

# ROLE OF INSIGHTS IN COMMERCIAL COMMUNICATIONS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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**Abstract:** *This article deals with insight in commercial communications. There is sound importance found in foreign literature that is assigned to insights. However, the attitude of practitioners in the Czech Republic was not found. Thus, the objective of this article is to present a survey that maps situation in commercial communications in the Czech Republic. Qualitative research, more precisely, in-depth interviews with 12 experts and practitioners in commercial communications were used. The research confirmed the importance of insights in the commercial communication also in the Czech republic with following key conclusion. Insight creation is likely not to be a process with standardised inputs and guaranteed outcome. Rather it is a collaborative process building upon the synthetic but also creative abilities of its participants. Following practical impacts were derived. First, this research is likely to be the first attempt to map the application of insights in marketing in the Czech republic. Second, inefficiency in the process of creating insights was detected. If this can be minimised, the time and money costs could be saved and communication campaign process could get more effective.*

**Keywords:** *insight, commercial communication, practitioner, process of creation, consumer*

**JEL Classification:** M37

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The term "insight" is used in many areas, such as marketing, media, consumer research, innovation, trade, psychology or psychiatry. This article deals with insight from the view of advertising practitioners and, in a way, from the view of consumer research as well. Thus it is the consumer insight that is dealt with primarily in the article.

There are many definitions and descriptions. Professionals often discuss what an insight is and is not. Gosh and Ramalingam [1] offer following definition: "An insight is a statement based on a deep understanding of the target audience's attitudes and beliefs, that resonates at an emotional level with consumer, provokes a clear response, which, when leveraged, has the power to change consumer behaviour. Insight must affect a change in consumer behaviour that benefits the brand, leading to the achievement of the marketing objective." From the view of theory and practice, this is probably the most precise definition, which determines the word "insight" clearly, describing its particular capabilities and making demands on it.

Insight in commercial communications is used in three different ways. First, an insight creates a bond between the brand and the consumer [2]. The insight shows to which degree the brand understands the consumer's needs [3]. The insight needs to attract the consumer and initiate an inner process – provoke emotions, shake with attitudes, and initiate a revision of consumer preferences in the consumer mind. Second, as regards development of an advertising campaign, an insight inspires the advertising idea. The advertising idea is the way the brand – either the product or the service – is sold to the consumer and, again, should provoke a positive emotional reaction, which will be transferred to the product or service [4]. If the insight is properly communicated and supported by other marketing tools, it has the capability and power to change the consumer's behaviour in favour of the brand [1]. Third, the

insight overcomes consumer's barriers against the brand. These are the awareness of the brand, its relevance, credibility, uniqueness or other negative attitudes (internal document, Young&Rubicam).

As regards the purpose, "an insight is the tool to deliver the statement about the brand in the consumer's memory in the most efficient way" [5].

There is sound evidence in foreign literature that research, verification and correctness of the insight is extremely important both in the professional and in the practical sphere of commercial communications [6], [7], [8], [9]. However, the attitude of professionals who work with insight in the Czech Republic, if any, was not found in any available literature.

Thus, the objective of this article is to present a survey of the situation in commercial communications in the Czech Republic to find out whether in this country the insight is perceived as the key tool to achieve higher relevance and better understanding of the target group or not. The research should reveal whether and how the particular subjects interpret the insight and how they work with it.

With respect to the depth, openness, and explorative character of the above-specified research questions, the qualitative research more precisely in-depth interviews with experts and practitioners in commercial communications was chosen as the most suitable method.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The method of in-depth interview or individual depth exploration is based on individual questioning. The interviewer can react to the respondent's answers, which gives them a chance to create a very intensive interaction. The exploration is not based on a questionnaire but on an explorative scheme, which provides deeper understanding of the problem area, relationships and respondents' attitudes, with accent to their diversity. In addition, one can do such type of research on his own and at low cost.

In commercial communications, the insight is used when creating the communication campaign. Communication campaign is usually created by three subjects: client, research agency, communication agency. Following the client's instructions, the research agency conducts a consumer research, that is contacts potential or existing consumers to find answers to the client's questions and issues, providing deeper understanding or insight into the minds, opinions and behaviour of the target group. The client defines the marketing strategy of the brand, provides source documents both to the research agency and to the communication agency, selects information, and, furthermore, makes decisions and gives approvals. The advertising creators, i.e. creative communication agencies, are the people who, following from the available information, source documents and client's expectations, will create the required commercial output. Therefore, all three parties were considered to be interviewed.

The key component of the research was quality recruitment of the creators and co-creators, since employees and people with decision powers, really influencing the process of advertisement making were needed. Thus it was important to eliminate people in executive or administrative positions. The selective criterion for respondents was marketing experience of at least 5 years, or the position of manager, senior or higher. At least 10 in-depth interviews were planned.

