
Advertising in Pandemic Times

Daniel Moise¹, Petruț Cristian Vasilache², Rusalca Velicu³ and Valentin Păuna⁴

¹⁾²⁾³⁾⁴⁾ *The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania.*

E-mail: moisedaniel@mk.ase.ro; E-mail: cristian@vpccparteners.ro

E-mail: rusalca.velicu@gmail.com E-mail: valentin.pauna@metro.ro

Please cite this paper as:

Moise, D., Vasilache P. C., Velicu, R., and Pauna, V., 2021, Advertising in Pandemic Times. In: R. Pamfilie, V. Dinu, L. Tăchiciu, D. Pleșea, C. Vasiliu eds. 2021. *7th BASIQ International Conference on New Trends in Sustainable Business and Consumption*. Foggia, Italy, 3-5 June 2021. Bucharest: ASE, pp. 81-85. DOI: 10.24818/BASIQ/2021/07/010

Abstract

Advertising is one key element for companies to transmit information to their stakeholders. Although the times and the uncertainty of the future are nowadays something very common, and what is much worse is that, the global economy must recover after the Pandemic. Entire economic sectors, like tourism, events, hotels, restaurants, cafes, transportation, spas, more precisely tourism sectors were affected and had not only to diminish their activities, but even to close down their businesses. Organizations still had to communicate with their audience. In this article, we propose a model of communication and the strategies that must be taken by companies in different fields, in order to transmit the message to their stakeholders. We also conducted a research to discover if the advertising in pandemic times has changed and in what manner and intensity. It is widely known that during economic crisis, the first department where the budget is diminished is the marketing budget. After conducting the research, we have discovered that organizations laid more emphasis on security, safety and protection as main communicational axe, although other companies transmitted the opposite, even showing that we can have the same “normal life” as before the pandemic. The majority of the respondents admire ads that present the normal life and ways of returning to the life before the pandemic, being more appreciated and watched. Ads can be very powerful, but at the same time, organizations must pay attention to the way the message is interpreted and decoded.

Keywords

advertising, ads, communication in pandemic times, consumer expectations.

DOI: 10.24818/BASIQ/2021/07/010

Introduction

The latest pandemic, on one hand, demonstrated that the medical and economy systems were not prepared to face such a virus that spread at such a high speed worldwide, but on the other hand, forced organizations to rethink (Tirtadarma and Darmo, 2020) and to accelerate the shift towards online. The shift towards online, was not (Bartikowski, Laroche and Richard, 2019) only regarding communication and advertising, but even to greater extent what regards logistics and the way customers can visualize the products, place an order and then being delivered to them. If, for some economic sectors like tourism, which were extensively affected due to travel restrictions, other sectors have flourished in this period. The sectors that had a greater expansion, regarding (Kim and Kim, 2020) their businesses, we can mention medical, pharmaceutical, biotechnologies sectors, as online platforms, companies producing hardware and software solutions, constructions and deliver companies. The times and the uncertainty of the future are nowadays something very common, as shocks (J.O.U.E., 2020) were transmitted in the logistic chains, due to the high demand for some type of products / services and diminished or even lack of the demand for others. In addition, and even worse than that, no one can say with certainty, or can predict when and how the global economy will recover (Pan, et al., 2021) after the Pandemic. Despite the fact that several vaccines were discovered and the majority of the countries started the inoculation of their population with different types of vaccines, the economic shocks and the macroeconomic major shifts are still going to appear. In addition, some of the main

factors that we have to bear in mind are not only due to the CoVid19 pandemic, but also those connected with the climate change. It is high time we took (Bae, et al., 2021) the proper development towards a truly sustainable and eco-friendly consumer behavior. To boot the adoption, lawmakers, governments, organizations and customers alike must converge to reach the ultimate stage of having zero footprint carbon dioxide emissions. The only issue here is of “not being too late”, as the planet is not ours, belongs to future generations.

Organizations, no matter if they had a boost, a decrease, or a constant demand for their products / services, still needed to communicate (Ewijk, et al., 2020) with their stakeholders.

