

INFLUENCE OF INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION TOOLS UPON CONSUMERS' BUYING DECISIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract. A topical business subject of nowadays is the influence of integrated marketing communications (IMC) for sustainability upon various consumer audiences and their buying decisions. From the standpoint of businesses the use of integrated marketing communications in product promotion contributes to the consumption of sustainable, ecological products and, consequently, a healthy lifestyle, yet the factors influencing buyer's buying decisions still remain topical. In this research the authors surveyed buyers of Latvian food retail chains to find out the influence of promotion-related integrated marketing communication tools for sustainability upon buyers' buying decisions. The research brings conclusions regarding a customer-oriented approach to the processes of integrated marketing communication for sustainability, incl. the making of integrated marketing communication for sustainability to increase consumer awareness of sustainability.

Purpose of the article: The purpose of the research was to study and assess the influence of promotion-related integrated marketing communication tools for sustainability upon buyers' buying decisions. The object of the research is promotion-related IMC tools for sustainability. The subject of the research is the influence of product promotion tools for sustainability upon buyers' buying decisions.

Methodology/methods: The research makes use of the results of the studies of food retail chains conducted by the authors in 2017 and 2018. The survey of buyers is based on the results of the survey of leading marketing specialists of food retail chains in 2017. Drawing on the conclusions the authors surveyed randomly selected buyers of Latvian food retail chains with a sample of 1,003 respondents. In order to attain the goal and objectives, the following quantitative and qualitative methods of economic research were used: survey, comparison, grouping, evaluation, market investigation, comparative analysis. The study is based on scientific papers published by Latvian and foreign scholars, general and special literature, and periodicals. The survey data were processed and analysed using the SPSS 23 software.

Findings: The research confirmed the hypothesis that the use of integrated marketing communications for sustainability in product promotion enhances consumer awareness of sustainability. The results of the research are of both theoretical and practical value.

Key words: *sustainability; sustainable development; sustainable marketing; integrated marketing communications for sustainability, buyer survey*

JEL code: M14; M31

Introduction

The use of integrated marketing communications for sustainability in strategies of businesses and the impact of their performance on consumer audiences in the process of buying decisions is a topical business subject. From the standpoint of businesses a strategically correct use of integrated marketing communications in product promotion contributes to the consumption of sustainable, ecological products and, in the long run, to a sustainable lifestyle. There is, however, a second key component to this strategic approach – one that pertains to the target audience. It is the objective and subjective influencers of buyers' behaviour and buying decisions. Based on consumers' wishes and needs, businesses develop IMC for sustainability where the market development trends need to be taken into account. A key role here is played by the raising of consumer awareness of sustainability issues, as awareness is closely linked to buyers' behaviour and conduct on the market. Changes in what consumers need to know in the context of globalisation make it difficult for businesses to find a way how to effectively apply the process of sharing and spreading of knowledge in their operations to create and/or choose the right means for communication with customers so as to effectively satisfy their needs for knowledge. In order to analyse the said issues, the authors studied the impact of promotion-related integrated marketing communication tools for sustainability on consumers' buying decisions by analysing the opinion of buyers of Latvian food retail chains and drew conclusions on a customer-oriented approach to the processes of integrated marketing communication for sustainability, incl. building integrated marketing communications for sustainability to raise consumer awareness of sustainability.

The objective of the research is to study and assess the influence of promotion-related integrated marketing communication tools for sustainability upon buyers' buying decisions while **the object of the study** is promotion-related IMC tools for sustainability. **The subject of the research** is the influence of product promotion tools for sustainability upon buyers' buying decisions. In order to achieve this objective, applying conventional quantitative and qualitative **methods**. The study is based on the scientific works published by Latvian and foreign scientists, general and specialised literature, periodicals. The authors of the study carried out an assessment, market research, comparative analysis, surveyed buyers of Latvian food retail chains, processed data with the MS Excel and SPSS 23 software.

