

BUCHAREST UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMIC STUDIES
INSTITUTUL DE STUDIILE DOCTORALE
Marketing DOCTORAL SCHOOL



DOCTORAL THESIS

Thesis Title:

**DOCTORES MODEL: S.M.A.R.T. MODEL
OF INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION**

Developed and optimized for increasing sales through e-commerce by
using strategies, models, marketing automation tools, machine
learning techniques, and artificial intelligence

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STRUCTURE OF THE WORK

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- **Chapter 1:** Focus on Integrated Marketing Communication as a Process
- **Chapter 2:** Focus on Identifying Integrated Marketing Communication Models and Other Models that Could Contribute to the Proposed Model's Construction
- **Chapter 3:** Focus on Integrated Marketing Communication in FMCG
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1.1 The Context, Objective, and Motivation of the Doctoral Thesis

1.1.1 Internet Penetration

The development of internet penetration and the accelerated growth of e-commerce over the last 10 years represents a global phenomenon that has fundamentally reshaped consumer behavior and business strategies. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, these trends have intensified, leading to rapid and often permanent transformations in the digital and commercial landscape.

Globally, over the past 10 years, internet access has grown exponentially. According to Internet World Stats, the internet penetration rate has increased from approximately 30% in 2010 to over 62% in 2021. This technological advancement has been supported by decreasing connectivity costs and the widespread adoption of mobile devices.

At the national level, in many countries, including Romania, the growth in internet access has been even faster. According to ANCOM, Romania has seen significant growth in high-speed internet connections, and smartphone usage has increased, facilitating access to online services and e-commerce.

According to estimates by GPeC, ARMO, and major industry players, the e-commerce sector in Romania is valued at approximately €7 billion by the end of 2023, a value about 10% higher than that recorded in 2022 (€6.3 billion). The value of €7 billion refers to all transactions generated from Romania, both to domestic merchants and online stores outside the country, and strictly represents the e-tail segment, meaning the physical products (tangible) purchased via the internet, according to the GPeC E-Commerce Romania 2023 Report (published on 17.05.2024). However, data provided by the Romanian Association of Online Stores (2023) shows that e-commerce sales in Romania increased by 15% in 2022 compared to the previous year, reaching €5.8 billion. There is no single source in Romania that centrally monitors all online sales, but certainly, all sources report annual sales growth in electronic commerce of over 10%, with similar growth estimates for the coming years. For such growth, especially entrepreneurial companies need to prepare to avoid being dominated by multinational companies, which are supported by global power.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digitalization by nearly as much in one year as in the previous 10 years. Many consumers who previously avoided online transactions started using digital services, from online shopping to banking and telemedicine. Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook noted: "As we build for the future, we are aware that people will need technology more than ever to stay connected."

1.1.2 The Evolution and Impact of E-Commerce

Globally, e-commerce has grown exponentially. According to Statista, global e-commerce sales grew from approximately \$1.3 trillion in 2014 to over \$4.2 trillion in 2020. This growth was driven by the diversification of offerings and retailers' rapid adaptation to consumers' online needs.

According to the "Global E-Commerce Sales Forecast" report by eMarketer (2023), global e-commerce sales grew by about 20% in 2022, reaching approximately \$5.7 trillion. This growth trend is expected to continue, with a forecast of \$6.3 trillion by 2024.

At the national level, in Romania, e-commerce has seen robust growth. Local platforms, such as eMAG and Altex, have significantly expanded their product and service offerings. Iulian Stanciu, CEO of eMAG, highlighted: "The pandemic accelerated our development plans, turning e-commerce from an option into a necessity."

The post-pandemic growth of e-commerce was not just a temporary response to lockdowns but is seen as a lasting change in purchasing behavior. Jeff Bezos of Amazon remarked: "We see that the pandemic has definitively shifted consumer behavior towards online, and we are well-positioned to serve this new digital consumption era."

