

Analysis of Marketing Communication Tools and Brand Building of Family Business in Terms of International Environment – Case Study

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Abstract: Building a corporate brand in an international environment is currently an opportunity for companies to reach out to new customers and increase brand awareness across the national markets. Therefore, in order for a company to become well-known and successful, it needs to constantly build its brand in order to make it stand out from competing products and to strengthen its position in the eyes of the customer. These are precisely the factors that very often influence and support enterprises with the help of individual marketing communication tools. The case study thus focuses on analysing the communication mixes of a selected Czech family brand operating on both the domestic and foreign markets. The result part focuses on the individual differences and characteristics of the cultural differences inherent in the various communication tools and the corporate strategy. The results part also include comparison of the individual communication mixes and their costs. The last part of the case study focuses on deriving conclusions that could help other companies if they were to internationalize.

Keywords: family brand; international marketing; international communication

JEL Classification: M30; M31; M37

1. Introduction

Globalization has enabled the rapid development of international business in the scope of just a few years, both in terms of manufacturing and in the service sector (Machková, 2021). It is factors such as the development of international trade, the free movement of capital and the development of modern communication and electronic technologies, which, coupled with other factors, have become the driving force behind the development of international business brands and have thus increased competition in the international markets (Machková, 2021; Birsan, 2018; Muis, 2020). As stated by Surugiu C. and Surugiu R. (2015), globalization not only affects the development of companies themselves, but also gives firms space to make the most of market opportunities with regard to the size and potential of the companies themselves.

A family business brand is a kind of bridge between a company, a manufacturer, a retailer and a consumer or customer (Podnikatel.cz, 2021). According to the American Marketing Association (2021), a brand is a name, a concept, a design, a symbol, or a combination of all these, which allows consumers or customers to differentiate between that company's product and those of its competitors. As indicated above, in the international

environment the brand is then affected by several different factors. According to Samiee et al. (2021), one of the most important factors is the intense and fierce competition in the international market and the heterogeneity of the behaviour of customers with cultural differences. Fann and Zhou (2020) point out that, given this situation, it is appropriate to adapt language and culture, which may subsequently be beneficial in building the branding and, in the long run, may reduce overall expenditure on traditional communication media. The marketing communication also influence other factors such as brand preferences, brand image etc. (Ebrahim et al., 2016; Schultz et al., 2013). That is why the international marketer must deal with brand communication differences in foreign environments from the characteristics of domestic environments.

This idea, coupled with the limited number of scientific or practical articles comparing communication activities within two different markets, prompted the creation of this case study, which may therefore expand the available resources relating to this topic and at the same time could offer an imaginary point of reference for new areas of research or analysis.

2. Methodology

This case study was created in collaboration with the company's owner, between September 2018 and April 2019. Various data collection methods were used when writing the study. These methods include in-depth interviews with the company's owner and individual employees focusing on this topic within the company. In addition, the company's internal (unpublishable) resources, annual reports and internal databases were used when preparing the case study. Last but not least, methods of observation were also used to collect data, thanks to collaboration between the author and the company itself. Observation was used not only for practical participation at certain business meetings and other activities involving representatives of German partners, but also in the analysis of online marketing tools. Overall, this case study aims to find answers for the following research questions:

- 1) Which communication tools used the company on the domestic market between September 2018 and April 2019?
- 2) Which communication tools used the company on the German market between September 2018 and April 2019?
- 3) What are the main differences between both communication mixes?

2.1. Presentation of the Company

This case study presents an analysis of the communication tools used by HOKAMI CZ on the Czech and German markets. HOKAMI CZ, s. r. o. has been operating on the market since 1991, although this family company has officially existed since it was first established by its entry into the Commercial Register on September 3, 1997. The company, currently headed by Ing. Josef Suska, employs approximately 300 people in the Czech Republic and Poland. The brand's main scope of business is the provision of the full range of services related to the production of printed circuit boards. These individual activities may therefore include the provision of screen printing templates for surface-mount technology (SMT), the production and mounting of printed circuit boards, soldering, cleaning, testing, painting

and assembly. Given its extensive investments and flexibility, after receiving the customer documentation HOKAMI CZ, s. r. o. is able to supply all the required products which are used today in satellites, aircraft, cars, medical devices, industrial machinery, military technology, etc. Thanks to its production capacity of 100 million SMD components and 6 million THT components per month, the company is able to meet demand both in this country and in the markets abroad, where it exports more than 85% of all its products. This fact, as well as its possession of various certificates and ratings (Quality Management System according to ČSN EN ISO 9001: 2016, D&B rating: 1A1 etc.), allows the company to achieve a relatively good turnover. At the turn of 2018-2019 this turnover amounted to almost 1 billion Czech crowns.

