

Unit 1:

Marketing Communications: Nature, Purpose and Process

INTRODUCTION

In this first unit we look at the nature, purpose and process of **marketing communications**. We examine the role of communications in effecting exchanges between organisations and their publics and the specific role of marketing communications in this process. We also introduce the main elements of contemporary marketing communications, or as they are often called, the tools of the **promotional mix**, together with their characteristics. In order to provide the platform for later units, we consider how communication works and some of the **models** and theories of communication. Related to this, we consider some key behavioural factors which affect how individuals **process information**. We also introduce a key theme of this module, namely the notion of **integrated marketing communications** and the increasing importance of achieving integration in contemporary marketing communications planning.

In this unit, you will need to read the following chapters from the textbook:

Chapter 1: Introduction to marketing communications

Chapter 2: Communication theory

Chapter 5: Understanding how customers process information

Chapter 6: Customer decision-making

The approach used in this and the successive study units is essentially the same.

- Normally, at the start of each major section in the unit you will be asked to read one of these chapters in its entirety.
- As you then work through the unit, where appropriate, we highlight particular passages or pages from the text for review. This will be used to help you perform, for example, a particular activity. You will be

directed to read some chapters as background reading. In this unit, Chapter 6 is background reading.

- To investigate some issues in more depth, you should consult the references identified in the further reading list at the end of the unit. In addition, you should monitor developments in the journals given in the introduction.

OBJECTIVES

After completing this unit, you should be able to:

- understand the nature, role and purpose of marketing communications in the contemporary organisation
- describe the key concepts and models in communications theory
- explain current thinking about how individuals process information and why this is important to marketing communications planning
- appreciate the relevance of understanding the buyer decision-making process
- appreciate the differences between communications in consumer and organisational markets
- describe the key tools in the marketing communications mix and their uses and limitations
- understand the meaning and significance of the move towards integrated marketing communications.

Read Chapter 1.

EXCHANGE PROCESSES AND MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

A widely held view about the nature and purpose of marketing communications is that it is principally concerned with advertising products and services in order to achieve sales and profits. Although we have already acknowledged that much of marketing communications activity is concerned with advertising and selling products and services, the examples in our introduction show that contemporary marketing communications is much broader, both in concept and application. This broadening of the concept and application of marketing communications reflects a broadening of the concept and application of the marketing process itself of which marketing communications is a part. To appreciate the nature of contemporary marketing communications, therefore, we need to remind ourselves of the concept of marketing, and in particular the notion of marketing as an **exchange** process.

Review Chapter 1, pages 4–18.

It is important to remember that marketing communications is just a part of a company's overall marketing activities and planning. We return to this idea many times throughout the course. At this stage, it is important to remind ourselves about the process of marketing so we can explore the role of marketing communications in this process.

You will probably recall from your foundation marketing studies, that the marketing process can most usefully be viewed as an **exchange process**. In understanding marketing communications, it is important to understand the role that marketing communications plays in this exchange process. In order for exchange to take place, a number of conditions must be fulfilled.

ACTIVITY 1.1

Think back to the last purchase you made. This purchase involved an exchange between yourself and another party. What conditions were necessary for this exchange to take place?

Commentary

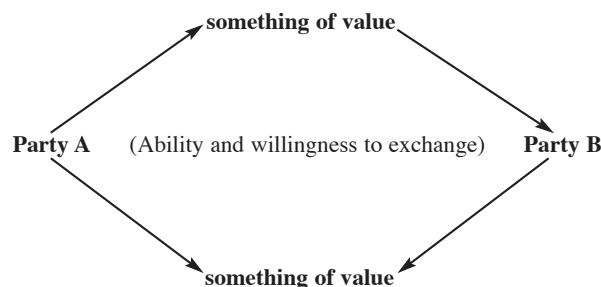
The most important conditions necessary for any exchange to take place are:

- there must be two or more parties
- each party must have **something of value** to the other
- each party must be able and willing to give up its something of value to receive the something of value held by the other party.

Simple model of the exchange process

The process of exchange can be illustrated by the use of the simple model shown in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1: A simple model of the exchange process



Role of marketing communications in the exchange process

If marketing is a process of exchange between two or more parties, what is the role of marketing communications in this process? The overall role of marketing communications is to facilitate and enhance the process of exchange. In what ways does marketing communications fulfil this role? What are the specific roles for marketing communications in the exchange process?