The research confirmed the **hypothesis** that the use of integrated marketing communications for sustainability in product promotion enhances consumer awareness of sustainability. The results of the research are of both theoretical and practical value.

1. Importance and theoretical aspects of IMC for sustainability

Nowadays, in the context of entrepreneurship development, it is important to develop innovative management principles with a crucial role assigned to setting up sustainable IMC of the companies as they foster synergy between companies' targets and consumers. In the literature, IMC is mainly described as a process and approach to a customer, yet, in order to evaluate certain guidelines in the process of IMC with a customer, the authors surveyed buyers of Latvian food retail chains with the purpose of finding out the influence of promotion-related IMC tools for sustainability upon their decisions and coming to conclusions on a customer-oriented approach to IMC for sustainability, including building IMC for sustainability to raise consumer awareness of sustainability. The authors' 2018 survey of buyers is based on the results of the authors' 2017 survey of leading marketing specialists of food retail chains. The survey of leading marketing specialists in 2017 confirmed that the use of IMC for sustainability may help companies boost demand. Hence, in order to find out the impact of the use of IMC for sustainability by companies in product promotion upon consumers' buying decisions in the context of sustainability and in promoting the consumption of ecological products. The authors surveyed randomly selected buyers of food retail chains with a sample of 1,003 respondents. The survey data was analysed with the respondents grouped by their income, education, gender and age.

According to *D. Martin, 2012* and *J. Schouten, 2012*¹, due to the rapidly increasing global population, the development of technologies, the changing economic relationship, and such economic issues as poverty, preservation of the ecosystem, shortage of water and food, climate change etc., sustainability becomes increasingly topical.

The concept of sustainability (sustainable development) is explained in multiple ways these days. In the report “Our Common Future” published by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987, sustainable development was defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”²

L. P. Thiele, Director of Sustainability Studies at the University of Florida (*Thiele L. P., 2013*)³, argues that sustainability stands on three pillars – society, ecology and economy. They are closely related and one cannot exist without the others. J. Strube, former CEO of the German chemical company BASF SE (*Strube J., 2006*)⁴, too, holds that sustainable development in such areas as economy, ecology and society will be key to success in the 21st century. Society cannot continue building their economic growth at the expense of environmental protection and social stability.

According to *F.M. Belz, 2012* and *K. Peattie, 2012*⁵, sustainable development lies in an integrating concept that considers the development and growth of humanity in such areas as business and economy, manufacturing and consumption, prosperity, environmental protection, well-being and health, justice (both social and environmental), integration and governance.

D. Martin, 2012 and *J. Schouten, 2012*⁶ distinguish economic, social and environmental sustainability, where economic sustainability fosters the prosperity of people and depends on their productivity, social sustainability depends on the ability of people to meet their need for food, medicine, clothes, services, transport, health care, education etc., and environmental sustainability is defined as preservation of the ecosystem and biodiversity.

*M. Stenmark, 2001*⁷ maintains that sustainable development is to some extent affected by: 1) *technology and technical means* possible to develop at present and in future; 2) *social organisations and economy*, i.e., the current economic and social structures and the improvements that will become possible in future; 3) *the Earth's biosphere*, i.e., the capacity of the ecosystem that can support and provide for human activity; 4) *moral attitude towards sustainable development*. He also stresses that sustainable development is built by the individual's behaviour and the government's policy that attempt to meet both the basic needs and wishes (as long as they do not come into conflict with the interests of the present and future generations, which, in turn, could materialise within the constraints set by technology, morality, social and economic structures, and the capacity of the Earth's ecosystems).

With the issue of sustainability becoming increasingly topical, there is a new trend of IMC development in the scientific literature, with IMC linked to marketing for sustainability. This stems from IMC activities being managed by the business *Barney, Miller, Day*^{8,9}, with the integration having the objectives of: 1) creating internal conditions (such as internal communication activity planning, organisational structure, personnel, implementation, and integration) to lay the internal foundations for an effective external communication; 2) coordinating and approving external communication activities to make sure that the company's image be clear, unified and comprehensible. This applies to all communication messages generated by the company and addressed to external stakeholders based on the company's strategic posture to

¹ Martin D., Schouten J., 2012. *Marketing in the Twenty-First Century*, USA: Pearson Prentice Hall, p. 8-9

² World Commission on Environment and Development Our Common Future. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

³ Thiele, L. P., 2013. *Sustainability*. UK: Polity Press, p. 5.

