



Marketing communication in spanish retailer company Mercadona

La comunicación de marketing en la empresa de distribución española Mercadona

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Abstract

This research analyzes the marketing communication of Mercadona, a spanish retailer company. Is analyzed the external communication of the company, paying special attention to Internet and social networks. The aim of the research is to understand the main communication tools used in its communication strategy. The research methodology used has been the observation and analysis of content. The main results determine a preferential use of the communication tools denominated nonconventional or below the line. Mercadona is present in the main social media and makes an efficient use of them, although Mercadona uses these tools from a more corporate than commercial perspective.

Resumen

Esta investigación profundiza en la manera en que la empresa de distribución española Mercadona, una de las más importantes del país y con mayor crecimiento en los últimos años, desarrolla su comunicación comercial o de Marketing. Se analizará la comunicación externa que la empresa realiza y se prestará además especial atención al uso que hace la organización de Internet y de las principales redes sociales, con el objetivo de conocer las herramientas de comunicación que implementa en su estrategia comunicativa. Para ello se ha desarrollado una metodología mixta cuali-cuantitativa, basada en las técnicas de la observación y el análisis de contenido, de cuya aplicación se desprende que Mercadona utiliza, preferentemente, herramientas de comunicación de las denominadas No Convencionales o No Masivas, sin hacer uso de las más tradicionales, como puede ser la publicidad en televisión, prensa o radio. Por otro lado, está presente en las principales redes sociales digitales, haciendo un uso eficiente de ellas, aunque este uso está más enfocado a comunicar su identidad corporativa que en dar a conocer sus productos. De los resultados se desprende, a modo de conclusión, que la empresa de distribución Mercadona está más centrada en comunicar desde una perspectiva de corporate que comercial.

Keywords | Palabras clave

Retailer, marketing, commercial communication, social media, internet, tools.

Distribución, marketing, comunicación comercial, redes sociales, internet, herramientas.

Introduction

It is common for large distribution companies to constantly bombard consumers with advertisements, brochures, catalogs, radio spots or advertising inserts on different websites. In contrast, the Spanish distribution company Mercadona, leader of the sector in Spain, and in 1993, coinciding with the company's first major expansion outside the Valencian community, invested its last few pesetas in television advertising, with an advertisement on Televisión Española which began with the phrase "nine out of ten women say yes to SPB (Always Low Prices)". Since then, the company has not used conventional advertising again; that is, it does not invest in company announcements or brochures with product offerings to distribute in mailboxes, newspapers or in its own sales outlets, while it does seem to be concerned with maintaining and improving its reputation, in dialogue with the customer or to be totally at its service. In short, in doing things in a way not as visible and noisy as the rest, with a prudence that usually draws much attention from the scholars of communication.

Many are those who claim that Mercadona does not need to advertise or promote itself. Nothing is further from reality. All that the Valencian Company has achieved was not achieved by chance, but by being planned and studied in detail. Mercadona has decided to advertise and promote itself, like all companies, but in a different way to what is considered as normal in these cases, in a silent, as well as effective way.

Throughout the present work will try to deepen in the way in which Mercadona develops its Marketing communication, in what it does, how it does it, in who does it and in why it does it. For this purpose we will analyze the external communication of the company and will also pay special attention to the Internet and its social networks, understanding that, for some years, they play a fundamental role within the communication strategies of large companies. The analysis and conclusions will provide an approach to the so-called «Mercadona phenomenon», based on its model of total quality management that involves a novel and unusual way of managing communication in such an important, prestigious and widespread company.

The main food distribution companies in Spain. The supermarket company Mercadona

According to information from Actualidad Económica, Mercadona's market share in the first half of 2012 was 25.3%, compared to 24.8% in the first six months of 2013. According to industry experts, during the first half

of the year the deflationary trend has continued in food products. The low-priced stores continue to hold market share and have consolidated during 2013 as the favorite channel to make the purchase in the scope of Great Consumption. This is one of the most relevant data that emerges from the report «Worldpanel Distribución 2014» prepared by the consultant Kantar Worldpanel and which aims to analyze trends in the distribution sector. While normal hypermarkets and supermarkets maintain market shares of around 14% and 21% respectively, low-priced stores have increased their market share from 32.3% to 34% in just one year, which translates into an advantage of more than three points compared to specialized stores and groceries, which hover around 30.7%.

