“Consumer receptiveness in the development of a holistic communication strategy: trust, advocacy and brand ecology”

Antonio Lorenzon (Italy), Luciano Pilotti (Italy)

Consumer receptiveness in the development of a holistic communication strategy: trust, advocacy and brand ecology

Abstract

In a new marketing era where the Push/Pull marketing model has been replaced by the new Trust/Advocacy framework to better relate marketing strategies with consumer behavior, companies still have problems to identify, measure and evaluate consumer receptiveness and to drive it in the development of an ecological brand communication strategy.

Even if brand loyalty is becoming increasingly harder to reach, managers are conflicted about brand dislike analysis and "brand ecology". Communication strategies have to become multi-channel and multi-targeted to better respond to consumer receptiveness and to allow advertising to shift from infotainment to entertainment and then with the support of a holistic marketing approach to move from entertainment to engagement.

Advertising has to create trust and empathy more than purchasing needs, only in this perspective companies will be able to sustain their Brand identities and equities on an increasingly more complex market.

The final purpose of this paper is to show the importance of Consumer Receptiveness as a key driver in the development of a holistic communication strategy based on multi-channel solutions. Create consumer receptiveness knowledge to better vehicle brand information to customers in a more engaging two-way dialog.

Keywords: marketing strategy, consumer receptiveness, brand communication, trust, advocacy.

Introduction

Since the early nineties some authors such as Payne (1995), McKenna (1991), Cross and Smith (1992) discussed the increasing need to manage relationship building that has brought forth a variety of "new generation" marketing approaches, customer-focused, market-driven, outside-in, one-to-one marketing, data-driven marketing, relationship marketing, integrated marketing, and integrated marketing communications.

The increasing importance of communication in marketing is demonstrated by differentiating these "new generation marketing" approaches from traditional and classic approaches. Each approach emphasizes two-way communication through better listening to customers and interactivity and the idea that communication before, during, and after transactions can build or destroy important brand relationships (Duncan and Moriarty, 1997; McKenna, 1991; Peppers and Rogers, 1993; Schultz et al., 1993; Zinkhan et al., 1996).

In this article we argue it is possible to build a competitive advantage into a brand communication strategies looking at the customers behavior with a "new generation" perspective: taking into consideration the reach, the attentiveness, the relevance, the receptiveness and the impact of a brand since during the whole brand communication strategy it will be possible to develop a real innovative holistic plan based on a Trust and Advocacy perspective (Urban, 2005) that offers to the brand image a real competitive advantage in term of awareness, trust and reliability and brand ecology.

The paper approach is based both on a critic literature review concerning the increasing customer power, the challenge to use a multichannel communication plan based on an ecological bidirectional dialog between front office and back office[1].

In their classic paper, Gardner and Levy (1955) wrote that the long-term success of a brand depends on marketers' abilities to select a brand meaning prior to market entry, make operational the meaning in the form of an image, and maintain that image over time. Several brands have been able to maintain their image for decades and it supports their position and our perspective.

Short-term, market-driven factors such as current consumer needs and competitors are used as a basis for managing the brand's image/position (Aaker and Shansby, 1982; Arabie et al., 1981; Keon, 1983; Trout and Ries, 1979; Urban and Hauser, 1980; Wind, 1982). Because both positioning and repositioning decisions are based on current conditions, they are not strategically oriented. In this perspective our objective is to provide a deeper understanding of the holistic communication in an interactive and increasingly more complex scenario where trust is no longer an added value but a requirement. Copy and advertising are becoming increasingly more expensive and the competition increasingly stronger so it becomes necessary to develop holistic communication plans based on the capability of a brand strategic target (or prime prospect) to be reached and to be involved into the brand message. After a

[1] Pilotti L., (2005), Percorsi di Management della Conoscenza, Carocci Editore – Milano. Urban, GL., (2005), Don't Just Relate, ADVOCATE – Wharton School Publishing.

critic literature review we found a lot of strategic overviews about these subjects but few indications of possible tactical solution for instance when and where customers are more receptive, how to use multimedia solution to reach engagement or even more importantly how to apply the concept of Brand Ecology inside a Trust and Advocacy multimedia communication plan.

The article is organized to show and to explain all the most important concepts that need to be included in an ecological holistic communication plan. We look first at Consumer Receptiveness and Customers Understanding, then at Brand Ecology, Trust and Advocacy and cross media benchmarking, and finally on the creation of an ecological holistic communication brand.

1. Consumer receptiveness

Several scholars have acknowledged that marketers play an important, active role in providing social relationships (Blau, 1973; Bradach and Eccles, 1989; Granovetter, 1985; Kang and Ridgway, 1996). Most market transactions contain social interaction elements (Granovetter 1985), and more importantly, marketers usually try to be nice to their customers (Bradach and Eccles, 1989; Granovetter, 1985). Furthermore, as relationship marketing has become an increasingly common marketing strategy, the social content of market interactions has increased (Kang and Ridgway 1996). Social exchange theory suggests that, in responding to marketers' friendliness, consumers feel obligated to return the friendly overture (Blau, 1973; Kang and Ridgway, 1996). This provides the unscrupulous marketer with an opportunity to harm consumers financially or emotionally. There are several theoretical explanations that can be used to identify consumers who are more receptive. Social integration and activity theories suggest that consumers' openness to sellers' may result from a sort of social isolation. Social isolation makes people feel less connected to friends and other support systems and makes them more likely to respond to sellers who pay attention to them, the consumer (Butler, 1968; Friedman, 1992; Kang and Ridgway, 1996; Phillips and Sternthal, 1977). In 1980 Nahemow explained the relationship between social isolation and the ability to persuade, as follows: "Individuals who, by virtue of their social isolation, are not in a position to argue their opinions for the benefits of a Brand with other people ultimately become unsure of their own point of view and are, therefore, highly vulnerable to persuasive communication".

So, as a matter of fact, a nowadays lifestyle that has us spending a lot of time by ourselves pushes our receptiveness high and helps companies to become more effective with their advertising.

