

UNCONVENTIONAL METHODS OF MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

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Abstract

In the era of an information revolution customers come in contact with huge numbers of marketing messages in their everyday lives. This leads to so called, information noise, which may result in many messages going unnoticed. Thus marketing managers are forced to search for more effectively ways of getting customers' attention and are more willingly to use unconventional promotional methods based on using original forms or places in an effort to create the element of surprise and make their message more eye-catching for the targeted audience. This kind of move tends to evoke strong emotions, motivating readers to pass the message on. Creating such a buzz around brand name would also enhance the campaign's effect. Unfortunately, this form of communication also brings with it some negative effects due to controversial or taboo topics connected with sensitive social issues. An analysis of the advertising methods used by the owners of the most powerful Polish brands shows that there is some evidence of the use of such methods in Poland. Nevertheless unconventional advertising methods are not a commonly used practice.

Keywords: *unconventional promotion, ambient marketing, guerilla marketing, outdoor, Polish brands.*

1. Introduction

In this time of globalization and the information revolution clients face huge amounts of information in their everyday life. According to statistics the American customer sees from 3000 to even 5000 promotional messages a day (Story 2007). Although the data comes from the American market, it is highly probable that the statistics would be only slightly lower also for Poland. Radio and TV stations, press, Internet services, face-to-face or phone conversations with sellers or friends, post, or e-mails are only few examples of sources of information for the customer. Their variety can cause information noise, which makes noticing and concentrating on each message separately impossible. As a result, some messages may be forgotten, neglected or unnoticed by the

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audience. Customers are hereby forced to filter incoming information and concentrate only on the most important or the most interesting ones.

Producers wanting to attract the attention of potential or actual customers to their message must search for attractive and unusual ways of making contact. If their message differs from conventional promotion methods in its controversial or unusual form, it becomes more eye-catching for the audience. Producers try, therefore, to surprise readers with original forms of messages or by posting their messages in unusual places. Organizing promotion efforts makes missing the message less probable and facilitates its memorization. On the other hand, the need for constant surprise, often related to controversial subjects producing extreme emotional reactions can lead to brand image destruction. This might be the reason why not all the companies decide to use such methods, but prefer conventional ways of promoting their brands.

Hence, the issues arise concerning, whether the customer's surprise is perceived as an indispensable element for this type of promotional activity, whether the promotion should be unconventional in order for the customer to remember the message or whether it really is an effective method of promotion; or even concerning the idea of imposing this method of contact with customers on all companies.

The purpose of the article is to address, among these issues, the issue of whether owners of the most powerful Polish brands prefer to use unconventional methods of promotion, or with the threat of destroying the brand image, they prefer a more conservative approach to promotion. The article also makes an attempt to answer the question whether some unconventional marketing promotion practices used with success in the European Union and the United States can also be used on the Polish market.

2. Changes in the character of promotional activities

The traditional promotion-mix set of tools consists of five basic elements: advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, public relations, and direct marketing. The speedy development of new communication techniques has created new communication possibilities and thus new promotional methods using tools not included in the set. The new elements included in the promotion-mix are event and experience marketing, word-of-mouth, and interactive marketing (Kotler, Keller, 2012, p. 512). All the new elements are based on multilevel, horizontal communications taking place not only between company and its customers (one-to-many or one-to-one communication) but mainly between the customers themselves (many-to-many). The purpose is to create more direct contact with the clients, providing them with unique feelings and emotions in relation to the brand or the company.

Interactive marketing is based on internet services and applications on the web used to attract surfers to a particular brand. Interactive marketing is, therefore, a combination of all the activity and programs in the internet whose purpose is to engage customers in interaction with the goal of improving brand image or raising the level of sales. Forms of communication in such marketing activity are web pages, banners, SEO, emailing and mobile marketing. A good example is JibJab, an American Internet Media Company, creating original e-cards, and a place where a customer can place his own picture and send a funny movie to his friends. This application, offered to users for free, has made the company word famous (<http://www.jibjab.com>).