⁴ Brassington, F., Pettitt, S., 2006, *Principles of marketing* (4th ed.). Essex: Pearson Education Limited, p. 22.

⁵ Belz, F. M., Peattie, K., 2012, *Sustainability Marketing*, TJ International Padstow, Cornwall, UK, p.12.

⁶ Martin, D., Schouten, J., 2012, *Sustainable Marketing*, Pearson Education, New Jersey, p.4.

⁷ Stenmarks, M., 2001, *Vides ētika un ilgtspējīga attīstība, ilgtspējīgas attīstības pamati*, 7.-11.lpp.

⁸ Barney, J. (1991). *Firm resources and sustained competitive advantage*. Journal of Management, Vol. 17, pp. 99–121.

⁹ Day, G. S. (2011). *Closing the marketing capability gap*. Journal of Marketing, Vol. 75(4), pp. 183–195.

achieve superior performance by developing, managing, capitalising on specific resources which are valuable, scarce, inimitable and non-substitutable.

Marketing communication is strategic efforts, and, in order to succeed, heads of marketing communications need to begin with clear objectives. Along with standard marketing targets, which are introduction, information, persuasion, reminding and rewarding, marketing communication for sustainability has additional ones pertaining to sustainability – maximum gain from minimum resources. (Martin, D., Schouten, J., 2012)¹⁰

Marketing communication for sustainability is integrated. In the concept of integrated marketing communication (IMC) it is believed that all messages from the organisation should work together in all media to convey the image or market position desired by the organisation. Imagine IMC as a rope. Its strength and effectiveness is provided by the integration of many individual strands of fibre into one string. Without a proper integration you have merely a pile of fibre. A marketing communication that lacks integration may only be a mix of various messages in various directions to various audiences. Without integration marketing messages may contradict each other, thus adversely affecting the credibility of the company or the brand and confusing the target audience.

D. Martin, 2012 and J. Schouten, 2012¹¹ have emphasised that the general purpose of marketing communication for sustainability is to help businesses reach their marketing and sustainability targets, expressed as economic success, whilst increasing both human and natural capital. Sustainable marketing requires an extensive cooperation of stakeholders, and marketing communication for sustainability is therefore a mechanism that enables them to cooperate despite different and even conflicting interests and ideologies. The authors have also mentioned the principles of IMC for sustainability: 1) integrity, 2) responsibility; 3) transparency and 4) credibility. They make a maximum use of resources by involving and mobilising the target audience and people in general.

These elements should be worked into the communication messages aimed towards educating the target audience through demonstrating a harmony of values between consumers and sustainable brands. Marketing implementers need to stress both the core features and benefits of the product and those of its sustainability features. Most importantly, in marketing communication one has to avoid greenwashing, hidden sponsorship and other misleading information. Governmental regulations and media participation, as well as guidelines on marketing communication for sustainability would facilitate cooperation among stakeholders.

F.M. Belz, 2012 and K. Peattie, 2012¹² consider marketing communications for sustainability the next step in the evolution of marketing communications because: 1) traditional promotion communications are focused on advertising the product to the consumer; 2) relationship marketing is more focused on communication with the consumer and particularly on finding out more about them so as to sell more effectively. Meanwhile, 3) marketing communications for sustainability also reveal the company behind the product offer to enable the consumers to find out more about it and open a dialogue between the consumer and the company so that both understand and learn from each other. This leads to the dual focus of the strategy of marketing communication for sustainability: to communicate with the consumer on the sustainability solutions offered by the company through its products, and to communicate with the consumer and other stakeholders on the company in general.

