

THE OFFICIAL

CIM

COURSEBOOK

Marketing Communications

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Marketing Communications 2008–2009

Marketing Communications 2008–2009

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AMSTERDAM • BOSTON • HEIDELBERG • LONDON • NEW YORK • OXFORD
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Butterworth-Heinemann is an imprint of Elsevier



Butterworth-Heinemann is an imprint of Elsevier
Linacre House, Jordan Hill, Oxford OX2 8DP, UK
30 Corporate Drive, Suite 400, Burlington, MA 01803, USA

First edition 2008

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN: 978 0 7506 8967 0

For information on all Butterworth-Heinemann publications
visit our website at <http://www.elsevierdirect.com>



Designed and typeset by P.K. McBride

Printed and bound in Italy

08 09 10 11 12 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Unit 1

Introduction to marketing communications

Learning objectives

For many businesses, marketing communications represent the focal point of their marketing activities, and in some cases the two areas are synonymous. The roles of advertising, sales promotion, public relations (PR), personal selling and other promotional tools are significant in achieving marketing success. The advent of new technologies has been changing the nature of communications activities, information gathering and purchasing which are being made increasingly easier via the Internet. However, many basic principles concerning how communications work remain sound. These include the ways in which individuals and groups influence different dimensions of purchase decision-making behaviour.

After completion of this section you will be able to:

- ◆ Understand the importance of marketing communications in achieving marketing success
- ◆ Explain some of the theories that underpin marketing communications
- ◆ Demonstrate how communications work in influencing purchase decision-making
- ◆ Describe the roles that individuals and groups play in making communications effective
- ◆ Understand the purchase decision-making process and the factors that influence its operation
- ◆ Explain the different types of appeal used in marketing communications and the concept of likeability
- ◆ Understand the issues concerning ethics and corporate social responsibility and their impact on marketing communications.

Syllabus references include: 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.5, 2.8.

Key definitions

Marketing communications – is a management process through which an organization engages with its various audiences. Through understanding an audience's communications environment, organizations seek to develop and present messages for their identified stakeholder groups, before evaluating and acting upon the responses received. By conveying messages that are of significant value, audiences are encouraged to offer attitudinal and behavioural responses (Fill, 2006).

Introduction to the coursebook

Marketing communications play an increasingly significant role in achieving overall marketing success. In large part, this is due to many organizations developing a relationship building approach to how they deal with customers on a long-term basis. This coursebook is structured in a way that identifies the key principles which underpin marketing communications and demonstrates how these principles are applied in many different types of situation, using the tools of marketing communications. In broad terms, there are a number of issues that influence marketing communications strategies and activities:

- ◆ Need for a co-ordinated approach in implementing communications campaigns
- ◆ Continuing advances in media and communications technologies
- ◆ Media fragmentation – new opportunities for communications channels
- ◆ Influence of ethics and corporate social responsibility
- ◆ Availability of detailed customer information and database technology
- ◆ More demanding and better informed customers
- ◆ Need for better evaluation and effectiveness measurement.

These issues will be discussed, some in a number of places, in this coursebook. The coursebook provides coverage of the whole syllabus for this module. Syllabus references are highlighted at the start of each unit where they are specifically addressed, although there will be areas of the syllabus which are dealt with in more than one unit (Table 1.1). The coursebook is only one of the tools that you will use in order to develop your understanding and knowledge of the subject. References are made to other sources including the essential textbooks recommended by CIM. Make sure you read as widely as possible around the topics discussed, making full use of those indicators contained in each unit for further study, and hints and tips. A number of activities will involve you in looking at the websites of different types of organizations; these will further aid the development of your knowledge and understanding of key issues.

Table 1.1: Learning outcomes and unit/syllabus guide

Learning outcomes	Study units/syllabus reference
Explain the role of marketing communications and advise how personal influences might be used to develop promotional effectiveness	Unit 1 – Syllabus 1.1–1.3
Explain how the tools of the promotional mix can be co-ordinated in order to communicate effectively with customers and a range of stakeholders	Unit 2 and Unit 8 – Syllabus 2.1–2.5, 2.16
Devise a basic media plan based on specific campaign requirements using both online and offline media	Unit 7 – Syllabus 2.6–2.7
Develop marketing communications and brand support activities based on an understanding of the salient characteristics of the target audience	Unit 1 and Unit 7 – Syllabus 1.3–1.5, 2.2–2.4
Explain the main elements, activities and linkages associated with the formulation and implementation of a marketing communications plan	Unit 6 – Syllabus 2.13
Recommend a suitable marketing communications budget	Unit 6 – Syllabus 2.14
Explain the importance of developing long-term relationships with customers, channel members, agencies and other stakeholders and transfer such knowledge to the development of marketing communications activities	Unit 4 and Unit 5 – Syllabus 3.1–3.5, 4.1–4.7
Suggest suitable methods to influence the relationships an organization has with its customers, any marketing channel partners and other stakeholders, using marketing communications	Unit 2, and Unit 4 and Unit 5 – Syllabus 4.1–4.7
Use the vocabulary of the marketing communications industry and be able to communicate effectively with other marketing practitioners	Unit 3 – Syllabus 4.4–4.7
All learning outcomes are designed in order that you can apply marketing communications in practice in a range of different situational contexts	The learning outcomes are relatively broad in nature and as such the syllabus references above are indicative only. At the start of each unit, the syllabus references are more specific to the topics covered

The communications process

It is not surprising that with all this ‘noise’ surrounding us, the task of marketing communications has become increasingly difficult. For any message to get through, it must break through the surrounding noise and grab hold of the potential consumers’ attention. To understand the complex process of marketing communications, we have to recognize that each and every one of us have to use some form of filtering system in order to extract the information we need from everything that surrounds it.

