

Determinants of marketing and logistics management in a micro-enterprise

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Developing competitive advantage based on knowledge becomes the only efficient action in the context of constant changes and globalisation of economy (Kowalczyk, Nogalski, 2007)

Abstract

At present, under the conditions of some turbulent changes observed in our environment, micro-enterprises seek for opportunities to win their competitive positions in the market and in the sectors in which they operate

The aim of the article is to present marketing and logistics management as one of the methods applied to achieve the market objectives of micro-enterprises. As an integrated method, marketing and logistics management may contribute to the improvement in competitiveness; hence, the recognition of conditions required for the application of this method may also contribute to the improvement in competitiveness. In the article, a review of literature related to the discussed problems is presented. The expert literature on the analysed subject does not provide any publications on micro-enterprise management, and scientific research in that sector is very scarce and provides only some general data. Therefore, it is necessary to analyse the processes taking place in the micro-enterprise sector in more detail, especially in the field of modern methods of management. In the article, some considerations on the specificity of integrated logistics and marketing processes are presented.

Research methods: a review of expert literature and the Author's own case-study research. The research was carried out in the years 2015–2018 among a group of micro-enterprises in the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Province, Łódzkie Province, Mazowieckie Province and Wielkopolskie Province. The aim of the research was to identify conditions required for marketing and logistics management in micro-enterprises and to define the impact exerted by the factors that determine the implementation of that process. Recognising knowledge as a fundamental determinant of the

implementation of modern management methods in the aspect of micro-enterprise operation requires some in-depth analysis.

The article presents the results of the research based on the case-study of integrated marketing and logistics management, on the example of a virtual micro-enterprise.

The main conclusions: In a virtual micro-enterprise, it is possible to indicate the field of integration of marketing and logistics processes and to define their courses and conditions. Knowledge of logistics and marketing allows us to extend the field referring to the environment of the analysed company in virtual space.

Key words: Logistics, marketing, marketing and logistics management

Introduction

The main task of contemporary business management is integration of its logistics functions with its management system. An example of such integration is a combination of two concepts, namely: logistics oriented towards flows and marketing oriented towards the market. Logistics deals with flows of goods, services and related information in the scale of the company and the whole market system, in order to meet customers' needs. An enterprise acquires information about the structure of the market and its customers' current expectations through its marketing operations. The implementation of a strategy based on cohesive logistics and marketing combines both approaches in order to achieve the intended market targets set by an enterprise; however, it is a process that requires some particular managerial skills and theoretical knowledge. The aim of the article is to present some considerations on the problems related to logistics and marketing management. The analysis of the above-mentioned problems results from a research gap, which refers to the recognition of processes of micro-enterprise management, including marketing and logistics management. The article presents a review of expert literature and some selected results of the author's own case-study research on the aspect of marketing and logistics management in a micro-enterprise. The article is focused on providing answers to the following research questions:

Q1: What elements of marketing and logistics management are presently applied in micro-enterprises?

Q2: What are the determinants of efficient implementation of marketing and logistics management processes in micro-enterprises?

Marketing and logistics management as a combination of theoretical and practical knowledge

In order to provide a complete description of business operation and management in management sciences, both theoretical and practical knowledge should be presented (Sudoł, 2007). Practical knowledge is indispensable to formulate recommendations and practical directives for improvement in management. Considering micro-enterprises, theoretical knowledge does not often underlie implementation of management functions, as it can be observed in large enterprises (Sułkowski, 2005). Seeing knowledge as a fundamental determinant for the implementation of modern management methods in the aspect of micro-enterprise operation needs some more in-depth analysis. In the operation of micro-enterprises, domination of practical knowledge over theoretical knowledge can be observed, which means that micro-entrepreneurs make their decisions on the basis of their own experience and skills (Juchniewicz, Grzybowska, 2014). As the studies carried out by Juchniewicz and Grzybowska indicate, the most significant role in micro-enterprise operation is played by company owners' knowledge and experience and information acquired from their customers. Such knowledge is applied in the development of companies, in order to implement innovation activities. The rise of the information society naturally imposes the necessity of new forms of business operation, which are characterised by high dynamics and are based on knowledge and

information exchange, as nowadays these are treated as goods. The research studies by Juchniewicz and Grzybowska prove that entrepreneurs indicate the following sources of knowledge:

