

## ONLINE MERCHANDISING – TOOLS, CONDITIONS, AND RESULTS

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**Purpose:** To present the essence of modern online merchandising (in light of literature studies and the author's own research), demonstrate examples of its tools, methods, and procedures, and develop recommendations for interested marketers.

**Methodology:** analysis of secondary sources of information, analysis of the services of specialised agencies offering support in methodical online merchandising activities, case studies of selected online stores from various economic sectors (grocery, food, clothing, cosmetics, footwear, hardware, home furnishings, pharmaceuticals, automotive, bookstores) with participant observation, and involvement of students in the evaluation of the level of online merchandising activities of these sites.

**Findings:** Instruments, determinants, and directions of development of methodical online merchandising activities aimed at stakeholder experience management taking into account contemporary trends and conditions and the results obtained.

**Research limitations:** The article is based on literature studies, selected web resources (specialised agency websites, thematic blogs, and other thematically related publications), case studies of selected online stores from different economic sectors, own participant observation, and involvement of young people (marketing students) in the analysis and evaluation of online merchandising practices of selected traditional and modern retail facilities. The research problem addressed should be analysed based on a larger number of online stores. Moreover, the next project also plans to survey the opinions of online store owners and companies supporting the development and implementation of online merchandising strategies, and conduct representative surveys of actual customers of the analysed retail facilities.

**Practical implications:** Systematising knowledge and identifying contemporary online merchandising instruments. Implementation of methodical activities in the analysed area with the involvement of stakeholders (including in particular: online store owners, partner companies, and customers). Actually enhancing the online shopping experience, ensuring multifaceted benefits for all those involved, reducing the burden of resource exploitation in the e-commerce process with reference to traditional commerce, engaging stakeholders and personifying activities, adapting activities to conditions, managing the experiences of e-commerce participants, building a real and virtual community.

**Social implications:** Research shows that online merchandising activities/actions/campaigns do impact customer behaviours, their experiences, attitudes, engagement, changes in the ways of buying and using products, marketer practices, and – consequently – the entire society and natural environment. They also lead to the promotion – under the brand and with the engagement of its stakeholders – of a sustainable approach to resource management and undertaking projects in line with the 2030 Agenda and recommendations of the ESG directive.

**Value:** It is the first study of this type (at least in the Polish market) regarding the impact of methodical online merchandising activities on the experiences of key stakeholders and the resulting practical implications (social, economic, environmental, and managerial).

**Keywords:** online merchandising, digitalisation, always online consumers, creating customer experiences in an online store.

**Category of the paper:** research paper.

## 1. Introduction

Having to cope with social (Gajewski, 1997; Foxall, Goldsmith, 1998; Zaltman, 2003; Clatworthy, 2022; Tracy, 2023; ), competitive (Wilk, 2014; Chaffey, Smith, 2017; Berkhout, 2019; Brzustewicz, 2023; Wolniak, Grebski, 2023; Wrzesińska-Kowal, 2024), technical (Tarczydło, 2015; Jak korzystamy..., 2024; Martinez-Lopez et al., 2024), technological (Levy, 2021; Troian, 2023; E-commerce w Polsce, 2024; Foster, 2024) and managerial (Keller, 2013; Kotarbiński, 2021; Kotler et al., 2021) conditions as well as trends (United Nations, 2015; Wan et al., 2016; Egorova et al., 2022; Kamiński, 2022; Chojan, 2023; Florczak, 2023; Ghaffar et al., 2023; Wolniak et al., 2023; Polski rynek e-commerce..., 2024), marketers try to implement various measures to support sales and generate multifaceted benefits for parties involved. The following study analyses online merchandising (a set of activities related to the arrangement of an online shop and the effective presentation of its offer tailored to the current market conditions) as an important trend in the management (Cox, Brittain, 2000; Levy, Weitz, 2004; Williams, Mullin, 2011; Wojciechowska, 2020) of online shops (Ebster, Garaus, 2011; Feldy, 2012; Sklepy przyszłości..., 2018; Sklepy internetowe..., 2024), the need to streamline their operations, personalise their offer and the growing expectations of digitised and digitalised customers (Wilk, 2015; Tarczydło, Miłoś, 2019; Troian, 2023; Foster, 2024; Kocot, Maciaszczyk, 2024; Wolniak, 2024) that are always online. All parties (Campbell, 2020; Kotler et al., 2021; Targiel, 2022) involved (online shop owner, operating staff, customers, partners and other entities) shall gain multifaceted benefits from online merchandising initiatives as an important phenomenon in modern management (Chaffey, Smith, 2017; Hansen, 2021; Troian, 2023) and in the era of dynamic e-commerce development.