The COVID-19 pandemic represented a moment of accelerated transformation in many areas, with e-commerce being one of the most affected. According to recent studies, the pandemic accelerated the adoption and development of the e-commerce channel, significantly changing consumer behaviors and marketing strategies. According to data presented by numerous global platforms such as Statista, DataReportal, Eurostat, e-commerce Europe, WeAreSocial, SimilarWeb, etc., as well as local sources like GPeC, the Romanian Association of Online Stores, ZF, iSense Solution, Profit.ro, PROTV, etc., global online sales growth reached record levels, and consumer habits underwent major changes. This shift underscores the critical importance of adapting digital marketing strategies to new realities and the need to develop effective models to address emerging challenges.

In conclusion, the increase in internet penetration and the expansion of e-commerce have reshaped the global and national economic and social landscape. The transformations induced by the pandemic not only accelerated these trends but also solidified the foundation for continued growth and innovation in digitalization. This dynamic represents a significant opportunity for businesses to adapt and thrive in the new digital economy, with an adaptation of integrated marketing campaigns to achieve profitable growth for brands and businesses.

In the post-pandemic context, e-commerce is no longer just an option for businesses but a necessity. According to Statista, the number of consumers who prefer online shopping has increased significantly, and companies that do not adopt appropriate digital strategies risk being left behind. This context emphasizes the need to develop and implement integrated digital marketing strategies that maximize the efficiency and ROI of e-commerce campaigns.

1.1.3 Consumer Behavior Changes

According to global statistics in the report by McKinsey & Company (2022), it was concluded that 75% of consumers intend to continue shopping online as frequently or more frequently than before the pandemic. According to a study by GfK (2023), 60% of Romanian consumers increased the frequency of online shopping in the post-pandemic period, and 40% stated that they prefer to shop online for convenience and safety.

1.1.4 Challenges and Opportunities in the Context of Sales Growth in E-commerce

When a sales channel exceeds 10% of total sales, it can no longer be ignored, especially as it registers annual growth rates of over 10%.

Despite accelerated growth, digital marketing in e-commerce faces significant challenges, including market saturation, frequent algorithm changes, and rising consumer expectations. In

this digital era, companies must navigate a complex landscape of platforms and techniques, and developing an integrated and efficient communication model is essential. Therefore, there is a considerable opportunity to explore and develop strategies based on in-depth research that can help optimize campaigns and maximize their impact.

In terms of market saturation, according to a Deloitte report (2023), 50% of marketers reported difficulties in differentiating brands in a saturated e-commerce market. This highlights the need for more sophisticated and personalized marketing strategies.

As this channel has developed significantly, consumer expectations have increased accordingly. According to a HubSpot study (2023), 80% of consumers expect personalized experiences and relevant communication during online interactions.

One of the biggest challenges is algorithm changes. The "Digital Marketing Trends" study by BrightEdge (2023) emphasizes that 65% of marketers believe that frequent search algorithm changes affect the effectiveness of their campaigns. There are also other challenges related to the integration and automation of various digital marketing platforms. According to a Forrester report (2023), 70% of companies encounter difficulties in efficiently integrating various digital marketing platforms for coherent and effective campaigns.

However, there are many opportunities in the field of Innovation, such as Automation and AI. According to the "Marketing Automation" report by Gartner (2023), 54% of companies are investing in automation and artificial intelligence technologies to improve the personalization and efficiency of their digital marketing campaigns. Personalized experiences are increasingly appreciated by digital consumers. The "Customer Experience Trends" study published by Salesforce (2023) shows that 72% of consumers are more likely to buy from brands that offer personalized and relevant experiences.

1.1.5 The Final Objective of the Paper: Development and Validation of the Most Performing DIGITAL MARKETING COMMUNICATION MODEL FOR PROFITABLE SALES GROWTH IN THE ONLINE CHANNEL OF AN FMCG BRAND, VALIDATED BY MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION EXPERTS AND USEFUL FOR ENTREPRENEURS

1.1.6 Personal and Professional Motivation

As a marketer with extensive experience in marketing, sales, and trade marketing, and a specialization in promoting and communicating brands in the digital environment, I have witnessed the rapid and ongoing changes in this field. The personal and professional reason for choosing this topic is based on the desire to contribute to integrating theory and practice to create an integrated digital marketing communication model that is not only theoretically valid but also practically applicable, even in my future work. Given my accumulated experience and expertise in the field, I have identified a significant gap between existing theories and the practical needs of entrepreneurs and marketing professionals. Through this research, I aim to address these needs by developing an efficient and pragmatic model that offers concrete and validated solutions for profitable sales growth in the e-commerce channel.

