

Chapter 13

Impact of Corporate Communication on Consumer Behavior: An Exploring Study

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ABSTRACT

The new current economic looks require the development of new modes of communication. Corporate communication based on the values and the identity of the company allows companies to develop visibility both internally and externally and to present a uniform and coherent brand image. The importance of this type of communication leads one to measure its effects on the behavior of the consumer. The question is if such communication has an impact on the behavior of the consumer and if the corporation can direct the choices of the consumer to environmental and new products. The literature review formulates hypotheses and is used to design an abstract model. The empirical study tests the influence of corporate communication on the behavior of the consumer. The results approve the composed hypotheses and show a clear influence of such communication on the consumers' behavior.

1. INTRODUCTION

In an environment where the production and the consumption become more responsible, companies are called to emphasize their communications actions. On one side, the corporate communication, element indispensable to the development of companies, allows to develop a visibility both at the internal level and the external.

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On other one, these last years were the theater of the sustainable development and the corporate social responsibility within companies.

The ecological awareness, as well as the growing social concerns placed companies in the center of the debate of the society. These owe answer in an adequate way. The current needs require the development of new modes of communication and new supports to establish more sustainable relations. The corporate communication thus becomes a tool of competitive advantage which must be considered with attention because she allows to value the products of a company and to strengthen the image of this one. Nevertheless, only the companies which really put a lot into an initiative of sustainable development can develop such communication. It is then advisable to be interested in the influence of the communication corporate on the behavior of the consumer. In other words, define if such a communication has an impact on the behavior of the consumer and can direct its choices to environmental and new products.

Most of the studies underlined the existence of a strong negative impact of the advertising of not public-spirited acts (Mohr and al, on 2001; Swaen and Vanhamme, on 2003). Folkes and Kamins (1999) for example shows that the fact of describing a company as breaking certain social principles (child labor) generates a negative attitude of the consumers to the firm, whatever is the quality level of the product offered (example of Nike). Swaen and Vanhamme (2005) also validate that a charge of not responsible activity generates a degradation of the attitude towards the company, towards the product, towards the intention of purchase and towards the trust to the company, that it has or not communicated on its societal commitments previously. Mohr and Webb (2005) as for others notice an asymmetry already postulated by Creyer and Ross (1997) in the effects of the societal commitments: responsible behavior influences positively the attitude towards the company and the intention of purchase of the consumer, while bad performances degrade them in a even more marked way.

But if the negative effects of the announcement of an irresponsible act seem indisputable, the positive effects of the societal commitments on the perceptions consumer are more mitigated (Brown and Dacin, on 1997; Sen and Battacharya, on 2001; Swen and Vanhamme, on 2003; Mohr and Webb, on 2005). These effects are observed on the general attitude towards the company, but are not it still at the level of the attitude towards products and towards intention of purchase (Brown and Dacin, on 1997; Swaen and Vanhamme, on 2003).

It is in this context that joins our contribution: if the corporate communication is a today current practice to number of brands, few academic researchers were led to understand the way that the consumer perceived it and especially, how it is going to influence his choices. More specifically, if certain authors proposed a theoretical link between the commitment in a societal cause and the construction

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