

STRATEGIC INTEGRATION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS AND MARKETING:

Integrated Marketing Communications

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Halkla İlişkiler ve Pazarlamanın Stratejik Bütünleşmesi: Bütünleşik Pazarlama İletişimi

Bugün küresel pazarların ve rekabetin artmasına paralel olarak bilgi ve iletişim teknolojilerinde de hızlı bir değişimin meydana gelmesi, pazarlama alanının iletişimle olan ilişkisini yeniden tanımlama ihtiyacı doğmuştur. Pazarlama ve iletişim arasındaki ilişki özellikle 1990'lardan sonra güçlenmiş ve geleneksel pazarlama karması elemanlarını oluşturan ürün, fiyat, dağıtım kanalı ve promosyonlara yeni boyutlar eklenerek; politik güç, halkla ilişkiler, siyaset, çevrenin korunması gibi kavramlar öne çıkmıştır. Bunun başlıca nedeni tüm pazarlama çalışmalarının merkezine iletişim çalışmalarının konulması ve tüketici odaklı pazarlama döneminin başlamış olmasıdır.

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Bugünkü Pazar ortamına bakıldığında ürünlerin birbirinden ayrılması oldukça zorlaşmıştır. Pekçok ürün kalite, fiyat, görünüm anlamında nerdeyse birbiriyle aynıdır. Bu aşamada pazarlama alanında iletişimin gerekliliği ve rolü anlaşılmaktadır, çünkü eski pazarlama teknikleri günümüzde başarılı olamamaktadır. Bir ürünün gerçek değerinin veya markasının tüketiciler nezdinde farklı konumlandırılması, tüketicinin o markaya verdiği değerle bağlantılıdır. Yani bir ürünün diğerlerinden farklılaşması, sadece o ürünün tüketicilerin aklında farklı bir fikirle yer almasıyla mümkündür. Bunu başarmak için de bütünlüklü pazarlama iletişimi tekniklerinin stratejik bir şekilde kullanması gerekmektedir. Bütünlüklü pazarlama iletişim en genel anlamıyla; reklam, doğrudan pazarlama, olay pazarlaması, satış noktası etkinlikleri, sponsorluk gibi pekçok etkili iletişim tekniklerini bir sinerji halinde, tek ses tek görüntü oluşturacak şekilde kullanarak tüketici veya müşterileri doğrudan veya dolaylı yolla, tutum ve davranışlarını değiştirme ve istenen yönde bir hareket yapmalarını teşvik etme çabasıdır. Kısacası, promosyonel ve non-promosyonel unsurların stratejik bileşkesini oluşturmaktır.

Her kurumda alınan üç önemli karar vardır. Bunlardan ilki **kurumsal kararlar**, kurumun üst düzey yöneticilerinin aldığı kurumun vizyonu, genel hedefleri, insan kaynakları ile ilgili kararlar, alınacak personel gibi kararları içerir. İkincisi **pazarlama kararları**, pazarda lider olarak konumlanmak, ne tür ürünlerin üretileceği konusunda kararlar almak, dağıtım kanalları, ürünün ambalajı ve fiyatı ile ilgili kararları içerir. Üçüncüsü ise **pazarlama iletişim kararlarıdır**, yani kurumda

üretilen bütün iletişim mesajlarının ilgili kitlelere duyurulmasıdır. Ne var ki, bir kurumda yapılan bu kadar çalışma ve alınan bu kadar karar mevcutken bütün bunları kontrol edecek bir mekanizmaya gereksinim duyulmaktadır. Bu noktada halkla ilişkiler teknik bir iletişim desteğinden öte bütün bu süreci kontrol edebilecek yönetim fonksiyonuna sahiptir. Bu bağlamda, çalışmanın temel amacı günümüzde pazarlama ve iletişimin ayrılmaz birer bütün olduğunu, yeni bir pazarlama yaklaşımı olan bütünleşik pazarlama iletişimi yaklaşımı ile açıklamaktır. Ayrıca çalışmanın ikinci bölümü bütünleşik pazarlama iletişimi sürecinin halkla ilişkilerin yönetimi ile bir kurum içinde nasıl daha sağlıklı işleyebileceğini göstermektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Pazarlama, bütünleşik pazarlama iletişimi, halkla ilişkiler.

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I. Introduction

Rapid growth in globalization and parallel transformations in the processes and practices of everyday life were the hallmark of the 1980s. During this period, developments in information and communication technologies emerged as the main component accelerating change. In many respects, these changes have brought about new relationships in and perceptions of the world where people can experience and respond to global events in their local environments. The main dynamic of the process of globalization is shaped by economic and market expectations,

where the process itself creates its own dynamic primarily in the need to protect the economy within national boundaries and within social and political movements.