ACTIVITY 1.2

What roles do you feel marketing communications might play in facilitating and enhancing the exchange process?

Commentary

Amongst some of the most important roles for marketing communications are:

- **Informing.** All parties to a potential exchange must be aware, first that another party is able and willing to exchange, and second what each respective party has to offer.
- **Persuading.** Often, one or more of the parties to a potential exchange will need to be convinced or persuaded about the value of the exchange, and in particular that it is worthwhile. The persuasion process may also require one party to convince another that some form of action is appropriate in order to effect the exchange.
- **Differentiating.** Competition between different parties wishing to exchange can be considerable. In addition, there are very many different types of potential exchanges which individuals and organisations at any one time are confronted with. For example, a customer may choose between exchanging financial resources for a new car or an expensive holiday. Supposing the customer chooses the new car, a choice must also now be made between alternative suppliers for the new car. Because of this myriad of choices between exchange processes and parties, a key role for marketing communications is in differentiating one party's offering from that of other parties.
- **Reassuring and reminding.** The notion of marketing as an exchange process and our simple model, although useful, perhaps does not stress sufficiently the fact that increasingly, marketers in particular are interested, not just in 'one-off' exchanges with their customers, but rather with repeat exchanges with them. In other words, the marketer wants customers to return the next time the exchange process is initiated. This assumes that the customer will

undertake another exchange process. Often customers must be reminded to initiate another exchange process and at the same time they may need to be reminded and reassured that the exchange process will be satisfactory. Marketing communications play a key role in this reassuring and reminding process and are increasingly being relied upon to support the development of long-term **relationships** and exchanges with customers.

Note you should recognise the **DRIP** mnemonic in the above roles! The key point is that if one of these roles for marketing communications in the exchange process is badly planned or managed then the exchange process itself is unlikely to take place or if it does, may be unsatisfactory to one or more parties.

Widening the concepts of exchange and marketing communications

In addition to illustrating why marketing communications is important, this notion of marketing as an exchange process is also useful in highlighting the following points about the nature of marketing communications in this process:

- There may be several parties to the marketing exchange process. Hence, communication may be necessary between a number of parties to the exchange and not, for example, just between the supplying organisation and customers. For example, marketing communications is also aimed at distributors, regulators and pressure groups.
- Marketing communications is not only concerned with exchanges that involve the supply of products and services in return for money. It can, and indeed must, be used in any type of exchange process between two or more parties.

ACTIVITY 1.3

Think of what might be exchanged by each party in the following examples:

A charity \longleftrightarrow general public

A political party \longleftrightarrow voters

A church \longleftrightarrow the local community

A university \longleftrightarrow students

Commentary

Clearly a number of exchanges may be taking place; we make the following suggestions:

- A charity may be providing feelings of 'worth' and 'self-satisfaction' in exchange for donations of funds and possibly time to help in fund-raising efforts.
- A political party may be promising a particular lifestyle, or standard of living in exchange for votes, funds, or time.
- A church may be exchanging the hope of salvation for attendance, donations, or – again – time.
- A university may be exchanging a promise of improved career prospects in return for applications and fees.

These examples illustrate what we have already stressed several times, namely that marketing exchanges, and hence marketing communications, are not restricted to conventional commercial transactions between sellers and buyers.

Other marketing activities and the exchange process

Although marketing communications is central to the exchange process, it is important to remember that it is only one element of marketing activity which is intended to facilitate this process.

ACTIVITY 1.4

What other marketing activities (or tools) are used by your own organisation to facilitate exchange processes with customers?

Commentary

You will probably have spotted that the activities (or tools) we refer to here include the other elements of the **marketing mix**. You will recall from your foundation marketing course, that these tools include the three elements of **product, price and place**, in addition to the tools of marketing communications which constitute the fourth element of the marketing mix, namely the **promotional** element.

The fact that marketing communications represents just one element in the marketing mix has a very important implication in our context. As only one tool in a mix of tools used by the marketer, it must be planned and integrated with the other elements and furthermore it must be planned and integrated with overall marketing and corporate objectives and strategy. This is a theme that we return to many times throughout the units.