F. Baldassare, 2016 and R. Campo, 2016¹³ have explored communication for sustainability as a business means or tool that enables businesses to reach new customers, draw investors. They have developed a self-assessment matrix for sustainability that identifies the importance and competitive advantage of marketing communication for sustainability.

¹⁰ Martin, D., Schouten, J. (2012) *Sustainable Marketing*, Pearson Education, New Jersey, pp. 200-247

¹¹ Martin, D., Schouten, J. (2012) *Sustainable Marketing*, Pearson Education, New Jersey, pp. 200-247

¹² Belz, F.M, Peattie, K., 2012. *Sustainability Marketing: a global perspective*. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, pp. 12

¹³ Baldassare, F., Campo, R. (2016) *Sustainability as a marketing tool: to be or to appear to be?* Kelly School of Business, Elsevier, pp. 421-429, piecjams <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2016.03.005> [skatīts 10.08.2017.]

The matrix features four different dynamic stages of businesses, or dynamically sustainable initiatives, with various approaches to marketing communication for sustainability, paying special attention to relative costs and benefits: 1) if businesses are responsible, do they opt to communicate on this matter, 2) or are they more discreet in marketing communication for sustainability, 3) do businesses perceive their sustainability conduct as part of their overall marketing strategy, 4) or merely as a matter of ethics, 5) can they afford to take a risk and entirely ignore the need to be sustainable. Also analysed are opportunities and threats – whether sustainability can be a marketing tool.

The authors find that transparency is a dynamic and thus controllable feature of marketing communication and of the relationship between the company and any stakeholders interested in being informed of the company's sustainable activities. Transparency in communication may be more than just a characteristic or attribute. Hence, marketing communication for sustainability should be implemented through all marketing channels, by all means of communication, corresponding to the different categories of stakeholders, which, in the authors' view, reinforces the importance of integrated marketing communications for sustainability. Commitment to sustainability actions and communication on it depends on variables, i.e., national legislation, corporate sustainability culture, internal business environment, communication between departments, certification costs, and financial resources.

Based on the above, businesses may have different marketing strategies when it comes to sustainability. However, in the context of sustainability marketing communication may bring the following advantages: new investments, improved working conditions, increased motivation of employees, and attraction of specialists, satisfaction with work, positive information and messages in the media.

*A. Pomeroy, 2017*¹⁴ has researched marketing for sustainability in the context of increase in the consumption value, where the sustainability of the company's communication as innovation may be implemented as a system. He has come to a conclusion that, in order to encourage customers towards consumption habits, one must build more distinct marketing communications for sustainability, implementable a system, with a particular emphasis on packaging, marking, promotional and other marketing communication activities for sustainability with the purpose of encouraging social responsibility, creating a consumption value, and addressing not only the needs and wishes of individual consumers but also those of society as a whole.

Nowadays, in the context of business development, it is important to develop innovative management principles, with a key role assigned to building integrated marketing communications for sustainability (IMC S) as they foster synergy between the company's goals and consumer audiences. Product promotion depends not only on product availability but also on the factors motivating the customer's choice¹⁵.

*O. Duralia, 2012*¹⁶ has listed a number of aspects that contribute to developments pertaining to environmentally friendly products: 1) changes in the demand structure – made by manufacturers, retailers and final consumers, i.e., their orientation towards safe, healthy and sustainable products; 2) the need to reduce costs – by diversifying raw materials, with preference to renewable biodegradable products that yield reduced costs and improved competitiveness in the long run; 3) an increase in the market share as a result of innovations – despite the present of major players there is fierce competition on the market, so a move towards innovation in the domain of ecological products may open up new opportunities for businesses.