Literature Review

Advertising still is (Vézina and Paul, 1997) one key element for companies to transmit information to their stakeholders and what is most important, it can change (Terblanche-Smit and Terblanche, 2010) the consumer behavior and perception towards the brands and even the organization itself. Although mass media advertising, especially the one that uses TV as a communication channel, tends to diminish in intensity and efficiency. This can be due to the decrease of number of people watching ads on TV, but in the same manner, the appearance of new forms of entertainment and the development of devices that enables TV audience to record, play, rewind and fast forwarding the TV shows will lead to the fact that many ads will remain unwatched. We might add that even, “zapping”- the ability to use the remote control to change the TV channels, had the same effect, but media planners managed to resolve that issue by planning to almost to seconds the ads transmitted through different TV channels. Marketers shifted (Kotler, Keller, 2016) towards communication through social media networks, entertainment, viral marketing, experiential and so on. Furthermore, companies started to manage customer portfolios instead of brand portfolios. Other companies are also appealing to corporate advertising in order to enhance the organizational image, but at the same time, to assume a position regarding a social cause or issue, and even to get direct involvement in reducing the risk of getting infected with CoVid. Corporate advertising was not always seen as a good strategy to appeal due to different factors as (Belch and Belch, 2018):

- The lack of interest from buyers;
- Costly form of self-indulgence in order to meet the egos of top management;
- The company is in some financial or public relations trouble;
- Seen like a waste of money, as they do not promote a brand, product or service, and the return of investment cannot be very easy to be monetized.

Since the pandemic started, many companies have appealed to this kind of advertising (Woolley, Donnell, and Worthington, 2020) in order to reassure the customers that the safety not only of their employees, but as well of the actual, potential customers, consumers and community is their top priority. The first impulse (He, Harris, 2020) of the companies is to reduce spending on marketing and especially on advertising, as it was the case in 2008, when the crisis was due to the economic turbulent environment. Nevertheless, the present crisis is even more complex, and the novelty consists, on one hand, of (Kedare, Kamble, Salunke, 2020) a medical crisis, followed by an economic one, and we might also add an environmental one. All of them can be considered of maximum high alert. Organizations have to activate Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR) strategies, and use (Severo, FerroDe Guimarães and Dellarmelin, 2021) them even at a larger scale than, they were used before. If companies take care of their customers, than profit will follow. Due to the pandemic, organizations should follow several strategies (Berger, 2021):

- Marketers should focus on their actual customers rather than attracting new ones, as the communication channels are already open and to reach their customers is more easily.
- Organizations have to lay more emphasis on digitalization and try to make the shift towards online.

- As promotion campaigns, discounts, deals, advertising and ads must become more personalized, organizations must use social media networks being easier to target the wanted and the right audience, in comparison with using the traditional mass media communications channels.

- Revise (Favier, et al., 2020) the entire all integrated marketing communication, not only the ads, advertising campaigns in order to see which ones are more efficient.

Adoption of appropriate advertising strategies can lead (Najafi-Ghobadia, Bagherinejad and Taleizadeh, 2021) to stakeholders’ engagement towards the brands and even the organization. We consider organizations, not only companies and NGO’s, but even political parties, as during the pandemic and the lockdowns, elections still took place. Being a good thing as gatherings, concerts, and different manifestations were not allowed, so the financial power was not seen as a crucial determinant of the results in some countries.

Marketers and advertising agencies, have to be (Jiménez-Sánchez, Ruiz and Margalina, 2020) very careful about the message transmitted. As shown above, it is a path never walked, on until now, with many unknown factors. To make things worse, people are more than sensitive these days. Some companies suffered not only the drop in sales, but even being on the point of closing down all the shops from some country markets, as in the case of H&M. Although sometimes it can be considered an exaggeration in interpretation. The power of stakeholders grew more and more, as the communication is not only unidirectional, is bidirectional, and furthermore, the message from audience can reach other stakeholders including authorities. Authorities that might take notice and react in the sense of starting an investigation and even heavily fining the company. Entire ads, marketing campaigns were withdrawn if the message, images, and acts, transmitted were considered inappropriate.