- internal sources: company owners, company employees and other companies operating in the sector
- market sources: customers, competitors, suppliers, consulting companies, laboratories and R&D institutions
- institutional sources: higher education institutions, research institutes, chambers of commerce and scientific centres
- other sources: conferences, fairs, exhibitions, scientific and specialist periodicals and publications, technology and industry associations and scientific associations (Juchniewicz, Grzybowska, 2014)

The highest evaluation marks are assigned to practical knowledge, whereas the sources of theoretical knowledge, such as higher education institutions or scientific institutions, are evaluated by the surveyed micro-entrepreneurs much lower. It may indicate the lack of micro-entrepreneurs' interest in the offer of theoretical knowledge put forward by higher education institutions and research institutes. Hence, a gap in theoretical knowledge can be identified as another determinant for the implementation of modern concepts related to micro-enterprise management. The growing complexity of inter-organisational links requires making fast business decisions and, consequently, better flows of knowledge in organisations (Mohrman, Finegold and Klein, 2002). Economy based on knowledge (Knowledge Economy, KE) is focused on transferring ideas, results of scientific research and skills from scientific institutions, higher education institutions and scientific research centres to groups of receivers of that knowledge and its users. Knowledge transfer (KT) is a process that links creators of knowledge and information and those who need them (Meece, 2009). Knowledge transfer can be of various nature, depending on:

- type of knowledge that is transferred
- type of tasks that must be performed with the use of relevant knowledge
- circumstances in which relevant knowledge is to be applied
- participants of the process of knowledge transfer

Considering relations between the scientific circles and the micro-enterprise sector, there is a barrier to the flow of knowledge, taking the form of weaker knowledge transfer (Janczewska, 2015). Coming as a result of corporate operation, new knowledge, new experience and skills provide new values, and they affect the formation of the knowledge society. According to the studies provided by Van de Ven and Johnson (Van de Ven, Johnson, 2006), an important element of the process of knowledge transfer is the identification of the knowledge gap, understood as a distance between the current knowledge and the knowledge that is indispensable for the development of a company (e.g., a technological gap). Recognition of the knowledge gap allows the involved parties to define their demand for knowledge. Problems related to knowledge management in micro-enterprises are scarcely discussed in expert literature. There are only some fragmentary research and observations provided. There are no publications on micro-enterprise management, on the application of modern management methods and systems, including knowledge management (Janczewska, 2014). Identification of attributes related to micro-enterprise competitiveness may be defined with the use of the following approaches:

- the influence exerted by a company on its environment and surroundings
- instruments applied by companies to develop their competitiveness
- competitive potential and positions taken by entities
- macro-economic instruments applied to control competitiveness of entities, enterprises, regions and economies
- levels of competition
- the scale of the influence exerted by entities

M. Koziół believes that one of the most important internal barriers to the development of micro-enterprises is an education barrier (Koziół, 2013). He lists the following factors that hinder the development of companies operating in the SME sector:

- low entrepreneurship culture
- insufficient knowledge of modern management methods
- limited access to economic information
- lack of skills required to acquire, to collect and to apply information from the environment
- low level of using the Internet and other IT tools
- gaps in the qualification potential resulting from low qualifications of employees
- high turnover of employees, especially of specialists
- low abilities and will to learn
- no education system related to the field of small business and others (Wilmańska, 2010)

In micro-enterprises, advanced methods of supply forecasting (SCM), which are fundamental elements of planning and providing purchase simulations in large companies (Marchesini, Alcântara, 2016), are not applied. The most often applied methods are based on micro-enterprise owners' intuition and experience, including the demand for products or services. The sources of information are mainly relations with customers and observations of activities undertaken by market competitors.