Event marketing is based on the assumption that emotions related to the message or the brand are the main factor the memorization process and brand image creation. A message that does not evoke any emotions will be neglected and forgotten by the customer. Emotions stimulate persuasion, information processing and customer opinion of the brand (Edell, Burke, 1987; Holbrook, Batra, 1987; Ruth 2001). They also significantly influence the decision taken by customers (Shapiro, Spence 2002) as learning by experience appears to be more attractive for the customer (Hoch 2002). The key to effective promotion is therefore bringing forth an emotional reaction in the customer.

A good example of this kind of approach is an Axe commercial where during the Woman Running Races in Denmark, a man wearing an Axe T-shirt and having used the Axe antiperspirant was running in front of 6,000 woman participating in the race, and they actually seemed to be chasing him.

The significance of the flow of unofficial information was noticed by marketing specialists many year ago and by the XXI century, due to the information revolution, this phenomenon began to develop on a scale never before seen. The quick development of communication techniques, making the exchange of information fast, easy and cheap, increased the role of such type of communication and convinced marketing specialists that such promotions could prove to be a more effective way of promotion than one-to-one methods. Word-of-mouth is based on the assumption that people trust someone belonging to the same community and with similar tastes. Research shows that unofficial one-to-one communication is a more effective way of influencing customers' decisions than traditional promotion methods (Godes, Mayzlin, 2004). It helps the company to attract new customers as well as to create customers' loyalty (Trusov, Bucklin, Pauwels 2009). This special role has been taken up by brand enthusiasts – customers really attached to the brand, and wanting to actively participate in brand promotion and the spreading of information. Due to their involvement, a promotional message gets transferred on to others with little effort by the company.

All the additional promotion-mix elements concentrate on creating a buzz around a brand, a company or a product. Their purpose is to create a positive attitude in customers, making them more willing to share their opinions, feelings and thoughts about a product with others. By evoking such positive feelings and reaction, the company starts a chain reaction where customers promote the brand themselves.

The plurality of marketing communication instruments together with the changes caused by the information revolution, increased the role of integration of marketing efforts. The variety of promotion tools can increase the effectiveness of promotion efforts, under the condition that all the actions create a consistent entirety (Quessenberry, Coolsen, Wilkerson 2012). The true challenge for marketing personnel is to integrate the use of all the tools; a task which can be especially hard in the situation where they can have no control over the way and form the message is spread. The problem here also is what to do to make people talk or feel strong positive emotions towards a brand.

3. Forms and success premises of unconventional promotional methods

Effectiveness of advertising in the traditional media (television, or radio) is declining simultaneously with companies' expenditures on advertising. This fact is visible especially now, in times of an economic slowdown, and concerns mainly press advertising (Szewczyk, 2013). The main exception to the rule is Internet advertising, which with the possibility to use interactive marketing techniques, is expected to grow by 7,5% in the 2013 (Baranowska-Skimina, 2013). It is already ranked third among higher advertising expenditures – after TV and press advertising (MPG Media Market Scan, za: Skocz 2011).

Due to the decreasing effectiveness of traditional advertising, companies seem to be more willing to look for alternative ways of marketing promotions concentrated on higher customer engagement in marketing activities (Carter, 2008). This has led to the creation of the Network Coproduction Model based on the assumption that not only the company should be responsible for creating and sending the messages concerning the brand (Kozinets, de Valck, Wojnicki, Wilner 2010). The key to the success of such promotion methods is to create interest and induce customers to promote the brand among themselves. Producers use different methods in such word-of-mouth advertising. Sometimes it is done through typical promotion efforts such as TV advertising, but it is also possible that a company uses some unconventional promotion methods. In the article the emphasis will be placed on unconventional methods used to reach set promotion effectiveness.