Companies know that and they usually wonder "when and where their consumers are more receptive". Looking both at the literature and at the market industry it is possible to assume there isn't a standard definition of receptiveness. All the models we have analyzed are based on the traditional AIDA[1] conceptual scheme for creating advertising and marketing communication messages.

According to Kang and Ridgway (1996) starting from AIDA model it is possible to decline tens of different combinations of consumer receptiveness schemes; although it is possible to define several basic steps that can cover all the different solutions in the field of Consumer Inclination.

Some of these aspects can be summarized as:

- being exposed to advertising;
- attention;
- interest;
- understanding the content;
- relating the content to available knowledge;
- acquiring the relevant skills;
- desire to own/consume;
- storing the changed pattern of knowledge/desire;
- storing the product features;
- attitude change;
- decision;
- purchase;
- possible repurchase.

The philosophy of the current big market consumer goods companies is to read the attentiveness of the consumer with huge advertising pressure and possibly high quality products. The advertising helps them to support what is called the "first moment of truth"[2] when a consumer decides to buy a product from a seller.

Starting from the AIDA model and going through the thirteen steps regarding consumer inclination to buy it would be possible to define three different overall scenarios concerning the consumers' involvement and in everyone it is possible to define a

[1] The AIDA model is an acronym to identify the four principle actions to develop on the way to have a customers' purchase: get Attention (A), hold Interest (I), arouse Desire (D), and finally obtain Action (A). – Krugman, E.H. (1965), The Impact of Television Advertising: Learning Without Involvement – The Public Opinion Quarterly, Vol. 29, No. 3. (Autumn, 1965), pp. 349-356.

[2] From Malcolm Gladwell's book "Blink" (P&G Expertise) it is possible to define as the "First Moment of Truth" when a consumer decides to buy a product from a seller and as the "Second Moment of Truth" when the consumer uses the product.

kind of priority order relating to the three main consumers' actions on the purchasing process: *Do* (the action of purchase), *Feel* and *Learn* (about the product).

According to the literature on consumer receptiveness and typologies of market (Lee and Soberon-Ferrer, 1997; Lord and Kim, 1995; McGhee, 1983), it is possible to define two main typologies of Product/Service market:

- *High involvement*: where consumers are strongly involved in the action of choosing, buying and using a product;
- *Low involvement*: where consumers are marginally involved in the action of choosing, buying and using a product.

Finally looking at several studies (e.g., D. Hyman and J. Shingler, 1999) concerning the relationship between consumer receptiveness and product distinctiveness we can distinguish:

- *Distinctive product*: when for a consumer it is easy and immediate to recognize a product, its peculiarity compares it with other product and its possible competitive advantage;
- *Similar product*: where it is hard for consumers to distinguish one product attributes from the other.

Looking at the "Do, Feel and Learn" approach along with the "typologies of market" and the "Product Distinctiveness" it could be possible to summarize them in a final scheme where depending on the typology of market and on the product distinctiveness, the three main consumers' actions on the purchasing process can take a different order (see Fig. 1).

High involvement	High involvement	Low involvement	Low involvement
Distinctive products	Similar products	Distinctive products	Similar products
1. Learn 2. Feel 3. Do	1. Do 2. Feel 3. Learn	1. Do 2. Learn 3. Feel	1. Learn 2. Do 3. Feel

Fig. 1. The different orders of the three main consumers' actions on the purchasing process (Keller K.L., 2003)

This result becomes very significant regarding the "Who", the "What" and the "How" on a Brand Communication Strategy.

When there is a High Involvement market, as for example Racing Motorbikes, and the products are very distinctive (Ducati, Honda, Yamaha, etc.) consumers first try to gather as much information as possible, then they try to get a feel for which is the best choice for them and it is not always the most convenient in terms of Cost/Quality, (Moschis, 1992) only at the end they decide which motorbike they will purchase.

On the contrary, when in a High Involvement market products are similar (e.g., casual clothes) consumers first buy a product, then they feel about the product and finally they start to learn about the product and about competitors.

In a Low Involvement market as Consumer Goods, consumers have the "Feel" action only at the end of the purchase process. When the products are distinctive, consumers first buy the "leader" product for their needs and then acquire the information about other similar products; when the products are similar, consumers first learn about products and then they buy the most efficient products for their needs.

Whether in High Involvement market the receptiveness of consumer is naturally very high on people that are interested in the product, and very low on people that are no-consumers of the product, in Low Involvement market it becomes strategically very important to define when the consumers could be more receptive because the natural interest on consumer goods product, for example, is usually very low.

So, being a company which sells product in a Low Involvement market, it is common to say that "identifying the drivers or situations of high receptivity (in a media sense) will be much more difficult than identifying the drivers of strong copy or advertising (in a content sense)". This is due to the fact that copy drivers work more on a general, basic level while media receptivity is more related to specific consumer groups, situations, etc. (Lee and Soberon-Feffer, 1997; Lord and Kim, 1995).

2. Receptiveness driving factors

Several authors, especially Bradach and Eccles in 1989 and Granovetter in 1985, identify three main driving successful factors in terms of creativity and media scenario (from a consumer receptiveness perspective):

- the basic *"C"* level (called *biological* or *natural level*, genetically driven): these are factors that influence consumers via consumers' natural and biological mechanisms;
- the intermediate *"B"* level (called *learned*, culturally driven level): factors that work on consumers' "learned" mechanisms;
- on top of them, the *"A"* level (called the *actual situation level*): these are factors related to the concrete situation in which the consumer is at a certain moment[1].

[1] The importance of identifying the right driving factors: Granovetter, Mark (1985), "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embedded-ness", American Journal of Sociology, 91 (3), 481-510.

The "C" factors are general and can be broadly applied across countries, target groups, categories. Companies are typically using many of these in their creative copy development work. Usually the advertising departments have a range of discrete numbers, and firms with experience in advertising have learned that these factors apply universally.

The "B" factors are more specific to countries, cultures, and target groups. Big firms address them typically in creative copy work when they think about the use of copy for different target groups. A simple example would be the arrangement of print advertising which should follow the standard theme of how a page is read: from left to right in Western countries, from right to left in the Near East.

