MASS CULTURE VS. MARKETING – CHOSEN ASPECTS

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Abstract

Development of new information broadcasting technologies caused the progress of mass culture, which is the ability to send a great deal of information to many people at great speed. The main goal of this article is to point out the hallmarks of mass culture and the way in which it influences different aspects of marketing; first of all – how it changes the promotion. In the paper the consideration of threats and opportunities connected with mass culture and marketing will be conducted. The main change seems to be a turn towards entertainment and prospective consumers participation in easily accessible activities of fun and enjoyment. So it seems marketing will more often be tied to the arousal of interest and pleasure, than to reasonable, useful facts and information.

Key words: promotion, modern culture, society, for-profit and non-profit organizations.

Introduction

Mass culture – symptoms

In discussing the core of mass culture one should begin with an explanation of ‘culture’ and ‘civilization’ conceptions. Throughout the history of mankind there are some periods where it can be shown that both concepts were identical in meaning, i.e. when society was not developed enough to separate technical outputs from customs. ‘Civilization’ is usually described as technological order, such as physical equipment and technique aspects of society's organization. This should be considered as certain levels of material development which are determined e.g. by the stage of expansion of means of communication. ‘Culture’ however is described as a sphere of human interests and aspirations therefore it consists of merits system, beliefs, ideologies and society’s ways of life. Into culture elements one ought to rank music creation, understanding of symbols (i.e. shapes and colours) as well as ways of spending free time. Culture has a huge influence on people’s and organizations' behaviours. It can be stated that culture begins where biological instincts end and realization of needs and pointed goals starts (Kłoskowska 2005).

Formerly a community was supported by three kinds of connections: family relations, neighbours relations and friendship resulting from shared interests. In city conditions these traditional relations disappear – we may observe a decaying of traditional social hierarchy, atheistic views and the rationalisation of attitudes. It can be mention that – in spite of crowded areas – people keep each other at a distance which is manifested by a lack of interesting in anything. What, in this situation connects people in modern society? – We may answer that there are means of mass communication that are essential in the interaction process, as well as in the linking and uniformity of the population.

If one wants to point out the main aspects of mass culture, one should mention: a passive permission for external determinants to influence lives, avoiding intellectual effort, susceptibility to flashing effects, fondness of fast and easy play pastimes. Mass culture is very often described as culture of kitsch and commerce (Kłoskowska 2005). In these conditions
entrepreneurs have to convince the environment that an offer is one of a kind and is worth interest.

The essence of marketing

The traditional attitude towards marketing shows that it is a conception of market organization activity based on the rule of recognizing and satisfying market needs. So the fundamental goal of applying marketing conception of management is the growth of buyers satisfaction and other, non-commercial, participants of market processes. Entrepreneurs may create their markets using the classic 4Ps (product, price, promotion and place), that has changed lately as regards CRS (corporate social responsibility) and ecological trends in business activities. According to modern conceptions of marketing it is difficult to agree with a statement that marketing is a way of gaining profit by the effective pleasing of clients (Koźmiński, Piotrowski 1995), although certainly a profit can be a proof of the good management of relations with clients and other market elements. Market segmentation, understanding the division of the market into relatively homogenous parts, even though new separation criteria appear, like ethics for example (Al-Khatib, Santon, Rawwas 2005), still seems to be a very important matter. Equally important are innovation issues, market research, strategies of use of the 4Ps (Wise, Sirohi 2005). So marketing, notwithstanding a lot of theoretical publications, as well as being based on experience publications, is even now a kind of proving ground, mainly because of the dynamically changing environment.

In a competitive economy one of the most important marketing tasks is the creation of identity and the good image of an organisation. The quintessence of identity is simply the set of unique values which will allow the distinguishing of one organisation from another, acting on the market. It is very often said that identity is mainly created by visual contacts, but it is also true that identity created by purpose is composed from these factors which are chosen by an organisation (e.g. behaviour procedures). Identity can be understood as ‘being the same’ or ‘seeking something clearly different’. In this first conception an organisation is in permanent harmony, in accord with its past; in the second idea – one wants to be different and looks for something special that can characterise its nature. In economic and management approaches both conceptions seems to be joined – identity is created by an organisation over a certain time to differ it efficiently from an environment and competitors. Generally it can be said that identity is formed by everything that shows differences between organisations. So it can be described as a set of creatures and values enabling proper presentation of a company and its achievements.

