

The Play Element and Marketing Policies

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*“Genuine culture cannot exist without
a certain playing component.”*

Johan Huizinga

Abstract. *“Play”, “plaything” are words with which our mind fly away to the extraordinary period of our life – the childhood, when all things are perfect. In this paper we analyze the implication of “play” idea in the labyrinth of marketing strategy, and marketing policy. We will demonstrate that “Play” has a profound influence upon customers, upon their attitudes, their motivations, their perceptions and preferences, and it constitutes “a possible face of marketing”.*

Keywords: strategy; tactic; marketing policy; influence; play.

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JEL Code: M41.

REL Codes: 14I, 14K.

At first impression, the “game” is something commonplace, simple and always easy to reach by the children. However though, the game is much more complex than it seems to be, people need the game to relax, but also to continue their work. Johan Huizinga considers that “*homo ludens*, the man who plays, indicates a function as critical as that of a creator and he deserves a place near the term *homo faber*” (Huizinga, 2003, p. 33).

This acceptance urges us, on the one hand, to appreciate the game more than a definition immaterial and, on the other hand, to give up to say that it exists and that performs a necessary or useful function, without leaving room for any philosophical or scientific explanation. In fact, the game is a true auxiliary universe, compensatory, a new order/reality which continues the daily one, in an attending games participating both players and spectators, play events starting from the individual interiority, being improved with imagination and becoming more and more complex, fact that will have a great influence on the whole economic and social life.

The most successful companies are those that manage to offer their customers the expected satisfaction, not understanding marketing as a separate function, but rather as a philosophy of ownership throughout the organization (Kotler, 1997, p. 24). This is the type of firms targeted on the game client-market and not on the product or costs, nowadays feature being the customer orientation, to his devotion and, ultimately, to a marketing based on client. “The most

important element in “*the great game of marketing*” are the buyers, the customers who have interests, the target – groups or rather the target – persons. Regardless of what we called, everything depends on customers” (Arms, 2008, p. 24). In such an optical design, when the game is a goal, rarely achieved by some players, more and more characterized by an increased competitiveness, designed to satisfy strong motivations and ambitions in various geographical areas, and marketing, as an expression of “thinking in the market spirit”, also the company involves its entrance on a continuous rising market, proceeding to the implementation of specific measures.

The appearance of play element in the product policy

Acorporal components of a product include, in addition to many others, the name (brand) of it. Brand can be a name, a term, a sign, a symbol, a drawing or a combination thereof, which is used to identify the goods or services of a provider, consumers considering it an important element that distinguishes the products of a company from the competitors. With this in mind, organizations use the full potential of play element to transmit messages, and meanings that a brand must transmit.

For example, the name (brand) product is chosen taking into account the easy of reading, pronouncing and memorizing it, the universe which it evokes. Thus was done in the *Biscoco* biscuits case: bis (from biscuits) + coco (from the monkey),

choosing a name easy to remember, or in the case of *Leone* biscuits, where the name is associated with the biscuits form – a lion’s head. For *Rex* detergent, Henkel Company chooses the image of a fox, easy to remember and with a high symbolic power, the message key sent to consumers being: “*Rex – a clever way to wash*”, being assimilated with a cunning fox.

From this point of view, the image of the product has a motivational subjective nature, result of how it perceived a product or brand by the consumer. In turn, the game is a manifestation of subjectivism, representing a universe created by man’s own taste, by his own feelings and needs.

Combining the two elements – product and game – we can build a successful brand with a great personality. This image, result of applying a creative program of identification, has to require the product to the customers. Each image must be carrier of a unique message, which suggests the main product quality and its market position. For example, a well-contoured image, based on one or more symbols, aimed recognition by consumers of the company or brand. As symbols that can be used are logos, colours, sounds. Logos should help to instant recognition of the product, choosing humans, animals or objects. Thus, some credit cards from BRD Bank, for example, have printed the image of athletes recognized all over the world in various sports games (Ilie Năstase, Nadia Comaneci and Gică Hagi)⁽¹⁾ or Cocolino balsam has a drawn picture of a teddy bear, stylized, designed to attract attention. Brand

history is closely related to the animated character chosen to represent: Cocolino, a fluffy teddy bear, just good to be embraced, transmitted the benefits of the product (softness and perfume conferred to the laundry by that balsam), as well as the emotions, evoking in the consumers’ soul, emotional states offered by love, safety, care about yourself and about others, willingness to embrace someone you love and to be embraced by someone dear.

There should remember and change optics about packaging, which transformed from an ancillary product into an individual one, which is a whole of interrelated elements, an organized set of knowledge and concepts, and ordered manner of action aimed at the overall achievement of optimal specific economic objectives. Thus, using the expression of the game in various forms, the package meets many of the marketing activity. For example, packs like a box of Milka and Heidi products, express game of the children and adults, and stylized images of animals on the Tedi, Prigat or Fanta juices packs, Barni biscuits, Biscoco biscuits etc. attract attention, have the characteristics of the product creates confidence and a favourable impression.