The problem seems to be as unconventional as the character of the methods themselves as it is hard to define precisely what kind of promotion

should be called, “unconventional”. The problem is related first of all with difficulties with systemizing all unconventional forms of promotions. They can take astonishing forms, not falling into any officially existing category of division. The next problem is related strictly with the definition of the term “unconventional”. According to the Thesaurus, “unconventional” means very different, odd. But different from what, or who, and what kind of activities should be considered as odd? Although these are questions to consider in terms of the effectiveness of promotion efforts, there seems to be no precise answer to the question in literature.

Similar to this problem are the ideas of ambient and guerilla communications. The main idea of these two is quite similar– to use unconventional methods of communication with customer. The former is defined as ‘a complex form of corporate communication that uses elements of the environment, including nearly every available physical surface, to convey messages that elicit customer engagement’ (Gambetti, 2010). Ambient is also defined as alternative media, different from TV, press, radio or internet. These are all unconventional actions taken with the use of classic as well as other communication channels (Hatalaska, 2002) . Despite the fact that the definitions are quite similar, there is a huge disproportion in categorizing the tools of ambient marketing. Some authors suggest that they use 3 types of media: classic print media, the artifacts-based media, motion-based interactive media (Tab. 1).

Table 1. Types of ambient communication media

Type of action	Media
Classic print media	In unexpected form, using public space <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • new high-tech billboards, • classic street furniture (bus-stop, sign poles), • new street furniture (stickering, multisensory bus shelters, unusual surfaces, • such as escalators, travelators, gas pumps, • classic transit advertising (sides, backs and interiors of buses, trams,etc), • new transit advertising (décor dynamics, brand buses, and brand trucks), • promotional street art (as graffiti), • naming rights advertising surfaces.
The artifacts based media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • objects positioned in unusual, out-of-place contexts and used as advertising tools, • plastic cups, hand bags, furnishings, footwear, bottles, pens, magnets, key rings, bicycles, cars, balloons, etc,

Motion-based interactive media	<p>stimulating consumers' active participation, often starts on the internet as social sharing viral content on web social networks (YouTube, Facebook). They involve people in a single location or in a limited number of squares and busy thoroughfares.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>event-products</i> that can be unique, and spectacular, interactive posters (e.g., touchscreen panels, or take-away posters), • <i>people-animated panels</i> –performed with active participation of people, • <i>event-actions</i>- unconventional promotional initiatives that involve people and employ urban.
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Source: on the basis of R.C. Gambetti (2010).

Other concepts of ambient marketing, despite defining them as an “unconventional” form of marketing, are the use of print media, transit advertising, public space advertising and mobile media. In this context ambient is defined as a part of ‘out-of-home’ advertising, aimed at making customers think, and helping to distinguish the message from the competitors (Radziszewska-Manikowska, Radzińska, Walczak, 2012). The disproportion shows that such a communication concept is still a developing phenomenon and, because of its unconventionality, still poses some definitional and categorizational problems.

Guerilla marketing was created by J.C. Levinson in 1984 (Levinson, 1984). The concept is based on performing communication activities at low cost but with maximum effects. It was created for small and medium enterprises, which do not manage huge budgets. Guerilla marketing uses small, short-term and astonishing actions based on imagination and creativity of the authors. This kind of activities is based on three elements: surprise, low costs and diffusion (Hutter, Hoffmann 2011). The purpose is to create a buzz with no excessive increase in promotion costs. The message should lead to an increase in customers’ engagement, by making them actively participate or being witness to the event. It should be convincing and support the brand image.

Unconventional promotion methods should not, therefore, be limited to only these two concepts, which in fact are related mainly to the use of public spaces. Unconventional communication methods can be used in each of the promotion –mix elements. They can be related to sales promotions – for example a surprising gift offered to the customer at the time of purchase (Canan, Pinar, Celal, Sinan 2010) as well as with direct marketing – by the use of unconventional content of a message sent directly to the customer. Unconventional communication methods should, thus, be understood as a feature that is given to different marketing promotion actions. It encompasses all kinds of communications that bring the element of surprise to the customer,

and that break the unofficial rules of promotion in a sector. As mentioned previously, unconventional methods concentrate on creating a buzz around a brand by evoking customer emotions. They are very often the first element in marketing.

