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MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

fame, influencers and agility

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Marketing Communications

Table 5.2   The main elements of the context analysis

Context element	Dimensions
The customer context	Segment characteristics Levels of awareness, perception and attitudes towards the brand/organisation Levels of involvement and types of perceived risk DMU characteristics and issues Media usage
The business context	Corporate and marketing strategy and plans Brand/organisation analysis Competitor analysis
The internal context	Financial constraints Organisation identity Culture, values and beliefs Marketing expertise Agency availability and suitability
The external context	Who are the key stakeholders and why are they important? What are their communications needs? Social, political, economic and technological restraints and opportunities

and, finally, they provide a crucial means by which particular marketing communications activities are evaluated.

Ideally, communications objectives should consist of three main elements:

1. **Corporate objectives.** These are derived from the business or marketing plan. They refer to the **mission** and the business area that the organisation believes it should be in.

2. **Marketing objectives.** These are derived from the marketing plan and are output oriented. Normally these can be considered as sales-related objectives, such as market share, sales revenues, volumes, ROI and profitability indicators.

3. **Marketing communications objectives.** These are derived from an understanding of the current context in which a brand exists and the future context in the form of where the brand is expected to be at some point in the future. These will be presented as awareness levels, perception, comprehension/knowledge, attitudes towards and overall degree of preference for the brand. The choice of communications goal depends on the tasks that need to be accomplished. In addition, most brands need either to maintain their current brand position or to reposition themselves in the light of changing contextual conditions.

These three elements constitute the communications objectives and they all need to be set out in SMART terminology (see Chapter 6). What also emerges is a refinement of the positioning that managers see as important for success. Obviously, not all plans require express attention to positioning (e.g. government information campaigns) but most commercial and brand-oriented communications programmes need to communicate a clear position in their market. Thus, at this point the positioning intentions are developed and these will be related to the market, the customers or some other dimension. The justification for this will arise from the CA.

Marketing communications strategy

As noted earlier, the communications strategy can take many different forms, but should always be customer-, not method/media-oriented. Therefore, strategy depends on whether the target audience is a customer segment, a distributor or dealer network, or whether other stakeholders need to be reached. In addition, it is imperative that the strategy be geared to the communications needs of the target audience that is revealed during the

customer and business context analyses. This will show what the task is that marketing communications needs to fulfil. Having established who the audience is, push, pull or profile-dominated strategies can be identified. The next step is to determine the task that needs to be accomplished. This will have been articulated previously in the marketing communications objectives, but the approach at this stage is less quantitative and softer.

The DRIP tasks of marketing communications can be used to suggest the strategy being pursued. For example, if a new brand is being launched, the first task will be to inform and differentiate the brand for members of the trade before using a pull strategy to inform and differentiate the brand for the target, end-user customers. An organisation wishing to signal a change of strategy and/or a change of name following a merger or acquisition may choose to use a profile strategy and the primary task will be to inform of the name change. An organisation experiencing declining sales may choose to remind customers of a need or it may choose to improve sales through persuasion.

Coordinated communications mix

Having formulated, stated and justified the required position, the next step is to present the basic form and style of the key message that is to be conveyed. Is there to be a lot of copy or just a little? Is there to be a rational or emotional approach or some weighting between the two? What should be the tone of the visual messages? It is at this point that those responsible for the development of these plans can be imaginative and try some new ideas. Trying to tie in the message to the strategic orientation is the important part, as the advertising agency will refine and redefine the message and the positioning.

From this the communications mixes need to be considered *for each* of the strategies proposed: that is, a mix for the consumer strategy, a mix for the trade strategy and a distinct mix for the communications to reach the wider array of stakeholders.

The choice of methods should clearly state the tools and the media to be used. A short paragraph justifying the selection is very important, as the use of media in particular is to a large extent dependent upon the nature of the goals, the target audience and the resources. The key is to provide message consistency and a measure of integration.

Resources

This is a vitally important part of the plan, one that is often avoided or forgotten about. The resources necessary to support the plan need to be determined and these refer not only to the financial issues but to the quality of available marketing expertise and the time that is available to achieve the required outcomes.

