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# **ETHICAL ASPECTS OF MARKETING COMMUNICATION IN NEW MEDIA**

**Summary:** The article deals with ethical aspects of marketing communication in new media. Differences between communication tools that are used in traditional and virtual marketing with reference to a consumer are presented. Bad practices in marketing communication in new media are demonstrated along with some attempts at creating relevant standards of behaviours.

**Key words:** marketing communication, new media, ethics of new media.

## **Introduction**

Emergence of cyberspace resulted in some change of purchasing behaviours of both consumers and enterprises. In case of consumers, something that used to be the enterprise-controlled market has become some place where fewer and fewer purchasing decisions are made on the basis of classical marketing only [Sadowski, 2012, p. 151]. Changes in consumer behaviour directly influence methods to be used while carrying out marketing related activities. Looking for information, enterprises try to use newer and newer media. Due to the Web, this is possible and there are no time or space limitations. However, in practice, the scope of virtual instrument usage may generate some doubts of ethical nature. Therefore, this work aims both at examining the very problem and at proving that it is possible to regulate standards to be followed in the context of behaviours related with electronic marketing communication.

## **1. Consumer as an addressee of communication instruments in traditional and virtual marketing**

“At present, we are living in the so complicated and difficult world and there are so many things happening all around that we permanently have to verify what others think about this, we have to consult them and ask for advice

or find the latest readings” [Kapuściński, 2006, p. 92]. According to Kapuściński, a reporter, this is the way the contemporary world is perceived in the context of communication processes.

On the other hand, in the marketing context, Kotler [2010, p. 289] has no doubt that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century principles that govern the way markets function, will change as a result of the very changes in the system of market communication. The industrial society will be replaced with the information one and the ICT based economy will be capable of penetrating each aspect of our everyday life.

The image of contemporary marketing is subject to continuous changes. Traditional marketing that involves overall activities undertaken by organisations in order to satisfy present and potential customers’ needs in the best possible way and to create new needs is evolving towards a flexible and prompt reaction to all identified relevant changes. At the same time, principles of ethics have to be adhered to [Baruk, 2011, p. 13]. Each instrument of the marketing composition is characterised by specific attributes that may, in practice, be ethically or unethically used by producers in the process of interacting with final customers. Such a situation may also refer to different tools of marketing communication. Baruk [2011] carried out some in-depth interviews that were supposed to identify final customers’ opinions on about the level of ethics represented by producers while advertising their products. Advertising defects that were most frequently named by respondents confirm their declared distrust in this promotional instrument. Respondents believed that commercials did not provide information about product disadvantages. What is more, it was believed that commercial contained intentionally fabricated communiqués concerning advantages of advertised products (26% and 28% of replies provided by 500 respondents). Respondents had a lot of reservations about the way advertising messages were sent to them. In their opinions, those messages were excessively pushy. They also felt they were treated instrumentally and had some impression that enterprises manipulated their emotions in a more or less subtle way. The Author notices that it is difficult to influence customers effectively by means of a tool that is not trusted by so many of them. Therefore, if enterprises wish to interact with their customers effectively and efficiently, they have to follow rules of ethics in order to increase their own reliability [Baruk, 2011, pp. 13-40].

Quality of marketing communication is influenced by numerous factors. They include new media whose importance needs highlighting. New media change almost all domains of activities undertaken by humans. New media make up another historic stage of moving from direct perception of the reality to mediated perception. Learning by doing is being gradually replaced with learning by systems of symbols and visual models. This all leads to changes in modes of communication and required intellectual competencies [van Dijk, 2010, p. 239].

It is interesting that with their global range new media are becoming more and more individualised. With ongoing fragmentation of supply and segmentation of the media market, a concept of mass broadcasting is being given up. Narrowcasting understood as reaching strictly defined groups of recipients who may be provided with specialised advertising messages is taking over. This concept is supported by interactivity of new media along with push technologies that are successfully used in the Internet. Push technologies follow users' interests to provide them with customised contents including, for instance, news, advertising or the way a particular portal looks like [Kowalski & Jung, 2006, pp. 261-264]. In this context, it is worth paying attention to the term of media 'ecology' that was first used by Postman in 1968. Postman believes that the notion of 'ecology' is related with researching into environments: their structures, contents and the way they influence people. Media ecology, on the one hand, focuses on the influence of media on human perception, feelings, values, but on the other hand, it pays some attention to the way our interactions with media facilitate or impede social chances for existence [after: Szpunar, 2012, p. 25].