¹⁴ Pomeroy A, Marketing for Sustainability: Extending the Conceptualisation of the Marketing Mix to Drive Value for Individuals and Society at Large, (2017), *Australasian Marketing Journal*, 25 (2), pp. 157-165, pieejams DOI: [10.1016/j.ausmj.2017.04.011](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ausmj.2017.04.011)

¹⁵ Bormane, S., Batraga, A., (2018), *Digital Promotion as Solution for Integrated Marketing Communication in Business*, Economic Science for Rural Development, No. 48, pieejams doi10.22616/esdr.2018.103, pp. 338-347

¹⁶ Duralia, O., 2014, Applying sustainable marketing strategies – The key to Obtaining Competitive Advantages On the Industrial Products Market, *Studies in Business and Economics* no. 9(3), 2014, pp. 21-28

From the consumer viewpoint, it is changes in the consumption structure and factors motivating the customers' choice that substantially affect the development of the company's plan on IMC for sustainability. *V.Kumar, 2012 et.al.*¹⁷ maintain that, when introducing sustainability in a marketing strategy, it may be difficult to formulate and implement, as the consumer is the one whose wishes and needs the marketing strategy is based on. Demand must be met, but not necessarily by communicating in the customer's language. On the other hand, a sustainable marketing strategy builds a long-term relationship with customers, to the benefit of not only business, but also society and ecology. The authors find that it is the consumers whose wishes and needs IMC for sustainability are based on, also considering marketing development trends in terms of buyers' behaviour.

*Franco S., Cicatiello C., 2019*¹⁸ Branding for sustainability may strengthen consumers' attitude towards purchasing the product and readiness to pay for it, consumers' satisfaction after purchase and consumers' loyalty towards products marked as sustainable. In order to achieve this, it is important to promote awareness of sustainability brands and their image, as well as to enhance consumers' knowledge about the impact of food production on sustainability issues, and to create a social environment where a food sustainability culture is highly regarded, thus urging consumers to make sustainable food choices.

Nevertheless, the authors hold that, in order to raise consumer awareness, businesses need not only to find an effective way and suitable channel of communication but also to appreciate the environment and the consumer. *Raudeliuniene, J., Davidavičius, S., 2017*¹⁹ maintain that changes in what consumers need to know in the context of globalisation make it difficult for businesses to find a way how to effectively apply the process of sharing and spreading of knowledge in their operations to create and/or choose the right means for communication with customers so as to effectively satisfy their needs for knowledge.

Due to the development of technologies and the growth of virtual space as a business environment, the role of digital marketing in IMC becomes more prominent. In this regard, *Belz F.M., 2012*²⁰ has underlined the importance of online marketing and digital environment in the implementation of IMC for sustainability, supported by the results of a study on consumers' reaction to marketing messages whereby consumers who are psychologically outward-oriented (i.e., expect appreciation from others) are difficult to motivate with appeals containing guilt, fear or sustainability value. Communication messages need to be based on the following principles: 1) make things personally significant (related to the particular consumer's home and lifestyle) and personalise; 2) avoid negative, guilt-based messages and focus on the benefits of saving money, "getting something" and convenience; 3) associate behaviours with positive self-images in the consumers' perception (wisdom, flattery and charm) and the local, known and present as opposed to the global and prospective; 4) be interactive, playful, entertaining and informative.

In this context, *Sabaitytė, J., Davidavičius, S., 2017*²¹ refer to the multigenerational nature of the present society and. The public assimilation of new technologies largely depends on consumers' attitude which, in turn, is determined by their psychological characteristics. It is also stressed that consumer segments on the market may be defined by generations and their specific characteristics and that the theory of generations may be used as a consumer segmentation tool.

¹⁷ Kumar V., Rahman Z., Kazmi A., Goyal P., Evolution of Sustainability as Marketing Strategy, Volume 37, 2012, pp. 482-489, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.03.313>

¹⁸ Franco S., Cicatiello C. The Role of Food Marketing in Increasing Awareness of Food Security and Sustainability: Food Sustainability Branding, Volume 3, 2019, pp. 27-31, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-100596-5.22018-0>

¹⁹ Raudeliuniene, J., Davidavicus, S., (2017), *A Conceptual Model of Assessment of Knowledge Transfer to consumer*, Business, Management and Education, Vol. 15(2), p. 174-195

²⁰ Belz, F.M, Peattie, K., 2012. *Sustainability Marketing: a global perspective*. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, pp. 12

²¹ Sabaitytė, J., & Davidavičius, S. (2017). *Challenges and solutions of adopting public electronic services for the needs of Z generation*. International journal of learning and change, Vol. 9(1), pp. 17-28.

