

Modern Means of Promoting Flower Sales in Constanța

Mariana Juganaru

Ruxandra Florentina Firica

“Ovidius” University of Constanta, Faculty of Economic Sciences, Romania

juganaru.mariana@yahoo.com

firica.ruxandra@gmail.com

Abstract

The development, considered spectacular, undergone by direct and digital marketing at the present time is due to the Internet and the digital technologies' innovations (smartphones, tablets, and other digital devices, but also the variety of digital platforms available on mobile, such as social media platforms). The companies' focus on the implementation of direct and digital marketing is materialized in the development of a new business model, able to ensure success by increasing the satisfaction of the wishes of different categories of customers. At the same time, direct and digital marketing tools are increasingly accepted by customers, who perceive them as modern means of promotion, able to develop close, interactive relationships (with offerers and other customers).

This study draws attention that promotion activity is changing, and the implementation of direct and digital marketing tools can be an opportunity to develop a successful business, even in the flower market.

Key words: direct and digital marketing, promotion, flower market, marketing research

J.E.L. classification: M30, M31, M37

1. Introduction

Flowers represent something normal, natural; they are part of the daily life of each of us, in many ways and in different moments. We see, admire, and enjoy flowers on the streets of our places of residence or where we travel, in gardens, parks, courtyards, at the windows and balconies of homes, institutions, but also inside them. We enjoy listening to music and reading poems about flowers, we love paintings, tapestries, fabrics, frescoes with floral motifs; sometimes we offer and / or receive flowers, but how many of us are aware of these aspects?

For an entrepreneur from Constanța, flowers represent the product around which he initiated and developed a business, but under a new, modern concept, correlated with the use of the technological progress. In this study we have included the presentation of a theoretical approach regarding the impact of the progress of digital technologies on the entire marketing activity of the company (regardless of its size and object of activity), but especially in terms of the modern means of communication, a marketing analysis of the flower market and a case study of a new company on the flower market in Constanța, which has implemented modern methods of activity, thus managing to achieve success.

2. Theoretical background

In the specialized literature, new concepts are brought to attention, such as digital marketing, online marketing, social networks marketing, mobile marketing. These are expressions of the modern tools used in marketing activities, which have emerged and developed with the help of the Internet and the expansion of digital technologies' innovations.

While in its traditional form, direct marketing was achieved through the sale of catalogs, by mail, television or by telephone (telemarketing), nowadays it is materialized as online marketing (through websites, online advertising, e-mail, online videos and blogging), social media marketing, mobile marketing and other digital devices (Kotler and Armstrong, 2015, pp. 370-372, 450).

The digital age has brought a new dimension to business, in the sense that people and companies can connect with each other (with the help of digital networks) anytime and anywhere. Statistics show the trend of business growth in the digital environment, and the forecasts of the specialists (based on studies on the changing of customers' behavior, but also as a result of the changing economic context, caused by the Coronavirus pandemic) suggest the continuation of this upward trend. In support of this evolution, we draw attention to the characteristics of the most commonly used digital marketing tools.

Website marketing gives to the company the opportunity to interact with the customers in order to get them to make a direct transaction (Kotler and Armstrong, 2015, pp.373, 448).

The brand's website aims to present the brand's content, which involves consumers and contributes to the creation of a brand community, and closer relationships are built with customers through their involvement (Kotler and Armstrong, 2015, pp. 452-455).

Online advertising refers to advertising that occurs while a person is accessing a site or is browsing through different digital platforms, and it involves sending or displaying ads or ad searches of the same category.

Email marketing is considered a very commonly used digital tool, which consists of sending personalized messages to a target group, aiming to foster relationships with them. The downside of this tool is the possibility of that email being sent to spam, which means it will not be seen / read (Kotler and Armstrong, 2015, p. 456).

Viral marketing is the transmission of various content, but especially videos, through social media networks (such as Facebook, YouTube) or direct communication channels (such as WhatsApp), and those who receive them will forward them to their acquaintances / friends / colleagues (Kotler and Armstrong, 2015, pp. 456-457).

Blogs (web journals) are used by individuals and companies to post opinions or articles on various, yet well-established topics. Bloggers access social networks, such as Facebook, Twitter for promotion. For companies, using blogs as marketing tools has the advantage of a new, inexpensive and personal way to engage in online conversations with the consumers, with the intention of listening to them, monitoring them and getting them involved in developing relationships (Kotler and Armstrong, 2015, pp. 457-458).