Media consumption does not mean any simple dependency of the 'stimulant – reaction' type. This results from the two-level system of information flow. Culture of this system is built of tangible elements (technologies) and intangible ones (standards, values and sanctions). The research carried out by Ogburn [after: Kowalski & Jung, 2006] allows for concluding that changes are more frequently observed in the tangible sphere as compared to beliefs, customs or values. Co-existence of two seemingly contradictory trends, i.e. globalisation and individualisation is characteristic for contemporary media consumption. This phenomenon is similar, in the context of the new economy and the information society, to the trend to 'globalise', i.e. a simultaneous increase in interests in global and local issues that results in development of local media in the media world. In this case, digital technologies provide much help and allow for obtaining a relatively high quality product that does not require much investment [Kowalski & Jung, 2006, pp. 263-264].

Since 1995, in the USA, it has been possible to prove statistically that using the Internet remarkably shortens time spent on watching television. In Poland similar data obtained in 2000 suggest that television is being decisively replaced with the Internet. On the one hand, 42% of the Polish Internet users who took part in the survey frequently visited websites of popular newspapers and magazines. On the other hand, a majority of the Internet 'consumption' took place in the television prime time [Kowalski & Jung, 2006, pp. 261-262].

This may be of much importance for creating precise marketing campaigns that contribute to acquisition of a large number of potential customers. Szpunar

[2012, pp. 31-32] believes that if one wishes to explain specifics of the way media influence their recipients, it is necessary to take into consideration at least four variables including the following:

- accessibility to a new medium,
- properties of media to be used by their recipients,
- particular message contents,
- attitudes and features of recipients.

Contemporary consumers enjoy much more opportunities for acquiring desired information, products and services than ever before. Development of cyberspace contributes to changes in the market landscape where a consumer is an important component. Online consumers more and more frequently look for recommendations related to purchase of goods and services in groups of their acquaintances. They are more willing to describe their purchase related experiences online. They are also more aware and better prepared to do their shopping. Initiating their contacts with enterprises, they expect prompt and respectful answers. More and more frequently, they look for opportunities for building solid relationships with brands. Modern customers do not firmly belong to any particular demographic group or any market segment any more. In case of modern customers, the Internet has become a natural communication channel to be used while contacting enterprises. It is important for them to obtain some confirmation that their feedback or opinions reach the enterprises involved and are going to be dealt with [Sadowski, 2012, pp. 153-154].

A process of diffusion of new media is complex. At the very beginning, it was possible to observe some slow start, then acceleration and some slow-down again. This slow-down frequently results from some saturation of a particular technology that is being universally launched, which is manifested in the very case of the Internet. According to Rogers [after: Szpunar, 2012, p. 30], this process consists of the following stages: knowledge, conviction, decision, implementation and acknowledgement.

A major role in processes of innovation diffusion including new media is played by a small community of innovators that make up approximately 2.5% of the society. Individuals that are referred to as 'innovators' are characterised by their openness and willingness to experiment, to look for and to be excited at novelties. They are 'do-it yourself' ethics driven. This ethics implies no fear while experimenting along with some easiness and willingness to interact with innovations. Recommendations of innovators who are simultaneously opinion leaders results in some attention paid to innovations by those early adopting ones [Szpunar, 2012, p. 31].

The Internet and other new technologies overcome barriers between those who send and those who receive, thus allowing all users (at least theoretically) to

disseminate their own created contents without any need to use media organisations as intermediaries [Jakubowicz, 2011a, p. 27]. Each of us can now independently use a possibility to publish any contents and opinions, and share them by means of social networks. The same principle applies to information concerning brands or products that have made our life easier or the way some enterprise has treated us. One-channel communication has already become two-channel communication that enables parties exert some influence on each other [Sadowski, 2012, p. 153].

