
Marketing Activities Caused by the Covid-19 Pandemic: Analysis and Perspectives

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Abstract:

Purpose: The article aims to present changes in the marketing activities of enterprises as a result of the covid-19 pandemic in 2020 in the global economy. An analysis of reports already prepared on the development of new forms of marketing, or the improvement and reorientation of the existing ones, is presented here. How the covid-19 pandemic influenced marketing activities and customer access channels was presented.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Therefore, it was necessary to verify the marketing activities during the pandemic and adjust them to the market situation. Due to this fact, it was necessary to look for new ways to reach the customer, there was a sharp increase in interest in the possibilities of the Internet and reaching the customer through this medium.

Findings: The analysis in this article shows that the changes in companies' marketing strategies brought about by the pandemic are long-lasting and will have an impact on companies' future activities. Companies that have successfully adapted to the new conditions and invested in digital technologies and AI have gained a competitive advantage. In turn, the growing popularity of e-commerce and influencer marketing points to the need for to continue to adapt to changing consumer behaviour.

Practical Implications: Marketing activities are aimed at promoting the widely understood brand of the company and strengthening the sales of the offered products or services. It is an extremely difficult process in times of numerous and predatory competition, which makes it difficult to acquire new customers for individual companies as much as possible.

Originality/Value: During a stable market situation, marketing activities require enormous creativity and ingenuity of enterprises, but the time of the covid-19 pandemic has shown that it is not enough.

Keywords: Marketing, operation, new, offer, market.

JEL codes: O4.

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1. Introduction

This paper uses a secondary analysis method of literature and industry reports from 2020-2023, using data from leading journals, and reports from research institutions including Gemius and McKinsey & Company. The aim was to identify the latest trends in post-pandemic marketing and to assess the effectiveness of the strategies implemented by companies.

Statistical data from Gemius and McKinsey & Company reports on changes in consumer behaviour and marketing strategies after the Covid-19 pandemic were also used. The methodology includes a critical analysis of the literature and case studies of companies operating in the e-commerce sector.

The question to be answered is: Has the Covid-19 pandemic changed companies' marketing strategies? How have these changes translated into the way advertising campaigns are run?

Marketing activities are a continuous process, which is supposed to influence, in the main, the increase of sales, the increase of customers' loyalty to the brand, the attachment to frequent purchases, being a regular customer of the company. This is a process that is not easy for 21st century companies to implement. The environment in which businesses have to operate has become turbulent, increasingly unpredictable.

The Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated vividly that stability is hard to come by in the operations of a 21st century enterprise (Grima *et al.*, 2020; Khan *et al.*, 2020). One has to be prepared for different market scenarios, flexible in adapting to the market. Also, the marketing carried out by companies must be constantly evolving and be as targeted as possible to the needs of the customer, his or her preferences, so that the company can make a profit from its business activities. One element that makes sales difficult is undoubtedly the very strong and aggressive competition.

Most companies on the market are currently facing the problem of overproduction. The capacity of production plants, but also service companies, is increasing all the time. This is related to the progressive process of automation, robotisation, computerisation of activities, resulting firstly from a lack of employees and secondly from the desire to generate more and more profit by taking advantage of the economies of scale.

Manufacturing capacity is increasing and the number of customers wishing to purchase the goods on offer is decreasing, as most countries in the world have societies with lower birth rates than mortality, so-called ageing societies. Despite these difficulties mentioned above, the market funds the new challenge of matching marketing efforts during the pandemic and now today. The Covid-19 pandemic caused most businesses, especially the tourism and catering sectors, to shut down

completely. In addition to this, whole societies have been blocked, access to the customer made very difficult. Businesses have had to change or accelerate certain marketing activities in order to maintain sales, or to keep footfalls as low as possible.

This article aims to analyse the changes in marketing activities due to the outbreak of the pandemic, but the process is already unlikely to be reversible and will continue in the future and it is worth pursuing this research issue.