Regarding the material component of assets, we noted the presence of the play element to a series of products in their actual physical configuration. For example, some products have a toy form: supports of toothbrush, soap dishes, glasses, cups, flower vases, biscuits of different shapes, vacuum cleaners etc. Others are printed with different play pictures: the characters from

stories and cartoons – such as lamps which have printed on them images of princess, Spider Man or Mickey Mouse.

New products are that “original products, improved, modified and new brands that the company realized them through the efforts of its own research compartment” (Jugănaru, 2000, p. 114). This activity involves the strategy of new products⁽²⁾ which have mainly attribute to concentrate effort on the creative team, producing the functional or departmental efforts. In this idea, the play element emerges in that it has a special contribution to training and developing skills for teamwork, to synchronize their actions with others, to achieve a common purpose, the game offering, while the individual is developing, an amount impressions that contribute to increase knowledge about the world and life, increases the capacity of understanding of complex situations, creating restraint capacities by stimulating memory, concentration abilities of obedience to certain rules, the abilities to make decisions quickly, to resolve the situation-problem, in a word develops creativity. This, bearing both the imagination and the systematic search methods and techniques for new ideas, underpins new product design, as the instrument of delegation, allowing team members to work independently and efficiently, but, in the same time, bringing them together in the team.

All these aspects allow us appreciate that the play element used in various forms of manifestation and a corresponding self-expression, help to create the product image

and its position on the market, just as contribute to the formation and development of human personality.

Price and game

In the company’s relationship with the market, beside the product, price has a place of prime importance, as the mechanism for balancing offer with demand of economic assets. Therefore, it appears the idea of *the price game*, that if the demand is greater than the offer, then prices will increase to a level at which the amount of available money for those who want to buy is equal to the total price of the products founded on the market. On the contrary, if the offer is greater than the demand, prices fall until enough buyers will enter on the market to ensure consumption of the available supply.

In this approach, we noted that, finally, those who decide the product price are the consumers, so companies should consider how consumers perceive prices and influence that carries on the perceptions about those buying behaviour. For example, Pic Hypermarket, by the advertising which represents a child who shows a symbolic gesture that *The lowest price is the Pic price*, suggests that they practice the lowest prices, because when the children play, they always are saying the truth. Under the concept of “*economic rationalism*”, buyers will always choose the supplier who is offering the lowest price, though, in reality, the many goods and services market will contain a variety of differentiated prices for apparently similar offers.

Into another advertising, Romtelecom presents the payment method of an invoice as a *child playing*, attracting attention about the facilities offered to pay for services with the image of a young woman who is playing with some balloons. At first sight nothing is unusual, but if we analyze the composite model of buying behaviour, proposed by Machel J. Baker, which attempt to combine economic factors with behavioural ones, we'll realize that the phenomenon of selective perception will contradict the concept of "*economic rationalism*".

The expression of the game in the product distribution

If a sport game strategy involves, as we saw, the players participation to the competition under a system of principles relating to the actual activities of the game, the approach of the key moments of the game and objectively relationship of the players, the distribution strategy involves the answer at least four questions: When? Where?, Whom? How?.

When? refers to the distribution moment, which must be correlated with the nature of the product and its specific consumption (currently, strictly seasonal or casual). Some socio-cultural and sports events (Olympics, tours, championships) exhibitions, the holidays of all kinds (religious: Christmas, Easter or secular – Mother's Day, Children's Day) may be used for products distribution, within a special role plays the game element, it taking,

perhaps, its most complex form. From the decorations to commercialized products as gifts, from those who distribute/commercialize products to customers, from the distribution places to the consumer ones, the play element is founded in: multicoloured greetings cards which combine the image with the text, all kinds of gifts as prevailing those somehow inspired by the games, advertisings whose messages are based on representations of the various games, distributors/retailers and also consumers dressed in story characters, events organized with parents and children through and for fun, distribution spaces arranged/decorated with game's specific elements etc.

Where? Often, companies develop strategies at national and international, regional or local levels. In the local distribution an important place is occupied by marketing deals in specially equipped places, but also in the others, such as parks or playgrounds. For example, products may be marketed in entertainment parks (to the seaside and to the mountain), children towns, game places permanently arranged, kiosks arranged in all sorts of funny shapes (dwarfs houses, wind mills, mushrooms), there where the play element is "at home" and where its influence is felt only on a careful analysis. Here the game overpowers on children and adults, on products and services, on the sale and purchase. Children are playing among electric trains, buffered cars, roundabout, flying plates, elastic mattresses, buying "on the unseen" these services, parents and grandparents paying

for them. In the relaxed atmosphere that establishes the game holiday, the adults become children for a moment and participate for their own pleasure and care for their children in these activities.