This article aims to introduce the essence of modern online merchandising, present examples of such practices (tools, methods and procedures) and develop recommendations for marketers interested in it. For this article, a literature study, a meta-analysis of available online sources and qualitative in-house research were carried out using the following methods: multiple case studies (how online merchandising activities are carried out by selected online shops, how they interact with stakeholder experiences and what impacts they generate), participant observation and online content analysis.

## 2. Literature review

Online merchandising (also known as e-merchandising or web merchandising) constitutes a set of activities related to the art of arranging an online shop, presenting its offer and individual products in such a way that it meets customers' expectations (Tarczydło, 2005; Diamond, Diamond, 2007; Witek, 2007; Morgan, 2008; Borusiak, 2009; Binsztok, Zuzanski, 2013; Garrido-Morgado, Gonzalez-Benito, 2015; Russel, 2015; Borusiak, Wanat, 2020; Bailey, Baker, 2022; Morgan, 2022; Czym jest merchandising..., 2024; Tobała, 2024). This is a range of techniques in the field of marketing, which includes: management of the shop's offer and the way it is presented; the category management method, the use of display techniques; use of knowledge about the psychology of perception and skillful influence on the online shop visitor; adaptation to current conditions, e.g. having virtual fitting rooms, and many others.

From a process perspective (Russel, 2015; Tarczydło, 2015; Wu et al, 2015; Trendy w visual merchandising..., 2024), online merchandising is the process of creating, maintaining and developing the unique character of an online shop that distinguishes it from its competitors, supported by other marketing measures (systematic market research, attractive product and pricing policies; unique promotional and supporting marketing communication measures).

According to Rafał Cyrański (2024), and it is reasonable to agree with his opinion, in order to effectively use the new trends in e-commerce (Raport e-commerce..., 2021; Kocot, Maciaszczyk, 2024; Polski rynek e-commerce..., 2024) merchandising to increase sales, several important principles must be followed. First of all, it is important that the online shop is easy to navigate and provides users with an intuitive experience. Providing users with quick and easy access to products and services can significantly increase the number of potential customers. Second, it is important that the online shop offers attractive promotions and discounts. Promotions can be applied in various ways, such as price reductions or free shipping. This can encourage customers to make a purchase. Thirdly, the application of personalisation techniques for marketing content, tailored to individual customer needs, is also essential. As a result, the products or services can be matched more closely to the customer's actual expectations and needs, thereby increasing the chances of selling.

In other words, online merchandising should enable an optimal access to products and services in order to overcome the barrier of the lack of direct contact with the transaction object, and to make the shopping experience easier and more enjoyable by i.a. good navigation on the shop's website, additional attractions – promotions and discounts, or personalised (Levy, 2021; Lubin, 2022; Kapelczak, 2024; Foster, 2024) content. The online merchandising projects/actions implemented are meant to positively surprise and differentiate from the competition. Creative activities evoking emotions (Skowronek, 2014; Tarczydło, 2014), creating e-commerce brand experiences (Smilansky, 2009; Schmitt, 2011; Ind, 2016; Tarczydło, 2016; Tarczydło, Miłoś, 2019; Wojciechowska, 2020; Foroudi, Palazzo, 2021;

Ghaffar et al., 2023; Larsen, 2023; Tarczydło, Miłoś, Klimczak, 2023), perfected down to the smallest detail hit stakeholder (Campbell, 2020; Tracy, 2023; Kocot, Maciaszczyk, 2024; Wolniak, 2024) expectations accurately. The undertakings carried out are intended to touch customers by drawing their attention, interest, willingness to take advantage and active participation. The experience or sensations gained should affect emotions, move, evoke feelings, but also provide rational arguments and, as a consequence, trigger some kind of measurable reaction towards the online shop brand.

In business practice, online merchandising ventures involve employees and other parties: partners, Internet users, media representatives, the online community, competitors, although they are usually targeted at customers. Hence, it brings multifaceted benefits for all parties involved.