Another relevant data from the Kantar Worldpanel report is that Mercadona, Dia and Lidl are the only large distribution firms that have increased their market share from among the top ten most selling in Spain. The rest of the components of this ranking of the large distribution has managed to maintain its presence among the top ten positions. Thus, Mercadona already concentrates 22.3% of spending on consumer products (in 2012 it concentrated 20%), while DIA, with 7.8% (7.7% in 2012), is placed above Carrefour Hiper, which holds the 7.7% it already had in 2012. The French giant is closely followed by Eroski Súper (3.3%), Lidl (3%) and Alcampo (2.9).

In 2015, Mercadona continues to lead the distribution landscape with 22.9% of the market, growing 2 tenths (22.7% in the same period of 2014), as Carrefour, which goes from 8.3% to 8.5%. Eroski fell by a tenth of a percentage point to 6.4% (6.4% in 2014) following the sale of some of its stores and the Alcampo group holding 3.8%, according to this report with accumulated data up to the third quarter of 2015.

Mercadona is one of the most important Spanish distribution companies, integrated into the supermarket segment. All this has been possible through rapid growth in a short period of time. Mercadona S. A. was born in 1977 within the Cárnicas Roig group with the purpose of extending the commercialization of meat and expanding into the grocery business. Its name comes from the fusion of the words in Valencian “Mercat” (Market) and “Dona” (Woman). Four years after the birth of the company, Juan Roig, one of the founder’s sons, acquires the company, which at that time consisted of eight grocery stores in Valencia, transforming them into a small chain of supermarkets which, little by little, would expand across the Valencian Community and, later by the rest of Spain.

At present, this distribution company, with 100% Spanish capital, is present in 46 provinces with about 1 450 supermarkets which, with an average of between 1 300 and 1 500 square meters of sales room, represent a market share over the total food area in Spain of 22.3% (Kantar World Panel, 2014) and contribute to the dynamism of the commercial environment in which they are located.

Currently, more than 74,000 people, all with fixed contracts, develop their professional life in the company with the same objective: to satisfy the needs in food, cleaning of the home, hygiene and pet food, of more than 4.8 million of households which make their daily purchase at Mercadona.

Mercadona supermarkets respond to a model of urban commerce of proximity, and maintain an assortment of food, drugstore, perfumery and accessories that is characterized by the presence of its own white brands - also called counter-brands - and reduce the supply of those brands which do not maintain a minimum rotation (Mercadona Annual Report, 2014).

Commercial communication and its main tools

Business commercial communication can be understood as the communication established by companies to relate to consumers or people who influence the buying process. Its basic objective is to achieve the consumption/use of the products and services that the company offers to the market.

According to Mazo-del Castillo (1994) one of the basic models in which Business Communication is structured is the so-called “of commercialization or marketing”, which considers Communication as a set of techniques whose main objective is conditioned to commercial interests. Communication only makes sense for a company if it means achieving the marketing objectives (of product or brand).

Traditionally the Communication has been linked to the marketing activities of companies (focused on products), looking for the best way to market them. Practically, until the end of the 20th century, communication in companies was limited to advertising or developing a technique to promote the product (Carrillo and Castillo, 2007). This responds to the fact that companies usually prioritize the most tangible policies (finance, production, and marketing). Business management, therefore, is much more concerned with Commercial or Product Communication than for others. Currently, in highly competitive markets, where consumers have a wide range of products and brands to satisfy the same need, it is not enough to offer a product of exceptional quality, but, as Reinares and Calvo (1999,

p. 1) point out “it is necessary to communicate with customers and make them aware of the offer of the company, since if they do not know it, they will hardly be able to buy them”.