3. Results

3.1. Marketing Communication Used within the CR

The communication tools used by the company during the period in question include personal sales, public relations, sales support and online marketing. For such a specific company and its customer base elements such as advertising and direct marketing did not provide as much information in 2018 as the tools listed below, and therefore the company did not use them during that time.

3.1.1. Personal Sales

Of all the elements in HOKAMI CZ's communication mix, personal sales can be described as the most important tool for most of its business and non-business relations. Owing to the nature of the product and the specific nature of the business environment, it is almost essential to visit customers on a regular basis and strengthen mutual relations between individual brands. Above all, the company sees foreign relations as being especially important, as these make up the majority of all the products and services it sells. According to the CEO of HOKAMI CZ, building and reciprocating mutual trust are essential in order to create and maintain any relationship.

The company still has a great many customers, which allows it to increase its turnover, and compared to its Czech and foreign competitors it has a 5-year lead in production, technology and possesses several patented trademarks. Therefore, within the domestic market the company does not focus so much on reaching out to new customers and is rather contacted by them. In response to an inquiry from a customer, the company is motivated to create a range of products and services. It should also be mentioned that the offer of these products and services differs from customer to customer and the actual course of personal sales also varies.

Personal sales can be used effectively if there is the need to explain the features and nature of the products or services on offer. At the same time, during face-to-face negotiations, the company's representatives are able to respond to the suggestions and reactions of customer representatives. The company usually prefers to hold personal meetings in its own premises, where, before or after the meeting itself, management

representatives can give the customer a tour of production and the company's other departments. These tours can give the customer a better understanding of how the product is manufactured and provide a greater insight into the company's corporate culture. If the company's representatives are invited to a place other than the company's premises, samples, examples of products and supporting documentation containing, for example, product parameters, etc., can be of assistance.

3.1.2. Sales Support

In the domestic market the business uses a few sales support tools, which focus on boosting immediate sales, but also on raising awareness of the brand. Various promotional gifts are used to strengthen the company's brand, such as pens and bags, which bear the company's logo and name. What is more, the company has thicker paper binders for papers, contracts and other documents, which are always given to the customer along with these gift items during negotiations. However, these gift items (bags, T-shirts etc.) are not always used for commerce; they are also used as sponsorship gifts at various events in Liberec region.

During negotiations with the customer, internal documents are also used, which are always produced or modified at the customer's request. These include, for instance, documents describing the technical specifications of individual parts, their prices, draft designs, etc. This documentation is generally one of the most important means of sales support and is often decisive in closing the deal. It is therefore essential that this documentation be processed in a professionally comprehensible form and with interesting graphic design.

3.1.3. Public Relations, Sponsoring and Event Marketing

These marketing communication tools are the second most commonly used set of tools after personal sales. The individual activities within the company will always be explained according to the impact that PR activities have on target groups.

One of the most important tools within the company is internal communication, especially email. This type of communication is a fast and generally reliable means of passing on various levels of information within the company's entire organisational structure. The company's management has also opted to create a corporate magazine. This magazine should provide employees with information about the company's achievements during previous years, its plans for the future, competitions and crossword puzzles for prizes, surveys, and, most of all, should present internal communications that cannot or should not be disclosed publicly. As the company's management holds its staff in high esteem, employees receive bonuses throughout the year. One example of this is the annual presentation of flowers to all the company's female employees on International Women's Day. During the year, various training sessions, surprises and events are prepared for all the staff. As part of their work, employees also have other means of obtaining benefits, such as in the café or the dental surgery that the company has helped to fund.