At present, the almost generalized use of the Internet and of digital technologies and devices has led to the emergence and diversification of the social networks. They represent independent and commercial online communities where people come together to express and exchange views, opinions, information. Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok or Pinterest are among the best known, but also the most used social networks. It is increasingly noticeable that they are part of the companies' marketing mix, and marketing specialists are involved in capitalizing on the benefits offered by their use.

The activity within the social networks is targeted, personalized, interactive, fast; it can be used anytime and anywhere; it is considered to have the greatest capacity for customer involvement and socialization. Social network marketing is the process of creating brand communities, respectively the place where those who are fans of the brand can share ideas, experiences, and information (Kotler and Armstrong, 2015, pp. 460-462).

It should be noted that social networks' marketing subjects the companies to permanent challenges, from many points of view, and consumers have control over the content of the social networks. While there is a rapid increase in the use of social networks, companies are turning to the use of platforms as communication tools (Kim and Ko, 2012).

Increasingly, companies are turning to combined marketing actions, namely the *marketing of integrated social networks* (Kotler and Armstrong, 2015, pp. 460-462).

Mobile marketing means that messages / the content are transmitted using smartphones, tablets or other mobile devices. The number of people owning mobile devices is high and it keeps growing, and web traffic is also growing. Under these conditions, companies are increasingly

expanding mobile marketing, in order to lead customers to immediate purchasing actions, to facilitate the purchasing process, but also to develop relationships.

Even if digital technologies' innovations have been quickly integrated into marketing, one can notice from the current practical activity of the companies that they are combined with traditional marketing techniques, and the future will surely surprise us with new creative strategies.

3. Research methodology

In order to achieve the objectives pursued in this study, we have combined several types of research (Jupp, 2010, pp. 95-97, 102-103; 113-115; 117-119) (Silverman, 2004, pp. 41-43; 48-54). We have used desk research, based on gathering secondary information from the specialized literature regarding the theoretical approaches to the current impact of the digital technologies' progress in the promotion / marketing communication activity of the companies, on the one hand, and on the other hand to be able to highlight the particular aspects of the flower market. Furthermore, we have used secondary data, collected in a longitudinal and transversal profile, represented by the economic indicators of the analyzed company (Jugănar, 1998, pp. 15-17; 23-25; 29-30). The field research, used mainly with the help of the observation method, has been used to conduct the case study, respectively the strategy for implementing modern means of promotion within the activity of a newcomer company on the flower market in Constanța.

4. Data, results, and discussion

We consider that a marketing approach of the "flowers" product brings to attention interesting, particular aspects, with implications for all the categories of participants present on the flower market. There is the opinion, based on archaeological evidence, that man's attention to flowers has manifested itself since ancient times, especially for their decorative and medical role (<https://ematoader.ro/prima-florarie-o-incursiune-istoric/>). Regarding the cultivation of flowers for decorative purposes, it is considered that it began to be practiced during the slavery period, and the meticulous work, needed for their growth and care, was done by the slaves (Milițiu and Ailincăi, 1967, pp. 17-25).

The production, especially floral arrangements, is gradually becoming a real art, which has evolved over the centuries, within different civilizations. The Japanese school of Ikebana is famous in the world for the beauty of its floral arrangements, which is why it is assumed that the first flower shop appeared in this country.

The demand, as a component of the flower market, must be analyzed starting from people's need to be surrounded by beauty, to express / convey a variety of feelings (of joy, esteem, gratitude, love, admiration), on different occasions and events. Most often, the demand for flowers refers to cut flowers, arranged in bouquets, garlands, wreaths.

The final buyer of flowers is often represented by natural persons / individuals, sometimes by legal persons / entities (Limited Liability Companies, firms, institutions, organizations, etc.). It is less common for a person to buy a flower arrangement for himself/herself. At the same time, flowers are bought to be given to individuals, which is why they are considered gifts. From a marketing research perspective, all these mentioned aspects represent particular aspects of the flower market.