Lastly, the "A" factors can be very specific: think of the factors that "rule" situations of media reception: target, mood of the person, time of day, social circumstances, program environment, position of commercial in block, etc. The difficulty here is that there are so many different factors (so that each of them has limited influence only), they come in many variations and combinations, and they are hard to control. Therefore it will be quite difficult to find rules or even guidelines to help advertising and creative manager identify "receptive" situations on a broad level (Kang and Ridgway, 1996). A corollary could be that corporate receptivity studies might be of limited value, at least for the developed countries where consumers are consuming media and advertising in a very sophisticated and educated, often cynical way. The situation may be different in developing countries where a company's products are more emotional and media (especially TV) are consumed in a more positive and sensitive way. In other words, companies may have to answer the receptivity question by individual studies, specific to country (or region), category, sometimes target. One golden rule in marketing is never ask the consumer about their receptivity directly. For consumers the topic is not self-concerning and it is too difficult for them to separate the media from the message. Companies will probably be more successful with an indirect approach or using consumers' panel where they obtain media exposure (for the different channel like TV, radio, cinema, print, outdoor/indoor ads) and read purchases. Using advanced modelling techniques, and based on a sufficient number of data points on respondent level, marketing departments could obtain the most effective situations of media reception with effectiveness being defined as triggering purchase (Moschis, 1992; Smith and Moschis, 1985).

Another very important aspect in the receptivity arena is the time in term of share of brain function dedicated to listening to advertising at that precise moment of the day. Someone who is much focused on an activity or is under high stress will not have much capacity left and not be receptive to advertising while someone who is in a relaxed mood and not focused on a demanding activity will have some brain capacity left and thus be more open to advertising messages. "The real problem with the concept of "timing" in terms of share of brain function is how to make it controlled and actionable by media and if it will be a reliable scenario".

The last important dimension about receptivity is "how" the message will be received. Starting from some empirical researches done by McKenna (1991) and McLuhan (1994) looking at the movies context we can define several main modals on how the movie story and drama are receipted by the audience:

- trying to find some connections and relationships between the content of the movie and their own life or current situation;
- being emotionally touched by the film (e.g., crying during sad scenes or screaming);
- loosing space and time dimensions because of being totally captured by the plot;
- deep identification with the hero;
- analyze in deep the message of the movie trying to extract emotional contents focusing on the emotional narrative element of the story;
- thinking about the production values of the film (money costs, special effects, etc.);
- how the plot could be changed (criticism or other points of view).

Different types of people will go through more or less all models, but tend to "prefer" some of these. Over the course of a specific movie, modals will obviously change, following the drama. Noticeably, these modalities are also at work for TV advertising. A hypothesis is therefore that advertising that "continues" the modality of the feature film is better received. Again, the question is how we can make this concept actionable. A lot of research will be needed, for example, on the relation of different modals to different channels, targets and situations.

3. When and where are your consumers receptive?

"Marketers are being bombarded with news and concepts that consumers are getting increasingly harder to reach with advertising messages" (Shocker, Allan D., Srivastava, 1998). Audiences are fragmenting, consumers are multi-tasking, and new technologies give consumers the power to skip commercials if they choose. The Big Advertising Spender Companies have responded to this news with a strategy to generate and leverage deep "consumer insights"[1] to connect effectively and efficiently with their targets when and

[1] "Consumer insights" are well know as what consumers would like to find in the performance and in the using of a product they are going to buy or to use.

where they are most receptive. The purpose of this paragraph is to synthesize some of the key current messages about receptivity and give guidance on how to proceed with receptivity work on a brand communication strategy plan.

Jean-Noel Kapferer (2001) in his work regarding the "Reinvention of a Top Brand in the new market realities" and later Keller (2003) explain in deep the concept of "receptivity"; here there is a summary of the four main components:

1. *Reach-ability*: It is the first building block to effective communication. Reach-ability is a basic requirement but it is not sufficient by itself. It tells us how many target consumers had an opportunity to see or hear an advertisement. The biggest worldwide companies have developed measures for most traditional and some emerging media vehicles in the different regions of the world.
2. *Attentiveness*: marketers need to reach consumers when they are paying attention to commercial messages; when they are listening not sleeping; when they are watching not chatting to friends; when they are interactive not attending to their children.
3. *Relevance*: categories have 'relevant moments', when consumers are more likely to engage with messages about the category. It is fundamental to know the prime prospects of a brand to choose the right advertising in the right moment. Furthermore, relevance of the message itself appears to be a driver of receptivity in all categories.
4. *Impact*: advertising messages reach attentive consumers when the category is relevant to them (the consumer) and the final step is to deliver a message that will motivate them (the consumer) to act. The current best measure for message impact is a mixture combination of recall and persuasion.

Starting from the population who is persuaded by the message, visually identified by the "Gaps" scheme to arrive at the Total Potential population:

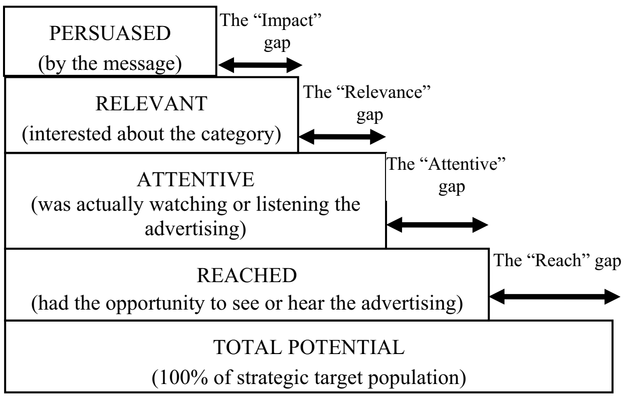

Fig. 2. "Gaps" scheme on receptiveness [1]

[1] McLuhan, M. (1994), Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man.

The majority of scholars about receptiveness (especially Friedman, 1992; Lee and Soberon-Ferrer, 1997; Moschis, 1992) are strongly connected with the clear understanding of "Who" is your "strategic target" and "prime prospect". In the literature scholars look at the connections between receptiveness and prime prospect focusing on two main directions:

1. *Contact-centric research* that produces insights about what vehicles are most influential to the brand target consumers and how consumers interact with media vehicles. Some examples of contact centric researches are Custom Contact Studies and Market Contact Audits. Finally, to provide consumer perceptions of what contact is most influential in a category worldwide consultant companies give Category Specific, available for all markets.
2. *Occasion-centric research* that provides insights about the occasions a brand message is most likely to be relevant to the brand target consumers, independent of their media habits.

