

THE CONTRIBUTION OF ADVERTISEMENTS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS ACTIVITIES IN SHOPPING CENTERS TO CUSTOMERS' LEVEL OF INTEREST

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In this study, an effort was made to shed light on points where advertising and public relations activities overlap and intersect. With the developments and changes in these two concepts, consumption habits also changed and this change followed a course that can be called “craze” regarding spaces of consumption. The grocers and greengrocers of the past were replaced by enormous shopping centers, temples of today’s consumer society. While individuals sought ways of meeting their needs in one place, retail places complied with their new strategies. While the products in these centers use advertising and public relations in order to attract the attention of consumers, shopping centers and markets where these products meet with consumers, enter into a competition among themselves to gain customers. To what extent success is achieved in this competition has been a subject of interest. Therefore, the research and application subject of this study can be stated as “The role of advertising and public relations activities in shopping centers on determination of customers’ level of interest”. In the application stage of the study, face-to-face survey was conducted on 300 randomly selected subjects at the M1 Tepe Shopping Center in Konya and the results were analyzed.

Keywords: Public relations, Advertisements, Shopping centers.

Introduction

Public relations, which is a field that is increasing its effectiveness and methods of application with each passing day, helps public institutions and private sector organizations to better know the target group that they serve and enable themselves to be better known by their target groups.

It is seen that public relations does not limit itself only to delivering a message to a recipient but intends to establish a mutual dialogue with them and therefore adopts an appropriate communication policy (Çamdereli, 2000: 37).

Another field that is side by side with public relations in terms of professional organization and proximity and therefore is frequently confused with it is advertising. Briefly, it is possible to describe advertising as a transfer of information between the producer and the consumer and a communication that moves from those who give advertisements to the target group. By virtue of this quality, the effectiveness of advertising in establishing a powerful bond between the brand and the target consumers if it is presented to the target group with an appropriate text and visual content within a specific program and at the right time (Elden, 2003: 17). In this study, the aforementioned subjects have been investigated and an effort was made to clarify the points where Public Relations activities overlap and intersect.

Literature Review

The fact that no complete agreement has been reached for a long time on the concept of public relations, which feeds on more than one scientific discipline and arrives at a synthesis using the data from these sciences, causes it to be considered within the sub-branches of social sciences (Peltekoğlu, 2001: 1). It is not possible to say that there is a generally adopted definition about what public relations really is. Sometimes, differences are observed in the methods and forms of application and at other times different views are presented as to functioning. The fact that it has a very large area of application and are sometimes intertwined with neighboring disciplines and applications lead to difficulties in making a proper definition. However, it seems that general character and outline of public relations have taken shape today (Kazancı, 1996: 57).

As a result of all other definitions made in addition to taking into consideration all this information as regards public relations, a general definition like “a privileged administrative duty that helps form and maintain mutual communication and understanding between an enterprise and a target audience” emerges (Peltekoğlu, 2001: 2). At this point, presenting two important and comprehensive definitions regarding the concept of public relations may broaden our point of view. “Public relations is a conscious and official process which is based on mutual and bidirectional communication and involves research, planning and application stages aimed at molding public opinion, forging a consensus between the institution and the public within the framework of a social responsibility approach and enabling the staff to adopt the institution’s goals” (Gökçe, 1993: 4).

That is to say that public relations is not a mere volley of propaganda. There is a mutual current between the sender and the recipient and the sender also benefits from this current. The purpose is, as was stated above, to persuade and influence the target audience, and direct them to a certain action through honest ways (supporting a campaign, voting, joining the army, betting in sports lottery, buying a product etc.) (Asna 1998: 24–25).

Advertisement, on the other hand, has become an indispensable phenomenon for both businesses and consumers like other components of the marketing communication because due to the rapidly changing market conditions and increasing competition, the success of these large numbers of firms, which produce similar goods, depends largely on how professionally and rationally they use marketing communication components. It is necessary to define advertisement, which is one of these components, first in order to investigate it in more detail (Kocabaş-Elden, 2001: 13).

Advertisement is a tool that, in all economic systems, promote various services and products, define where, how and at what price they can be bought and how they can be used, and demonstrate consumers in what way they can make their spending wisely (Özgür, 1994: 16).

