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Marketing communications process on the pharmaceutical market

Summary

The issue of marketing communications is currently generating growing interest among researchers and entities operating on the pharmaceutical market. The unique nature of the product, i.e. a medicine that supports or saves human lives, the system of co-financing pharmaceutical production by the state, the large number of entities in the distribution channels, legal restrictions on promotional activities, the expectations of end buyers (i.e. patients) on that market, as well as the general considerations related to the globalization process and the emergence of new communications technologies all exert material influence on the communications processes observed in the pharmaceutical sector.

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate the impact of the pharmaceutical market's unique nature on the communication processes and related tools, taking into account the latest trends, as well as to point out the need for an integrated approach towards communication process management. This paper also stipulates that marketing communications on the pharmaceutical market should be integrated at three levels: promotional tools, marketing mix components (pharmaceutical product, price and distribution methods) and the overall company strategy.

Key Words

Marketing communications, pharmaceutical market, e-pharmamarketing, integration of marketing communications on the pharmaceutical market.

Objectives

The interest in marketing communications processes on the pharmaceutical market is due to significant changes caused by, among other, the rapid development of cutting edge technologies and the amendments to the legislation governing those processes. Furthermore, such interest is also stimulated by the fact that in business literature one may find only a general discussion of issues related to pharmaceutical marketing, focusing mainly on the use of various promotional tools by pharmaceutical companies, wholesalers or pharmacies. The notion of marketing communications, however, is broader in its scope and requires a more integrated approach in their analysis.

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate the impact of the pharmaceutical market's unique nature on the communication processes and related tools, taking into account the latest trends, as well as to point out the need for an integrated approach towards communication process management. This paper also stipulates that marketing communications on the pharmaceutical market should be integrated at three levels: promotional tools, marketing mix components (pharmaceutical product, price and distribution methods) and the overall company strategy.

Methods

The analysis of these issues is based on literature studies and the observation of practice on the Polish and international pharmaceutical market. Pharmaceutical marketing literature is rather limited. The publications worth mentioning include substantial research output by Mickey C. Smith (1983, 1991, 2002) and Dimitris Dogramatzis (2002). Polish literature features only one non-serial publication by H. Mruk, M. Michalik, B. Pilarczyk (2005, 2008). There are many more articles and papers that feature a more detailed discussion of promotional activities on the pharmaceutical market. However, there is a shortage of publications with a focus on marketing communications, their unique character on the medicines' market and the theoretical aspects of integrating the communications processes taking place on that market. This paper attempts to fill this void and outline the areas where the hypotheses presented should be reviewed and verified in the future.

This paper will present, in consecutive order, the issues related to the nature of the marketing communications, the factors determining their unique character and, finally, the integration of the communications processes at the level of promotional tools and the marketing mix.

1. The essence of the marketing communications process

Communication is a complex, multidimensional notion and is the subject of interest of many research fields, including marketing. Marketing orientation requires that communications (promotion) activities should generate value exchange processes between the company and its environment. Marketing communications are defined as a set of information (signals) sent by the company from various sources towards not only its own customers, but also towards other entities in its marketing environment (suppliers, intermediaries, competitors, opinion leaders etc.) and a set of information gathered on the market (data on consumer preferences and needs, economic development trends). [Wiktor J. 2001, p. 10-11]. It is a form of social communication that serves to satisfy needs through market offer in the broad sense. In

business literature marketing communications is a notion often used interchangeably with promotion, despite the fact that these two are not identical.

The communication process is most often described using W. Schramm’s definition, i.e. as the process of “establishing a commonness or oneness of thought between a sender and a receiver”. In terms of marketing, this process involves the company sharing a certain material or use value (in case of services) or knowledge (e.g. of product features, its application, market position etc.). This means that communication is not a set of tools used to influence customers, but rather a process resulting in the creation of a specific value for the customer. [Prymon, M., 2010, p. 31].

The communication process between companies and their environment is objectively necessary and it is of secondary importance which tools will be applied, such as advertising, personal selling, sales promotion or public relations. Business literature classifies these tools in different ways. One of the most recent Ph. Kotler’s publications distinguishes advertising, sales promotion, company events and experiences, public relations and publicity, direct and interactive marketing [Kotler Ph. And others, 2009 p.78] . Marketing communications on the pharmaceutical market may be analysed both as a process (see Table 1 and Figure 1) and as a set of tools with specific properties. The communications process on that market covers three essential elements: message senders, message content and the channels through which the messages are transmitted, and, finally, message receivers.