In my role as a marketer with over 27 years of experience and 7 years of specialization in e-commerce, I have directly observed the impact of changes in the digital environment and understood the need for innovative and effective solutions for online sales growth. The experience I have gained has motivated me to delve deeply into integrating theory with practice to develop a scientifically validated digital marketing model.

From the perspective of the study's relevance and proposed contribution, it focuses on developing and validating an integrated communication and effective digital promotion model that combines the latest theoretical findings with practical applicability. By integrating qualitative and quantitative research, the study will make a valuable contribution to existing literature,

providing entrepreneurs and marketing professionals with a scientifically validated tool for optimizing marketing campaigns in the e-commerce channel. Thus, the research will not only address current challenges but will also propose innovative solutions to maximize success in the digital environment.

The need for an applicable model: Existing analyses suggest that many studies focus on theoretical aspects, particularly on what needs to be done, without offering practical, directly applicable solutions for entrepreneurs on how to do it to achieve results above the industry average with the highest possible ROI. My study aims to fill these gaps by providing a concrete model based on applicable data and research, addressing both theorists and practitioners, covering both "what needs to be done" and especially "how to do it." The proposed model, which I have named DOCTORES, aims to determine all the critical aspects necessary for creating, implementing, and evaluating a successful digital marketing communication campaign, to significantly influence the positive results achieved by a brand in the e-commerce channel.

1.2. Objectives and Importance of the Research

Based on my experience and in-depth study so far, I believe that this research is strictly necessary because no such integrated digital marketing communication model for profitable sales growth in the e-commerce channel has been developed until now, and it will be useful both for digital marketing specialists who want to achieve results above the industry average and especially for entrepreneurs starting out who do not have marketing experience, especially digital marketing. This model aims to be built on already validated models, complementing the missing aspects of already developed models, mainly due to the post-pandemic impact, the digital evolution of recent years, technology, the digital environment in general, digital platform algorithms, and major behavioral changes observed in consumers in recent years. The impact it can have on the digital marketing and e-commerce industry, in general, can help interested experts significantly improve their performance by following step-by-step stages, techniques, tools, strategies, and tactics to convince the target consumer to buy a certain product. My aspiration is to contribute to the development of the most effective communication and promotion model in the digital environment that can be applied and validated in the current reality, offering concrete solutions for significant profitable sales growth in the e-commerce channel.

1.2.1 Defining the Research Objectives

- **General Objective:** The main objective of this research is to develop and validate an integrated digital marketing communication and promotion model that optimizes e-commerce campaign performance and increases profitable sales in the e-commerce channel above the results obtained by direct competitors, with a positive market share acquisition and, ultimately, a positive ROI.
- **Specific Objectives:**
 - o **Literature Analysis:** Conducting an in-depth analysis of the literature to identify and integrate the most relevant existing models and strategies in digital marketing and e-commerce.
 - o **Segmentation and Personalization:** Exploring how different segmentation models and message personalization can be applied to maximize the effectiveness of digital marketing campaigns.
 - o **Model Development:** Creating an integrated theoretical model based on conclusions from the analysis and empirical research.
 - o **Model Validation:** Validating the proposed model through qualitative and quantitative research with marketing experts and entrepreneurs to ensure its applicability and

efficiency in practice.

o **Practical Applicability:** Providing recommendations for implementing the model in companies, focusing on its usefulness for entrepreneurs without marketing experience.

o **Quality of the Integrated Digital Marketing Communication Process:** By identifying the most critical aspects to include in this model, it will also contribute to educating marketing professionals and entrepreneurs by raising the level of knowledge and thus developing better quality integrated digital marketing communication campaigns; and not least, if entrepreneurs follow and develop all the necessary elements for developing a high-quality integrated digital marketing communication campaign, there will be a positive impact on the quality of the products and services offered.

