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Abstract

The way marketing communications are used by organizations to reach target audiences has changed significantly in recent years. Once, the emphasis was on promoting 'to' audiences through an acquisition and persuasion orientation, now it is about communicating 'with' audiences, where the focus is on interaction and relationships. The traditional promotional mix was based on the five main communications tools but it is argued that this is no longer representative of contemporary communications practice and an increasingly complex media environment. It appears that the promotional mix approach does not reflect current industry practice neither does it complement contemporary marketing theory. It is accepted that there has been debate about the efficacy of the mix as a concept (Copley, 2012) but the emphasis of this paper is on the exploration of the validity of the promotional mix as a model for explaining how modern marketing communications are operationalized. It considers some of the practical and theoretical issues associated with this convention, and it reviews the way in which the tools and media are used as a focus for understanding the ways in which organizations communicate. Finally, a new framework is presented which, it is hoped, will stimulate discussion and further research in order to better represent both marketing theory and marketing communications practice. The promotional mix element of the 4Ps marketing mix has become established as

the conventional method to express the way organizations promote their products and services. Commonly agreed to consist of advertising, sales promotion, public relations, personal selling and more recently, direct marketing, each tool possesses different properties and capabilities. As a result, the promotional mix can be assembled in a variety of ways to achieve different outcomes, both cognitive and behavioural. However, ideas that organizations should promote and hence persuade customers to think and behave in particular ways have changed.

Keywords: Marketing communications mix, media, messages, Target Audience, Financial Resources

Introduction

'In the 1980s, with only two commercial channels in the UK, Procter & Gamble reckoned it could reach 90 per cent of consumers with just three television advertisements. Persuasion is now regarded as just one of a number of tasks that an organization needs to accomplish through its communication activities. For example, providing information, listening, informing and reminding customers are just some of the complexities associated with contemporary interpretations and usage of marketing communications. The emphasis has shifted from a 'promoting to' to a 'communicating with' focus. Whilst the origins of the promotional mix may have provided a basis

for firms and their representatives, to have organized their operations, today's complex communications environment suggests that consumers and other stakeholders care little as to what terms are used to describe the forms through which they receive communications. What is also interesting is that media were regarded as an element of advertising and subservient to all the tools. Consideration is given to the ways in which communication 'messages' are created and how they are received and interpreted by audiences. This leads to the presentation of a new framework for understanding the way in which the marketing communications mix interrelates primarily with media and messages, not tools and methods. This is called MCM2. Although at this stage this new configuration is derived from an audience perspective and underpinned through relational theory. It is an interpretive approach and although yet to be tested empirically, it is presented as more compatible with prevailing marketing thought. This model is presented as a starting point to stimulate further research and discussion. Now it would take more than 1,000 for the same impact' (Silverman, 2006). Saatchi (2006), describes the concept of continuous partial attention (CPA) as the ability of 'a modern teenager, in the 30 seconds of a normal television commercial, to take a telephone call send a text, receive a photograph, play a game, download a music track, read a magazine and watch commercials at x6 speed.' These results in next day recall scores for TV ads, to reduce from 35% to 10%. These examples clearly identify the significant change that has occurred in the means by which organizations communicate with their customers. Further, it suggests a need for a review of the models and frameworks used by

firms to organize their marketing communications activities. The experience of P&G and other firms, discussed below, also illustrates how clients and agencies are now utilizing a wider range of communications methods and developing media neutral strategies. Yet, despite these changes, the promotional, or communications mix appears relatively unchanged, as witnessed in various publications (Fill, 2009; Pelsmacker, Guans and van den Bergh 2009; Smith and Taylor, 2009; Belch and Belch, 2009; Brassington and Pettitt, 2010).

Research method

The paper is based on a review of academic literature and secondary research.

Review of Literature

Relational and Resource Based Perspectives Fill and Hughes (2009), identified and discussed two key underpinning concepts, relational theory and the resource based view of the firm, as the basis for an explanation of the changing marketing communications landscape. These offer interesting yet contradictory perspectives and may well reflect some of the core issues underlying the marketing communications industry and the way the subject is taught. Relational theory is derived from McNeil's (2012) work about norms of behaviour within relational contracting activities (Broody, 2010). It is assumed by many authors and researchers that relationship marketing only involves relational or collaborative exchanges. McNeil however, recognized that there is an element of relational content in all marketing exchanges. This may be limited in transactional exchanges and more extensive

in collaborative exchanges, but a spectrum of relational content can be observed. In terms of marketing communications, this manifests itself in the use of response driven activities aimed either at customer acquisition, or to those associated with developing and establishing customer retention. The latter are often part of so-called loyalty schemes supported by off and online communications. 'Traditional' mass media based promotional communications are an interpretation of the linear or bullet theory of communication (Schramm, 1955). More 'modern' relationship building communications centre around an interactive response model. Communication theory has progressed and is now understood to be concerned with listening and considering, providing information, reassuring, reminding and differentiating organizations, products and services (Fill, 2012).

