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DIGITAL ADAPTATION OF RETAIL MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS IN RESPONSE TO THE IMPACT OF WAR IN UKRAINE

ЦИФРОВА АДАПТАЦІЯ МАРКЕТИНГОВИХ КОМУНІКАЦІЙ РИТЕЙЛУ ПІД ВПЛИВОМ ВОЄННИХ ДІЙ В УКРАЇНІ

The paper examines the transformation of Ukrainian business communication strategies under martial law. Based on analytical data and leading brands' experiences, it identifies key market challenges, prospects, anti-crisis solutions, and methods for integrating social responsibility into business goals. The study outlines the war's impact on macroeconomics, consumer behavior, advertising market dynamics, and support for the Defense Forces. Additionally, potential threats are identified and practical recommendations provided. Post-war, value-based marketing communication will become standard, with society expecting higher social responsibility. Future success lies in aligning social messaging with business models and leveraging AI, digital technologies, and personalization for meaningful consumer dialogue.

Keywords: *digital adaptation, marketing communications, retail, consumer behavior, brand, advertising, war.*

У праці висвітлено специфіку трансформації комунікаційних стратегій вітчизняного бізнесу в умовах воєнного стану. На основі аналітичних даних та досвіду провідних брендів України з'ясовано ключові виклики, перспективи й антикризові рішення, а також способи інтеграції соціально-етичної відповідальності в бізнес-цілі підприємств. Окреслено масштабний вплив війни на макроекономічне середовище, поведінку споживачів та операційну діяльність компаній. Дослідження охоплює динаміку рекламного ринку, базові завдання маркетингових комунікацій і суб'єктів, які стимулюють їхні зміни. Окрему увагу приділено фактору допомоги Силам оборони як фундаментальному елементу сучасного українського ритейлу й сервісу. Наприкінці виокремлено загрози та надано практичні поради щодо вдосконалення комунікаційних процесів. До початку повномасштабних бойових дій вітчизняні компанії переважно послуговувалися стандартними методами стимулювання збуту, прямої реклами та PR-просування. Однак у сучасних умовах воєнного часу традиційні інструменти виявляються неефективними або потребують концептуального

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переосмислення. Глибока трансформація суспільства, підвищена чутливість споживачів, запит на прозорість і ризик репутаційних втрат через спекуляції на воєнній тематиці звужують межі допустимого комунікаційного впливу. Це змушує бізнес шукати баланс між економічними цілями та соціально-етичними орієнтирами, розробляючи адаптивні моделі маркетингової взаємодії для збереження лояльності клієнтів і підтримки економічної життєздатності в умовах високої турбулентності. Можна впевнено прогнозувати, що ціннісна маркетингова комунікація стане нормою у післявоєнному періоді, адже очікування суспільства щодо соціальної ролі бізнесу залишаться високими. Ключове завдання полягатиме у дослідженні того, як брендам поєднувати соціальні меседжі з бізнес-моделями на етапі відновлення, перетворюючи соціальну відповідальність на стійку конкурентну перевагу. Також зростатиме роль цифрових технологій, AI, персоналізації та інтерактивних форматів, які дозволять брендам вести змістовний, двосторонній діалог із кожним споживачем, поглиблюючи зв'язок на рівні цінностей, що є перспективною темою для подальших наукових розробок.

Ключові слова: *цифрова адаптація, маркетингові комунікації, ритейл, поведінка споживачів, бренд, реклама, війна.*

Formulation of the problem. In the pre-war period, domestic economic entities relied on traditional tools for promotion, marketing stimulation, and image building. However, under wartime realities, classic communication models lose their effectiveness or require a fundamental review. Tectonic shifts in society, increased emotional sensitivity of the audience, an acute demand for authenticity, and reputational risks associated with the inappropriate use of war themes significantly narrow the allowable scope of marketing activity. Under these conditions, a need arises for constant maneuvering between the financial and operational goals of business and corporate ethics. The key problem lies in identifying the mechanisms for such a transformation of marketing communications that would allow enterprises to maintain customer loyalty, respond to societal demands, and preserve economic efficiency in a dynamically unstable environment.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The issue of restructuring marketing communications and implementing digital innovations under martial law has gained significant scientific resonance in Ukraine. The modern academic community views marketing communications as a multidimensional system that synthesizes digitalization, corporate ethics, and an emotional-psychological context. Scientific discourse emphasizes the interplay between macroeconomic turbulence, digital transformation, and the anti-crisis adjustment of business strategies.