Reflecting on these changes and their influences on life standards and style provides an excellent opportunity to rethink and re-define the field of marketing and the role of marketing in relationship to the fields of communication and media. More generally, it is possible to define marketing communication as a process whereby consumers are aided in the constituting of their attitudes and behaviors around the presentation of products or services. In other words, marketing communication can be understood as managing the product and services, decision-making process of consumers and potential consumers (Shimp, 1993).

The contemporary marketplace is an arena where products are difficult to differentiate one from another and it is in this area that the role of communication can be understood as crucial to a fully responsive field of marketing. In this light, the various forms and genres of traditional marketing techniques can be seen as a variety of 'forms of communication' that help to encourage and motivate the beliefs, desires and imaginations of potential consumers.

Actually, public relations provide the cohesion for each of these approaches and increasingly new approaches, including sponsorship marketing, relationship marketing, event marketing and issue-marketing; approaches that have their beginnings in the 90s and gradually took their place within the broader 'marketing mix'.

The partnership between communication and marketing started, in a strong sense, in the 90s and has accelerated in terms of both development and invigorated investigation of the field. An understanding has developed that it is impossible to execute marketing activities without marketing mix elements (the 4P's: product, price, place and promotion). In the center of today's marketing activities, communication is positioned as the basic component of value. One result of this new partnership has been the elaboration of the basic 'Four P' as much as 'Eight P', such as power, public relations, protection of the environment and politics (Hunt & Grunig, 1994). Thus, within this historical process we find provisional solutions to contemporary marketing problems.

This innovative perception of the interconnectedness of marketing and communication is pivotal to understanding the marketing processes and the major criteria influencing consumer attitudes and behaviors. With a focus on consumer-centered marketing (whereby increased knowledge of the consumer can positively influence the direction of marketing plans), the marketing mix elements can respond more efficiently to changes in the consumer market (Harris, 1998).

Currently, the only distinctive features that a marketer can offer consumers is an 'idea' about the company, product or service and a way of thinking about a brand. The only place where the value of a real product or brand can be placed is inside the potential consumer's mind because product planning, pricing, distribution, usefulness of the product

and all other marketing variables can be copied, duplicated or alerted by competitors (Kotler, 1991).

This study is going to investigate one of the new marketing approaches, called integrated marketing communication (IMC), which has emerged to determine effects of globalization, the global economy and intensive competition. This study will also explore the difficulties that the approach has faced within the strategic planning and implementation process. Last but not least the new mission of public relations regarding the solutions of IMC problems is going to be investigated.

II. The Concept and Definition of Integrated Marketing Communications

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) starts with the customer database and sets out the necessary forms and methods based on the effective communication programs. The aim of IMC is to affect behavior, either directly or indirectly, making IMC both a continuum as well as a concept. Therefore, IMC has also been defined as the 'discipline,' 'orchestration,' 'single voice,' 'coordination' and 'integration' of all the different efforts regarding marketing communications.

The American Advertising Agencies Association defines IMC as an integrating concept in achieving communication at its most effective level that analyzes the strategic roles of different communication methods like advertising, public relations, direct marketing and sales management

together with leaving these methods open as being based on a wide content (Bozkurt, 2000).

In the most general sense, the IMC approach can be defined as the following: IMC is the process of orchestrating all the different decisions made by the organizations by considering the communication level through strategic planning and synergy. It is the process where the decisions are applied to the consumer's database and can affect their buying behavior (Duncan, 1993).

Characteristics common to all definitions of IMC can be summarized as the following:

- Planning and integration of all communication tools with the marketing mix.
- Using technology effectively.
- Focusing on customer loyalty and affecting consumer preferences.
- A structure based on the individual buying behaviors of the target audience.
- Directly affecting the buying behavior.
- Being measurable.
- Creating an interactive communication period.
- Planning and implementation on the basis of a database.
- Strategic planning of all the communication outputs of the organization (Caywood, 1997).

III. The Role of the Communication in Marketing

Nowadays, competition is the most remarkable issue both domestically and globally. Small companies, large corporations and conglomerates are competing for the customer's money. But in order to gain the customer's loyalty, these companies must first gain a share of the customer's mind and heart. They must know how to build strong consumer awareness and relationships.

That is why we believe communication is rapidly becoming the major marketing force of today and certainly tomorrow. If we think for a moment about traditional marketing, we begin to realize that almost all the marketing techniques and approaches that we have used up until today are essentially some form of communications. For example, the product design distribution channels, sales promotion and product packaging are all in one way or another, a form of communication.

