % admit significant influence. These indices prove that personal selling is highly important at all stages of buyers' behaviour in the market and affects the vast majority of buyers.

Sponsorship and souvenirs have relatively little influence on product purchases, which means that sponsorship, just as any advertisement, is a substantial means of communication to a certain extent and the building of dialogue between the buyer and the seller, but not at this stage of buyers' behaviour. Thus, as the author's have previously concluded, sponsorship serves for building mutual relationship rather than solving technical issues concerning the purchase of a particular product.

Overall, the results of the authors' study approve the proposed hypothesis that the peculiarities of marketing communications show as trends and their development is influenced by factors of external environment and particular communication objects – the industry, the company, the products etc.

At the first stage of buyers' behaviour – the emergence of need – the highest influence is essentially that of advertising, direct marketing and public relations (see Figure 4). According to the authors' research, sales promotion, personal selling, direct marketing and certain types of advertising stand out.

At the second stage of buyers' behaviour – the search of information and the assessment of alternatives – the highest influence is essentially that of direct marketing, advertising and public relations (see Figure 4). According to the authors' research, sales promotion, personal selling, direct marketing and certain types of advertising stand out.

At the third stage of buyers' behaviour – the buying decision – the highest influence is essentially that of direct marketing, advertising and public relations (see Figure 4). According to the authors' research, sales promotion, personal selling and direct marketing stand out.

At the fourth stage of buyers' behaviour – the purchase – the highest influence is essentially that of personal selling, direct marketing and sales promotion (see Figure 4). The authors' research emphasizes the same types of marketing communications.

As it can be seen, the defined trends of development of marketing communications were essentially approved by the authors' research, but there were such distinctions as the significant role of product sales promotion and the weak role of public relations.

In the authors' opinion, the influence of sales promotion measures (incl. price discounts) on the buyers' behaviour can be explained with external environment factors – the relatively low purchasing power of people and the fierce competition in the construction supplies market. The weak influence of public relations (incl. sponsorship) on the buyers' behaviour in the market stems from the specific character of construction supplies market, the lack of knowledge in the preparation of public events and the high implementation costs thereof.

By using each type of marketing communications separately, it is possible to achieve a goal in short term, whereas by using different types in combination and by integrating them it is possible to attain long-term efficiency – increase the sales amounts, the number of customers and loyal purchasers, improve the communicative efficiency in the company's dialogue and relationship with the customers and society. If a company uses a complex of marketing communications or integrated marketing communications in communication with consumers and product promotion, it can work with the existing and potential buyer continuously rather than in campaigns. Without doubt, there are peculiarities of product selling and service provision in each industry, but there are also common market trends that apply to all industries.

Conclusions / Recommendations

1. The trends of development of marketing communications nowadays are the rise in popularity of the Internet as an advertising medium; extensive communication possibilities among consumers; the in-

crease of importance of direct marketing; the strengthening of link between marketing communications and the stages of buyers' behaviour in the market; the selection of marketing communications based on the stages of product life cycle.

2. The said peculiarities of development of marketing communications show as tendencies are subject to the influence of factors of external environment, objects of communication, the specific character of industry, companies and products.
3. The research conducted in the construction suppliers market confirmed both the objective trends of development of marketing communications and the influence of external environment and other factors.
4. The companies should increase the part of marketing communications budget related to direct marketing and personal selling, thus enhancing the role of personalized communications.
5. When planning communication with the buyers, their behaviour in the market at the relevant stage should be taken into account.

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RINKODAROS KOMUNIKACIJOS ĪTAKA VARTOTOJŪ SPRENDIMO PRIĒMIMO PROCESUI

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Santrauka

Straipsnīje apzvelgiama rinkodaros komunikācijas esmē ir svarba šiuolaikinēje rinkoje bei versle, rinkodaros komunikācijas vystymosi tendencijos: didējantis interneto populiarumas, vartotojū komunikācijas pokyčiai, tiesioginēs rinkodaros svarba, rinkodaros komunikācijas priklausomumas nuo produkto gyvavimo ciklo. Atkreipiamas dėmesys į rinkodaros komunikācijas rūšis, taikomas skirtingose pirkėjo elgsenos stadijose. Autoriai pateikia savo tyrimo, kuris atliktas 2011 metais, rezultatus. Šiame tyrime autoriai naudojo organizacijų duomenis, apklausė 417 respondentų ir išanalizavo gautus rezultatus.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: *rinkodaros komunikacija, vystymosi tendencijos, pirkėjo elgsena rinkoje.*

JEL KLASIFIKACIJA: M310