Developments in the concept of exchange: relationship marketing

Recently, the concept of the exchange process between organisations and their customers has begun to change. Although it is still central to the marketing concept, organisations recognise that it is much more effective to look at this process as a series of exchanges based on long-term relationships between the organisation and its customers rather than as a one-off transaction. By considering the exchange process in this way, both buyers and sellers can benefit. The organisation benefits from having loyal customers, which in turn can reduce the costs of marketing. Customers can benefit by having lower risk and lower switching costs. Developing long-term relationships rather than one-off transactions with customers requires a very different approach to marketing and to the use of the marketing mix elements. For example, a relationship marketing approach places a much greater premium on reliable delivery and consistent product quality. Conversely, price discounts and promotions are much less likely to be emphasised in the marketing mix. One of the most significant effects of adopting a relationship marketing approach, however, is in marketing communications. Much more emphasis will be given to two-way or interactive communication between the organisation and its target markets.

Marketing communications must be designed to encourage target audiences to enter into a dialogue as a basis for building long-term relationships. Relationship marketing has affected the planning of effective marketing communications in many ways, we therefore consider these effects throughout the course. It is particularly important to note that relationship marketing also widens the concept of exchange by considering all of the parties involved – suppliers, distributors, and other stakeholders who impact on, or influence the exchange process. As we see, marketing communications planning must include a variety of interested parties and exchanges, and not just those involving the organisation and its customers. This is another theme that we return to throughout the course.

MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS MIX

Just as there is a marketing mix comprising of a number of different marketing tools or activities, so too there are a number of tools for marketing communications. As with the marketing mix itself, decisions must be made about which are the most appropriate tools to use in achieving communication objectives. This collection of marketing communications tools is the **marketing communications mix** or the **promotional mix**.

Review Chapter 1, pages 19–27.

Obviously to plan marketing communications within the mix first requires the planner to be familiar with the range of promotional tools available. Second, the planner must understand the nature of each promotional tool including its key characteristics, its effectiveness for particular tasks of communication, and how to plan and manage each tool. Finally, the planner must use this understanding to make decisions about the best mix of tools. Much of what follows in the course is aimed at developing this understanding, but at this stage it is useful to gain an appreciation of the different tools of marketing communications.

Classifying and identifying marketing communications tools

In the context of a particular promotional campaign, there are many individual marketing communications tools. You will also find that different authors, researchers, and practitioners classify these tools in different ways. We start by identifying the four most traditional tools of marketing communications.

ACTIVITY 1.5

What marketing communications tools are you aware of as a consumer?

Commentary

The five main traditional categories of promotional tools are:

- **advertising**
- **sales promotion**
- **public relations**
- **personal selling**
- **direct marketing.**

Only a few years ago, direct marketing would probably have been considered in the traditional category of sales promotion, however, as we see in Unit 4, direct marketing has recently been one of the fastest growth areas of marketing and promotional activities. The speed of this growth has been such that most would now consider that direct marketing constitutes the fifth promotional tool in its own right. At this stage, we need not be concerned with the reason for this growth but we mention it because it illustrates the dynamic nature of marketing communications and the ever-changing tools of the promotional mix. We need to ensure that we keep up to date with trends and developments and in particular the growth of newer categories of marketing communications tools. To our five

major tools, we can also add some of the newer and, like direct marketing in the past, fast-growing categories. Under this heading we look in later units at the following two additional tools:

- **sponsorship**
- **online and interactive media.**

Choosing and combining the communication tools

Even at this early stage of the module you will recognise that one key task in planning marketing communications is the most effective selection of the tools available to achieve communication objectives. Again, we stress the need for integration. Many factors will affect the selection of the most appropriate marketing communications mix, but two of the most important factors affecting this choice are the different **characteristics** of each marketing communications tool, and related to this, their relative effectiveness in achieving particular communication tasks.