Their view is shared by *Raudeliuniene, J., et al., 2018*²² who maintains that, since the virtual environment is constantly changing, not only consumers' needs for information and knowledge changes but also the means and channels used by organisation in communication with customers. There is a tendency to shift more advertising campaigns to social media, given the opportunities they provide to organisations and users. The popularity and user base of these networks keeps increasing.

In another piece of research, *Davidavičienė et al. 2017*²³ points out that the development of social media gives rise to new ways of marketing communications and scientific challenges. The increasing role of B2B and B2C communications and customer relationship is affected by dynamic changes on the e-market. In this context, depending on the market where there are either sales transactions between businesses or a transaction process between a business and a final consumer, different activities may be needed, as well as different channels for conveying information.

The progressive social changes and observed trends in the food chain urges producers to seek opportunities to attract consumers' attention to credible product information. *Wyrwa, J., Barska, A., 2017*²⁴ maintain that information on the food packaging as one of the components of marketing information is a factor of substantial impact upon consumer's opinion about the product.

Information on product marking, labelling, packaging and other key elements is governed by national legislation, governmental regulations and other regulatory enactments. The state thus has tools to introduce changes that are binding to both producers and traders. The availability of information educates consumers and affects demand and assortment in stores. This is how the link among the consumer, the producer, the trader (retail chain) and the state manifests itself²⁵.

Still, not all consumers are using the latest technologies, possibly due to a lack of information, skills and knowledge when it comes to selecting information and comparing alternatives. Such a situation may stem not only from buyers' habits in the pre-purchase stage but also from the timing of the buying decision. For instance, advertising in mass media or information in specialised newspapers are IMC tools for sustainability that often reach their target audience outside the shop where the purchase is made. The consumer might receive product information in a moment when he/she is not ready to perceive it and develop a negative attitude towards both the product and the company. Even if the marketing communication has appealed to the consumer, the situation may change due to various external circumstances up to the moment when the consumer arrives in the shop and makes a purchase. Thus, factors of influence on the buying decision may also be invisible communication from friends, acquaintances, relatives based on experience, changes in one's priorities, marketing activities by competitors, other factors in the competitor offers, such as price changes, gifts for purchase, appealing product design, sales assistant advice etc.

However, as already stated by the authors, in order to draw conclusions regarding the impact of specific IMC tools for sustainability on consumers' buying decisions, one needs to analyse the age, income, education and gender structure in-depth.

²² Raudeliuniene, J., Davidavičienė, V., Tvaronavičienė, M., Jonuška, L., (2018), *Evaluation of Advertising Campaigns on Social Media Networks*, Journal Sustainability, Vol. 10, p 14

²³ Davidavičienė, V., Pabedinskaitė, A., & Davidavičius, S. (2017). *Social Networks in B2B and B2C Communication*. Transformations in Business & Economics, Vol. 16(1), pp. 69–84.

²⁴ Wyrwa, J., Barska, A., (2017), *Packaging as a Source of Information about Food Products*, Procedia Engineering 182, p.770 – 779

²⁵ Bormane, S., Šķiltere, D., Batraga, A., (2018) *Impact of the regulatory decisions of the Republic of Latvia on Sustainable Product Supply Provided by the Food Retail Chains*, Regional formation and development studies, p. 21-35

2. Influence of promotion-related IMC tools for sustainability on consumers' buying decision, an empirical study

While concurring in essence with the conclusions on the present-day development of integrated marketing communications, the authors put forward a hypothesis that the use of IMC for sustainability in product promotion enhances consumer awareness of sustainability.

In order to confirm or reject the hypothesis, in 2018 the authors conducted a survey of randomly selected buyers of Latvian food retail chains with a sample of 1,003 respondents.