The same is true with distribution channels and with pricing. Indeed, all marketing is communication and almost all communication can be seen as marketing. If we look at the development of product or service, we see that almost everything the marketer does is related with communication or provide some form of communication to customers and prospects, from the design of the product through the packaging and the distribution channel selected. These product contacts communicate something about the value and the person whom the product is designed for.

It is obvious that the advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing and public relations programs are forms of customer prospects' communication. Even, how often the product has been purchased and the kind of customer service that is provided has a great deal of communication power among purchasers. In short, marketing in the 1990's is communication. Both marketing and communication are inseparable and it is for this reason that the proper integration of all marketing messages is very important.

1. How Does Integrated Marketing Communications Work

Most consumers initially absorb information in bits and pieces; they then put these fragments of information together in the type of brand, category or usage network. The critical issue for most marketers is how to control the input of information that consumers use to build, adjust and maintain the product/service/brand concepts in the marketer's category. The basic reason for integrated marketing communication has been the only sustainable competitive advantage of marketing organizations and will continue to be in the future. The marketer can control only a limited amount of the total information that actual and potential customers gather and process about products or services.

Since consumers process information using a judgment approach, what the marketer says about a product or service must fit with what is already stored in the customer's mind or is received from outside sources.

2. Understanding Information Processing

Information processing consists of 3 main stages:

a. The first processing step is the sensory register:

- The person aggregates the sounds, symbols and sensations.
- The sensory register holds the information for short periods of time or for future processing.
- It alerts higher brain centers.

b. The second stage of information processing is the short-term memory store (STS). Information is held temporarily in STS for consumer judgments. This judgment can be accepted or rejected, because STS is a very active memory and has very limited capacity.

c. The third stage of information processing is the long-term store (LTS). This is the last stage, called the mind, which contains all the information a person has processed throughout his/her life (Schultz, Tannenbaum & Lauterborn, [1995], p.33).

As it can be seen, first of all consumers select information from the outside environment, they then hold the information for a short period in order to decide acceptance or rejection. Lastly, if the information is useful, consumers store it in the long-term memory.

The real reason for the need of integrated marketing communications programs is the result of what we have learned and what we are still learning about how humans select, take in, process and store information, as well as experiences and how they use this information in

making future purchasing decisions. This process has a number of names, but for simplicity we will call it information processing.

There are two major factors in the broad system of information processing. The first is the concept of perception; how we select, process and store information in memory. The second is directly related with how to access, add and use the information that we have previously stored. Because the number of sensations in our environment is so much greater than our ability to process them, we select only those things that we perceive to be important and we ignore those that aren't.

In other words, we transform the sight, sounds and sensations around us and put them into a kind of sensible form we call concept, which can be stored in our memory. From these concepts, we then create categories. The categories enable us to further classify and store information. For instance, the category of travel may contain multiple concepts such as a vehicle, loading, meals, other people cultures and so on. Through the transformation and categorization process, we are able to store relatively large amounts of data and information in our mind with only few concepts and categories.

IV. The Messages Created by Organizations as a Source

Consumers perceive the various activities of the message source with a single perception method, thus developing their acts, tendencies and buying behavior within this structure.

The consumers get and perceive the messages related to the product, service or pricing from different marketing communication activities such as advertising, public relations, personal selling, sales promotion, packaging, trade fairs, and from distribution channels. Therefore, they make their decisions by considering the messages and creating their own tendencies. The creation of messages that do not compliment each other from different sources have negative impacts on the purchasing decisions of consumers.

Organizations are in constant relationship with their environment. During this relationship there are numerous messages that are sent by the organizations to the environment. However, the organizations are unable to control all of those messages in terms of their goals and aims. The rate of the messages that the organizations are unable to control, are significantly higher than the controllable ones. Generally as Duncan (1993) has stated the messages that the organizations create can be defined under four categories:

1. Planned Messages: Covers all of the communication activities that an organization is willing to be involved in with its target audience. The marketing communications messages like advertising, public relations, sales promotion, trade fairs, direct marketing, the product or the service itself and point of purchase can be listed under the category of planned messages.

2. Perceived Messages: These messages are explained as the efficiency and the effects of the planned messages of the organization on

the target audience. In other words, this is the inability to create the desired perception of the planned messages on the consumers due to wrong timing, wrong media, wrong target audience or wrong message content. For example, the emphasis on cheap price can create the perception of low quality.

3. Carried Messages: These are the messages that are carried out by the employees in their interactions with the customers. Carried messages are the combination of all the non-intentional messages that result from various sources such as word of mouth and rumors. The manager's behavior and statements to the media, the behavior of salespeople and the service providers after the sales are some examples under the category of carried message.

