

## Marketing Communications: Theory and Applications

Pearson Education: Australia

John R. Rossiter & Steven Bellman (2005)

### Overview

Marketing Communications: Theory and Applications is a text aimed at both marketing managers and students (i.e., undergraduate and postgraduate marketing communication students). As the title suggests, the book promises to deliver theoretical frameworks and executional procedures that will help managers negotiate, what the authors rightfully contend, are a myriad of choices available to them.

Central to the text is the notion of the brand and the role of marketing communications in presenting the brand to consumers. To this end, a six-step model of marketing communications guides the structure of the text. The steps being: (1) brand positioning, (2) campaign objectives, (3) creative strategy, (4) promotion strategy, (5) media strategy, and (6) campaign management.

The text begins in a feisty style. As part of a discussion of the academic-practitioner divide, we are told that the academic literature "has remained straightjacketed in terms of marcoms ideas for at least 10 years and has pursued trivial sameness with just a few exceptions. Academic researchers, particularly in advertising, must learn to get real." While this sentiment probably resonates with the target market of practitioners, it is arguable. For readers who fiercely endorse the notion that academic research is out of touch I suggest they read Calder, Phillips and Tybout (1981) (specifically, their discussion of effects application and theoretical application). This article could be used as a vehicle to explain the apparent neglect of reality by academic advertising research, which presumably pursues theoretical application. Having said that, criticisms in the preface are also aimed at practitioners.

The text draws upon a useful spread of journals and is not solely restricted to the Journal of Advertising and Journal of Advertising Research as one might expect for a marketing communications text. Indeed, top-tier

journals such as Journal of Consumer Research, Journal of Marketing Research, Marketing Science, and top social psychology journals receive a number of citations, as do journals as diverse as the Australasian Marketing Journal, International Journal of Research in Marketing, and Journal of Consumer Marketing. Rossiter and Bellman are to be congratulated for going to this level of effort. This is important given research that highlights the diversity of marketing journals (see for example Baumgartner and Pieters 2003).

### Text Structure and Content

Marketing communications is a subject that students often equate with advertising. Hence, the challenge for authors is to write a text that addresses advertising, without demoting other aspects of marketing communications to insignificance. Yet at the same time, advertising needs to be recognized as a key, visible aspect of this area and addressed accordingly. The authors here present advertising and promotions as two major, distinct elements of marketing communications, with public relations and personal selling as related areas that are managed in a separate but consistent fashion. The structure of the text essentially follows the aforementioned six-step model with the addition of a section on other marcoms.

Chapters 1 to 4 set the foundation. Chapter 1 clearly delineates between advertising and promotions, provides background figures, and emphasizes the assertion that brand equity is the main determinant of profit. In other words, despite the tactics suggested throughout to generate consumer response, managers should keep in mind that a beneficial effect on brand equity should be a key motivation for long-term success.

Chapter 2 presents three levels of effects which I will discuss in a subsequent section.

Chapters 3 and 4 outline a series of useful models that fit

into the overall six-step framework; for example, the TCB model (i.e., Target customer, Category need, and Key Benefit) for brand positioning. Interestingly, even topics such as brain research (what the authors term "brain-levels theory") get an airing here. This clearly differentiates the text from many other marketing communication books. Also included are topics such as a brief nod to archetypes and the manner in which brand benefits should be communicated is discussed. Benefit positioning is addressed in detail in Chapter 4. A multi-attribute approach for managers is presented with detailed examples. Throughout, the authors retain their focus on how this relates to the brand and bring in the importance of integrating marketing messages.

Chapters 5 and 6 study campaign objectives. The authors discuss brand loyalty segmentation and present a questionnaire which can be used to classify a potential market. The notion of desired communication effects is addressed in relation to persuading consumers to take action. Consistent with previous parts of the text, the importance of the brand is again highlighted regarding, for example, brand recognition and brand preference.

Chapters 7 to 10 consider creative strategies for advertising. The authors set the scene with figures indicating effectiveness issues, and then present components of an ad as a foundation for discussing such issues as the key benefit claim and the creative idea. The suggestions in Chapter 7 regarding brainstorming and the examples are informative.

Chapters 11 and 12 examine advertising media strategy. The authors recommend that managers be directly involved in media planning, and provide a logical sequence of topics and decisions for managers to consider. In particular, reach and frequency are discussed in depth in an insightful way. Chapters 13 and 14 address the campaign budget and tracking. This includes the good use of data, examples and practical advice.

Chapters 15 to 18 address other areas, such as sales promotions, corporate image advertising, personal selling and social marketing campaigns. This section was a nice surprise, as will be discussed in relation to personal selling.

All chapters conclude with a summary and a set of discussion questions. Generally, there are seven questions for each chapter, with a surge to 14 questions for the chapter on Sales Promotion. While some teachers may seek more questions, there are some benefits to the approach Rossiter and Bellman have taken. Namely: (a)

The questions require some effort on the part of reader that is of an interesting nature (e.g., find an ad, design an ad). The authors generally do not ask the reader to recite terms from the chapter with minimal application. (b) The product contexts for the questions are varied, ranging from the expected (e.g., Coke) to the unexpected (e.g., a CD for the Dixie Chicks).