The elements of human behavioural psychology (Underhill, 2001; Zaltman, 2003; Feldy, 2012; Binsztok, Zuzanski, 2013; Clatworthy, 2020; Tracy, 2023; Kapelczak, 2024) versus effective e-merchandising constitute a relevant topic. In order to design effective online merchandising activities, it is crucial to be aware of the behaviour of the buyers one wishes to influence. The behaviour of buyers represents the totality of activities related to the acquisition, use and disposal of products, together with the decisions that precede and condition these activities (Gajewski, 1997; Zaltman, 2003; Tarczydło, 2005).

In marketing (Kotler et al, 2021), there are many theories and models (Foxall, Goldsmith, 1998; Smilansky, 2009; Zaltman, 2003) about buyer behaviour at the point of sale that can be adapted for e-commerce. These models illustrate the great role that the environment in which the product is offered plays in the customer's decision-making process.

The simplest model indicating the need for promotional activities in the selling unit is the SLB (Stay, Look, Buy) model. The AIDA model seems to be the most common model. It is an acronym for: Attention – to attract attention, Interest – to arouse interest, Desire – the desire to possess, Action – action, purchase. The model reflects the reality that capturing consumers' attention and arousing their interest in a product triggers a need for possession and, consequently, a purchase. Another model is AIDCAS (Attention, Interest, Desire, Conviction, Action, Satisfaction). This is a formula compatible with current market conditions. It requires a great deal of skill to select the means and methods of merchandising activities in a particular sales unit in such a way that the customer is able to go through the various phases of the indicated model and, consequently, loyally return and purchase.

Successful influence on the buyer depends on his perception, i.e. the process of recognising, selecting, organising and interpreting stimuli in order to make sense of the surrounding reality (Tarczydło, 2014; Targiel, 2022; Troian, 2023). Perception takes place through the senses – sight, touch, hearing, smell and taste. The factors influencing perception can be reduced to two categories. The external group of factors consists of the stimuli that affect the person, while the second category concerns the internal conditions of the person and his or her individual characteristics. Stimulus factors are related to physical characteristics of the perceived objects

such as size, colour, shape, weight, etc. Size directly determines the strength of the stimulus. Thus, it is perhaps the most prominent feature that sets it apart from its surroundings.

The modern world sends out numerous signals (stimuli). Everyone perceives external information differently. People pay attention only to stimuli that they consider relevant to their needs, desires, beliefs and attitudes (Jak korzystamy..., 2024). An important clue for online merchandising measures may be the fact that people's attention is especially attracted by information that is not fully explicit as well as surprising (Dudka, 2024). Curiosity drives people into action. Salespeople deploy all sorts of tricks to get the customer's attention.

People show a high selectivity in the perception of information (so-called filtering perception), mainly due to the limited perceptive capacity of the individual senses and the limited capacity of consciousness. It is believed that a person can assimilate at most 6-7 separate pieces of information (Tracy, 2023) at the same time. Thus, only a small part of the information reaching a person is noticed and remembered, thereby becoming an internal source of information. Any other information is suppressed, ignored or discarded. As well as being subject to selective perception and memory, signals are often distorted and inconsistent with reality. Examples include increased feelings of hunger influenced by tasteful images and pictures of appetising products, or the limits of promotional offers, which arouses the desire to get the attractive offer. Although in both cases there were no physical changes that would explain the increase in hunger or the change in the hierarchy of needs - the client behaves differently. A great deal of this type of behaviour is leveraged by online merchandising (Borusiak, Wanat, 2020; Bailey, Baker, 2022; Morgan, 2022; Cyrański, 2024; Czym jest merchandising..., 2024; Dudka, 2024; Tobała, 2024; Trendy w visual merchandising..., 2024), which generates a range of stimuli.

The subconscious, which also registers certain stimuli, is often utilised in the perception process. This is known as subliminal perception (Zaltman, 2003; Jak korzystamy..., 2024). The problem of subconscious perception, i.e. perceiving stimuli and reacting to them beneath a certain perceptual threshold (subconscious threshold), is often addressed in the marketing psychology literature. It raises a number of controversies. For ethical reasons, the use of subconscious perception is often prohibited when developing marketing messages. The perception process is further complemented by emotions and patterns memorised from the past.

