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ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION IN CONTEMPORARY MARKETING – THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND MARKET PRACTICE ON THE EXAMPLE OF PACKAGING – PART 1

OCHRONA ŚRODOWISKA WE WSPÓŁCZESNYM MARKETINGU

– PODSTAWY TEORETYCZNE A PRAKTYKA RYNKOWA NA PRZYKŁADZIE OPAKOWANIA – CZĘŚĆ 1.

ABSTRACT: This paper presents theoretical and practical aspects of packaging compliant with the environmental protection principles in marketing communication. There were indicated models valid from the perspective of technical knowledge, such as recyclability, biobased materials, biodegradability, compostability and upcycling. Focus was placed on the attitudes, level of knowledge and awareness of the buyer, which translate into the effectiveness of various ways of communicating about a product or brand.

Key words: environmental protection, effectiveness of marketing communication, buyers' attitude, purchasing decisions

STRESZCZENIE: Analiza prezentuje teoretyczne i praktyczne aspekty stosowania opakowania zgodnego z zasadami ochrony środowiska w komunikacji marketingowej przedsiębiorstwa. Wskazano uprawnione z perspektywy wiedzy technicznej modele takie jak przydatność do recyklingu, biopochodność, biodegradowalność, kompostowalność czy upcycling. Szczególnie skupiono się na postawach, poziomie wiedzy i świadomości nabywcy przekładających się na efektywność rozmaitych sposobów komunikacji dotyczącej produktu czy marki.

Słowa kluczowe: ochrona środowiska, efektywność komunikacji marketingowej, postawy nabywców, decyzje zakupowe

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary brand and product management, packaging plays a key role as an effective element of positioning, distinguishing and adding emotional values building customer loyalty. Compliance of packaging with the principles of environmental protection is an increasingly important aspect of packaging design due to the expectations of buyers, but also legal regulations: recycling rates and restrictions on the use of disposable products. The numerous limitations, but also

the level of awareness of the buyer, makes that effective marketing communication through environment compliant packaging is a complicated issue, requiring a synergic combination of promotional elements with technical knowledge. The modern market is aware of environmental conditions, the consumers have wider access to knowledge, and the phenomenon of prosumers (Toffler 1980) is becoming more and more common. Irresponsible (intentional or resulting from lack of knowledge) behavior of enterprises bearing the

hallmarks of the so-called greenwashing (Horiuchi et al. 2009) may undermine or even destroy the image of enterprises, brands, and products. Therefore, it becomes necessary to build modern environmental communication and registers of authorized solutions relating to scientific knowledge, which can be the basis not only for product design, but also for information strategies.

In this complicated situation, packaging becomes a medium for two types of marketing messages: general (a) and more precise, concerning both the product (b) and itself (c). The latter is a powerful communication tool, according to McLuhan, assuming that the choice of medium itself is the message (McLuhan 2004) (and the choice of packaging reflects the actual activities of the company, even if they are not communicated directly and convincingly):

- a. medium of general information about activities related to environmental protection or social responsibility, e.g., activities for communities or social groups. However, a noticeable problem is the low level of verifiability of the manufacturer's declaration. The lack of trust of the modern buyer is influenced, for example, by imprecise, unjustified, or deliberately misleading environmental declarations – practices of greenwashing,
- b. medium of information related to the product, e.g., manufacturer, composition, best-before date, suitability for vegans. This group of information elements also includes the so-called third-party labels for products such as EU Ecolabel, Krav or Nordic Swan,
- c. medium of information about the packaging itself, such as the environmental protection models used, e.g., various forms of messages regarding recyclability, compostability or the use of bioplastics. It is especially advisable to undergo codified assessment methods, e.g., certification of bio-origin or compostability, preceded by tests that authorize the use of appropriate signs on packaging (Karwowska 2021).

1. MODELS OF SHAPING PACKAGING ACCORDING TO ENVIRONMENTAL CRITERIA

Based on consumer research and the circular economy model principles: the Life Cycle Assessment and the eco-design

guidelines, it has been established a list of the most important criteria for environmental protection. It is also worth emphasizing the fact that the defined criteria are universal: they can be applied not only to the packaging, but also to the whole product. These features can be combined, bio-based and compostable, for example:

1. recyclability,
2. recycled content/material,
3. bio-biobased content/material,
4. biodegradability,
5. compostability,
6. suitability for upcycling (Karwowska 2021).