Activity 1.1

Spend 10 minutes or so thinking about the kinds of marketing communications messages you can recall ‘receiving’ over the last 24 hours. Can you identify what kinds of information these have included and what responses you have made?

We can look at a simple model of communication which describes the various stages. At its simplest level, we can describe the model as having three elements. The first is the sender of the message, the second is the message itself and the third is the recipient of the message. This could be depicted as shown in Figure 1.1. Unfortunately, this model oversimplifies the nature of the process. It makes no allowance for the fact that the message may not be understood or even received by the recipient; nor does it take into consideration the means by which the message is transmitted to the receiver.



Figure 1.1: A simple model of the communication process

A better understanding of the process is provided by the more detailed model shown in Figure 1.2.

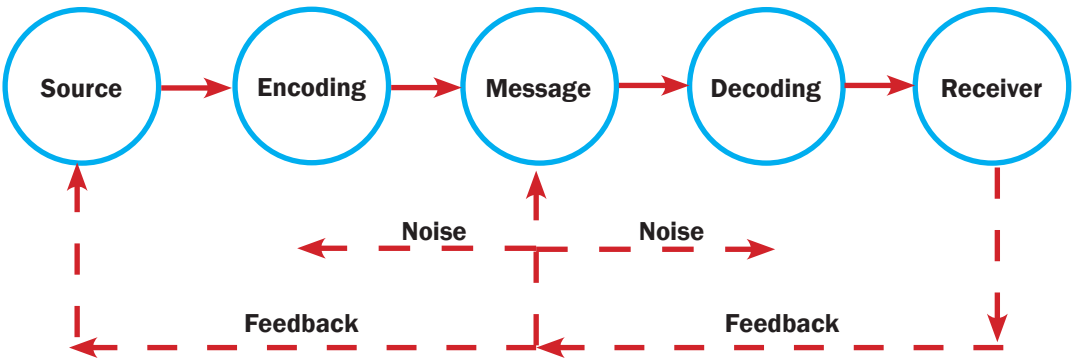


Figure 1.2: A linear model of the communication process

Source: after Shannon and Weaver (1962)

- ◆ **Sender** – The sender is the source of the message, that is the organization – they ascertain the need to communicate with the customer and will then, through the encoding process, identify the appropriate basis of communication.
- ◆ **Encoder** – Encoding the actual message, its content and the intended meaning into a symbolic format that can be transmitted and understood by the target audience; symbolic format being appropriate words, pictures, images or music that the customer might identify with and be attracted by.

- ◆ **Channel** – The method by which the message is communicated, for example TV, radio, the Internet.
- ◆ **Decoding** – The customer actually understands the symbolic format that was transmitted, that is associating with the symbols, words or images used.
- ◆ **Receiver** – The target audience – the customer, the organization or the audience for which the message was intended.
- ◆ **Feedback** – The response the receiver makes – their communication back to the actual source of the message.
- ◆ **Noise** – Background noise, interference, distortion of the message, its content and meaning, making it difficult for the receiver to interpret, understand and respond to the message accordingly – overcoming noise is of the essence in order to gain successful feedback.

Even with this extended model there are a number of complexities that occur that may make the process ineffective. Importantly, we must recognize that the message is only one of many which the intended receiver will be required to deal with in a relatively short period of time. To understand that, think of yourself reading a newspaper or a magazine. The advertiser who wants to tell you something about their product must compete for your attention not only with the variety of other advertisements included in that issue, but also with the diversity of articles for which you bought the publication in the first place. The resultant noise may well interfere with the effective communication of the message. The reader may not spend enough time reading the advertisement, and may only glean enough information to form an impression of the intended message. The intended receivers will not necessarily be devoting all their attention to this particular medium. They may be, at the same time, watching TV or listening to the radio. There will be advertisements in the magazine from other firms, many of them direct competitors. The amount of information we receive and, more significantly, retain will vary greatly.

In addition, there is all the ‘surrounding noise’ with which we have to deal. Few of us have the opportunity to consider an advertisement in splendid isolation. Invariably, there will be a whole variety of things going on around us which may detract us from our ability to concentrate and to extract the full message being sent by the advertiser. The decoding process may, therefore, be incomplete or confused. In any case, it will be influenced by the recipient’s preconceptions of the sender. If he or she regards the company as being reliable and trustworthy, then it is likely that the message will be interpreted in that light. However, if the individual has previously had some form of negative experience with another product or service from the same company, then it is less likely that the message will be interpreted in a positive manner.

