

Internet Marketing Target the Young Generation

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Abstract: - Children represent the market with the biggest growth potential. As a result, to strict regulations adopted in many countries for protecting young children and teens from TV commercials, more and more companies find new ways to reach this target-public. One of these creative methods is **Internet Marketing**. The Internet offers children and teens many opportunities to explore new ideas, make friends, visit foreign lands, and participate in interesting and challenging games. Unfortunately, some aspects of the virtual world can be harmful to children. Advertisers and marketers can use the Internet to target children and gather personal information every time they visit commercial web sites, register for club membership, play games or visit chat rooms.

The marketers' aim has always been to make known to the target- audience (in this case, children) a particular brand, the brand logo, the musical background and video presentation accompanying the respective product. Well, all these aspects are best combined by internet marketing.

Key-Words: - internet marketing, mobile marketing, Generation Y, Generation Z, marketing ethics

1 Introduction

Every day we are bombed with so much publicity from so many sources that we started to develop a certain resistance, some kind of “short-sightedness” that helps us block away part of these advertisements and select only the messages we consider useful.

The pressure that the teenagers are submitted to, especially the children, must be overwhelming because they haven't developed yet these adjustment gears. The problem is that by the age of 7 years old the children do not understand the fact that the main purpose of advertising is to sell the product, they do not differentiate between the news and the commercials (these are considered by children as being funny news and do not doubt any moment about the authenticity of all the aspects that

the advertisements promote, even the obvious fantastic ones and beyond reality).

The strife between parents and marketers proves to become more difficult; while we count on education, positive examples, healthy life principles and the promises of a better way of living, the marketers are using multimillion budgets to promote attractive products which they always transform into a “must have” through media and through the teenagers' favourite idols. We promise them a better life in the future while the marketers urge them to live the present at a high level of satisfaction. The young generation is the generation of the moment – they must have *now* the ultimate cell phone, the latest computer with the necessary accessories and games. The future? Well, they will see when they'll get there.

At the same time, we may say there have never been so many possibilities to reach the target (children and teenagers) and there haven't been yet used all the ways to influence them, even by some means considered taboo in the past (violent language, irony against adults, etc.).

In this competition it is decided not only who gains the youth market but also who will raise and educate these children, who will influence their choices, opinions and even who will shape their character. Nowadays' young generation evaluate into the most materialistic society, where the basic values build up on the principle of *having* and *not being*.

According to the study "The impact of advertising upon children" made during October - November at the request of the National Audiovisual Council, 72% of the children of 6-10 years old said that they had asked at least once to their parents to buy a product after seeing an advertising on television, and at 81,9% of children there have been purchased the requested. It should be mentioned that this percentage is decreasing once with the increasing age of children - from 82, 5% of children aged 6 to only 70% of those that are 10 years old state this thing, confirming the increase of the scepticism or distrust towards advertising once with the age.[1]

As children grow, they tend to assert their independence, the will of being rebels makes them even more accessible towards the companies pursuing them with their products even in bookstores or schools (textbooks include advertisement pages, retailers offers school materials at the beginning of the school year, they organize contests for students and so on).

The ethics of the marketing actions aiming children has never been as controversial as it is today. The companies aiming the public target and the followers of the intense marketing for children keep on underlining the positive even educating aspects of their actions. So, marketing can be a precious informational source for children; it can provide them with the first lessons in being responsible consumers, it offers them the ability of appreciating the offer diversity and teaches them how to take right decisions. Parents are stimulated to teach their children to have a financial judgment while at school they are taught how to use different types of media.

Eventually, children are present, especially potential consumers and knowledge is power in their personal development. We'd better educate and make children understand and act in knowledge than forbid them the access to publicity and advertisements. Of course, closing fast foods,

eliminating their sponsorship on TV is not an option, even though a number of countries such as Denmark and Finland succeeded in forbidding advertisements during the shows aiming children. The traditional marketing campaign for products aiming children implies a message towards both children and grown-ups. The marketers' ethics considers specifying that the offer aims first at parents, as they are the material and moral buyers.

There are many possibilities to aim at children without breaking the principles of ethics in marketing and all of them suppose parental agreement before buying (advertisements in revues for adults, sites, parental forums, a.g.).