Literary overview

Mass culture and marketing problems occur from the beginning of the economic activity of mankind, although in its modern form are present from the time of the industrial revolution and mass production. From this article's subject point of view, the most important papers are those which discuss mass culture and its influence on marketing as general or specific marketing tools. Very often – and rightly – mass culture problems are discussed in aspects of mass means of communication (J. Wilson, S. Wilson, 2000) and from ethical dilemmas (Leslie, 2003; Campbell 2006). The greatest deal of publications discuss sociological points of view, for example talking about values important to society, the migration of people and identity problems, as well as inter-human connections coming into existence. In literary, P. Cormack in the book “Sociology and mass culture” (Cormack 2004) as well as Grossberg, Waratell, Whitney and Wise (2006) in the book “MediaMaking: mass media in a popular culture” deal with mass culture problems. In Poland the best known publication is A. Kloskowska’s work titled “Mass culture” (Kloskowska 2005). Communication with the
environment very often refers to the marketing conception of organisation activity, and work
done by T.C. Melewar, K. Bassett and C. Simoes “The role of communication and visual
identity in modern organisations” (2006) can be the example. The authors underline that
nowadays the identity of an organisation is created not only by logo and name, but by all
forms of internal and external communication.

As it was mentioned previously, because of different alterations on the market, marketing
should also change. We may find such statements in publications like “Revising the
marketing domain” (Levy, 2002) and “International green marketing” (Gurau, 2005). It is
worth adding that changes do not only concern the commercial sphere; now non-
governmental organisations – like business organisations and government administrations –
are considered as important elements of the market, therefore marketing ideas ought to take
this trend into account. The result of this attitude are works discussing changes in
contemporary society and ways of managing modern organisations (Eden, 2003; Al-Khatib,
Santon, Rawwas 2005).

Material and methods

The main goal of this paper is to describe hallmarks of mass culture and its influence on
marketing conceptions; the second aim is the analysis of chances and threats resulting from
modern mass culture's effects on marketing management. Material used in the analysis is
Polish and international literature on sociology and marketing supported own research on
chosen aspects. Amongst the methods applied in this article are: method of documentary
research, an opinion poll and case analysis. The opinion poll was used to research peoples
views about current promotion campaigns and knowledge about certain offers and actions.

On account of the limited size of the article, reflections on mass culture influence on
marketing are confined to chosen matters, mainly connected with public relations and
advertising.

Results and discussion

Marketing is used by market entities as a conception of activity and development. It
relates to commercial organisations as well as non-profit ones. Marketing should create offers
that will suit supplies to demand. It should be underlined that the mentioned offers are not
only a certain amount of goods or services but also consists of the proper price levels,
appropriate means of distribution, and finally the correct promotion.

In the mass culture aspect the most difficult matter seems to be realising the promotion,
because it depends hugely on the ability of the environment to accept and understand
marketing messages. All other marketing tools (product, price and distribution) would seem
more dependent on the company, though they are grounded by laws, regulations and market
structure. One shouldn’t forget about competitors activities, which are always important and
inspire doings of other market entities.

Discussing promotion sub-tools, one ought to mention that most of them are connected
with communication – for the reason that public relations, fairs and exhibitions, advertising,
personal sell, telemarketing, merchandising and sponsoring, enclose different techniques of
spreading information. Because one can be sure that mass culture influences promotion
perception, this is an important motive to which market organisations should pay attention to
mass culture creatures and effects.

The difficulties with promotion-mix realisation can be seen in the case of strategy of
identity creation, which is the public relations domain. If one will agree with a statement that
modern society is rather intellectual lazy, in a passive way one accepts external influences and is mainly interested in fast and easy amusement, so HOW in this situation is an organisation able to reach consumers with an important mission or offer information? HOW can they shape an extraordinary and easy to recognise image? The problem can be solved easily when the given entity is large and has accurate potential (promotion budget), then it can support traditional ways of communication by some exceptional events. The example can be public relations doings of Zielona Budka – a corporation which has produced ice-cream for over 60 years. This company used people’s inclination for easy amusement and looking for extra benefits and in June 2007 – celebrating its 60th. anniversary – offered Warsaw inhabitants free rides by special tram. During every ride company workers gave ice-cream out and a tram-disco jockey played music. Thousands of people took the opportunity and this is proof that it was a very good promotion idea; much better than common advertising or printed materials about the company. So Zielona Budka used a special event to emphasize its history and gain new consumers interest in their offer. In this case identity was associated with tradition and aesthetics. Apart from occasions like special events, entrepreneurs are forced to use different means of communication, because this can be a guarantee of reaching a wide audience. One of the examples of campaigns organised across Poland, is the one promoting a new image of beer by Redd’s. They arranged a large scale action which was prepared in base with TTL doings (through the line) which consisted of different information channels, in this case television, press, internet and BTL where something funny always have happened. So it is not enough to create ATL or BTL conception; a mixed set of tools is essential, which is mainly the result of consumers differentiation.

In base of two presented cases the first conclusion can be propounded – because of mass culture companies have to explore different contact channels, focusing more on modern ones (like telemarketing), and in addition they have to surprise and amuse communication receivers. Without which it is very difficult to catch and keep attention of promotion beneficiaries. In this situation a turn into the unknown for given market cultures can be suggested; then consumers could be more easily surprised by new aesthetics, types of service or the scope of an offer. Nonetheless ideas such this one should be compared with a company’s tradition (identity), with up-to-date customer habits, and finally with organisational and financial possibilities of an organisation. The problem described in this way, in spite of difficulties, seems however, to be more a chance than a threat.