2. Marketing Activities and their Impact on Sales Effectiveness

In recent years, especially post-pandemic, artificial intelligence (AI) and automation have played an increasingly important role in marketing. Companies are using AI to personalise campaigns, analyse real-time data and target customers automatically. The automation of marketing processes enables constant contact with customers with minimal effort, increasing the effectiveness of campaigns.

In common parlance, it is considered that advertising is the lever of commerce. Advertising is considered the main form of communication between businesses and their customers, focusing the attention of the public on the product or service offered.

According to the definition given in 1948 by the American Marketing Association, advertising is "any paid form, non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods or services by a specific sponsor" (Kotler, 2005).

Marketing activities are a set of activities that lead to the creation of a company's image, help promote products or services and allow the building of customer relations. Their dimension and scope of activities may vary, but should always be tailored to the specific product or service. Therefore, we cannot say that there is a one-size-fits-all answer to the question of which marketing activities to apply in a company. It all depends on what goal we want to achieve (Florian, 2022). The most important goal of any company is to maximise profit.

However, in order to achieve this, many sub-goals have to be realised along the way, which will contribute to the main goal. Everything must therefore be planned carefully and thoroughly. Planning is undoubtedly one of the more difficult stages of implementing marketing activities in a company. At the same time, it is one of the most important elements for determining what the company's objectives are and what means will be used to achieve them.

Marketing activities should have an objective. This could be to increase profit, improve the visibility of the website in search engines or build customer relationships. The objectives do not have to be mutually exclusive. It is possible to simultaneously increase sales of your products or services and, at the same time, establish lasting contacts and bonds with consumers.

The purpose of advertising is to reach the target group chosen by the entrepreneur and provide them with key information about the product or service and indirectly promote an idea. Advertising creators consciously choose the form, content and medium of the message through which they effectively reach a specific circle of people, while at the same time encouraging consumers to take the indicated action (Starzyńska, 2015).

Advertising should draw the customer's attention to the product or brand and arouse their appreciation of it. Moreover, a good advertising message should cause the recipient to want to purchase and try the promoted product (Mrożek, 2020). However, for advertising to fulfil these tasks it should be characterised by:

- **Attractiveness:** the advertising message must grab the viewer's attention and communicate the product in an unusual way;
- **Suggestiveness:** advertising should be as persuasive as possible buy or use a service, and its arguments should be tailored to our target audience;
- **Comprehensibility:** through the information provided, we should create in the recipients the idea we have formed about the product; the customer should not have any problems in interpreting our message
- **Memorability:** the ease with which an advertisement is remembered facilitated by repeated repetition, the use of rhymes and associations;
- **Brevity:** the advertising message should be short and focus on the most important features of the product;
- **Originality:** the way the good on offer is promoted should out from the competition and be unique;
- **Topicality:** advertising should be adapted to the prevailing socio-economic situation (Nowacki, 2005).

When planning an advertising campaign, both the form of the of the message, as well as its medium. The form of the advertising message is "one of the physical possibilities for displaying advertising content in a given medium" (Pillar, 2012). In turn, all forms of broadcasting advertising messages that are tailored to the specific media and means of advertising, are advertising media (Pierścionek and Jurek-Stepień, 2006).

Among the most popular forms of broadcasting media are television commercials, radio commercials and Internet commercials. The medium of radio has a number of advantages, thanks to which it is still not losing its popularity. First of all, the variety of stations makes it possible to reach a narrowly defined target group with an advertising message.

Furthermore, radio can serve as a primary medium - when it is the main channel for the distribution of advertising content - or as a supporting medium. Radio advertising by its form can reach the listener regardless of what he or she is doing at the moment, the only condition being that the receiver is switched on.

Compared to television advertising, both production and broadcasting costs are low. The media for radio advertising are broadcasts, advertising spots and programmes.