The principles of marketing are considered to provide solutions to all these problems, taking into consideration that imposed restrictions within elaborating the marketing for children do not restrain the acting possibilities but even create new opportunities – such as developing a healthy food products line, developing strategies not only to sell new products but also to educate the consumers for a healthy and well balanced way of life – leading the consumers (parents and children) through television programs towards a different life style, recommending toys, sports equipment and different activities leading this way. Although the TV channels present bridling these advertisements and social messages to educate the consumers' taste, they finally have a certain impact on the teenager consumer who will not note the message "tobacco is bad for health" but she will remark the ad for Camel no.9 made wrapped in a girly packaging – strong pink on black pack.

2 Particularities for the Young Generation Market

Acknowledging the vastness of the market, the marketers aimed along the years to identify the main characteristics of the teenagers' generations and the how they evolved in time. Starting from "Generation X" sintagma, used for those born between 1966 –and 1976 in Canada and USA, researchers called the *Generation Y* (for those born between 1977 and 1994) and with *Generation Z* (for those born between 1995 and 2009), therefore the last generation of children born after 2010 is called the *Alpha Generation*, for those born in the new millennium. The borders of these generations vary for different geographical areas, for example in Romania they started later than in the Western world.

Jeffrey Cole, a media futurist, who studied the youngsters' consumption behaviour, points out the following main features for the Internet Z Generation of teenagers, features available even for the younger members of Y Generation: [2]

- Teens do not read newspapers except for some niche magazines the youth is not interested in written media, their main source of information remaining the Internet (blogs, newsletter alerts, etc.);
- They have precise preferences regarding the TV shows, they almost never watch the shows with their parents, most of them have their own TV set or watch television via Internet;
- They grew up with cell phones and access on the computer;
- They trust more their friends (even virtual groups of friends, social networks) than the traditional informational sources;
- Although they do not admit, they are more concerned in the brand of the products they use than other consumers;
- They communicate all the time through messages with their group of friends, take photos and resend any information, any news they consider interesting for their group of friends (grapevine phenomenon);
- They are constant part of the virtual environment, surfing on the Internet, downloading music or games, sending messages, or all of it at the same time.

These particularities made this segment of potential customers be considered extremely difficult to have access to by the marketers through the marketing traditional ways. Difficulties don't make this target less attractive due to many factors such as:

- Children and teenagers have more buying power than ever. More and more children are raised in families with both parental income or in single child families, which gets them a wider financial independence. Not only they have access to their own amounts of money for personal needs but they also have an important influence on the family shopping, even for the very expensive stuff, like cars, cosmetics, electronics or when choosing the family holiday destinations;
- The teenagers are taken into consideration as market target even for their future potential, according to the principle "from cradle to grave";
- These generations of teenagers lack the sense of saving, they spend at an impulse and they continuously act their need to have;
- Even if they are more difficult to be influenced through the traditional marketing, the

marketers dispose of new promoting ways, even more invasive such as the Internet, the mobile phone, buzz marketing, WOM, etc

3 Marketing on Internet Target Young Generation

After more than five decades of controversies about the impact of television upon children, recent studies show that the Internet has an overwhelming influence on the younger generation. With the help of the *Internet*, the world in which the children carry on their life, make friends, document for subjects far beyond the family's horizon, of the school, of the city or even of the country where they live in.

Children in the digital age must deal with the duality of the *Internet*:

- on the one hand, they have access to a variety of information and ideas, that can help them to go beyond or exceed the limits of the actual space in which they live and learn;
- on the other hand, the video games, the virtual shops and all forms of aggressive marketing that are targeting the children- teenagers segment can manipulate the way in which they see reality, the values which they had at the expense of the parents', teachers' efforts, and the civil society efforts.

The Internet has accelerated the cancellation of the differences between generations, and the children have more specific tastes and preferences than the children of the same age from past generations and do have no reticence in materializing them. The latest trends are almost instantly presented on the *Internet*, and the young people are always updated and aware.

In the past, the absence of the credit cards prevented children from being on-line active shoppers, but in the last ten years the banks and the credit institutions have developed numerous attractive programs for young people, by resolving this impediment. Also, in Romania online shops have adapted to the reluctance to use cards in the purchasing of the products, offering the possibility to pay the products in reimbursement delivery system.