Despite bringing a lot of the above mentioned advantages, unconventional methods of promotion can also bring some negative results. First, unconventional actions break the rules typical for a sector. Organizing a promotion of this manner can be risky because the final result – the way it is perceived by audience – can be extremely different than anticipated. Due to the fact that unconventional promotions methods are related mainly with public spaces, they can be perceived as an act of vandalism as they change the look of certain public locations, especially when they happen without the acceptance of the owner (like stickering). One example here would be a promotion in Poznan called, ‘Thin, white line’. The action was to promote three pubs: Meskal, Dragon and Meskalina. The idea was to draw a white line combining the three pubs on the pavement in the city of Poznan. This was perceived by some people as an act of vandalism, even though there were many positive artistic elements to it (Cienka Biała Linia).

Another aspect is related with public perception. Such an unusual action may be perceived not just as something negative and unsuitable evoking extremely negative emotions or something leading to brand image delusion, but as something original. Gambetti suggests that in order to make such actions effective the company should concentrate on three fields (Gambetti, 2010):

- customer-related factors – the communication should highlight the value creation process, importance of consumption and its hedonistic aspect. The message not align to the expectations and beliefs of the target audience will evoke fear, anger or sadness (Hyman, Tansey, 1990),
- media-related factors – the company should follow the technologic and social changes, and rethink its media-mix as well as the economic weighting of the various media,
- company related factor – which refers to basing the brand image creation on an integrated mix of old and new media.

Despite meeting this requirement, a problem can also arise concerning disproportion between various target audience’s perception such as between teenagers and other groups such as seniors. The assessment of such an action depends on the level of tolerance, openness to ‘the new’, and a willingness to accept such unconventional ways of communication.

An important problem is also related with creativity and originality, elements necessary for such actions to work. All the activities have to be unconventional and unusual. The renewed message will not be as attractive for the customer as the first one and will not be met with such enthusiasm.

What is more, repeating the same method will cause the loss of its impact on the target audience (Darke, Ritchie 2007) as there continues to exist the necessity of continuously finding new methods of promotion.

The measure of effectiveness of such unconventional actions also poses some problems to managers related mainly to:

- unconventionality of such activities that makes this kind of action easy to qualify into any known categories,
- the need of promotion integration which makes it difficult to divide the benefits coming from each of the promotion tools. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that the spreading of these messages constitutes a sign of effectiveness in reaching the target,
- the multiplicity of purposes of such campaigns,
- uniqueness – something requiring special effectiveness measures created especially for the need of the particular campaign (Radziszewska-Manikowska, Radzińska, Walczak, 2012).

4. The use of unconventional advertising methods by Polish brands

Unconventional promotion methods are commonly used in the USA and West European countries. Due to the information revolution, the flame of the most successful marketing actions quickly spread around the world and their descriptions or photos can be found on different marketing-related unofficial web pages, e.g. Axe effect guerilla marketing campaign (plodnyumysl, 2010) or in social networks concentrating rather on street and internet campaigns – like Street Nike campaign, and Cadbury chocolate on wykop.pl (Smith, 2011), a fact that proves how easily the spreading of such information on the internet occurs. Campaigns can be photographed easily outside and the picture send to other internet users. Event and experience marketing actions whose purpose is to create emotion, are more difficult to spread around due to the fact that, even if recorded and placed on the net, they may be perceived just like any other movie evoking no special reaction. The campaign of the Swedish Army called, ‘Who cares’, encourages people to think of others by sacrificing their own time to replace a man sitting closed in a small box in the center of Stockholm. Although the event can be seen on YouTube (Swedish Armed Forces: Who Cares?), it is just another movie placed on the webpage, and gives the customer no possibility to actively participate in the action.