ACTIVITY 1.6

Review Table 1.4, page 27 in the textbook together with the sections on effectiveness and selection criteria, pages 24–26. Then select **one** of the promotional tools from those shown in Table 1.4 which you feel might be the most effective in the following situations:

- *Company A* is launching a new consumer brand mass-marketed at a national level. The company has substantial financial resources available for the launch and feels that a simple message is appropriate for the target market. Initially, the campaign is aimed at generating high levels of awareness.
- *Company B* has, like the UK government in its handling of the foot and mouth crisis in 2001, suffered from adverse publicity in the national press due to extreme concern about product safety and the environment. The company feels that it must take steps to reassure its publics that all the products involved have been recalled and that there is no further problem since new stringent policies and processes have been put in place.
- *Company C* markets hi-tech computer control systems for industrial processing equipment. It is seeking to increase its sales in new markets. It only has relatively limited funds available for promotion and wishes to ensure that it has a high degree of control over how the products are presented to potential customers.
- *Company D* markets specialist adventure holidays and knows that only a small segment of the market represents their potential target market. Using specialist agencies and its own market

database, it has built up a good picture of the target market and its needs and wants. The company knows from past experience that the target market responds well to individualised marketing approaches.

- *Company E* markets fast-moving consumer goods and has recently experienced a loss of market share due to a combination of special price deals and free offers by competitors. It wishes to respond through a marketing communications campaign.
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Commentary

There are no right answers to this activity. However, the characteristics of the various tools, their relative effectiveness in achieving different marketing and communication tasks, and the key criteria in selecting the different tools, together tend to suggest that the following marketing communications tools might be most appropriate:

- *Company A*: advertising
- *Company B*: public relations
- *Company C*: personal selling
- *Company D*: direct marketing
- *Company E*: sales promotion.

Obviously, this is very much an over-simplified exercise concerning the selection of appropriate promotional tools based on their characteristics and effectiveness. In addition, you were artificially constrained in this activity in selecting only one marketing communications tool. In fact in most situations we are looking at the best combination of tools and hence our use of the term **marketing communications mix**. A further point to note from this activity is the **interchangeability** between the marketing communications mix tools. Again, these are all facets of planning integrated marketing communications which we return to later. Finally, selecting promotional tools and combining them into an effective marketing communications mix requires an appreciation and understanding of the **context** in which these decisions are made in an organisation.

MANAGING AND PLANNING MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS: KEY TASKS

Review Chapter 1, pages 27–32.

The management and planning of marketing communications involves many complex and interrelated activities and decision areas. We look at each activity and decision area in some depth in the course culminating in a detailed discussion on how to plan integrated marketing communications strategies in Unit 5. At this stage, however, it is useful to consider the essence of the key tasks facing the manager responsible for planning marketing communications.

Review the list of these key tasks on page 29 of the textbook.

Fill's list captures the essence of managing the marketing communications process and therefore represents a very useful and shorthand way of highlighting the key tasks. We can summarise the key tasks even further – the effective management of marketing communications involves determining:

- **what to say?**
- **to whom?**
- **through what channels?**
- **for what purpose?**

There are distinct dangers in distilling the key tasks in planning and managing marketing communications to this extent. However, there are also distinct advantages in getting right to the essence of these complex processes. You will, therefore, hopefully find that this distillation is useful as we now detail the complexities surrounding the tasks of planning and managing integrated marketing communications in this and later units. As a start, whilst at the same time further exploring the nature, purpose and processes of marketing communications, we investigate how communication works. We begin by examining the **theories of communication** and some of the important behavioural factors involved when **buyers process information**. An understanding of these areas is necessary for planning marketing communications.

COMMUNICATION THEORY: MODELS OF COMMUNICATION

Read Chapter 2.

Although essentially this module is about how to develop 'real life' marketing communications plans, in developing these plans we need some understanding of how communications works – the underpinning processes. This understanding, as in any body of knowledge, is dependent on theoretical constructs. Here, we consider some of the theory surrounding communications in general and marketing communications in particular. Of particular relevance and importance are the so-called

models of communication. A number of models have been developed to help explain how communications works. As with most theoretical models, some pertain to the whole process of communications and look at all the various elements and how they fit together. Others are partial models and concentrate on just one, or a selected few, elements of the process in order to further our understanding. We start by examining the **linear model of communication.**

Linear model of communication

Review Chapter 2, pages 41–47.

The linear model of communication, the best known being proposed by Wilbur Schramm, views the communication process as essentially a series of steps or elements between a sender and a receiver. By understanding each step and how they relate to one another, we will understand the process of communications better and hence can plan it more effectively.

ACTIVITY 1.7

Using the Schramm model of communication (Figure 2.1, page 42), what factors might prevent or reduce effective marketing communications between the source (sender) and the receiver?