Table 1

Sociodemographic profile of respondents in Latvia, 2018

Gender	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Male	484	48.3
Female	519	51.7
Total	1,003	100.0
Age		
Up to 30	217	21.6
30 to 45	246	24.5
45 to 65	391	39.0
65 and more	149	14.9
Total	1,003	100.0
Education level		
Primary	62	6.2
Secondary (incl. vocational secondary, college, technical school)	304	30.3
Incomplete higher (incl. student)	107	10.7
Higher (professional higher, bachelor, master, doctoral degree)	530	52.8
Total	1,003	100.0
Income level (monthly net)		
Up to 500,- EUR	277	27.6
500,- EUR to 1,000,- EUR	453	45.2
1000,- EUR and more	273	27.2
Total	1,003	100.0
Residence		
Riga	669	66.7
Vicinity of Riga	334	33.3
Total	1,003	100.0

Source: created by the authors after processing the buyer survey data in SPSS

The survey data were aggregated using MS Excel and analysed using SPSS. The goal of the survey was to explore and assess the impact of promotion-related IMC tools for sustainability upon consumers' buying decisions in the context of sustainability. The key faults identified from the survey of buyers served as basis for drawing up proposals and improving IMC in the further development of the process of IMC for sustainability under a customer-oriented approach.

Next, the study addresses IMC tools for sustainability because, based on their previous research, the authors believe that demand at food retail chains is affected by such factors as product location and placement in a shop's premises, shelves etc., advertising in mass media, internet, outdoor advertising, advertising stands, visual information about product discounts, product discount coupons etc. measures to increase sales, product tasting in shops, shop assistant consultations, loyalty system, best-before dates, product proportion etc. The above and the survey data suggests that the following IMC tools for sustainability tend to have an impact (including a substantial impact) on consumers' buying decisions in the context of sustainability:

Table 2

Key IMC tools for sustainability with impact on buying decisions, 2018

No.	IMC tool for sustainability	Percentage of respondents
1.	Price discounts on Latvian-made products	87.7
2.	Price discounts on ecological products	80.7
3.	Best-before dates of Latvian-made products	79.1
4.	Proportion of Latvian-made products on offer	73.8
5.	Price discounts on products with environmentally friendly packaging	71.7
6.	Best-before dates of import products	70.7
7.	Linkage of loyalty card to payment options	69.9
8.	Availability of environmentally friendly shopping bags	68.9
9.	Waste sorting options	67.2
10.	Products with environmentally friendly packaging (that quickly decomposes in nature)	66.7

Source: created by the authors in MS Excel after processing the buyer survey data in SPSS.

The authors find that the key factors in the context of sustainability when it comes to buying decisions are price, availability of domestic products, best-before dates, and understanding of environmental and social issues. In Table 2 the authors have pooled the respondents' answers on what affects buying decisions with their answers on what substantially affects buying decisions. It follows from Table 2 that a key role in consumers' buying decisions is played by price-related, product-related, geographic placement and technology-related, and digital promotion-related IMC tools. Hence, when the IMC approach is used for reaching the target audience, the above tools tend to contribute to consumers' buying decisions in the context of sustainability. The target audience can be reached through a complex application of IMC tools in the context of sustainability, both for specific campaigns and a marketing strategy. However, in order to ascertain benefits from IMC tools for sustainability and find out which IMC activities have contributed to buying decisions, the authors recommend doing research before and after the campaigns and studying the factors of influence on buyers within a specific period of time. Furthermore, Table 2 suggests that buying decisions in the context of sustainability are affected by such factors as price discounts, best-before dates, loyalty system, payment options, availability of packaging supplies (for takeaway), product packaging etc.

Given the variety of consumer audiences, it is important to find out not only which IMC tools for sustainability do not contribute to purchases, but also in which groups of age, education, income, gender etc. there might be differences that would be relevant in the planning and implementation of IMC.