Whom? Often one says that the game is typical for the children, but do not forget that they will become teenagers, young men, and then mature persons. Therefore, adults also enjoy playing, sometimes for simply amusement, sometimes under the circumstance that they were children sometime. From this perspective, the play element put its footprint on the segment of buyers formed in particular by children and young people. Thus, if we refer to the campaign named “*Play*”, the launch of Dacia Sandero, we see, after assessing Roxana Panaitescu, group creative director at BBDO Graffiti, that “Dacia truly has something to offer to a young target, currently without a family and without any special obligations, except the job, who had more often escaped from the daily routine, preferably in the bunch, and default on fun”. In other words, marketing, as business philosophy, means the ability to create and maintain a profitable customer, the game in general being a special premise for attracting a very important market segment – children and adolescents, because they have a “purchasing power” sufficiently large to cause the development of specific products, types of offers and advertising.

How? In organizing a game, most often are involved new rules, new players, even new stages, all these because the game involves creativity and imagination,

becoming mysterious, alluring, strong attracting, passion coming from the inside. In this idea, almost any activity and action may be a game and almost any object (the fingers of hands, a thread of a yarn broken muffler, a matchbox etc.) can be transformed in a toy, being used for this purpose and attracting interest. Thus, to facilitate presentation of the product and to strengthen the emotional or rational side underlying the decision to buy, some companies use to promote products transforming the sale place into a clowns show (Carrefour complex) or using promoters equipped with different costumes inspired by stories and film characters. For example, on Christmas holidays are used costumes of Santa Claus for the sellers and cashiers. Using play element it is emphasized this subjective side of the demand, influencing it to be a greater one. Parents gather around the selling stand, triggered by their children, and, if they already come here, they buy some products, not necessarily for the use or children enjoyment, but because they are useful.

Promotional activity is purely game

Even the world is in a crises, in the current economic and social conditions, in the growth of economic international exchanges, and continued diversification of goods and services for the society needs, the consumer is virtually impossible to find himself what kind of goods are on the market, where and when he can buy them

and, especially, if they answered his needs. In these circumstances, it is necessary to ensure permanently communication between providers and consumers. Thus, a product is related to that person who will consume it, but the product is unknown to the consumer and for satisfying curiosity is not enough to submit only the image, but it must be surrounded with elements of the user's daily entourage. One of these elements is the game, omnipresent and reach of all. For example, in advertising spots for Hochland cheese are presented two kids playing "crazy about" this product. Daughter persuades her mother to buy the same cheese, and the little boy surrenders to ride his bike for a sandwich with Hochland cheese.

If we analyze promotional activities, we note a lots of play elements in different forms, encompassing both the people game, the animals and things one. To comment on structural issues of advertising, products promotion, public relations and influence of the game on the promotional message, we appeal to psycho-structural theory, which examines the relationship between "me – other – the world", taking as a starting point precisely the game. Olivier Reboul (Reboul, 1984, p. 98) wonders why the advertising addressee let himself influenced by a message so simple, brief, naive, and almost incredible. The answer is simple: the message corresponds to certain mind requirements; every adult wants to identify himself with the fact he feels child along with his parents, advertising doing

only to transfer this simple need to the object which it proposes by the publicity material. Under the circumstances of a consumption society, each tends to procure most goods and advertising broadcaster wants to increase profits, the possession being such an experience of ecstasy play.

Such publicity often pass from a purely informative level to an emotional one, the reality deforming without the receiver gives notice. That happens in the advertising spot called "Dacia Sandero has fancy playing", the car being alive and participating in a gamely-spy or in a game of playing ball with some young people. This mechanism allows the receiver to identify himself with the characters of the publicity material and, therefore, to consider himself the owner of the product. It creates such a desire to buy and from the desire to act is only a step.

Therefore, as life is a game created by our own taste, by our own feeling and needs and "the game is fighting, hazard, or mock dizzying whirl (...) a whole universe of opportunities and risks" (Chevalier, Gheerbrant, 1994) also marketing, in general, and marketing policies, in particular, are unique by the dimensional universality of the economic potential which is selective adapted to the rules of the game for a free and competitive economy. From this perspective, the play element is established as one of the possible faces of marketing, the game being as the tangible guarantee for maintaining the freedom reflex, a true freedom, not just wanted, promised, suggested, or dreamed.

Notes

- ⁽¹⁾ The Nike Company has reached the first place on the sportswear market (before that being on the third place after Reebok and Adidas) by associating its products with the world basket star, Michael Jordan. Other products and companies that dominated the market by associating with sports personalities are: Coca-Cola (Cristi Chivu), Golden Brau (Bogdan Stelea), Pepsi (Adrian Mutu and David Beckam), Vodafone (Gheorghe Hagi) etc.
- ⁽²⁾ In the dynamics of creating a new product Ph. Kotler distinguishes two stages: product strategy and marketing strategy. These two, in their turn, contain a series of principal stages such as: ideas generation and selection, concept creation and testing, economic analysis, product creation, marketing testing, product marketing (Kotler et al., *Marketing Principles*).

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