Commentary

The seven components of Schramm's linear model communication serve to highlight why marketing communications might be ineffective. Taking the components in turn:

- **source:** The source of the communication itself can prevent or reduce effective marketing communications. Communication may be ineffective because the source is perceived to lack credibility or conviction and as a result the receiver may then simply not listen to the message, or may discount it.
- **encoding:** Involves choosing the symbols, words and pictures to encapsulate the message to be communicated. If any element of this encoding is inappropriate and may be misunderstood or misinterpreted by the receiver, then again effective marketing communications might be prevented or reduced. An example might be where the message includes words, which have a different interpretation to that intended by the sender, because of cultural differences with the receiver. This is understandably a major potential problem when encoding marketing communications messages in international markets.

- **signal:** In terms of marketing communications, the signal involves the channel or medium by which the message is transmitted. One broad distinction between types of channels for the signal is that of personal versus non-personal channels. If the marketer chooses inappropriate channels for the circumstances and target audience, then again marketing communications might be less effective. A good example is if a marketer uses mass-media advertising when the target audience only responds to personal contact and communication.
- **decoding:** There are plenty of potential problems for effective marketing communications in this element of the model. If the receiver is unable to decode the message and/or decodes it incorrectly, then the communication process will be ineffective. Decoding problems can arise due to initial encoding problems, but essentially decoding issues arise when the receiver fails to make sense of the communication received. Again, this can be due to language problems or differences in culture, for example.
- **receiver:** The receiver may decode the intended message correctly but still may not fully understand or appreciate the communication intended by the source. For example, the receiver may not have the necessary experience to interpret the communication effectively. The communication process in these linear models of marketing communications is enhanced where the source and receiver share a common **realm** of understanding.
- **feedback:** Effective feedback is essential to communication. The sender needs to be able to assess if the message has been received and interpreted correctly. Without such feedback, the sender will not be in a position to assess the effectiveness of the communication. The importance of feedback puts a premium on the sender being able to receive and evaluate feedback. Feedback may take a variety of forms including measuring and assessing the response of the receiver. A good example of feedback is the measurement of recognition or recall of an advertising campaign.
- **noise:** This element of the linear model of communication serves to interfere with the communication process. It may result in the distortion of information or even non-reception of information. Many factors can give rise to noise in the communication process. For example, the receiver may be distracted during the communication process by some other factor. This can be a major problem in television advertising where we know that many viewers make tea or get a drink during commercial breaks. Another factor causing noise is the sheer magnitude of marketing communications now being aimed at customers. The amount of marketing communications to which an individual is potentially subjected to every day is simply enormous. This **information overload** gives rise to noise with the receiver simply being unable or unwilling to take in and comprehend all the marketing communications to which they are subjected.

This activity not only illustrates the relevance and potential usefulness of the Schramm linear model of communication to the development of effective marketing communications, but also underlines the fact that theoretical models generally help in the development of 'real life' marketing communications plans. Bearing this in mind, we can now turn our attention to some other theoretical models of communication.

Personal influences and word-of-mouth models

Review Chapter 2, pages 47–58.

Several communication models centre on the role of personal influences in the communications process, the related area of the effect of word-of-mouth communication, and the role of **opinion leaders**, **opinion formers** and **opinion followers**.

There is no doubt that personal influence and, in particular, **word-of-mouth** can play a major role in the communication process. These models suggest that personal influences and word-of-mouth act as **filters** between the source and receiver ends of the communication chain. Linear models of communication do not account for these personal influence and word-of-mouth effects, but rather suggest that communication flows in one step from sender to receiver. The introduction of personal and word-of-mouth influences in the process has given rise to the **two-step** and **multi-step** flow models depending on the degree of interaction amongst the parties to the communication process.

Word-of-mouth in the communication process consists of individuals seeking or receiving the opinions of others and entering into discussions about these opinions. For example, an individual might discuss with a friend the relative merits of a particular car, having test-driven a new model or seen it advertised. The importance of word-of-mouth is that it is known to be a very powerful influence on buyer behaviour and choice. We actively seek and value the opinions of others. Indeed there is a link here with our earlier notion of 'source characteristics' as these opinions, being personal rather than marketer instigated, have high source credibility and high source attractiveness. A major implication of the recognition of the importance of personal influences and word-of-mouth communications has led to marketers being particularly interested in identifying individuals who are perhaps pre-disposed to receiving and passing on information to others. We can identify three types of groups:

- **opinion leaders**
- **opinion formers**
- **opinion followers.**

Review the Mini-case: Because it works! 67–68.