Table 1

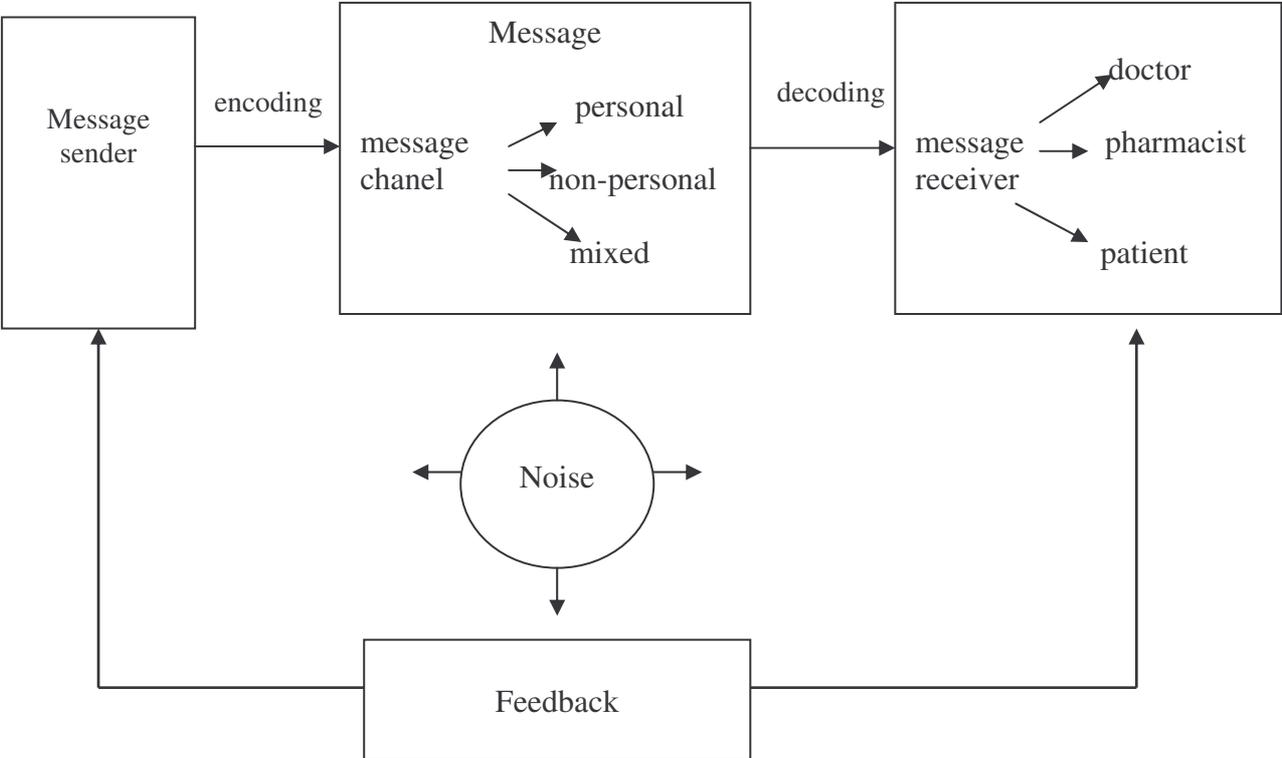
Communication process elements on the pharmaceutical market

Message senders	Message (content) Communication channels	Message receivers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - drug manufacturer - medical representative - doctor/hospital - wholesaler - pharmacy - state authorities - institutions in charge of health care sector operations - other 	<p>Message</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - drug properties - application - dosage - activity - effects (desired, adverse) <p>Channels</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - personal - non-personal - mixed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - patient - doctor - wholesaler - pharmacist - competitors - non-pharmacy outlets - other

Message senders include both drug manufacturers, as well as a specific type of intermediaries, i.e. doctors prescribing or recommending a given drug, medical representatives and entities acting as intermediaries in the distribution channel, i.e. pharmaceutical wholesalers and other, pharmacies, stores, newsagents, petrol stations selling OTC drugs. An important role in the communications process on that market is also served by state authorities, such as the Parliament of the Republic of Poland or the health minister, as well as institutions in charge of pharmaceutical market operations, including the Chief Pharmaceutical Inspectorate, Pharmaceutical Chambers etc. The content of the message should include the drug’s properties, its application, description of its activity (often together with research findings), as well as the effects of taking the drug (including adverse side effects). The message is encoded by the senders and transmitted to the receivers using the following types of channels: personal (e.g. doctor, medical representative, pharmacist etc.), non-personal (television, press, radio, the Internet, posters etc.), and mixed (e.g. a marketing event organised by the drug manufacturer for wholesalers and pharmacists, where leaflets with information about a new drug are distributed). The received message is then decoded by the receivers (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

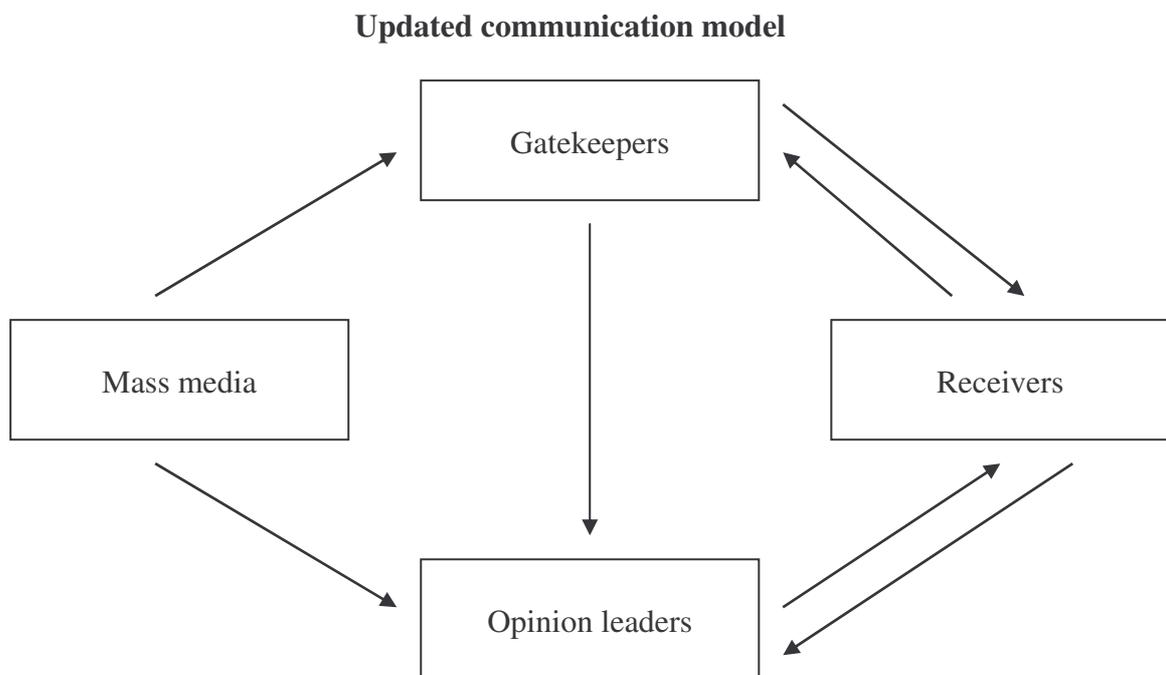
Model of the marketing communications process on the pharmaceutical market