It might be appropriate to make the following definition and summary about advertisement by looking at the matter from the perspective of public relations: Advertisement is an important element that helps consumers and brands and enable consumers to gain awareness regarding brands. Through advertisements, consumers “realize what the product does and what benefits it provides, believes the promises of the product as a result of sources of information that they have read, seen or heard and ultimately chooses that brand instead of its rivals (Kozlu, 2000: 329–330).

It is possible to say, within the framework of these definitions, that advertisement has all the factors that are seen in a communication phenomenon. In this sense, the source in an advertisement could be a business, an institution or an advertising agency as well as a staff member working in any of these organizations. The target, on the other hand, is the consumer or a potential consumer group who can afford to buy the product that is being advertised to satisfy needs and desires. The message of advertisement is a phenomenon that intends to tell consumers about benefits of a product or service through various symbols and is shaped up according to the characteristics of mass media (Harper, 1965: 79).

Both public relations and advertisement aim at promotion and, more or less, they make use of the same mass media. Research, planning and program are important for both them.

These two concepts differ from one another in terms of their place in the organizational structure. While advertising falls within the area of responsibility of the marketing unit of the organization, public

relations generally functions as an independent unit that is directly affiliated to the top management. If the two concepts are compared according to their areas of responsibility, it is seen that public relations has a larger area of responsibility than advertising (Budak-Budak, 1995: 12).

Promoting the whole organization on the one hand and reaching the whole public on the other hand renders the task of public relations unit more difficult than advertising. Since it is not possible to limit the target audience in public relations, a public relations official has more difficulty than an advertisement person in developing a strategy that can appeal to people of all levels, characters and quality. Since the target audience in advertising will be limited to people who are expected to buy the product or service and their characteristics, it will be relatively easier to determine strategies that will facilitate reaching this audience (Budak-Budak, 1995: 12).

The Place of Advertising in the Process of Public Relations

Although public relations and advertising differ from one another in many respects, it is necessary to mention their similarities as well:

- Both of them intend to mold public opinion through promotion.
- They both employ the same or similar mass media in molding public opinion.
- The research process is one of the fundamental steps in both applications.
- The planning/programming stage is valid for both of them.
- Timing of the program is important for both of them.
- It is seen that employees are paid well in both of them.
- Activities are evaluated in both of them (Çamdereli, 2000: 28).

The aforementioned items indicate that it is not always possible to distinguish public relations and advertising activities.

Method

In the theoretical section of the study, literature review was conducted from the specific to the general. In the application section, on the other hand, a field work was carried out at M1 Tepe Shopping Center, a commercial shopping center continuing its activities in Konya, in order to test the effects of Public Relations and Promotion activities on the interest levels of customers who go to shopping centers. The population of the study consists of individuals above the age of 18 who visit the shopping center. In this context, a face-to-face questionnaire was administered to 300 subjects who were selected using the random sampling method and the results were analyzed. The questionnaire that was used in the study contains three parts. These involve to what extent Public Relations and Promotion activities conducted at the shopping center are remembered and how effective they are, activities that are desired to be organized at the shopping center and demographic features.

Findings

This section includes the results of the study concerning the effects of Public Relations and Promotion activities on the interest levels customers who go to shopping centers. In this context, first, the effects of Public Relations and Promotion activities on visits to the shopping center and the effects of the medium by which activities are announced on visits to the shopping center will be analyzed.

The Subjects' Levels of Being Influenced by Public Relations and Promotion Activities

It is necessary to present frequency analyses concerning the determination of effectiveness levels of Public Relations and Promotion activities through tables.

Mother's Day

Table 1. Effectiveness Level of Mother's Day.

	Frekans	Yüzde
Etkisi Yok	83	29,6
Kısmen Etkili	144	51,4
Oldukça Etkili	53	18,9
Toplam	280	100,0

When the effectiveness levels of the Mother's Day activity are examined, it is observed that Partially Effective choice comes first with a rate of 51.4 % followed by It Has No Effect (29.6 %) and Quite Effective (18.9).

May 19 Cycling Activity

Table 2. Effectiveness Level of May 19 Cycling Activity.