It is opportune to analyze the buyers distinctly from those who use, consume, benefit from a certain product (a category known in marketing as end users / consumers), respectively the persons to whom the flower gift-product is offered. In order to research the flower market, these two categories (the flower buyers and those who receive the flowers) must be identified and studied, the factors involved in shaping the purchasing and flower offering decision must be known, the purchasing behavior, the aspects that intervene in the satisfaction felt by buyers, but also by those who receive the flowers as gifts, what marketing actions can be used to retain the customers and increase their satisfaction (Cătoiu and Teodorescu, 2004, pp. 13-20).

There are particular aspects, from one country to another, brought together in a code of manners when it comes to offering flowers as a gift - only flowers are offered or together with other gift-products on certain occasions, to whom flowers can be offered, the connection between the

assortments of flowers and certain events, the significance of the color of the flowers, the interpretation of the number of flowers and the size of the bouquet / arrangement, the way the packaging is done, etc. (Toma, 2009, pp. 68-74 ; <https://ematoader.ro/prima-florarie-o-incursiune-istoric/>).

For the marketing specialists, these represent directions for conducting research on the demand and behavior of flower buyers in order to organize the activity of the offer representatives, in terms of modernization and correlation with the demand.

The offer of flowers is represented by national and international producers, distribution limited liability companies / firms (wholesale) having in their structure stocking / storage centers, adequate means of transport, equipped with installations capable of ensuring certain temperature and humidity parameters for an adequate storage of the flowers, as well as exhibition and sale spaces (in the case of the retailers). The merchandising principles are applied both inside and outside the flower shops / retail spaces and represent elements of individualization / personalization of the offer, but also of attracting the demand (Mouton and Paris, 2009, pp.19-26; 245-263; 299-307).

The flower market is marked by an intensification of the direct competition, manifested in the increase in the number of offerers-sellers, and also by the diversification of the sale, payment, communication means with the customers.

The trends in the evolution of demand and supply of flowers are determined by the cumulative action of various general factors (including the level of economic development, the standard of living, the degree of culture and civilization), but also specific / local factors (traditions, customs, tastes, preferences, personality, lifestyle, motivation, religion values, etc.) (Datulescu, 2006, pp. 23-24) (Cătoi and Teodorescu, 2004, pp. 47-53). The technological progress is a factor which has strongly marked the entire economic and social activity in the last century, implicitly the production, distribution, promotion, but also the behavior of flower buyers (Kotler *et al*, 2010, pp.45-54). Perceived as an opportunity, both customers and offerers have shown a real phenomenon of acceptance and integration within their work of information technology elements. In this context, the traditional marketing activities have been rethought, reconfigured, and the consequences have materialized in the creation of new communication channels, the development of new market forms, the reduction of the time and space lag.

The company Darux Flowers SRL (Limited Liability Company) from Constanța was established in 2019 and since July of the same year, it started the activity of selling cut flower arrangements by means of a vending machine (unique in Constanța, in the year 2019; currently, there are over 15 such devices in Romania). This appliance, with the appearance of a refrigerated display case, is located inside a shopping centre in the city center, it has a special equipment, with a control system for temperature and humidity values, as well as software that gives the user the opportunity to monitor it remotely, informing him/her in real time about all the operating parameters. The capacity of the vending machine is 18 floral arrangements.

The promotion strategy of Darux Flowers SRL expresses a modern vision, structured on the use of digital, online marketing, social network marketing and mobile marketing. The inauguration of the vending machine, in July 2019, also represented the moment of the company's appearance in the digital / online environment on the Facebook, Instagram and Google MyBusiness platforms. With the creation of digital profiles on the Facebook and Instagram platforms, the company began to use the Business Suite promotion tool. Towards the end of the year 2020, the company expanded its selling methods by inaugurating an online store (webshop), integrating Google Ads into the promotion activity.

The combined use of these online promotion techniques offers the advantage of a great openness towards various customer segments, the permanent monitoring of their purchasing behavior, being reflected in the increase of its results. The information submitted online is the general identification data of the company (name, address, field of activity, visual identification elements of the brand), ways to contact the company, aspects related to the product offer and the opening hours.

At the same time, the use of online marketing means not only the transmission of information to customers, but also a framework to develop the communication with them, to gather information from them, to build a database on the perception of the company's offer and the level of desire satisfaction. The processing and interpretation of this information, within the marketing research, is

the starting point for reaching decisions regarding the successful organization and management of the company's activity.