Source: own work based on Shimp T.A.,1990, p.39, Smith Mickey C., Kolassa E. M. “Mick”, Perkins G., Siecker B., 2002, p. 313-317

The message receivers include, first and foremost, the patients, doctors and pharmacists, as well as the competitors and entities involved in moving the drug from the manufacturer to the end user, i.e. the patient [Michalik M., Pilarczyk B., Mruk H. 2008, p. 208]. It is also worth taking a look at other communication models, including the one depicted below, the so-called updated communication model.

Figure 2



Source: Solomon M.R., 1999 p. 355

In the so-called updated communication model gatekeepers have been introduced, i.e. entities filtering the flow of information and materials addressed to the receivers, i.e. the patients. These gatekeepers include the representatives of the Ministry of Health, employees of pharmaceutical supervision bodies, doctors, pharmacists, as well as persons in the household to whom other household members turn for solutions when suffering from ailments. These models enable researchers to analyse communication processes on selected markets, including the pharmaceutical market.

2. Factors determining marketing communications processes on the pharmaceutical market

The unique nature of the pharmaceutical market largely determines the communications processes occurring thereon. The most frequently cited factors include: the type of needs to be

satisfied, the type of drug, buyer habits and preferences, the laws in force, market globalization processes, increasing competition, as well as the development of new marketing communication technologies. Pharmaceuticals satisfy the most important human need, i.e. health, which is why patients pay particular attention to the communication processes on that market. They expect to receive comprehensive, reliable and credible information about a given drug, its properties, application, dosage, effects and possible side effects. Such information may be provided by a doctor, a pharmacist, a leaflet, drug packaging, advertising etc. The manner in which this information is presented depends on the type of pharmaceuticals, with the general division into RX, i.e. prescription drugs and OTC (over the counter) drugs being sufficient. In the case of the first group of drugs the buyer (patient) does not independently decide on their purchase and the only place authorised to sell them is a pharmacy. The marketing communications message is addressed mainly to doctors and pharmacists, while the communication channels used are more personal in nature. Promotional activities on the OTC drugs market are different, as the consumer purchases such drugs in the same way as FMCG (fast moving consumer goods). The marketing communications strategies used are aimed at reaching the patient directly, while the tools include the mass media and incentives to buy more drugs or buy them more frequently (sales promotion). The factors affecting marketing communications decisions also include the changing buying habits and consumer preferences. These changes result from the increasing lack of time to take care of health, difficulties in gaining access to doctors, greater inclination towards self-medication, more frequent use of the Internet to research medical conditions, pharmaceuticals, doctors etc. The conditions for which patients most often choose to self-medicate include headaches (around 80% of Poles complain of headaches and nearly the same percentage self-medicates), common cold, running nose, cough, as well as bone and joint pains and gastric problems. The self-medication trend is irreversible, therefore marketing communications can be used to educate patients on OTC drug use. Patients also value convenience in purchasing OTC drugs, buying them in grocery stores, petrol stations or over the Internet. They seek instant solution to the pain they feel.

Taking into account buyer behaviour on the pharmaceutical market it is worth dividing patients into 4 categories [Światowy G. Szalonka K, , 2000, nr 4]:

- experimenter – enjoys self-medicating, reads medical literature, consults pharmacists more frequently than doctors, wants to alleviate discomfort quickly,
- obedient patient – takes care of their health, attends regular check-ups, consults doctors, only buys the drugs recommended by them,

- hypochondriac – excessively concerned about their health, continuously studies medical information, buys a lot of drugs, especially novelties,
- ignorant – disregards health issues, does not see doctors, relies on pharmacist's recommendations.

Establishing the target market segment determines the activities with regard to choosing the communication channel and the manner in which the message should be constructed.

Promotional activities on the pharmaceutical market are also regulated by specific laws in force. Pharmaceutical law expressly defines medicinal product advertising and which products may be advertised, as well as lists forms of information activities excluded from the definition of advertising [Michalik M. Pilarczyk B. Mruk H. 2008, p.211-212].

Under the legal provisions in force any mass advertising must include the following warning “Before use please read the leaflet provided with the medicine or consult your doctor or pharmacist” [Ordinance of the Minister of Health of December 16, 2002 on medicinal product advertising]. Apart from legal regulations governing promotional activities, such activities are covered by the industry's codes of conduct, comprising a set of ethical standards. The globalization of the pharmaceutical market also affects marketing communications in this respect. Global and international pharmaceutical holdings operating in Poland, as well as rapidly expanding pharmacy chains (e.g. Superpharm, Euroapteki) have been transferring aggressive promotional methods from other markets onto the Polish market, with intense advertising accompanied by a wide range of sales promotion techniques (e.g. medications for “1 grosz”, bring a prescription and get a 10 PLN voucher). This results in growing competition between the domestic pharmacies and pharmacy chains and the search for new marketing communication methods to reach doctors and end users, i.e. patients. The final group of factors are new marketing communication technologies. The development of advance technologies and their digitalization lead to an overlap of communication channels. Television is becoming interactive, the printed press has electronic issues, while advertisements have their multimedia editions and are available to countless computer users. New communication channels are usually interactive and enable contacts with patients regardless of their location. New forms of communication have also been influenced by the development of broadband Internet, which provides advertisers with an opportunity to use interesting audiovisual effects in their messages [Taranko T. 2010, p.103]. Owing to technological progress it is now possible to use mobile devices in marketing communications, including mobile phones. Mobile marketing is the fundamental feature of modern communications, enabling interaction with the receiver, boosting customer loyalty and

building social networks around the brand. The use of cutting-edge technologies in marketing communications on the pharmaceutical market is more common in the prescription drugs segment.