ACTIVITY 1.8

Although this Mini-case is intended to show the importance and use of opinion leaders and opinion formers in marketing communications, what do you think are the problems in using opinion leaders and formers in a marketing communications campaign?

Adoption and diffusion models

You have probably come across these models in your earlier marketing studies. They are not really marketing communications models, rather they are models concerning decisions and processes related to new products. For example, the **adoption model** looks at the stages that an individual passes through in deciding whether to adopt or reject a new product or brand. The closely related **diffusion model** examines how new products spread through a market as a result of individual adoption decisions. This model looks at different **adopter categories** with regard to how early or late they are in the diffusion process.

Although not truly models of communication, in the same way as those we have already discussed, we can say that the adoption and diffusion models have important uses and implications in the understanding and planning of marketing communications. Some of the most important ways in which these models can help in promotional activities include the following:

- identifying key target audiences
- message design
- media selection
- selection of marketing communications tools.

Interactional, contextual and network models

More recent models of communications theory have begun to explore marketing communications processes in a wider, and in some ways, more realistic context. These models include the more complex behavioural and social aspects of communications between the parties including the 'rules of engagement' (**interaction models**). Others explore the effect of the circumstances surrounding a particular communications process (**contextual models**); others stress the complex webs of communication and information flows between the different parties in the exchange process (**network models**).

Review Chapter 2, pages 58–65.

ACTIVITY 1.9

Think of any ways in which the interactional, contextual or network models of communication might have practical implications for the marketer and for planning effective marketing communications in particular.

Commentary

Many of these newer models of communication theory have not been fully explored with respect to their possible practical uses and implications in planning marketing, and marketing communications. However, these models offer some important pointers:

- selection of sales force (interaction model)
- conducting negotiation processes during personal selling (interaction model)
- integrating marketing communications elements (contextual model)
- developing relationship marketing strategies (contextual and network models).

These are some of the more important models of communication. Equally necessary and valuable in planning marketing communications, however, is the need to understand the behaviour of buyers. There are two related components to this understanding – how they process information and some key forces and factors affecting this process. As part of our important foundation framework for understanding how communication works, we now look at various concepts in buyer information processing. We specifically consider buyer decision-making processes in Unit 4 when we examine the importance of understanding target markets and buyer behaviour in developing communication plans.

BUYER INFORMATION PROCESSING

If marketing communications is largely concerned with the transmission of information between parties to the exchange process, then it is important to understand how information is processed and the factors which affect this. Clearly in planning marketing communications we are interested in how target audiences process any information which is aimed at them. Here we consider some key concepts and models, in particular we look at some of the main behavioural forces which affect how customers interpret and respond to marketing communications. First, we need to remind ourselves about the nature of the buyer decision-making process and the different types of buyers in the market, particularly the differences between

consumer and organisational buyers. You will recall this from your foundation marketing course.

Consumers and organisational buyers

As you will appreciate, although there are often several parties to exchange processes, much of marketing communications is primarily aimed at buyers. Indeed, this is why we are introducing concepts and models related to understanding how buyers process information. The term 'buyers' is a very broad one. There are different types of buyers and different types of buying situations which affect the information processing behaviour and therefore the planning of marketing communications. Simply, in discussing and analysing buyers we need to be clear about the type of buyer. This raises the issue of how buyers can be classified into different types. Although there are many ways in which this classification can be made, for our purposes we distinguish between two major types of buyers and buying situations – **consumers** and **organisational buyers**. Although this is a very broad distinction, you will recall that most marketers accept that these are two very different types of buyer that require different approaches to marketing strategies and plans, including plans for marketing communications. Where appropriate, and particularly when discussing aspects such as buyer behaviour, we highlight any considerations arising from the differences between these two different types of buyer groups. First we remind ourselves about the nature of the buying decision process for these two different types of buyers.