Internetisation of media takes a form of using the Internet as an additional channel of sharing contents, either parallel to primary sharing of the contents (e.g. broadcasting or printing) or separately as contents created for the particular distribution channel. Traditional media that are present in the Internet gain in multimedia and interactive features along with message transfer customisation or addressing the content to strictly defined groups. Moreover, new potential sources of income emerge and they include transactional charges, Internet subscription fees, e-commerce, new forms of advertising, new charges for generating traffic in the Internet, etc. [Jakubowicz, 2011a, p. 31].

At present, it is getting quite obvious that the Internet (and other new media) may be used not only as a tool of remote communication but also as a carrier of information about new types of advertising and the way marketing communication should be realised. Simultaneously, it is necessary to remember that this carrier is much more effective than application of traditional advertising messages [Mokrzysz-Olszyńska & Targański (eds.), 2012, p. 119].

A particular role in modern communication is played by social media marketing. Although social media are rather considered to be a new domain of communication, they are much appreciated by enterprises because of a possibility to approach customers very closely and to receive important information about targeted customers. Social media are expected to witness rapid development of location-based services – LBS. More and more people use mobile devices that make it possible to participate in discussions at different Internet forums, in different places and on different subjects. Discussions held in the context of shopping are of particular importance for enterprises.

This allows for creating a profile of customers' orientation and for obtaining information on them and their acquaintances that somehow influence their choices. Knowledge about places users visit allows for identifying their loyalty to enterprises they deal with. On the other hand, a stream of shopping gives some information, inter alia, about users' susceptibility to particular offers [Bertelsen, Schneider, Henderson, after: Lovett, 2012, p. 379]. Merger of social media data, mobile device data and transaction data may provide marketing

experts with a myriad of idea opportunities [Lovett, 2012, pp. 378-379]. Marketing enterprises could, for instance, address commercials that would be selected on the basis of individual 'likes' given to particular products and services. Having a few pieces of information about a particular addressee, it is easily possible to contact such a person and suggest what he or she could buy [Bailyn, 2013, p. 141]. It is also not difficult to imagine that in the quite near future in the world where all people's mobile phones send some data concerning locations, transactions or emotions, enterprises will use this information to create some thematic maps that would allow for understanding local marketing environments [Bailyn, 2013, p. 141]<sup>1</sup>.

Using social media data is one of the three pillars apart from e-commerce and global value chains that provide foundations for the New Economy. Some characteristic feature may be found here in participation of enterprises in networks, both vertically and horizontally, thus replacing linear systems. As a result, a complex business environment (a business ecosystem) is obtained to create, together with the network economy, some electronic business community. Total economic value of these networks largely depends on the potential of knowledge and information that can be delivered onto the market. This allows for increasing incomes, decreasing costs and creating networks of customers [Mokrzysz-Olszyńska & Targański (eds.), 2012, p. 28].

## **2. Bad practices in marketing communication in new media**

Risk related with insufficient time that is necessary to know your business partner well enough is a major problem in all developing market segments (B2B, B2C, C2C, B2P, G2C, and G2B). As a result, some frauds may be encountered [Mokrzysz-Olszyńska & Targański (eds.), 2012, p. 28].

Promotion of erotic services that offer a wide range of multimedia products available for mobile phones including text service subscriptions, games, wallpapers, video or images creates numerous opportunities for fraudulent actions and for breaching customers' interests. Unfortunately, Polish legislation lacks regulations that would in detail govern this market segment in spite of its continuous popularity. The very issue is serious because mobile phones or the Internet are frequently used by the minors [Mokrzysz-Olszyńska & Targański (eds.), 2012, pp. 132-133].