The Times newspaper recently ran a series of advertisements for the newspaper itself with a theme highlighting *The Times* coverage of important issues with the heading ‘WHAT’S IMPORTANT’ above *The Times* logo. The visuals used depicted a series of photographs of the same object with words describing various interpretations of how these objects might be perceived without further explanation. This provided a good example of the complexities of decoding. One of the ads showed six photographs of a banana on a plate. Under each one were different words describing how the photograph might be interpreted. The words were banana, vitamins, slapstick comedy, sexual innuendo, trade wars and racist weapon. Taking things at face value does not always allow the correct meaning to be understood.

The response which the receiver makes will vary according to the nature of the message and these extraneous factors. Depending on the objectives for the campaign, some advertisements simply convey information, others contain some form of invitation to purchase. The response of the receiver to the specific message will be of great importance to the sender, who will need to build in some form of feedback mechanism in order to better understand the nature of the response and, if appropriate, be in a position to change the message if that response is negative. This is, of course, the dialogue that we identified earlier as an important aspect of marketing communications.

One final comment on the communication process – the effectiveness of communication is determined partly by the elements we have highlighted here. However, there are a number of other elements that need to be considered when developing marketing communications, and these concern the environment in which the communications are expected to work and the behaviour (e.g. mood) of the people involved in either sending or receiving communications.

Insight: Falling TV revenues as viewers switch off

Advertising revenues of 'traditional' TV stations have been declining for some time, both as a result of so-called new media opportunities, cable and satellite TV channel growth and the impact of Internet-based advertising. It has always been a problem for TV media to demonstrate effectiveness of advertising, relying on formal market research to assess prompted and unprompted recall, individual viewing diaries and devices plugged into TVs which indicated which channels were being watched at specific times. The latter measurements were often flawed as although they indicated that the TV was switched on to a specific channel, they did not actually record whether anyone was in the room watching or if someone was in the room at all, whether they were watching, reading a newspaper, having a conversation or some other activity. Another measurement problem for TV results from the use of remote controls to switch channels during advertisement breaks and the significant use of video and recordable DVDs, which facilitate the editing out of commercials. Further problems result from the advent of multi-set homes with TVs in several rooms, often tuned into different channels, as well as shifts in lifestyles with many alternative forms of leisure activity taking over the dominant role of TV in peoples lives.

Personal influences (Syllabus 1.1)

The communication process is influenced by a wide range of other factors. One of the skills of the communications manager is to manage these other elements in such a way that they enhance the effectiveness of the communications and improve the efficiency of the communications spend.

One of these factors is the influence other people can have. Messages received from individuals rather than the media have the potential to deliver a stronger message than those delivered through media alone. One of the ways in which this can be effected is through the use of opinion formers. These are people who are either experts or who are actively involved in the subject area. Messages received from these people are more likely to be believable as they contain higher levels of credibility. For example, specialist journalists

relay information and are perceived to be objective in their analysis and the comment they pass on.

Figure 1.3 gives some indication of the way in which communications messages might reach their intended target audiences. These routes are often described in terms of 'step models'. One-step models suggest there is a one-way communication link between the source and each of the target audiences. The two-step model is based on the premise that there may be some interaction between the source and the target audiences and also that targets may not receive the message directly from the original source but via an opinion leader or former. Further, those targets that do receive the original message from source, may also receive the message (perhaps in a different form) from an opinion source, which acts as 'message reinforcement'. How this might work is described in more detail below. Multi-step models involve possible interaction between all recipients of the communication, the different target audiences as well as opinion leaders and formers.