Project management software such as Prince2, and Gantt charts and other planning aids, are best used to support this part of the plan. Preferably, actual costs should be assigned, although percentages can be allocated if being written for examination purposes. What is important is the relative weighting of the costs, and a recognition and understanding of the general costs associated with the proposed communications activities.

It must be understood that the overall cost of the strategy should be in proportion to the size of the client organisation, its (probable) level of profitability, and the size and dynamics of the market in which it operates.

Scheduling and implementation

The next step is to schedule the deployment of the methods and the media. Events should be scheduled according to the goals and the strategic thrust. So, if it is necessary to communicate with the trade prior to a public launch, those activities tied into the push-positioning strategy should be scheduled prior to those calculated to support the pull strategy.

Similarly, if awareness is a goal, then (if funds permit) it may be best to use television and posters first, before sales promotions (unless sampling is used), direct marketing, point of purchase and personal selling.

Evaluation and control

Evaluation is an important aspect of the plan. There are numerous methods to evaluate the individual performance of the tools and the media used, and for examination purposes these should be stated. In addition, and perhaps more meaningfully, the most important measures are the communications objectives set in the first place. The success of a promotional strategy and the associated plan is the degree to which the objectives set are achieved.

Feedback

The planning process is completed when **feedback** is provided. Not only should information regarding the overall outcome of a campaign be considered, but so should individual aspects of the activity. For example, the performance of the individual tools used within the campaign, whether sufficient resources were invested, the appropriateness of the strategy in the first place, any problems encountered during implementation, and the relative ease with which the objectives were accomplished are all aspects that need to be fed back to all internal and external parties associated with the planning process.

This feedback is vitally important because it provides information for the CA that anchors the next campaign. Information fed back in a formal and systematic manner constitutes an opportunity for organisations to learn from their previous campaign activities, a point often overlooked and neglected.

Viewpoint 5.4

Contexts frame the planning process

Image 5.5 Bloom & Wild created a new brand platform, 'Care Wildly'
Source: Sergey Andrianov/Shutterstock.

A campaign to reach young and affluent drivers for **Toyota's** Yaris was founded on the need to change the poor and dull perceptions held of the brand by the target audience. Research found that to be successful the campaign needed to have a much smaller focus on the car, its features and the gadgets and technical aspects and a far bigger emphasis on associations with attitude, energy and personification. Gymnast Katelyn Ohashi was recruited to front the campaign in which she performs a specially choreographed 'Perfect 10' routine. This lifted the mood of the audience, which was then associated with the Yaris when she was pictured in the car. The film was shot so it could be broken down into clips of impactful digital content.

The online florist **Bloom & Wild** found that its brand awareness and brand understanding levels were poor compared to its competitors. To correct this situation, brand-building TV was used. This enabled Bloom & Wild to tell its story and, in doing so, also drive consideration. Previously it had used search and social extensively, but this limits the amount of storytelling. Using a new brand platform, 'Care Wildly' the TV ad drove broader reach than social and strategically built brand fame.

Sheba's '4am Stories' campaign was based on the insight that cats, driven biologically to be out and about, wake their owners at approximately 4am. Many cat owners then find it difficult to get back to sleep. In response to this insight Sheba created content specifically designed to get people back to sleep. This material included a Spotify sleep track, and a five-hour YouTube video with expert-created material designed to get people back to sleep. In the first four nights of the campaign the video had 8 million views on YouTube, of which 84 per cent occurred around 4am.

Sources: How Toyota Yaris increased its market share to an all-time high (n.d.); Jefferson (2021b); Ritson (2021b).

Insight

It can be argued that the success of these three campaigns can be traced to successful engagement following insightful contextual understanding. Through an appreciation of the customer context (the need to correct perceptions held by the target audience), the business and internal contexts (the need to establish the right type of awareness and within restrained financial resources), and customer and business contexts (the need to assist cat owners to return to sleep) underpinned the subsequent strategy and planning of each of these campaigns. By not losing sight of the premise of the campaign and ensuring that the campaign plan always incorporated the core idea, success was accomplished.

