

MARKETING COMMUNICATION: Thinking outside the Box and Moving Beyond Promotion Mix

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses about the concept of marketing communication and its importance for the marketer as well as for the consumers. Usually ‘marketing communication mix’ and ‘promotion mix’ are considered as one and the same concepts and are used synonymously. All the elements of ‘promotion mix’ i.e. sales promotion, advertising, sales force, public relations and direct marketing are commonly used by the marketer to communicate the message to the target customers. Over the years, the awareness among the consumers have increased manifold times due to multiple factors like increase in the exposure to media, rise in the level of higher education, influence of ‘mall culture’ etc. Consequently, the marketers are compelled to think outside the box and have come up with innovations in the field of marketing communication. Marketers are now making use of not just ‘promotion mix’ but are intelligently using other three Ps i.e. product, price and place to convey their message to the customers. The article explores how the marketer is cleverly making use of other three Ps of marketing mix as a means of marketing communication.

Keywords: *Brand diffusion, building & penetration, guerilla marketing communication, logo, colors, POP, Vodafone, Idea, ‘pick-me-up’, tetra packaging, Maggi, Scooty Pep, brand contact audit.*

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INTRODUCTION

An effective marketing communication is the one which smoothly flows from the company to the target customers and vice versa. Marketing communication is often considered as the flow of information related to a product or service from marketer to the target customers. The flow of communication from consumer to marketer is often ignored. But as a matter of fact, the flow of communication from customers to marketer is equally vital for the company. Marketing communications helps in defining and nurturing company's relationship with its customers. Instead of perceiving marketing communication merely as a process of promoting the product, it must be looked upon as an exercise to build strong relationship with the target customers. The positive image of the company is formed in the minds of customers not only because of the favourable experience that they have with product or service but it also substantially rest upon how well the marketer communicates with the customers in the long run.

Thus, marketing communication serves two way purpose and has the importance for the marketer from two aspects-

⊗ **Flow of communication from marketer to customers-**

Effective communication by the marketer is necessary not only to spread the awareness about his offerings but also to bring out the distinguished features of the product before the target customers and differentiate the product from that of competitors. It has to be persuasive as the market is characterized by a fierce competition and customers have a variety to choose from the assortment of products and companies. Apart from spreading awareness, marketing communication is imperative for brand diffusion, brand building, product positioning and brand penetration.

☞ **Brand diffusion-** Brand diffusion refers to the spreading of visibility of the brand among target consumers. It is necessary to spread the visibility of the new brand of the product so as to bring it under the notice of the target consumers. In the current market scenario marked by stiff competition, brand diffusion is the important exercise undertaken by the marketer not only for the new product but is equally essential for the existing products. Every day when new brands of product are making their foray into the market, it is necessary for the existing brands to remain on the customers' 'top-of-mind' and not to lose the market share to the newer brands. One can often find the array of display boards of telecom brands like BSNL, Tata Indicom, Airtel etc. on the road divider. The motive of the marketer behind such display is to spread the visibility of the brand.

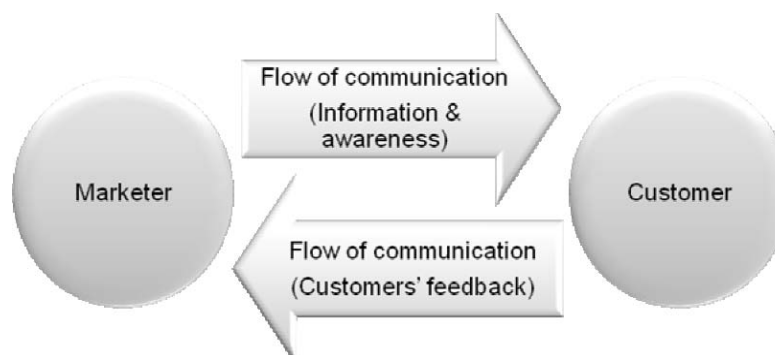
☞ **Brand Building-** Branding is all about creating differences (**Kotler & Keller**). These 'differences' lies in the products' name, quality, price and various other elements. The customers would only be able to notice such differences when they are communicated about them. Through effective communication only, customers can be persuaded that the

‘differences’ are significant and makes the product different from that of competitors.