Specifically, Kushnir T. and Moroz M. [1] substantiate the priority vectors for the digitalization of domestic entrepreneurship, highlighting the growing role of artificial intelligence, SMM technologies, and customized content in building customer engagement. According to the authors, digital tools are transforming from technical means into strategic business assets during periods of declining consumer demand. Certain aspects and prospects of applying digital marketing under wartime conditions are also addressed in [2].

A wide range of issues related to adapting marketing communications to crisis and war conditions is reflected in [2–10]. For instance, Buchynska O. [3] explores the specifics and evolution of PR tools in Ukraine. Researchers in [4] focus on emotional marketing as an instrument of consumer influence. Zubchenko V., Herasymenko I., and Osypenko N. [5] examine wartime challenges, including market contraction, declining purchasing power, and the audience's heightened sensitivity to reputational risks. The authors demonstrate that ethics and trust have become critical factors in maintaining reputation, requiring the establishment of new communication channels via social networks and digital platforms. Marchenko S. and Lishchenko A. [6] analyze the transformation of communications within the specific context of the agricultural sector.

The humanization of marketing activities is investigated by Salo Ya. and Kochevoy M. [7], who argue for the necessity of transitioning from aggressive promotion toward empathy, psychological support, and social responsibility to retain the customer

base. Khrapkina V. and Bukhtieieva T. [9] consider digitalization as a foundation for anti-crisis resilience, where AI, Data Analytics, and automation make it possible to optimize expenses and maintain communication flexibility. Meanwhile, Shyshpanova N. and Holinei V. [10] propose applying the SOSTAC model for strategic planning in wartime conditions.

Summarizing the researchers' contributions, it is possible to state the formation of a new paradigm of marketing communications that integrates innovative technologies, ethical standards, and social orientation. However, the applied mechanisms for ensuring the effectiveness of this concept and the trends in its evolution during the wartime period require further in-depth study.

Formulation of the purpose of the article. The article is aimed at substantiating the direction of changes and identifying the future outlines of the development of marketing interaction between domestic enterprises and the market under the pressure of war factors. To achieve this goal, a series of sequential tasks is set: to assess the destructive impact of military actions on the general socio-economic situation, consumer priorities, and business operations; to analyze the capacity, market conditions, and temporal trends of the advertising and communication segment of Ukraine; to characterize the transformation of the fundamental functions of marketing communications and the practices of their implementation by Ukrainian brands during the war; and to formulate strategic guidelines and recommendations for improving the effectiveness of communication models during the recovery stage.

Presentation of the main material. The full-scale war has dealt a devastating blow to the socio-economic environment of Ukraine, as confirmed by a number of destructive factors [4, 11]:

- Large-scale economic decline: In the first months of the conflict, the state lost about a third of its GDP (30-35%), triggering the deepest recession in modern history.
- Rapid impoverishment of the population: The poverty rate increased from 5,5% to over 24% of citizens.
- Inflationary shocks and food crisis: Price surges across basic commodity groups and raw materials significantly impaired food security levels.
- Decline in living standards: The destruction of critical infrastructure, manufacturing facilities, and logistical hubs caused mass unemployment.
- Workforce shortage: Mobilization and migration processes significantly reduced the available labor force.

Against the backdrop of these events, consumer behavior has undergone a qualitative transformation [2–10]:

1. Demand for emotional relief, humor in promotional campaigns, and value-driven initiatives surged rapidly due to the need for psychological support.
2. E-commerce consolidated its positions, demonstrating a steady trend toward expansion.
3. Environmental awareness among buyers became an important factor directly influencing corporate product strategies.
4. Mobile applications transformed into a key element of marketing interaction.
5. Consumers en masse reoriented toward domestic products, stimulating the growth of local brands.

In contemporary realities, marketing communications face a number of acute challenges:

- Heightened emotional sensitivity of the audience: Requires extreme caution in messaging to minimize reputational risks.
- Revision of life priorities: Consumer focus on basic needs necessitates clear communication of a product's real value.
- Resource constraints: A shortage of finances, materials, and personnel forces businesses to transition toward digital channels.

• Search for effective formats: Adapting communications to conditions dominated by the digital environment and social networks.

Ukrainian companies are forced to respond flexibly to these challenges: diversifying product lines and pricing policies, establishing partnerships with charitable foundations, strengthening analytics, and optimizing budgets. Over the past three years, marketing in Ukraine has significantly diverged from global trends, concentrating instead on overcoming "polycrisis", where trust, empathy, and artificial intelligence have become the primary tools for connecting with the audience.