However, television advertising is considered to be the most evocative form of advertising. Bringing together the three elements of word, sound and image, it has an intense effect on the emotions and subconscious of the audience. From a psychological point of view, the more senses are involved, the stronger the brand image will be created in the minds of the audience (Lindstrom, 2005).

The advantages of television as an advertising medium also include its large reach and numerous viewers. Thus, the high cost of production and airtime used is compensated to some extent, as the cost of reaching one potential customer turns out to be relatively low. Television advertising usually takes the form of a spot, product placement during the broadcast of any television programme, film or series. A special form of television advertising is also television sponsorship, i.e. patronage of a broadcast event (Strużycki and Heryszek, 2007).

Today, however, one of the largest advertising media is the internet, which is the vehicle for the realisation of a new industry known as e-commerce (Dudzik-Lewicka and Hofman-Kohlmeyer, 2015). The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has forced us to change our lifestyles and has largely shifted our education, work and all other aspects of social life to the virtual world. In turn, this has had a direct impact on the increased reach of online advertising.

The Internet has at the same time the characteristics of a mass medium and a direct communication medium, making it possible to distribute a message to a wide range of people as well as to an individual viewer. On the web, it is mainly the viewer, and not the advertiser, who decides whether he or she will take the information. This is why the creators of Internet advertising attach particular importance to intriguing the viewer in order to convince him or her to at least click on a banner and explore the information presented on it (Habryń, 2002). The next subsection focuses on online activities that serve to better acquire customers.

3. Online Marketing Activities

Influencer marketing has grown in importance, especially on platforms such as TikTok and Instagram. By working with influencers, companies are able to generate results quickly and reach younger consumers who prefer authentic recommendations from trusted individuals.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, people-to-people contacts were severely undermined. Even new employment opportunities for workers have emerged. Platform work involves matching supply and demand for paid labour through an online platform or app. The employment status has not been clarified, but in most cases the worker is considered self-employed or a so-called freelancer.

Paid labour is organised through an online platform, three parties are involved: the online platform, the customer and the employee, the goal is to perform specific tasks or solve specific problems, the work is outsourced, divided into tasks, and services are provided on a given demand (Kaczynski, 2022). Businesses have also reached out to many online marketing activities.

The marketing efforts of a company that wants to increase its online visibility very often start with SEO. Well-conducted website optimisation and link building can bring satisfactory results. With their work, SEO specialists make it possible to increase a company's visibility on the web. Properly conducted activities result in the website being displayed in search results under an increasing number of phrases, thanks to which information about it reaches a larger number of potential customers.

It is very important to choose the right keywords, i.e., those by which potential customers may search for a particular company's product or service on the Internet. SEO is a very important part of the marketing strategy for companies that want to exist on the internet and take the positioning of their website seriously. SEO alone, however, is not yet a comprehensive marketing strategy.

Nowadays, SEO activities are followed by content marketing, or content marketing. Even if someone finds a company in a search engine thanks to SEO, it is still necessary to interest the person in the company's website. Internet users are increasingly paying attention to how the content on the website is presented, whether the news is credible and interesting, and whether the layout of the website is tailored to their needs. The company's content marketing activities are primarily aimed at creating clear and transparent content that responds to the needs of potential customers.

The fact is that nowadays social media has enormous power. Social networks offer companies many opportunities. One of the most interesting is viral marketing. A well-prepared viral social media campaign gives quick results and its costs are relatively low compared to the results achieved. Company profiles on social networks also allow interaction with the recipients of the company's products or services, which increases the company's credibility and allows building a positive brand image.

A marketing action that comes to the aid of building lasting relationships with customers and strengthening the brand image in their minds is certainly e-mail marketing. Through it, we gain a direct communication tool between seller and customer. Personalised messages, interesting content and a tailored dispatch time will help optimise the advertising process and contribute to establishing a lasting contact with your customer.