Recycling is a recovery method in which waste is reprocessed into products, materials, or substances for original or other purposes – products other than packaging. The term organic recycling can refer to the aerobic (including composting) or anaerobic treatment of biodegradable waste under controlled conditions using microorganisms. This process produces organic matter or methane. On the other hand, material recycling means the reprocessing of waste into products with utility value, usually for purposes other than the original one. This takes place in the so-called a cascade system in which products are less demanding at each subsequent stage. The last solution is chemical recycling, which consists in processing waste into materials with different physical and chemical properties by depolymerizing chains to monomers (Żakowska 2017), (Karwowska 2021).

Bioplastics are a group of biodegradable and/or bio-based polymers made of three types:

- non-biodegradable (not degradable to simple organic compounds under the influence of microorganisms) from renewable resources (reproducible in the same or shorter time than the time needed to use them),
- biodegradable from renewable raw materials,
- biodegradable, produced from conventional petroleum-derived raw materials.

Biodegradable packaging material undergoes biochemical decomposition of organic compounds into simple inorganic

compounds with the participation of microorganisms. On the other hand, biomaterial is produced from renewable sources, from natural resources other than crude oil (Żakowska 2017), (Karwowska 2021).

The term composting and compostable refers to one of the biological processes of processing organic substances. It is a natural method of waste disposal (recovery) and waste management, consisting in the decomposition of these substances by microorganisms (Ustawa z dnia 14 grudnia 2012 r. o odpadach), (Karwowska 2021).

Upcycling is a form of waste recycling that produces products with a higher value than the original value of the waste. It is worth noting that this type of practice is common in households, but in the recent years there has been an increasing interest in this solution among companies introducing products to the market. The solutions that favor reuse and thus extend the life cycle are considered part of packaging design.

Additional features of packaging related to environmental protection should also be reusable or monomateriality (using a combination of materials that do not limit or exclude recycling). It is worth noting, however, that the use of reusable packaging applies to a limited group of products, usually traditionally packaged in a specific way, and associated with an appropriate collection system – on the Polish market this applies primarily to beer. This feature of the packaging, although it complies with the eco-cutting guidelines, does not distinguish it from the group of competing products in terms of marketing (Karwowska 2021).

2. VISUAL ELEMENTS INFORMING ABOUT COMPLIANCE WITH ENVIRONMENTAL CRITERIA

The second key element of the analysis is to assess the effectiveness of visual elements that communicate compliance with environmental criteria available to the buyer at the time of purchasing the product. As such visual elements the following were defined:

- text information,
- slogans,
- symbols related to the certificates and attestations held,

- other occasional symbols not related to the certificates and attestations held, designed by the enterprises themselves,
- colors (Karwowska 2021).

It is crucial to determine which of the above-mentioned solutions are the most effective in conveying knowledge to the consumer about the environmental aspects of packaging, creating the right associations and convincing to make a purchasing decision, and whether there are noticeable differences in this respect between individual types of messages, and then types of packaging or packaged products. It is the perception of the consumer, his perception and proper interpretation of information on solutions for the protection of the natural environment that seems to be the key issue determining the success of the implementation of these solutions in business practice. Therefore, it is necessary to determine which visual signals are perceptible by the buyer and how they are interpreted and whether the interpretation of the average consumer (representative sample of the Polish market) is conducive to making decisions in accordance with the principles of environmental protection, or vice versa – it disturbs the mentioned process.

2.1. TEXT INFORMATION

It seems that relatively extensive communication of this type, although probably relatively less effective than the others, is effective in the case of so-called habitual (taken under the influence of habit) or impulsive (made from curiosity or price) purchase decisions and requiring fuller involvement, in the context of environment has the greatest value. A precise message, referring directly to the buyer's awareness, and not based on the subconscious perception of the product or loose associations, creates the least opportunities to promote the product and brand using greenwashing practices – understatement or syllogisms suggesting the environmental qualities of the packaging. Of course, the producer may act unethically also in this case, but his actions are easier to identify, it is also easier to verify the content of the message and, if necessary, apply sanctions related to the violation of consumer rights or competition law (Karwowska 2021).

From the perspective of the authors of the study, however, it was primarily important to determine whether longer, often complex, and technical knowledge-based messages are effective in the context of the level of perception of the buyer, and the knowledge conveyed in this way is a real source of information about the environmental qualities of the product. It was expected that the extended form may not be adequate to the situation of making a purchasing decision due to the excess of information creating a kind of information noise for a person with an average or lower level of technical knowledge – this initial thesis was largely confirmed by the study.