3. Integration of marketing communications processes at the level of promotional tools

The current marketing communications activities of pharmaceutical companies require integration at three levels of organization: the whole corporation, marketing mix and communication mix. [Belch G.E. Belch M.A. 2004, p.10-11]. For the purposes of this analysis the final two levels of integration will be of particular interest. Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) thus involves co-ordinating various promotional components and other marketing activities aimed at facilitating the company's communication with its customers. [Clow K. Baack D. 2007, p. 8]. The lowest level of integration concerns the choice of appropriate tools and communication channels to achieve message consistency and a synergy effect related to the selected tools (e.g. a TV advertisement of a pharmaceutical combined with sales promotion techniques). Such integration is internal in its nature and at this level relates to promotion, i.e. the set of informative and persuasive activities and the feedback between the company (as message sender) and the customer (a doctor, pharmacist, patient as message receiver). The fundamental promotional tools include advertising, personal selling, sales promotion (supplementary), Public Relations and e-pharmamarketing. Integration processes at this level require creating a "mix" of those tools (promotion mix, communication mix), which, by means of informative, persuasive and reminder functions of promotion, will help to establish groups of regular and loyal drug buyers. Creating appropriate promotion mix could have important meaning for searching competitive advantage on the market [Dogramatzis D., 2002, p. 267].

Table 2

Promotional tools used in marketing communications on the RX and OTC markets

RX drugs	OTC drugs
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Advertising: specialist press publications, addressed to doctors, pharmacists, information leaflets 2. Personal selling – medical representative, support through new technologies – e- 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Advertising: television, press, radio, posters, BTL media (promotional materials in pharmacies, surgeries, clocks, calendars, leaflets, pamphlets, information banners etc.), ambient media

detailing, CLM (Closed Loop Marketing) 3. Sales promotion: providing supplies on credit to wholesalers and pharmacies, free samples of drugs for doctors, discounts for wholesale purchases, package deals for pharmacies, loyalty programmes 4. Public Relations – marketing events, training for doctors and pharmacists, lobbying, sponsorship, visual identification system, media relations, consulting programmes for pharmacies 5. e-pharmamarketing	2. Personal selling - pharmacist's advice 3. Sales promotion: bigger package for the same price, discounts, additional product with the purchase of the primary drug, vouchers, competitions, loyalty bonuses 4. Pharmacy merchandising 5. Public relations: sponsorship, publicity, marketing events for doctors, pharmacists, patients 6. Product placement (placing an OTC drug in a movie or a TV series) 7. e-pharmamarketing
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The role and significance of those instruments is different for the RX and OTC market and changes with the growing volume of the drugs produced, the degree of supply diversification and the creation of new distribution channels (e.g. selling pharmaceuticals online). Exceptional creativity in developing the message content is required, as well as constantly searching for new, original forms and methods of reaching the end customer. Table 2 presents the most important tools, forms and marketing communication channels on the RX and OTC market, in order to show their variety. This paper does not aspire to provide a comprehensive overview of all those tools. The relatively high number of publications dealing with classic promotional tools suggests focusing on modern forms of marketing communications collectively referred to as e-pharmamarketing.

E-pharmamarketing – modern forms of marketing communications

Changes in the buyer behaviour on the pharmaceutical market make it necessary to use new forms of marketing communications that incorporate technological progress and reflect the needs of health care professionals and patients in terms of access to comprehensive information and the time and manner of its provision. A natural consequence of the development of new technologies and the Internet is their application in marketing communications processes.

The growing importance of the Internet in marketing communications on the pharmaceutical market can be attributed to several reasons:

- the search for alternative forms of communication,
- increasingly restrictive laws governing pharmaceutical advertising,
- expanding range of various online promotional activities,
- greater credibility of online advertising (as compared, for instance, to television)
- growing specialization of marketing agencies.

Over the past few years the notion of e-pharmamarketing has emerged, describing essentially virtual communications on the Internet.

E-pharmamarketing usually includes the following tools:

- websites (including thematic portals, medical portals, product cards)
- databases (medical registers)
- e-mailing (enabling the application of viral marketing techniques)
- e-knowledge (e-learning, e-CME)
- online PR (press media on the Internet, word of mouth marketing)
- e-communities (web 2.0, web 3.0)
- advergaming
- videoconferences
- SEM (Search Engine Marketing)
- SEO (Search Engine Optimization)
- e-detailing
- CLM (Closed Loop Marketing)

The tools listed above are used on the pharmaceutical market either only in the communication process between drug manufacturers and doctors or pharmacists (e.g. videoconferences: e-detailing, CLM) or are universal in character and are applied also in contacts with patients (e.g. websites, e-communities, advergaming, online PR).

The changing role of medical representatives and legal regulations aimed at limiting direct contacts between pharmaceutical companies' representatives and doctors [As of December 1, 2008 the contacts between medical representatives and doctors during office hours have been restricted by law (Ordinance of the Minister of Health of November 21, 2008)] have generated growing interest in e-marketing techniques as a tool supporting both marketing communications and sales on the RX drugs market.