4. Unplanned Messages: The events that occur outside the control of the organizations and the messages that are the outcomes of these events can be listed within this group. The reports that are placed in the media about the organizations or about their brands, the announcements of non-profit organizations about consumer rights, the organized actions of environmental groups about the organization and its products, the relations with trade unions and its reflections in the media can be given as examples.

This situation that resulted from the classical marketing communications approach creates various difficulties both for the organizations and the target audiences. This is mainly because, even for a

single product or brand, numerous messages with independent, united or even conflicting meanings are created and sent to the consumers.

Considering all those intense message bombardments from each firm in the market, it can be realized how difficult it is for the consumers to choose one product or brand. At the same time, the possibility to create a product or brand difference becomes equally difficult for the companies.

V. The Relationship between the Organizational Decisions and Messages

Integrated marketing communications take a systematical approach to the organizational decisions. Different decisions making up the organizational communication are created at different management levels and each decision made by the previous level describes the application style and content of a next decision.

With this approach it is possible to collect decisions that make up the organization under three main groups. If the organization can make these decisions in a harmonious way that they support each other, the most important barrier of integration will disappear. Consequently, the confusion because of message differentiation which is defined above can also disappear.

The integrated marketing communications approach considers all of the decisions made by the organization as also being messages to the consumers, thus it tries to support the harmony and coherence between

these decisions (Sirgy, 1998). The decisions grouped under these categories can be presented as follows:

1. Organizational Decisions: The most definite decisions taken by the organization are organizational decisions as all other decisions are based on these. The organizational decisions taken by the higher management define the visions of the institution or organization, because they indicate the general goals. In other words, the organizational decisions contain the decisions that predict in which position the organization will be in the next 5-10 years.

Some of the organizational decisions are: the development of the goals of the organization, the investments that are going to be made for human resources, hiring new employees, tendencies about new investment areas, buying new machines, total quality or production and marketing based on national and international standards, decisions about corporate identity, organizational image and organizational culture, entrance into new markets, opening up to public etc.

2. Marketing Decisions: Contains the decisions about the implementation of the decisions taken by the higher management about general development and market shares. Consider an organization with the goal of becoming the leader of the market; here marketing decisions define the decisions that can be taken for the achievement of this goal. The marketing decisions, in the most common sense, contain the marketing mix. These are the decisions related with the definition of what kind of products and services can be provided, decisions related with the

channels of distribution and marketing decisions about pricing, promotion or sales management.

3. Marketing Communications Decisions: The marketing communication decisions take place after defining the marketing decisions taken by the higher management of the organization; this is done in order to realize the general goals and objectives of organizational decisions. The marketing communications decisions contain all of the decisions taken by the organization for the transmission of the communication messages that can create positive attitudinal changes on the target audiences about the organization.

The marketing communication decisions are actually the most concrete, visible and measurable supplements of all the organizational and marketing decisions, since all the decisions taken in the organization are targeted toward the internal and external environment of the organization. Some of the marketing communications decisions are: advertising, public relations, personal selling, direct marketing, mailing, trade fairs, and promotional activities related with sales management, etc.

The integrated marketing communications approach is based on the centralized strategic planning and implementation of all the decisions made by professionals, about the goals and objectives of the organization. The approach also allows the control and measurement of all the messages produced either consciously or unconsciously by the organization, a development that was impossible to apply in traditional marketing systems.

VII. Difficulties facing Integration and the Role of Public Relations in the Integration Process

The restructuring of public relations as a management function is dependent on the structural and functional changes that it has gone through. This change has made it possible for public relations to take over a strategic mission in the planning and coordination process of integrated marketing communication (Richman, 1991). There is a parallel correlation between the increasing value of communication within marketing and the increasing value of public relations within the organization. Therefore, inside the organization, the communication support that is vital for marketing is maintained by public relations because it knows the communication discipline best (Hendrix, 1992). Nowadays, with their ability and knowledge about marketing and communications, it is not a luxury to place public relations professionals at the top-level executive positions of organizations, but an obligation (Harris, 1998).

The public relations model offered for the IMC approach in this study is based on the criteria below (Bozkurt, 2000):

1. All the problems that emerge as obstacles to the process of integration, result from the lack of strategic planning and coordination. Public relations can solve this problem in the institutional structure.
2. In the implementation process, IMC is faced with some difficulties such as; the new constructions that can perform the task of management, resistances against organizational change,

budget expenditure, rotation of authority and anxiety about the loss of expertise within the organization. Public relations that is tied to the higher levels of management within the organization as well as its communication and management infrastructure (MPR, Pro-active, Re-active and CPR) can dissolve all these resistances without the need for new structural formations.