A permanent concern is to follow the evolution of certain indicators considered representative for the activity of the company Darux Flowers SRL. Thus, in the case of the vending machine, the following indicators are monitored: the sales volume, the time and date of their realization, the payment method used by the customers (cash or card), the performance of each product and its share in the sales volume.

For the online store, other categories of indicators are followed, respectively: the frequency of website traffic, the source of website traffic, the time spent by users on the website, the sales volume, the product performance, the performance of posts and ads on social networks, recurrence of visitors, the reviews received, the activity of the competition and its performances.

Table no.1 The evolution of the sales (in terms of value) by months and years

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
2019	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,980	3,900	3,840	4,090	5,560	15,150
2020	4,020	3,665	6,180*	0	0	0	1,520	3,570	5,340	3,710	3,630	3,500
2021	5,490	7,950	15,090	6,730	7,210	7,920	-	-	-	-	-	-

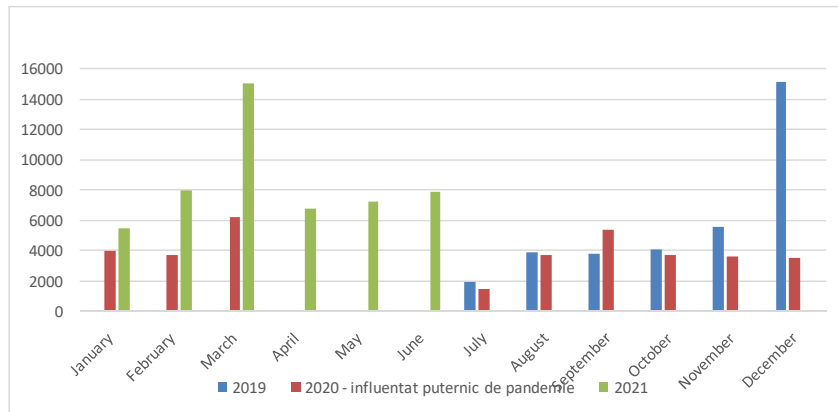
Source: internal records of the company

For the interpretation of the data in the table, we call attention to some aspects pertaining to the economic situation specific to the last two years. In July 2019, at the beginning of the activity of Darux Flowers SRL, the general economic situation was within normal parameters. Even though it entered a highly competitive market, the evolution of the value of the sales volume increased in July-December 2019, which shows that, from the very beginning, the company's offer (representing the sale of floral arrangements through the vending machine) attracted more and more customers from Constanța. The high volume of sales in December 2019 correlates with the theoretical aspects we have presented in this study, namely that flowers are a gift-product, and during that month there are many opportunities for offering flowers (St. Nicholas, the days of Christmas, St. Stephen, New Year's Eve, but also the organization of events - weddings, baptisms).

In the first three months of 2020, the activity continued to grow, registering a significant increase in March, due to the events specific to that month. From March 20 until the beginning of July 2020, the activity ceased, due to the restrictions imposed by the authorities during the Coronavirus pandemic. After the elimination of some restrictions, the activity recovered, but in December, the commercial units in Constanța municipality were closed on weekends and people's movements were restricted, these measures being imposed by the authorities as a result of the evolution of the Coronavirus pandemic. Additionally, between March 2020 and February 2021, there were permanent movement restrictions for people, bans on organizing parties and other events, which is why the demand for flowers decreased considerably.

Knowing better and better the customers' behavior, correlated with the evolution of the market situation (sometimes difficult to anticipate and without the possibility to influence it through microeconomic measures), at the end of 2020 the decision was made to open an online store (webshop), also integrating in the promotion activity the digital tool Google Ads. This new strategy has meant for the Darux Flowers SRL company an increase in visibility, communication and attraction of new customer segments, which was reflected in the significant increase (from one month to another, starting from January 2021) of the value of the sales volume. It should be noted that, in March 2021, there was an almost equal level of the sales volume (15,090 u.m.) to the one recorded in December 2019 (15,150 u.m.).

Figure no.1. Representation of the evolution of the value of the sales volume in the case of Darux Flowers SRL, by months and years



Source: internal records of the company

The evolution of the sales volume, throughout the entire period of the company's existence, shows that the decisions taken regarding the organization and management of the company's activity, especially in terms of the marketing activity, had the capacity to contribute to the development of the business.