In this line, Carrillo et al. (2005) points out that in a market where there are many products and services with very similar characteristics, differentiation often comes from developing an efficient commercial communication. Thus, the perception of each brand makes consumers opt for a particular product or service that is likely to compete at equal price and characteristics with other goods. It is obvious, therefore, the relevance of a good communication strategy for the products and, finally, also for the company (Carrillo et al., 2005, p.29).

Given the aforementioned similarity between the products and the difficulty of differentiating them based on tangible values, so-called Commercial Communication is currently linked not only to the product but also to the brand. As pointed out by Carrillo et al. (2005, p.33):

(...) the brand has become a valuable resource whose management depends directly on the senior management of the organizations, with the help of the communication department or any other name given to those in charge of managing, especially, the communication of the company.

Managing the brand becomes, therefore, a growing need for companies because consumers also perceive certain values and benefits provided by them (Delgado, 2003). The traditional axis of communication activity in companies, to inform consumers about their brands and their products or services has been, as a matter of priority, advertising, but it is not the only tool. Other conventional activities are also used such as direct marketing, point of sale communication, merchandising, promotions, sponsorship, personal sales, etc. The media and supports used in Commercial or Marketing Communication are, fundamentally:

1. Direct communication and personal sales. This is the communication actions carried out by the sales force of the company in front of its customers, normally this type of communication is usually direct, even weather through internet, mail, telephone or face to face. Advertising in general information newspapers, as well as in free newspapers, sports, etc.
2. Advertising on supplementary newspaper magazines.
3. Advertising in Magazines. Of general information and as well as specialized in decoration, feminine, masculine, fashion, heart, sports, etc.

4. Radio Advertising.
5. Advertising in Cinema.
6. Television Advertising. It includes national, autonomous, thematic channels, local televisions, etc.
7. Outdoor Advertising. Includes telephone booths, public transportation, marquees, tarpaulins, billboards, posters, banners, aerial signs, etc.
8. Internet advertising (pc and mobile). Includes sponsored links and graphic formats
9. Advertising, displays and animations at the point of sale.
10. Merchandising, labeling, directories.
11. Promotional marketing and sales promotion.
12. Relational Marketing.
13. Direct marketing.
14. Mailboxing and brochures
15. Phone marketing.
16. Mobile marketing (excluding internet).
17. Fairs and exhibitions.
18. Sports sponsorship events.
19. Business Publications.

The tool to be used will be determined by the type of product or service, the available resources of the company, the nature of the market, the stages of the buying process, the product life cycle, whether they are consumer products or industrial products, etc. And also by the type of business and communication strategy. The companies, through the implementation of these tools, pursue a series of objectives among which can be highlighted, mainly: the creation of brand image, product differentiation, positioning, changing attitudes, generating confidence towards a Brand, communicate advantages, differentiate the brand, present new products, among others (Soler, 1993), but, above all, increase sales and improve the organization's results.

In any case, both the definition of objectives and the choice of means must be supported by a strategic management of the Commercial Communication which, previously planned, allows the organization to establish relationships as solid as possible with its consumers, reporting the highest possible benefits, in every way, for the organization.

Materials and Methods

Research objectives

This research is based on the Spanish food distribution company Mercadona S.A and its marketing communication. Starting from this object of study, a series of basic objectives have been proposed which, in turn, are composed of a series of secondary objectives that complement and give shape to the former. The main objective is to know and analyze the marketing communication tools used by Mercadona. For this purpose, we will analyze the communication made by this food distribution company through the Internet, taking into account both the presence and use it makes of its social networks and its institutional web portal.

Methodology and research design

Observation

Throughout this work, observation has been considered as a systematic, conscious, planned and objective process. Thanks to this technique we obtain primary information about the object of study, as well as a sample of the behavior of the people and groups that are intended for study. For the development of this methodological technique, an analysis sheet (Chart 1) has been elaborated based on the classification made by the Infoadex organization, which distinguishes broadly between conventional media and non-conventional media.