	Frekans	Yüzde
Etkisi Yok	96	36,8
Kısmen Etkili	95	36,4
Oldukça Etkili	69	26,4
Toplam	261	100,0

Concerning the Effectiveness Level of May 19 Cycling Activity, the choice It Has No Effect comes first with rate of 36.8 % followed by Partially Effective (36.4 %) and Quite Effective (26.4 %).

April 23 Costume Ball

Table 3. Effectiveness Level of April 23 Costume Ball.

	Frekans	Yüzde
Etkisi Yok	88	34,4
Kısmen Etkili	101	39,5
Oldukça Etkili	67	26,2
Toplam	256	100,0

When the effectiveness levels of April 23 Costume Ball activity are examined, it is observed that the choice Partially Effective ranks first with a rate of 39.5 % followed by the choices of It Has No Effect (34.4 %) and Quite Effective (19.6 %).

International Women's Day (Knitting Contest)

Table 4. Effectiveness Level of International Women's Day (Knitting Contest).

	Frekans	Yüzde
Etkisi Yok	88	34,0
Kısmen Etkili	91	35,1
Oldukça Etkili	80	30,9
Toplam	259	100,0

As it is stated in the Table 4, regarding the effectiveness level of International Women's Day (Knitting Contest), the choice Partially Effective ranks first with a rate of 35.1 % followed by the choices of It Has No Effect (34 %) and Quite Effective (30.9 %).

Valentine's Day

When the effectiveness level of Valentine's Day is considered, it is observed that the choice Partially Effective comes first with a rate of 39.5 % and that this choice is followed by the choices Quite Effective (36.5 %) and It Has No Effect (24.1 %).

Table 5. 3.17. Effectiveness Level of Valentine's Day.

	Frekans	Yüzde
Etkisi Yok	65	24,1
Kısmen Etkili	107	39,6
Oldukça Etkili	98	35,6
Toplam	270	100,0

Weekend Activities for Children

Table 6. Effectiveness Level of Weekend Activities for Children.

	Frekans	Yüzde
Etkisi Yok	79	28,5
Kısmen Etkili	98	35,4
Oldukça Etkili	100	35,0
Toplam	277	100,0

As can be seen in the Table, the choice Partially Effective ranks first in the effectiveness level of Weekend Activities for Children with a rate of 35.4 %, followed by the choices of Quite Effective (35 %) and It Has No Effective (28.5 %).

The Effects of Public Relations and Promotion Activities on the Frequency of Going Shopping

The title “The Effects of Public Relations and Promotion Activities on the Frequency of Going Shopping”, which was one of the important questions of the questionnaire administered in the study and tested with two hypotheses, seems to be an important step in the emergence of the results of the questionnaire.

Table 7. The Effects of Rate of Remembering of Public Relations and Promotion Activities on Visiting the Shopping Center.

			Shopping frequency				Total
			No	Mon thly	Once a week	Daily	
Recall	Weak	Count	26	45	2	1	74
		% within Recall	35,1%	60,8%	2,7%	1,4%	100,0%
		% within Shopping	70,3%	31,3%	2,8%	2,3%	24,9%
	Medium	Count	5	56	18	17	96
		% within Hatırlama	5,2%	58,3%	18,8%	17,7%	100,0%
		% within Shopping	13,5%	38,9%	25,0%	38,6%	32,3%
	Strong	Count	6	43	52	26	127
		% within Recall	4,7%	33,9%	40,9%	20,5%	100,0%
		% within Shopping	16,2%	29,9%	72,2%	59,1%	42,8%
Total	Count	37	144	72	44	297	
	% within Recall	12,5%	48,5%	24,2%	14,8%	100,0%	
	% within Shopping	100%	100%	100,0%	100%	100,0%	

Chi-Square and Correlation Analyses were conducted in order to reveal whether there is a significant relationship between the subjects' levels of remembering of Public Relations and Promotion Activities and the frequency of their going shopping. According to the results of the Chi-Square test that was applied, it is seen that as the subjects' level of remembering Public Relations and Promotion Activities increases, the frequency of their going shopping also increases. According to this result, the frequency of the subjects' going shopping exhibits a significant variation depending on their level of remembering Public Relations and Promotion Activities (Chi-Square 92,84, sd = 6, $P < 0,05$). Likewise, a correlations analysis between the two variables was also conducted in order to test the same two hypotheses. According to the results of the analysis, there is a positive, and moderately significant relationship between the subjects' level of remembering Public Relations and Promotion Activities and the frequency of their going shopping ($r = 0,476$, $p < 0.01$).