1.2.3 Importance of the Research

- **Practical Relevance:**

- o **For Marketing Specialists:** This model will be a valuable tool for practitioners, helping them improve the efficiency of e-commerce campaigns through an integrated and personalized approach. My practical experience has highlighted the lack of clear and efficient models that can be applied in various business contexts and in different leadership roles, especially when new team members join, who need to be trained and aligned to a certain standard.

- o **For Entrepreneurs:** The usefulness of the model for entrepreneurs who do not have solid marketing expertise will be significant, both to define the critical elements of the business and the brand they want to develop and for better coordination of the human, financial, technological, etc., resources involved in an integrated digital marketing communication campaign. Entrepreneurs who choose to use this model will be able to follow a clear and structured guide to implement efficient integrated digital marketing communication campaigns, thus increasing their chances of success online in front of competitors.

- **Contribution to the Literature:**

Given that I have not yet identified such a model in the specialized literature, my research will add value to the existing literature by integrating and adapting classical theories and existing integrated digital marketing communication models to the current context. The novelty and practical importance of the proposed model, which not only theorizes but also provides practical, tested solutions, will incorporate the most effective models currently used by digital marketing and integrated communication experts, to which their practical expertise will also be added.

- **Social and Economic Impact:**

- o **Social:** This model, if developed and later implemented in practice, will have a potential impact on consumers, who will benefit from more relevant and personalized communications, thus improving the shopping experience.

- o **Economic:** An efficient digital marketing model can contribute to increasing the profitability of companies, thus stimulating economic development in the e-commerce sector.

1.2.4 Innovation in Research

- **Novelty of the Model:** The proposed new model will bring added value to the digital marketing landscape, being a guide built by digital marketing experts and validated by practitioners and entrepreneurs active with brands in the digital environment. It will

include the integration of elements from various already validated theoretical models, adapting them to the current e-commerce context, current technology evolution, and the use of new techniques for personalization and segmentation, based on models researched for over 30 years by specialists and validated over time.

- **Adoption of Modern Technologies:** The proposed model will consider new technologies and trends in digital marketing, such as the use of AI for message personalization or campaign automation, as well as algorithm changes and the evolution of social platforms.

1.2.5 Limitations of the Research Included in the Paper and Proposals for Future Research

- **Limitations of the Resulting Model:** This research may also have some possible limitations, such as dependence on certain data sources – there is currently no entity that consolidates all data from all e-commerce platforms in Romania, especially in the FMCG area, or challenges in implementing the model in other industries besides FMCG. For other industries, further dedicated research would need to be developed, considering the particularities of each industry.
- **Directions for Future Research:** This research can pave the way for future studies that explore and validate the model in various contexts, through concrete case studies where the model has been implemented and applied, as well as the possibilities of extending and adapting it to other digital marketing channels and/or other industries.

1.3 Research Questions and Hypotheses

The selection of questions from the questionnaires included in this research and the hypotheses are of major importance in guiding the investigation process. These questions and hypotheses will serve as the basis for developing the most effective integrated digital marketing communication model for increasing sales in the e-commerce channel, focusing on the three essential stages of a campaign: preparation, implementation, and evaluation of integrated digital marketing communication campaigns.

1.3.1 The Questions Built for the CAMPAIGN PREPARATION Stage Were Focused on the Following Dimensions:

1.3.1.1 Questions related to business definition: vision, mission, values, purpose, role, "why," SWOT, Business Case, business differentiator, etc.

1.3.1.2 Questions related to company definition: organizational culture, S.M.A.R.T. analysis of the market and main competitors, company positioning, and the openness of the company & board members regarding automated systems and innovative technologies, models, tools, techniques validated in other businesses with extraordinary results after implementation, and approved for use within the company; principles, internal and external policies defined within the company for the proper functioning and development of the business; experience of the team, collaborators, partners, etc.