Blogosphere is another sector that is subject to various unethical activities. It is necessary to remember that both employees and their organisations are fully

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<sup>1</sup> The Author can imagine maps that would show some marketing niches including 'openness to new experiences' or 'readiness to spend money' and 'the greatest brand loyalty'. This type of maps could help enterprises make their decisions concerning locations of new businesses, distribution of leaflets or organisation of local advertising campaigns.

responsible for their blog activeness. When caught red handed, some organisations responsible for unethical behaviours decide to elaborate some formal guidelines aimed at those employees who have their blogs, which results from the fact that such unethical practices remarkably tarnish corporate reputation. Table 1 presents a few problems that require some attention. Moreover, examples of blogosphere malpractices are also given. The list is not complete although it may be perceived as some launchpad for considering ethical aspects involved [Scott, 2009, pp. 218-219]<sup>2</sup>.

Table 1. Guidelines for employees who blog

<b>Transparency</b>	You should never pretend a person you are not
<b>Privacy</b>	If you have not been granted permission, do not disclose any confidential information on your blog
<b>Openness</b>	It is important to disclose all information that may be considered some conflict of interest on your blog
<b>Truthfulness</b>	Do not lie
<b>Recognition</b>	You should recognise all bloggers (or other sources) whose materials were used by you to develop your blog

Source: Scott [2009, pp. 218-219].

Each organisation should independently decide whether they wish to develop such guidelines. This decision ought to be based on information that comes from, inter alia, marketing and human resources departments [Scott, 2009, pp. 217-218]. Running a business and customer-driven communication requires an enterprise to trust its employees. This also calls for some belief that employees are able to represent the brand and that they can provide competent customer oriented services. Management should demonstrate this trust by enabling employees to express themselves on behalf of their enterprises and by giving them some freedom to build relationships with customers [Sadowski, 2012, p. 154].

Some doubts of ethical nature are also raised while conducting research into social media. An example of unethical research may be provided by ordering contractors to track persons who criticise activities of a given enterprise in social media. This type of orders does not comply with Polish legal regulations concerning personal data.

Disclosing data concerning authors of entries in systems that use particular social media tools is another problem (according to ESOMAR<sup>3</sup> that should not be done). In this context, it is also necessary to remember about research that is

<sup>2</sup> Word of Mouth Marketing Association developed a guidebook devoted to ethical behaviour in the blogosphere entitled Ethical Guide for Bloggers [www 2].

<sup>3</sup> ESOMAR is European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research, an international organisation of research enterprises.

conducted by means of the covert participant observation. Users subject to this method do not know that they are observed. That is why, their most natural behaviours may be observed [Miotk, 2013, p. 183].

Zittrain [after: Bauer, 2009, p. 406], a professor of law at Harvard Law School who deals, i.a., with electronic communication regulations on the one hand believes that free access to works and values of culture is better than its limitation because all limitations encourage crime. On the other hand, he presents dramatic visions in which the following irresponsible individuals acting in the Web play a major role: hackers, secret service agents and marketing specialists who all hunt for detailed information. Therefore, it is now difficult to find out who and to what extent threatens the Internet. Are powerful corporations that somehow control the World Wide Web to be blamed? Or perhaps blame goes to those who, enjoying anonymity and impunity, are looking for methods to be used to reduce opportunities to commit crime [Bauer, 2009, p. 408].

Becoming a trendsetter is the most valuable action that may be undertaken. This way, persons who are linked with us by means of social media will see our recommendations, which will motivate them, including other trendsetters, to 'like' what and where we buy or what we sell and who buys from us. In any new social environment, a number and importance of individuals who like or share products of particular enterprises determine a number of people who are likely to see those products [Bailyn, 2013, p. 140].

However, in the context of the above discussions, it is necessary to pay attention, on the one hand, to the low sense of responsibility for the communication process that is so largely dependant on technologies. A task of initiating and sustaining communication is, therefore, transferred to technical media [van Dijk, 2010, p. 314]. On the other hand, luckily, due to well-developed electronic community, bad practices are quickly identified and information about unreliable enterprises or individuals is spread in form of warnings to be found in blogs [Mokrzysz-Olszyńska & Targański (eds.), 2012, p. 29].

### **3. Creating standards of behaviour that regulate communication processes in new media**

Participants of conversations held by means of new media have not created generally accepted standards of behaviours yet. No socially accepted rules of conduct apply here. That is why, it is necessary to be particularly careful while making any generalisations. Nevertheless, it is possible to demonstrate certain practices that govern interactions in the electronic world. These practices are not,

however, well known and accepted and they are always strictly context related [van Dijk, 2010, pp. 321-322].

