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Introducing Marketing Communications

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One of the key features to managing marketing operations, and marketing communications in particular, is how best to select an optimum promotions mix to achieve your objectives. This implies that you know what your objectives are, (which you may not know at this stage) and how the elements of the promotions mix works best to deliver on your objectives (which you may have some knowledge of already from previous feedback or again, you may not know). Within the practice of promotion, a good starting point is to review the nature of the communications process, so that you have an understanding of the role it plays in shaping the thinking behind the choices you make (for example, media, appeals and timing). Therefore it is useful to examine the theory of communication as it relates to both how it is reviewed, and how it influences decision making. This introductory chapter attempts to do this.

Our journey starts with an outline of the topic of marketing communications and takes us through to understanding the nature of the process of communications, and reinforces the insights that marketers need to draw on to help them design and develop marketing communications. Finally, we acknowledge the new marketing topic of WOMM (word of mouth marketing) and we recognise that marketing communications cannot be accepted as separate from patterns of consumption, hence we feature likely consumer responses. First though, let us establish a baseline with this simple question: what exactly is marketing communications?

What is marketing communications?

The purpose and intention of marketing, according to Baker, is “the creation and maintenance of mutually satisfying exchange relationships” (2016: 5). The inference here is that both parties enter into an exchange on a voluntary basis. The value in the exchange is that both parties will be satisfied – so much so that they will want to repeat the exchange and further the experience should the need arise.

From a management perspective, marketing communications has a prominent role to play in a range of other managerial domains, for instance, in competitive strategy. Marketing communications is relevant when considering the three resource-based marketing strategies – undifferentiated, differentiated and concentrated. Take, for example, launching a new product or repositioning an existing product, which suits the undifferentiated approach and requires marketing communications effort. So does the differentiated approach whereby products and services are modified to suit subgroups. This segmented tactic requires a different approach to the marketing mix – pricing, distribution and in particular promotion. For a smaller enterprise, a more concentrated strategy may be appropriate because of resource allocation. In this case marketing communications plays a key role in the promotion of its products and services. Simply put, marketing communications is significant in terms of supporting the marketing mix underpinning marketing strategy, and therefore has a prominent role in generating value in achieving competitive advantage.

The job of marketing communications, as pointed out by marketing guru Kotler, is to inform, persuade and remind customers (both internal and external) either through direct (for example, TV or cinema advertising) or indirect means (for example, giving a product away for trialling and PR purposes) about the products, services and brands the enterprise seeks to exchange. Kotler et al. go on to say that, in a way, “marketing communications represents the *voice* of the company and its brands, and are the ways in which it can establish a dialogue and build relationships with customers.” (Kotler et al., 2016: 630). Marketing communications also has several functions surrounding the market offering, which sends out a signal helping both the firm and customers to better understand and further the exchange as clarified below:

- How and why a market offering is used; what type of person is it for/is using it; where it can be used and also when it can be used
- Who is it that has designed, developed and produced the market offering
- What is the reward for me as the customer for usage

- What are the opportunities for me as a business to get involved in partnership with your products and services

In short, marketing communications plays a key role in contributing to brand equity because its helps to:

- Establish the brand in our long-term memory
- Create a brand image
- Drive sales
- Affect shareholder value.

The marketing communications mix

Marketing communications works through a platform known as the marketing communications mix, which is made up of methods that offer either one-to-one communications, one-to-many or many-to-many forms of marketing communications activities.

Table 1.1: The marketing communications mix in general.

Marketing comms mix	Communications objective(s)	Marketing communications methods & activities
Advertising	Paid; non-personal; identified sponsor designed in the main for awareness.	Product & services, direct response advertising, corporate.
Direct marketing	Communicate directly; solicit a response, prompted information	Direct mail/email, telecon, mobile - information services (contact centres & websites & mobile technology).
Sales promotion	Short term incentives designed to stimulate trial and purchase, merits of personal experiences.	WOM, trialling, packaging, point of sale, promotions, exhibitions, merchandising.
Public relations	Project and protect image, reputation, and market offerings (products/services/ideas) – to gain positive editorial, to address crises, to correct information	WOM, sponsorship, publicity, stakeholder communications, corporate identity, lobbying, familiarisation trips/trialling for editorial gain, event management.
Personal selling	Company sponsored activities developed and produced to create product/service or brand exchange and interaction	Direct sales, over-the-counter, telemarketing, trade fairs, factory tours, event experiences, presentations.