Some examples of occasion-centric researches are Focus Groups and One-to-one deep interviews.

As a brief conclusion of these two approaches it has to be said that the real challenge for companies is to find the intersection of influential contact and relevant occasions, and some of the best examples are on businesses that have run both types of research together.

4. Understanding customers: "Who", "What" and "How"

Since 1941 Oxenfeldt and Swam said that "a well-communicated image should help establish a brand's position, insulate the brand from competition and therefore enhance the brand's market performance". Later in 1979 Shocker and Srinivasan added that you can "well communicate" only if you know who is the right target for the communication. All the biggest consumer goods companies, for example, Procter & Gamble, Unilever, Colgate and so forth invest heavy budgets and lots of effort trying to understand their customers' thoughts, needs, behaviors, etc. For them it is crucial to know something about consumers before the competitors because, as Wind (1993) said "to create relationship with your customers is the first and critical step in building competitive advantage".

Similarly, as the traditional marketing mix elements have become commoditized, companies are realizing that their most valuable assets are relationships with customers and other key stakeholders. This is because the net sum of brand relationships is a major determinant of brand value (Duncan and

Moriarty, 1997). The importance of relationships as market-based assets that ultimately contribute to shareholder value is discussed by Srivastava, Shervani, and Fahey (1998). Duncan and Moriarty (1997) (as reported in the following scheme) described in deep the parallel communication and marketing processes showing that the communication is properly defined by a receiver ("Who"), by a message ("What"), by a channel ("How"), and finally by the presence of the competitors ("Noise" is called by Duncan and Moriarty).

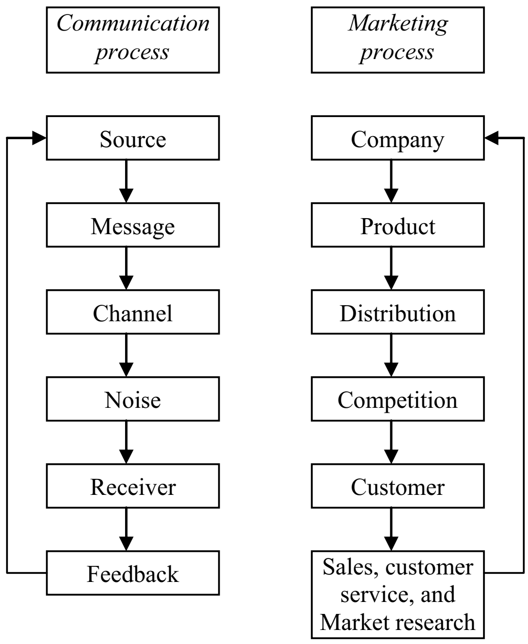

Fig. 3. T. Duncan, S. Moriarty – Parallel communication and marketing processes – 1998

So, to create relationships marketing and brand managers have to answer three basic questions:

1. "Who" is the target I want to relate with?
2. "What" do we want to tell them during our communication and our relationship?
3. "How" can we pass the brand message to make it as efficient as possible?

On the following pages, we will try to go deeper into answering these three questions with a special focus on the correlation between "Who", "What" and "How" definition and the development of a holistic brand communication media plan.

1. "Who":

Before starting with any marketing action the most important aspect is to understand who will be the target of our marketing or communication campaign. Inside the potential universe of people that could use our product/service it is important to define:

- *overall target*: people that can be interested in trying or purchasing our product/service;
- *strategic target*: we have to define which segment of the overall target is strategically more significant for our business and for the company;
- *prime prospect*: finally, it is very important to define inside the strategic target the consumers who could be more profitable for the company and the consumers who have to buy first the product to support the ROI of the advertising campaign.

Fig. 4. The composition of "Who?"

When these three segments are clearly defined managers have to start wondering which message ("What") could be more appropriate for the prime prospect they have defined:

2. "What":

Duncan and Moriarty (1997) in their Parallel communication and marketing model call our "What" as "Message": the concepts are exactly the same.

Which message does the company want to communicate to its Strategic Target and Prime Prospect? We decide to use "What" because the question marketing managers have to wonder is "What do we want to communicate". The answer can be connected with the new using of the product, or the benefits of a product, or a new claim to re-position the product or a simple clear picture of a special characteristic or design.

The "What" is the message we want to communicate to our "Who". In the message it has to be clear which is the brand we are talking about and its benefits. Both the brand and the benefits have to be in line with the already existing brand equity and the brand image.

The purpose of the message is to show to the "Who" that there is a brand which responds to their needs and which makes them feel comfortable with its benefit.

Finally, when we have defined the target of our communication and the object to communicate it is fundamental to define how we communicate the "What" to the "Who".

It is time to define the "How" or "the right channel to communicate the message to the target"

3. "How":

In Schramm's basic communication model (1954), information flows through channels of communication, or media. Channels in marketing studies refer to distribution instead of communication, and "flow" is represented by the movement of goods. In marketing's value chain, Schramm's stream metaphor contributes the idea of upstream (suppliers/vendors) and downstream (distributors, customers). What is common to both is that a channel is a conduit through which a stream of something (products, information) flows. The way to communicate a Brand message is as much important as the message. Very effective messages are sometimes communicated with an improper "How" and, on the other hand, not very effective messages are communicated with very efficient media channels and communication actions.

In the communication plan the media strategy is usually the part concerning the "How" and the measures to determine if a media is good to communicate and advice about the "What" are: *Reach, Frequency* and *Gross Rating Points* (GRP) per media[1]. Although it is important to remember that a good "How" is not only concerning about choosing the right media channel but also working together with the whole brand team to define the main line to follow to communicate as clearly as possible the benefits and the plus of a product/service.

Not only the television, the radio or the print can be right channels to "How" communicate: packaging, free sampling, tribal marketing, stickers, word of mouth can often be much more effective channels (e.g., "A-Style", fashion clothes for young, in Italy).