We propose an adapted AIEDA model, and as external threats, we consider CoVid19, climate change and sustainability. The audience of the message are started to arouse (Hussian, et al., 2021) interest in the moment when they lack control and want to search for more Intel. Regarding the evaluation perceived, consumers will take into account only the information they find it useful, and if the company was credible up to this point. The message must be constructed in such a manner that will trigger the desire to obey or to follow the indications. In addition, one the most important moments of the models regarding the action is to realize the purchase or to accept the main idea.

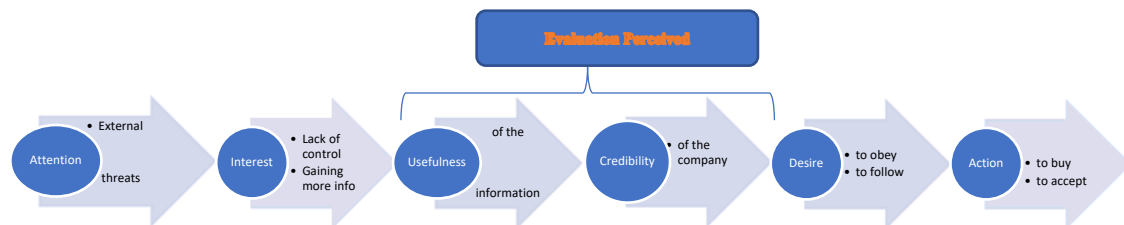


Figure no. 1. The AIEDA model

Source: adapted after A model of tourism advertising effects, 2021

Research methodology

From the model proposed, we have conducted a research among young adults, with ages between 19 – 24, students and master program students in order to discover what their preference towards advertising and ads is, laying emphasis on some examples and case studies. We want to see how the respondents perceive these case studies and examples.

Research findings

First, we wanted to discover what their opinion is towards the threats that humanity faces in this period: CoVid19 pandemic, Climate Change and sustainability. If Climate Change and sustainability are perceived like something that the organizations, and they include here not only NGO's, but governments and law makers, that must take immediate and drastic measures in order to overcome this threat. Among measures to be taken, they mentioned zero carbon emissions, the use of trains for short and medium distances, and investing in underground trains. One of the respondents addressed a very intriguing issue that a lot of money is invested in colonization of other planets like Mars, but not in resolving environmental problems.

Respondents were shown different case studies and ads as examples, companies like: Vel Pitar, Metro, NN insurance, Olympus, Help Net, Regina Maria, ASIROM, Edenia and others. The ads where the main characters wore masks, gloves and keep physical distancing, were more appreciated and in respect to the recommendations and measures made and taken by the authorities. These companies were considered more social responsible. The most debated examples were of Vel Pitar and Ryan Air, as they started a "tsunami" also online and not only. The controversial ad regarding Vel Pitar was the one showing that the company packages each loaf of bread separately from within the factory, without the interaction of humans, leading to diminish the possibility of spreading Coronavirus. While "Jab & Go" Ryan Air ad campaign begins with the message "vaccines are coming", after showing people in the ad not obeying the rules taken by almost all the countries in the world, like physical distance, wearing masks and gloves.

Conclusions

During national, international and worldwide crisis, companies must reassure their stakeholders that are all in together. In the same manner, the tone and time of launching an ad must be perfect and adapted to the fears and concerns of their stakeholders and trying to find a solution. Moreover, by not to giving the impulse and negative examples to their audience that it is all right to break the rules and disobey, leading to an unfortunate end.

Limitations of the research and future research. Quantitative research should be conducted and even marketing experiments, before launching ads, especially those that are going to be transmitted using the mass media channel TV.