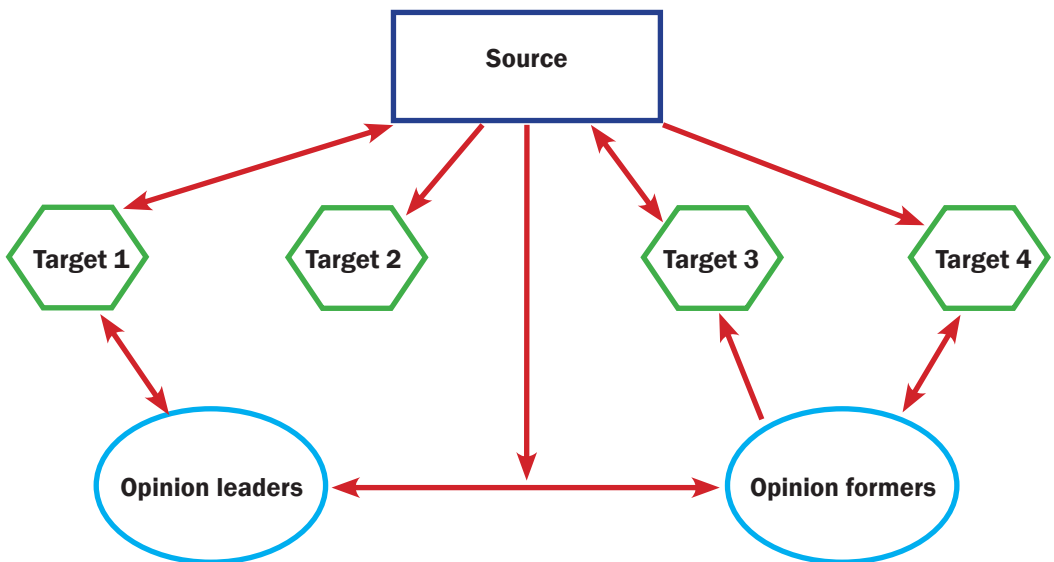


Figure 1.3: Opinion leaders and opinion formers in the communication process

Source: Fill (2006)

Opinion leaders, on the other hand, are usually members of our own peer group. Their expertise is based upon their own interest as a hobby or pastime in the subject areas. It is certainly not their career or part of their job. Therefore, word-of-mouth (WoM) communications from these individuals carries even higher levels of credibility than those borne by opinion formers (Figure 1.3).

Opinion leaders play a significant role in our everyday decision-making. They can include the media, subject specialist consumer interest magazines such as *Which?*, published by the Consumers' Association, who bring influence to bear on the decision-making of anything from computers to motor vehicles, washing machines and so on. They will provide opinions, weightings and ultimately a significant influence upon the decision-makers, particularly those who need confidence and reinforcement of their behaviour and of their decisions.

Opinion leaders can take many forms, for example pressure groups. They may force us to consider very carefully the basis of our decision-making. They will ensure that we consider not only what the product has to offer, but perhaps some of the principles of the organization that is providing it to us, and perhaps the basis of their supply chain.

With both invasive and investigative media, customers and consumers are coming to realize that there is no such thing as a 'pure' or 'value-free' offer, which makes them concentrate very seriously on the broader aspects of their decision-making process.

Behind every brand, product and service offering, lie the people who are making decisions and choices in a more informed way, and according to priorities, motives and perhaps personal goals.

Increasingly, customers are getting to know more about the product and perhaps the ethos of the organization. In some instances, customers will even want to establish a relationship between themselves and their suppliers based upon trust. Customers are becoming more 'sophisticated' both in their purchase decision-making and the ways in which they respond to communications.

Where high-profile brands are concerned, customers want to be reassured that promises will be met. Can they really deliver what they say? Many organizations use personalities in their communications as some kind of opinion formers. David Beckham and Michael Schumacher are used by Vodafone to demonstrate the benefits of picture messaging on new types of mobile phone.

Zafer Erdogan (1999) considers the pros and cons of using celebrities to endorse brands. The former may include increasing attention, image polishing, new brand launch support, as part of repositioning strategies and the underpinning of global campaigns. Disadvantages suggested are the overshadowing of the brand by the personality, potential controversy and image change or loss of public recognition. Also in some cases, such endorsement may be expensive.

Insight: Luxury goods have celebrity appeal

Luxury goods of many types have for many years been supported by heavyweight media advertising in order to promote and develop brand image. TAG Heuer's use of Formula One driver, Lewis Hamilton, to endorse and promote the brand has been hugely successful. His attributes of determination, mental strength and style are consistent with those of the core brand. This has been an extension of TAG Heuer's relationship with Hamilton's McLaren racing team which first started in 1985 and has included drivers such as Ayrton Senna, Alain Prost, David Coulthard and Kimi Räikkönen. In addition to badging on the driver's car, he is also seen wearing his watch on many social occasions, thus extending the range and value of potential communications points. TAG have also produced a watch for which Hamilton was involved in the design and which carries his signature.

Source: Doulton (2007)

Thomas (2001) suggests some ground rules for celebrity endorsements to work:

- ◆ Articulation between the brand promise (What am I?) and the personality involved (Who am I?)

- ◆ Agreement among the brand team on the communications objectives to be achieved
- ◆ Focus on the characteristics the celebrity should possess to provide synergy with the brand
- ◆ Clearly establish what the celebrity is going to communicate.

Because of the strong brand character of the endorser, a potential mismatch could be counterproductive to the brand being promoted.

Activity 1.2

Identify some examples of where celebrities have been used to endorse well-known brands. Do you think the criteria outlined above have been achieved?

Opinion leaders are playing a more and more significant role in responding to customers' thirst for knowledge. They are individuals who are predisposed to receiving information and then using it to influence others.

Opinion leadership manifests itself through a number of channels, in advertising, PR, editorials, journals, pressure groups, to name but a few.

For marketers, therefore, the role of opinion leaders should never be underestimated and they should never be excluded from a communications agenda. The emergence of new technologies and media means that 'news', good and bad, spreads very quickly. This includes information about organizations and their products and services. Opinion leaders' and formers' thoughts can be across the world in seconds.

It is important as an organization, therefore, not just to have customers and consumers, but also to have friends and supporters, who may, to your advantage, be opinion leaders and who will exert positive influence upon your organization. This will be vitally important as you, along with your competitors, are in a desperate race for competitive edge.

