

# Application of communication channels by marketing addressing of customers in gastronomy

## *Využitie komunikačných kanálov pri marketingovom oslovení zákazníkov gastronomických zariadení*

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**Abstract:** Social and habitual changes of guests and a more difficult competitive situation are forcing the gastronomy industry to change. As one necessary reaction, restaurant operators need to apply a more specific and therefore a more effective communication policy. This research proves that there exist categories of guests, which react strongly positively to a certain mix of information content and information channel. Thus, communication policy is most effective, when such a communication mix is used. The explored factors are dimensions, not types; which means that each guest will show a different rate of interest in each of the defined dimension. The theory behind these dimensions is adopted from the applied personality theory, which has led to the development of the Big Five personality dimensions. The empirical analysis was exclusively conducted on the basis of the existing guests (189) of two pizzerias in Germany. The analysis mainly presents results for the relationship marketing, which focuses on the satisfaction of the already existing customers.

**Key words:** communication policy, gastronomy, information channel

**Abstrakt:** Zmeny v návykoch zákazníkov, sociálne zmeny a zostrujúca sa konkurencia nútia aj gastronomický sektor k zmenám. Jedným z prístupov riešenia tohto stavu je uplatňovanie špecifickejšej a tým aj efektívnejšej komunikácie. Realizovaný výskum potvrdzuje, že existujú skupiny zákazníkov, ktorí pozitívne reagujú na určité spojenie medzi rôznymi tematickými a obsahovými ponukami gastronomických zariadení a informačnými kanálmi, ktorými sú oslovovaní. Použitie tohto komunikačného mixu robí komunikačnú politiku omnoho efektívnejšiu. Skúmané faktory sú dimenzie, nie typy, čo znamená, že každý zákazník preukazuje rôznu mieru záujmu pre každú definovanú dimenziu. Pri vymedzovaní dimenzií bola použitá aplikovaná osobnostná teória, ktorá vedie k vzniku „Big Five“ osobnostných dimenzií. Výskum bol realizovaný na vzorke 189 zákazníkov dvoch pizérií v Nemecku. Výsledky výskumu sú prínosom predovšetkým pre oblasť vzťahového marketingu, ktorý spočíva vo vytváraní dobrých vzťahov s už existujúcimi zákazníkmi.

**Kľúčové slová:** komunikačná politika, gastronómia, informačný kanál

The task of an efficient communication policy is to confront the “suitable customer” through the “suitable channel” with the “suitable arguments” in order to influence the consumer behavior in a positive way. The German catering industry is undergoing the biggest revolutionary period of the past 50 years. Especially the classic catering trade, and here the most specifically different segments in the area of service catering, are hit by significant drops in turnover and have to cope with great difficulties. The big changes that are taking place were caused by very diverse factors (IBB 2005). The development of the general demand for

services is essentially characterized by changes within the economy, environment, technology, politics and society (Bieger 1998). These factors influence the customer structures and have effects on consumer behavior (Meffert, Giloth 2002).

Consequently, an unequivocal positioning and customer orientation of the catering industry are imperative. This creates the necessity of a well-directed communication policy of the companies (Gedenk 2002). In the competition for the customer and for shares of the market, an efficient communication policy will therefore increasingly become a strategic tool.

For a better understanding of the term communication policy, we have to start by defining the term of communication. Bruhn (2005), Horská (2004), Nagyová et al. (2007) give the following definition: "Communication means the transfer of information and meaningful contents for the purpose of controlling opinions, attitudes, expectations and behavior of defined addressees according to specific goals". The purpose of communication therefore consists in influencing someone else's behavior in order to achieve one's own goals.

Marketing communication in a shop plays an important role by gaining customers and affecting their perception, attitudes and shopping decisions. (Nagyová 2008)

The research on companies of the catering trade shows that catering companies can maintain their hold on the market and be successful when they concentrate on only a few dominant features and communicate these features to their relevant consumer group.

Furthermore, there are neither products nor services which would satisfy the needs of all customers. When considering the communication policy a company in the catering industry, already the feature of the concrete content of communication with regard to the defined target group is an important factor. Therefore, in the framework of a goal-oriented communication policy, it is essential to consider not only the "how", but also the "what" to do.

