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DOI 10.5937/kultura1339381R

UDK 005.346

658.8

Original Scientific Paper

CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT STRATEGY AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR IMPROVING THE MODERN MARKETING CONCEPT

Abstract: *Previous marketing practices have caused much criticism of this concept, which is why the necessity for its overcoming is emphasized in academic and professional debates. Therefore, the basic task of the modern marketing concept becomes building good relationships both with the market participants and the wider social public. This paper aims to show that creation of good relations with key participants in the market is one of the possibilities for improving overall business in the global environment. The starting point of this issue is consideration of the marketing criticism from a wider perspective and highlighting its solving potentials in the direction of building good relationships with marketing participants. In this process, it is important to emphasize the potential of marketing relations as the concept that we promote within the contemporary marketing. The concept of marketing relations will be considered through the 4 Os model. Reaching these complex but legitimate demands sets difficult task before the participants in today's market, but trends show that only by developing good relations it is possible to achieve a long-term sustainable position.*

Key words: *marketing criticism, relationship marketing, 4 Os model, CRM, strategy*

Introduction

Recent marketing practice shows that it is not enough to meet expectations of the buyers but also to offer additional value, which is a direct result of increased competition. Modern marketing should use the area of communication, creation and product delivery to create superior value and thereby gain a competitive advantage in selected target markets. Many researchers have determined that companies that embrace the concept of marketing achieve better results on the market, which confirms its validity.¹ Therefore, it is likely that long-term successful position in the market depends on the ability to create and deliver value to the customers, and to find ways to do better than your competitors. It is likely that market oriented firms do better than others.² The reason for this is that the very concept of modern marketing insists on meeting customers-identified demands and on increasing their satisfaction and loyalty. Successful implementation of this concept must include ethical business outcomes. However, there still are market participants who did not (do not want or do not know) to perceive the importance of corporate social responsibility.

Today's marketing managers are forced to modify the traditional ways and means of doing business and to find completely new concepts that will enable companies to develop and maintain a competitive position in the market. Unfortunately, regardless of the development of marketing tools and improvement of the process, it often happens that a widely known criticism of marketing concepts diminishes the efforts of today's marketing managers. Most of this criticism is the merit of the past and the concepts of business operations which are subsumed under the transactional marketing. However, the practice shows that even today there are market participants whose actions negatively affect the perception of marketing. In order to overcome the criticism, it is of great importance to emphasize the positive aspects of relationship marketing concepts, and in this context, to acknowledge the strategy of customer relationship management (CRM).

Every organization has certain obligations to local community in which it operates. The concern for social responsibility has

1 Kotler, Ph. and Keller, K. L. (2006) *Marketing Menadžment*, Beograd: Data Status, p. 16.

2 Milenović, B. and Ratković M. (2009) *Strategije marketinga, kako ući na tržište i uspešno opstati na njemu*, Beograd: Fakultet za trgovinu i bankarstvo, Univerzitet BK, p. 12.

become one of the key factors of competitiveness.³ Observation and use of marketing relationship potentials should be aligned with socially responsible behavior as it is the only way to obtain maximum effects. Creating a business strategy based on socially responsible behavior should take into account the interests of all categories of market participants. If we consider these categories as crucial stakeholders, we can distinguish four main groups which are in this paper classified into the 4 Os model.⁴

The first category of participants interpreted within this model to promote the development of good long-term relationship, are the buyers. In the process where we meet their needs, where we manage our relationship with them, as well as in process of creating a relationship with the public, it is necessary to design an adequate communication strategy. As communication plays a particularly strong role in creating positive reputation and inspiring your customers with trust and loyalty, public relations stand out as a distinct management activity. In the second half of the twentieth century it began to be considered indispensable for the economic, political and social development of a modern society.⁵ Also, in a modern marketing environment, creation of good long-term relationships with employees is becoming one of the most important ways to maintain product quality and consequently – good relationship with customers. Finally, in the end-user supply chain, the importance of establishing long-term profitable relationships with all your agents must be pointed out because their relationships can directly affect the efficiency of the overall business strategy. In today's industrial market, we have witnessed an intensive development of flexible types of partnerships, alliances and networks among various business entities.⁶ If key stakeholders are defined on the basis of importance of these relations in each specific case, we can create opportunities for the improvement of our overall marketing strategy. This will, at the same time, help overcome some criticism of the marketing concept itself.

