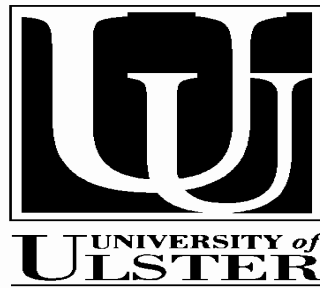


# BA (Hons) Business Studies with Specialisms

Year II

## Marketing Communications MKT326M2



*Outline the key elements of the communication process.  
What particular issues need to be considered when designing  
marketing communications mixes across cultures?*

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# Introduction

Marketing communications can be defined as communications by means of promotion within a target audience or market.

To communicate with consumers in order to persuade them to buy the company's products is by no means the only objective. To view it as being only sales -orientated is to underestimate the complexity of modern marketing communications.

“It is necessary to target customers in an integrated fashion to inform, persuade and remind prospective and existing consumers and customers of the firm, its products and services and how these are differentiated to appeal to and satisfy targeted needs, wants and desires of target markets.”<sup>1</sup>

Marketing communications does not entail the continuous application of tried and tested techniques, rather it is constantly moving and dynamic, not just in terms of messages, but also medias, monies expended and changing consumer mindsets. An example of this, *product placement*, which involves the deliberate featuring of a product or brand in a film or television programme, was in its infancy even five years ago. Today, however, it represents a useful – if still marginal – element of the communications programme for many consumer goods organisations.

It is also about creativity. Marketing communications is an exciting and vigorous subject area. It is becoming the *sine qua non* underpinning all manner of exchanges in both the public and private sector.

Promotion is the communication arm of the marketing mix. Organisations use various promotional approaches to communicate with target markets and the following text will look at the general dimensions of promotion, defining promotion in the context of marketing and examining its roles. Next, to understand how promotion works, the text analyses the meaning and process of communication, as well as the product adoption process. The remaining of the text discusses the major types of promotional methods and the factors that influence promotion across cultures.

## Promotion: Dimension and Role

People's attitudes towards promotion vary. Some take a positive view and often admire advertising messages as nourishing. Some attack promotion in general and say that it represents a waste of money because well-made products will sell themselves. Others focus on specific organisations and their marketing programs. Examples of complaints include those against uninformed, overly aggressive salespeople; misleading, deceptive, tasteless advertisements; and phoney sales promotions that seek to make consumers believe they are getting something for nothing.

Ours is a heterogeneous society – a mixture of people with different ethical and social values, abilities, and educational levels. Thus promotional activities, with exception of personal selling, can never be tailored exactly to each person's situation.

The role of promotion in a company is to communicate with individuals, groups or organisations with the aim of directly or indirectly facilitating exchanges by informing and persuading one or more of the audiences to accept the firm's products.<sup>2</sup>

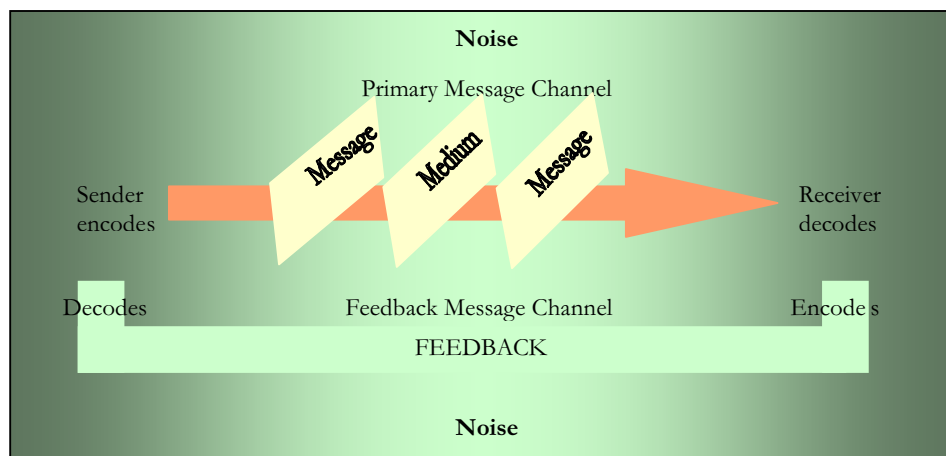
Marketers indirectly facilitate exchanges by focusing information about company activities and products on interest groups (such as environmental and consumer groups), current and potential investors, regulatory agencies and society in general.

A company frequently communicates several different messages concurrently, each to a different group. For example, McDonald's may direct one communication towards customers for its Big Mac, a second message towards investors about the firm's stable growth and a third communication towards society in general regarding the company's Ronald McDonald Houses, which provide support to families of children suffering cancer.

As the basic role of promotion is to communicate, it is necessary to analyse what communication is and how the communication process works.

