

THE IMPORTANCE OF MARKETING COMMUNICATION IN THE TOURISTIC NEGOTIATION

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Abstract

The article deals with a complex and original field of analysis – the role that promotional communication can have within the commercial negotiation process between tour-operating agencies and hotels. In a business world dominated by competitiveness, every method regarding the optimization of the negotiation process is welcomed from the point of view of modern organizations. Therefore, the present research finds its utility through its scope – measuring the impact of marketing communication upon the stages of the negotiation process in the field of touristic services.

I propose a series of factors - variables that influence the different stages of negotiation, and analyse their importance into the context.

The research conclusions reveal the fact that some correlations can be outlined between the different aspects of the negotiation process and the promotional communications of the two parties involved. Also, a very interesting path for further research is represented by the effect that the correlation between internal and external marketing communication can have upon the activity of the two partners in the negotiations process.

Keywords: *marketing communication, negotiation process, touristic services, optimization*

JEL Classification: L₈₃, M₃₁, M₃₇

Introduction

Marketing communication represents a complex of processes that ensure the dynamic connection of organisations to the business environment. The objectives pursued by any economic agent through the intermediary of marketing communication refer mainly to the building of a specific image of the organisation, to the establishment of its position on the market, to the feedback from the customers, etc.

Thus, through its specific functions and content, marketing communication plays a vital role in the optimization of the business strategy of economic agents and in the proper adjustment to the changes in the business environment. Also, the concern for maintaining long-term relationships is equally important in business to business relationships which are specific to the touristic services market. If in the case of business to consumer relationships the attitude and the emotional response

influence up to 75% of the consumers' buying decisions (Cătoi I., Gârdan D.A., Geangu I.P., 2012, p. 279), when it comes to the relationships between organisations, the success lies in the partners' efforts to provide correct and adequate information to the other party.

Within the relationships that economic agents establish with other entities in the business environment, exchange relationships are of a major importance, their continuity ensuring the well-functioning and the achievement of the mission assumed by each and every organisation. Exchange relationships will be initiated, carried out, maintained and developed through negotiation processes – complex processes that presuppose the effort of aligning the interests of the two parties involved. In the course of the interest alignment processes, the stakeholders exchange information, reconsidering their position and attitudes permanently. For each economic agent involved in negotiation processes, marketing communication – especially promotional communication, can influence to a great extent their capacity of knowing their partner and of positioning themselves adequately in respect to the partner's offer.

The specificity of the marketing communication that touristic services providers use is determined by the marketing mix, which is much more complex in this case than that of the businesses that provide goods. This complexity derives from the fact that the undertakings to “render tangible” the future performances are enhanced through the communication process, by using those elements that can make the offer visible and, most of all, that can convince the consumer to accept it. The market research conducted in Romania confirmed that modern consumers, especially the young, spend much time searching for touristic offers on the internet and favour electronic communication channels with tourist/travel agencies (offers through newsletters, internet surfing through mobile phone, social networks, etc.) (Gârdan D.A., Geangu I.P., Roşu A.M., 2011, p. 231).

On the whole, the marketing communication carried out between tourist accommodation units and tour-operating travel agencies – and the communication with the intermediaries on the touristic market in general (the so-called „business” customers) focusses on outlining those aspects that highlight the special features of the offer, which differentiate it from the competitors' offers and are likely to improve the tourists' degree of satisfaction. In the case of tourism, the promotional communication techniques that precede seasons and events and that contribute gradually to increasing the area's and the operator's popularity are inherently necessary (advertising, public relations, the organisation's promotion on the market, personal selling, direct marketing, etc.). Each and every promotional technique will add its own communicational potential and contribute to the global effort of transposing into practice the basic elements relating to the image of the organisation and of the services it provides. This type of communication comes to complement the continuous communication techniques in regard to the brand, to the contact personnel, to the location of the organisation, etc.

Generally, the promotional communication of the accommodation units, targeted at tour-operating agencies, is meant to lay the foundation for business relationships and, subsequently, to help maintain and develop them. The mere

intention of communication – that of conveying information and messages meant to enhance the customers' buying attitude is not enough in order to achieve customers' loyalty. It is compulsory to deliver information that allows the thorough knowledge of the services provided, of the contractor's mode of action, as well as of the type of the relationship likely to be established. Thus, the focus will be on establishing the objective framework that, in an open contractual environment, through „win-win” negotiations, should ensure the long-term loyalty of the partners.

From the perspective of the long-term relationship between the contractors – the accommodation units – and the tour-operating agencies, promotional communication will also target the contracting agreement, the actual negotiations between the two parties involved.