5. Brand ecology

In a marketing arena where it is getting increasingly harder to catch consumer receptiveness the concept of brand ecology becomes more central and strategic for the development of a communication campaign.

The concept of business ecology (Pilotti, 2004) is concerning the creation of a virtuous network between the final results and the beginning factors that helped to create that result. The idea is to create a virtuous circle where not only the business key factors (customers, processes, suppliers, market shares, etc.) are analyzed and considered to develop new strategies, but also the correlations and the interrelations among these concepts become strategic. If we apply this perspective to the brand management we could say that brand ecology is the evaluation, development, analysis and creation of brands where receptiveness, segmentation, targeting, positioning and so on become not anymore a single channel concept but a multi-channel one so we will have multi-segmentation instead of single segmentation, multi-targeting, multi-positioning, new concepts that will be able to re-orienting the brand strategy in a scenario with an increasing brand distortion and receptiveness fragmentation.

Clients are increasingly more different from each other, not only in their life-styles but also in their purchasing impulses associating with different products frequently not connected with the traditional demographic, social or "by using" variables. There are other factors such as community styles or brand dislike where the traditional mass market advertising is not so efficient anymore. This weakness is strongly connected with the more widespread micro-segments that are able to move independently of the macro-segment where they are considering part of.

For example, a phenomenon like brand dislike (Dalli, 2004) becomes increasingly more frequent in the creation of specific users community, and a lot of micro-segments start to follow an adaptive imitation process to identify themselves as not-belonging to some brand values.

The brand ecology suggests considering concepts as targets, channels, timing exposure, etc. increasing the level of complexity during the cross sections analysis to investigate possible hidden correlations and interactions.

Consumers perceive different messages depending on conditions where they listen to the advertising, depending on the channel it is presenting the advertising and so on. The level of complexity is maximum during this receptiveness process and more importantly, this process of acquisition of brand information is not sequential.

As a possible answer to that problem there is the Brand Ecology Approach where the push-pull marketing strategy is substitute by the Trust and Advocacy Approach (Urban, 2005).

6. Trust and advocacy

"Advocacy is a major step forward in the evolving interaction between a firm and its customers. Push/pull marketing is driven by the economics of mass production-efficient processes that created mounds of low-cost goods. Relationship marketing

[1] *Reach* is defined as the size of the audience who listen to, read, view or otherwise access a particular work in a given time period. *Frequency* is the measurement of the number of times that a commercial occurs per unit of time (hour, part of a day, a day and so forth). *Gross Rating Point* (GRP) represents the percentage of the target audience reached by an advertisement.

is impelled by the saturation of push marketing and intense rivalries, particularly around quality, price and communication. Advocacy will be the next imperative because of the accelerating growth of customer power" – this is how Prof. Glen Urban (2005) explains the shift from the push/pull model to the new trust/advocacy model. Behind this shift there is the growing customer power, customers who start to dislike and to reject both mass communication products and mass communication advertising. To create virtuous relationships the communication has to become more efficient in the customers' perspective. Today on the Internet you can compare prices, performances, fares and whatever else just in a few clicks. If the communication is reaching the wrong target, or the perception of the message is too low, a company could lose its customers in a shorter period of time than 5 years ago. To build competitive advantage it is strategic to know as much as possible the receptiveness of the "Who" but it is strategic as well to communicate the "What" in the most trustworthy manner to gain customer loyalty and to contrast as much as possible the Brand Dislike effect.

To work in an advocacy perspective it is important to understand consumer receptiveness (Do, Learn, Feel) to communicate the right message in the most holistic and complete way. Inside the new trust/advocacy paradigm the brand ecology plays a crucial role: only with an ecology perspective it will be possible to move from infotainment to entertainment. Only when a communication strategy reaches an entertainment level it will be possible to move forward to the final engagement level and to reach that it is necessary to work with a cross-media campaign.

To engage customer it will be necessary to surprise them communicating the right message at the right time keeping control not only on consumer behavior, habits or like but especially on effect as brand distortion, community dislike effect, perceptions and feelings.

Trust and advocacy have to lead business choices in all the different media-channels and in particular on the new-media as Internet, mobile devices, TV on demand, and so forth, where the power of customers is a key factor of success. Companies have to understand that customers are responsible and very good decision makers. Urban in his "Don't Just Relate, Advocate" (2005) is writing that "Customers are active and want to control the buying process; they prefer to learn and make an informed decision". The implication of this "Advocacy Theory" is a more efficient communication strategy based on real superior performances based on engaging advertising messages to create feelings on top of brand loyalty.

Trusted tools (advisors, neutral benchmark, free trial, sampling, etc.) are available and are proven trust builders throughout each communication channel. The ecology approach suggests using them simultaneously to improve the complexity of the communication matrix and to create an engagement built on trust. To create engagement is necessary to create a multiplicity of stimuli and the only way to do that is to pop up the complexity (considering more variables and more customer human being aspects) and the inter-communications among channels, messages and receptiveness.

7. Cross media benchmarking

Another very important aspect to be considered is the cross media analysis to determine the effectiveness (in term of cost and ROI) of a specific media in relation with a specific brand or service. Overall, the results show that TV, print and large, interactive on-line advertisings such as "Superstitials"[1] or Integrated Sponsorship (area on media sites that look/feel like the brand with brand/category specific content), are effective communication vehicles. However, other on-line advertising units, such as banners, pop-ups and sidebars, do not deliver similar branding and should be curtailed, where branding is an important objective. Looking more in details at the media quoted above (font: Nielsen Media Research and Nielsen//NetRating, 2005):

1. *Television* provides the best balance of providing broad reach to a brand's strategic target, effective communication of the brand's core equities, and creating an emotional connection with viewers in a cost effective manner.
2. *Print*, despite being lower in recall vs. television, is still an effective medium; particularly as it relates to creating a more intimate message amongst a brand's prime prospects or strategic target where increased depth of sale/greater explanation of benefits are required.
3. *On-line "Superstitial" and Integrated Sponsorship* deliver effective branding. They also show strong potential to create a two-way dialog to communicate very complex and personalized messages. Interaction with and recall of advertisings increase with their size, provided the large size does not negatively disrupt the task/quest the consumer.
4. *Other on-line advertising models* (e.g., banners, banners with pop-ups, sidebars, etc.) suffer from poor interaction and recall and should be

[1] "Superstitial" is a highly interactive, non-banner advertising that can be of any size on the computer screen and up to 100K in file size, featuring full animation, sound and graphics capable of effectively conveying integrated advertising while protecting a Web site's performance.

avoided for branding purposes. However, with better negotiations/industry moves to cost per click or acquisition metrics, these units may become economical conduits to other quality branding vehicles (e.g., e-mail, sampling, etc).

