

Towards Achieving the Success in Communication Campaign: A Study on Marks and Spencer

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ABSTRACT

Marks and Spencer (M&S) suffered from losing its customers' trust and confidence which substantiated significant decline in sales since the beginning of this century, especially in 2004. But M&S developed a new marketing communications strategy following the McQuail's communication approaches that touched customer's heart and eventually M&S regained previous image and crowned with the top honor at the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising's annual effectiveness award. This study discusses how McQuail's communication approaches have been used in the M&S's communication campaign for which it regained its customers' trust. It is expected that business firms of the world will get directions and guidelines in designing their communication message and thereby regaining and retaining the customers' loyalty and trust.

Keywords: Communication, customers' trust, message.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the inception of human civilization, communication has been acting as an 'adhesive lubricant' between humans, society and other social organizations (Balasubramanian, 1994; Debanjan, 2010). It has the capacity to stick things together and being able to keep them moving. Among the benefits of communication, people are able to use communication as a means to develop and shares their culture, values, norms and beliefs. Over the decades, the pattern and dimension of communication has changed dramatically. Consequently, mass communication has taken place due to digital revolution in the media landscape. Nowadays, businessman, politicians and other groups are using mass communication to disseminate their messages and philosophies (Debanjan, 2010).

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Activities of mass communication and media are not static rather more dynamic (Ambler, 1998). This is more creative and practical than theory bound. Recent dynamic evolution of mass communication has attracted researchers and academicians (Kidd, 2002). Side by side, the development of sociology and psychology has helped researchers formulating theories or incorporating new dimensions in the existing models. This theoretical development has helped all groups of people delivering their messages to the audience. For instance, within less than a decade, Google has become one of the most valuable companies in the world mainly because of its ability to attract advertising revenue from companies seeking to intercept people while they navigate the Internet.

Furthermore, there are many amazing histories in this arena where mediated communication has played a significant role for the survival of corporations and helping those becoming leaders in specific market or industry. Success of communication campaign basically depends on how intended messages are effectively communicated between sender and receiver (Ambler, 1998; Shannon & Weaver, 1949). For example, Travelocity in 2004 and Marks and Spencer (M&S) in 2005 have proved the unimaginable strength of mass communication (IPA case, 2006). This study was conducted based on the revival history of mediated communications used by a giant retailer “Marks and Spencer” (M&S), a culture icon of British people. This study explores the critical aspects of the communication programs undertaken by M&S as described in the award winning case in the IPA Advertising Works Collection from 2006. It discusses how the communication strategy helped the firm to survive by considering theoretical perspectives that elaborate on the mechanisms by which the campaign achieved its objectives.

Thus, this case study attempt to focus on the communication campaign exercises by a renowned global business firm group like M&S. This will help provide business firms worldwide with motivation and ideas in designing and redesigning their communication message in a strategic way, thereby regaining and retaining their customers’ trust and confidence. In writing the article, the researchers studied and visited the annual reports and websites of M&S along with the available published literatures, research monographs, journal, and magazines in this field.

This study has been designed into four parts. The present situation of the communication industry in UK has been discussed in the first part, M&S’s context before and after the survival in the second part and an analysis of M&S’s communication campaign based on McQuail’s (2010) four approaches to media theory in the third part. Finally, an inference has been drawn alongside concluding remarks.

2. UK COMMUNICATION MEDIA LANDSCAPE AT A GLANCE

Creative media landscape of United Kingdom is vast, influential, mature and international standard. It is relatively open and second in position internationally after the USA. UK communication industry covers many areas like broadcasting, film making, music, gaming, advertising and many more (Bromley, 2010). Moreover, UK has a very significant contribution to the operations of global media conglomerates like News Corp, Bertelsman and Time Warner despite none of them are UK based. Media communication vehicles like; newspapers, television, magazines, radio, film, books, advertising, music, telephones and public relations are mostly owned by the giant private corporations. Some corporations have chains of newspapers, magazines and other channels also. This type of concentrated media ownership is generally comparable with other European countries (Kelly, Mazzoleni, & McQuail, 2004).