In the eyes of other stakeholders, HOKAMI CZ strives to present itself as a socially responsible company. Therefore, over the years, it has invested a great deal of money in

setting up a local organic farm, which is situated just a few metres away from the company. As mentioned above, the company also invested its funds in a nearby café and dental surgery, run by one of the children of the company's family management. Both these establishments are open to employees as well as to the general public. The company is thriving not only in terms of its local investments, but also wins various awards in business rankings and competitions. The awards the company has received include, for example, the 2018 Liberec Region Czech Leader award and the Vodafone Company of the Year award in 2016. Thanks to these awards and references from other entrepreneurs the company has attracted the interest of several journals, newspapers, prestigious magazines etc. These include, for instance, the weekly *Ekonom* and *Hospodářské noviny*. Over the years, the company has also become a long-standing major sponsor of the Czech Tennis Championship and a supporter of youth hockey.

3.1.4. Online Marketing

Online marketing is a relatively new and unexplored tool for the company, although it sees an opportunity for its use in the future. The company sees the main benefit of online marketing to be the fact that it makes it easy to communicate its message online, quickly and at low or zero cost, enabling it to reach selected customer segments or other stakeholders.

The company now has its own website, which acts as a kind of cornerstone for the enterprise and its customers. For the company, this is one of the first and also longer-standing tools that it has started to use for its online communication. Initially, the site provided only the most basic information, with no graphics or content. Of course, as the company developed, along with the technologies themselves, the site began to take the shape that can be found today at www.hokami.cz. The overall concept of the website today is based on simplicity and clarity. The company's main goal for this website is currently to add more content and link the site with other online communication tools. Therefore, the site is now constantly updated, with new elements being gradually inserted and added (pictures, videos, corporate news etc.), which could not previously be found on the site.

In the past, the company has faced the problem of staff shortages, so it has begun to seek new ways to attract and reach out to potential job applicants. This is where social media have come into play, in this case offering a relatively cheap and fast alternative means of getting new people to join the company's ranks. These social networks have mainly been Facebook and Youtube.

In 2018 the Facebook account "Work at Hokami CZ" was followed by 134 people and had 128 "likes". As mentioned earlier, the initial aim was to spread awareness and information about the existence of the brand amongst potential applicants. The content of the Facebook account therefore focused on what it is like to work at HOKAMI, on various work-related bonuses and benefits, and actual job vacancies. The content has now been modified slightly, so as to appeal to a much larger audience. The wall now features topics such as the company's achievements, while information affecting the company's CSR is shared and the brand itself is strengthened in the eyes of staff as well as the general public.

In order to promote the company and make it more appealing, several short videos have been shot, which can be found in the videos section on Facebook, as well as on the YouTube channel "Hokami CZ". The YouTube channel is the latest element in the company's online communication mix. In 2018 the YouTube channel had just 2 subscribers and 2 videos. The average number of views for the videos was 223 in 2018.

3.2. Marketing Communication Used in the Selected Foreign Market

3.2.1. Personal Sales on the German Market

In both the local and foreign markets, personal sales are one of the means enabling the company to gain new customers. The position the company holds in the Czech market can also be transferred to the international environment, primarily due to the specific nature of the products and services it offers and the relative scarcity of competitive companies with the corresponding technology.

The biggest difference here can be seen in the company's management style and the individual personal meetings, which are always held in a different market. As these meetings are mostly held abroad, more funds need to be spent on sending sales representatives on business trips to present the company on the German market. The increasing volume of funds entails more complex and far more important requirements for the preparation of business negotiations, which are affected primarily by the customs and culture that prevail in the German market. The cultural differences identified through corporate practice include, for example, the need for perfect grammar during negotiations, as well as punctuality and accuracy. When contacting a German customer for the first time, the company prefers to communicate in writing, where great emphasis is placed on the German language, grammar and editing the message to ensure that it is free of errors. The company's sales representatives are sent to meetings one or two days in advance, precisely in order to avoid delays or the eventual cancellation of the scheduled meeting. According to the company, one of the most critical factors is punctuality, when failure to meet the set times or deadlines for a meeting may result in the German customer classifying the firm as an inferior company or breaking contact with it altogether. In most cases, the content of a personal meeting is specified before the company staff arrive. This enables the structures and agendas of meetings to be dealt with, drafted and approved in advance, including the stated starting and ending times. If everything goes well and both parties arrive at the meeting, there are first a few words of welcome, during which the parties always shake hands, after which they get down to the agenda of the meeting fairly quickly. This could be described as directness, which is also one of the characteristic traits of German customers. During the meeting itself it is important to be prepared, otherwise in most cases the German party brings the negotiations to an end and ceases to do further business with the company. During the course of the meeting, it is essential to provide truthful information and to support all important information with graphs, tables, etc., and it is obviously necessary to distinguish important information from what is unimportant, and to address the participants by their full name, including any titles, unless stated otherwise. Last but not

least, it is essential to mention that German customers are very particular about compliance with obligations in a business relationship and also dislike uncertainty.