Slightly different from earlier mentioned cases is a situation where an organisation meets really big troubles. The story of the Polish producer of meat and sausages, Constar Company from Starachowice, can serve as an example, because in 2005 this organisation met a crisis caused by illegal practices in production described by the press. After several weeks of the papers publishing in the country-wide press, as well as on television, Constar constructed a special Internet site, where the company’s managers denied charges of unfair behaviour, which – saying the truth – was not believable. It is interesting that the company did not use these circumstances to confess and make a declaration to improve the situation; instead of this they ignored the whole situation. In this case, on account of the speed and the scope of the spreading information across the country – and further a field – many acquired knowledge of the illegal activity. And next one can discuss the aspect of mass culture – it is possible for fast and countless pieces of information to reach the largest part of society in a very short time. This feature may be a chance, as well as a threat, and it depends on the entities behaviour. If they accept a concept of a ‘glass house’ (a way of crisis management) when the honest and the wishes of cooperation are assumed, an organisation may only take a profit. In the case of the blocking of information and aversion to environment (especially mass-media), a crisis may lead to destroying hitherto achievements of an organisation and ruin its image as well as market. Discussing examples refer to narrow aspects of promotion – public relations. But
mass culture effects may be observed in advertisements (simple, obvious ideas in schematic forms) and in merchandising too (garish colours and music to attract attention to a chosen part of a shop area).

Considering mass culture effects, one should mention that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) seems to be in a much more difficult situation than commercial ones. They do not submit an interesting deal nor offer lucrative contests; moreover – they very often ask for help or involvement with their activity. A short survey checking this hypothesis brings the proof – the opinion poll conducted on a small group of students (156 persons) shows differences in promotion perceptions, and it is clearly shown that NGOs are in a difficult position from a marketing point of view. In the mentioned pool, respondents were asked about three matters: 1) Which bank is promoted by Polish actor Marek Kondrat? 2) What the PZU advertisement about the level of price increase says? How much it will increase? 3) Where The Green Federation Gaja acts and from which city it originates? Figures 1, 2 and 3 show answers on adequate questions.

**Fig. 1. - Which bank is promoted by Polish actor Marek Kondrat?**

![Bar chart showing indications for different banks promoted by Polish actor Marek Kondrat.](source: own study.)

**Fig. 2. - How much (in percentage) the prices of a PZU offer will increase referring to the ads?**

![Bar chart showing indications for the price increase percentage.](source: own study.)

**Fig. 3. - Where Green Federation Gaja acts and from which city does it come?**

![Bar chart showing indications for the location of Green Federation Gaja.](source: own study.)
Of course, answering the first question, respondents only had to remember the main and the best known person connected with the ad – and 94% (147 persons) gave good answers. It may be proof that when something is simple and funny it is also easy to remember. Answering the second problem, respondents were not so sure and in this case only 41 persons (26.3%) were right, that no prices increase is emphasised in the ad. So, when an ad is funny it attracts people, but they are focused on the easiest part of the message and do not remember the details. And this aspect of humorous ads may be a great threat for promotion campaigns. The third question was the most problematic because only 9% of respondents replied properly that GF Gaja acts in Szczecin. And again it confirms the assumption that people do not want to look for interesting information about valuable actions and prefer pleasant, funny promotions, avoiding awkward ones. To these matters fig. 4 refers.

**Fig. 4. - Good answers in accordance to given questions**

The results of the opinion poll seem to prove the supposition that mass culture – because of the great deal of promotions - causes the necessity to avoid too much information, therefore people are ready to show interest in any easy means of obtaining news rather than to devote their time, attention, money and work to remembering or to doing something more difficult. And this thesis was partly considered by L. Festinger in his well known work “A theory of cognitive dissonance” (Festinger, 1957) where it is written that people are not able to (and do not want to) receive all the information from the environment and therefore they have to choose. Unfortunately – from the point of view of more ambitious marketing campaigns – they choose something uncomplicated, and this trend will strongly change marketing in the nearest future.
Conclusion

In this paper the mass culture influence on marketing was considered. The main matter/theory resulting from mass culture - discussed in the article - is the turn towards entertainment and the involvement of prospective consumers in simple fun and enjoyment. This thesis was checked out in a small opinion poll and some conclusions can be pointed out:

1) when an ad is simple and funny it is also easy to remember;
2) but when an ad attracts people because of its funny story they are focused on the easiest part of message and do not remember the details;
3) NGOs activities may be inconspicuous which is caused – among other determinants of effective promotion – by mass culture's domination in the communication channels.

Apart from the conclusions mentioned above, after the case studies analysis and the survey, one may say that mass culture changed marketing, especially advertising, into non-complicated and invisible factual messages, so trying to create their own identity or promotion, companies have to organise something special (beyond classical tools). Moreover, special events should be used more regularly because of the surplus amount of ads, and this is an important direction for organisations planning promotion campaigns. Finally it should be added that modern promotion must be very diverse and surprising, then it will have an opportunity to win with mass culture.

References

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