Since 1979, communication media industry has been facing some legislative obstacles under both Conservative and Labour Government (Bromley, 2010). Despite legislative difficulties, still industry growth is rapid and continuous. Apart from this, according to Stephen Carter (first minister of communication, technology and broadcasting in UK), a tremendous evolution has taken place within last 20 years in the media communication sector where consumers and businessman are embracing the opportunities. He also declared a plan to save the position of UK communication industry by ensuring innovation, investment and quality (DCMS, 2008). Government encouragement substantiated the industry growth, consequently significant contribution taken place to the national economy.

On the other hand, media communication has always had the potential influencing culture and the social structure of contemporary life. Modern and innovative modes of communication help advertising industry exploits that potential (Blankson & Kalafatis, 2007). This industry might help developed countries like UK fostering own culture and contributes to the national economy. In addition, rapid growth of this industry is opening the window for the new graduates who have an informed and lively interest in the creative use of the new forms of communication.

3. A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF M&S AND IT'S REVIVAL

M&S is one of the leaders in UK's retail industry having 600 UK stores and 75,000 employees. Since its inception, company stands on five pillars; quality, value, service, innovation and trust. Based on these pillars, it offers stylish, high quality, great value; innovative clothing, home products and foods sourced from around 2000 global suppliers. Among the total sales, 49 percent revenue comes from clothing and home-ware and 51 percent from foods. Recently, the company

introduced a five-year eco plan, where plan A is to contribute in the carbon neutral activities. These activities, in turn, will substantiate the customer loyalty level to be the most sustainable retailer in the world within 2015 (www.marksandspencer.com).

Since the beginning of this century, companies had been suffering a lot in the retail market. In 2004, M&S suffered from losing customer's trust which substantiated significant decline in sales. Consequently, Philip Green, owner of the Arcadia Group offered to takeover the company. During that time, M&S was getting negative support from very unpopular advertising campaign "I'm normal", which showed a British woman of average size 16 running naked up a hill (Sweney, 2006). Due to that, M&S was on the brink of disaster.

After Philip Green's offer had been rejected by the board of directors, CEO of M&S developed a new marketing communications strategy that moved customer's heart. While it was very difficult, he took the challenge to come back again (Sweney, 2006). Eventually, M&S regained its previous image and crowned with the top honour at the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising's annual effectiveness award. Top analysts of UK described it as an "advertising-led discovery" which set a new milestone in the industrial history (Sweney, 2006). Subsequently, it is worthwhile to find out the magic of this marketing communication strategy.

The main touchy and appealing theme was "Your M&S", introduced by the chief executive officer Stuart Rose. Rose felt that M&S's history was related with the British people's history. During 125 years of its journey, M&S developed a heart to heart relationship with British people as well as British culture. It was indeed needed to create a great communication idea during the disastrous situation and Rose did that, said James Murphy, chief executives of M&S's advertising agency Rainey Kelly Campbell Roalfe/Y&R. "Your M&S" sent a message to the customers that it is not ours, it is not Philip Green's, it is yours, and let's return it to its best" (Sweney, 2006).

Based on the discussed context, the main focus of the campaign was on M&S's history of quality, value and service. Women's wear and food were considered as the pivotal merchandise for the whole campaign. The women's wear campaign was designed by some favourite and famous faces, iconic Twiggy alongside Laura Bailey, Lizzie Jagger, Noemie Lenoir and Erin O'Connor. For the food campaign, the company used an appealing slogan "not just food, M&S food", with a "look behind the label" (www.marksandspencer.com).

The amazing result of the "Your M&S" campaign shown from the estimated additional 18 million customer visit during last business year. The positive press coverage on the success of Twiggy, Laura Bailey, Lizzie Jagger, Noemie Lenoir and Erin O'Connor's attracting attention of the public was estimated £6m

(Sweeney, 2006). M&S's year-end results that were announced in April saw a sharp rise in full-year profits, from £505.5m to £745.7m. Rose could now smile in satisfaction looking at healthy share price of 655p while Green made an offer 400p per share (www.marksandspencer.com).