Some examples of unconventional promotional actions can be noticed also in Poland. One of the most famous was the campaign of Heyah, carried out when the brand was marketed. The characteristic red hand appeared in public spaces (the roof of newsstands and on pavements), leading people to

discuss the idea and meaning. A brand that is also famous for its unconventional promotional methods in Poland is the Ikea brand, which organized many events and outdoor campaigns using public space. For example, a tram furnished with Ikea furniture was driving around Poznan with the opening of a tramway line leading to an Ikea shop on Franowo. Passengers could travel in comfortable conditions, sitting on sofas with cushions, at the tables covered with colorful tablecloths, and windows with curtains from Ikea (*Tramwaj Ikea wozi za darmo na Franowo*). Another example is the Ikea bus stop designed by Ikea. Other example is the Oreo poster placed at the bus stop, that allows people to take a picture of themselves looking like they were wearing a white t-shirt (due to the mirrow effect), or Desperados – special music boxes, placed at bus stops, letting people to ‘join the party’ by plugin in their own headphones and listening to the music.

Observation of Polish brand promotion methods as well as the analysis of literature encourage us to formulate the hypothesis that unconventional advertising methods are methods of promotion commonly used by the most powerful Polish brands. The changes in the character of communication, and the decreasing effectiveness of promotion efforts is also forcing Polish companies to use more unique and buzz-creating methods of advertising. The hypothesis seem to support the fact that unconventional promotion methods (such as ambient) can be successfully used in all sectors and markets (Radziszewska-Manikowska, Radzińska, Walczak, 2012).

The subject of research was the method of promotion used by the most powerful Polish brand names with special interest to unconventional advertising campaigns. In the research the author concentrates only on one aspect of unconventional promotion methods – unconventional advertising. All the other unconventional aspects used in relation to other promotion-mix element (e.g. direct marketing, public relations, or event and experience marketing) will not be examined. The research therefore concentrates on unconventional aspects of advertising campaigns carried out by the owners of the most powerful brands.

Fifteen most powerful Polish brands were chosen for the research. Although in this time of globalization it can be problematic to answer the question of what kind of brand should be considered to be ‘Polish’, in the articles it was stated that Polish brands are those created in Poland regardless of who owns the brand. Thus, Polish brands taken over by the foreign capital are still treated as Polish.

A powerful brand is defined as one evoking such strong associations in the customers’ mind, that they create a differentiation effect on customers’ responses to the companies’ efforts (Keller, 1993). The method of brand power evaluation is questionable, but this issue has not been addressed in

this article. Based on assumptions, fifteen of the strongest Polish brands were chosen – ranked according to the most powerful (not the most valuable) Polish brands ‘Polska Marka’ 2011. The list therefore consists of 15 brands: Wedel, Winiary, Pudliszki, Lubella, TVN, Sokolow, Tymbark, Allegro, Hortex, Apart, Koral, Biedronka, Zywiec Zdroj, TVN, Bacoma (*Ranking Sily Marki*, 2011). The fact that they were placed on the list confirms the abilities of their managers to use marketing tools (promotion here included) in a successful way. Promotional campaigns were examined in order to find any aspects of unconventional methods of advertising. The research were based on the assumption that such unconventional methods of promotion would not remain unnoticed by the audience, and would create a buzz. In the research only secondary data were used. The studies were based on an analysis of literature as well as official data from company (internal publications, web pages, official fun pages). Another source of information were the most common social media in Poland – Facebook and YouTube. In this case the research was based on search results of a brand name and reaction analysis (measured by number of comments, “like it”, character of comment, and numbers of people mentioning the campaign). The problematic issue in the analysis was to create a method of analyzing such data because the information presented on the web takes several forms (from ‘liking it’, through sharing, to presenting comments and opinion). The problem of such a data analysis has not been clearly resolved by marketing practitioners, who are continuously searching for new, more effective methods in the field.