The Internet and cyberspace cannot be subject to the system of traditional regulation of contents (apart from media audio-visual services that are available there). The European union, similarly to other international organisations, acts by means of promotion of self- and co-regulations. Table 2 presents self-regulating organisations that function in Europe.

Table 2. International organisations that promote regulation of the Internet contents

<b>EuroISPA</b>	groups Internet Service Providers
<b>INHOPE</b>	groups organisers of hotlines, e.g. Polski Dyżurnet
<b>INCORE</b>	creates a system that describes contents of the Internet in order to remove illegal or harmful contents
<b>ICRA</b>	assesses and 'labels' Internet contents to let users know what they deal with
<b>EICN – European Internet Coregulation Network</b>	promotes coregulation, i.e. cooperation between the state and market entities aimed at regulating the Internet

Source: Jakubowicz [2011b, p. 157].

The European Commission states that telecommunications, media and information technologies are influenced by convergence. This creates numerous development opportunities including chances to increase employment for many sectors and economies. New technologies mainly including more and more common application of digital networks will equally influence societies and their citizens, thus providing them with some access to new services and applications [Jakubowicz 2011a, p. 30].

Table 3 presents the European Commission initiatives undertaken in order to regulate the Cyberspace.

Table 3. Activities undertaken in order to protect children and youth and to respect human dignity in new technologies

<b>Years</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>
1	2
1996	The European Commission issued the Green Book devoted to protection of minors and human dignity in audio-visual and information services
1998	The Council adopted the 98/560/EC recommendation that refers to "the development of the competitiveness of the European audiovisual and information services industry by promoting national frameworks aimed at achieving a comparable and effective level of protection of minors and human dignity"
1999	The European Parliament and the Council adopted the multiannual plan that addresses activities undertaken by the Community in order to promote safe use of the Internet through fighting illegal and harmful contents of global networks

table 3 cont.

1	2
2004	The Commission presented a draft of a new recommendation that is meant to be an answer to challenges related to the technological development in the audio-visual sector and in services provided by the information society
2006	The European Parliament and the Council adopts their new recommendation on protection of minors, human dignity and the right to of reply in relation to the competitiveness of the European audio-visual and on-line information services industry (Official Journal L 378,27/12/2006, pp. 0072-0077)
1999-2002/2004	Program Safer Internet Action Plan (SIAP) with its budget amounting to over 38 million Euro and its continuation within promotion of safe use of the Internet
2007	Efforts undertaken by the European Commission resulted in mobile telephony operators signing their European agreement to promote safe use of mobile phones by minors and youth
2008	Decision No. 1351/2008/EC of the European Parliament and of the council establishing a multiannual Community programme on protecting children using the internet and other communication technologies
2009	Initiative of the European Commission that encourages major European social networks to adopt a set of rules entitled Safer Social Networking Principles for the EU. Signatories of this document include the largest networks (Arto, Bebo, Dailymotion, Facebook, Google, Microsoft Europe, MySpace, nasza-klasa.pl, Yahoo! Europe, etc.)
2013	Programme Safer Internet Plus is a SIAP continuation and has a budget amounting to 55 million Euro. The programme covers technologies related to mobile telephony, broadband transfer, online games, peer-to-peer transfer and all other forms of communication in real time including chats and Internet communicators

Source: Jakubowicz [2011b, pp. 157-160]; [www 1].

Sector organisations that specialise in research into communication or in the Internet market research have already undertaken first attempts at standardising the way research is conducted and all relevant indexes [Miotk, 2014, p. 184]<sup>4</sup>. These organisations stated that the standards in question would be created in cooperation with the most important companies available on the market and in reply to need voiced by the market. The standards are not going to be compulsory although they are supposed to promote fair competition and they have to comply with the antimonopoly law [Miotk, 2014, p. 192].