## Communications Explained

Communication is defined as a sharing of meaning.<sup>3</sup> Two-way communication is the essence of successful marketing and marketing communications. This implies a relationship between a *sender* (or source) and a *receiver* (destination or audience) in which both parties are treated as equal partners. The sender has a meaning and seeks to share it with one or more receivers. The sender of the message can be a person, group or organisation. The tools senders use to reach their intended receivers are called messages and channels. A receiver is the individual, group or organisation that decodes a coded message. Furthermore, there has to be commonness of thought between senders and receivers. The communication process itself involves performing the communications functions of encoding, decoding, receiving feedback, and coping with noise.



To make communication successful, a marketer faces four challenges: (1) to identify the intended receiver's characteristics and what change in behaviour is desired, (2) formulate the message and place it in a form the receiver can interpret (encoding), (3) select the channel(s) that can best reach the receiver and carry the message, and (4) interpret feedback from the receiver (decoding) and determine what changes may be needed to improve the communication process.

### Encoding

To meet these challenges, the sender must arrange ideas into symbolic forms such as words, pictures and gestures. This process is called **encoding**. Marketers must encode ideas in a form the intended receiver will understand. Symbols can be especially valuable for a firm that has global target markets. People of many languages, worldwide, for example, understand the golden arches of McDonald's. The receiver will assign meaning to the symbols in light of his or her own experiences and knowledge. Thus the symbols must be tied to some common point of reference between the source and the receiver.

### The Communication Channel

A communication channel is anything that carries a message – a means by which the sender conveys or transmits a message to receivers. Two broad types are interpersonal communication channels and mass communication channels. Interpersonal communication channels provide direct contact between the sender and receiver. Such channels are selective; that is, the message can be tailored to the individual receiver. Examples are personal selling and word of mouth.

Mass communication channels are used when the sender wants to reach a large number of receivers, perhaps tens of millions, simultaneously. Examples include print media and broadcast media. The source has less control and the channel is less direct. Marketers who use mass communication channels, however, often can generate considerable interpersonal communication through word of mouth channels. Opinion leaders are people who expose themselves more to mass media, and whose opinions about products are sought by less-knowledgeable people.

### Decoding

Decoding is the process by which the receiver attempts to convert symbols, which the source conveyed, into a message. Different receivers may decode, or interpret, the message in different ways because of their individual characteristics, biases, background and so on. Whenever a receiver does not decode the meaning that the sender encoded, the result is noise.

### Noise

Noise is anything that interferes with the communication process so that the receiver gets a message that is different from the one the source sent or gets no message at all. Interference with TV reception, radio static, poor colour reproduction in magazine ads, are all examples. Noise also occurs when a source uses a sign that is unfamiliar to the receiver or that has a different meaning from the one the source intended. Noise may also originate in the receiver. A receiver may be unaware of a coded message because his or her perceptual processes block it out or because the coded message is too obscure.

## Feedback

After a message has been sent, the source is interested in securing feedback from the receivers. It may not be immediate and the longer it takes the less valuable the feedback becomes. Feedback generally is more immediate when the source uses interpersonal communication channels like personal selling.

## Channel Capacity

Each communication channel has a limit on the volume of information it can handle effectively. For example, an individual source can only talk so fast, and there is a limit to how much an individual can take in aurally.

Now that the basic communication process has been explored, it is worth considering how promotion is used to influence individuals, groups or organisations to accept or adopt a firm's product.

## Product Adoption Process

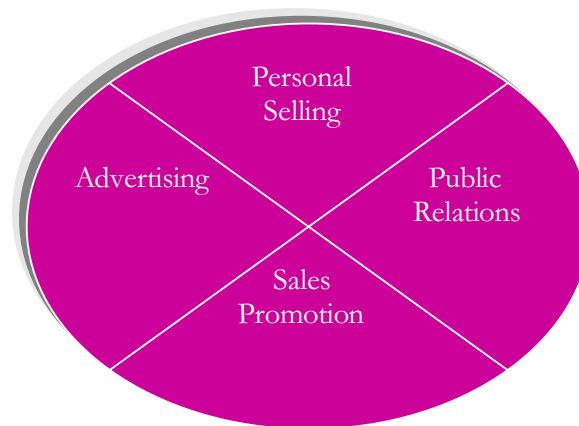
The following stages of the product adoption process are generally recognised as those that buyers go through in accepting a product.

1. *Awareness.* The buyer becomes aware of the product
2. *Interest.* The buyer seeks information and is generally receptive to learning about the product.
3. *Evaluation.* The buyer considers the product's benefits and determines whether to try it.
4. *Trial.* The buyer examines, tests or tries the product to determine its usefulness relative to his or her needs
5. *Adoption.* The buyer purchases the product and can be expected to use it when the need for this general type of product arises again.

In order to communicate with their targeted receivers, marketers must develop promotion mixes. The elements in such a mix must be carefully selected and blended properly to produce an effective promotion program.