4. MCQUAIL'S FOUR MAIN APPROACHES TO MEDIA THEORY AND ANALYSIS OF ITS APPLICATION IN THE M&S'S COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN

Communication is deeply connected with the heart of human behaviour and different construction of the society (Debanjan, 2010). Carey (2002) states that communication is culture and scholar should explore their research in that paradigm. Hall was the first one who placed intercultural studies directly into the communication realm. Communication is just transmitting information from one person to another but in reality; many scholars of communication treat this as working definition. Many scholar use Lasswell's sequential process of communication ("who says what to whom to what effect") as a means of confining the field of communication (Katz, 1990; Debanjan, 2010). In addition, communication theory itself is an attempt to describe and explain precisely what communication is.

Analysing the definition of mass communication as a process, it can be divided into two paradigms, one is dominant and another is critical (McQuail, 2005). Sequentially, McQuail (2005) identified four approaches for the solution of the question, how the new media should be conceptualized. These models and their applications in the M&S's case have been presented in a framework and thereafter described below.

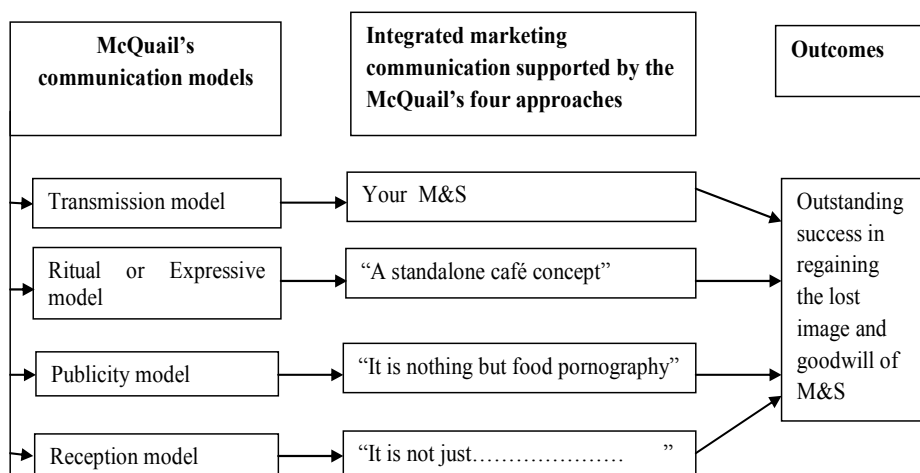


Figure 1: Framework showing the outcomes of the integrated marketing communication supported by McQuail's Model.

4.1 Transmission Model

A fundamental component of the dominant paradigm is ‘transmission’, that is the transmission of an information determined by the sender, also known as mass communication process (McQuail, 2005). Lasswell (1948) was the first contributor in the mass communication study by developing a model “who says what to whom, through what channel and with what effect?”. Subsequently, Shannon and Weaver (1949) proposed another communication model based on technology. Later both models were criticized and attempt has been done to improve the simplistic version of these models by McQuail and Windahl in 1993. On the other hand, Westley and Maclean (1957) developed most complete version combining both models and adding a new communicator role. This communicator role was the professional journalist in a formal media organization. The sequence of the model has become not simply: sender-message-channel-many potential receivers, but rather: events and voices in the society—channel/communicator role—message—receiver. So, it is now obvious that, mass communicators do not generally invent messages or communication rather they act as a match maker between society and audience.

