

MARKETING SUPPORT OF GREEN INNOVATIONS BY COMMUNICATION MIX TOOLS

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Abstract: *The issue of environmental protection requires our attention in order to make up for our own unecological activities. People do continuously feel the need for environmental protection and this results in creating a long-term trend of green innovations in the commercial sphere. Those innovations shall be fully environmentally friendly or even enable us to improve the environment. Innovations are being implemented for various reasons, e.g. social pressure, following current trends or increasing effectivity of sales after implementation. The article deals with green innovations and their support through marketing communication tools.*

Keywords: *Innovations. Green innovations. The environment. Marketing. Marketing communication.*

JEL Classification: *M31*

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, green innovations are becoming a common term to use. Businesses do take into account the need for their implementation and as customers call for greener products, entrepreneurs are trying to implement their business activities in a more ecological way, i.e. to put into practice the principles of environmentally friendly behaviour while some of them are trying to implement these principles in production and the others in most of their business activities.

There are different groups of customers with regard to green features of products. Some customers call for a change by demanding green products, others are more or less reluctant or purchase a given product by accident or on recommendation. Only time can show if this is a new fashion to follow or real awareness in order to respect our roots and the environment we live in. We can notably be motivated by desire to live in harmony with the environment, live more healthy and more naturally and start protecting everything valuable the nature offers to us.

The field of green innovations is highly dynamic and therefore it is influenced by various trends and fashions. At present, businesses consider creating inventions and their implementations in innovation processes to be of high importance. However, they do not sufficiently benefit from particular tools of communication mix to use in a mass marketing campaign in order to promote the implemented innovations.

Green innovations

A consumer way of life and our permanent struggle for tangible goods and their collection have all caused great imbalance in the nature. All this results in over-exploitation of natural resources and a lack hereof (either present or anticipated), environmental, water, air pollution, exceeding consumption and consequential enormous burden on production systems, factories and eventually drain of natural resources. Nevertheless, we do feel a need for changing the attitude of present generations and replace it with alternatives which are more favourable to the mankind, the

environment or human existence as such.¹ Green innovations are one of the possibilities how to contribute to change by particular steps and thus pave the way for improvement or even change in human thinking.

The definition of green innovations draws from the definition of innovations while taking into consideration another viewpoint – positive impact on the environment either as a direct result of the innovation process or a secondary effect of implementation of a new business process or services. We recognise various definitions although each of them expresses the mere basis of a green innovation:

Fussler and James understand a green innovation as: *„implementing new or considerably improved products (goods or services), production processes, marketing or organisational methods with the aim to create positive impact on the environment.“*²

As the European Commission states: *„ecoinnovation is each form of the innovation with the aim to achieve considerable and tangible progress towards sustainable development by lowering negative impact on the environment or reaching more effective and more responsible exploitation of resources including energies.“*³

Ecoinnovation Observatory states that a green innovation is understood as: *„implementing a new or a considerably improved product (goods or services), a process, an organisational change or a marketing solution which lower exploitation of natural resources (including raw materials, energies, water or soil) and eliminate release of toxic substances in course of the whole product life cycle.“*⁴

¹ BEZÁKOVÁ, Z. 2013. Green innovations: Marketing challenge. In *Quo vadis massmedia, Quo vadis marketing*. Trnava: FMK UCM, 2013, p. 15.

² FUSSLER, C. – JAMES, P. 1996. *Driving eco-innovation: A breakthrough discipline for innovation and sustainability*. London: Pitman, 1996, p. 36.

³ *Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme – Eco-Innovation*. 2014. [online]. Available on: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecoap/pdfs/guidelines_for_cip_eco_innovation.pdf>. [quoted on 8 May 2015].

⁴ *The Eco-innovation challenge*. 2011. [online]. Available on: <http://www.eco-innovation.eu/media/ECO_report_2011.pdf>. [quoted on 8 May 2015].

Green innovations can also be defined as: „*innovations focused on tangible progress which results in sustainable development mainly by lowering negative impact on the environment or achieving greater effectivity and responsibility while exploiting natural resources including energies.*“⁵

Green innovations can bear a different form (e.g. new ways of energy production, use of biomass, thermal resources, solar, water or wind energy, implementation of product recycling, implementation of new ecological materials, manufacturing of bioproducts, hybrid engines, e-cars, etc.) all resulting in positive impact on the environment. Such a change, no matter if it relates to products, processes or other production procedures is much needed these days. Many of us may ask a question which type of the innovation is the most important one? It may seem that on the top of chart are green innovations related to natural resources and energy saving, yet even ordinary human activities, such as waste recycling within a business can be regarded as useful, i.e. forming smaller waste disposal dumps with consequent recycling.