Perception can also be formed through pleasant associations, creating a mood and atmosphere conducive to shopping. This can be done using, for example, appropriate colours, changing backgrounds and other available stimuli (Skowronek, 2014; Tarczydło, Miłoś, 2019; Wolniak, 2023).

The second group of factors influencing perception is related, on the one hand, to a person's somatic (bodily) characteristics (e.g. human body structure, defects in the sense organs) and the state of his or her body (e.g. fatigue, illness, hunger) and, on the other hand, to one's psychological characteristics, inclinations, expectations, the conditions in which one

uses the online shop's offer and even the device with which one makes the transaction, etc. (Foxall, Goldsmith, 1998; Binsztok, Zuzanski, 2013). Factors related to the structure of the human organism (bodily characteristics, state of the organism) do not have as great impact as the external factors of a 'stimulus' nature described earlier.

The perception of stimuli causes specific buyer behaviour according to the model (Tracy, 2023): stimulus – reaction – organism (photo, look, interest; product presentation, interest, close inspection). In practice, purchasing decisions are influenced by a complex of determinants, including, among others, reflection time.

The biggest opportunity for online merchandising comes from impulsive decisions (Ebster, Garaus, 2011; Dudka, 2024). In business practice, the following occur: real impulses, someone did not plan to buy, but bought, e.g. because of a promotion; unreal impulses, someone was supposed to buy a product, e.g. shoes, a dress, a gift, but did not know what type, brand and chose a particular good, e.g. because of a good display in an online shop or thanks to the use of additional stimuli, hints of 'others also bought'.

There is no consensus among authors in the information sources available on the scope of online merchandising activities (Diamond, Diamond, 2007; Witek, 2007; Morgan, 2008; Borusiak, 2009; Binsztok, Zuzanski, 2013; Garrido-Morgado, Gonzalez-Benito, 2015; Russel, 2015; Borusiak, Wanat, 2020; Bailey, Baker, 2022; Morgan, 2022; Czym jest merchandising..., 2024; Tobała, 2024) and measures. Furthermore, merchandising is an area of marketing tools that theoreticians learn from practitioners, hence the need to deepen knowledge in this area.

### **3. Own research methodology**

The research gap revealed concerns the scope and methodological considerations of online merchandising activities. For the purpose of this article, a qualitative self-study was carried out using the following methods: multiple case study (aimed at answering questions: How are the online merchandising activities of the selected online shops carried out? What do they cover? How do they interact with the addressee, their senses, mind and heart and with other stakeholders? How do they engage, what experiences, behaviours and attitudes do they create? What effects do they generate? What lessons can be learned based on them? Participatory observation and online content analysis. The following research scopes were defined: temporal: November 2023 – March 2024; subjective: active internet users, observers; objective: ways and forms of online merchandising of the analysed shops; and spatial scope: websites, online and traditional shops, in other available channels.

Based on a review of the available literature and online sources, the own research was carried out for the purpose of the article. These included analyses/case studies combined with participant observation in selected online shops (grocery, food, clothing, cosmetics, footwear,

hardware, home furnishings, pharmaceuticals, automotive, bookstores). The results of the observations were referred to available literature sources as well as our own experience of using merchandising in business practice. For more than a dozen years, the author has been involved in developing and implementing merchandising strategies for companies, including online merchandising, i.a. from the following industries: grocery, food, clothing, footwear, paints and varnishes and construction. She also holds classes in Merchandising (a specialisation subject in the Management course), Online and Offline Merchandising (an elective subject) and training workshops for practitioners.

The aim of the research was to obtain information on the tools, methods and procedures of online merchandising activities, while taking into account the specific characteristics of the industry. The research was conducted in selected online shops, at point-of-sale and tablet desks with access to the wider offering, among partners where the author was involved in implementing merchandising strategies, at industry events on e-commerce and online marketing. The research included also systematic participant observation, case studies of selected market players owning and developing online shops. The author carried out a qualitative analysis of the resources acquired (photos, handouts, videos). She paid particular attention to ways of creating opportunities for unique experiences for online shopping customers through appropriate display of the products on offer, other tools and procedures applied and their resonance and results.

#### **4. The online merchandising toolbox developed**

From the perspective of several years of observing merchandising activities in various economic sectors, personal involvement in the strategies developed and solutions created (shop layout, atmosphere, display techniques, supporting measures...), as well as the high dynamics in the development of e-commerce and the need to organise increasingly functional and attractive online shops, there is a clear tendency to diversify them, adapting them to technological progress, changing consumer expectations and legal, environmental and competitive conditions.