Related, but beyond this media study, e-mail and mini-sites are emerging as cost effective branding vehicles:

1. *E-mail* has become an effective vehicle, particularly when in-house lists are used. All brands should drive options to opt-ins for future contacts, as part of site registration or as part of other on-line sampling, promotion, e-mail or sponsorship programs. However, caution must be used to ensure contacts reward the consumer for their attention by providing valuable programs, offers and utility/services to avoid risk of list burn-out or deleting.
2. *Mini-sites* (less than 15.000€ manufacturing) are important for all brands to cultivate a basic presence on the web. These sites provide basic brand/product information, answer FAQ (Frequent Asked Questions), collect registrations into email opt-in lists and create a base to drive sampling or word-of-mouth efforts. Conversely, creating the destination-sites (more than 30.000€) will be appropriate only for brands in the categories with high involvement or a high information need that is not being met otherwise. The constant need to refresh content to maintain repeat visitors makes this cost prohibitive for most brands and companies. As such, these large sites should only be considered as part of a broader CRM effort.

J. Lull (2000) in his work about Media, Communication and Culture assumed that to complete a cross media benchmarking other two concepts have to be analyzed and considered as indicators for media plans development: effectiveness and efficiency.

1. *Effectiveness:* television, print and Superstitials are all strong in terms of their effectiveness in communication and recall. Specifically, television provides the best balance between broad reach and the ability to make an emotional connection with the viewer communicating basic brand messages and refreshing its core equities (Television average recall 63% – Nielsen Media Research, 2005). Where more detailed information is needed or where the message is complex, print (Print average recall 43% – Nielsen Media Research 2005) or Superstitials within mini-sites are likely to be more effective. Other online models like banners or frames are relatively less effective[1]. Even if it was not directly investigated in this paper, in the literature (Lee and McGowan, 1998; McQuail, 2002; Lull, 2000 and others) there is a broad convergence on the conclusion that the biggest value that internet based models can bring is in creating two-way consumer relationships. Also, recall and interaction are linked to the size of the interactive advertising units. Further, while this is not a specific media mix research, some results from media consultants (e.g., Nielsen//NetRatings) show that television when integrated with an online campaign produces more effective results than either one used separately.
2. *Efficiency:* brands must look at acquisition and impression costs of effectively reaching target consumers via each medium. In terms of generating recall, television is about 30% costlier than Superstitials, and print is about twice as costly as televison. However, television is still three times cheaper than web-banners in this respect. Nevertheless, since only part of the population is online, limitations of reach with Superstitials/e-mails and the type of marketing message (e.g., whether there is a need for interaction) still make television essential to achieve broad scale message delivery.

So, in terms of effectiveness and efficiency, television or print are not always the best media choices. Looking for alternatives, for example, e-mail is capable of delivering personalized brand messages in a cluttered online media environment, particularly as part of in-house lists. E-mail, when integrated into a well orchestrated Consumer Relationship Management (CRM) program has the highest impact as it is expected and benefits from significant open rates (more than 70% – Nielsen Media Research, 2005). This is because those who opt-in are more inclined to respond to the brand communications. This reinforces the theory that marketing to existing consumers is cheaper (McGhee, 1983 Lord and Kim, 1995).

8. The ecological holistic communication plan

"A holistic communication is the base line to create a good and successful brand image and brand idea" (Friedman, 1992; Lee and Soberon-Ferrer, 1997). Looking at the literature there is a lot of efforts regarding the importance of developing an efficient master communication plan, but only few works exist regarding the importance of the qualification test before starting with the final execution of advertising to calibrate the receptiveness factors and to start an ecological circle on customer channels. A holistic communication plan which tries to be as consistent as possible on building the brand image becomes ecological when all the factors described

[1] Nielsen Media Research 2005 – www.nielsemedia.com; Nielsen//NetRatings – www.nielsen-netratings.com

before (from the definitions of the key driving factors for an engagement communication (factor C, B or A) to the definition of reachness, attentiveness, relevance and impact through the analysis of the purchasing process (Learn, Feel, Do) concur with the same importance on the definition of the cross media choices to reach a real multichannel plan. In this plan all the messages have to be trustworthy to advocate consumers' purchasing and to shift from infotainment to entertainment. Summarizing the main works on communication developed during the last decade by Walther (1996), McQuail (2000), Friedman (1992), Lee and Soberon-Ferrer (1997) and other researchers regarding media communication projects it was possible to synthesize five critical steps of a holistic communication plan creation:

1. The importance of the landscape

Before starting with any communication or marketing action it is fundamental to clearly define and understand the Strategic Target and the Prime Prospect within it. Inspirational, broadly defined, relevant brand equity is important along with clear business objectives and a good understanding of the landscape (Friedman, 1992).

2. New ideas in communication

The first and basic idea has to be media-neutral and inspiring. It needs to have legs and be able to support a possible campaign. The brief that has to be done at this stage is not for a storyboard or a print advertising, but it is a brief for a general communication idea. "The key tip to see if an idea could be an immediate good one was to ask the agency to explain their idea in less than 20 words" (McQuail, 2000). Only with good ideas advertising can create entertainment. If the good idea is communicated at the right moment the entertainment will become engagement.