1.3.1.3 Questions related to brand definition: brand history, brand story, brand communication history, Brand Book, consumer insights, market research implemented or accessed, brand key messages, brand essence, brand positioning, brand differentiator, values, reason to believe, lessons from previous campaigns, brand annual S.M.A.R.T. objectives and KPIs, etc.

1.3.1.4 Questions related to strategy: corporate strategy, business strategy, marketing strategy, brand strategy: offline and online, content strategy, brand marketing mix included in the campaign, approved tactics for the current year, etc.; what strategies and tactics for message personalization are most effective in increasing the relevance and impact of digital marketing

campaigns; message personalization strategies based on human typologies defined by established models that respond to certain types of messages, demographic, psychographic, and behavioral characteristics of the audience.

1.3.1.5 Questions related to the consumer: brand personas defined for the brand included in the campaign, targeted consumer insights, communication channels with consumers, research implemented or accessed about target brand consumers, segmentation from as many criteria as possible, and profiling of target consumers, targeting methods; focus on how target audiences can be effectively identified and segmented based on their behaviors and preferences in the digital environment.

1.3.1.6 Questions related to competitors, the market, and context: positioning, segmentation, and targeting of competing brands, market context, the impact of seasonality.

1.3.1.7 Questions related to technology: the degree of technology adoption, AI technology: implementation in marketing tactics, adoption of tools for automating marketing department activities, database management and consumer profiling, and automated and personalized communication with consumers.

1.3.1.8 Questions related to the campaign: planning and organizing campaign stages in terms of TOOLS. MODELS. TECHNOLOGY. TECHNIQUES. PROCEDURES allocated to the digital marketing CAMPAIGN that will support each stage of PIE (Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation of the campaign) to ensure that the digital marketing campaign meets its objectives, i.e., to achieve a positive ROI and profitable and sustainable business growth, above the competition and the market average; the STRATEGY AND TACTICS planned for implementation in the digital marketing campaign in each stage of PIE and in which COMMUNICATION CHANNELS, the CREATIVE IDEA for the digital marketing CAMPAIGN, seasonality and context in which the Campaign is implemented, campaign duration, mechanism, prizes, campaign team, necessary pre-launch testing, A/B testing, development of all creative materials and their adaptations according to the specifics of each communication channel, agreed upon in the established time to be launched for promotion on the agreed date and in the agreed launch rhythm, etc.

1.3.1.9 Questions related to Objectives and KPIs set before the campaign starts: campaign objectives, along with the most important KPIs for each stage of the digital FUNNEL (KPIs for awareness, KPIs for engagement, and KPIs for conversion) that maximize ROI and support sales growth in e-commerce; campaign budget and planning and organizing campaign stages for each communication stage in the digital FUNNEL; post-campaign evaluation methodology.

1.3.2 The Questions Built for the CAMPAIGN IMPLEMENTATION Stage Were Focused on the Following Dimensions:

1.3.2.1 Questions related to activating the online tools agreed to be included in the campaign: the brand's website, promotional landing pages, questionnaires created with the help of marketing automation tools, brand pages on social networks, email campaigns, blog articles, chatbot questions and chatbot management during the campaign, online banners, database management of consumers, complaint registration, etc.

1.3.2.2 Questions related to optimizing the online techniques/tactics agreed upon in the planning stage: online advertising, especially paid advertising, online public relations (online PR), sales promotions, search engine optimization (SEO), email marketing, marketing activities through social or mobile networks (m-commerce), neuromarketing, marketing through blogs, affiliate marketing, online branding, marketing developed with the help of influencers, content campaigns, and other digital integrated marketing communication tactics; stopping underperforming campaigns and initiating others with better results.

1.3.2.3 Questions related to implementing the tactics according to the plan under the concept

of "OTIF: on time, in full" for each stage of the digital FUNNEL (awareness, engagement, and conversion): implementing all marketing materials on time, for each communication stage, agreed upon to be developed and implemented, and all tactics agreed upon in the agreed channels, within the agreed budget.

1.3.2.4 Questions related to technology, especially automation/optimization and AI: investigating the potential of emerging technologies in improving the implementation and management of digital marketing campaigns with the help of automation and artificial intelligence to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of ongoing digital marketing campaigns.