Main principles to adhere to in order to ensure not only green innovations but also suitable production are as follows:⁶

- economical use of materials and raw materials,
- avoiding use of materials damaging the environment,
- minimising green-house emissions,
- minimising energy consumption,
- repetitive use of raw materials, components and energies,
- reducing the waste and creating possibilities for its simple processing and disposal.

Finally, the purpose of the whole innovation process lies in the change in thinking and directing investments in businesses with the aim to promote environmental protection and energy and resource saving while the main priority except for a profit margin are the efforts to support sustainable development.

Interaction between green innovations and marketing

Innovations and marketing communication belong to the two most important activities to be interconnected in the framework of business projects. In each step, the ongoing innovation process should be properly supported by a given marketing strategy in order to ensure immediate success. Green innovations are an important category of innovations. For a green innovation to be successful, it is not sufficient to launch a new product or service on the market as a mere result of the innovation process, give it a considerable price and make it accessible to customers. The key to success of a green innovation is communication with a customer. The aim is to determine a unified marketing strategy consisting of the whole communication mix. By way of a properly chosen marketing communication, the company informs customers on provision of products which can meet their wants and needs and comply with the required quality reflected by the price. The manner in which

the message is being remarkably communicated to a consumer – without fading out in the whole spectrum of innovations – requires flexible thinking, creativity and permanent search for ideas.⁷ The attitude is more than expected in case of green innovations, as they keep on searching for a proper consumer target group, which may vary considerably depending upon a given product. Therefore the selection of suitable tools along with their timing is more than crucial.

Education and information flow represent the core when raising environmental awareness. The main message can be spread by various forms of marketing communication without negative impact on the environment or exceeding material consumption. Personal communication should be more than emphasized along with organising environmentally-oriented events and using the Internet as a main communication channel. It is essential to build up trust that green innovations will bring a valuable advantage to the environment and simultaneously, they are consumer-friendly and profitable in comparison with the former product which did not bear the same ecological significance and prosperity. In order to achieve success in the marketing campaign it is important to note that besides briefly stating the key features of the product which contribute to lowering negative impact on the environment, the public should also be explained how those features will reflect in the environment and life of a person or society.⁸ In implementing green innovations, a good marketing communication strategy plays a key role as it relates to the overall environmental orientation and communication of the business. As stipulated by Borguła, the number of businesses taking into consideration environmental criteria when deciding upon purchase has considerably increased.

As he further states: „*businesses which perceive the trend and offer an ecological alternative can gain a competitive advantage through organisational factors instead of supporting exclusively marketing factors. Such an attitude will certainly be appreciated from the part of customers, employees or employers using their own efforts to promote positive alternatives.*“⁹

At present, both individuals and businesses do not only purchase a particular brand as such. In broader sense, by purchasing the product, they also buy company's philosophy and policy. They take into account a broader context of their buying habits and adapt their selection and purchasing behaviour hereto. This conscious behaviour is seen in other important spheres of human existence, e.g. applying for a job or investments where individuals place greater emphasis on environmental, ethical or social consequences of their behaviour.

Marketing communication in green innovations can be perceived from two angles. The first one is using marketing communication to communicate on green innovations of

⁷ KENDER, Š. 2005. Marketing communication and communication mix. In *Transfer of innovations, 2005*, vol. 8, p. 78.

⁸ PROKOPOVIČ, M. 2012. Green marketing and green innovations. In *Sustainable development of regions and business through innovative and green technologies*. Trnava: FMK UCM, 2012, p. 296.

⁹ BORGUŁA, M. *Environmental marketing: opportunity for innovations*. 2011. [online]. Available on: <of.euba.sk/zbornik2011/ZBORNIK%20VEDEC KYCH%-20STATI%202011PDF/KMR/BORGU%C4%BDA_M._KMR.pdf. [quoted on 8 May 2015].

⁵ RITOMSKÝ, A. 2009. Reflexions of innovators as a methodological inspiration. In *Social and political analyses*, 2009, p. 21.

⁶ *Marketing and business strategy*. 2014. [online]. Available on: <http://www.people.vslib.cz>. [quoted on 8 May 2015].