Another marketing measure is the use of Google Ads, which effectively influences online recognition. Thanks to Google Ads, it is possible to reach with your message

where the company's potential customers are. Marketing activities that Google Ads can offer include the possibility to reach customers via websites, i.e. the use of display advertising. This can also include adverts displayed on YouTube or ads appearing in search results. Such activities will undoubtedly assist the process of acquiring new customers, as they find them in the places where they focus their activity (Florian, 2022).

In summary, it is safe to say that the internet has become the main tool for marketing activities during and after the pandemic. It is important to remember that the most effective marketing activities are when you combine several of them at the same time. Do not opt for just one activity.

4. The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Changes in Corporate Behaviour in Undertaking Marketing Activities

According to the 2023 report by Gemius and e-Commerce Poland, around 79% of Internet users in Poland declare that they make purchases online. The pandemic has not only perpetuated these habits, but also contributed to the dynamic growth of the e-commerce sector, which is now one of the most important sales channels.

5. Discussion

Research by McKinsey & Company (2023) shows that the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital transformation, with up to 75% of companies modifying their marketing strategies to increase their online presence. Additionally, according to Sheth (2021), marketing strategies changed significantly after the pandemic. His analysis indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital transformation and shifted marketing priorities towards online channels (Sheth, 2021). The growth of e-commerce noted in the Gemius report (2023) points to the consolidation of new consumer shopping habits that will remain relevant in the coming years.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused rapid changes in marketing strategies. Research by McKinsey & Company (2023) shows that 75% of businesses have accelerated their digital transformation by implementing new technologies to increase the effectiveness of their marketing activities. Gemius' 2023 report shows that e-commerce has seen a 20% increase compared to 2019, indicating the consolidation of new shopping habits. Influencer marketing has become an important tool for building relationships with customers.

The outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic in 2020 made many entrepreneurs realise the importance of being flexible in their operations. Adaptation to the new reality had to be demonstrated in a fairly short period of time. Within literally one day, the entire trade fair industry in Poland and around the world came to a standstill, and this was the place where companies could present their products to the customer. According to estimates by the Polish Chamber of Exhibition Industry (TVN 24, 2021), the

industry in Poland is made up of around 5,000 companies, employing nearly 500,000 people (of whom around 40% are salaried employees). In the run-up to the pandemic, the total annual turnover of the exhibition industry was equal to about PLN 4.9 billion (representing approximately 0.2% of GDP), and revenues from VAT paid amounted to approximately PLN 0.5 billion (Newseria, 2021).

Already in 2020, monthly losses of the trade fair sector in Poland amounted to PLN 150 million, and the first bankruptcies of companies in the sector also appeared (RP Biznes, 2021), and, in addition, successive editions of the government's shields for entrepreneurs did not include direct aid for the industry. During the COVID-19 pandemic, redundancies in the industry were as high as 60%.

According to a report by the Convention Bureau of Europe, due to the pandemic, spending on events organised in Poland by the MICE industry will decrease by €1.4-2.1 billion. The report assumes that the number of participants in these events and their spending will not return to previous levels until 2022 or even 2023 at the earliest (Krakow Convention Bureau, 2021).

Trade fairs and economic exhibitions are meeting places for entrepreneurs from many regions of the world to build new relationships between them and to develop existing dimensions of cooperation, so when thinking about the promotion of products and enterprises after the pandemic period, it is necessary to see a significant contribution from this industry. At the same time, coming out of this deep slump will require a very careful analysis of the state of the industry and the possibilities for its development.

The analysis and diagnosis of the industry's situation is particularly important, because already before the pandemic period, the formula of some trade fairs was changing and, despite the overall increase in their number (as well as their visitors), some industries were also intensifying the implementation of other communication tools in the process of communicating with the market. The Covid-19 pandemic has forced, both for trade fair organisers and their clients, an accelerated digital transformation.