1.3.2.5 Questions related to Objectives and KPIs linked to the budget invested in each stage of the digital FUNNEL: how important the Campaign DASHBOARD is to monitor and evaluate weekly, on each dimension, to make real-time optimizations/adjustments/cancellations/initiations of more successful actions, ensuring that all campaign objectives set at the beginning of the campaign are delivered.

1.3.3 The Questions Built for the CAMPAIGN EVALUATION Stage Were Focused on the Following Dimensions:

1.3.3.1 Questions related to KPIs achieved vs. planned evaluation: Evaluating the Campaign Dashboard: What are the most relevant performance indicators (KPIs) that were achieved/exceeded or not met to assess the success/failure of the digital marketing campaign implemented in the context of e-commerce to extract all lessons for future campaigns.

1.3.3.2 Questions related to lessons and experiences accumulated and the refinement of tactics implemented in future campaigns: Post-campaign data analysis to extract lessons and formulate optimization strategies for future campaigns.

1.3.3.3 Questions related to consumer perception research and brand awareness: Deciding and conducting necessary post-campaign research; examining the results of techniques to assess the impact of campaigns on brand perception and consumer loyalty.

1.3.4 Research Hypotheses:

- **1.3.4.1 Hypotheses for the campaign preparation stage:**
 - Hypothesis 1: Segmenting and profiling the audience based on human typologies, behavioral and demographic analyses will lead to more effective message personalization launched in the campaign and a higher conversion rate, well above the KPIs obtained by the main competitors.
 - Hypothesis 2: Personalizing marketing messages according to identified preferences will significantly increase user engagement and campaign efficiency.
 - Hypothesis 3: The campaign team's knowledge of all business, marketing, brand, and content strategies and all approved annual tactics for the brand they promote, and setting well-defined campaign objectives aligned with relevant KPIs, will lead to an increase in ROI and sales, well above the KPIs obtained by the main competitors.
- **1.3.4.2 Hypotheses for the campaign implementation stage:**
 - Hypothesis 4: Segmenting and profiling the target audience, then applying messages (image/text/sound) personalized for these identified personality types, launched within an optimal combination of relevant digital marketing channels for each audience type targeted by the brand, will maximize the response to the message, immediate action, and campaign impact in a way that competitors have never achieved.
 - Hypothesis 5: Strategic and dynamic allocation of the campaign budget based on the response received from prioritizing the types of target audience to

which the campaign message will be transmitted, to obtain an action from each segment of the target audience, will optimize its performance and ensure a positive ROI, making the difference between success and failure.

- Hypothesis 6: Developing a constantly active digital asset architecture around the brand and integrating automation and artificial intelligence with the help of marketing automation tools in digital marketing campaigns will significantly improve campaign execution efficiency and results.
- **1.3.4.3 Hypotheses for the campaign evaluation stage:**
 - Hypothesis 7: Using specific KPIs at each stage of the digital FUNNEL (awareness, engagement, and conversion) will allow a precise and comprehensive evaluation of the campaign's success.
 - Hypothesis 8: Post-campaign data analysis will identify optimization opportunities that will lead to significant performance improvements in subsequent campaigns.
 - Hypothesis 9: Analyzing multiple case studies and the expertise of marketing experts who have run more than 5 marketing campaigns in the last 3 years will add considerable value to this communication and promotion model for profitable growth of an FMCG brand in the e-commerce channel.
 - Hypothesis 10: Evaluating elements: 1. TOP Priority ZERO because they are critical with a major impact on results, 2. Necessary Priority 1 but with a medium impact on results obtained, and 3. Non-Priority but necessary with a minor impact on final results, for each stage of the campaign planning, implementation, and evaluation will reveal a positive correlation between campaign success and long-term customer loyalty growth and, consequently, brand profitability.