3 Vasiljević, M., Perić, N. and Botorić, V. Odnosi s kupcima kao vid eksternih odnosa s javnošću, in: *Zbornik radova međunarodne naučne konferencije Eurobrand 3*, (2011), Zrenjanin: TQM centar, pp. 116-122.

4 Milenović, B. and Ratković, M. (2012) *Marketing*, Sremski Karlovci: Cekom books, pp. 317-318.

5 Ratković, M., Grubić, G. and Marković, J. (2012) Ethics in Public Relations, *International journal of economics and law: scientific magazine reflecting trends in law, economics and management* no. 6, Novi Sad: Faculty for education of the executives, pp. 81-89.

6 Lovreta, S., Berman, B., Petković, G., Veljković, S., Crnković, J. and Bogetić, Z. (2010) *Menadžment odnosa sa kupcima*, Beograd: Data status i Ekonomski fakultet, Univerzitet u Beogradu, p. 86.

This paper indicates the importance of developing good long-term relationships with all (key) stakeholders, as defined within model 4 Os. In this context, we are looking at the concept of relationship marketing as a possible modern marketing concept observed through the aforementioned model. Since criticism also partly offers opportunities, in this paper we will present well-known marketing criticisms, which can be indicators for improving customer's relationships and making higher profits. These criticisms are largely merits of the past, where the concept of transactional marketing was much more present than it is in today's market. However, the perception of general public, when we come to certain marketing activities, is the same as it used to be and this fact can create a problem to today's marketing managers. Therefore, the papers based on perception of criticisms and their resolution which aim to improve relations with customers, should present the marketing managers with the opportunities arising from this issue. In order to mitigate or eliminate the effects of these criticisms, marketing managers and companies must develop strategies that will reconcile the needs and desires of customers with the desired profit, respecting the principles of socially responsible behavior at the same time. This task is not easy and it requires communication modes to change in the direction of emphasizing ethical behavior in all business activities with target groups.

The basic assumption of this paper is that overcoming a well-known marketing criticism can be achieved by improving relationships with customers and other stakeholders. At the same time, the concept of relationship marketing is viewed as a key opportunity of the modern marketing concept, where customer relationship management is particularly emphasized. Accordingly, the aim of this paper is to point out the importance of establishing good relationships with customers and other stakeholders defined within the 4 Os model. In addition, stakeholders' categorization into four groups within this model may represent theoretical contribution to the interpretation of relationship marketing problems. The importance of this topic results from the necessity to find possible ways of differentiation in a highly competitive environment of today.

Marketing Criticism

Today's business environment is in most aspects radically different from that in the recent past. The changes that are taking place at the global level indicate increasingly difficult circumstances for maintaining a competitive position of participants in the global market. Marketing managers have a more difficult task of fulfilling the essence of the marketing

concept towards achieving the requirements, fulfilling the wishes of our customers and making marketing decisions in the area of corporate social responsibility and ethical behavior. Under such conditions, creation of effective communication with target groups, as well as with the general public, becomes imperative. Ethics should encourage decision makers to think about how their decisions will affect different groups of people or any individual.⁷ Ethical Advertising Standard of American Advertising Federation defines eight rules about the behavior of market participants, among which the truth is imperative, followed by the authenticity of public claims, as well as ethical behavior towards competition in the context of their products.⁸ Participants whose decisions are not made or executed in accordance with ethical business behavior may be faced with severe criticism of the public, which may result in endangering their actual position in the market. Regardless of the profession, it is necessary to adhere to the ethical business principles that should provide at least a minimum of moral values.⁹

Unfortunately, despite the efforts of today's market participants, marketing is still considered as an "area" based on motives of self-interest. In that sense, marketers will always force increasing of product prices, as well as creating of false and misleading advertising, promotional incentives, services and packaging. In addition to the above mentioned, critics of marketing also refer to:

- High sale pressures;
- Discriminatory prices;
- Unsafe or poor products;
- Planned obsolescence and replacement of products;
- Poor service to unattractive consumers;
- Stimulation of wrong desires increasing benefits to industry rather than consumers;
- Political force so strong that it allows powerful companies to influence important politicians, media and institutions;

7 Kastratović, E. (2006) *Uvod u menadžment*, Beograd: Fakultet za menadžment u sportu, Univerzitet Braća Karić, p. 57.

8 Wallace, S. S. (2011) *Principles and Practice for Advertising Ethics*, Washington: Institute for Advertising Ethics, American Advertising Federation, http://www.aaf.org/images/public/aaf_content/images/ad%20ethics/IAE_Principles_Practices.pdf (27 April 2013).