3. The communication Master Plan

The development of a good communication master plan is based on deep consumer insights and a good understanding of not only the contact points, but the context of when and where the target is likely to be most receptive. The connection context (McLuhan, 1994)[1] is the idea that crystallizes and embodies your desired connection with your target. The connection with the target has to be established in the right context for the consumers. The right context is the best moment of receptiveness of consumers and it coincides with the using of the product or with the need to have a specific product for the current context. The connection context becomes the lens; filter; focus for when and where you will connect. The Communication Master Plan is the blueprint for connections and reflects when and where our target will have the opportunity to see, feel, hear, and touch the brand's messages. The key here is to consider all relevant touch-points. Brand management doesn't necessarily have to use them and it may end up with television being the key channel to reach the consumer, but don't just default to television without considering the full range of appropriate contacts. Appropriate contacts include in-store and influencer/PR driven opportunities. As well as prioritizing contact points, the Communication Master Plan outlines the strategic role of each contact point and how they integrate (McLuhan, 2000).

4. Qualification and pre-Test

Based on the contact channels identified, issue the "call to work" briefs to the agencies that will execute the contacts and the agencies that will develop the content. New steps at this stage include the agencies conducting a synergy review themselves ahead of the complete work being presented to the brand. In this step the pre-test qualification becomes very important because depending on the Communication Master Plan defined it is important to invest energy and money in a feasible and traceable idea development. A real test of the idea in this step could be not applicable because it is too early, but it is important to start the qualification process between the Master Plan and the idea creation and definition. During this pre-test it has to be measured the Connection Context (McLuhan, 1994) to better define the weights and the degree of development and application of concepts such as attentiveness, receptiveness, purchasing process, receptiveness driving factors and so forth.

5. Execution and measurement

The last action is regarding the execution of the idea and then the measurement of that. It is strategically very important to develop the idea exactly as it was defined on the plan without changes concerning problems in the material execution of the communication message or the advertising. The correct measurement of the communication idea in terms of attribution, awareness, ROI[2], purchase and re-purchase etc. is as important as the execution. In terms of ROI it has to be considered the correct period of development of the idea and it has to be "cleaned" from other communication/advertising/promotion effects.

Regarding the attribution and the awareness it is important to test if consumer correctly connects the

[1] McLuhan, M. (1994), Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man.

[2] ROI: Return on Investment. This financial indicator is a comparison between the money earned (or lost) on an investment and the amount of money earned (or lost) in a secure investment.

communication with the brand and of course if they have seen it at least one time. Measuring this it has to be kept in mind that "it is not enough to have seen an advertising (Awareness Barrier) but it is necessary to remember the brand whose the advertising is concerning about (Attribution Barrier)" (McLuhan, 1994; Keller, 1993).

Finally, it is relevant to make sure the learning is brought back into the marketing and media organization.

Conclusions

This paper intends to be an overall review of all the key factors that occur during the development of a holistic brand communication plan from an ecological point of view. Both in the academic literature and in the industries' market there is a clear convergence on the importance to consider the final consumer as the driver for any marketing action and especially for the communication projects. In this scenario the definition of the right "prime prospect" becomes fundamental to avoid the risk to be driven by the wrong driver.

Looking at the whole communication process described above it is important, at the same level of the "Who" to support the "What" and the "How" analyzing in a trust and advocacy perspective all the marketing processes required: from the company organization to the customer service passing through the concepts of product evaluation, distribution, and competition analysis and customer segmentation. Only using a complete perspective it will be possible to develop an ecological and holistic communication plan.

The brand has its own specific identity and in an increasingly competitive market the management has to respect its image and equity developing innovative communication plan and marketing projects. Looking at the competitors' media strategies could not be enough for three main reasons: first, it is becoming increasingly harder to correctly identify the delivery strategies, the targeting strategies and the continuity strategies of competition, secondly, competitors can have another "prime prospect" as driver and, thirdly, it is always harder to define a clear brand identity and brand image if a company is following the actions of the market leader. Instead of looking too much at competitors it is much more efficient to concentrate on how to evaluate the receptiveness of brand consumers and to communicate in the entertainment way using multichannel solutions with a higher degree of complexity concerning the relationship between consumer receptiveness and message engagement. It has to be understood which is the right consumer purchase behavior "Do, Feel, Learn" and which are the right receptiveness driving factors to evaluate "when" and "where" they are more receptive.

A brand communication plan has to be part of a broader trust and advocacy business philosophy where strategies are global but tactics are local. A global competitive advantage can be gained only supporting the brand with trustworthy efficacy local tactics starting from product position to local cross media benchmarking. The right definition of the "How?" passes through a complete analysis of all the possible touch-points with the final market. Effectiveness and efficiency have to be key words in the definition of the holistic communication plan and in this definition process a special comment has to be developed for the most important media: television. In the "New Marketing Era", Paul Postma (1998) explains how in a holistic perspective the rule of television has to be strongly correlated both with the using of "new media" such as internet and e-mail and with the traditional communication channel to create a multichannel environment where engagement is the new shared language.

An efficient holistic communication plan, driven by consumer needs and based on trust and advocacy paradigm, can become the most important competitive advantage for a brand in terms of image, awareness and recognition. Building a holistic and trustworthy reputation allows the brand to be positioned in consumer's mind as a leading brand and consumers are more leaned towards giving knowledge to an image leading brand. So the marketing knowledge circle regarding the brand shift from an efficacy circle to an ecological chain where brand knowledge sharing between consumers and the company becomes a powerful fuel to build new ideas and stronger competitive advantages. In this ecological perspective marketers and companies have to use the interactive tools (web, mobile devices, blogs, etc.) as strategic solutions to gain feedbacks from the growing customer power. Messages reach customers several times per days and the majority reach the customer when their receptiveness is very low. For this reason a more interactive communication model based on trust and advocacy could re-distribute communication budget focusing more on entertainment or engagement solution instead of only on an invasive infotainment.

There is also another important aspect: the correct evaluation of the communication cube (channel, message, content and contest). It could become useless to show a luxury car advertising right after an advertising concerning a non-profit funding campaign. The single message has to be as much interactive and engaged as possible but it has to present and communicate a content appropriated for the overall contest.

In this scenario marketers have to be very careful to measure the possible brand-dislike phenomenon using respect, trust, advocacy, commitment, partnership, transparency as basic ingredients to create an advertising campaign.