In 2004, when M&S was in a disastrous position, whole communication industry involved with the negative public relation (Bromley, 2015). Receiving the negative messages causing customers losing their confidence towards M&S. Despite that, customers still have very soft and heartfelt feelings in their minds toward M&S. A top class analyst Mowat said “M&S has always been trusted and has an honest relationship with its customers”. Following the theme of transmission model, Rose sent a message (Your M&S) to their audience that M&S is their company and he wanted to give it back to them. British people received that message since it is appealing to their heart. In order to upgrade customer’s confidence, it was indeed important to visualize the company’s intention. Visibility is the prime component of transmission model and television is the prime media to visualize its commitment to the audience. In connection, company used very sophisticated and famous celebrities in their communication campaign especially in the advertisement. One advertisement that showed iconic 60’s face Twiggy sporting a cream three-quarter sleeved blouse resulted in more sales in a week than any other product in M&S history (IPA case, 2006). It is an evident that the company understood the British people and sent the precise message. Subsequently, M&S developed quality, design and value in their product category with the credibility they have had during the beginning. Accordingly, company reassured their audience that they were very much conscious to uphold their sound commitments and ethics. In order to stimulate trust and confidence of the British people, M&S designed a communication message for their food products “not just food, M&S food” with a “look behind the label”. Trust, quality and reliability are the basic components of M&S’s culture and British people always like it. In this way, M&S regained their image as well as market share. Eventually, the media industry substantiated their

positive public relation and M&S have enough press coverage which cost two million pounds for the advertising space (Thompson, 2007).

4.2 Ritual or Expressive Model

Transmission model was criticized again by McQuail in 2010, by showing its limitations like instrumentality, cause and effect relations and one directional flow. He also stated that this model only appropriate for some media like news and advertising. Ritual communication model or expressive communication model is an alternative way of communication which is orchestrated with the terms such as sharing, participation, association, fellowship and the possession of common faith (Carey, 1975). The basic components of this model are mutual understanding and emotions. In this model, there is a scope to perform between sender and receiver by which exact message could be disseminated. Ritual communication messages are usually implicit and based on various customs and associations available in the specific social culture (McQuail, 2010). This model is especially useful in uniting and mobilizing the audience in a specific society. Cultural art, religion, public ceremonials and festivals are the best example of rituals of a society (McQuail, 2010).

Ritual or expressive model of communication is basically based on some ritual customs and framework of expressions which is implicit in nature. To use this model, communicator must analyses the culture and rituals of the specific society. Since its inception, M&S passed 125 year of its successful journey in the British culture and become the culture icon of British people. M&S adopted the chemistry and archaeologies of British culture. The company developed their products based on how British people wanted to observe rituals like religious festivals and social ceremonials. M&S always offered special products for Christmas and Easter. As a campaign, M&S designed all store's interior during December showing special honour to Christmas and offered product emphasizing on style credentials. M&S also launched a new sub-brand 'a standalone café concept', M&S kitchen and store design by Fitch. Accordingly, "Your M&S" would help customers on a spectacular show during Christmas. In addition, Bruce Hubbard from Citi Group stated "it's not just Christmas, it's an M&S Christmas". By this way, the company showed participation, sharing and possession of common faith and connected with the pulse of British people.

Ethics and green marketing are another two components which can touch the hearts of British people. These two have become part of British society. British people are now more curious about the supply chain of the company whether goods are ethically sourced. It had been observed that in 2006 when M&S declared its stock of fair-trade coffee and tea, sales increased 27% abruptly. M&S declared reducing 55% carbon emission (Plan-A) in stores by introducing efficient lighting system, incorporating daylight, using low energy bulbs and new refrigeration system (www.marksandspencer.com). Plan A, definitely influenced

audiences to be more loyal and substantiated the sustainable growth of the company.

4.3 Publicity Model

Other than the two discussed models, publicity model is somewhat different from the stand point of intention or objective of communication. It is basically used to attract audience's optical or aural interest. This model could be used in gaining two directional interests; one is audience revenue and another is selling audience interest to the advertisers. In this communication model, audiences are playing as spectator's role than information receiver. In addition, attracting interest is getting priority than quality of attention (Elliot & Wattanasuwan, 1972; McQuail, 2010). Some audience watch media just to spend their time and publicity model does not emphasize on passive relation between sender and receiver (McQuail, 2010).