9 Ratković, M., Grubić, G. and Marković, J. (2012) *Ethics in Public Relations, International journal of economics and law : scientific magazine reflecting trends in law, economics and management* no. 6, Novi Sad: Faculty for education of the executives, pp. 81-89.

- Creating a materialistic view of life;
- Criticism related to electronic marketing etc.

Self-interest is not always condemnable, but some authors suggest that it should be distinguished from selfishness, which is always to be condemned.¹⁰ Protection against potential abuse of marketing can be found in legislation, as well as codes of advertising, public relations, marketing research etc. In addition, consumers should be allowed the right to know the real cost of the content and use of the product as the best way to protect them. On the other hand, we should not forget how important it is to respect the environmental rules of business, and the efforts that should be made in developing ecological awareness that is promoted by environmental organizations and movements. This is how a concept of environmental marketing was created that implies a holistic process of identifying and meeting the needs of consumers and society in a profitable and sustainable manner.¹¹ In such an environment, marketing managers need to treat ecological problems as challenges rather than limitations that may lead to expansion of marketing criticism. Socially responsible corporate businesses describe widely accepted concept of company management that maintains a balance not only between social and economic goals but also between individual and public interests. Socially responsible business operations help companies to be more responsible to the community which they receive profits from, treating all social actors in the community and the company in an ethical and socially responsible manner.¹²

Alleviation and/or elimination of the above criticism involve constant searching for ways that will allow customers to get more for less cost and less purchasing efforts. The primary purpose of this effort is to establish good relations with customers, which is also the goal of a modern marketing concept discussed below. Naturally, the first step in this process involves consideration of criticism as a real problem that can present locations and guidelines for improving overall operations. However, it is certain that a common denominator in addressing marketing criticism lies in development of good long-term relationships with key market participants.

10 Prnjat, A. (2012) Lični interes i moralna motivacija veznika, *Kultura* br. 137, Beograd: Zavod za proučavanje kulturnog razvitka, pp. 342-343.

11 Milenović, B. and Ratković, M. op. cit, pp. 328-330.

12 Perić, N., Krasulja, N. and Gujanica, I. (2012) *Medijske, PR i brend tendencije*, Beograd: Čigoja štampa, p. 82.

*Developing good relationships with customers
within the 4 Os model*

Good relationships should be established with several categories of participants, defined in this study as customers, employees, partners and the public. The above categories are discussed in the framework of a relationship marketing concept. Because of its importance and distribution, relations with customers are used as a synonym for relationship marketing in literature. However, this should not diminish the importance of establishing good relationships with other stakeholders.

Authors from this field define different models of relationships in terms of key parties that number between two and several dozens.¹³ In accordance with this literature, but above all relying on previous researches of different authors, we can examine relations according to above categories of participants, as stated in the 4 Os model. Thus, the group of market participants with which we should foster good relations can be divided into partners, customers, employees and the public.¹⁴ Establishment of adequate interaction or potentially successful cooperation with them should be a common goal for all participants who want to achieve and maintain a competitive position in a modern business environment.

The model of 4 Os emerged from the need for a more precise definition of activities which are part of individual strategies toward key parties, but it does not put these groups into the same position. The importance of creating good long-term relationships with these groups is different and depends on specific situations and the overall strategy. It is also clear that certain activities in the domain of relationship marketing overlap, and that the final business strategy brings all activities to one goal. However, to simplify analysis, and more in terms of theoretical discourse, this model can contribute to a more clear perception of the possible ways for improving overall business by taking advantage of good long-term relationships, which is also considered as the essence of a modern marketing concept as well as an opportunity to overcome well-known marketing criticisms.

13 Ratković, M., Grubić, G. and Tasić, S. (2012) Evolution of marketing: from product up to employment, *International journal of economics and law: scientific magazine reflecting trends in law, economics and management* no. 5, Novi Sad: Faculty for education of the executives, pp. 72-78.