However, the business process does not end upon the conclusion of the personal meeting; on the contrary, this sees the start of another important phase for the company, and that is meeting the customer's wishes and needs. During and after the entire business process, the company provides its German clients with complete customer support, with the ability to communicate any of the customer's requirements and wishes 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

3.2.2. Sales Support on the German Market

Almost all the support tools used on the German market are based on the basic concept applicable to these elements within the domestic market. As a rule, the design and image of these tools are also the same, but some tools are modified so to be more informative for the German customer. Obviously, items such as pens and bags, etc., do not require any modification. This category of non-localized tools can include promotional gifts bearing the company logo, samples and demonstration models, or small presentation forms. One special tool that can be included in this group is business cards, which from the beginning have been designed for both the domestic and the foreign market. Business cards play a crucial irreplaceable role at international business meetings, where the exchange of business cards is a way of presenting the company, and above all business cards provide the manufacturer and the customer with one another's contact information and help build the company's brand.

The second group in the company comprises what are known as localized sales support tools (print catalogues, price lists and leaflets etc.), which in most cases are characterized by the fact that they bear far more important, more specialised and possibly specific information, enabling sales representatives to exert a positive influence on the German customer's decision-making process. The company also creates presentations and various internal documents, which are always prepared for each customer on an individual basis. This is always due to the fact that each customer has different product requirements, together with the specificity of the services used. Some of these localized tools are used in foreign negotiations, as well as in company presentations abroad. As these tools are localized, the company needs to invest more funds in production itself; it is more time consuming to create and modify the actual tools that would suit the customary practices on the German market. However, the most important factor for the success of these tools is the linguistic quality of the text, and the accuracy and comprehensibility of the message communicated to the German customer.

3.2.3. PR on the German Market

The company's PR activities on the German market are amongst the most high-profile tools in its international marketing mix. What is important within the German market is to work to build the company's reputation and, above all, to maintain its position as a credible foreign entity, one with which German companies will not be afraid to do business. As this is

an international environment, the company is forced to invest a large amount of funds in PR activities and the company's managerial staff also strive to use tools that the company does not use so often to address customers in the domestic market.

One very important element of these tools is the company's participation at German trade fairs. Since 2014 it has become a tradition for the company to attend the international Electronica trade fair, which was held every year until 2018 in Munich. It should be noted at this point that this was before the Covid-19 pandemic. Trade fairs are a great opportunity for the company to present its activities abroad and enable it to forge better relationships with foreign customers and potential cooperating partners. At the same time, by attending trade fairs, the company can gain a better picture of where it stands in relation to the international competition and get a look at or discover new production technologies and processes that are on show at trade fairs. Trade fairs often include professional talks, which, as they are given by experts, are often a source of know-how for the company, helping it work with future trends and future developments in this branch of industry. According to the company's management, these exhibitions and fairs can be thought of as a ticket to a foreign market, which can often also be the most important source of information for the customers themselves. HOKAMI CZ has therefore put together a team responsible for presenting the company and its business activities to German customers and in charge of preparing, presenting and building brand awareness at these trade fairs.

Its other PR activities within the German market include, as in the domestic market, support for the people affected by the flooding in the Zittau region. Being a socially responsible company, the company strives to develop and assist with the activities of smaller business entities within the Tripoint region. This region comprises the border territory between Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic. Last year the company invested funds to support local bio-farms and small businesses in this area. Within the German market, the company has already succeeded in gaining a reputation as a trustworthy brand for German companies, mainly due to the WOM between customers and other media.

3.2.4. Online Marketing on the German Market

Online marketing communication on the German market is subject to the same conditions as on the Czech market. However, at the international level, in terms of visitor numbers, the company's home page is at the forefront of its marketing, visited by 5 times more foreign customers than domestic ones on average. As a result, emphasis is placed on the localization of these pages into English and German. The biggest difference between the Czech and foreign language versions lies in the fact that the company is far more active in adding Czech content than it is with the foreign language versions.