Theories concerning the Resource Based View of the Firm (RBV) hold that a firm can develop a sustainable competitive advantage based on the superior value it generates by managing its key resources more effectively than its competitors (Fay and Smither, 2009). Essentially, the RBV is concerned with using the right resources in order to generate long-term value for stakeholders. In a marketing communications context, the resource perspective can be seen through the development of digital technologies. Digital technologies have had a significant impact on each of the promotional tools and have served in many instances to lower costs, extend audience reach and improve communication effectiveness. The ability to store and analyze vast amounts of customer data has facilitated customized communications for retail

organizations including Tesco and Amazon and allowed them to gain significant competitive advantage in their respective markets. Audiences have come to value the empowerment that interactive communications provide, a key feature of the resource based perspective. Limited resources have led many organizations to seek out new ways of reaching customers given the noise and clutter of competitor communications and the changing media consumption habits of intended audiences. This includes utilizing promotional tools in a variety of creative and innovative ways; product placement (advertising), programme sponsorship (PR and advertising), field marketing (sales promotion), key account management (personal selling) and an increasing range of direct marketing initiatives (advertising). The tensions apparent in the marketing communications industry (client and agency) are reflected in the contradictions between the relational and RBV interpretations. Client demand for effectiveness measurement has moved the agency sector away from reliance on recommending traditional advertising, particularly TV, to seeking other media platforms. Creative resources are now focused on developing a much wider range of communications concepts across broader media landscape. Bartle, Boggle and Hearty's (BBH) success in winning large communications accounts, including British Airways and Unilever's soap brand business, worth some £200 million, has been attributed to the agency's 'strategic creative ability.....to deliver thinking and ideas that will genuinely unify customers around the world' (Mariner, 2009).

Towards a New Marketing Communications Mix

As a starting point it is proposed that the phrase marketing communications mix be adopted as it overcomes the restrictions imposed by the promotion/persuasion platform and allows for the accommodation of a wide array of communication methods and audience experiences. The marketing communications mix (MCM) needs to reflect the role of marketing communications, namely that it is an audience centered activity that seeks to engage target audiences (Fill, 2010). This approach is compatible with relational exchange theory and accommodates the wide range of relationships, including transactional exchanges, which organizations develop with their stakeholders. It is proposed that the marketing communications mix be considered from an audience perspective and from this a two-tier approach be adopted. The first is a macro and the second a micro perspective.

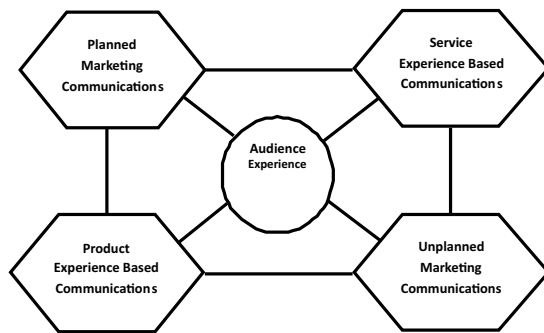


Figure 1:
A Macro Interpretation of the Marketing Communications Mix

Source: An adapted from Gringos, 2012

From a macro viewpoint it is possible to appreciate the broad spectrum that constitutes marketing communications. Gringos (2012) provide a useful framework for this when he refers to both planned and

unplanned marketing communications and to product and service messages. These are presented in Figure 1. Planned marketing communications for example, takes the form of advertising, sales calls, sampling and internet banners, whereas unplanned marketing communications refer to word-of-mouth communication, news stories and general gossip. Examples of product experience based messages concern the design and durability of a product, whereas service messages refer to customer service encounters prior to, during and after consumption. This approach enables not just the breadth but also the complexity of managing marketing communications to be observed. However, it fails to provide any detailed understanding, particularly of the planned marketing communications element, which it is argued, has the capability to influence the communications concerning both the product and service experience. The role of the micro perspective is to articulate these elements.

Any new (micro) mix needs to take account of two key points. First, in order to determine the nature of any engagement through marketing communications, it is necessary to understand the nature of the information the target audience is likely to require and to then design the message content to meet these needs. The second point concerns the manner in which the audience prefers to access the information they require, namely their media usage and preferences. It is proposed that these two elements, message and media, should lie at the heart of any new marketing communication mix. In addition, the role of creativity, both in constructing effective messages and in selecting appropriate media channels, needs to be considered. For some, this creative element has become the driving force behind communications development.