During the wartime period, marketing communications perform a number of critically important functions [2, 5–7]:

• Protection and reinforcement of reputation: Preserving a positive image in a turbulent environment.
• Operational adaptation: Instantaneous response to changing purchasing patterns.
• Retention of the customer base: Investing in long-term loyalty despite the crisis.
• Demonstration of social responsibility: Volunteering and humanitarian initiatives as the foundation of trust.
• Maintenance of competitiveness: Preserving brand visibility and sales volumes.
• Informing and persuading: Delivering relevant messages and stimulating demand.

As noted in market research, particularly by CASES Media [13], companies are abandoning purely product-oriented promotion in favor of emotional meanings, whereas business disregard for the war context triggers audience boycotts. Forbes Ukraine [14] emphasizes the importance of an empathetic tone of voice, while corporate blogs (e.g., Mehbud [15]) highlight the evolution of business PR. Classical approaches are giving way to social marketing, where aggressive selling is replaced by genuine solidarity.

A variety of entities are involved in this process: national giants (Rozetka, Nova Poshta, Kyivstar), flexible small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), local brands, non-governmental organizations and foundations, opinion leaders, as well as consumers themselves acting as brand advocates.

The central narrative of communications has become the "we are together" concept, emphasizing unity and shared responsibility. Brands focus on real-life stories, transparent reporting on military aid, and the integration of charity into their core product offerings.

Dominant formats include authentic storytelling, field reporting, and rapid dialogue across social media and messaging platforms. Collaboration with volunteers has evolved into a systemic partnership, where companies contribute their own media and logistical resources.

Strategic Advantages and Risks of Adaptation:

• *Advantages:* Growth in loyalty and trust, building a reputation as an ethical and socially responsible player, and creating a long-term bond with consumers based on shared values.
• *Risks:* The danger of messages being perceived as opportunistic or "hyping on blood" due to insincerity, high demands for alignment between words and real actions, market information overload, and the high cost of quality content creation.

Analyzing the successful experience of Ukrainian companies [15, 16], key recommendations for business can be highlighted:

1. Operational diversification: Creating backup capacities abroad or in safe regions to ensure business continuity (e.g., the experience of Ajax and Nova).
2. Integrating donations into products: Turning aid into a regular habit through transaction-based mechanisms (e.g., WOG or Monobank).
3. Focus on public utility: Providing free access to critical services (MEGOGO, Ukrzaliznytsia, air raid alert apps) to position the business as an essential infrastructure element.
4. Transparent communication: Honest disclosure regarding issues, recovery timelines, and compensation (e.g., Kyivstar).

5. External expansion: Scaling into EU markets as a risk diversification tool (Nova, SkyUp).
6. Local safety protocols: Cautious, phased reopening of operations without compromising human safety (e.g., McDonald's).
7. Culture of co-creation: Providing open access to data, recipes, or tools (Pravda).
8. Network effects: Creating an information ripple around initiatives, encouraging the audience to organically share content (Ukrposhta stamps, Monobank case studies).
9. Prioritizing actions over slogans: Real humanitarian missions and military discounts instead of loud advertising statements.
10. Scenario planning: Maintaining clear protocols for blackouts, cyberattacks, or other force majeure events.

Practical illustrations of successful transformation include Monobank's fundraising campaigns for the army, Rozetka's "Stand Together" initiative, Kyivstar's social projects on communication resilience, and Uklon's "Cabbing to Victory" movement [4, 8, 9, 15]. They prove that business resilience during wartime relies exclusively on real, systemic actions that form an organic part of a company's core business processes.

Conclusions. The paper summarizes the impact of martial law on market entities, consumer expectations, and the overall economic situation in the country. An analytical assessment of the state of the advertising and communication segment was carried out, key functional tasks of marketing were determined, and groups of entities driving its restructuring were identified. Special attention was paid to the adaptation practices of Ukrainian brands, where assistance to the Armed Forces of Ukraine acts as a core component of business activity. Key threats were highlighted, and practical guidelines were provided for the reorganization of marketing activities.

It has been established that wartime challenges triggered a fundamental shift in the marketing paradigm: direct advertising gave way to human-centricity, social support, and emotional dialogue. In crisis conditions, consumers evaluate brands through the lens of their societal utility and involvement, turning marketing communications into a core element of corporate responsibility. The greatest efficiency is demonstrated by companies capable of consistently combining value-driven messaging with practical operational actions, thereby maintaining financial stability and strengthening customer trust.

Crucial factors determining marketing effectiveness include: the absence of opportunism, semantic relevance, restrained tone of voice, high adaptability, and uncompromising authenticity. At the same time, the study emphasizes significant reputational risks arising from inappropriate messaging or attempts to exploit tragic events, which necessitates thorough analysis and constant adjustment of communication activities.

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