People were interviewed by author herself, during 3 weeks, from 5 to 22 December 2011 in Prague, face to face. Altogether, 20 potential respondents were contacted. The respondents were selected on the basis of the author's 5-year experience in the business. Contacts, both direct and indirect, were used. It was extremely important to choose independent respondents, i.e. to eliminate people who the author had been in close working contact with. Furthermore, before the particular respondents were contacted, their competence for the research was verified in all available ways (searching for the profile of the person in Internet browsers, interviewing colleagues of the potential respondent, etc.). When selecting potential respondents, the emphasis was placed on diversity as it was necessary to include both large companies (the client and the agencies) and smaller players in the market as well. All the factors resulted in two positive aspects of recruiting for the interview.

First, the people were quite willing to take part in the in-depth interview. Three ways of contacting were used – through an intermediary, online and by telephone. Out of the 20 contacted practitioners, 12 persons in total participated in in-depth interviews. 4 respondents excused themselves for being too busy, 2 were ill and 2 respondents did not react at all, despite repeated attempts for contact. Thus the success rate in contacting potential respondents achieved 60%.

Second, the above-specified requirements for the respondents (business experience or higher position) were fulfilled. Except for one respondent, both requirements were fulfilled in the same time, i.e. the experience and the higher managerial position as well. Therefore, the contacted people were considered as competent to provide their opinions on the given topic.

Half of the respondents were people from communication agencies. 2 respondents were from research agencies and 4 from marketing departments.

From the view of the profile of the participating companies, it was a mixture of large, medium-sized and small companies. To be more specific, at the time of the research the respondents were working for the following companies:

- i. Communication agencies: Young&Rubicam, McCann-Ericksson, Team Red, Publicis Modem, Nydrle Digital, Red Media
- ii. Research agencies: TNS Aisa, Perfect Crowd
- iii. Clients: Unilever, Brown-Forman, Danone, ING Bank

As regards the required length of professional experience in the branch, most of the respondents had gained experience in other companies as well (clients: Procter&Gamble, Vodafone, Coca-Cola; communication agencies: Euro RSCG, Leo Burnett, Arc Worldwide, Advatures, Proximity).

The interviews were held in Prague, in the company premises or outside the company offices. Every interview was recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions are available if upon request.

The explorative interview was based on the explorative scheme. In quest of achieving the objective, the maximum independency and spontaneity of the interview, the respondents did not know the particular objective of the research, which was to identify the role of insight in commercial communications. What is more, they did not know the topic (insight) either. They only knew that the in-depth interview would be linked to the topic of working with target groups. Each interview was facilitated in this way. The interview began with sorting questions. After the warm-up, the respondent was asked to say something about their work. After that, the topic was open in general. The moderator waited to see whether and how the respondents mentioned working with insight and its usage. If they did not start speaking about insight themselves, after a certain time they were prompted to do so. From that moment, the interview was directed to the problem area of insight, i.e. how they use it, how they work with it, how they obtain it, and how they validate it. In the end of the interview, each respondent was asked to describe an insight in his own words, i.e. to formulate a definition of the insight. Within the in-depth interviews with the respondents – clients and communication agencies – the following question areas were used: What information about a target group do you take into consideration? Which information is the key information for you? How do you obtain insights? How do you validate them? How would you define an insight? The results from the research are analysed in the following section.

### 3. RESULTS

First, it was confirmed by the in-depth interviews that insight is being used when creating communication campaigns. With view of the fact that during the interviews 50% of the respondents began speaking about the insight spontaneously, the concept of insight is considered as "rooted" in the branch of commercial communications in the Czech Republic and is used in practice.



Figure 1 Word cloud created from insight definitions

Source: author's research

This is supported by the fact that the remaining 50% of the respondents confirmed that they worked with insight once they were specifically asked.

Second, it was obvious from the definitions of the insight and its attributes formulated by the respondents that the general awareness of the concept was quite good, although some of the respondents made the concept somehow simpler.

Third, following from the word cloud presented above, nearly all definitions comprised three basic components – the consumer, the consumer's need, and the effort to understand it. Furthermore, most of the respondents connected the insight with a particular product. Fewer yet still the majority of the respondents have mentioned the insight's capability to provoke a certain reaction in the consumer, in the form of emotions, becoming open towards the brand, changing the attitude towards the brand or improvement of the consumer's current situation. Furthermore, most of the respondents said that the insight should be connected with a particular brand or product. Some of the definitions were rather simplified, which may be confusing, because they miss the connection with the brand or product (consumer questionnaire, understanding consumer's needs, consumer's inner world). Nevertheless one can conclude that the general idea was more or less understood correctly by most of the respondents.