In addition, German customers have the opportunity to visit other media on which the company presents itself from foreign markets, especially social media, which in international terms includes the company's Facebook, LinkedIn, and YouTube accounts. In the international context, Facebook and YouTube face the same problem as the aforementioned foreign language versions of the website. The vast majority of all the messages it communicates are in Czech, although this does not give German customers a

deeper insight into what happens in the company. The customer is thus entirely dependent on the visual aspects of the company's presentation on social media, namely images and videos, which are sometimes accompanied by short foreign language captions.

The LinkedIn profile HOKAMI CZ, s.r.o. is big news on this social network. The company's profile currently has 182 followers and its presentation on this social network is in English. The "ABOUT US" section on this profile gives a brief biography of the company. Another important section in this profile is the "JOB OPPORTUNITIES" section, where the company always posts vacancies in the company as needed. The "HOME" section contains space to share information and create content that the company has not yet used.

As the company is still just testing the strength and potential of social media in the B2B market, it is already aware of several shortcomings that have arisen so far. The most important of these is the lack of foreign language content and insufficient time to create it. If the company were able to invest more time in creating foreign language content, it could increase the number of its followers not only from the German market, but from all over the world. The company could also attract more followers and raise awareness of the company by unifying the individual names of its accounts under a single name. As online media are becoming an affordable and inexpensive means for the company to reach out to potential customers and present itself and its services and products on an international scale, a meeting will be scheduled to outline future steps to be taken in the firm's online communication.

3.2.5. Comparison

Decisions about the applicability of current and future tools in the company are influenced by the company's financial situation and the management's willingness to invest in those marketing tools, its business goals, number of customers and the ability to spread those marketing activities across different departments due to the lack of a marketing department.

As regards how usable these communication tools are given the scope of the market, it is evident that the tools that the company uses in this country serve as a kind of springboard for the marketing communication tools used in the foreign market. There are certain similarities as well as differences in the individual tools play a part in communication with current and potential customers in the given markets. These differences can be seen, for instance, in the use of online marketing and in the company's participation at trade fairs. In terms of its usability and reach, online marketing is aimed mainly at Czech customers, although foreign customers do also have access to these tools, at the cost of missing out on certain messages if a different language version is chosen. As regards its participation in trade fairs, foreign exhibitions and trade fairs are more important for the company than the Czech ones, as the majority of its production is exported to the German market. Moreover, the German market is more sophisticated than the Czech market in terms of electrical production technologies, and more innovations are emerging in this sector than in the Czech Republic. In personal sales and its use of all the other tools, the company also has to work with factors such as cultural differences, different consumer behaviour, language differences and the available competitiveness of other companies, which also affect the form and style of the message it communicates across the individual countries.

In terms of costs for the year in question, 2018, marketing expenses accounted for 0.23% of the company's turnover in the Czech Republic and Germany. Of this, 0.09% was expended on marketing activities in the Czech Republic and the remaining 0.14% on the German market. A breakdown of the costs within the framework of the marketing tools used is shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

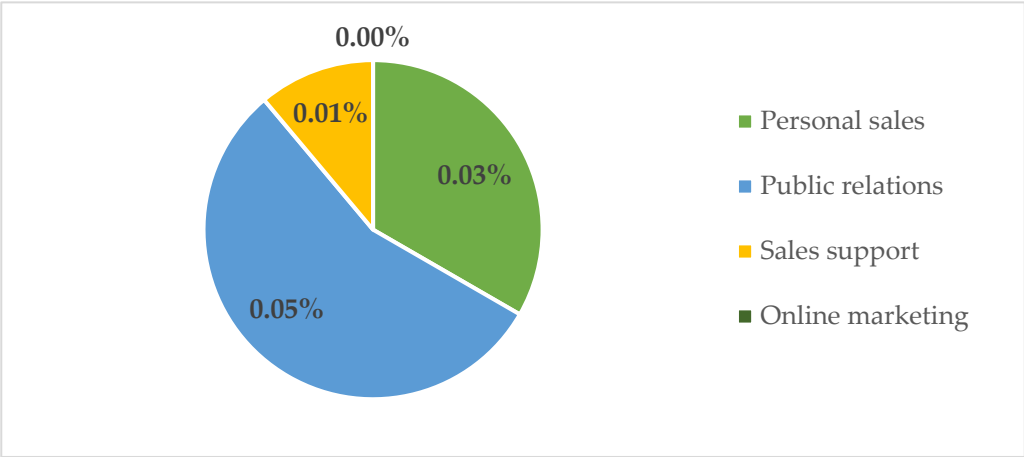


Figure 1. Percentage of expenditure on marketing activities in the Czech Republic