Agency Saatchi & Saatchi have restructured their business away from that associated with 'full service' advertising, to a framework that supports clients through innovation and change as businesses as well as providing creative communications expertise. Message Content Mix It is apparent that the rise of digital technologies has encouraged organizations to reconsider the content of the messages they convey through their marketing communications activities. One example of this concerns the design and research associated with web sites. Having to think through the processes visitors undertake when visiting a site has encouraged thought about the content and the messages conveyed. Watts (2010) identifies examples of the creative use of web based communications to engage with visitors. Nappy brand Pampers has created a website offering advice on breastfeeding and toddler tantrums which receives over 400,000 hits per month. Social network sites such as MySpace have also been used commercially to promote brands. Unilever used a My Space website for the deodorant brand Lynx aimed at young males.

It is clear that people make various judgments about the messages they receive and work by Lutz, Mackenzie and Belch (2009) led to the 'attitude- toward-the-ad' concept. This has had a significant impact on the marketing communications literature and has been supported by subsequent researchers. There is evidence that messages that promote a positive emotional response are positively related to subsequent brand attitudes and purchase intentions (Goldsmith and Lafferty, 2012). Similar findings have been found in the business- to-business context (Gilliland and Johnston, 2010), in new media and ecommerce (Chen and Wells, 2010), web site design and the 'attitude-toward- the-site' concept (Kumar

and Bruner, 2011). Even in personal selling the idea that a favorable attitude-towards-the-salesperson requirement has been established, albeit anecdotally, for a very long time. What is clear is that attitudes-towards-the- message, and it is argued associated delivery mechanisms, influence not just brand disposition but also purchase intentions. Message design in its broadest sense, is therefore an integral part of marketing communications, and should be a part of any new mix. Audiences who prefer transactional exchanges favour messages that inform them about product attributes and services and the value they will derive from entering into an exchange. Audiences that favour a relational exchange seek information that not only enables them to learn more about the topic of 'conversation' or relationship specific knowledge as Galantine (2011) suggests, but that it also invites, encourages or makes accessible further messages and opportunities for interaction. This indicates that the other party is actually interested or at least willing to share information, if it is required.

Media Channel Mix

The practitioner evidence indicates that the second element of the new configuration should concern the media. Organizations seek to deliver their messages through an increasing variety of media to the extent that use of the promotional tools appears to reflect preferred media routes to target audiences. The media are normally considered to consist of paid for delivery mechanisms through which messages are conveyed to target audiences. Traditionally this has focused on so- called above the line advertising media – TV, radio, cinema, posters and print. However, this is a narrow interpretation as media do not always have to

be paid for, in a direct sense. Television and cinema advertising are prime examples of paid-for-media where clients pay to use the channels. However, there are other media that do not attract a third party usage fee. For example, letterheads, websites, delivery vehicles, buildings and work-wear clothing represent opportunities to convey messages without having to pay to use the facility. There is one off set up charges but there no usage fees. The examples offered so far relate mainly to advertising media. However, this demarcation can also be used to understand the delivery of public relations messages. No media fee is incurred with press releases but there is with sponsorship. Sponsors such as Samsung are paying Chelsea football club a record £55million over 5 years (O'Connor 2011), mainly for shirt endorsement and perimeter board exposure opportunities, whilst Emirates Airlines paid a similar amount to have the exclusive naming rights to Arsenal's new stadium. Agency group WPP is planning to make its own TV dramas in order to exploit potential for product placement and programme sponsorship (Andrews, 2009).

**Figure 2:
Examples of Direct and Indirect Media Channels**

Direct Media Channels	Indirect Media Channels
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email/ Blogs/ Communities • In store/Retail/Location • Sales Promotion –premiums, Competitions, Coupons, deals • Personal Selling/KAM/GAM • Public Affairs and Crisis Communications • Web site-Internets, extranets, portals , e-Commerce • Packaging • CRM • Letterhead/ Livery/Work wear • Customer/Staff Interaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outdoor & Transport • Print • Broadcast • Sponsorship- sports-programme and the arts • Direct Mail/Inserts • Ambient • Cinema • Affiliates • Telemarketing • Field Marketing –road shows, merchandizing, sampling • Product Placement

Source: Brassington, Frances and Pettitt, Stephen (2009), *Principles of Marketing, 3e*, Harlow: FT Prentice Hall