particular businesses in order to inform the public and create a positive company brand name. Green innovations themselves have positive impact on the Earth and business environment and by proper communication they can generate long-term financial profits. The second point of view is using ecological solutions and innovations directly for marketing activities of businesses. The volume of goods, consumption of energy and other raw materials used for marketing activities by businesses is enormous and therefore it causes great economic and ecological burden. As stated by Foret, successful communication between an addressor and an addressee occurs if the addressee receives a comprehensible and explicit message generating behaviour as anticipated by the addressee. Therefore, the message shall go through all the stages of the communication process without changing its main idea. Only the communication campaign complying with the above mentioned principles can be considered as effective and efficacious. Even though an effective communication campaign plays a crucial role in case of green innovations, small and middle-sized enterprises in Slovakia do not pay much attention hereto, which was proven by the results of the research presented in the following chapter. Final success of a new product as a result of the innovation process depends upon the quality of implementation of all the above mentioned stages – in the scientific, research, technical and marketing fields. It is understood that the innovation project of a new product requires complex elaboration of technical, manufacturing as well as marketing strategies.¹⁰ Green innovations are of high importance and therefore businesses, regardless of their size, should use their finance, efforts and energy to create inventions and innovation processes supported by mass marketing campaign. Businesses have to seize the opportunity and persuade a customer by way of various marketing communication tools or influence people's ecological awareness or purchasing behaviour by further education all for benefit of ecologically-friendly products.¹¹

As mentioned above, green innovations currently represent the field which has become an inseparable part of a business life. Their importance can be understood from various perspectives, e.g. in gaining a competitive advantage, improving a company's brand name or creating an added value. In the first place, it should be perceived as a right thing to do taking into consideration sustainability of business or the planet itself.

2. SCIENTIFIC AIM, METHODOLOGY/METHODS

In order to analyse the present condition of green innovations in Slovakia we carried out market research in February to March 2015 – its implementation and assessment represent one of the main objectives of the first year of the VEGA project 1/0640/15. The pioneering research focused on businesses to which a questionnaire was distributed (regardless of companies' innovation activities). The key objective of the research was to find out if the businesses had implemented green innovations in

past three years and if such an innovation had been supported by marketing communication. In total, 200 questionnaires were distributed with the feedback of 90 %.

3. FINDINGS

The research showed that 57.22 % of respondents had implemented green innovations in the period 2011 – 2014. The businesses stated to have implemented the following green changes:

- implementation of waste disposal – 56.31 %,
- implementation of new environmentally-friendly technologies – 47.57 %,
- implementation of a manufacturing procedure with lower energy consumption – 15.53 % and the other strategies - namely: new ways of energy production, use of new ecological materials, manufacturing of bio-products, purchase of e-cars for business use or use of new environmentally-friendly building materials.

We were trying to define a company's relation to environmental protection in everyday life and the fact whether they are aware of the term itself. The research showed that:

- 45 % of all respondents have active approach to environmental protection,
- 26.67 % of all respondents have precautionary approach,
- 6.11 % of all respondents have reactive approach,
- 3.33 % of all respondents have pro-active approach.

By summing up the data, we concluded that 81.11 % of businesses have positive approach to environmental protection. Moreover, businesses are fully aware of the term „green innovation“. Up to 86.67 % of businesses recognise the term „green innovation“ or they had encountered it before. Both awareness of the term and active approach to environmental protection form the basis for green initiatives and their implementation.

The research also showed that as far as marketing promotion is concerned, businesses prefer using the on-line environment – 51.43 % to off-line – 48.57 %. Only 35 businesses having implemented green innovations supported their green activities by marketing communication tools. The marketing communication tools which were the most often used are as follows:

- digital marketing – 51.43 %,
- advertising – 34.29 %,
- personal communication – 34.29 %,
- sales promotion activities – 22.86 %,
- PR – 20.00 %,
- direct marketing – 2.86 %.

4. DISCUSSIONS

The research also showed that 51.11 % of businesses are planning to implement communication support of green innovations by way of digital marketing techniques. Up to 48.89 % of businesses are more reluctant to using such a technique due to various reasons:

- overall disinterest in green innovations;
- personal reasons in the company hierarchy (non-existence of the marketing department);

¹⁰ ČIMO, J. 2010. The role of innovative marketing in the complex innovation strategy. In *Economic outlooks*, 2010, vol. 39, no. 3, p. 122.

¹¹ ZAUŠKOVÁ, A. – MIKLEŇČOVÁ, R. – MADLEŇÁK, A. – BEZÁKOVÁ, A. – MENDELOVÁ, D. 2013. Environmental protection and sustainable development in the Slovak republic. In *European Journal of Science and Theology*, 2013, vol. 9, no. 6, p. 153.

- difficulties in implementation of marketing communication tools;
- green innovations are not being used to such an extent to require communication and marketing promotion.

By carrying out the research, we succeeded in naming some crucial facts and thus determined next stages of the scientific research.

5. CONCLUSION

Text Innovations, as signs of positive changes, also represent a way to gain a competitive advantage and promote the results of a creative activity of innovators. Green innovations are bound to bring about positive

changes and improve the environment. In order for the positive change to occur in the form of a successful innovative process, it is necessary to implement all the stages of the innovation process by way of mass marketing communication support. Green innovations and effective marketing campaign focused on those innovations – these are the keys to success.

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