References

- Bae, K.H., El Ghoul, S., Gong, Z. (Jason) and Guedhami, O., 2021. Does CSR matter in times of crisis? Evidence from the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Corporate Finance*, 67, Article number: 101876.
- Bartikowski, B., Laroche, M., Richard, M.O., 2019. *A content analysis of fear appeal advertising in Canada, China, and France. Journal of Business Research*, 103, pp.232-239.
- Belch, G.E. and Belch, M.A., 2018. *Advertising and Promotion an Integrated Marketing Communications Perspective*. New York: McGraw-Hill Education Publishing House.
- Berger, B., 2021. *6 Post-Pandemic Marketing Strategies With Long-Term Benefits*, [blog] Available at: <<https://www.wordstream.com/blog/ws/2020/10/27/post-pandemic-marketing-strategies>> [Accessed 14 March 2021].
- van Ewijk, B.J., Stubbe, A., Gijsbrechts, E. and Dekimpe, M.G., 2020. Online display advertising for CPG brands: (When) does it work? *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, Article number: S0167811620300628.
- Favier, V., Daniel, S.J., Braun, M. and Gallet, P., 2020. Medical Simulation: The Least Advertised and Most Versatile Weapon in Pandemic. *Frontiers in Medicine*, 7, Article number: 582150.
- He, H. and Harris, L., 2020. The impact of Covid-19 pandemic on corporate social responsibility and marketing philosophy. *Journal of Business Research*, 116, pp.176–182.

- Hussian, T., Choudhary, M., Budhwar, V. and Saini, G., 2021. COVID-19 pandemic: An era of myths and misleading advertisements. *Journal of Generic Medicines: The Business Journal for the Generic Medicines Sector*, Article number: 174113432098832.
- Jiménez-Sánchez, Á., Margalina, V.-M. and Vayas-Ruiz, E., 2021. Governmental Communication and Brand Advertising During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Tripodos*, 2(47), pp.29–46.
- Jurnalul Oficial al Uniunii Europene, 2020. *Comunicare a Comisiei Cadru temporar pentru evaluarea aspectelor ce țin de normele antitrust referitoare la cooperarea comercială întreprinsă ca răspuns la situațiile de urgență generate de pandemia actuală de COVID-19*, 2020/C 116 I/02, [online] Available at: <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/RO/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020XC0408%2804%29>> [Accessed 10 February 2021].
- Kedare, S., Kamble, R. S., Salunke, P., 2020. Understanding the Influence of Advertisements on Consumers During Pandemic 2020-A Study On Soap Advertisements. *An International Bilingual Peer Reviewed Refereed Research Journal, SHODH Sanchar Bulletin*, 10(39).
- Kim, D.Y. and Kim, H.-Y., 2021. Influencer advertising on social media: The multiple inference model on influencer-product congruence and sponsorship disclosure. *Journal of Business Research*, 130, pp.405–415.
- Kotler, P. and Keller, K., 2016. *Marketing Management 15 Edition*. New York: Pearson Publishing House.
- Ghobadi, S.N.-, Bagherinejad, J. and Taleizadeh, A.A., 2021. A two-generation new product model by considering forward-looking customers: Dynamic pricing and advertising optimization. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Article number: 102387.
- Pan, T., Shu, F., Kitterlin-Lynch, M. and Beckman, E., 2021. Perceptions of cruise travel during the COVID-19 pandemic: Market recovery strategies for cruise businesses in North America. *Tourism Management*, 85, Article number: 104275.
- Severo, E.A., De Guimarães, J.C.F. and Dellarmelin, M.L., 2021. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on environmental awareness, sustainable consumption and social responsibility: Evidence from generations in Brazil and Portugal. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 286, Article number: 124947.
- Terblanche-Smit, M. and Terblanche, N.S., 2010. Race and attitude formation in HIV/Aids fear advertising. *Journal of Business Research*, 63(2), pp.121–125.
- Tirtadarma, E. and Darmo, B., 2020. Analysis of Tokopedia Advertising #DirumahAjaDulu and Its Correlativity to Tokopedia Branding Position in Pandemic Era: In: *Proceedings of the International Conference of Innovation in Media and Visual Design (IMDES 2020)*. [online] International Conference of Innovation in Media and Visual Design (IMDES 2020). Tangerang, Indonesia: Atlantis Press. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.201202.046>.
- Vézina, R. and Paul, O., 1997. Provocation in advertising: A conceptualization and an empirical assessment. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 14(2), pp.177–192.
- Weng, L., Huang, Z. and Bao, J., 2021. A model of tourism advertising effects. *Tourism Management*, 85, Article number: 104278.
- Woolley, J., Donnell, C. and Worthington, S., 2020. Making impressions count: An evaluation of the quality of information provided by orthodontic practices in London in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. *Heliyon*, 6(11), Article number: e05516.