- ④ **Product positioning-** Positioning refers to creating favourable image regarding a product or service in the mind of target customers. Positioning is mainly done through advertising by the marketer. Think about Dettol and Savlon and if the question is put up before you to tell the difference between the two, the obvious answer would be “Savlon JALTA NAHI!” Savlon when applied to wounds does not create tickling or irritating sensation. Now, this is the image created in our minds through advertisement; a tool of marketing communication.
- ④ **Brand penetration-** It refers to ‘getting into the minds of the target customers’. Marketers actually try to get into the minds of target consumers to acquire what is called as ‘mind share’ of customers. Marketers have recognized the fact that to acquire the market share, it is firstly important to gain customers’ mind share. The route to the market share is through customers’ mind share. Various sales promotional methods like ‘bog-off offers’ (Buy 1 get 1 or more units free), customer loyalty programmes etc. are driven towards acquisition of customers’ mind share. Take a case where you enter into an apparel retail outlet. The outlet stocks multiple brands. You ask the sales attendant for the specific brand of jeans. Unfortunately the outlet doesn’t have the brand that you asked for and sales attendant insist on showing the other brands of jeans which are trendier and are ‘in-thing’. But you refused and left the outlet at once fuming. Now in your case, a specific brand of jeans has penetrated into you mind and you are not willing to settle for any other brand!

⊗ **Flow of communication from customers to marketer-** It is likewise significant for the marketer to know the customers feedback so as to determine their satisfaction level and if required then modify the product according to the feedback. It’s been an extensive practice adopted by the marketer to know the customers’ satisfaction and attitude not only towards the product but also towards the point of purchase, sales attendant etc.

Fig.1: Marketing communication- A two way process



MEANING OF MARKETING COMMUNICATION

Marketing communication refers to the integrated efforts of the marketer for conveying the message to the target customers through various channels with the objective of generating

positive response towards the company’s products and services and at the same time to obtain customers’ feedback for providing better product offerings in the future. “Marketing communications are the means by which firms attempt to inform, persuade, and remind consumers-directly or indirectly-about the products and brands that they sell. In a sense, marketing communications represent the “voice” of the brand and are a means by which it can establish a dialogue and build relationships with consumers.”(**Kotler & Keller**)

As per the old school of thought or traditionally speaking only ‘promotion mix’ comprising of personal selling, advertising, sales promotion and publicity, was considered as the mode of marketing communication. But as per the modern view and in practice too, the marketers use all four Ps i.e, product, price, promotion and place to communicate its message to the target customers. Companies in practice communicate the message to target customers through product itself, its packaging, logo, colour of the product etc. even the price and the place communicates with the customers. “The firm’s communication with the market is taking place through all the elements of marketing mix.” (**Ramaswamy, V.S & Namakumari,S.**)

Logo as the means of communication-

Some examples where ‘logo’ communicates-



- ③ The logo of telecom network ‘Vodafone’ is open inverted comma. The logo can be interpreted as a message by the marketer- ‘start talking with our network.’
- ③ The logo of telecom network ‘Idea’ is the name ‘Idea’ itself and if one notices carefully then in ‘Idea’, ‘I’ is actually an exclamatory mark and is written as ‘!dea’. When some sudden thought or an idea comes in our mind, then in written communication such thought is depicted by using exclamatory mark ‘!’. Here the marketer is using ‘!’ in spelling ‘Idea’ which goes well with the punchline- “An idea can change your life.” The logo too tries to ‘communicate’ the same message.
- ③ Similarly, when Dabur repositioned itself, it changed its logo too. Earlier it was the old banyan tree which ‘communicated’ to the customers that the Dabur’s products are for elderly people as banyan tree is associated with oldness or long life. Now, the logo of Dabur is a youthful and refreshing tree and hence ‘communicating’ that the Dabur’s products are equally good for younger generation too.

PACKAGING AS THE MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

When it comes to packaging, perception plays a significant role. It's a common behaviour of the consumers to pick up the attractively packed products displayed in the shop. Good packaging enhances the visual appeal of the product and generates impulse purchase. Nicely packed biscuits with catchy graphics and colours, peeking from the retailer's shelf at once grab the customer's attention. Customer forms a preconceived opinion that the biscuits inside the packet would be as good. The packaging seems to communicate- "Pick me up, I'm fantastic!" or "take me off the shelf and carry me home!" Now here one thing is to be noticed, packaging is also associated with quality. A customer would never purchase a product packed in crumbled or torn packs/boxes. The reason for the same could be attributed to the cost. Customer is paying for the product and the packaging is very much the part of the product. The customer wants value for money. Secondly, if the packaging is the tampered one, the quality of the product inside the pack could also be damaged. Many characteristics of a well-packaged product are structural in nature, such as secure-looking qualities, so the package doesn't look tampered with. Various FMCGs like bread, milk etc. comes in poly packaging with the carrier attached to the pack, called as 'pick-me-up' packaging which communicates that it is easy to carry. But marketer must not get carried away and should avoid 'over promising and under delivering.' As mentioned earlier, good packaging is associated by the customer with the good quality of product. Therefore, the product's quality must match up with the good packaging.

Some examples where 'packaging' communicates-

- ③ Tetra packaging communicates that the 'quality' of perishable items such as milk, fruit juices etc. will be intact.
- ③ Pet bottles of cold drinks like *Fanta*, *Mirinda* etc. are shaped in such a manner so as to provide an easy grip for holding it, thereby communicating 'convenience' to the customers.