Question: To what extent should campaign planning be driven by data rather than any other factor?

Task: Find an example in which the internal or external contexts play a significant role.

Integration within marketing communications plans

It was mentioned earlier that there are a number of linkages associated with different parts of the marketing communications plan. Although the nature of integrated marketing communications is discussed fully in Chapter 8, it is important to understand the nature of these links as they represent the interconnections between different parts of the plan and the rationale for undertaking the CA in particular.

Table 5.3   Linkages within the MCPF

MCPF	Elements explanation
Objectives	From the marketing plan, from the customer, stakeholder network and competitor analysis, and from an internal marketing review
Strategic balance between push, pull and profile	From an understanding of the brand, the needs of the target audiences, including employees and all other stakeholders, and the marketing goals
Brand positioning	From users' and non-users' perceptions, motivations, attitudes and understanding about the brand and its direct and indirect competitors
Message content and style	From an understanding about the level of involvement, perceived risk, DMU analysis, information-processing styles and the positioning intentions
Promotional tools and media	From the target audience analysis of media habits, involvement and preferences, from knowledge about product suitability and media compatibility, from a competitor analysis and from the resource analysis

The CA feeds the items shown in Table 5.3. For example, research undertaken by Interbrand for Intercontinental Hotels, to find out what influenced the brand experience of hotel guests, discovered that one of the key factors was the hotel concierge. As a result, the role of the concierge became a central element in the communications strategy, influencing the campaign goals, positioning and message strategy (Gustafson, 2007). The objectives derived from the CA feed decisions concerning strategy, tools and media, content, scheduling and evaluation.

The marketing communications strategy is derived from an overall appreciation of the needs of the target audience (and stakeholders) regarding the brand and its competitive position in the market. The communications mix is influenced by the previous elements and the budget that follows. However, the nature of the tools and the capacity and characteristics of the media influence scheduling, implementation and evaluation activities, and are important considerations within the overall MCPF.

Scholars' paper 5.4

Planning Renault's expansion

Caemmerer, B. (2009). The planning and implementation of integrated marketing communications. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning, 27*(4), 524–538.

Students of marketing communications should read this paper, simply because it illustrates the tasks involved in the planning and implementation of integrated marketing communications. Using a case study approach based on Renault's attempt to expand its market share in Germany, the paper considers the range of tasks involved in planning an integrated marketing communications campaign. These include the context analysis and the identification of marketing communications opportunities; choosing the right marketing communications agency; campaign development and implementation, including the selection of the marketing communications mix, creative execution and media planning; campaign evaluation; planning of follow-up campaigns; and managerial coordination between all tasks and parties involved to ensure integration of marketing communications initiatives throughout the campaign.

Key points

- There are many different views of what constitutes strategy, partly because it is a multidimensional concept.
- Marketing communications strategy is not just about the mix, and should start with an audience-centred orientation.
- Marketing communications strategy should be concerned with the overall direction of the programme and target audiences, the fit with marketing and corporate strategy, the key message and desired positioning the brand is to occupy in the market, plus the resources necessary to deliver the position and accomplish the goals.
- There are four core ways of interpreting marketing communications strategy. These are the positioning, audience, platform and configuration approaches. Each of these emphasise particular elements and issues but they are not mutually discrete. Aspects of each can be found in the others.
- The positioning approach is derived from the STP process.
- The audience approach is referred to as the '3Ps' of marketing communications strategy.
- The platform approach can be advertising-led (around a creative idea), brand-led (around a core brand characteristic) or take the form of a participatory platform.
- The configuration approach requires managing the structural elements of an intended communications event, within the prevailing relationship, climate and power context, where appropriate.
- To manage efficiently and perhaps more effectively, marketing communications should be implemented through the use of a planning framework.
- The framework consists of a number of elements, which are presented sequentially, but in reality often happen simultaneously. Key to understanding the planning framework are the linkages between the various elements.