Parents are worried because they cannot supervise the purchases made by the children on the *Internet*, as well as by the financial responsibility of the children, but also about the invasion of aggressive marketers upon the private information of the children.

As an answer to all these problems, several sites offer to the parents the possibility to establish the

amount that their children are allowed to spend and even what they are allowed or not to buy.

Among the characteristics of the marketing on the Internet that occur in the relation with the children and adolescents target-segment, we can mention:

- on the *Internet*, the children are targeted from the earliest age – starting from the four years old, they often surf on the *Internet* without the parent's supervision

- more sites select the profile of each child who frequents it and depending on this profile there are designed personalized messages in order to attract them (micro-targeting)

- the marketers offer gifts or free samples to the children who accept to fill in the questionnaires

- some sites have a very attractive opening page, but allow the access only after the registration of the children, this implying the disclosure of some information about family, preferences, buying / consumption habits and other data that will end up in various marketing databases

- the sites of some manufacturers encourage the children to develop a personal relationship with the characters who promote the products or the brands, even receiving personalized emails from them

- many sites of promotion of a product or of a brand name are presented as interactive games, very appealing to children; often the access at higher levels of certain games or to certain bonuses are conditioned by the purchase of some items, toys (the Webkinz toys are accompanied by a code that allows the access to the company website)

- Many companies benefit from the advice of some specialists in child's psychology in order to analyze the reaction of the children and to choose the most effective ways to attract them in a long-term relationship

If we add to these trends the conclusions of the statistics that show that the young people have more confidence in the information gathered from the *Internet* than in their parents' advice, then we understand the growing concern of the parents and of the support groups regarding the harmful effects of promotion on the *Internet*.

The more stringent legislation regarding the marketing for children through television, has determined the marketers to seek for new ways to address to this target segment less strictly regulated. Even if officially the operators must obtain the parental consent in order to obtain personal data from children, the way in which this can be done is more than unclear. Thus, there are not precisely established the types of information that can be required directly from children; from what age children can respond without parental consent; how

can the operators be sure that they discuss with a parent and it is not the child that responds on behalf of a parent. These issues raise questions or problems for both operators as for the safety of the children who are surfing on the web/ *Internet*.

The main concern refers to the possibility of ensuring safety for the children on the *Internet*, and preventing the potential abuse upon them.

Secondly, the concerns are heading for the ease with which the children disclose personal information about themselves and about their families, thus leaving them to the disposal of the direct marketing campaigns that invade their privacy with endless series of offers and deals.

More and more countries make a priority from adopting a stricter legislation regarding the marketing practices that are targeting children, most of them watching the specific TV programmes, but there is a more recently concern for their protection on the Internet. All these projects aimed at protecting children up to age 12-13 years, leaving fully revealed to the media segment adolescent aggression. In the eyes of the law, Internet marketers can treat them as if they were adults.

Compared with the children who are particularly attracted by the Internet especially by gaming and consider everything as a wonderful adventure, the teenagers use the Internet as their main source of information, which makes them potential knowledgeable buyers.

Nowadays, the adolescents have at their disposal sums of money more important than in the past and they develop loyalty towards products / brands much more sooner, which makes them very attractive for the marketers, who are interested in them to transform them into loyal customers for life.

In our country, where there is no tradition of the consumer groups who can take action or have an attitude, the parents are not equally concerned about the danger to which are exposed their children on the *Internet*. The parents suppose, most often, that as long as there is *Internet* access under their own roof or in a public place, the children are safe. Also, most often, the teenagers (even children) know more about the *Internet* than their parents do.

Advertising influences the children's minds, in that it creates a need to own that product which is advertised. The shining images from the magazines or on the posters or the television advertising flashes create the desire to buy impulsively. The parents who cannot deal with the issues raised or with the angry temperament have the tendency to give up to their child's requirements. Children get used afterwards to a certain lifestyle, which is shown on television or through various media sources. This

thing creates a distorted impression upon their young minds, making them to lose the ability to live a life without relying on material pleasures. Thus, the power of advertising cannot be ignored.