A systemic concept of marketing and logistics management in micro-enterprises

In expert literature, there is a scarce number of publications which refer to the marketing and logistics approach towards business management. Considering the context related to the improvement in competitiveness in the SME sector, logistics and marketing take an important position. The selection of an integrated strategy requires proper recognition of logistics processes and particular elements of marketing policy. Therefore, business knowledge about phenomena observed in the sector becomes indispensable, along with the knowledge about problems related to the fields of management, economics, marketing and many others. Development of science results in the fact that marketing knowledge as well as logistics knowledge undergo constant improvement and systematisation; this, in turn, results in the fact that it is necessary to complement knowledge, using numerous available sources. At present, the combination of knowledge related to logistics processes with skills related to marketing analysis and management methods becomes a necessity for small and middle-sized enterprises. SMEs are flexible, they respond quickly to the signals from the market, and they are able to fulfil various and changeable orders. Hence, logistics managers should combine knowledge and skills to plan logistics processes, to monitor them, to improve their implementation and to properly interpret the signals from the market (Gundlach, Bolumole, et al., 2006, pp. 428–438). New technologies and communication means additionally extend the possibilities of the global use of logistics and marketing, which provides new challenges to the improvement in corporate competitiveness. In developed countries, organisations have undergone the process of transformation, starting from some industrial forms to information processing, transferring and generating new knowledge (Teece 1998). Some beneficial effects for enterprises have been observed during the application of marketing methods supporting the processes of customer logistics services (Hofer, Ronn, Smith, et al., 2014). Table 2 presents the characteristics of logistics processes in micro-enterprises.

Table 1. The characteristics of logistics processes in micro-enterprises

Selected logistics processes	Features of the process in micro-enterprises
Purchasing and materials management	Processes are carried out in a constant, slow way, depending on the level of financial resources

Logistics of production/logistics of services	Processes are implemented by manual work, no automation, no implementation of quality management systems. The infrastructure of processes is adjusted to financial capabilities of entrepreneurs.
Transport	Enterprises are oriented towards minimisation of costs, transport processes are implemented with the use of company's own means of transport
Warehousing	Warehousing processes are implemented manually, with minimal use of machinery and equipment, including computers.
Inventory management	Monitoring and replenishment of inventory is implemented with the use of traditional methods; computers are occasionally applied and no specialist software is used to support inventory management.
Waste management	Ecological management is not implemented in a systemic way; activities under reverse logistics are occasionally implemented; there is no interest in waste management

Source: the Author's own study

The concept of marketing and logistics management includes the elements of generating demand for niche products or services with regard to the production capabilities and resources of particular enterprises. In the assumptions related to the concept of marketing and logistics management of an enterprise, customers and their needs are considered to be the starting point for the formulation of market strategies (Rojek, 2011). The surveyed entrepreneurs indicate the following as the most important strategic aims:

- customers' satisfaction
- integrated marketing and logistics operations: marketing-mix, logistics-mix
- profits earned by an enterprise

Marketing and logistics activities should form a cohesive system in micro-enterprises. The analysis of relations established among various elements of the system indicates their different character than the observed in large companies, which have complex structures and specialised organisational units. Considering their specific organisational structures and small numbers of employees, in micro-enterprises, various tasks are often performed by the same people. Figure 1 presents a scheme of a logistics system in a micro-enterprise along with its sub-systems. The system is composed of the following sub-systems:

- the internal sub-system of an enterprise and the processes related to purchasing, production, distribution, logistics infrastructure and marketing policy
- the external sub-system along with the elements of the environment of an enterprise, such as: the condition of economy and its economic level, legal regulations, technological advancement, social and cultural environment and natural environment

Logistics activities in micro-enterprises refer to the following fields:

- customer service – in micro-enterprises, it is based on direct contact with customers, interactive methods of information exchange
- transport – micro-enterprises use their own transport, or they outsource it, mainly in cooperation with courier companies
- inventory monitoring – micro-enterprises base their operation on limited amounts of materials, raw materials and packaging. Commercial companies store their goods at their suppliers' places, and goods are sent by transport companies
- storage – small financial resources limit the possibilities of storage
- warehousing – it refers to the currently needed materials required for production or for implementation of services