E-detailing is a communication process using interactive multimedia presentations posted online to emphasize the properties and advantages of a given pharmaceutical. Such a

presentation should cause doctors to change their opinions and decisions regarding the prescription of specific medications. This is possible due to the simultaneous use of interactive promotional activities (presenting marketing and substantive content) and access to analytical data (observing a given doctor's behaviour and quickly modifying the communication strategy). The introduction of e-detailing into the promotion mix used by pharmaceutical companies means using an attractive form of communication that enables its users to shape the marketing message in a variety of ways and affect most of the senses and emotions (e.g. with the aid of flash animations, 3D presentations or video webcasts). The involvement of doctors in the message and interaction makes communication more effective. The application of e-detailing results from the strategy adopted and the aim for which it is used. At the drug introduction stage it can serve as a tool for raising awareness among doctors, at the product growth and maturity stage it can reinforce the traditional promotional tools and increase market penetration (i.e. lead to bigger sales, more frequent use of the drug, use of the drug by new patients etc.). The most often named advantages of this form of communication include: [Połyniak M, bobok.wordpress.com]:

- the opportunity to customize the message during the session,
- the chance to learn about the product and the treatment at the time chosen by a doctor and therefore convenient (i.e. on the doctor's terms),
- lower costs of reaching the audience as compared to other marketing communications activities,
- learning more about the doctors and pharmacists and their preferences,
- increasing the quality and attractiveness of visits by medical representatives.

Therefore e-detailing is a flexible tool that provides unlimited opportunities for creating the promotional message and, at a relatively low cost, makes it possible to reach a wide audience of doctors with an interesting and attractive message.

E-detailing presentations may take the form of:

- a multimedia presentation,
- a video presentation,
- a static presentation with interactive elements.

The popularity of this tool is growing along with the growing interest of doctors in gaining access to medical information online. Research has demonstrated that around 88% of doctors are interested in such access, while of those approximately 47% are open to the idea of e-detailing, whereas around 50% believe that the effectiveness of this form of promotion hangs on combining it with traditional visits by medical representatives [www.medscape.com 2007].

E-detailing is largely based on the idea of Closed Loop Marketing and places particular emphasis on investigating the doctor's needs and expectations and on interaction, i.e. the involvement of the doctor in the message presented. CLM has already gained popularity abroad (widely used in Denmark and the USA), while in Poland it is slowly beginning to generate some interest among the pharmaceutical companies. [The only company on the Polish market that has its own CLM system called Active CLM is Active Pharma Sp. z o.o.] CLM supports the medical representative in his or her direct contact with the doctor. The company representative is equipped with a mobile device (PC tablet, UMPC, CDA), whose aim is to provide the graphics for his or her presentation and which allows the doctor to become involved in the process by answering the questions displayed on the tablet. It is the doctors themselves that participate in designing their own customized message, which boosts their concentration and interest in a given presentation. The use of CLM together with cutting-edge interactive communication devices helps to shape a modern image of pharmaceutical companies in the eyes of doctors. The doctor gets an impression that it is not the pharmaceutical, but the doctor himself/herself that is the centre of attention at the meeting with the medical representative. It is worth noting that CLM is not a tool for manipulating doctors, but rather a professional business partner assisting them in their medical practice. The doctor gets specific data backed by medical analyses and research findings (and not advertising materials), in the form of a message adapted to his or her individual needs. The doctor does not need to spend hours researching information in a given medical field, since having chosen a given presentation path during the representative's visit he or she has expressly formulated the issues of interest and such information shall be provided to him or her in the future. [<http://prportal.pl/2009/05/>] The doctor's reaction and areas of interest are saved in the system, processed and analysed. At the next visit the doctor's specific needs are taken into account in the form of modified and customized substantive and marketing information. Such communication process is beneficial for all participants (pharmaceutical companies, doctors and patients), which translates into optimized marketing activities, greater effectiveness and thus greater profits.

The communication forms discussed above and backed by cutting-edge technologies are in line with the rapidly developing PTE concept (Promotion through Education). It is an innovative idea recognizing the growing educational needs of the medical community. Its objective is to effectively promote pharmaceutical products by providing partnership support for health care professionals in gaining expertise. The key instrument in the implementation of this concept are multimedia solutions: the Internet and CDs featuring highly effective and

attractive training tools, such as e-training, multimedia training sessions, research conferences or tests and quizzes. An example is an educational portal addressed to doctors (paediatricians, laryngologists, orthopaedists and homeopaths) developed and implemented with Active Pharma (in co-operation with Heel Polska), called Akademia Heel. The use of state-of-the-art technologies in the training process offers doctors tangible benefits in the form of time and money savings (access to knowledge at any time and in any place). [www.medusoft.pl/pic/pr/Księcikowski P. Falkowski A.]

However, it should be noted that, on the one hand, e-pharmamarketing activities reinforce face-to-face meetings with medical representatives, but on the other gradually make such meetings obsolete, due to the fact that:

- they are becoming more easily accessible
- they are gaining wider acceptance among the medical and pharmaceutical community
- they are recognized by the corporate and anti-corruption policies of pharmaceutical holdings and companies
- they do not take up the doctors' working hours.

The success of these techniques is determined by the development of relatively long-lasting relations with the medical and pharmaceutical communities by free communication with the end user, i.e. the patient.