The key IMC tools for sustainability predominantly rated by respondents as having no impact on buying decisions are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Key IMC tools for sustainability with no impact on buying decisions, 2018

No.	IMC tool for sustainability	Percentage of respondents
1.	Barcode information on disposal, re-use, composition of packaging and its health impact, pictures of general use of product	75.6
2.	Mobile applications providing information on ecological and Latvian-made products available in-store	70.5
3.	Informational messages on vegan products (without ingredients of animal origin)	68.2
4.	Creation of social groups on social media for regular buyers of ecological products	67.7
5.	Consumer involvement in making new products, game element system drawing to brand loyalty programme to promote sales of ecological products (points, discounts, gifts, status etc.)	66.3
6.	Option of consumer involvement in making new products	62.8
7.	Location of import products in shop shelves	60.8
8.	Support for and contribution to conferences, education and instructional literature	59.4
9.	Structure of information on company website, with ecological and Latvian-made products singled out	56.7
10.	Proportion of import products on offer	56.3

Source: created by authors in MS Excel after processing the buyer survey data in SPSS.

The authors find that buying decisions tend to be unaffected by digital promotion-related IMC tools for sustainability, yet the authors also believe that more thorough research would be needed on how the said IMC tools affect buying

decisions for certain groups of respondents, i.e., whether or not there are different opinions among people of different education levels, ages, and income. This stems from the fact that the use of digital promotion tools involves the latest technologies and the knowledge, skills and habits of utilising the advantages of smartphones differ among generations.

Table 3 also suggests that consumers lack understanding of the necessity of contributions to education and instructional literature in dealing with sustainability issues and for the purposes of public awareness. Hence, information on the results of scientific research in the business environment becomes increasingly topical for public education. Still, the authors see a positive trend from the viewpoint of promoting the consumption of domestic products – the location of import products in shop shelves does not matter to consumers and nor does their proportion in the assortment.

The authors find different classifications of consumers in scientific research, e.g., as passive, active, initiators etc., yet there is an assumption that consumers with a higher level of education earn more but tend to exhibit a different market behaviour because of busyness, risk less in their buying habits and are reluctant to change their favourite brand for another. Hence, IMC may often fail to reach the target audience if no complex system approach is developed. The authors also find that digital tools for sustainability are relatively new, as proven by the results of the study whereby digital IMC tools for sustainability do not exist at companies, yet food retail chains intend to use them in marketing communication within the next few years.

Conclusions and proposals

1. The research confirmed the initial hypothesis that the use of IMC for sustainability in product promotion enhances consumer awareness of sustainability. The results of the research are of both theoretical and practical value.
2. A key role in consumers' buying decisions in the context of sustainability is played by such marketing communication activities as price discounts on ecological and Latvian-made products, products with environmentally friendly packaging, best-before dates, loyalty system, payment options, staff knowledge and advice, proportion of domestic products etc., thus making the factors of influence on buying decisions more prominent.
3. Assigning a key role to IMC for sustainability in a company's marketing strategy fosters synergy between the company's goals and consumer audiences. Product promotion depends not only on a strategically reasoned assortment, but also the factors motivating the customer's choice, the overall public attitude towards sustainable development, and the importance of environmental conservation and social responsibility, information exchange among the company and all stakeholders of the buying and selling process, public understanding of healthy lifestyle.
4. IMC may often fail to reach the target audience if no complex system approach is developed. In the context of sustainability and, in line with the company's corporate strategy for sustainability, a key role in marketing communication with the buyer and in the use of IMC for sustainability should be played by activities pertaining to price lowering, product availability and appearance (incl. packaging) to help reach new customers and draw investors.
5. Buyers at food retail chains lack understanding of the necessity of investments in education and instructional literature for dealing with problematic issues and raising public awareness. Hence, there is an increasing role in public education for information about the results of scientific research in the business environment.
6. It becomes topical for scholars to explore in detail how the said IMC tools for sustainability affect buying decisions in specific groups of respondents, i.e., whether there are differences in opinions among people with different levels of education, income and ages, based on a variety of factors – the advantages of new technologies, knowledge and skills, generational differences in habits.

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