- order fulfilment – in the shortest possible time, in accordance with terms agreed upon with customers
- material purchasing for production – most frequently implemented on the basis of the just-in-time system
- forecasting the demand – based on market observation, customers' comments, specialist publications, information is provided in the Internet
- information management – mainly of the formal character, with reference to orders, commercial documents, customer databases
- movement of materials – during the process of production or distribution, it is applied on a small scale and it is related with the current implementation of customers' orders
- supply of spare parts and after-sale service – implemented on an ad-hoc basis, often as a result of customers' complaints or additional orders
- packaging – in micro-enterprises, these operations are most often performed by company owners or employees appointed for such tasks
- handling returned goods – returned goods and complaints are handled by company owners

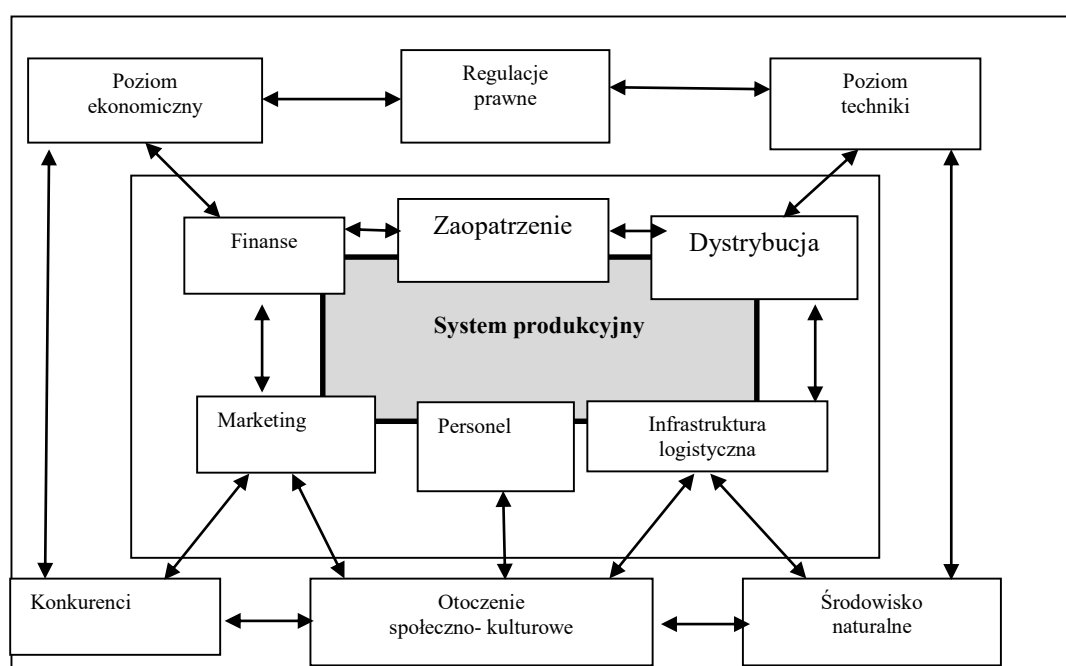


Figure 1. Levels of the logistics system in a micro-enterprise

Source: the Author's own study based on: J. Bendkowski, M. Kramarz, *Logistyka stosowana. Metody, techniki, Analizy*, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Śląskiej, Gliwice 2011, p.170.

Logistics operations of micro-enterprises should be integrated with their market strategies. Marketing operations undertaken by enterprises require some support in the form of efficient and quickly implemented logistics processes. In order to win a high position in the market, it is indispensable for companies to implement knowledge management, including knowledge acquisition, collection, sharing and application.

The marketing aim of a micro-enterprise is to reach the maximum number of customers for its products or services. Marketing operations require micro-enterprises to recognise their capabilities and resources in the market in which they operate (Pitta, Weisgal, Lynagh, 2006, p. 160). The next step in marketing operations undertaken by micro-enterprises is the development of their market offers and presentation of their products or services, in accordance with the marketing principles. Marketing instruments and their formation come as a classical example of operation undertaken by companies in the market. Marketing instruments include (4P) products, promotion, prices and place (distribution), and in the case of services – people. At present, some newer concepts of marketing are

applied (Noorachi, 2014). Acquisition of knowledge about the market in which contemporary micro-enterprises operate can be implemented with the use of modern IT technologies and the Internet. Market research should provide possibilities to acquire the following knowledge about the market:

- identification of the geographical scope and selection of the local, domestic and foreign markets
- estimation of the potential number of customers and their purchasing power
- estimation of the number of competitors and the characteristics of their commercial offers
- identification of the current trends and fashion, forecast of some possible changes in the future.