Therefore, based on the results of conducted literature and empirical research (analysis of selected online shops from the point of view of applied activities in the analysed area), they provide a basis for a broad understanding of online merchandising efforts. Complex thinking and acting in the area discussed should, according to the author, take into account the following elements:

- well-considered choice of the ‘location’ of the online shop, in other words, its appropriate positioning on the web and SEO and SEM marketing activities for it,
- taking care of publishing content so that active leads can be acquired and the potential customer is redirected to the online shop, e.g. from the company blog or from the brand’s social profiles,
- design of the shop’s website tailored to the circumstances and ‘up to date’ possibilities,
- informing about special occasions,
- making reference to significant events from the lives of visitors and from the local environment,
- sales assortment and its clear presentation as well as assistance in finding what the customer is interested in,
- category management (which, in a nutshell, consists of dividing up the assortment on offer and displaying the products in such a way as to facilitate customer purchases, while optimising the results of the trader and manufacturer),
- a clear layout of the site using techniques to attract the visitor’s attention, e.g. by locating the image in a central visual point or using ‘call to action’ buttons,
- responsive shop websites adapted to mobile phones, computers and other devices from which users enter the online shop, browse the offer and make purchases or leave the shop,
- intuitive shop interface,
- ability to navigate the site smoothly (seamless switching between different devices),
- shaping the climate (colours, shapes, lighting, metaphorical smells and tastes...),
- specialised themed arrangements,
- presentation of the products on offer in such a way that their qualities can be seen,
- additional content,
- convenient payment systems,
- virtual fitting rooms and other shopping support systems/solutions (e.g. functionality for measuring the foot before purchasing shoes),
- management of the sales assortment in terms of its range, introduction of new products, adaptation of the offer to customers’ expectations,
- possibility to customise the product with configurators,
- designation of active and passive zones, i.e. where the exposure will be best and worst seen,
- application of specialised display techniques (e.g. open display, rich display, total display, brand presence, themed display, series display, block display, amphitheatre display, quality display, cross merchandising),

- matching price information with the results of market research and the psychology of human behaviour (e.g. the formation of price lines, the determination of basic price zones and the use of psychological pricing),
- developing an annual list of promotional campaign themes around which thematic arrangements will be organised and which are important and interesting for people using the online shop's offer,
- concern for the climate of the commercial unit, i.e. the set of factors that directly affect human well-being (including influencing the senses of sight, taste, hearing, smell, touch and 'business acumen' through appropriate temperature, lighting, colours, music, smell, etc.),
- design of online merchandising concepts and/or planograms, i.e. templates for displaying products in tabs and shop windows,
- organising a virtual shop corresponding to a traditional one,
- matching the type of online merchandising strategy being pursued, whether by the manufacturer, retailer or joint unit owner, taking into account both the interests of the manufacturer, the retailer and the convenience of the customer,
- training of staff involved in implementing online merchandising solutions,
- planning a schedule of activities, including who is responsible for what, when and who coordinates it,
- permanent analysis of the behaviour of people using e-commerce and the competitors' actions, according to the principle that those who are creative, can surprise and can make a spectacle out of sales, thus providing additional value to customers, win,
- developing tools and methods to measure the effectiveness of the applied actions (e.g. having appropriate software that records the volume of sales and indirectly gives the possibility to analyse the effectiveness of the applied display techniques, 'tracks' the behaviour of online shop visitors and when they want to leave the shop it generates additional stimuli, e.g. subscribe to a newsletter and receive a 5% discount),
- application of available digital solutions to support the management of the online shop, such as electronic loyalty cards, mobile loyalty apps, electronic price labels ESL (Electronic Shell Labels), which work with a central management server and allow flexible price changes according to time, hour or type of customer; eViator electronic shopping cart to help track the path of a customer who does not hold a loyalty card or mobile app; innovative billing systems...

Apart from the aforementioned areas of activity, appropriate supporting measures are of great importance, i.e. encouraging the customer to visit the online shop, e.g. by publishing content that enables redirections or by clearly indicating the name or logo. Use of specialised display techniques, e.g. presentation of the product on a virtual persona, preparation of additional promotional measures, e.g. graphic signs, colour coding, additional information

material, etc. Complex online merchandising activities provide wide-ranging benefits for the parties involved, i.e. the retailer, the manufacturer and the customers.