An organization's sales force provides a media channel to reach target audiences and each message does not incur a fee. Similarly, database and associated CRM and direct marketing activities that use electronic channels do not incur usage fees whereas direct mail and telemarketing activities incur charges per item/call by the Royal Mail and the telephone company respectively. In the same way, sales promotion and packaging do not attract third party charges. In addition to the regular use of street furniture to drive local traffic, various supermarkets use in-store radio, posters, promotions, merchandising and various ambient media opportunities to influence shoppers. Some supermarkets have experimented with plasma

televisions in the aisles, not just to promote their own products and services but as a media opportunity for brand manufacturers and local businesses. The media mix has been further complicated with the growth of search engines such as Google. Waters (2012) reports on Google's drive to dominate in both on and offline sectors. In addition to dominating search based advertising, their acquisition of YouTube provides a video advertising platform. Further purchases and agreements facilitate purchasing of radio and print media. The characteristics of transactional exchanges suggest that participants prefer to engage through mass media based communications. This is because communication is one-way, and engagement occurs on a platform where there is no expectation, or indeed opportunity, of a direct response. The communication is essentially a monologue, impersonal, unidirectional, an imbalance that suggests that the relationship is asymmetric. At the other extreme, audiences involved in relational exchanges prefer personal communications and to engage with sales people, account managers, digital media and associated technologies simply because there are opportunities for both parties to interact, explore and share information. So, although interaction and dialogue are emerging concepts and critical to relationship marketing (Gringos, 2010), media management should recognize the important role that traditional mass media communication still has with transactional exchange based audiences.

The choice of media, whether it be paid for or not, should reflect the exchange preference of the audience. For example, in order to move from an acquisition to a customer retention strategy, media choice becomes critical. Media should become more personal and capable of customization, enable interaction and be discrete. For some firms, the shift toward

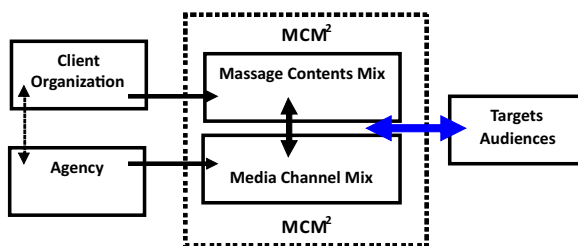
changing media availability is a gradual one, reflecting the needs of their customer base. Retailer, Marks & Spencer defines their audience as older and comfortable with traditional media, watching terrestrial TV more than satellite, read newspapers, look at billboards whilst driving and do not spend hours on the internet (Hall, 2012). They are planning to prelaunch their website in conjunction with Amazon early in 2010 recognizing the potential value of other new media. It is proposed that the new marketing communications mix needs to reflect the use of direct and indirect media. Direct media do not involve third parties either as usage fees or in terms of message delivery. They are characteristically owned and managed by the client organization. Indirect media are owned by third parties, consequently usage fees, as rental of their service, are necessary. Some possible media allocations based on the direct and indirect criteria are presented in Figure 2. The task for marketing management is to consider the appropriate balance of direct and indirect media, in the light of the intended messages, financial resources and the target audience.

A New Marketing Communications Mix

It is proposed therefore, that a new marketing communications mix should combine both the message and media elements explored earlier, as represented in Figure 3. This new mix introduces two new terms, namely, Message Content Mix and Media Channel Mix. The Message Content Mix refers primarily to the presentation of the message and involves the informational/emotional balance, the design and style, depth, volume, direction and frequency that the content is presented. The Media Channel Mix refers to the balance of indirect and direct media used to convey messages to target audiences. Media, in its broadest sense, has become management's

key to reaching target audiences, and when combined with relevant and likeable content, enhanced audience engagement can be observed. In keeping with conventional marketing practice, both terms can be identified by their initials, and it is suggested that the new mix be referred to as MCM2, if only to prompt recall. The level of detail that can be represented in the MCM2 mix should be varied according to the level of the audience's knowledge and experience. This configuration overcomes many of the problems associated with the traditional promotional mix and incorporates many of the key issues identified in this paper. It is accepted that this interpretative configuration has limitations concerning the scope and the lack of any

Figure3:
The Marketing Communications Mix or MCM²



Source: Andrews, Amanda. (2012), WPP to make its own TV dramas, the Times, 18, October, p53.

Conclusions

Examining the promotional (communications) mix using relational and RBV theories is useful because it reveals some of the contradictory developments in marketing theory and organizational practice. It also reflects some of the core issues underlying the marketing communications industry and the way the subject is taught. The exchange context provides what McNeil refers to as the atmosphere in which exchanges occur and frames the nature of the interaction.

Marketing communications has a crucial role to play in the development of the requisite atmosphere. Both theory and practice have moved forward and the new marketing communications mix presented here is intended to reflect some of the key changes. At the core of the MCM2 are two elements, what is to be said and how the message is to be delivered and these are embedded in the Message Content Mix and Media Channel Mix elements of the proposed new framework. It is through these that audiences perceive, interpret, assign meaning and in doing so develop appropriate attitudes-to-the-message, a key factor in brand management. Although there remains a question about the appropriateness of the term 'mix' in the marketing vocabulary, its practice and teaching, the MCM2 provides a more accurate, helpful and detailed teaching framework for explaining how marketing communications work, from both a theoretical and practitioner perspective.

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