Based on the theme of the publicity model, M&S developed some advertisement just to attract audience's interest to watch or hear the advertisement rather than sharing the information. Top favourite models in women wear campaign and visualizations of delicious food in food campaign were used to purposely attract the audience's interest to watch the advertisement. M&S presented foods in a different, uncommon and eye-catching way as to attract audience interest. Steve Sharp is one of the top managers of M&S and he commented that its nothing but food pornography. In addition, in August 2004 "Your M&S" campaign was publicized by Stuart Rose in the city and a high profile poster campaign was demonstrated in September 2004 which was done especially to attract audience's attention (IPA case, 2006). Furthermore, a well decorated taxi rally was organized as a means of publicity (Thompson, 2007). M&S was very careful in choosing media tools and timing in order to catch public attention and achieved goals by combating the challenges.

4.4 Reception Model

Reception model is the McQuail's fourth communication approach which has a different communication view from others. In this model, focus is given on different view of communication message by different receiver who might not understand the same message sent. This model is underpinning the culture domain rather than the social sciences (McQuail, 2010). 'Power of audience' is the main theme of this model. Communication message should contain special feature and structure of meaning which are closely related with the culture and beliefs of the audience. Because media message always has a room to be polysemic and, it is analysed and received considering the cultural context of the audience (McQuail, 2010).

Reception model is completely based on culture domain of specific audience. In the communication process, a message would be received by the audience depends on their culture. Before developing a message, sender should consider the cultural context of the audience. Owner of the Advertising firm Mark Roalfe said “M&S is at the heart of British culture”. So, M&S knows the architecture of the British culture. According to Hofstede (1994), British culture is individualistic culture. Individualism is the degree of people’s feelings to be comfortable to act as an individual rather than groups. They value self-interest and looks after own family like husband, wife and children (Hofstede, 1994). Considering this cultural context, M&S sent a message of products with the autograph of top celebrities to the audience. In addition, it was advertised that “it is M&S’s food which could be served to your friend”. Top celebrities had been chosen as a brand ambassador to touch the individualistic families.

On the other hand, British culture is high context culture (Hall, 1984). Anticipating this, M&S developed advertising message which was explicit, simple and clear. High context communication is economical, fast and efficient (Mooij, 2005). M&S did not use any symbol in the message rather it used highly expressive language. Consequently, the line used in the campaign ‘this is not just.....’ become a part of national culture. Many British comedy programs (Brenmar, Bird and Fortune) used this line as a parody and also parodied in the playground from Exeter to Edinburgh. Thus, British people took it by their heart and start their action again. Howard Saunders stated that “if some high street shops went bust, people would cheer. But if it was M&S, they’d shed a tear” (Contagious case, 2006).

Considering the above discussion, an inference can be drawn that without cultural understanding no communication would be effective. Culture has been interlaced with every communication approach. M&S has chosen every media vehicles and tools as such precise message can be sent to the target audience. Some other factors involved behind the unparalleled success are smartly chosen brand ambassadors, striking TV commercials, ethical considerations, amazing store design, some old fashioned food pornography and an experienced CEO.

5. CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Mass communication has become a part and parcel of business organizations around the world due to its strategic importance. In many cases business success are depending on mediated communication. M&S is the live example how mediated communication could help an organization to regain and retain its lost reputation. While designing the communication message and media, a firm must be very strategic following the example done by M&S. Indeed, M&S designed its communication strategies by incorporating traditions, rituals, and norms of British culture. In a world, it can be said that M&S studied

the architecture of British culture very deliberately and delicately. Furthermore, M&S used most of McQuail's communication approaches in a very prudent way. Consequently, the communication campaign of M&S was a great success. So it is expected that the business organizations of the world should not ignore the strategic importance of communication. Rather, with the help of communication it is possible to develop the trust and confidence among the customers and consumers which will untimely help in increasing the sales and revenue of the organization. But, in designing the communication message, the firm must integrate the tradition, rituals, belief literature and culture of the society. Otherwise, communication may not yield fruitful results.

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