As a conclusion, it is assumed that the methodical practices of online merchandising are well-thought-out activities; the process of generating incentives that influence the addressees; creating opportunities to learn about the offer and additional attractions.

E-merchandising managers emphasise the importance of so-called ‘touchpoints’, i.e. broad opportunities for interaction, e.g. visiting a website, seeing an advert, visiting a shop, talking to a virtual customer adviser, entering a competition, using a mobile app, etc.

Finally, it is important to determine the so-called *customer journey*, i.e. all the elements that make up the sum of the interactions taking place in contact with the branded market player, from the initial contact through all stages of interaction (using the offer), including possible potential interactions, including post-sales service and the marketing tools used, e.g. the loyalty card or other forms of lead nurturing.

In addition to the customer journey, the *experiential selling proposition* is also important, and this is reflected in the ability to associate certain emotions and experiences that translate into value and experiences with an online shop, usually a shop of a particular brand. Emphasis should also be put on the significance of contemporary conditions (social, technical-technological, economic, competitive, environmental and other) determining the effectiveness of the issues and practices under consideration. In the era of social media and the prevalence of sharing knowledge and experiences with other members of the community with whom we are in contact and the willingness of prosumers to engage with providers, the art of designing the layout of an online shop’s interior and displaying its offerings appropriately has taken on particular importance.

Furthermore, one can conclude that online merchandising is still a new and complex topic and that the research being discussed should help marketers to better understand the perspective of consumers and other stakeholders and to approach these practices methodically, which seems to be necessary due to technological advances, the development of web functionality and the pressure for changes in e-commerce.

To summarise, in view of the research conducted, the spectrum of online merchandising activities, is both impressive and desirable. Tools, methods and procedures of the practices discussed are of great importance in e-commerce, but also resonate with activities in traditional distribution models and are expected by customers, but also by online shop managers. They generate many benefits for all involved, for the environment, for the planet.

## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

Given the current market conditions, including the rapid growth of e-commerce, merchandising is developing very fast. The reason for this is the ability to replicate ready-made Western models (without the need to develop new strategies), and the high absorptive capacity of the market. The changes in e-commerce are clearly visible and striking. Nevertheless, there is still a huge gap between the available online shops, which, fortunately, is not the rule. One thing that is unequivocal is that customers are increasingly demanding and the appropriate product range is no longer enough. There is a clear need for continuous improvement of the sales conditions, which is reflected in the survey results. The Centre for Public Opinion Research says that Poles are increasingly satisfied with e-commerce. When buying, they are guided by shopping convenience, low prices, frequent promotions and advice from sellers.

Another argument stimulating efforts in the analysed area is the fact that international corporations have been using comprehensive online merchandising activities for a long time, therefore domestic entrepreneurs should not neglect these activities either, if they want to meet the standards of competition.

The literature studies and own research carried out provided information on the instrumentarium of online merchandising and related issues, i.e. its strategy, persons in charge, specialist agencies, conditions and trends, supporting tools, expectations of stakeholders (especially traders and customers), development directions and legal aspects.

To summarise, the literature studies and practice observations show that methodical online merchandising activities are an essential element of successful online sales management. Every organisation, be it a manufacturer or retail entity owner, should strive to develop an online merchandising strategy for its own brand, product range or shop to optimise the effects of virtual shelf management and to adapt as much as possible to the current expectations of customers, who not only want to buy, but also to experience the corresponding emotions during the shopping process. Likelihood of success can be significantly increased by comprehensive and methodical measures within the area considered according to the approach proposed in this article. Customers' trust in a provider depends heavily on the emotional satisfaction experienced as a result of each interaction with its brand. Hence, in order to strengthen loyalty, it is essential to satisfy both the rational and emotional needs of stakeholders in all interactions with the commercial offer. Delivering value to stakeholders while maintaining sustainable business growth is one of the key challenges for today's entrepreneurs. A fundamental question being asked by marketers is how effective management of people's experiences under a brand emblem translates into a company's economic performance, particularly in a highly competitive environment.