Chart 1. Media analysis sheet for the study of commercial communication

CONVENTIONAL MEDIA	USE
Cinema	
Newspapers	
Dominical Magazines	
Outdoors	
Radio	
Internet	
Press Magazines	
Television	

NON-CONVENTIONAL	USE
Sponsorships	
Patronage	
MK Social / RSC	
Sports Sponsorships	
Point of sale Animation	
Yearbooks	
Guides and directories	
Mailboxing / Brochures	
Fairs / Expositions	
Promotional Games	
Personalized mailing	
Mobile MK	
Telephonic MK	
PLV Merchandising	
Billboards	
magazines / Memoirs	
Publicity gifts	
Loyalty card	

Once this analysis template has been validated, the on-site observations of the points of sale were carried out in the towns of Puerto Real, Cadiz, El Puerto de Santa María and Chiclana de la Frontera, all of them in the province of Cádiz (Spain). In total, five centers have been visited. Both the observation of the points of sale and the recording of the data has been carried out in the period of time between the months of March 2015 and July 2016.

Content analysis

It is a technique used to interpret and obtain conclusions about texts, images or other different forms where all types of data records may exist, transcription of interviews, speeches, protocols of observation or documents. This methodology has been applied on two different supports: the analysis of web pages, on the one hand, and that of social networks, on the other. Based on this consideration, two self-made analysis sheets have

been designed. The index card that applies to the analysis of the corporate web (Chart 2) is theoretically based on the work of Marín, Lasso de la Vega and Mier-Terán (2015). From these works a series of variables have been selected that allow measuring the navigability, the organization, the readability and the online purchase process offered by the Web. For each of these variables a series of items have been determined and the presence or not of each of them has been measured in the institutional web.

Chart 2. Index card for the analysis of the institutional web of Mercadona

NAVIGABILITY	PRESENCE
Map of the website	
Easy to remember URL	
Links to Ppal pag. From all pages	
Help page	
Having a search function	
It shows how to solve problems	
ORGANIZATION	
Ordered in a logical manner	
Titles describe the info they header	
LEGIBILITY	
Adequate Font size	
Background images offer good contrast	
Clear and precise language	
PURCHASING RPOCESS	
Pictures of the product	
Product description	
Browsing without purchasing	
Minimum purchase	
Offer of payment methods	
Customer service	
Secure website	
Page loading time	

As a theoretical basis for the analysis of the different social networks, a second analysis sheet (Chart 3) has been designed based on the work of

Fondevila, Del Olmo and Bravo (2012). The average number of followers, the quality of the images, the periodicity with which materials are uploaded, the type of content and whether or not to allow dialogue and interaction with customers for each of the Social networks in which Mercadona has presence would be analyzed.

Chart 3. Analysis sheet for the study of Mercadona's social networks

	Average number of followers	Quality images / text	1st use Date	Frequency of uploads	Type of contents	Costumer Dialog
Facebook						
Twitter						
Youtube Channel						
Instagram						
Google +						
Linkedin						
Coorporate Blog						

The analysis process was carried out between June and July of 2016, applying these analysis sheets to the corporate website, as well as to the main digital social networks.

Analysis and results

Communication tools

The tools that have been measured and analyzed correspond to the classification made by the Infoadex organization, which distinguishes broadly between conventional media and unconventional media. As can be seen in the analysis sheet (Chart 4), with regard to the so-called conventional media, it is observed how Mercadona dispenses with the use of the two main and most popular such as television and radio, highlighting the use of the Internet. In addition, outdoor advertising, and more specifically advertising billboards, are used by Mercadona, using media of various sizes depending on whether the location of the point of sale may or may not lead to confusion to potential customers. In addition to billboards, usually use canopies located at urban bus or train stops always near the point of sale are used.