The majority of analyzed brands – eleven out of 15 – were related with FMCG, one with jewelry, two with media and the last one was an internet company. Having analyzed the advertising methods of those brands a high level of integration of promotion methods can be noticed. The companies integrated the forms of messages sent through different media – TV, radio, press, outdoor and internet in order to create a consistent image of the brand. All the brands were using all kinds of traditional advertising media, passing quite conventional messages in creating brand image. The companies were set on creating a community of users by encouraging them in different ways to get involve in communities or support one brand. A good example of this approach are campaigns by brands such as Winiary, Pudliszki, Lubella or Wedel.

The analyzed companies did not commonly use unconventional methods of advertising. Among the leaders in the field was Allegro, which was involved in many unconventional advertising actions when promoting the Allegro brand as well as its Foundation ‘All for the planet’. They concentrate on event marketing, for example, at events like the Woodstock festival. Although marketing of events is not the subject of the research it is worth noting because

many original advertising forms were used on the occasion; huge stages, balloons, posters, cars and so on. Allegro promoted the brand even with the use of a huge zeppelin balloon flying above main Polish cities. It also got involved in the advertising campaign 'AlleRogal' promoting traditional bagels of St Martin – a regional product produced only in Poznan. The campaign was based on posters placed on bus stops in Cracow and Warsaw, giving off the smell of a bagel.

Another example of a brand using surprising methods of advertising was the case of Zywiec Zdroj. The brand in the campaigns uses all kinds of media including outdoor advertising, which represents the most unconventional method of advertising from all the activities of the company. A good example of such unconventional activities is the 3-D billboard placed on the building in Warsaw, presenting a group of friends sitting at the table, eating salad and drinking Zywiec Zdroj, which, as opposed to the rest of the billboard, are in 3-D. Another example can be the scrolling billboard presenting puzzles with one stable element: a piece with the notice 'Zywiec Zdroj suits the dinner'.

TVN

The communications network, TVN, also used unconventional methods to promote one of its programs, 'You can dance'. Close to the bus stop where a poster was placed, a huge sticker was stuck to the pavement showing the audience the steps of a dance. RMF FM presented something similar to Allegro, but less controversial, using different events and presenting the company logo on cars, stands or balloons. One of the analyzed brands organized a city game in which the participants were to find the Wedel Easter Egg. This action was a typical example of event marketing which although falling into the category of unconventional methods, is not related with advertising.

In general, an analysis of advertising methods used by Polish brands suggests that advertising campaigns rather concentrate on the use of traditional, and less risky methods of promotion. Very controversial actions (evoking shock, fear or anger, making people think about serious issues) are not used by the most powerful brands. Unconventional promotional methods, although rarely used, tend to support the brands image and create positive feelings. In some cases a controversial modification of the original advertising could be found on YouTube, but it was not placed by the official company's channel. For that reason it is hard to verify its originality. This is a common case of viral marketing, where the element of success is not to relate the actions of the brand owner. In this case it is impossible to state the originality of the message and taking under consideration its character it is really hardly probable that it was done the company.

5. Conclusions

The research shows that using unconventional promotion methods is not a common practice for most powerful Polish brands, as it constitutes only a small piece of their advertising activities. Only a few examples of such actions can be stated in the research. Further research in the field should concentrate on establishing the reasoning behind the use of such practices. The most probable explanation at this stage of research on the basis of analyzed literature and the conducted research is:

- a fear of brand image delusion, as only the most powerful brands were used for the research.
- Polish society may not be ready for such unconventional methods resulting from a shorter advertising history than American and West-European societies,
- unconventional promotional methods are suitable for small and medium companies with less powerful brands,
- the lack of creativity for unconventional promotion campaigns.

Without any question, the motives inhibiting companies from using such methods should be analyzed.

The research also showed a wide disproportion in definitions of unconventional promotion methods. Despite the fact that it is not a new phenomenon there is still a lot a discussion among scientist and practitioners on the definition and the set of tools that should be qualified as unconventional. The increasing role of such practices in promotion can encourage further analysis of the problem.

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