We therefore have to think more specifically in the way of customers or the customer dimensions, who want to be informed about certain contents and who, at the same time, react to certain elements of the communication policy. In this scholarly work, evidence shall be given that there is an optimal combination of certain contents and information channels in respect to the customer. Knowing such facts can facilitate the methodological planning and the efficiency of the communication mix. Moreover, this research can provide valuable findings especially for the so-called relationship marketing. Problems connected with information and communication channels are also discussed in the works of Nagyová et al. (2006) and Hennyeyová (2005)

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The inquiry was carried out through a questionnaire in a company which operates two restaurant outlets in Munich. During the inquiry, all persons questioned were chosen at random by a different service staff. The total number of responses amounted to 189 questionnaires.

The following seven theme contents which are available to the company in the framework of its specific type of operation were considered in the questionnaire:

- *Special condition/rebate actions* imply a discount on the price or are characterized through the collection of bonus points.
- *Choice of meals, choice of drinks and product specials*. Within the catering trade, these contents are essentially summed up through the term "menu card".
- *Nutrition*. Subject-related nutrition is one of the present-day trends in the catering industry and here, more specifically, the use of organically produced, healthy food.
- *Special day time offers* like breakfast, lunch, coffee and cake and so on.
- *Theme parties* like Christmas, Easter, New Year's Eve, Children Sunday, Halloween and so on. For the company, theme parties are an interesting medium for attracting additional customers especially on religious or public holidays which are normally less frequented.
- *Merchandising articles*. Within the communication policy of marketing consumer goods, merchandising means the production, distribution and advertising of brand products that transport the same logo or the same message as a known brand product without offering the same advantage.
- *Events of cultural or charity nature*.

Enquired elements of communication policy in the questionnaire:

- *Printed advertisement*. Printed advertisement can be subdivided into advertisement in newspapers, magazines and other types of printed advertisement.
- *Direct mailing*. Written advertising in the form of direct mailing is the most original form of direct communication.
- *Direct e-mailing*. Sending electronic news to individual internet users or user groups has been established in the most recent years as a further important instrument of direct communication.
- *Homepage*. An important instrument of online marketing communication is represented by one's own internet site (or website, homepage).
- *Internet advertisement* - the advertisement for own products on a foreign website.
- *Radio advertisement*. Radio is a background medium which accompanies people during the whole day. In the later afternoon or in the evening, radio is replaced by television and therefore it is only of minor importance during this time.

- *Cinema advertising.* Cinema advertising is characterized by its rather young target group. About two thirds of the audience is below 30 years of age. In addition, this instrument of advertising can be controlled extremely well.
- *Personal sale.* Within the catering trade, personal sale is considered to be the strongest direct communication instrument. Personal sale is relatively expensive because of its time intensity.
- *Catalogue.* Translated into the catering trade, catalogue means shaping of the range of products, i.e. the menu of the company.
- *Telephone advertising.* This instrument is presently used only in specific cases of marketing communication within the catering industry.

Within the framework of this research project, the interest dimension is determined by the statistical procedure of a factor analysis. In this context, the term of interest dimension defines a bundle of certain theme contents – which always appear together with certain information channels. This bundle is valid for the total of the customers of the company. These contents and elements of communication policy were described in detail above.

Through factor analysis, a reduction of variables is achieved, while information is concentrated in order

to transport the same information through fewer factors. Thus, information is transported through the original 17 entered variables of theme contents and communication elements. These fewer factors do represent the so-called interest dimensions and show the intensity of correlation of above theme content and information channel to the respective factor or interest dimension. The term interest dimension should not be confused with so-called customer clusters. The latter refer to clearly defined customer subgroups and types of a defined relative size and show a certain concrete combination of feature intensity.

In practical use, the established interest dimensions with their specific combination of selected, highly correlating variables (contents and information channels) represent the highest efficiency when being influenced through the communication policy of the company.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The rotated component matrix in the following table shows the correlation of the particular variables for the established factors which shall be interpreted as interest dimensions (Table 1).

Table 1. Rotated component matrix – Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation

Rotated components		Interest dimensions					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
Information channel	printed advertisement	0.029	0.284	0.061	– 0.051	0.735	0.102
	direct mailing	0.306	0.543	– 0.050	0.238	0.327	– 0.010
	direct e-mailing	0.802	0.127	– 0.036	0.183	0.004	– 0.056
	homepage	0.885	0.073	0.095	0.047	0.117	0.106
	internet advertisement	0.327	0.110	0.282	0.111	0.248	– 0.157
	radio advertisement	0.184	0.566	0.562	0.020	0.134	– 0.107
	cinema advertisement	0.063	0.128	0.672	0.057	– 0.263	0.398
	personal sale	0.044	0.028	0.002	0.123	0.133	0.883
	catalogue	0.033	0.330	0.046	0.046	0.231	0.626
	telephone advertisement	0.107	0.098	0.167	0.865	0.079	0.093
Information content	choice of meals, drinks and product specials	0.135	– 0.035	0.143	0.092	0.733	0.248
	theme parties	0.052	– 0.054	0.761	0.135	0.202	– 0.042
	events of cultural or charity nature	0.143	– 0.129	0.537	0.244	0.436	0.008
	nutrition	0.784	0.165	0.177	– 0.113	0.065	0.105
	special day time offers	0.070	0.819	– 0.052	0.162	0.136	0.134
	merchandising articles	0.018	0.212	0.114	0.879	0.011	0.084
	special conditions/rebate actions	0.157	0.822	0.068	0.076	– 0.094	0.205

The correlation of the variables of the respective interest dimension ranges from 0.157 for “internet advertisement” on the interest dimension 6 up to +0.885 for “homepage” on the interest dimension 1. For a better clarity, the highly correlating variable values in the interest dimensions are marked in bold.

These highly positively correlating variables are now defined as bundles. They represent those theme contents and information channels which have the strongest effect on the respective interest dimension. As a consequence, the assumption can be made that the determined interest dimensions can be influenced most effectively through addressing all variables of the respective bundle.

The evaluation of the inquiry conducted established that six interest dimensions can be defined. These interest dimensions are composed of a respectively specific bundle of content and information channel. The correlations within the bundles all have a positive sign. This results in interest dimensions which will react positively to the suitable marketing communication of the company. The theoretical assumptions of this research project can therefore be confirmed.

All the predefined seven theme contents are represented in at least one of the six established, highly correlating bundles. The theme content “events of cultural or charity nature” is the most popular one and appears in three interest dimensions (dimension 3, 4 and 5). The theme content “choice of meals, choice of drinks and product specials” appears in two interest dimensions. Nine out of ten predefined information channels appear at least once in the established bundles. The only exception is “internet advertising”, which was found as not highly correlating. This shows that the questioned persons gave only a low preference to this information channel. The information channel “radio advertising” appears in the interest dimension 2 and, at the same time, in the interest dimension 3. The same is true for the information channel “direct mailing” in interest dimensions 2 and 5.

#### **The established bundle: interest dimension 1**

Interest dimension 1 shows a high correlation between the theme content “nutrition” (0.784) and the electronic information channels “direct e-mailing” (0.802) and “homepage” (0.885). The correlation of these three variables within the factor is very high.

Therefore, this means for the marketing communication of the company that products implying healthy food have to be advertised on the internet website of the company and at the same time the customers should be informed about these products by person-

alized emails and possibly also through the company homepage.

#### **The established bundle: interest dimension 2**

Interest dimension 2 shows a high correlation for “special conditions/rebate actions” (0.822) and for “special day time offers” (0.819). The questioned guests grouped to this dimension correlate at the same time with the information channels “radio advertisement” (0.543) and with “direct mailing” (0.566) via the posted mail. The correlation of these four variables within the factor is very high for the theme contents and high for information channels. The signs of the three selected variables defining this interest dimension are all positive.

From this correlation, it can be deduced for marketing that the theme contents “special conditions/rebate actions” and “special day time offers” are valued, as the customer generally presupposes a very good price-performance-relationship. Thus, in the marketing communication the favourable price should be placed ostentatiously. At the same time, marketing communication should emphasize by means of radio advertising that a gastronomic experience is possible despite limited financial resources.

#### **The established bundle: interest dimension 3**

The combination of the theme content “theme parties” (0.761) and “events of cultural or charity nature” (0.537) as well as “radio advertisement” (0.562) and “cinema advertising” (0.672) correlate with interest dimension 3. The signs of all highly correlating variables within the factor are positive. The correlation of these four variables within the factor is high. The signs of the selected variables defining the interest dimension are all positive. Addressing these variables by the marketing communication will therefore, with regard to the customers of this interest dimension, achieve a great customer interest in the theme content combined with a great effect of the information channels.

The interest of the theme content “theme parties” and “events of cultural or charity nature” implies the opportunity of a common activity with one’s family or contacting other single persons. It can be supposed that persons of this interest dimension have only a small amount of the available time. Therefore, persons of this type will like to be informed in the background by the radio advertising and so-to-speak on the side by the cinema advertising. The marketing communication of the company should therefore present the company as a place of common activities or

as a meeting point, a place for joining up or meeting friends, possibly before seeing or after having seen a film in the cinema. As cinema advertising is very costly for this kind of segment-specific marketing, radio advertising should be preferred as the information channel.