Fourth, it was obvious from the interviews and from the graph above that the insight was considered as one of the key information inputs connected with the target group when creating a communication campaign, along with socio-demographic and psycho-graphic descriptions.

Fifth, to generate an insight, the respondents mostly used the qualitative consumer research and/or their personal experience. In addition, the respondents often used a dialogue with their friends or colleagues; sometimes the insight creation was entrusted to a creative communication agency. However, the in-depth interview showed that the process of searching for an insight and its creation did not seem to be very easy, and the results were uncertain for most of the respondents. Their solutions were the engagement of multiple participants, detailed consumer research or an effort to develop an insight making methodology. The research agencies answered that they use both brand and non-brand solutions when searching for an insight (for example, TNS Aisa – Insightment, Perfect Crowd use the concept of co-creation and online communities). Nevertheless, despite the fact that the procedure is known, as the agencies put it, there is no warranty that the result will be satisfactory.

As regards the validation, according to the respondents, their assessment often depended on their personal or their colleagues' feelings, and/or they tested the insight through consumer research within creative execution.

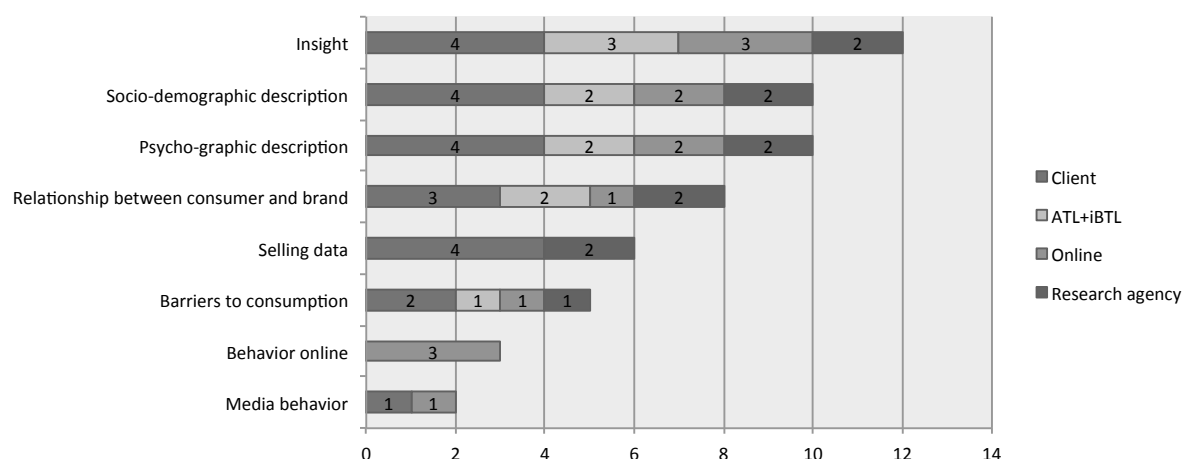


Figure 2 Key inputs about target audience when creating communication campaign

Source: author's research

#### 4. IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH

Several practical impacts of this work can be found. First, such research is found to be unique in the Czech Republic. Nothing similar has been detected during literature research. So far, all the materials found mapped the territory of insight already connected to particular brands, products or problems. No research focused on insight as such. Therefore this research is likely to be the first attempt to map the application of insight in marketing praxis from a theoretical point of view with an attempt to give it a certain structure and detect grey areas suitable for further research.

Second, the practical impact is also seen in the structure of respondents. All were active experts with an average of 9 years' experience in commercial communication. Therefore the research output can be considered as highly realistic and with strong predicative power.

Third, thanks to involvement of all three key parties that actively influence the insight creation process (client, communication agency and research agency), several discrepancies were found. First, the research shows the effort to "process" the insight creation, to develop a kind of

manual to follow when formulating an insight. On the other hand, most of the respondents know that this is not enough for an insight of high quality. Thus, an insight cannot be perceived only just as product of a process. Most of the respondents insist that insight creation is rather the result of the collaboration of multiple parties. Second, the insight creation is preceded by a rather difficult phase of collecting all available relevant information about the target group. This phase is usually covered by the client and by the research agency. The information is then transferred to a communication agency, which, according to the outputs from the interviews, selects the information and sets priorities. However, sometimes the information is not exhaustive or does not provide the necessary qualitative trace, which means that the communication agencies have to invest extra time to collect more information.

Both discrepancies stated above are likely to lead to inefficiency in the process of creating a communication campaign, and if these can be minimised, the time and money costs could be saved throughout the creative process of generating an insight and developing communication campaigns.

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