3. In such a competitive environment to perform only profit oriented marketing activities, while disregarding social responsibility and the creation of social benefits principles, can be considered to be main weaknesses of organizations. The basic criteria of public relations in developing the organizations' relations with the internal and external environment can solve this problem.
4. Public relations, starting from the principles of social benefit and transparency, accept ethical criteria as a basis in marketing communications, as well as in other organizational activities. The national and international public relations organizations constantly set standards concerning this issue and check the obedience to these standards.
5. According to the IMC approach, all the decisions made by the organization have a communication and message dimension, therefore there is a necessity to think in a consumer oriented way and carry out public relations to the higher levels of the

management of the organization, because of the communications knowledge and skills it has.

6. In the IMC approach, where the organization in general is perceived as a source of communication, the realization of consumers' attitudes and behaviors toward the organization and its brand is possible only through the pro-active approaches and the techniques and methods of public relations.
7. Public relations, by evolving structurally and functionally has become one of the basic functions of management. On the basis of its aims and activities, public relations has become the communications unit which is closest to the organizational top level. Therefore, public relations lies at the starting point of the strategic planning of IMC.
8. IMC defines the vision of the organization related to its future by looking at the organization from a general perspective. As all decisions of the organization related to marketing and marketing communication has to be agreed upon by all the functions making up the organization, public relations develops the communication channels within the organization.
9. During the strategic planning of IMC process, implementation task of each of the corporate, marketing and marketing communication decisions based on the aims, goals, strategies, tactics, budget and evaluation are either directly realized by public relations, or by external independent PR agencies, which

are under the coordination of the public relations department of the organization.

10. The achievements of public relations activities inside the organizational structure in relation to total quality, corporate culture, corporate image, human resources management and crisis management, constitute the main framework of IMC activities.

Conclusion

When we look at the applications in the field of public relations up to the present day, it is possible to see that the functions of marketing themselves have also played a role in the construction of the public relations discipline. The changing trends in the organizational and market environment create a possibility for the public relations discipline to restructure itself as a management function. Moreover, the needs for communicating a message to the public or the customer in a specific format and through a specific media have also provided an opportunity for the public relations discipline to restructure itself. When we look at the issue from this perspective, it can be said that public relations has changed both structurally and functionally and is located at the center of organizational management and the decision making processes.

Public relations has experienced a great progress from the time it started to restructure itself as a part of the organizational decision making process to the present today. This indicates that integrated marketing

communications has improved in the direction of public relations. Using customer databases in an increasing manner as well as advertisements, direct marketing and sales promotions are tasks that should be done inside the organization, also the fulfillment of the social responsibilities are the common aims of public relations professionals. The strategic structuring of this process as well as informing and coordinating the responsible people in the implementation phases are the duties that need to be performed by public relations within the organization.

Corporate Public Relations (CPR) and Marketing Public Relations (MPR) where its sub divisions are pro-active and re-active public relations practices are also seen as the new dimensions and specializations of public relations. In the integrated marketing communication approach, these kinds of different communication techniques give the opportunity to plan everything strategically and inside the organization (Harris, 1998). In recent years, as there has been an increase in confusion of communication messages, this approach will provide an opportunity both to control all of the communication messages and to decrease the resistance for change, either inside the organization or its environment.

Public relations is not an invention that has been recently created but is an essential component of any organization whether small or multinational, social or commercial. Public relations is an essential tool of communication during times of change and especially where new and unexpected pressures arise in any business environment, without it there

would be misunderstandings and lack of unity between sectors. The IMC approach has proven to be an essential component of contemporary business applications, as it has the ability to fully integrate marketing and communications activities in a commercial environment that is becoming more and more fragmented all over the world due to globalization. Database marketing and integrated marketing communications are ideal tools in today's extremely competitive markets. The concept of integrated marketing communications is often seen by most organizations that employ the strategy as having a competitive advantage over other organizations that do not make use of the sophisticated method.

Today, integrated marketing communications is seen as the uniting element in institutions and organizations of any shape or size, even the smallest company needs a method of relating to their audience or various internal or external publics in an informed and synergized manner. The modern capitalist systems relies on market-oriented economies on a more international scale than in the past, this is why the integrated marketing communications approach has a new commitment to promote long term mutual understanding and shape organizational reputation at every level of the organization's structure. Although markets and public relations are not always in agreement because public relations usually satisfies human relationships and social responsibility rather than profit making, it is important for the approach to create a balance between today's modern economic system and social benefit. The new role of IMC in today's information driven environment builds vital communication

bridges globally between the organization and each individual stakeholder no matter where or who they are.

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