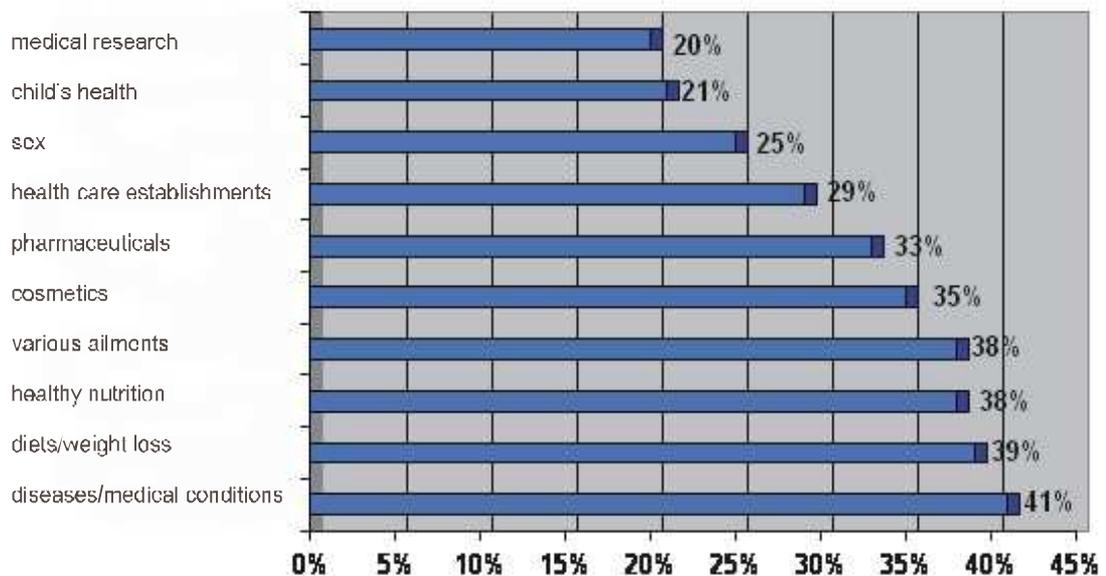
The creation of web communities is of particular significance for marketing communications. This group of tools includes for instance konsylium24.pl, a website dedicated to doctors. It is available only to registered and verified physicians who discuss various matters online. The website has already over 18,000 registered doctors representing 72 medical specialisations; over 13,000 queries have been submitted and over 270,000 replies and comments provided. When observing the communication trends on the pharmaceutical market, it is noticeable that doctors are becoming more and more active Internet users, creating their own virtual communities and becoming involved in their operation. Moreover, websites offer a platform for promotional activities, using non-standard promotional methods, which make the message more attractive.

General websites, including drug manufacturer websites and news portals, are important universal e-pharmamarketing tools (i.e. addressed both to doctors and pharmacists, as well as patients). They generate a relatively large volume of traffic by visitors searching for information or advice. It is worth noting that patients use the Internet to find a solution to their problem, i.e. information about a given illness, available treatments, dietary advice, rather

than specific pharmaceuticals or information on where such pharmaceuticals may be purchased (see Chart 1).

Chart 1

Type of health-related or healthy lifestyle information sought online (TOP 10)
“What specific health care information have you sought online over the past 3 months?”



N = 1447 – respondents who over the three months preceding the survey searched for medical or healthy lifestyle information online.

The percentages presented in the chart do not add up to 100% since the respondents were allowed to provide more than one answer.

Source: Gemius S.A., “Portale medyczne i zdrowie”. gemiusReport, March 2009

It seems that medical websites constitute an underused marketing communication tool. These websites are commonly divided into general medical portals (e.g. Eskulap, Medycyna Praktyczna, Lekarze.com, Res Medica, MedSerwis and others) and specialist portals devoted to specific medical conditions and/or treatments (e.g. www.gastrologia.pl, www.onkologia.pl, www.malaria.com.pl, www.ziolecznictwo.pl, www.antybiotyki.pl). The number of these portals is significant, some of them have a relatively short life span and are removed from the