The negotiation process and importance of marketing communication

In the field of touristic services, the relationships between the players on the market are complex and dynamic, which is specific to a service economy. Given the specificities of the touristic services market, they are generally long-term relationships, the basic touristic service providers, as well as their distributors aiming at developing stable relationships that can enhance long-term profitability.

In order to analyse the importance of marketing communication in the negotiation process, I consider necessary, as a first step, to outline the basic content of the negotiation phases, as they are presented in the specialized literature: (Pistol Gh., 2004, p. 19-21)

- the pre-negotiation stage takes place in the preparatory phase, when the first contacts are established, data are gathered, the motivation for the future negotiation is outlined;

- the actual negotiation stage comprises the beginning, the development and the conclusion of the negotiations through an agreement of the stakeholders;

- the post-negotiation stage occurs after the signature of the agreement, when this starts taking effect and when action is taken to settle the disputes between the parties;

- the proto-negotiation stage takes places after the conclusion of the contractual terms agreed upon during the last negotiation; it marks the moment when a new negotiation process may begin, with a new pre-negotiation phase.

Since I considered necessary to determine the importance of marketing communication in the negotiation process, I set out to structure the constitutive activities, allocating some variables, depending on the way in which the managers envisage the possible influences of promotional communication during the phases of the negotiation process.

Research methodology and results

In order to determine the influence of promotional communication at the level of the negotiation process, I was devised a research of the type field survey.

I conducted a structured, transversal survey to gather data, and I used an online questionnaire to collect information. The questionnaire was administered to tourism agencies by e-mail. Initially, the questionnaire was administered to 213 tourism agencies; subsequently, I removed the questionnaires that were not valid as the information recorded was either incomplete or inaccurate.

Our survey aimed at outlining the following aspects:

- The perception of the managers/officers in the tour-operating agencies with respect to the importance of the promotional communication carried out by their partners – the accommodation units – during the phases of the negotiation process between these latter and the tourism agencies.

- The determination of the influence the promotional communication undertaken by the accommodation units has on the identification of new opportunities for partnerships.

- The determination of the influence the promotional communication undertaken by the accommodation units has on facilitating the building of the negotiation file.

- The determination of the influence the promotional communication undertaken by the accommodation units has on the need for more information about the partner of the tour-operating agency.

- The measurement of the importance the content of the promotional communication undertaken by the accommodation units has on identifying the objectives of the negotiation between these latter and the tour-operating agencies.

- The identification of the effect that the information delivered through promotional communication has upon the capacity to make concessions during negotiation.

- The identification of the effect that the information delivered through promotional communication has upon the capacity to find compromise solutions and to align the interests of the two partners during negotiations.

- The determination of the degree to which the promotional messages within the marketing communication carried out after the conclusion of the negotiations can facilitate the monitoring of the execution and application of the contractual terms agreed upon during the negotiation.

- The determination of the extent to which the information gathered through promotional communication can contribute to the re-renegotiation or to the amendment/adjustment of certain contractual terms.

- The determination of the degree to which the effect of promotional communication can contribute to the maintenance of the communication between the two partners, after the conclusion of the negotiations.

- The determination of the correlation between the perceptions about the influence of promotional communication upon the progress of the negotiations.

- The perception about the influence of promotional communication upon the progress of the negotiations and the willingness of the managers to get involved in the efforts related to the promotional communication of the accommodation units.

– The identification of the degree to which the promotional communication of the accommodation units can contribute to the transfer of some elements of the latter's organizational culture in relation to the partner tour-operating agencies during the negotiations.

– The determination of the extent to which the promotional communication of the accommodation units can facilitate the maintenance of a long-term collaboration and support new negotiations.

Each objective identified will be set in relation to a hypothesis that will highlight the possible direction of evolution of the information obtained from the research, in the sense of validating the data or rendering them invalid. Thus, I will use the SPSS 20.2 programme.

Conclusions and future research directions

The analysis of the data obtained from our research revealed a series of conclusions that may, in their turn, serve as starting point for future research directions.

Thus, generally, the managers of tour-operating agencies acknowledge that the promotional communication of the partner accommodation units plays an important role in the context of the negotiations between the latter and the tourism agencies.

The great majority of the respondents (92%) considered that promotional communication influences to a great extent and to a very great extent the agencies' capacity of identifying new opportunities for partnerships. On the other hand, merely 36% consider that the promotional communication undertaken by the accommodation units facilitates the building of the negotiation file.