14 Ratković, M., Grubić G. and Tasić S. Dobri odnosi sa kupcima kao faktor konkurentske prednosti, in: *XIV Međunarodna konferencija Upravljanje kvalitetom i pouzdanošću, ICDQM-2011*, ed. Papić, Ž. (2011), Čačak: Istraživački centar DQM, pp. 180-186.

The customer relationship management is a strategic approach produced by creating improved relations in the marketing channel through the development of an appropriate link to the vital customers and customer segments.¹⁵ In modern environment, this process combines the potential of relationship marketing strategies and the communication technology in order to create profitable long-term relationships with customers and other key stakeholders. The relationship marketing concept is gaining in importance, as, thanks to new technologies, it is now possible to get a complete insight into customer demands, their habits and interests.¹⁶ The process of building good relationships with customers requires inter-functional fusion of processes, people, operations, and marketing capabilities, which necessarily involves modern solutions in the field of information and communication technologies. One of the well-known ways of building good long-term relationships with customers, based on the aforementioned technologies, is the IDIC model (*Identify customers, Differentiate customers, Interact with customers and Customize treatment*).¹⁷ However, as these technologies have become an integral part of marketing strategies as well as the overall strategies of present participants in the global market, this text will not study them especially, but will focus on a comprehensive approach to building and maintaining good relationships with all key parties.

In addition to attracting customers and maintaining customer relations, the concept of modern marketing also involves expansion of their value. Maintaining good relations with customers over extensive periods of time is becoming the main goal of the modern marketing concept due to stronger market competitiveness leading to a permanent reduction in average duration of such relationship.¹⁸ Clearly, this requires more effort in each part of the strategy, because increased competition affects reduction of the average life of the aforementioned relationships. However, if we know that this is one of the rare ways to improve operations, and in frequent cases to maintain market position, it is necessary to invest further efforts to improve the process of managing relationships. In the past, marketing concept has often been focused on attracting new customers

15 Payne, A. and Frow, P. A. (2005) Strategic Framework for Customer Relationship Management, *Journal of Marketing* no. 69, American Marketing Association, pp. 168-170.

16 Ratković, M. and Grubić, G. (2011) Promene u marketingu i komunikaciji usled primene savremenih informacionih tehnologija, *Ekonomika* br. 1, Niš: Društvo ekonomista, pp. 67-79.

17 Peppers, D. and Rogers, M. (2004) *Managing Customer Relationship*, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 68-71.

18 Ratković, M., Grubić, G. and Tasić, S. opt. cit, pp. 72-78.

while maintaining good relationships with existing groups was neglected. In other words, transaction marketing was a prevalent concept over relationship marketing, which is now promoted as the possibility of achieving long-term relationship with customers and improving overall business. A modern marketing concept promotes proactive approach of all involved parties and this implies taking responsibility. From the perspective of corporate responsibility, this means adoption of a socially responsible marketing concept that relates to the interests of general public, which by default includes the ethical context of marketing activities. Acceptance of such behavior means that, in formulating its strategy, a company must set an acceptable ratio of profit-making and respect for social interest. Consequently, the definition of a strategy that is consistent with the concept of socially responsible marketing opens up a possibility of attracting more customers and the possibility to maintain long-term and growing links with the existing ones – which is one of the main tasks of the modern marketing concept. However, this process requires great expertise and understanding of the market situation, otherwise it may lead to a situation due to which the marketing concept is attributed to a number of different reviews.

An integral part of any strategy aimed at achieving a good relationship should be ethical outcomes of the overall marketing strategy. In other words, the emphasis on morality of marketing decisions and social responsibility in order to ensure socially and environmentally acceptable effects should be an essential part of the strategy of building good relations among all market participants.

*Relationship marketing aimed at
improving the business*

The consequences of global changes, increased competition, struggle to attract more customers and maintain good long-term relationships with them as well as the necessity of preserving the environment are the main contributing factors to the increased responsibility in marketing decision making. If marketing is considered in the context of broader social interests, it results in creation of new concepts such as holistic marketing. Among other aspects, this concept sets marketing in a socially responsible framework with emphasis on the ethical context and environment. Acceptance of socially responsible marketing is a natural consequence of a holistic worldview that requires understanding of a broader context of interests and ethical marketing activities. Compliance with these principles often leads marketers into a difficult position of having to resolve the conflict of three legitimate demands:

- Respect for the broader social – public interest;
- The fulfillment of customer wishes;
- Generating profit to the company.