Creating shared trust value with a "win to win" strategy where there are benefits both for companies (profit, awareness, loyalty, etc.) and for customers (trust, engagement, message and product customization, etc.) allow advertising to continue to play a strategic role during the transition from broadcasting scenario to the narrowcasting scenario.

Further research trajectories

As a next step research trajectory in building competitive advantage into a brand communication plan is to consider the debate around the value of prime time versus non-prime time (or daytime). In this paper we haven't considered these variables in the developing of a holistic communication framework because in the literature, there isn't clear evidence on how to manage this prime time versus non-prime time variable. Then there is a lack in taking into account the question of distribution channels which is important in high developed countries such as European countries and United States (e.g., network vs. cable channels). A future step could be measuring the receptiveness of customers in an engagement scenario vs. an entertainment or infotainment one using the ecology approach in a complete trust and advocacy perspective.

References

1. American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) (1996), "AARP Calls for New Approach in Fight Against Telemarketing Fraud", News Release, (August 6) – (1999), "Facts About Fraudulent Telemarketing," (accessed April 27), http://.aarp.org/fraud/ Ifraud.htm
2. Brill, Jonathan E. (1992), "Interpersonal Interaction Styles of Adult Retail Shoppers: A Social and Aging Perspective", doctoral dissertation, Temple University.
3. Cohen, Jacob and Patricia Cohen (1983), Applied Multiple Regression/Correlation Analysis for the Behavioural Sciences, 2d ed. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
4. Duncan, T., Moriarty, SE (1998), "A Communication-Based Marketing Model for Managing Relationships", Journal of Marketing, 1998 – JSTOR
5. Fay, M., Currier, G. (1994), – "The Rise and Fall of the Copy Point", European Journal of Marketing.
6. Ganzaroli A., Pilotti, "I sistemi informativi di nuova generazione" in Pilotti L., Percorsi di Management della Conoscenza, Carocci, 2005.
7. Granovetter, Mark (1985), "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embedded-ness", American Journal of Sociology, 91 (3), 481-510.
8. Hyman, D.J., Shingler, J. "The Hierarchy of Consumer Participation and Patterns of Economic, Social, and Political areas", The Journal of Consumer Affairs, 1999 – Blackwell Synergy.
9. Kang, Yong-Soon and Nancy M. Ridgway (1996), "The Importance of consumer Market Interactions as a Form of Social Support for Elderly Consumers", Journal of public policy & Marketing, 15 (Spring), 108-17.
10. Kapferer, J.N. (2001), Reinventing the Brand: Can Top Brands Survive the New Realities? – New York Press.
11. Keller, K.L. (1993), "Conceptualizing and Managing Customer-Based Brand Equity", Journal of Marketing.
12. Keller, K.L. (2003), Strategic brand management: building, measuring, and managing brand equity.
13. Krugman, E.H. (1965), "The Impact of Television Advertising: Learning Without Involvement", The Public Opinion Quarterly, Vol. 29, No. 3. (Autumn, 1965), pp. 349-356.
14. Lee, J., and Karen M. McGowan (1998), "Direct Marketing Solicitations: Do They Generate Sales or Consumer Annoyance?" Journal of Marketing Management, 8 (1), 63-71.
15. Lee, J., Geistfeld, L. (1999), "Elderly consumers' receptiveness to telemarketing fraud", Journal of Public Policy & Marketing, Vol. 18, Iss. 2; pg. 208.
16. Lorenzon, A., Van Baalen, P.J., Pilotti L. (2005), The Strategic Support of CRM in the Governance of the Relationships between data and Knowledge: the Balanced Score Card approach – Lisbon (Portugal) – Workshop on Trends and Fashions in Management Studies", School of Economics and Management – EIASM Brussels (Belgium).
17. Lorenzon, A., Van Baalen, P.J., Pilotti L. (2005), Marketing Knowledge Management in strategic adoption of a CRM solutions: global supports and applications in Europe – Working Paper Series n° 3 – University of Milan (Italy).
18. Lull, J. (2000), Media, Communication, Culture: A Global Approach.
19. McKenna, K. (1991), Personal Communication – Pictou County Naturalists Club – NY – USA.
20. McLuhan, M. (1994), Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man.
21. McQuail, Kelly, M. (2004), The Media in Europe: The Euromedia Handbook.
22. Moschis, George P. (1992), Marketing to Older Consumers: A Handbook of Information for Strategy Development. Westport, CT: Quorum Books.

23. Moschis, George P. (1994), "Consumer Behavior in Later Life: Multidisciplinary Contributions and Implications for Research", Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 22 (3), 195-204.
24. Pilotti L., (2005), Percorsi di Management della Conoscenza, Carocci Editore – Milano.
25. Pilotti L., (2005), Le strategie d'Impresa, Carocci Editore – Milano.
26. Peppers, D., Rogers, M., (1993), "The One to One Future: Building Relationships One Customer at a Time", Currency/Doubleday, New York, NY.
27. Postma, P. (1998), New Marketing Era: Marketing to the Imagination in a Technology Driven World – McGraw-Hill Education.
28. Roy L. Moore (1987), "Social Effects of Advertising and Personal Communication on the Elderly Consumer", in Advances in Marketing and Public Policy, Vol. 1, Paul Bloom, ed. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 65-92
29. Schultz, DE; Barnes, BE (1999), Strategic brand communication campaigns – NTC Business Books Lincolnwood, Ill.
30. Shocker, Allan D., Srivastava, Rajendra K. Ruekert, Robert W. (1994), "Challenges and opportunities facing brand management", Journal of Marketing Research, May 1994, 31, 2, pg. 149.
31. Shuler, L., Payne, D.G., R van de Geijn, S. Gupta (1994), Interprocessor collective communication library (InterCom) – Scalable High-Performance Computing Conference, – Knoxville, TN, USA.
32. Urban, GL., Hauser, JR (1980), Design and marketing of new products – Hall Englewood Cliffs, NJ.
33. Urban, GL., Hauser, JR (1993), "How Consumers Allocate Their Time When Searching for Information –
34. BD Weinberg", Journal of Marketing Research, 1993 – JSTOR.
35. Urban, GL., (2005), Don't Just Relate, ADVOCATE – Wharton School Publishing.