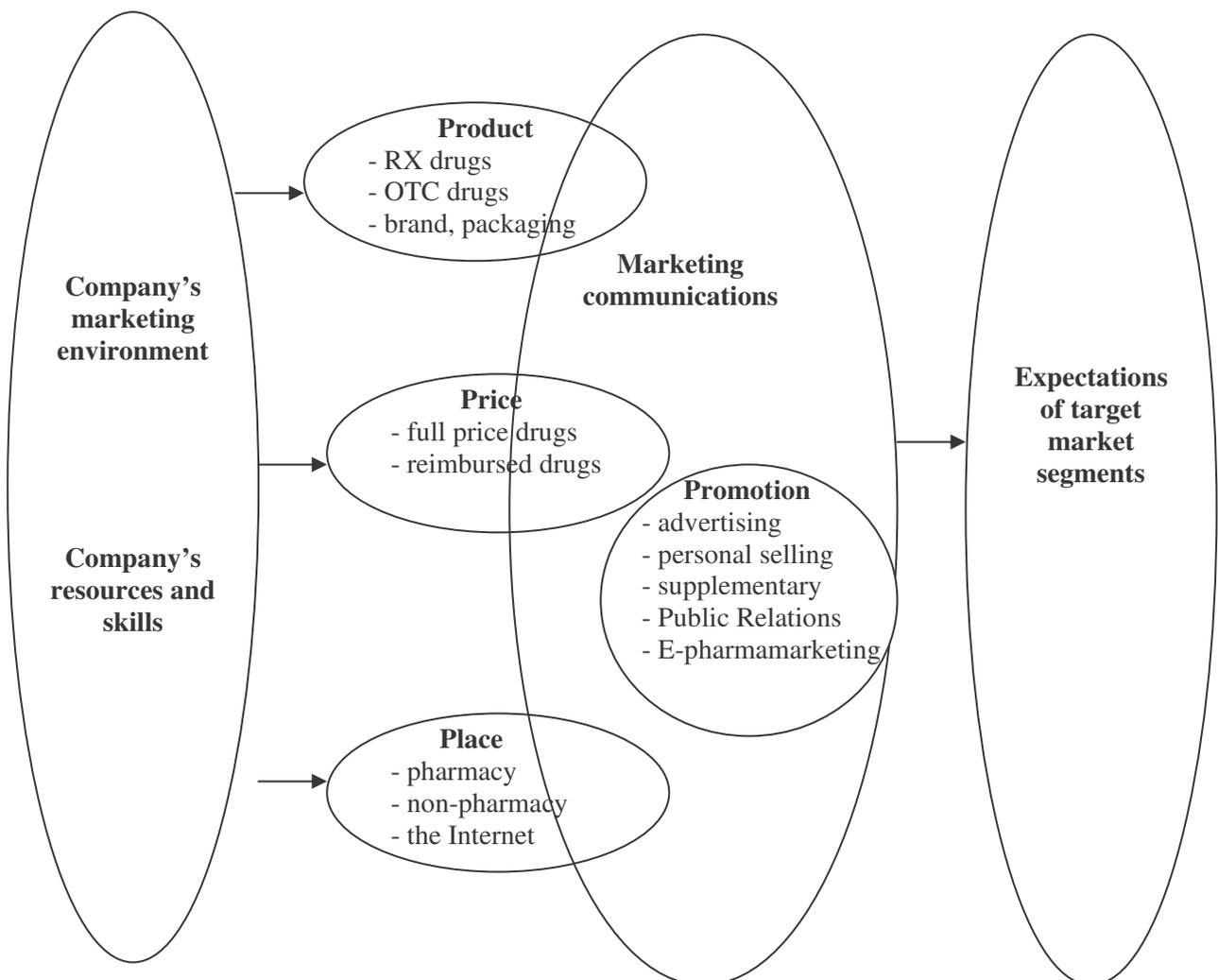
Internet. Moreover, media platforms grouping specialist medical websites are also being established (e.g. Medforum or Openmedica.pl).

4. Integration of marketing communications with the marketing mix

The second level of integration involves integrating communications with the remaining components of the marketing mix, i.e. the product, price and place. In order to select the issues of greatest importance for the communications between a company and its market environment from those components a holistic approach to marketing communications management processes is required (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Integration of communications with the marketing mix



In the pharmaceutical product's marketing strategy a vital role in the communication process is played by its name, brand and packaging. On the pharmaceutical market each product (drug) has three names: chemical (originating from the formula of the active substance in the pharmaceutical), international (the name generally accepted worldwide, usually incorporates elements of the chemical name) and the trade name (selected independently by the drug manufacturer). [For instance – chemical name: N-(hydroxyphenyl) acetamide, international name: paracetamol, trade name: Panadol (Glaxo), Apap (US Pharmacia), Codipar (Glaxo), Acenol (Galena), Paracetamol (Herbapol Wrocław)].

The ® mark placed at the end of the name informs the patient that the trade name is legally protected. Often the medication is produced by several manufacturers, which means that pharmacies may offer it under various trade names. Very often the trade name is expanded to include a short phrase indicating its application or additional benefits provided by a given pharmaceutical – e.g. Apap Extra, Apap Noc, Apap C plus or a dietary supplement, e.g. Bodymax Żeń-szeń (an energy boost for men), Bodymax plus, Bodymax senior 50+, Bodymax sport. The brand name of a pharmaceutical plays an important role in marketing communication processes. Pharmaceutical companies offering OTC drugs usually apply the individual brand strategy (e.g. Ibuprom, Etopiryna, Rutinoscorbin). The name of the manufacturer is irrelevant to the patient. This is not the case on the RX drugs market, where the manufacturers often strive to build a strong brand position among doctors (e.g. Pfizer, Roche, Novartis etc.).

The brand development and market communication process should incorporate a few principles that affect brand value and determine its position on the market. These principles include:

- emphasizing the mandatory brand components – the name, the logo, colour scheme and packaging,
- brand positioning in the customers' minds (doctors, pharmacists, patients) – the brand should be promoted in such a way, so as to stand out among the competitive brands in the minds of the target customers (e.g. priority rule, the sound of the name, etc.)
- invoking the sources of authority and brand reference – e.g. medical research findings, opinions of experts – authorities in a given field of medicine, awards, e.g. Pharmaceutical of the Year, etc.,
- communicating brand personality, i.e. its unique features, appealing to emotions and the social context of using the brand (e.g. Polpharma – “people help people”)

- referring to the brand culture and its heritage, as well as making historical references (e.g. “Herbs grown by monks”, “Amol – a century on the market – a product based on the herbal mixture developed by Carmelite monks).

Brand management on the pharmaceutical market and the use of its attributes in the market communication processes is more effective when all brand building components have been thoroughly and carefully prepared.

From the point of view of promotional activities an important element of a pharmaceutical product is its packaging. Packaging as an integral component of a drug secures its usability, guarantees high quality, protects the medication during transport and storage, as well as makes it safer and easier to use (e.g. single-tablet dosage from a jar, childproof caps etc.). The protective function of packaging on the pharmaceutical market is particularly significant. It includes, apart from the above-named purposes, the function of preventing pharmaceutical counterfeiting. Effective means of such prevention feature, among others, microprints, holograms, labels and tags. The protective function is also closely related to the informative function, equally important on the pharmaceutical market – the rules for placing information on packaging are expressly regulated by the laws in force. Such information should include: the name of the medication and the content of active substances in a single dose, information on the form of the medication, method of application, the name of the manufacturer, lot number, and expiry date. As far as marketing communications processes are concerned, the most important is the marketing function of the packaging, however, this plays a much more significant role on the OTC drugs market than in the RX drugs sector. On the non-prescription drugs market various elements of the packaging (design, colour scheme, shape) may affect the patient’s purchasing decisions. It is important to use the OTC drug’s packaging in TV, press and outdoor (billboard) advertising or in pharmacy merchandising, e.g. for multi-facing on a shelf. Packaging on the pharmaceutical market is gaining significance as a means of marketing communication and a tool for building the image of a given pharmaceutical and its manufacturer.