Read Chapter 6. This is the first of your background reading chapters. You will see that it covers the area of buyer decision making (buyer behaviour) including the differences in this process between consumer and organisational buyers. These are all aspects covered in your foundation marketing course. Remember that the background reading chapters are crucial to the development of your understanding of the concepts in the unit. You should now read through and assimilate the content of this chapter before proceeding.

FACTORS AFFECTING BUYER INFORMATION PROCESSING

Read Chapter 5.

Various theories of human behaviour have been proposed but the now widely accepted **cognitive theory** is based on the notion that human behaviour centres on information processing and problem solving behaviour. This theory is particularly useful in understanding the processes by which individuals receive, interpret and use information from marketing communications. The planner needs to understand the key behavioural factors which cognitive theory suggests affect information

processing and the implications of these factors in marketing communications planning. These key behavioural factors are:

- **personality**
- **perception**
- **learning**
- **attitudes**
- **environmental influences.**

Personality

Review Chapter 5, pages 133–136.

Both Freudian psychoanalytic theory and the more recent trait theories of personality have proved useful in our understanding of how buyers process information and hence for the development of marketing communications. Freudian theory has increased our understanding of the meaning and uses of symbols in marketing communications and the importance of subconscious fears, hopes and aspirations in motivating consumer behaviour. We know that consumers are often motivated by factors about which they are not themselves aware, particularly sexual factors. Marketers have used this knowledge in developing advertising campaigns, and in the use of appropriate symbols and subconscious messages in advertising.

Trait theories of personality centre on the enduring and measurable characteristics of an individual's personality, such as whether they are **extrovert** or **introvert**, **aspirers** or **succeeders**, etc. Of most interest to marketers is the extent to which these personality traits are related to the behaviour of buyers, including aspects such as brand choice, lifestyles, and segmentation. We now know from research that there is a strong relationship between a person's personality traits and these and other aspects of their buying behaviour. By understanding personality traits, the marketer can design marketing programmes to specifically appeal to certain personalities. Brands can be given **personalities** to match that of the target market. Trait theories have been very useful to the development of marketing communications plans.

ACTIVITY 1.10

How would you describe the personality of the following brands:

- BMW
- Levi jeans
- Marlborough cigarettes

- Calvin Klein underwear.
-

Commentary

Obviously, there are no right answers to this activity. You will have your own ideas about what constitutes the personality of these brands. Hopefully, for at least some brands, you will have had no problem describing their personality. Even the fact that a customer cannot describe the personality of a brand has implications for marketing communications planning.

Perception

Review Chapter 5, pages 136–141.

Understanding the processes and nature of perception is essential for the effective planning of marketing communications. Many facets of perception have implications for this planning including **selective perception, perceptual organisation processes** and **perceptual interpretation**.

In broad terms, perception involves the processes whereby individuals take in and interpret stimuli, including those from marketing communications, to make sense of the world. The planner must ensure that information is not filtered out, either knowingly or unknowingly, by the target audience. In order to achieve this, marketing communications must be designed to cut through the sheer volume of messages to which individuals today are exposed. Understanding the processes of perception, including perceptual selection and perceptual organisation concepts such as **figure-ground, grouping, closure** and **contour** can all help.

The marketing communications planner must also ensure that messages and other symbols are interpreted appropriately by the target audience. Again, an understanding of perceptual processes, and in particular perceptual interpretation is essential. We know some of the key factors that affect the interpretation process including the past experiences of the target audience, the context within which perception occurs, the expectations and preconceptions of the individual.

Perception has many implications for the marketer and the marketing communications planner including product and brand positioning, product evaluation, product selection and choice. Marketers, through their marketing communications, may need to establish, confirm, or change perceptions about their products and brands.

ACTIVITY 1.11

What are some of the difficulties that a company like Bird's Eye, described in the textbook, have in attempting to change customer perception of its products?

Commentary

Once established, customer perceptions about a company's products and brands can be extremely difficult to change. Bird's Eye has been trying to achieve a change towards attracting more people to frozen food. However, the perceptual processes mean that some individuals will simply ignore or distort the messages designed to achieve this. There is also a danger of confusing customers about the image of Bird's Eye resulting in weak positioning in the market. Finally, creating changed perceptions, especially for a company with such a strong positioning and brand image like Bird's Eye can be very expensive indeed.