In July 2011, ESOMAR published a document entitled ESOMAR Guideline on Social Media Research that was devoted to ethical aspects of conducting

<sup>4</sup> For instance, an international organisation that associates companies active on the market of measuring and evaluating communication in social media – AMEC (Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication), IAB (Interactive Advertising Bureau – an American organisation that functions in Poland as Związek Pracodawców Branży Internetowej IAB Polska – Association of the Internet Sector Employers).

research in the context of social media. The document does not present any methodological recommendations and concentrates on the issue of the use of personal data that are widely available in social media services in the research into social media [Miotk, 2014, p. 182].

Therefore, the following conclusion seems to be justified: protection against forbidden or limited advertising in mobile service channels is frequently insufficient [Mokrzysz-Olszyńska & Targański (eds.), 2012, p. 133]. Firstly, mobile marketing is a new and very dynamically developing domain of marketing. Its development pace largely exceeds speed of legislation adjustment efforts. Secondly, this is a specific sector that stems from marketing and new technologies, which contributes to emergence of numerous untypical and niche problems that are difficult to qualify in any framework of regulations that concern issues that seem to be similar [Mokrzysz-Olszyńska and Targański (eds.), 2012, pp. 133-134]. Table 4 presents issues that concern protection against unfair or forbidden advertising in mobile marketing.

Table 4. Protection against unfair or forbidden advertising in mobile marketing

Pursuant to Article 16 Item 1 Point 5 of the Unfair Competition Act a deed of unfair competition involves any advertising that significantly interfere with privacy, particularly through abuse of technical means of information transfer
The Code entitled E-Mail Marketing Good Practices that includes detailed recommendations concerning permitted and ethical forms of spamming along with guidelines on the way consumers should be informed about their possibilities to object reception of such contents at their private e-mail boxes
The Ethical Code of the direct Marketing Association is a soft law type document that, to some extent, may be used as some model to be followed by self-regulating initiatives in the context of mobile marketing

Source: Mokrzysz-Olszyńska & Targański (eds.) [2012, pp. 131-134].

In the context of marketing communication in new media, it is also worth paying attention to the way new media present a particular organisation of public opinion. This can remarkably influence the organisation's reputation. As a result of presenting particular information about a company in a particular way, company image may be strengthened in the positive or negative context. Company reputation and the way stakeholders think are not influenced by media information only. However, organisations have to be aware that media are able to highlight a particular problem or enhance a positive image [Cornelissen, 2010, pp. 209-210].

## Conclusions

Consumers want companies to have 'human faces'. Since they also wish to live longer and better, they are ready to accept some responsibility for their own

health and quality of life. This responsibility is manifested in requiring companies to increase standards of goods and services provided.

Remarkable influence on the change in companies' behaviour in this context is exerted by the media evolution. Coexisting media may be perceived as elements of the complex ecosystem in which particular media interact with one another, they penetrate one another and demonstrate numerous similarities [Szpunar, 2012, p. 25]. Due to the Internet, one of the elements of the ecosystem in question, both consumers and companies have some access to a much larger amount of information. They may easily look for the best offer providers, check their credibility and share this knowledge with other recipients.

New media provide their recipients with great volume of information in organisation, economy or society related contexts. Multiple processing of information about the same issues results in some reinforcement of the information in recipients' brains. This information somehow 'shapes' public opinion that might be positive or negative for the entities involved [Cornelissen, 2010, p. 210]. Baudrillard [after: Bauer, 2009, p. 406] believes that this is some form of participation in a contemporary game with media that gradually leads to media annihilation. Whether this vision of media future is actually possible or not, predominantly depends on individuals who create the media in question.

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## ZAGADNIENIA ETYCZNE KOMUNIKACJI MARKETINGOWEJ W NOWYCH MEDIACH

**Streszczenie:** W artykule podjęto problematykę etycznych aspektów komunikacji marketingowej w nowych mediach. Zaprezentowano różnice w zakresie narzędzi komunikacji, wykorzystywanych w marketingu tradycyjnym i wirtualnym, w stosunku do konsumenta. Pokazano przykłady złych praktyk w komunikacji marketingowej w nowych mediach oraz próby wypracowania standardów zachowań w tym obszarze.

**Słowa kluczowe:** komunikacja marketingowa, nowe media, etyka nowych mediów.