4 New Solutions for an Ever New Market

The Internet proved to be an extremely favourable environment for the marketing activities especially for the young people and this because:

- it is part of the culture of the new generation - any teenager has access to the Internet, either from school or home, the Internet has become a mass communication medium, the penetration degree already exceeding 60% in the urban areas, the young people spend on average 1 to 3 hours daily on the Internet

- while the television commercials are regulated and monitored, there are no clear regulations regarding the marketing actions on the Internet

- most of the parents are surpassed by their children regarding the use of the Internet

- The Internet is the only environment or medium that offers the possibility of presenting live commercials, colourful, moving and with sound (like the classical communication channels) but, in addition, it also enables the users to interact with the characters, thus developing a special relationship with these.

In the previous section we talked about the problems that the Internet raises, both as a social responsibility towards the young people, as well as possibility to transmit promotional messages to this target segment. The difficulty of accessing this market of the young people should only represent a challenge for the creative minds of the marketers.

If Generation X spent most of their free time in front of the TV, making it an ideal target for television advertising, we can state that the young generations (both Y and Z generation) gave up in an overwhelmingly extent at radio and television in the favour of the Internet, of the mobile phones and the game consoles.

As a result, the marketers must adapt:

- the marketers must know the specific language, "encoded" of the young people, the messages must be designed in such a way to produce the expected effect

- the marketers must attend the same information media as the young people, to "scan" permanently the sites and forums, even to generate new trends among the young people by using the grapevine effect, the influence of certain bloggers, etc.

- the necessity to integrate the marketing communications – in order to be sure that they reach the target group, the marketers must design messages for both traditional media (if the specificity of the product requires it) as well as for the Internet, mobile phone (SMS or MMS), buzz marketing, WOM, etc.

An example of a marketing campaign designed specifically for the youth's market is done by Ogilvy Advertising for Fanta with the help of an application for the mobile phone that allows the young people to communicate secretly, without the adult's intervention (each adolescent's dream). *The Fanta Stealth Sound System* is based on the fact that the adults after 20 years time lose the ability to hear very high frequency sounds. The application allows young people to download more different sounds from one, each having specific sense allowing only the adolescents to use this secret language. The campaign was very animated, using traditional methods of promotion (promotional clips) but also the viral marketing and buzz marketing. [3]

The special attention that the youth segment enjoys for this product can also be confirmed by the Fanta campaign launched by Carnation Group in Romania. The campaign aims to attract the teenagers Fanta through an exciting, digital and innovative experience. The young people are invited to create a special Fanta hello, record it and upload it on the site in order to get votes and win prizes. At the end of the contest, the creator of the film with the most votes will have his own official 3D Fanta character, which will be joined by Maya and Cipri, and the rest of the gang, on the promotional Fanta materials in Romania.

Besides these two instruments (Internet and mobile marketing) with exceptional power of penetrating among the young people, the marketers must design their promotional strategy by integrating the other marketing strategies specific for children market: pester power; using knowledge of child psychology in the development of promotion themes; development brand name loyalty since childhood; involvement in the educational process; buzz or street marketing; games and toys inspired by the programs for teenage and adults. [4]

4. Conclusions

The adolescents and children from Romania resemble more with the teenagers from the whole the world than with their parents' generation. They grow up in a very materialistic society, which promotes hedonistic excess and consumption as the

path to success and of personal satisfaction. They are used to receive easily, without any effort or personal merits almost anything they want, whenever they want (probably a result of some parents' *guilt factor* who are always busy).

We cannot protect them by prohibiting all the advertising to unhealthy products, but we can make a greater effort in educating the young people in order to become more conscious consumers.

The marketing for the youth's market should be viewed from two perspectives:

- First of all, of the social responsibility, of the ethics promotion actions by a public extremely eager for news and extremely impressed

- Secondly, of the necessity to adopt some marketing strategies and techniques specifically designed to reach to this group of consumers who is extremely knowledgeable and informed and always connected. The Internet and mobile phones enables them the instant access to any information from any field and anywhere in the world, and therefore promotional campaigns that should arouse a real interest can no longer rely on bright or sparkling packaging, the promise to be *cool* or on the teenage star smile.

In conclusion, the solution cannot be the global labelling of the marketing for children considered unethical and the prohibiting of promotional activities that target children. Children should, instead, be familiar with the positive and negative aspects of the marketing actions, and the entrepreneurs must meet the requirements in a manner that should protect and even be beneficial to the interests of children.

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