As for the influence of promotional communication on the need for more information about the negotiating partners, 48% of respondents claimed that promotional communication increased to a great extent the need for more information. In order to draw a relevant conclusion, however, this information must be correlated with supplementary data, since the need for more information arouse either as a consequence of deficient promotional communication, or as an endeavour to clarify certain aspects related to the providers' offer that the promotional communication outlined.

At the same time, one can notice the number of respondents who perceive as important the role of promotional communication in relation to setting the goals to be negotiated. Thus, the average score obtained was of 3.108 and as a percentage around 28% of managers believe that marketing promotional communication of the accommodation units has greatly influenced the identification of the negotiating objectives. A promotional communications that clearly states the attributes by which the accommodation units is positioned and individualized on the market can highlight a number of advantages that the travel agency wants to use once the contract between the partners will be signed. These positions that offer advantages are valuable for the travel agents in their future transactions with the consumers.

The offers of the accommodation units that refer to prices, terms, facilities, etc. allow the business customers to establish their objectives. Thus this can constitute in the case of the first contact of a tour operator travel agency the only information they possess, a fact that exponentially increases the role of promotional communication.

In terms of partners' capacity to negotiate, to make concessions while negotiating, the information from promotional communications had no effective influence on it. On the same line, a weak influence of the promotional communication from the perspective of the possibility of identifying compromise and harmonization solutions of both partners' interests was highlighted.

At the same time I wanted to identify the existence of the correlation that may exist between the perception about the influence of promotional communication on the conduct of the negotiations and the agency managers willingness to engage in the efforts of the promotional communicate of the accommodation units. The average score obtained was 4.438 which shows that managers believe that promotional communication has a somewhat important influence in the context of the negotiations, being willing to engage in partners' promotional effort in the view of maintaining some long-term relationships.

81% of the surveyed managers felt that the messages and information contained in the promotional communication have a little contribution to the easier monitoring of the progress and accomplishment of the contractual terms agreed during negotiations. At the same time, the majority of respondents consider that the information from the promotional communication contribute greatly to the total or partial renegotiation of contracts, the average score obtained being 4.817.

After analysing the data, it can be seen that managers believe that promotion communication is able to influence the conduct of the negotiations and when they seek to maintain long-term relationships they are interested to get involved in supporting the promotional effort of the partners.

Studying the ways in which managers conceptualize their own involvement in partners' promotion efforts represents an interesting topic from the perspective of some future research directions. Such an involvement denotes the willingness to apply the principles of relational marketing, building a common communicative approach, designed for other categories of consumers in the tourist services supply chain – retail travel agencies and end users respectively. Also an interesting research direction could be represented by determining the importance that internal marketing communication may have in the context of negotiations. This because the communication between employees from various levels of decision/execution, the communication with members of the negotiation team, the integration of the effort to train employees in the context of ensuring the competitiveness of companies represent very important elements from the communicational perspective of the internal environment. (Tudose G., 2007, p. 103)

Respondents appreciate the role of promotional communication in transferring certain elements specific to the organizational culture that can help maintain the relationships between partners during several negotiation processes. The consensualisation of the development directions of the organizational culture

emphasizes the opportunity of the relational marketing. In the wider context of the touristic services market, business relationships between providers and distributors may develop starting from common business visions, similar target customers and even a similar approach of the touristic product. Using the same package of values, some similar types of management and generally harmonizing the organizational cultures allow the maximization of the negotiations' efficiency of the on way of developing tourism in our country.

Within the bivariate correlation analysed it resulted that about 83% of the tour operator agencies with over 20 employees stated that they get involve much or very much in supporting the promotional efforts alongside accommodation units partners. This fact highlights the capability of proactive exploitation of the financial and human potential in order to strengthen long-term relationships.

A somewhat similar result has also resulted from the correlation between manager's involvement in the efforts regarding promotional communication of the accommodation units and the seniority on the market of the tour operator agencies (79% of the agencies with a more than 10 years seniority). These results confirm the idea that a travel agency, as it evolves on the market and successfully surpasses different crisis conditions, earns extra know-how that allows it to further develop integrated strategies.

Besides the research directions already highlighted above (studying the ways in which managers conceptualize their own involvement in the efforts to promote partners, the role of promotional communication in the context of agency's seniority on the market), the existence of the need to investigate the relation between the efforts associated to the promotional communication of both partners – accommodation unit and agency – in a double sense stands out as well.

It is also recommended to investigate as well the complex role that internal marketing communication within the two organizations can play in tandem with external marketing communication, the extent to which the two types of communication complement and mutually reinforce themselves.

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