With market developing and expanding, the necessity for harmonization of interests and cooperation is growing, which leads to an increase in the importance of building and maintaining good long-term relationships with customers, employees, partners and the public. In this context, it can be said that the relationship-marketing concept has inherited a holistic marketing approach and has, at the same time, improved certain aspects of cooperation between key parties. The most important contribution of relationship marketing might be the very definition of a group to establish proper relations with, and their common denominator is creation of a long-term mutually beneficial relationship. Defining above mentioned groups was carried out because of their importance in terms of making profit, although their relations strategy should be aligned with socially responsible behavior. Division of key parties in the 4 Os model can be regarded as the result of an analysis of activities making the concept of relationship marketing, based on which defined relations can be further developed. Direction of their development and their individual importance is defined according to the specific situation in the context of developing an overall strategy. Due to all this, it can be concluded that the relationship marketing has contributed to the reorganization of the known marketing concepts, with the aim of a more comprehensive approach to contemporary problems (Figure 1).¹⁹

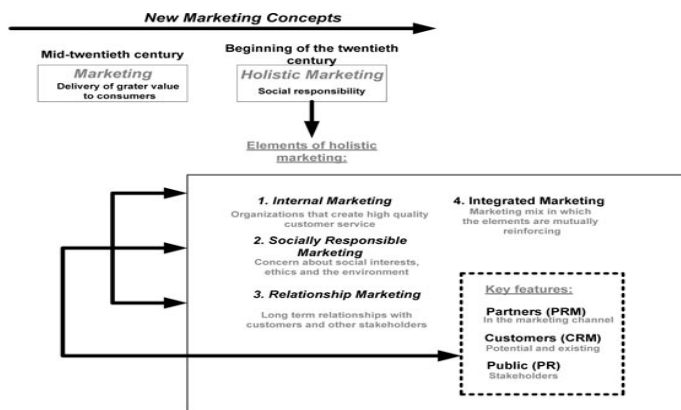


Figure 1. The development of modern marketing concept and position of marketing relationship in holistic marketing

19 Ratković, M., Grubić, G. and Tasić, S. op. cit, pp. 72-78.

Concepts of relationship marketing and customer relationship management promote expansion of marketing management from a specific department to the entire organization, i.e. creation of a fully market-oriented management of a company. In order to understand this transformation Evert Gummesson introduced the terms part-time marketer - PTM and full-time marketer - FTM).²⁰ Dedicated marketers are employed in the marketing department of a company and they existed in previous marketing concepts.²¹ The thing that before mentioned concepts want to impose is the transformation of all employees into partial marketers, analogous to the TQM concept, where all members of the organization contribute to the overall quality of business. Partial marketers realize the impact on relationships with customers by providing services, sales execution, and personal communication in various forms: in person, by phone, email, text messages and uploading content to the website of the company.

The previous practice as a process of building and maintaining good relationships with customers has often been identified with the concept of relationship marketing, so from that point of view, this key side can be treated as the most important. A marketing oriented company must set the customers and their needs and requirements in the center of its business as well as its strategies that will result in increasing their satisfaction and loyalty. The modern concept of marketing must never depart from this rule, because every customer has an increasing potential value, although the probability of leaving the company under the influence of competition is also greater. In order to retain customers it is of great importance to implement the model of customer relationship management that will be able to determine accurately the different categories of customers, in order to establish appropriate relations with them. Strategy Relationship Management with different groups of customers should be based on a thorough knowledge of their behavior. The activities and resources that make up the current strategy should be flexible with respect to possible changes in their needs and requirements.

In the spirit of highlighting morality in marketing decisions, we will emphasize that the main goal of the modern marketing concept and establishing an effective customer relationships process is to achieve their satisfaction, which is more often

20 Gummesson, E. (2008) *Total Relationship Marketing*, MA/USA: Elsevier Ltd.

21 Ratković, M. (2009) Interni marketing u funkciji povećanja zadovoljstva kupaca, *Marketing* br. 4, vol. 40, Beograd: Srpsko udruženje za marketing i Ekonomski fakultet, Univerziteta u Beogradu, pp. 269-275.

accomplished through creation of additional value. At the same time, a direct effect of the activities that make this process should be long-term profit of the company. In this sense, the main areas where the company needs to focus its efforts are:

- Achieving an appropriate level of customer satisfaction, which often involves exceeding their expectations;
- Creating added value which is often referred to as providing alternative ways to shop;
- Accomplishing continuity in the relationship;
- Harmonizing total logistics of the offer in the marketing channel, in order to create a realistic perception/evaluation of customers;
- Creating different strategies for different groups of customers.