Interestingly, given the authors' awareness of the American target audience for the text the discussion questions are not specific to American culture. This can be a challenge when using Marketing Communications texts from America, where discussion questions - or indeed instructor manuals - often focus on examples unfamiliar to Australasian students. The authors get around this issue nicely by referring readers to websites for further information. The internet exercises on the website that relates to the text are also useful and in some instances contain brief hints to assist people. The website also contains Media Mania, a useful program on media scheduling models written by Peter Danaher.

In terms of presentation, the text is well-structured and easy to follow with models and formulae clearly presented. There are good signposts of where the text is going and also when areas will be discussed in greater detail. Personally I prefer sources of models to be fully cited under a figure or diagram, whereas this text tends to cite authors and year of publication, with a note at the end of the chapter with fuller details. This allows for commentary on the paper but requires flicking to the end of the chapter to get the information. Some terms are also not in the glossary or index. For example, the term "polyarchical" is mentioned in the text, the summary, and is the subject of a discussion question, but it is not defined in the glossary or referenced in the index.

Yet the writing itself has a simple, clear, almost chatty style that reflects an appreciation of when things may be difficult for a novice reader. For example, "The diagram may look complicated but it's quite easy to understand when you work your way through it" (p. 24), or "The terminology with which we describe them below will look Martian at first but special terms are necessary and we'll define them carefully" (p. 235). Equally there are some nice touches of humour, such as, "and Newton (that's Derek, not Sir Isaac) recommends . . ." (p. 407), although at times the writing does lean towards stating the obvious. For example, "will produce a 0.3% (that's three-tenths of one percent) . . ." (p. 12).

Indeed the preceding example shows a feature of the

writing style of the text; namely, the frequent use of parentheses to elucidate some point. This results in longish sentences at times, but eliminates the need for footnotes or further chapter endnotes. The parentheses are also useful for referring to other chapters. The endnotes are generally informative, although at times are indulgent (e.g., how one of the authors had just had children and had a recent need for diapers, p. 41) or thanking individuals for providing examples (couldn't they have been thanked for this in the acknowledgements?). Still, these are minor points, and whether you view such things as adding colour to the text or as unnecessary diversions depends on the personal preference of the reader.

### Points of difference

How then does this text differ from a standard marketing communications text beyond its brand focus? Some points of difference include:

Specific recommendations. A strength of books by John Rossiter is that he offers recommendations. Unlike texts which say nothing more than "this issue is crucial" and present a model or two, Rossiter and Bellman offer their readers concrete rules. For example, commission levels in retail sales (p. 405). This is one of the key virtues of the text.

Integrating the message. Contrary to some texts which revolve around the notion of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC), the authors present a pragmatic argument for taking a more restricted focus. Rather than arguing that marketers use a broad variety of media to present a message, the authors suggest that advertisers tend to use one primary medium with one or two secondary media. They back this view up with data and tie it to notions of reach and frequency.

Three levels of effects. The authors move away from citing the standard hierarchy of effects model, and instead present three simultaneous levels of effects, discussed in Chapter 2. The three levels are: first, ad or promotion processing (e.g., "attention"), second, brand communication effects (e.g., "category need"), and third, customer decision stages (e.g., "not in the market"). The authors discuss how some areas can act in a hierarchical fashion, but recognize where other areas do not (e.g., for processing effects). They also include the role of emotions under processing which augments a cognitive perspective. Many of these elements will be familiar to consumer researchers who have an understanding of

memory, attitudes, involvement and processing of stimuli. The authors discuss the typical considered purchase versus impulse purchase (analogous to high and low involvement decisions), and then usefully bring together the customer response stages with the planning stages for a manager.

Australian examples and media references. In contrast to American texts, this text includes data from other countries, including understandably enough, Australia, to supplement American data, and to engage the reader.

Personal selling. Surprising perhaps, given the depth given to advertising and promotion, the chapter on personal selling is very interesting. Whereas some marketing communications texts simply give a definition of the selling process, Rossiter and Bellman present a variety of interesting features. For example, discussing how General Mental Ability (i.e., IQ level) relates to hiring. Consumer individual differences also get a workout in this chapter in relation to such issues as salesperson rejection and attribution style. A nice touch.

While these examples of points of difference are a strength, at times one could argue that the stated contributions may be "new" but not necessarily "unique" as suggested in the preface. Specifically, one such contribution is the "Consistent approach carried through to other marcoms - sales promotion; personal selling and telemarketing; sponsorships, PR, and corporate image advertising; and social marketing campaigns." Yet the notion of consistency parallels that of IMC where a synthesized approach or uniform message is presented through multiple media. Thus, such a contribution would not appear to be unique, even if it is differentiated from the IMC approach.

### Conclusion

Overall, *Marketing Communications: Theory and Applications* by Rossiter and Bellman presents a great deal of useful theories and concrete, actionable recommendations. The brand focus, and the recognition of brand equity, sets this book apart from texts that revolve around an IMC approach. For that alone it represents an interesting and engaging take on this ever-popular topic. Personally, it is the sort of text I would consider for undergraduates, rather than for postgraduates. However this would depend on the nature of one's postgraduate programme. In summary, this text is a highly useful addition to the texts on offer to marketing educators.

**References**

Baumgartner, H. and Pieters, R., 2003. The structural influence of marketing journals: a citation analysis of the discipline and its subareas over time. *Journal of Marketing* 67 (2), 123-139.

Calder, B.J., Phillips, L.W. and Tybout, A.M., 1981. Designing research for application. *Journal of Consumer Research* 8 (September), 197-207.

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