Chart 4. Results. Media used by Mercadona in its marketing communication

CONVENTIONAL MEDIA	USE
Cinema	
Newspapers	
Dominical Magazines	
Outdoors	X
Radio	
Internet	X
Press Magazines	
Television	
NON-CONVENTIONAL	USE
Sponsorships	
Patronage	X
MK Social / RSC	X
Sports Sponsorships	X
Point of sale Animation	X
Yearbooks	
Guides and directories	
Mailboxing / Brochures	
Fairs / Expositions	
Promotional Games	
Personalized mailing	
Mobile MK	
Telephonic MK	
PLV Merchandising	X
Billboards	X
magazines / Memoirs	X
Publicity gifts	
Loyalty card	X

Regarding non-conventional media, it is possible to observe how Mercadona uses a smaller number of tools than the other distribution companies. Among them, the development of patronage actions is quite significant. The name of the company does not appear in any of these sponsorships, or donations, using instead one of its related foundations, such as the foundation Trinidad Alfonso or the sponsorship that is made

to the Basketball Club Valencia of the ACB League, through the appearance of the slogan «Cultura del Esfuerzo» (Culture of effort) in its T-shirt, a coined slogan and phrase always used by the president of the company D. Juan Roig Alfonso. Mercadona does not participate in fairs or in thematic exhibitions on food. Neither uses promotional games or points that are subsequently redeemed for discounts on the purchase.

It is very common for food distribution companies to use mailboxing as a tool. The different and varied offers they are promoting are usually transferred to the citizens in this way, except Mercadona, which not usually uses it even in the event of the opening of a new point of sale. It is also usual the use, by the companies of the sector, of credit cards or loyalty. Mercadona in this sense uses it only to finance purchases and postpone payments, but not to offer discounts, promotions, among others.

Analysis of the presence and use of social networks by Mercadona

As can be seen in Chart 5, Mercadona makes a significant use of digital social networks since in August 2012 began to use Facebook and Twitter, while progressively adhering to the main and most popular digital social networks.

Chart 5. Use of social media by Mercadona

	Average number of followers	Quality images / text	1st use Date	Frequency of uploads	Type of contents	Costumer Dialog
Facebook	420.000	Very good	Aug-12	1 daily post	Products / Warnings	Fluid and wanted
Twitter	83.000	Very good	Aug-12	1-3 messages responses	Products Dialog	Fluid and wanted
Youtube Channel	2.000	Very good	May-13	1 monthly video	Products Supplier	
Instagram	450	Very good	Mar-15	Starting to use	Products Supplier	
Google +	660	Very good	May-13	1 daily upload	Products Supplier	
Linkedin	23.900	Not developed		0	0	
Corporate Blog	canalmercadona	Very good		daily	News various	

It is necessary to emphasize the quality of the images, the texts, as well as the process of interaction with the client, which is continuous, professional and systematic. Mercadona does not usually fill the walls or message timelines if it is not necessary. On average it usually publishes one or two daily posts on Facebook, as well as between one and three messages on Twitter. One of the aspects that Mercadona and its network strategy stand out for is the fact that the interaction with the customer is constant and professional. Mercadona’s team of network managers responds to all doubts and customer complaints quickly and assertively. The company also stands out and differs from the rest by not using the «re-tweet». All the contents and images that it publish are of own production and elaborated by its department. It also highlights the increasingly consistent use of other social networks such as Instagram or Google +.

Analysis of the institutional web of Mercadona

As far as the web of Mercadona, it is possible to affirm that it is a web with an austere design, not too graphically ornamented and, at the same time, very navigable. What really interesting of this web is the reference to the company’s corporate blog (Canalmercadona), in which news, clarifications and even answers to the many hoaxes that are circulating on social networks are inserted daily.

As can be seen from the data collected in the analysis sheet (Chart 6), at first glance it does not seem at all like the e-Commerce website of a large company leader in its sector. The design is obsolete and rather austere, typical of a website from the beginning of the nineties. If we focus on thier online shopping platform, as in most platforms of these characteristics, it is necessary to register in order to access it and proceed to order products within the offered assortment.