The Effect of the Success Score Given to Public Relations and Promotion Activities on the Frequency of Visits to the Shopping Center

Table 8. A Comparison of Scoring and Shopping Frequencies.

			Shopping frequency				Total
			No	Mon thly	Once a week	Daily	
Rating	Weak	Count	6	14	3	2	25
		% within Rating	24,0%	56,0%	12,0%	8,0%	100,0%
		% within Shopping	24,0%	10,6%	4,2%	4,7%	9,2%
	Medium	Count	13	51	11	5	80
		% within Rating	16,3%	63,8%	13,8%	6,3%	100,0%
		% within Shopping	52,0%	38,6%	15,3%	11,6%	29,4%
	Strond	Count	6	67	58	36	167
		% within Rating	3,6%	40,1%	34,7%	21,6%	100,0%
		% within Shopping	24,0%	50,8%	80,6%	83,7%	61,4%
Total		Count	25	132	72	43	272
		% within Puanlama	9,2%	48,5%	26,5%	15,8%	100,0%
		% within Shopping	100%	100,0%	100,0%	100%	100,0%

Chi-Square and Correlations analyses were made in order to reveal whether there is a significant relationship between the success scores that the subjects gave to Public Relations and Promotion Activities and the frequencies of their going shopping. According to the results of the Chi-square test that was applied, it is seen that as the scores that the subjects gave to the Public Relations and Promotion Activities increase, the frequency of their going shopping also increases. According to this result, the subjects' frequency of going shopping exhibits a significant variation depending on the high scores given to Public Relations and Promotion Activities (Chi-Square = 42,78, sd = 6, $P < 0,05$). Likewise, a Correlations analysis was also conducted between the two variables in order to test the two same two hypotheses. According to the results of the analysis, a positive and significant but weak relationship was found between the scores that the subjects gave to Public Relations and Promotion Activities and the frequencies of their going shopping ($r = 0,376$, $p < 0.01$).

Conclusion

It is necessary to repeat the following findings about the levels of remembering of Public Relations and Promotion Activities and their levels of effectiveness. "Mother's Day" has a level of remembering of 38,5 % and an effectiveness level of 51,4 % whereas "Valentine's Day" has a level of remembering of 38,5 % and an effectiveness level of 39,5. Other Public Relations and Promotion Activities such as "May 19 Cycling Activity", "April 23 Costume Ball", "International Women's Day (Knitting Contest)" and "Weekend Activities for Children" were made into tables according to their levels of being remembered and their effectiveness levels and were examined in the section where their frequencies were analyzed. It was determined that these activities had a significant effect on the interest levels of customers as the figures given above suggest.

The subjects stated that they heard about the Public Relations and Promotion Activities when they came to the Shopping Center (63.5 %), from their acquaintances (17,6 %) and from Various Other Media (8,1 %). Those who had not head of these activities formed a group of 10.8 %. As for the last of our

frequency analyses, that is the media by which the subjects wish to be informed of the activities, it is seen that television tops the list with a rate of 58.4 %. Television is followed by Open Air Advertisement Media (18,8 %), Radio (6,7 %), Newspaper and Internet (with the same rates) (%5,7), Magazine (2,7 %) and finally My Immediate Acquaintances (1,7 %).

The Effect of Public Relations and Promotion Activities on The Frequency of Going Shopping seems to be one of the important results of the questionnaire. It is observed that as the subjects' level of remembering of Public Relations and Promotion Activities increases, the frequency of their going shopping also increases. On the other hand, it is observed that as the scores that the subjects give to Public Relations and Promotion Activities increase, the frequency of their going shopping also increases. As a result of these findings, it will not be wrong to conclude in the light of the example of M1 Tepe Shopping Center that Public Relations and Promotion Activities are effective on the customers' interest levels and naturally on their frequency of going shopping.

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