It is also important that you have an understanding of the role of opinion formers. Effectively, they are people who exert personal influence because of their authority, status, education or perhaps association with the product or service offering. They are likely to provide information and to advertise, and in some instances may take on roles as 'expert witnesses'; that is they use their experience and expertise to justify particular situations in relation to various products. A good example of this could relate to the roles played by specialist journalists in fields such as motoring and travel. Many people thinking about purchasing cars and travel will closely monitor the press and broadcast media to help them in their purchase decision-making. Clearly, these journalists act as expert witnesses and therefore become expert 'opinion formers'.

The influence of opinion formers is quite significant and can act as a vehicle for reinforcing the credibility of products and services, or indeed the validity of such products can actually be questioned and found to be deficient in some areas.

In order that organizations can 'win friends and influence people' they will often seek support through lobbying in addition to various other activities to win the opinion formers' support. Public relations has a major part to play in providing information to media sources for them to use in producing favourable editorial material.

It is not surprising, therefore, that some campaigns seek to generate WoM recommendation as this form of personal influence has a far greater impact than advertising, sales promotion or direct marketing is ever likely to achieve.

In the world of new media, this idea of personal influence is used through viral marketing. This involves the transmission of e-mails from friend to friend and is referred to as WoM communications. Picture messaging is now enhancing this communications method.

Source credibility

Following on from the general points made in the previous section, it is worth considering some aspects of source credibility in more detail. Fill (2006) develops original work by Kelman in identifying three key components of source credibility:

- 1** What is the level of perceived expertise (how much knowledge the source is perceived to hold)?
- 2** What are the personal motives the source is perceived to possess?
- 3** What degree of trust can be placed in the source concerning the motives for communicating the message in the first place?

Percy and Elliott (2005) discuss the application of the VisCAP model of source effectiveness, first introduced by Percy and Rossiter. This identifies four main source characteristics in communication – visibility, credibility, attractiveness and power.

- ◆ **Visibility** – how recognizable the source is from the target audience perspective.
- ◆ **Credibility** might refer to perceived knowledge of the source and/or the level of objectivity, sincerity or trustworthiness of the source.
- ◆ **Attractiveness** has two components; likeability and the perceived similarity/familiarity of the source.
- ◆ **Power** suggests the degree of influence the source may have on the target audience.

All of these factors may facilitate the effectiveness of marketing communications in achieving given objectives such as raising brand awareness, influencing consumer attitudes or behaviour. The VisCAP model was developed in relation to advertising but can be adapted to the use of a range of communications methods.

Word-of-mouth communications (Syllabus 1.1)

Word-of-mouth communications are an important part of the communication process. Campaigns such as those for the launch of Häagen Dazs super premium ice cream and energy drinks such as Red Bull have been launched with the specific aid of WoM communications. It is said that 70 per cent of Dyson floor cleaners are sold through the power of WoM communications. Using the influence of opinion leaders and opinion formers, WoM communications provide high levels of credibility and are relatively free of media and production costs.

A key question concerns why people talk about products and services and if we know that, it may be possible to stimulate WoM as part of a marketing communications campaign.

Dichter (1966) suggested that there are four main reasons why people engage in WoM:

- 1 Product interest** – People like to talk about products that they find pleasurable and those that give them unfavourable experiences. The latter is particularly significant when products fail to reach expectations and cognitive dissonance sets in.
- 2 Message interest** – People like to talk about messages (advertisements, news items and stunts) because they are outstanding, interesting or which stimulate controversy or curiosity. Benetton and Tango advertisements are classic examples. The Benetton campaigns using poster and print advertising, incorporated images which many found shocking and distasteful. These included a bloodstained shirt from a soldier killed in the Balkans and a black priest kissing a nun. Benetton's response was to suggest that they felt it appropriate to use advertising to raise social issues and not directly be connected to promoting products. The Tango campaigns were less controversial but did stimulate media interest. A life-size 'orange-shaped man' was seen slapping the face of an unsuspecting man talking to friends. Children started imitating this action resulting in damage to the ear drums of their 'victims'. The advertisements had to be modified as a result. Interestingly, the strap line 'You know when you've been Tangoed' became a popular everyday expression!
- 3 Self-interest** – People like to talk about advertising because the watch they have bought (or been given), or the car they are driving is believed to bestow status and prestige on them.
- 4 Other interests** – The final form of interest concerns the feelings people have towards others and their need to communicate information about particular products and brands in order that other people may enjoy or avoid the hazards of ownership.

How do marketing communications work?

The short answer to this question is that we do not really know! Although a great many theories have been put forward to explain the mechanical operation of marketing communications, many of them have either been too simplistic or have simply not stood up to empirical examination.



