DOCTORAL THESIS SUMMARY

Entitled

THE IMPACT OF INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION ON ONLINE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT IN ROMANIA
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KEYWORDS: integrated marketing communication, synergy, Internet, online marketing
communication, business environment
Doctoral Thesis Summary

The importance of communication in everyday life, ours as individuals, but also in the economic one, have been the subject of many research papers, both in foreign and in Romanian literature. Furthermore, reflecting about our own existence, we realize that it is based on the capacity of each individual to communicate. Since birth we are constantly taught the essential rules for belonging in our society and we, in turn, communicate who we are and what we desire. Communication represents the linking element between individuals and we express through it thought, sentiments, ideas, demand. Practically, communication sits at the base of everyone’s personality development, of the creation of relationships between individuals, of the development of organizations, these in turn consisting of individuals, and of the creation of the relationships between individuals and organizations. Regarding communication from an organization’s point of view, it is essential for market presence, regardless of the activity domain. Even when an organization does not initiate a communication process, this, in fact, represents a form of communication, which is why it is recommended that the organization take control. However, the business environment is a complex and dynamic one and trying to achieve a relationship in such an environment can prove difficult. Communication has become, thus, an essential component of marketing activity, with more and more specialists, both theoretical and practical, admitting the important role that marketing communication has in reaching marketing objectives, but also in reaching the organization’s objectives in general.

The motivation behind the choosing of this work’s subject has its starting point in the desire to understand the business environment, being in a state of change, especially in the manner in which organizations in Romania use the integrated marketing communication for online business development, using information and communication technology successfully, adapting to new trends and creating a coherent strategy for using the online marketing communication tools and techniques in order to achieve general and specific objectives.

In this thesis I have begun from the general to the particular, the theme and objectives of this research being reflected in the chapters: the first chapter focusing on the place and role of marketing communication in economic life, the second presenting the evolution and characteristics of the Internet from the business environment perspective, seen as a support tool of integrated marketing communication, the third chapter showing the role that integrated marketing communication has on the development of business online and underlining the particularities of integrated marketing communication in the online medium, continuing with the fourth chapter which presents the techniques and tools of integrated marketing communication used for the purpose of business development online and culminating with the two chapters which contain the
research done within the marketing specialists ranks from organizations in Romania. The research of practical aspects, applied at the organization level in Romania, can offer a perspective on what integrated marketing communication means and the vision that marketing personnel have on using integrated marketing communication with the purpose of business development online. The last chapter of the thesis presents the managerial implication, the limits of the research and the trends seen in future research.

The first chapter, **Place and role of integrated marketing communication in the economic life**, follows the growing importance that marketing communication has in the development of any activity of any organization. This chapter is composed of 3 subchapters, where I have considered an opportunity to present a few aspects of communication in general, in order to have a larger image of this concept. Thus, it has followed the identification of the *functions* which communication performs and the presentation of the *typology of communication*, having as a base criterion such as: the nature and number of message recipients; the nature of symbols used; the nature and objectives of the emitter. Following, a series of *communication models* are presented, elaborated at the beginning of the research in communications, but which are considered fundamental in this domain and have their merit to be presented because they stand at the base of further researches. The primary models presented are: Harold D. Lasswell model of communication, the Shannon-Weaver model, the Gerbner model, communication model with application in marketing domain proposed by Kotler and Keller. At the same time, communication from the perspective of interhuman relationships is considered, through the presentation of *communication axioms* formed by the Palo Alto School. Furthermore, there is evidence of the *obstacles in communication*, presented in general, as well as from a marketing point of view.

The next subchapter proposes a concept analysis: *promotion, marketing communication, integrated marketing communication*, focusing on the definition and presentation of these concept’s particularities, as well as the importance of communication between the organization and customer, which becomes essential for the long-term success of an organization. The concept of *integrated marketing communication* has been revealed as an answer to the challenges that have manifested in business environment: development and usage of the Internet and digital technologies in economic activity, stepping over geographic and cultural boundaries through the globalization of a business, the necessity of a top position on the market, competition intensifying, differencing the offers of products and services and using the brand for this purpose. The necessity of integrated approach results from a very large volume of available information regarding the organization and its entire activity, information that the consumers can easily reach and organization have a limited control over.
The last subchapter brings into discussion the marketing communication system, seen from the target public’s perspective: internal communication and external communication respectively. In this subchapter techniques and tools of marketing communication are analyzed, which can be used by an organization both internally and externally, each one having an important contribution in efficient communication accomplishment.

Chapter 2, Internet – support for integrated marketing communication, focuses on the impact that the Internet has on most aspects of our lives as individuals, but also on the economic activity. Most organizations have reorganized their entire marketing policy, trying to adapt to new trends. Thus, a first subchapter follows the presentation of evolution and characteristics of the Internet from a business environment perspective. Following, economic aspects and social implications of Internet usage are presented, because its development and ease of access in its usage have social and cultural implications which must not be neglected. The third subchapter presents the particularities of the Internet as a business environment, focusing on online marketing communication and the online consumer behavior. The last subchapter shows practical aspects of Internet usage in Romania. We cannot compare the Internet to any other support medium in existence because we are talking about an ‘unique and innovative medium, with its own unique and innovative requirements and requests’, so described by Al Ries and Laura Ries (2006, p. 23). As opposed to mass communication, online communication conducts an exchange of information between the organization and the target audience, be it consumers, shareholders, suppliers, distribution or other stakeholders. What makes it different is the combination of advantages which mass communication and interpersonal communication bring, individually: marketing message transmission to a large audience, individualization of the messages, huge interaction between the communication participants and rapid feedback (Orzan & Orzan, 2007, pp. 11-12).