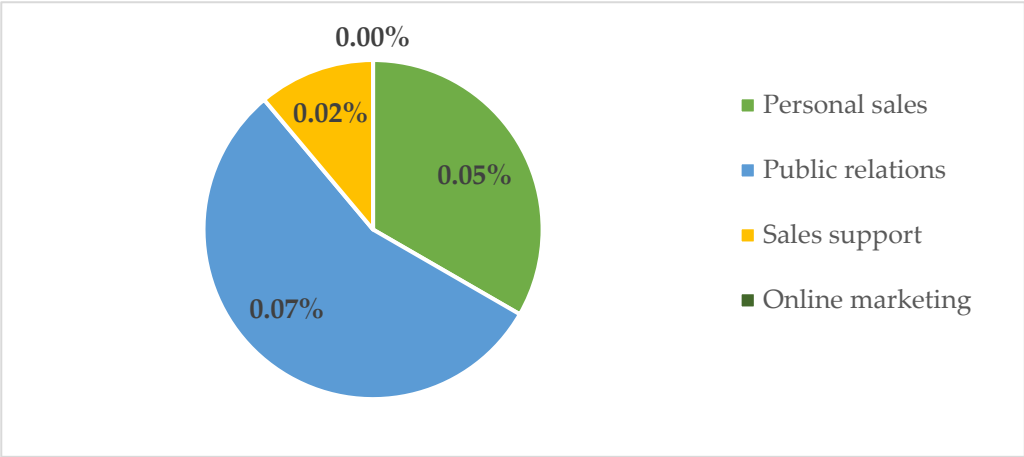


Figure 2. Percentage of expenditure on marketing activities on the German market

4. Discussion

Based on finding answers on research questions and provide analysis of communication mixes, the above case study enables some conclusions to be drawn, which could aid other companies that are considering entering a foreign market.

One of the most important steps is to be aware whether the company has sufficient funding and know-how to enable it to engage in business and marketing activities in the selected international market (Lopes, 2019). In terms of comparing the company's marketing expenses, it may be inferred that the process of adapting and customising communication in the foreign market is far more demanding as regards the funds that need to be invested (Brei et al., 2011). Another factor that can aid companies in successful communication and building their brand in the foreign market is adaptation and the use of existing (local)

communication tools, which can act as a kind of springboard for the linguistic and cultural adaptation of the international communication mix (Akgün et al., 2014). According to Keller (2007), the optimal combination of the communication mix and its tools, such as the aforementioned personal sales, sales support, PR and online communication tools, has a positive impact on international brand building and aspects such as the image, awareness and knowledge of the brand, etc. This case study also presents that management of communication activities has really important role in corporate strategic management (Milichovský, 2013; Steyn, 2004; Kumar, 2008) and marketing communication itself can be marked as the most visible and audible component of the marketing mix (Purcarea et al., 2015; Duralia, 2018). The idea that family brands applying digital marketing gain a competitive advantage over brands that use only traditional marketing tools (Nadanyiova et al., 2021) cannot be fully supported. For supporting this idea, the next research and analysis of company's online communication tools would be needed.

5. Conclusion

The case study focuses on analysing and comparing the communication mixes used by the family company HOKAMI CZ on the German and Czech markets. Based on this analysis, conclusions are presented that can aid companies in planning their international communication activities. However, it is important to bear in mind that all the above conclusions should be appropriately verified in a subsequent study by means of a questionnaire survey and statistical methods.

Company communication strategy has slightly improved after 2018. In these days there is for example new applied visual identity on HOKAMI CZ websites. A very small increase can be seen on social media websites; however, the company must make some important decisions. For example, YouTube channel get during 3 years only 5 new followers. The main reason is probably due to the lack of the right content that would give followers reason to follow company profile. Almost all marketing communication costs has also risen about 0,02 %. That is probably due to financing more in new marketing factors as brand visual identity and its application in to the each of marketing communication tool.

However, overall, the case study gives a relatively detailed and realistic view of the communication of a family brand in a selected international market.

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