Based on their knowledge resources, micro-enterprises may develop their market offers and present them to customers, using some integrated means of marketing communication. Integration of marketing and logistics tasks in micro-enterprises allows them to implement their market tasks in a quick and dynamic way; eventually, it results in an increase in customers' satisfaction. Knowledge resources come as a significant determinant in the development and improvement of marketing operations, especially in terms of implementation of integrated marketing and logistics operations. Rojek states (Rojek, 2011) that an integrated marketing and logistics strategy can be considered a favourable strategy for competition in the following fields: selection and formation of the market on which companies operate, identification of customers' preferences, design of products and formation of their market images, optimisation of the cost structure, providing values to customer service. The acceptance and implementation of an integrated marketing and logistics system into corporate management imposes a necessity of interpreting values for customers (Łukasik, Bril, Tatara, 2016). The last stage of logistics and marketing management is the implementation of the logistics and marketing programme and periodic monitoring of the results.

A virtual enterprise as an example of applied marketing and logistics management – in light of the case-study research

Among the numerous types of virtual organisations, commercial companies referred to as on-line shops are strongly represented. The most important features of virtual organisations are listed by Mazur (Mazur and Mazur 2002):

- time – it emphasizes the temporary character of virtual organisations
- space – it is unlimited, and the headquarters of entities that form virtual organisations can be based at any geographical locations
- resources and infrastructure are used in order to achieve particular aims
- knowledge – viewed in the process of flow and diffusion, it increases efficiency of operation, and it implies generation of new knowledge
- structure, especially a variety of structures of virtual organisations, provides them with high flexibility and abilities of quick adjustment to the requirements of implemented tasks

Leithbridge (2001) presents some examples of virtual organisation types: *Virtual face*, *Star alliance*, *Market alliance*, *Co-alliance*, *Value alliance*, *Parallel alliance*. Virtual organisations require the following types of information (Leithbridge, 2001):

- the method of the information flow is defined
- the aim of activities undertaken by a virtual organisation and the types of such implemented operations are defined
- information about the current operations
- types of contact with customers
- information about the monitoring of the current and strategic processes implemented in a virtual organisation

The research survey was carried out in the years 2015–2018 with the use of the methods involving direct interviews based on a questionnaire form. The participants of the survey were middle and senior managers, MA students of the University of Social Sciences in Łódź. The results of the research were sent by an e-learning platform; there were 90 answers provided from enterprises, including 20% of the answers provided by micro-enterprises. In the article, a case study is presented, which refers to a virtual organisation operating in the territory of Poland. The core activity of the enterprise was trade, and it employed two people. The owner defined the integrated logistics and

marketing operations, indicating the specific course of the particular actions that resulted from their virtual character. The enterprise used an extensive database and advanced IT technologies. There were two employees responsible for the operations undertaken by the enterprise, including those of marketing and logistics character. The structure of the enterprise was flat, and the scope of responsibilities resulted from the fulfilment of customers' orders. Commercial transactions were supported by IT and were of the non-cash character. The logistics and marketing system was based on the dynamic flow of information and the use of IT in virtual space. In such a space, it is possible to observe some elements that characterise particular virtual organisations, namely: virtual work, virtual offices, virtual teams, virtual departments (Szpringer 2012), which could also be observed in the analysed micro-enterprise. A determinant of the functioning of the system included objects, which were interrelated and which existed in the virtual space. Those were the following objects:

- virtual memory
- virtual reality
- virtual organisation
- virtual service
- virtual product (Predygier, 2015)

Because operations were carried out in virtual space, the high speed of the implementation of linked logistics and marketing processes could be clearly observed. The virtual character of work consisted in using the Internet, where most logistics and marketing processes were implemented. The cooperating parties had an access to the databases, and they were able to carry out their tasks from any location. Table 2 presents the characteristics of logistics and marketing processes in the analysed micro-enterprise.