Chapter 3, The role of integrated marketing communication in online business development, is divided into four subchapters and highlights the role and characteristics of integrated marketing communication in online business development. Relating to competition, the business environment is becoming more competitive. It would seem that businesses take a struggle to win an important place among consumer preferences and advance the position that is most favorable in the target markets, having available a supply of goods and services even richer and slightly differentiated. Moreover, the very large volume of messages consumers are exposed to, dwindling attention given to these messages, and lack of time pressure felt by us all, lead to greater importance which must be given to marketing communication. In these circumstances, the communication between the organization and the customer is essential for long term success. However, a simple public information can not constitute a sound basis for achieving effective communication. Therefore, integrated marketing communication can be a source of competitive
advantage and can make a decisive contribution to achieving its objectives (Ivanov, 2012). But the major requirement, like any competitive advantage, is to be maintained in the long run through continuous adaptation to the consumer demands, their needs and preferences, but also through a careful tracking of the movements of the competition.

Therefore, the first subchapter presents the evolution of integrated marketing communication in terms of illustrating the concept of synergy and highlight the benefits of integrated marketing communication. Both in theory and in practice, experts agree with the benefits that an integrated approach bring to communication activity, considering integrated marketing communication as having a crucial role in the conduct of any organization. However, at the operational level, managers still face problems in understanding the concept of integrated marketing communication and implementation of such communication programs, which is why I considered it important to highlight these barriers.

The second subchapter presents the process of marketing communication within the context of integrated communication strategy, which involves the stages well defined to ensure coherence, consensus and consistency of communication activities undertaken by the organization.

The third subchapter highlights the role and importance of brand in developing business in the online environment, by illustrating the concept of brand presentation attributes and emphasize the strongest brands and the online brand features.

The last subchapter presents the communication mix elements and the way the integration of online marketing communication with the traditional marketing communication is carried, while emphasizing the challenge regarding the measurement of communication approaches undertaken by an organization.

Chapter 4, Techniques and tools of integrated marketing communication used for business development in the online environment, consists of three subchapters and seeks to capture the way communication techniques and tools of integrated marketing communication can be used to develop online business. Therefore, since the first subchapter has followed familiarity with the concepts involved in online marketing activity, namely interactivity, permission, databases and word-of-mouth marketing. The second section describes the necessity and advantages of online business development, presenting the business environment in Romania, the trend of development of education and entrepreneurial culture in Romania, as well as some particularities of electronic commerce. The last subchapter focuses on the description of online tools and techniques used in integrated marketing communication, presenting the specific characteristics of each typology and benefits of using them in an integrated manner.

Starting from these theoretical aspects, we thought it is necessary a practical approach that can highlight the real experiences of entrepreneurs and marketing professionals within
organizations in Romania. Thus, the next section of the paper was materialized through conducting two marketing researches.

In the initial phase was conducted **qualitative exploratory research**, in chapter 5, which will provide answers to questions regarding the way entrepreneurs and marketing professionals within organizations in Romania, use integrated marketing communication in order to develop business in the online environment. Study of practical issues in our country will provide an overview of the integrated marketing communication in Romania and the contribution that the Internet has in Romanian business development. The purpose of this research is to study the perception of marketing professionals on the online presence of an organization and integrated marketing communication role in developing business in the online environment. Achievement of objectives of this research are developed in line with the overall aim both main and secondary objectives were pursued. **The main objectives** are formulated on central direction and pursued the following aspects: to portray entrepreneurial profile of the business owner; study of opinion on the role that the Internet has on current business activity; identification of general opinion on the presence in the online environment of an organization; opinion study on an integrated approach to marketing communications; opinion on the role of using integrated marketing communication tools in online business development. Operationalization of the research was based on individual semi-structured interview technique. This technique was chosen because it is very flexible, allowing the interviewee the opportunity to express themselves freely, to construct their own discourse. I had a guide which contains a series of questions that were not addressed in strict order, but in line with the flow of the conversation and the respondent side, aiming at the same time, if preset themes are handled by the interviewee. The results of qualitative development contributed to the foundation of the quantitative survey and the proposed conceptual model for research.

Therefore, Chapter 6 contains **quantitative marketing research** that aims to study the role of the integrated marketing communication techniques and tools in online business development in Romania. The quantitative research was conducted in 2016, and the data collection method used a questionnaire containing 27 questions. The questionnaire was administered online with Esurveyspro platform and its distribution for completion was performed using Mixpanel platform. Esurveyspro platform allows exporting raw data obtained from research, thus creating a database in .xls format. It has been imported and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 21 program and WarpPLS 5.0. At the end of the session allocated to complete the questionnaire, it recorded a total of 457 respondents, of which 25 failed to meet the selection criteria imposed, i.e. not used the Internet in communication efforts undertaken. Therefore, 432 respondents were considered for the first stage of preliminary data.
From analysis of the literature, theories and patterns, was pursued building a model that reflects the adoption and use of the integrated marketing communication techniques and tools for business development in the online environment. To this end, varying from models and theories basic, very well-known and tested, such Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) and the Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Rogers, 1983), have been identified and selected to compose conceptual model proposed to research. These variables were defined and integrated into a conceptual model which was subsequently validated based on quantitative research conducted. Of the 14 main hypotheses, 13 were validated, which demonstrates that there are significant relationships between variables of the proposed model. Validation of the model enabled the identification and explanation of influence factors that determine encouraging the use of integrated marketing communication in online business development.

The last chapter, Final conclusions, managerial implications, limitations and further research, is dedicated to its final conclusions on the role and impact of integrated marketing communication on online business development in Romania and presenting managerial implications, limitations and future research trends.