## The Promotional Mix

The promotion mix, one of the four major components of the marketing mix, involves a careful blending of several elements to accomplish the organisation's specific promotion objectives. The four traditional elements are advertising, personal selling, sales promotion and public relations.



### Advertising

Any paid form of nonpersonal communication through the mass media about a product by an identified sponsor is advertising. The mass media used include magazines, direct mail, radio, television, billboards, and newspapers. This is used when the sponsor wants to communicate with a number of people who cannot be reached economically and effectively through personal means.

### Personal Selling

Personal, face-to-face contact between a seller's representative and those people with whom the seller wants to communicate is personal selling. Non-profit organisations, political candidates, companies, and individuals use personal selling to communicate with the public.

### Public Relations

Communication to correct erroneous impressions, maintain the goodwill of the organisation's many publics, and explain the organisation's goals and purposes is called public relations (PR). Unlike the other promotional mix elements, public relations is concerned primarily with people outside the target market, although it may include them. Publicity is news carried in the mass media about an organisation – its products, policies, personnel, or actions – at no charge to the organisation for media time and space.

### Sales Promotion

Sales promotion communicates with targeted receivers in a way that is not feasible by using other elements of the promotion mix. It involves any activity that offers an incentive to induce a desired response by salespersons, intermediaries, and/or final customers. Sales promotion activities add value to the product because the incentives ordinarily do not accompany the product.

In June 1996 Kodak launched the Advantix range. To recoup its significant development costs, the promotional message at the heart of its launch and brand building campaigns had to appeal to both the dedicated photographer and the "happy snapper". By using some technical information in its advertising within a simple, memorable execution, Kodak's advertising proved a successful ingredient in the marketing mix for the Advantix. To reassure its customers, Kodak's advertising plays on the company's reputation, record of constant product innovation and position as the most established

name in the market. A good reputation is not enough, however, as Kodak knows. Its campaign included advertising with 30 and 60 executions, supported by sales promotion and point-of-sale activity.

Although most marketers use a combination of elements in their promotional mixes, each element should reinforce the messages of the others.

## **Marketing Communications across Cultures**

The symbolic content of promotional messages must, in order to be meaningful to the consumer, make use of the cultural currency of symbolic codes in contemporary use. Marketing communications may not conform to rational criteria of economic, political or ethical assessment. However, they must conform to a kind of cognitive rationality in tapping into the symbolic codes by which people constitute their social world.

Language differences often cause problems in the translation of advertisements. In India alone, twenty-two languages are spoken. In the United States it's easy to decode the meaning that Pepsi-Cola intended in its slogan, "Come alive with Pepsi," but it's not so simple in India. In Hindi, the meaning decodes as "With Pepsi you will get life", in Tamil, "Regain life through Pepsi"; and in Telugu, "Escape death by drinking Pepsi." Likewise, in the United States, marketers who target ethnic market segments must be especially careful in choosing symbols to convey their messages.

Also being aware of aesthetic codes is essential when promoting across many cultures. For example, many countries associate specific colours and objects to different occasions, white lilies are associated with death in Great Britain, Sweden and Canada.

Wernick<sup>4</sup> states

... it would be impossible to valorise products symbolically if the symbolism employed to that end were itself unintelligible or without ideological appeal. Symbolic ads, must therefore not only find effective pictorial and verbal devices by which to link commodity with a significance. They must also build significance from elements of an understood cultural code: and in such a way that the values in terms of which the product is endorsed are themselves endorsed by those to whom they make appeal.

## **Conclusion**

We began by suggesting that, for many organisations, marketing communications represent the most visible face of the organisation and that because of this, the question of how the communication programme is to be managed is a fundamental strategic issue.

In developing the communication plan, the marketer needs to begin by recognising that the various tools of communication such as advertising, public relations, sales promotion and so on cannot be looked at and managed in isolation. Instead, they need to be seen as the component parts of a promotions or communications mix, which, in turn, is just one part of the organisation's overall marketing mix.

Because of this, it is essential that the marketer develops a clear understanding of the nature of the interrelationships that exist between the individual elements of the communications mix and how these then influence and are in turn influenced by the

elements of the marketing mix. However, it is often still the case that either these interrelationships are not fully understood or, because of a series of organisational constraints, the elements of the communications programme are managed largely independently.

Having developed and implemented the communications programme, the marketer then needs to measure its effectiveness through developing a detailed feedback loop so that lessons for the future might be learned.

The consequences of this are typically seen in a number of ways, but most obviously in terms of the organisation's failure to deliver a consistent and seamless message to the marketplace. Therefore, the planner needs to manage each of the individual elements in as optimal a way as possible.

The rationale for this is that marketing communications is an area of exciting diversity and development. The last word has not been written on the subject of marketing communications nor its theoretical nor practical foundations. Questions and issues abound, but the answers are within today's and tomorrow's practitioners and theorists.

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