Table 2. The selected features of logistics and marketing processes in the analysed micro-enterprise, in the aspect of time and space

Logistics process	Action/operation		The aspect of time	The aspect of space
	Logistics	Marketing		
Purchasing	1.Planning of the purchase of raw materials/materials/goods	Consistency with customers' requirements	Short-term, based on customers' orders	Care given to dynamics and speed of planning
	2. Selection of suppliers	Analysis of the offers	Quick exchange of information; comparison of offers	Distance and location of suppliers is of no significance
	3.Selection of suppliers	Evaluation and comparison of suppliers' capabilities. The Porter model	Quick decisions based on the specific criteria, for example, quality, price, delivery date	Preferred quick deliveries of supplies, based on the selection of transportation means
	4.Negotiation of the purchase terms	Negotiations, product analysis, competitiveness analysis	Terms of the contract negotiated with the use of advanced IT technologies	Commercial and legal conditions, which result from the fact that legal regulations of a particular country should be considered
Production	1.Planning of production in the selected enterprise	Marketing evaluation of trends	The schedule consistent with the technological process	Location of the manufacturer is of no significance; production can be implemented in any country

	2. Processing operations	Monitoring of the consistency of production with the current trends	Implementation of the production process in the time specified before, with the use of production means at the enterprise	The required criterion of timeliness and preparation of the dispatch
	3. Product quality control	Analysis of customers' requirements	It is based on certificates of a production enterprise	Transferring information about the quality level is implemented via the Internet
Transport	1.Preparation activities	Analysis and evaluation of abilities of transport market participants	Information about readiness for loading, its time and place	The speed of the information flow depends on the standards of the Internet connection; the space is of no significance
	2. Loading		Just in time agreed with the transport company	The location of loading is determined by the virtual centre
	3.Physical translocation		Transportation of goods – with a possibility to monitor and to control the transportation time	The route of translocation is planned and it can be monitored
	4.Delivery and unloading		It should be implemented in time agreed in the arrangements and instructions provided by the virtual centre	The place of delivery and unloading is consistent with the customer's order and the schedule planned for the transportation process
Distribution	1.Planning of distribution channels	Evaluation of the channel with the use of marketing methods	Planning of the distribution channels is flexible and fast	Optimisation of distribution channels is implemented with consideration of the shortening of the delivery time and comfort of delivery collection
	2.Physical translocation of the goods along the distribution channel		It is implemented in real time which is scheduled and monitored	Geographical space that results from the planned transportation routes
	3.Cooperation in the distribution chain		The communication time is shortened; dynamic information exchange	Geographical space is of no significance; cooperation is implemented in a virtual way

Source: the Author's own study

In the analysed virtual enterprise, some supra-organisational elements were implemented for the efficient marketing and logistics management. Those elements came as the determinants of efficient management: virtual relation, virtual network, virtual market and virtual community (Brzozowski, 2006). In the interview, the owner defined what kind of knowledge was indispensable for the company operation: knowledge about management, marketing, modern IT technologies. As the most important sources of knowledge, the following elements were indicated: the Internet, professional experience, information provided by customers. Scientific knowledge was evaluated much lower – which is consistent with the research studies provided by Juchniewicz and Grzybowska, mentioned

in the first part of this article. The owner also indicated the need to create a new form of virtual environment, as a condition for the functioning of his micro-enterprise. It proves the necessity of acquiring new practical knowledge which is related to the development of IT, software and digital tools. At present, operational activities in the field of marketing and logistics take place in virtual space, and they form a chain of values. A gap has been indicated between the theoretical and practical knowledge in the field of logistics and marketing. Simultaneously, generation of new knowledge based on the established relations and arrangements between the analysed micro-enterprise and its customers has been observed.

Conclusions

In the article, some considerations on the concept related to marketing and logistics management and its implementation in micro-enterprises are presented. Some selected aspects of marketing and logistics marketing are discussed, along with the features of logistics and marketing processes. Logistics and marketing processes are described in the aspect of time and space, on the example of the case study of a commercial virtual micro-enterprise. The example of a virtual micro-enterprise allows the Author to present the results of the research on the conditions of logistics and marketing management. Based on the literature review and the Author's own studies, it is possible to provide the answers to the research questions that are formulated in the introductory part of the article.

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