Learning

Review Chapter 5, pages 142–151.

Much of human behaviour is learned, including consumption behaviour. Learning theorists have contributed substantially to our understanding of human behaviour in both general and buying behaviour. Both **behavioural** and **cognitive** theories of learning have added to our knowledge of planning marketing communications. Behavioural theories of learning have shown the importance of developing positive associations for consumers when they think of a product or brand. Another area where behavioural learning theories are used in marketing communications is in the use of reinforcement by linking the product or brand to rewards for the customer. Clearly, if promotional messages are not remembered and recalled by the target audience then these messages, and the spending involved in delivering them, is wasted. We know a considerable amount about how memory and recall works. This knowledge can be used to decide whether advertising monies are best spent in a single burst of concentrated advertising activity, or whether it is better to have repeated but short bursts of advertising in order to keep the product or brand in the mind of the customer.

Attitudes

Review Chapter 5, pages 151–156.

Like learning, attitudes are a key component of human behaviour including purchasing behaviour. Attitudes are complex and encompass:

- our knowledge and beliefs – **cognitive component**
- our feelings towards things, products, people, companies, ideas and so on – **affective component**
- and on the basis of these, our predisposition to behave in certain ways – **conative component**.

Much of marketing communications is concerned with attitudes – trying to form them, or reinforce them or change them. Because of this, it is essential to understand the underlying nature of attitudes and how they can be affected in different ways through marketing communications. Both the **multi-attribute attitude models** and the **compensatory models** have proved useful in this respect. There are several ways in which marketers can use these models in marketing communications. The multi-attribute models point to the importance of identifying the key attributes of a product or service underpinning the customers' attitudes towards this product or service and hence determining choice. Similarly, the marketer may attempt to change customers' attitudes about the important attributes. A good example of this is the marketing strategy and communications mix used by the UK retailer, The Body Shop. This company has managed to change attitudes towards issues like animal testing in the development of cosmetic products. Marketing communications is essentially attempting to create a positive attitude towards a product and/or a company. However, in order to achieve this, the marketer must understand and measure the attitudinal components of customers in order to determine how to design appropriate messages. Perhaps one of the most difficult tasks for marketing communications is to change attitudes, especially where these are strongly held and/or central to the customers' belief and behaviour system.

Environmental influences

Simply, environmental influences on information processing and behaviour are important as the marketing communications planner needs to understand something of the context within which these behavioural factors take place.

Review: Chapter 5, pages 156–159.

As this is something of a 'catch all' category of factors affecting buyer information processing, there is a danger of thinking that some factors are not as important as those we outlined earlier. In fact, some of the most important factors affecting buyer information processing, and hence the design and marketing communications programmes, are covered here. Many of the most important of these environmental influences fall into the category of **social/cultural** forces and factors including culture, sub-

cultures, social class and groups. These social/cultural forces are so important to the development of marketing communications that we return to them at several points in later units.

The second category of environmental influences, **situational influences** really does represent a 'catch all' category as it represent those influences which are specific, and often peculiar, to each individual buying and marketing communications situation. It includes the time available for information processing and purchasing, the lighting and atmospheric conditions prevailing at the time and place of purchase, and whether or not someone else is present during information processing and purchasing. Although there is no doubt that these situational influences do affect buyer information processing, by their very nature they are difficult to take account of and particularly plan in advance for. All we can probably do is to take account of them, in for example assessing the effectiveness of marketing communications.

REVIEW ACTIVITY 1.1: CHANGING ATTITUDES – THE LOST GENERATION? THE CHALLENGE OF COMMUNICATING WITH POLITICALLY CYNICAL BRITISH YOUTH

Read the Mini-case on pages 162-164 and answer questions 1a and 2 at the end.

SUMMARY

In this unit, we have looked at the nature, purpose and process of marketing communications. We have seen that marketing communications plays a key role in the exchange processes between organisations and their publics. We have introduced the main elements or tools of the marketing communications or promotional mix, many of which we look at in more detail in later units. In order to provide a platform for the module for understanding how to plan effective marketing communications, we looked at how it works and some of the key models in this area. In addition, and as part of the same process, we have also considered how buyers process information and some of the key forces and factors affecting this processing. Throughout the unit, we have stressed the need to develop integrated marketing communications plans.

FURTHER READING

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