However, in order to follow this path, it is necessary to reach for new know-how and training in this area more and more quickly. The pandemic has only accelerated the implementation of virtual solutions in the organisation of trade fairs, which has translated into changes in the marketing activities of companies. This trend is sure to continue.

The outbreak of the global pandemic made it necessary for companies to look for new solutions. This was particularly true for various types of advertising or marketing activities. It can be said that the challenges posed by today's reality resulted in the need to evolve the commonly known methods of marketing communication - from increasing the number of promotional activities in certain market sectors, to

maintaining contact with consumers at the current level, to reducing or even stopping advertising campaigns altogether. Changes within media consumers' habits and the structure of the media market can be observed on the basis of advertising market data. The structure of the global advertising market has undergone significant changes over the past decade.

In 2010, the dominant media type in the global advertising market was television, slightly outstripping newspapers in value. In 2020, by contrast, the value of advertising on the global internet exceeded the combined value of all other advertising types. Radio, outdoor advertising and cinema advertising maintained a stable share of the global advertising market until 2019. This situation was only changed by the pandemic, during which the share of advertising expenditure in all areas other than online declined (Grzeszak, 2021).

2020 has been a year of uncertainty and redefinition of operations in many industries. Faced with the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic, companies had to adapt to the new reality at a rapid pace. Phenomena such as remote working and learning, the reduction of physical contact between people and the shift of some product and service sales to the web have translated into the largest increase in the percentage of households with internet access in four years - up to 90.4% compared to 86.7% last year.

The e-commerce market has become a natural beneficiary of the pandemic constraints. The number of people declaring to buy online according to Gemius increased year-on-year by 11 p.p. - to 73%, while according to KPMG's report 'New reality: the consumer in the age of COVID-19', 34% of Poles in 2020 bought products online that had never been ordered through this channel before (Strategic Internet Report 2020/2021, 2021).

The changes in marketing activities brought about by the covid-19 pandemic have proved successful, as most companies have survived this difficult period and continue to function perfectly well. Of course, it was not only the changes in the way of reaching the customer that had an impact on the company's health, as the anti-covid shields applied by the Government also helped to survive.

However, the changes initiated in the way the company reaches out to customers will continue in the future. The majority of customers are positive about the company's changes in marketing activities. This is due to the fact that the pandemic has taught many people to buy online, where this method of order fulfilment was not considered at all for various reasons, mainly the unfamiliarity of individual customers with this channel.

The activities initiated in the sphere of the Internet will certainly be continued by creative and developmental companies in the coming years.

6. Conclusions

The analysis in this article shows that the changes in companies' marketing strategies brought about by the pandemic are long-lasting and will have an impact on companies' future activities. Companies that have successfully adapted to the new conditions and invested in digital technologies and AI have gained a competitive advantage. In turn, the growing popularity of e-commerce and influencer marketing points to the need for to continue to adapt to changing consumer behaviour.

Going forward, companies need to continue to invest in new technologies to maintain and develop their market positions. So we have answered the research questions posed in the introduction. Changes in marketing strategies have occurred with a focus on new tools and channels for sending advertising content, the way to reach the customer, with a particular emphasis on online channels.

The Covid-19 pandemic was a period of very intensive corporate learning of the new reality. It should be emphasised that the market behaviour of consumers is also a combination of psychological, demographic and economic factors, which also change over time. Hence, it is extremely important from the point of view of marketing activities to constantly monitor the changes taking place on the market, as well as to anticipate the direction of their development, which will allow for proper planning of activities undertaken in the enterprise (Kowalska, 2017).

The change process of marketing activities should be customer-oriented, so that information about products and services can be reached as effectively as possible. A well and reliably informed customer will make a purchase, which will translate into an improved bottom line for any business.

The subject matter addressed in this article is of great interest from the point of view of both the enterprise and the customer and will evolve as the reality around us develops. Therefore, it is worthwhile to address this topic from the scientific side from time to time, as this article is a prelude to further publications.

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