Linking the modern concept relationship marketing goals and the main reasons for business of market participants, we can say that company profit is directly dependent on customer loyalty. If we continue with this logic, it can be reasonably assumed that achieving loyalty is achieving added value, which is often a function of socially responsible behavior. Also, what we can state with certainty is that the key principle of establishing good relations is at the same time achieving long-term cooperation and creation of additional value for both parties in a specific situation. This situation is recognized as a so called win-win relationship where both parties have benefit and are willing to continue cooperation.

Conclusion

The concept of modern marketing implies that business activities must be directed towards improvement of customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, which is, in today's academic and professional discussions, interpreted in the scope of the relationship marketing. In further analysis of this concept we come to the importance of the process of customer relationship management and activities aimed at attracting customers, maintaining relationships with them and expanding cooperation. Therefore, the focus of the modern marketing concept is on relationships with customers, although we should not neglect other key parties considered in the scope of marketing relationship. Relationships with customers and other key parties make the 4 Os model, which represents possible means of theoretical analysis of the importance of business relationships today. However, since the relations with the customers are priorities for most market participants, the strategy of

establishing a good relationship with them stands out as a matter of highest significance.

Companies and marketing managers are making great efforts to detect and meet their customers' requirements and wishes. Regardless, the marketing concept still suffers certain criticism. Some of it is solely merit of the past, but some is still manifested in the operations of individual market participants. The conduct that involves high-pressure sales, misleading promotion and packages, as well as promotion of materialistic view of the world, is just some of the criticisms that threaten the primary objectives of the modern marketing concept. Confrontations with criticism and assessment of their negative effects should prompt marketing managers towards the implementation of activities that may eliminate or mitigate them. This process should take advantage of the full potential of the process of customer relationship management, as well as of the concept of relationship marketing, which promotes building of good long-term relationships with all key stakeholders.

If we consider relationship marketing as the basis of modern marketing, we can conclude that there is a wide range of features in one of the few possible ways of achieving differential advantage in today's business environment. In this paper, we interpreted possible activities that may influence overcoming of the criticisms in the process of establishing a good relationship with customers. Today's business conditions are said to be difficult because, in addition to greater competition, they involve higher customer expectations which must often be met by creating additional value. However, if additional value can be found in the promotion of social responsibility and ethics in marketing, it is definitely a safer way to create good long-term customer relationships and improve marketing.

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УПРАВЉАЊЕ ОДНОСИМА СА КУПЦИМА КАО МОГУЋНОСТ УНАПРЕЂЕЊА САВРЕМЕНОГ КОНЦЕПТА МАРКЕТИНГА

Сажетак

Досадашња пракса у маркетингу је произвела многобројне критике овог концепта, због чега се данас, у академским и стручним расправама истиче неопходност њиховог превазилажења. Истовремено, савремени концепт маркетинга посматра изградњу добрих односа са учесницима на тржишту, али и са широм друштвеном јавношћу, као основни циљ. Циљ овог рада је да покаже да креирање добрих односа са кључним учесницима на тржишту представља једну од могућности унапређења укупног пословања у глобалном окружењу. Полазиште у представљању ове проблематике је сагледавање критика маркетинга из шире перспективе и истицање потенцијала њиховог решавања у правцу изградње добрих односа са учесницима на тржишту. У том процесу, важно је нагласити потенцијал маркетинга односа, као концепта који промовишемо у оквиру савременог маркетинга. Концепт маркетинга односа биће разматран кроз модел 4О. Постизање ових комплексних, али легитимних захтева поставља тежак задатак учесницима на данашњем тржишту, али, како трендови показују, само развијањем добрих односа могуће је остварити дугорочно одрживу позицију.

Кључне речи: *критике маркетинга, маркетинг односа, односи са купцима, модел 4О, ЦРМ.*