Based on the literature studies conducted and own research, it is reasonable to state that given the current market conditions, a proper online merchandising strategy seems to depend on the ability to create an engaging and exciting buyer experience that increases brand trust, loyalty and earnings of the online shop owner.

Effective online merchandising shall respect the fact that experience is an internal and subjective response to a direct or indirect interaction occurring between a brand (or related business) and a stakeholder, throughout the duration of their interaction and leading to engagement on rational, emotional, sensory, physical and spiritual levels.

Considering the fact that today's consumers are eager to use e-commerce, it is worth dosing marketing stimuli aimed at the awareness and subconscious of stakeholders that create value, influence behaviour, encourage the creation of relevant experiences and contribute to a closer human-brand relationship, which is arguably what methodical online merchandising activities are all about.

The author understands the limited nature of the qualitative research carried out and therefore intends to pursue it on other sites and plans to expand it to examine the reactions and reception and evaluation of such online merchandising activities by the stakeholders involved.

As a conclusion, the literature studies and empirical research carried out consolidated the view that marketers managing online shops should rethink the following issues: Are appropriate employee, customer, partner, media, web, community and other experiences being built by means of marketing programmes? Does the brand of the online shop succeed in fulfilling its promise? Does the process of offering value under a specific brand emblem sufficiently match expectations and trends, taking into account the actions of major competitors, create a positive online shop brand experience for the recipients? Does the online shop's branding distinguish it from its competitors? Is customer loyalty to the online shop being built appropriately among the targeted customers? To what extent are online merchandising tools conducive to the creation of relevant customer experiences adapted to the current circumstances and are characterised by creativity and relevance to them? Finally, are they taking advantage of the opportunities arising from socio-scientific and technical progress, including the development of the Internet, or marketing activities in general?

When applied well, online merchandising activities: are in line with trends in the behaviour and expectations of customers and other stakeholders; contribute to the rationalisation of expenditure; generate multiple benefits (reliable information, building relationships, providing information and entertainment, opportunity for key stakeholders to participate in the provider's activities, creation of a brand community, value creation, effective differentiation from competitors...).

To identify recommendations for marketers interested in implementing effective online merchandising activities, the following points should be noted: 1) Alignment of all supporting marketing activities with the expectations of today's consumers and other stakeholders (media representatives, Internet users, potential social and/or business partners.) 2) Skilful 'crowd

engagement' as today's stakeholders and especially Internet users demonstrate strong tendencies towards prosumer behaviour. 3) Activities should be based on the results of research on, for example, what the key target groups are interested in, what is important to them and what can be combined with the online shop's offer and activities. 4) A holistic approach to the human being, i.e. influencing the individual on mental, physical and spiritual levels, is essential. 5) Methodical actions require an adequate budget, hiring of professionals, allocating enough time and launching the entire spectrum of activities listed in this article. 6) Flexibility and responsiveness are vital success factors. 7) Skilful positioning and building an appropriate and unique online shop brand tailored to the profile of the customer handled is also important.

Marketers managing online shops need to take steps whereby they participate, so to speak, in the life of their communities. Making references to current events, generating content and allowing for participation are particularly important. Consistency, multimediality, creativity and a methodical approach is what counts.

To sum up, in the light of the considerations and research carried out, it seems reasonable to conclude that online merchandising activities should be considered methodical and valuable and worth following. Moreover, they generate multifaceted benefits for all market players (brand stakeholders, representatives of the brand's real and virtual communities and other collaborators and affiliates) in line with social, technical, technological, market and management considerations, including the pursuit of a balanced approach in every aspect of the activities of the brand owner under which the online shop operates.

Given the current market conditions (intense competition, digitalisation, information society, technical and technological advances, development of research into buyer behaviour – neuroresearch, improvement of marketing tools, methods and procedures...), effective online merchandising constitutes a complex of activities addressing the mind, soul and body of the recipient, who responds simultaneously on every level: mental, physical and spiritual.

Technical and technological advances and the development of the Internet are significantly influencing the behaviour of buyers, especially purchasing behaviour. A digital consumer equipped with mobile devices has basically permanent access to the web. Such a consumer has the ability to use multiple shopping channels simultaneously according to the situation and circumstances. He also has more and more opportunities as a result of the popularisation of various applications. Concluding, important determinants of successful online merchandising activities are innovation combined with creativity, flexibility, adaptation of supporting measures in line with technical and technological advances.

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