5. Conclusions

The last 30 years emphasize the growing access of people and companies to the Internet, the growing use of a variety of digital devices, which has posed new challenges for online / digital marketing activity, but also for the purchasing and / or consumption behavior.

In the promotion / communication activity, traditional media sources, such as TV, radio or magazines have started to be replaced, more and more, by social networks and media platforms for researching information. The viral content, which disseminates information among people through social networks, is much more powerful than traditional media sources, such as TV, radio, and print advertising. Communication knows new forms and dimensions of manifestation. Through social networks, consumers are quickly connected to each other, but also with brands and vice versa (Wolny and Mueller, 2013).

Being aware of these directions of evolution, a company established in June 2019 included in its development strategy elements of online / digital marketing. In June 2021, the Darux Flowers SRL company was using for the promotion / communication activity a combination of digital / direct marketing tools; specifically, the company has a website, www.vitria-constanta.ro, an email address, office@vitria-constanta.ro, a Facebook account VitriaConstanta - <https://www.facebook.com/VitriaConstanta>, an Instagram account @VitriaConstanta - <https://www.instagram.com/vitriacostanta/?hl=en>, a profile within Google MyBusiness - Vitria Constanta vending flower machine.

Its online presence grants to the Darux Flowers SRL company the following advantages: increased flexibility and adaptability in the evolution of customer needs; knowledge and careful monitoring of consumer behavior; improving customer relations, presenting and promoting the product offer.

In the communication strategy of the Darux Flowers SRL company, other digital marketing tools will be introduced both in line with the trends of technological progress, and with the changes in customer behavior. These decisions aim to increase customer satisfaction, improve its image and strengthen its position on the flower market in Constanța.

6. References

- Cătoi, I., Teodorescu, N., 2004. *Consumer Behavior [Comportamentul consumatorului]*. Bucharest: Uranus Publishing House.
- Datculescu, P., 2006. *Marketing research [Cercetarea de marketing]*. How you get into the consumer's mind, how you measure and analyze information [Cum pătrunzi în mintea consumatorului, cum măsoari și cum analizezi informația]. Bucharest: BRANDBUILDERS GRUP Publishing House.
- Jugănar, M., 1998, *Theory and practice in marketing research [Teorie și practică în cercetarea de marketing]*. Bucharest: Expert Publishing House.
- Kotler, Ph., Armstrong, G., 2015. *Introduction to marketing [Introducere în marketing]*. Bucharest: PEARSON Publishing House.
- Kotler, Ph., Kartajaya, H., Setiawan, I., 2010. *Marketing 3.0. From product to consumer and human spirit [Marketing 3.0. De la produs la consumator și la spiritul uman]*. Bucharest: Public Publishing House.
- Jupp, V., 2010. *Dictionary of social research methods [Dicționar al metodelor de cercetare social]*. Iași: Polirom Publishing House.
- Milițiu, A., Ailincăi, N., 1967. *Floriculture [Floricultură]*. Bucharest: Didactic and Pedagogical Publishing House.
- Mouton, D., Paris, G., 2009. *Merchandising practice [Practica merchandisingului]*. Iași: Polirom Publishing House.
- Silverman, D., 2004. *Interpretation of qualitative data [Interpretarea datelor calitative]*. Iași: Polirom Publishing House.
- Toma, F., 2009. *Floriculture and Floral Art [Floricultura și Artă florală]*, Vol. V: *Floral art*. Bucharest: Invel Multimedia Publishing House.
- Kim, A. J., Ko, E., 2012. Do social media marketing activities enhance customer equity? An empirical study of luxury fashion brand. *Journal of Business Research* 65, 2012. [online]. Available at: < <http://hamkarfile.ir/up/1650.pdf> > [Accessed March 17 2021].
- Toader E., 2020. *First-florist-a-history-raid [Prima-florarie-o-incursiune-istorie]* <<https://ematoader.ro/prima-florarie-o-incursiune-istorie/>> [Accessed 3.06.2021].
- Wolny, J., Mueller, C., 2013. Analysis of fashion consumers motives to engage in electronic word-of-communication through social media platforms. *Journal of Marketing Management* (PDF), [online]. Available at: < <https://242fashion.files.wordpress.com/2016/11/peer-to-peer1.pdf> > [Accessed April 14 2021].