Figure 1.4: The AIDA model

Originally proposed in the 1920s to explain the process of personal selling, the AIDA model was rapidly adopted to explain the process of communications in advertising (Figure 1.4). The basic principle was that, in order to have effect, the first stage of any campaign was to gain the *attention* of the viewer or reader. The second stage is the stimulation of an *interest* in the proposition. In most cases, it would be reasonable to assume that if the first requirement – attention – had been met, the second would follow on almost automatically. The third stage is to create a *desire* for the product or service being promoted. Often, this will take the form of a 'problem–solution' execution in which the advertiser seeks to position the product as the answer to a problem which has previously been identified.

Activity 1.3

Identify at least three examples of current advertising or other communications from which you can identify the AIDA process being utilized.

The fourth and final stage of the AIDA model is the stimulation of some form of response on the part of the audience – the *action* stage. Many advertisements have a specific call to action, and are linked with promotional offers designed to induce a purchase of the product or some other desired end result.

The AIDA concept might apply in the development of an overall communications campaign or indeed in the creative design of an individual piece of communication. The launch of a new model of car, for example, might involve a TV advertising campaign to create and build awareness – to gain initial attention. Direct mail to prospective purchasers might be used to stimulate interest and invite inspection at dealers. Test driving, sales literature and personal selling at the dealer level will further develop interest, create desire and lead to action. Study of individual communications, single advertisements or the content of a direct mailing, can also demonstrate the use of AIDA. A bold headline or colourful image may gain attention. The words in the body copy create interest and build desire. A free phone telephone number or website address, coupled with some kind of incentive, free gift or discount, provides a call to action. A recent advertisement for a Bose music system included a headline which said ‘A revelation in sound’ above a photograph of the system itself. Subheadings described, the system as ‘Compact, sleek and unique’, ‘Elegant and easy to use’. The advertisement ended with an offer to trade-in an old radio and receive a £50 refund and provided a free phone telephone number, text number and web address.

From the outset, it was recognized that a fundamental aim of communication was to cut through the surrounding clutter and arrest the attention of the potential purchaser. Moreover, it suggested that the process of communications required the audience to pass through a series of sequential steps, and that each step was a logical consequence of what had gone before. The principle of sequential activity or learning is commonly used in many marketing models, and is often referred to as hierarchy of effects. It is clear that the attention phase is key to the process, since whatever follows will be of little value if the attention of the audience has not been obtained.

However, this model and other ‘hierarchy of effects’ models are now discredited as valid interpretations of how advertising (marketing communications) works. Many other models have been developed to explain consumer interaction with advertising and the way advertising messages are processed. For example, the ‘heightened appreciation model’ is a valuable tool for explaining some of the mechanics of the advertising message and, importantly, assists in determining advertising strategy. What the model suggests is that, by identifying a desirable attribute of a product (through the use of consumer research) and linking it directly with the brand, the consumer is made more aware of that attribute and is able to associate it with the brand. The direct result of this activity is to create a more positive awareness of the product or service, which results in more frequent usage and the building of a better image.

A good example of how manufacturers focus on a specific attribute and can arouse heightened appreciation of that attribute can be seen in the soap powder market. For many years, the primary benefit of all products within the category has been their ability to get

clothes whiter. As a result of changes in the formulation of the product, the focus has shifted towards colour fastness or freshness or ease of use. Advertising in this category now stresses one of these benefits, with the result that the consumer now compares competing products against the dimension that is important to them rather than the degree of whiteness which is delivered by the product.

Activity 1.4

The model described above stresses heightened appreciation. Find examples of marketing communications campaigns which attempt to heighten the consumer's awareness of a specific attribute of a product or service.

Contemporary thoughts about how marketing communications (very often just advertising) work tend to be less specific and less inclined to suggest that buyers move sequentially. The learn–feel–do sequence suggested by the hierarchy-of-effects models is now generally considered to be out of date and inaccurate.

Today, ideas such as Hall's four frameworks, Jones's Strong and Weak theories of advertising (and Ehrenberg's awareness–trial–reinforcement, ATR model) and general descriptions such as Prue's Alphabetical model are more widely accepted as suitable interpretations. These and other models are discussed more fully in the module's recommended text. One of the issues surrounding their application is the original focus on advertising as the prime communications tool. As we have already discussed and will continue to do, the role of marketing communications and the methods used in today's marketing environment are much more complex. Advertising a new brand of convenience product from Heinz, Kellogg or Procter & Gamble might well result in persuading a consumer to purchase (Strong Theory). The ATR model (Weak Theory) might more accurately reflect the wider abilities of marketing communications to be fully effective in both stimulating initial purchase (advertising), trial (sales promotion) and reinforcement/repeat purchase (advertising, sales promotion, direct mail, loyalty schemes).

What emerges from this is that co-ordinated marketing communications (CMC) work through an interaction between the brand and the communications that surround it. As we will see later in this coursebook, brand-related communications can be orientated to the rational factual aspects of a product or may be orientated to image and emotional brand associations. Brands can remind people about category needs and also about the advertising and the associations that surround a brand.

Advertising can work by persuading people to buy a brand (Strong theory) or they might work by reminding people of a need they may have (Weak theory). Advertising and marketing communications work in different ways in different situations (contexts) and it is not right to say that they work by any one single method.