These questions and hypotheses will guide me in the research process and development of the proposed model. I mention that the answers to these questions will significantly contribute to creating an innovative and efficient model capable of responding to current challenges in e-commerce and digital marketing, built with the help of the expertise of the TOP 10 marketing directors and later validated by both digital marketing experts and entrepreneurs active with brands in the digital environment, aiming to increase the profitable performance of sales achieved through integrated digital marketing communication campaigns.

1.4 Research Methodology

The proposed methodology will allow obtaining relevant and robust data for developing an integrated communication and promotion model in digital marketing, applicable in the e-commerce context.

The overall design of the study was conceived to include three essential phases: an initial quantitative research conducted with online consumers, followed by qualitative research organized with top marketing directors, and finally, quantitative validation research with digital marketing experts and entrepreneurs. The first quantitative research will be exploratory, aiming to understand the purchasing behavior of online consumers who order products through the e-commerce channel. The second research, qualitative, will be descriptive, with the goal of developing a proposal for an integrated marketing communication and online promotion model to increase the sales of a brand in the e-commerce channel, based on the expertise of the top 10 marketing directors in Romania. The third research, quantitative, will be validation research of the model proposed by top marketing directors, to confirm the proposed model or improve it based on the expertise of marketing specialists and entrepreneurs active with a

brand in the digital environment.

During all three studies, ethical standards will be ensured at all stages of the research:

- **Confidentiality and anonymity:** I ensure the confidentiality of data and anonymity of participants at all stages of the study.
- **Informed consent:** All participants will be informed in advance about the purpose and nature of the research and will give their informed consent before participating.
- **Bias and validity:** I explain how I will minimize potential biases and ensure the validity and reliability of the results.

1.4.1 Phase 1: Initial Quantitative Research

- **Objective:** To understand the consumer behavior of online shoppers in Romania, including barriers, opportunities, triggers, and motivations to order more, more frequently, and to increase order value.
- **Methodology:**
 - **Research tools:** Structured questionnaire, distributed online via email and the survey platform of the research agency UNLOCK.
 - **Sample:** Online shoppers in Romania, selected through a stratified sample to reflect various demographic and behavioral categories.
 - **Data collection method:** Online survey.
 - **Data analysis:** Descriptive and inferential statistical analysis (factor analysis) to identify relevant trends and correlations.

1.4.2 Phase 2: Qualitative Research

- **Objective:** To outline an integrated communication and promotion model in digital marketing, based on the expertise of top marketing directors from companies in Romania.
- **Methodology:**
 - **Research tools:** Semi-structured interviews to facilitate in-depth discussions.
 - **Sample:** 10 top marketing directors from companies in Romania with relevant digital marketing experience of over 10 years.
 - **Data collection method:** Individual interviews and focus groups, each lasting 60-90 minutes.
 - **Data analysis:** Thematic analysis to identify common themes, perspectives, and recommendations that will underpin the proposed model.

1.4.3 Phase 3: Quantitative Validation Research

- **Objective:** To validate and adjust the proposed integrated communication and promotion model using feedback from digital marketing experts and entrepreneurs.
- **Methodology:**
 - **Research tools:** Structured questionnaire based on the proposed model, designed to collect feedback and suggestions from a specific target audience.
 - **Sample:** 100-150 digital marketing experts and entrepreneurs from Romania.
 - **Data collection method:** Online survey with closed and open questions to allow detailed feedback.
 - **Data analysis:** Descriptive and inferential statistical analysis, plus qualitative feedback analysis to identify potential adjustments to the model.

I chose to use a combination of quantitative and qualitative research because a mixed approach allows obtaining a complete and detailed perspective on consumer behavior, as well as robust validation of the proposed model.

There will, of course, be limitations to the methodological approach, such as:

- Possible difficulties in recruiting a representative sample.
- Limitations related to the self-reported nature of questionnaire data.
- The potential for subjectivity in qualitative data analysis.

But despite these limitations, the methodological approach is well thought out and capable of answering research questions and testing the proposed hypotheses. Additionally, this methodology will lead to valid and valuable results that will contribute to the general objective of the proposed paper.

Keywords: Integrated marketing communication, digital, e-commerce, integrated communication model, marketing, integrated marketing campaign, growth, research.