#### **The established bundle: interest dimension 4**

Interest dimension 4 is composed of the combination of interest for “events of cultural or charity nature” (0.244) and “merchandising articles” (0.879) as well as showing a high correlation with the information channel “telephone advertising” (0.865). The correlation of these three variables within the factor is very high for two of the three variables. For the variable “events”, it is rather low. The signs of the selected variables defining the interest dimension are all positive.

This dimension shows a strong interest in merchandising articles, as an expression of the life style and quality, which is suggested through these items. Furthermore, an uncomplicated attitude towards consumption prevails here. Persons who show this interest dimension prefer to be addressed by telephone advertising, as a personalized address probably reinforces the feeling of belonging. So it seems plausible that persons showing this interest dimension are interested in events, as these promise variety and entertainment and offer the possibility of contacting the similar-minded people.

From this, it can be deduced for the marketing communication that the existing and in particular new merchandising articles should emphatically be offered via telephone. For this purpose, buyers of the merchandising articles should be marked in the existing customer data base of the company. Under the pretext of events, a phone call to these customers can be “misused” for this purpose.

#### **The established bundle: interest dimension 5**

Interest dimension 5 correlates with “choice of meals, choice of drinks and product specials” (0.733) and “events of cultural or charity nature” (0.436). At the same time, the information channels “printed advertising” (0.735) and somewhat less “direct mailing” (0.327) correlate. The signs of the selected variables defining the interest dimension are all positive. Addressing these variables by marketing communication will therefore meet with a great interest of customers of this interest dimension concerning the theme content with a simultaneous effect of the information channels.

If this interest dimension is to be addressed, the marketing communication of the company has to combine the classic printed advertising with the appropriate theme contents in a straightforward way.

#### **The established bundle: interest dimension 6**

Finally, in the interest dimension 6, “personal sale” (0.883) correlates with “catalogue” (0.626). The theme content “choice of meals and drinks and product specials” was identified as showing the highest correlation.

Apparently there is only a poor readiness of communicating personal data, as the information shall only take place via the personal sale and via the menu. Because of these traditional theme contents and information channels, the marketing communication of the company has to concentrate on the gastronomic product and on its competent communication. This means in practice on the one hand training the service staff who has to be able to indicate product innovations competently and also to answer more complex product-related questions of the customer. On the other hand, a permanent innovation has to be visible from the offer. So this can be the place especially for seasonal products. It can be assumed that this will meet with a great customer interest during the personal communication at the table.

Generally speaking, the evaluation has shown that the theme content “events” has an effect on as many as three of the six established interest dimensions. This theme content therefore stands out as the most popular one surpassing even the most basic gastronomic offer, namely the offer of meals and drinks. Thus, events should absolutely be intensified by the company. As a consequence, it is very probable that most of the customers addressed by it will react in the positive way. The information channels radio advertising and also the direct address via direct mailing are apparently very popular with the guests of the company. It is important to keep this point in mind when choosing an element of the communication policy.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research project was able to give evidence that there is an optimal combination of certain theme contents and information channels in the customer communication. The methodological procedure which establishes the so-called interest dimensions gives us an opportunity to discern customers who want to be informed about certain theme contents and who, at the

same time, react to certain elements of communication policy. As expected in the theoretical assumptions, it was possible to identify six interest dimensions which are composed of a specific combination of the theme content and information channel. All the highly correlating variables of theme contents and information channel within the established interest dimensions show a positive sign. This allows us to assume that the customers of the company can be influenced in their consumer behavior by specifically addressing theme contents and information channels simultaneously. Translated into practice, this means that now the company disposes of the concrete information on the combination of single elements of the communication mix and that for all customers an efficient communication is achieved by the “suitable” bundling of elements. It is imperative to make advantage of this efficient bundling by the means of the marketing communication of the company.

Summing up the findings of this research, valuable information can be deduced from understanding the interest dimensions for the marketing of the company. On the basis of these results, the opportunity arises to use an efficient combination of the theme content and information channel in order to make an impact on the customers. It is fundamental that the methods of this research are generally suitable, transferable and applicable. Therefore, it is only the theoretical model, but not the specific result of this research that can be generalized for other companies in this industry. By example, the result of this research only mirrors the selection of certain theme contents and communication channels. It is for this reason, that the results of the empirical analysis cannot be transferred completely but only in a limited way to a company which uses i.e. television advertising as an element of communication policy. This allows for the further research work.

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