Another component of the marketing mix is the price of the pharmaceutical, i.e. its value expressed in monetary terms. From the marketing point of view, the price is related, first and foremost, to the product and its properties, as well as promotional expenses and distribution costs. Original pharmaceuticals used in the treatment of some conditions (e.g. cancer, genetic defects) are very expensive, due to patents protecting their active substance. These pharmaceuticals are usually subject to reimbursement, i.e. co-financing by the state. The reimbursement policy covers the so-called essential medicines (life-saving drugs) – the

patients pay a lump sum amount of PLN 3.20 and supplementary medicines – patients' cost amounts to 30% or 50% of the price. The inclusion of a medicine on the reimbursement list means that it is used to treat chronic diseases or the so-called rare conditions. The biggest reimbursement expenses concern pharmaceuticals used to treat conditions affecting the central nervous system, the cardiovascular system, the digestive tract and the respiratory system. The lower price of a medicine (i.e. inclusion of the drug on the reimbursement list) means that doctors will prescribe it more often.

Another important group of costs reflected in the price are promotional expenses, advertising costs, medical representatives' remuneration, loyalty bonuses to pharmacies and wholesalers. They usually account for several percent of the drug's retail price (15-25%). Rebates or discounts are used as a sales promotion tools at various levels in the distribution channel: by a wholesaler for a pharmacist, by all those entities for the end user, i.e. the patient. Discounts on the B2B market (manufacturer, wholesaler, pharmacy) may concern payment dates, the size of a single batch ordered, package orders, seasonality of purchases etc. For the patient (B2C market) discounts may take the form of a bigger package for the same price, various seasonal bargains (e.g. cheaper Geriavit for Grandfather's or Grandmother's Day), each filled prescription rewarded with a PLN 10 voucher for OTC drugs (in the SuperPharm chain). Discounts are effective within a relatively short period of time and encourage patients to purchase medicines (mainly OTC drugs). The discount amount should be noticeable and beneficial for the patients (15-20%), but may not suggest lower quality. Information about discounts reaches the patient either through a poster displayed in the pharmacy or an advertising newsletter delivered to their home. Usually the previous price is crossed out, while the new price strongly emphasized, which serves as an incentive to select that brand from other pharmaceuticals in the same group.

Place as another element of the company's offer reflects its strategy in reaching the end customer. [Czubała A. 2001, p. 164-169].

The development of distribution channels, the choice of specific intermediaries and outlets selling pharmaceuticals are determined by one of the three forms of distribution: intensive, selective or exclusive. The intensive distribution strategy is used on the OTC drugs market for selected groups of those pharmaceuticals approved for non-pharmacy sales. These pharmaceuticals are offered by pharmacies, but also by grocery stores, super- and hypermarkets, newsagents, petrol stations etc. They include painkillers, cold and flu medicines, as well as gastric medicines and vitamin supplements. For patients the widespread availability of OTC drugs in retail chains is very convenient, at the same time suggesting that

they are safe to use and may be purchased without consulting a doctor or a pharmacist. The marketing communications for those medicines usually focus on mass and impersonal forms (e.g. advertising, sales promotion) and means (e.g. television, press, radio, the Internet) of communicating with the patient. The selective distribution strategy is used, first and foremost, on the RX drugs market, which means that they are sold by selected intermediaries, such as pharmaceutical wholesalers and pharmacies.

Patients expect to receive additional information, for instance on the usage of a given drug and often consult pharmacists when purchasing a specific medicine. Marketing communications focus more on individual, personal forms and information channels. In case of exclusive distribution (for instance offering certain cancer or psychotropic drugs only through hospital pharmacies), marketing communications processes are further customized. There is much less interference and noise than in the other two strategies, while the primary form of communication is persuading doctors of the effectiveness of a given pharmaceutical in a specific treatment.

At the marketing mix level it is also necessary to integrate the intensity and scope of promotional activities with the production capacity, projected distribution and customer demand.

The appropriate choice of communication tools and their comprehensive, effective, yet flexible use, as well as correlating the remaining marketing activities regarding the product, price and place, determine the success of the company's marketing strategy and its competitive advantage.

Marketing communication activities at the level of the strategy of the entire enterprise also need to be co-ordinated and integrated. Particular attention should be paid to coherent objectives and the selection of appropriate tools for their execution, so as to ensure the company's success on a market as unique as the pharmaceutical market.

Conclusions

The marketing communications processes on the pharmaceutical market evolve continuously. This evolution is stimulated by a number of factors, the most important of which are the development of new technologies and amendments to the legislation governing medicine promotion. These factors lead to the emergence of new communication channels (e.g. online) and new tools (e.g. e-pharmamarketing). At the promotional tools level, a pharmaceutical company needs to choose the correct promotion mix in order to meet the expectations of the target audience and effectively modify their behaviour. The need for integration at the

marketing mix tools level stems from the necessity to develop the offer of a company that fosters a coherent business image and gives it a competitive edge on the market. The marketing communication objectives and the manner in which they are executed should also form part of company's overall business strategy. These issues have merely been outlined in this paper. Further studies and research are required to investigate this area.

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