Information processing (Syllabus 1.2)

There are a number of topics associated with information processing. However, you are required to know about perception and attitudes, and how they influence and are influenced by marketing communications.

Perception

Consumers are continuously bombarded with vast quantities of information. Whether the information is orchestrated by the marketer or the media, in general, is less relevant than the fact that there is simply too much information for the average consumer to process effectively. The inevitable consequence is that much of the material is simply screened out and discarded. The result is that the consumer may make purchasing decisions based on limited knowledge, or even a misunderstanding of the real facts. The individual is far less concerned with the average advertising message, which makes the task of ensuring appropriate communications with the target audience an even more daunting prospect.

As consumers, our awareness of specific advertising messages is treated in a similar way. Some form of trigger mechanism is usually required to encourage us to pay attention to the variety of marketing communications messages. Usually, this is an internal recognition of an unfulfilled need, which heightens the levels of awareness of pertinent advertising and other information. The principle can be commonly observed. If, for example, you have recently purchased a new hi-fi system, your awareness of the brand will be enhanced and you will immediately become aware of messages received about all competing brands for a period of time after purchase.

The process of decoding a message, whether it be from an advertiser or simply in the form of an article which interests us, will be substantially influenced by a number of perceptual factors. All of us, whether we think about it consciously or not, are influenced by a number of factors in our perception of a situation. And, as we will see later, perception itself is a key factor in the field of marketing communications.

Often, the consumer will possess only limited information on which to base a purchase decision. Some of that information, gleaned from other sources, will be incomplete. Value judgements will be based on that limited understanding since, for the individual involved, their perceptions are reality. It is irrelevant that what they understand about the nature of a product or service is lacking or even wrong. In the field of marketing communications, we must deal with those perceptual values and either play to them or seek to change them if that be the appropriate course of action.

Essentially, perception is about how we manage the various stimuli that we encounter. From a marketing communications perspective we are dealing with advertisements, promotions, members of the sales force, direct mailers and so on, all of which represent stimuli. The perception of stimuli involves three components – attention-getting, organizing and interpretation.

Gaining the attention of the target audience is an essential prerequisite of other levels of the process. If the attention of the potential consumer is not secured by the marketing communications message, then it is impossible to communicate salient aspects of that message. In some respects, attention is determined by the consumer's attitudes towards the product category and the brand within it. If there is little interest in the product category, then gaining attention will be a difficult task. By the same token, however, if the consumer has become interested in the particular category (heightened awareness) for some reason, then significantly more attention will be devoted to the advertisement and its contents. This may come about, for example, because the consumer has decided to purchase a new car. Following that emotional decision, advertisements for cars, particularly those in the area of interest and relevance, will be more readily perceived. Typography, colour, shape, presentation, sex, music, tone of voice, brand name and voice-overs are all variables used to get attention.

Activity 1.5

Identify different types of marketing communications that you have received recently – advertisements, direct mail, telephone calls – and determine the devices used to get your attention.

Whilst advertising is important to gain awareness for a brand, sales promotions such as sampling can be an important part of the process. Sampling aims to generate behavioural responses, whereas advertising develops mental pictures of a brand. Therefore, sampling has proved to be a popular method of stimulating brand awareness and understanding, particularly in the food and drinks industry. Recently, Fox's Biscuits launched its new Echo brand using sampling teams who distributed challenge cards. The brand's message is based on getting people to talk, so the card invites people to hug a passer-by or talk to a stranger or do a little dance and they are then rewarded with a free sample. Brand experience accelerates the normal development process of brand knowledge and perception. It is becoming common practice for new products to be launched using the so-called 'teaser' campaigns. This starts by providing limited amounts of information about the product and service, and then building up gradually until actual launch.

The organization of the stimuli, once perceived, is necessary in order for us to understand what it is that has attracted our attention. Various devices are available but, of these, contour and grouping are often-used techniques. So, when our attention is drawn to a bottle with a dark liquid, it means Coca-Cola because we understand the shape of the bottle. This is an extreme example but it illustrates the principle well. Just mentioning the words 'Coca-Cola' will create images in consumers' minds, very often the contour-shaped bottle. In fact, so strong is the bottle in branding terms that it became the United Kingdom's first registered trademark in packaging.

New or misunderstood products can be shown with products and brands that are well known and understood so that we learn that the weaker product is similar to the recognized brand. So, healthy foods are pictured next to a gymnasium, top sporting stars or people working out.

Finally, the organized stimuli need to be understood or *interpreted*. The Coca-Cola stimuli mean something about American life and quenching thirst. This aspect of perception is influenced by our background, family values, the society in which we live and the culture to which we belong. All exert a significant impact on our own decision-making process. A product which is wholly acceptable in one society might be taboo in another because of social, religious or moral values. Even the colour of the packaging may mean something different in different markets. The advertiser must be conscious of these factors when developing a communications campaign.

Perception is at the heart of positioning. This part of the context analysis provides information that feeds the objectives, positioning, message content and media vehicle scheduling.