2.2. SLOGANS

It was assumed that next to the color of the packaging, it is the element that has the strongest impact on the consumer's subconscious. According to the so-called affect transfer model, the attitude towards the brand results directly from the attitude towards the advertisement concerning it. It seems, therefore, that the more emotion-based the message, the greater the buyer's, albeit not fully conscious, emotional relationship with the product and the greater the tendency to choose it. Promotional slogans, due to their specificity: metaphors, humor, paradox, are an example of reaching the consumer and attracting his attention directly through emotions. Therefore, it is an effective tool, which unfortunately often encourages producers to abuse it. Various slogans concerning the green values of products or brands are so general and difficult to verify that their unauthorized use in practice does not entail any image or even more legal consequences. In the study, apart from analyzing the issue of the promotional slogan itself, it was decided to compare the effectiveness of two models of its construction: a short slogan and a more complex one (Karwowska 2021).

2.3. SYMBOLS RELATED

TO THE CERTIFICATES AND ATTESTATIONS

Due to the level of credibility, it is probably the most ethical promotion tool related to the environmental parameters, but it requires a high level of awareness from consumers, which may be a certain difficulty in reaching a mass customer and create

the phenomenon of the noise, information overload, especially in the making quick or routine purchasing decisions in which the buyer is unwilling or unable to invest significant resources of attention or time. However, this does not change the fact that in the case of more and more consumers who are aware and willing to use products compliant with the principles of environmental protection, this type of element may be an interesting solution to the issue of promotion, especially since the share of the so-called three parties, i.e. an authorized institution, may eliminate the potential lack of trust in the declarations of the manufacturer itself, which – as the study showed – is a significant problem on the Polish market affecting the effectiveness of communication. In addition, through a kind of exclusivity of participation in certification systems, as in the case of quality systems, such marks can undoubtedly place the product in a higher segment, reducing buyers' sensitivity to price (Karwowska 2021).

2.4. OTHER OCCASIONAL SYMBOLS

These types of visual solutions are a complex issue that requires careful analysis, also in the context of greenwashing and official certification symbols or third-party attestations. Awareness of the real meaning of individual symbols and the ability to distinguish those associated with specific features from those created freely by the manufacturer only for promotional purposes may be a problem for customers. Producers should, however, consider the fact that abuses in this area, although they may translate into an increase in demand or profit in the short term, can be quickly verified by the market and have an extremely negative, permanent impact on the image (Karwowska 2021).

2.5. COLORS

As an element that directly appeals to emotions, evoking a strong reaction, color is undoubtedly a key, effective element of marketing communication. Its role additionally increases with the development of concepts showing the buyer not only in behavioral terms as a consumer of goods, but as a personality, individuality with a wealth of emotional experiences. The color of the packaging in many cases affects not only the

perception or selection of the product, but also the creation and consolidation of a specific image of it. In the era of increasing importance of environmental protection, a trend called green marketing has become widespread. Shades of green, but also the so-called earth tones, as well as the gray of unbleached paper are supposed to evoke the environmental qualities of the product. The authors of the study initially assumed that it would show a high degree of effectiveness of color as an element of marketing communication but focused on the question of whether the buyer's impressions and attitudes clearly change with the modification of only this element (Karwowska 2021).

3. RESEARCH METHOD

The aim of this study was to determine the effectiveness of individual models of marketing communication based on packaging compliant with the principles of environmental protection. The analysis was carried out in an indirect way, tailored to the buyer's perception. A tool in the form of an online panel questionnaire was used (e-panel). The survey was conducted in November 2022 using a statistical survey method: the Ariadna Periodic Panel, specialized in quantitative consumer and social research. They were carried out on a quota-matched, statistically justified sample of adults living in Poland, used in the case of the panel study, reflecting the structure of the population in terms of demographic characteristics such as: gender, age, education, size of town. The sample size was 1066 respondents.

The respondents were selected in two stages: through pre-selection based on data in the user panel, and then through a series of filtering questions. Designed in this way, and then conducted once, the study made it possible to make the most of the opportunities offered by the study panel, such as: precise sample items, completeness, exceptionally high level of so-called feedback (the ratio of the number of the completed questionnaires to the number of questionnaires provided to respondents) and the speed of implementation. research while avoiding most of the limitations that may be associated with this method. The main limitations include the lack of

representativeness or the so-called wear of the panel, i.e., resignation from participation in subsequent stages (Babbie 2008).

...to be continued

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