Packaging as a means of 'Guerilla Marketing Communication'-

The concept 'guerilla marketing' devised by Jay Conrad Levinson now a days has become a popular and cost effective method used by the company to market its product among target customers. As the concept means, guerilla marketing refers to non-traditional, low-cost but effective marketing efforts usually targeted at customers out of sudden. Thus, Guerilla marketing efforts uses minimum cost but creates maximum impact. Packaging is becoming a popular 'media vehicle' for guerilla communication. Nestle's Maggi noodles has cleverly used packaging for spreading awareness about the new offering from its brand mix (2010). When a consumer opens the packet of 'Maggi Masala Noodles' and takes out the pack of tastemaker (which is inside the noodles' packet), he come across the message written on the tastemaker's pack- 'try new curry *masala*'. The message is a part of guerilla communication as firstly, it doesn't cost extra to the marketer. Secondly, least effort is put in by the marketer for communicating the message but the impact created on the consumers is quite considerable and they may try out the

new product variant.

Packaging wonders!

A weaver here has made a saree, a six-meter drape worn by women that fits into a matchbox. Nalla Paramdhamulu, an award-winning artist, folds the saree made of silk, just 12 times to fit into the matchbox. Paramdhamulu put in over four months of painstaking effort to make the saree, a similar feat he had accomplished two years ago. He had received the Master Craftsmen's

Award from President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam last year. He was chosen for this award for his earlier effort that also fits into a matchbox. The Films Division of India has made a 14-language documentary on Paramdhamulu and his work.

Source: <http://www.highbeam.com>

Product's design as a means of communication-

Marketer pay immense attention to the product's design, shape etc. and the intricacies involved therein. Nokia's Bajaj's Pulsar has a huge fuel tank symbolizing male's bicep and 'communicating' that the bike is as powerful as a muscular male.

Colour as the means of communication-

Colours of the packets and the product 'communicate' a lot. Bath soaps in pink and white colours are considered as feminine and are meant for females. The green dot on the pack of the products communicates that the ingredients of the product are vegetarian whereas the red dot communicates that the ingredients of the product are non-vegetarian. TVS Scooty Pep's bright and vibrant colours 'communicates' the vehicle is for girls. It had also launched the range of 99 colours of TVS Scooty Pep to lure the female youths.

Product's price as a means of communication-

A high price of the product prevents many customers to purchase the particular product but some customers may perceive high price as the cost for quality. Therefore, a sometimes marketer strategically fixes the price of the product on the higher side where the high price communicates the 'quality.' On the contrary, if the product has the entire essential features and the price is kept low by the marketer, then it may 'communicate' to certain group of customers that the manufacturer must have compromised with the quality of the product.

Point of purchase as a means of communication-

Point of purchase 'communicates' the ambience, quality of products, location, convenience etc. Now a days, special attention is given by the retailers on visual merchandising so as to create a pull of prospective customers. A well displayed products in the shopping outlet not only 'communicates' convenience and ease in shopping but also generates impulse purchasing.

Posters, displays, stacks, racks, counter displays, floor stands, bins etc are some of the commonly used POP materials used by the marketer as a means of communication. A customer enters a store with an intention to buy a product which is backed by 'need'. The 'need' act as a driving force and makes customer to pick cues from surroundings to decide what to purchase. The role of POP as a means of marketing communication comes into frame when customer looks out for the product which can satisfy his need. The indications or cues direct the customer to buy the product which can satisfy his need effectively.

Fig. 2: 4Ps of Marketing Mix as Marketing Communication Mix- Moving beyond promotion mix



Conclusion

The marketing communication can be made more effective by taking into consideration the time and context of messages from customer's mind. The marketer must look into-

- When the target customers are more likely to pay attention to the message?
- Where the customers would be most receptive to the message?
- Understanding the purchasing pattern and the consumption pattern of the product or service.
- Understanding occasions and seasonal trends.
- Carrying out brand contact audit.

Brand contact audit is concerned with identifying the instances when a brand comes in contact with the consumers and the impressions it creates during these contacts.

It can be a useful tool to identify the points or instances at which the customer is most responsive to the message. Let's suppose a customer is planning to purchase a new bike. He would more positively respond to the information provided by the bike dealer and would be more relevant for him. On the other hand, if the company calls him in his office when he is engrossed with work,

the prospective customer would not very favorably. Marketer is surely getting innovative in communicating his message to the target customers.

Such innovations have given birth to new 'means' of marketing communication. Rather than just relying upon the elements of promotion for communication, marketers are thinking beyond promotion mix and are immensely making use of all four Ps of marketing mix. The results of such moves taken by the marketers are amazing and have brought the revolution in the field of marketing communication.

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