Attitudes

As we have seen elsewhere, the consumer holds a series of *attitudes*, some of which may relate to the brand and the purchasing decision. Although most of these attitudes will be formed by external factors – age, sex, class, the influence of relatives, friends and

peer groups, cultural factors and so on – some are the direct result of the impact of an advertising message. In some instances, the *advertising* will serve to reinforce existing beliefs; in others, it will modify existing attitudes. If the consumer already believes that a well-balanced diet is essential to good health, then a product which promotes itself with this proposition is likely to be well received. The advertising will reinforce held beliefs and attitudes, and strengthen the perception of the brand. In some instances, the advertising message may modify attitudes, perhaps by presenting a potential solution to a problem which the consumer previously felt could not be resolved.

Attitudes are an expression of an individual's feelings towards a person or object, and reflect whether they are favourably or otherwise disposed towards that person or object. Attitudes are not directly observable, but can be inferred either from behavioural patterns or by some form of interrogation, typically using market research methods. Attitudes consist of three main components: cognitive, affective and conative. These are more easily remembered and understood as learn, feel and do (Figure 1.5).

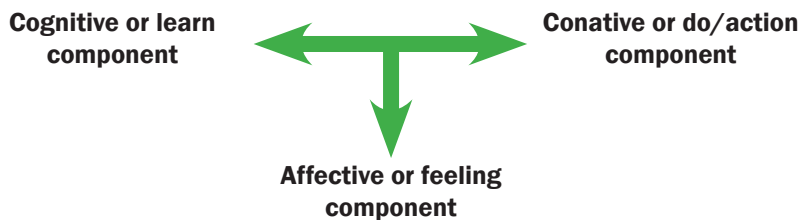


Figure 1.5: The three-component attitude model. Source: Fill (2006)

What this means is that when we buy something we learn something first, then feel something (about the product) and then do something (reject it, buy it or ask for more information).

These feelings (the affective component) are often attached to significant attributes (tangible or intangible). So, when looking at attitudes towards, say, tinned soup, the feelings (like or dislike) may be a reflection of the taste (tangible attribute) or the brand name and the associations that they bring to the individual (intangible). Marketing communications can play a very important role in modifying the attitudes people have. By changing negative attitudes into positive attitudes, a person's predisposition to buy that brand at the next opportunity increases.

Marketing communications can change attitudes by the following methods:

- ◆ **Change the physical product or service element** – At a fundamental level, attitudes might be so engrained that it is necessary to change the product or service and then claim in the marketing communications that it is 'new', or 'revised' or 'reformulated'.
- ◆ **Change misunderstanding** – By product demonstration, it is possible to change misunderstanding about the function of a product.
- ◆ **Build credibility** – Through use of an informative strategy based on product demonstration and hands-on experience (e.g. through sampling) it is possible to build credibility – a brand to be relied on.
- ◆ **Change performance beliefs** – By changing perceptions held about the attributes, it is possible to change the attitudes about the object. So, if product performance is in doubt, provide evidence to correct the misperception.

- ◆ **Change attribute priorities** – A strategy to emphasize a different attribute can change attitudes. By stressing the importance of service attributes, airlines might have an advantage over their rivals who stress punctuality.
- ◆ **Introduce a new attribute** – This action might create a temporary advantage if it is valued by the target audience.
- ◆ **Change perception of competitor products** – By changing the way competitor products are perceived, it is possible to differentiate your own brand.
- ◆ **Change or introduce new brand associations** – By using celebrities or spokespersons with whom the target audience can identify, it might be possible to change the way a product is perceived on an emotional basis rather than relying on attributes and a more rational argument.
- ◆ **Use corporate branding** – By using the stature of the parent company, it is possible to develop a level of credibility and brand values that other brands cannot copy.
- ◆ **Change the number of attributes used** – Today, two or even three attributes are often combined with strong emotional associations in order to provide a point of differentiation and a set of benefit-orientated brand values.

A fuller account of this important aspect of marketing communications can be found in the essential textbook for this unit (Fill, 2006).

Activity 1.6

Select a market sector with which you are familiar (travel, convenience foods, alcoholic or soft drinks, financial services, etc.), determine the leading brands and find examples of their communications. How have they used attributes to communicate? Are any of them trying to change the attitudes held of the target audience?

Attitudes towards products and services are an important dimension, since they will affect the individual's propensity to purchase. Products for which favourable attitudes are held are far more likely to be purchased than are those which create negative attitudes.

It is important to recognize that attitudes are not easy to change. Most consumers adopt fairly consistent behavioural patterns which can only be changed over time. If the consumer is of the view, for example, that all drink is evil, then no amount of advertising for alcoholic beverages is likely to alter that attitude.

Activity 1.7

Identify examples of communications which seek to change existing beliefs and seek to reinforce beliefs.

However, we have to remember that the consumers will not necessarily take in all of the advertising message, or may modify the content of the message to suit their existing views. Advertising promoting healthcare insurance will be irrelevant if the consumer believes that they are too young, for example, to be likely to fall seriously ill.