Chart 6. Analysis of Mercadona’s institutional website

NAVIGABILITY	PRESENCE
Map of the website	X
Easy to remember URL	X
Links to Ppal pag. From all pages	O
Help page	O
Having a search function	O
It shows how to solve problems	O

ORGANIZATION	
Ordered in a logical manner	X
Titles describe the info they header	O
LEGIBILITY	
Adequate Font size	O
Background images offer good contrast	X
Clear and precise language	X
PURCHASING RPOCESS	
Pictures of the product	O
Product description	O
Browsing without purchasing	X
Minimum purchase	X
Offer of payment methods	X
Customer service	X
Secure website	X
Page loading time	O

Among the negative aspects of the sales website is the non-existence of highlighted products, or photographs of products, offers or detailed descriptions of products, except those of their brands or counter-brands that do appear sufficiently detailed. In the purchase platform there are no offers beyond a side menu item identified as *bajada* PVP (lower retail price). The fonts are difficult to read in most cases, an aspect that often complicates the purchase decision. The shopping cart is a kind of virtual ticket that appears on the right side similar to an Excel box and difficult to handle and interpret. However, the website offers the possibility to create lists of products and save them and has a good home service rate of around 8 euros.

The web platform has few sections or pages of content. It is also possible to access content related to the company's loyalty card, to corporate information about it or to job offers published by the company itself, which is professionally managed by infojobs.net.

Another aspect in which the web stands out is the possibility of accessing it in many languages. . Apart from being able to do it in Spanish, Catalan or Basque, it is possible to do it in Valencian, Galician, English or German. Regarding the overall ranking of visits of this website, it can be affirmed that it is well positioned in Spain with an average of permanence

in the page per visit of 4.17 minutes, a visit of 4.1 pages or sections per visitor, occupying the position 927 of the Spanish ranking.

Despite not being a simple and practical web for the costumer, the position that occupies in the ranking is quite good, perhaps obtained thanks to the popularity of the company in relation to the direct sale and the quality of the brands or counter-brands that It trades in its physical points of sale.

Discussion and conclusions

The difference between Mercadona and its direct competitors is that it does not use commercial communication in a conventional way. Its idea is not to reach the masses through commercial communication. In this way it is concluded that the company intends to humanize the brand, to reach the customer in the way a typical neighborhood store has done so far: with quality products, proximity to the home, and the seller is a prescriber of brands, close and friendly. In this way, Mercadona focuses and seeks what is called corporate communication.

With regard to the communication tools used by Mercadona S.A it can be determined that, fundamentally, uses the so-called Non-Conventional or Non-Massive communication tools. Mercadona is present in the main digital social networks and makes an efficient use of them.

Among the main features of its use of social networks is the quality of images, texts and the process of interaction with the client, which at all times is continuous, professional and systematic. Its strategy is based on corporate rather than commercial communication. To emphasize the fact that the most common themes in networks focus on promoting their own brands, the processes of elaboration, the denominations of origin of their products or the contribution of the company to the improvement of the environment and the contribution of the same for purposes of social nature.

For its part, the Mercadona website is a simple and austere interface in terms of illustrations, ornamentation, functionality and content. As in its strategy in social networks, on the website they focus mainly on the company, its contribution to the society and its importance within the sector in Spain. In terms of the online shopping platform, it is also important to note its aesthetic simplicity and difficulty of use. The prices of the home delivery service of purchases made through the web are competitive with respect to the rest. The lack of updating and improvements in the website denote the fact that Mercadona does not bet much on this type of sale and focusing more towards direct sales.

By way of conclusion, Mercadona differs from its main competitors because it does not prefer to use commercial communication and rather use corporate communication more frequently, essentially managing the so-called non-conventional or non-massive tools. While its competitors are keen to publicize their prices, offers, promotions, discounts and products, the data observed and collected in this study indicate that Mercadona prefers that its image, its own products and its way of doing things reaches the public through the face to face with the customer so that, in this way, the purchase becomes a pleasant experience.

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