



Barriers in Planning and Implementing of Marketing Communication Strategies

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Abstract

This paper aimed to contribute to academic literature by focusing on identifying the barriers experienced by car dealerships in planning and implementing marketing communication campaigns. This study adopted a broad organisational approach perceiving the planning and implementation marketing communications as a task that involves the entire organisation. A qualitative research approach was followed to realise the research purpose using semi-structured in-depth interviews with marketing personnel of different car dealerships in Gauteng, South Africa. A content analysis was used to analyse primary data with the aid of Atlas ti version 8 computer software. The findings revealed that car dealerships experience both internal and external barriers during the planning and implementation of marketing communication campaigns. The findings of this study make significant contribution to academic literature. In addition, this study, provides recommendations to key stakeholders in the motor industry and directions for future research directions.

Keywords: Content Analysis, Marketing Communications, Marketing Communication Objectives, Media Platforms, Qualitative Research

1. Introduction

Marketing communication requires proper planning and implementation to achieve the marketing communication objectives of an organisation. Organisations use marketing communication to realise different marketing communication objectives to ensure that the marketing message reach the right audience at the right time (Villanova et al., 2021). The marketing communication objectives should be linked to the overall marketing objectives of the organisation (McDonald & Wilson, 2011). McDonald and Wilson (2011) added that these objectives create awareness amongst employees about organisational strategies, the expectations about what needs to be accomplished and indicates when a strategy has accomplished. The point is that the marketing communication strategies are developed within organisations to create awareness, build brand image or increase sales (Du Plessis, 2008). On the other hand, the marketers' objective might be to seek a cognitive, affective, or behavioural response. That is, the marketer might want to put something into the consumer's mind, change an attitude, or persuade the consumer to act (Adetunji, Nordin & Noor, 2014). Du Plessis (2008) added that marketing communication objectives should be specific, measurable, realistic, and time-specific.

Szmerekovsky and Zhang (2009) alluded that vehicle manufacturers and dealerships usually use marketing communications to attract customers and increase sales. However, it is interesting to note that manufacturers in the motor industry may pay part, or all of the expenses of the dealership's sales promotions. Observation is that in the motor industry, the responsibility for marketing communications is shifting from the car manufacturers to the car dealerships (Kaplan, 2013). The preceding supports the view by McCabe (2009) that media changes has become important issue in developing marketing communications considering audience fragmentations. These changes calls for the developing customised marketing communications which are relationship-marketing orientated according to the fragmentations in media and audiences (Schultz, Kim & Kang, 2014). Therefore, these changes make it imperative to scrutinise the results of this shift in the motor vehicle industry to identify any existence of internal or external barriers faced by car dealerships in planning and implementing marketing communication campaigns and strategies.

2. Theoretical background and literature review

This section presents the literature review on marketing communication, with emphasis on the nature of the concept, elements of the marketing communication mix, and a review of previous research studies.

2.1 The nature of marketing communications

The use of marketing communication elements is an important part of the organisational activities of many organisations. Marketing communication activities are aimed at informing, reminding and persuading present and potential customers to support the organisation by purchasing its products (McDaniel, Lamb & Hair, 2013). McDaniel *et al.* (2013) added that marketing communications is a powerful tool when organisations aim to influence consumer decision-making and their buying and consumption behaviour. For example; marketing communication tools such as in-store promotions may encourage the consumers to see more of the retailer's available stock. In addition, mobile promotions can lead consumers to walk into the store and lead to more unplanned spending (Sciandra, Inman & Stephen 2019). Marketing communication is also an important marketing tool, which provides customers with information to help them make purchasing decisions. The result of a successful marketing communication campaign can lead to sales growth, an increase in market share, and subsequently to increased profitability (Ahn, Lee, Lee & Paik, 2012).

There are many elements of marketing communication at the marketer's disposal; for example, advertising, direct marketing, personal selling, sales promotions, public relations and sponsorships may all be employed to maximise the impact of promotional activities (Du Plessis, 2010). Keller (2009) pointed out that marketing communication strategies and campaigns are carried out by organisations that use media vehicles such as print, internet, television, radio, outdoor billboards, public transportation, yellow pages, speciality advertising (on items such as notebooks and pencils) and other media (catalogues, brochures, newsletters) in promoting their product. Marketers today have a wide array of marketing communication. Elements such as advertising which is viewed as the most visible tool or element to marketer's communication efforts (Cant, Van Heerden & Makhitha, 2017; Kotler and Keller, 2012). Previous studies argued that advertising in different media tend to shape customers' perceptions and purchase intentions. These media comprise television, radio, newspapers, organizational websites and Internet, books, advertising brochures, social media, and movies; and other verbal media such as word-of-mouth communications, advertising, and other promotional materials (Bailey *et al.*, 2016; Erkan and Evans, 2016).

Personal Selling is another element which can be used which is described as a face-to-face interaction that dominates the marketing communication mix in many organisations as many businesses (Cant *et al.*, 2017). On the other hand, marketers can use sales promotion and point-of-sale digital media initiatives are some of the examples of shopper marketing (Cant *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, marketers can utilise direct marketing: which includes the use of mail, telephone, e-mail and internet media to communicate directly with the customer (Kotler & Keller, 2012). Furthermore, marketers can use public relations and sponsorship which comprises of a variety of programs directed to both internal and external stakeholders to build and promote organisation's image (Cant *et al.*, 2017; Kotler & Keller, 2012). Organisations such as car dealerships can use these elements of marketing communication and media platforms in carrying out their marketing communication strategies and campaigns in pursuit of various communication objectives.

2.2 Broad approach to marketing communications

Luxton, Reid and Mavondo (2017) argued that a holistic approach should be followed in marketing communications and as an activity that requires the involvement of the whole organisation. In this perspective, for Luxton *et al.* (2017) positioned marketing communications as "a firm-wide market relating deployment mechanism that enables the optimization of communication approaches to achieve". Duncan and Moriarty (1998) added that marketing communications requires interactivity within organisation to build and nurture relationships as it involves the entire organisation which require stakeholder-orientation. Marketing communication (IMC), specifically, Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is based on the principles of consistency, collegiality and teamwork or synergy. This means It employees should work together with the customers of the organisation and other stakeholders (Kliatchko & Schulz, 2015). Taking into account a broad approach to organisation in planning and implementing marketing communication campaigns and strategies, the campaigns and marketing messages should be shared with all the departments, units and divisions of the organization, in order to reduce the effect of operating in silos. A broad approach to marketing communications has a potential to promote consistency, uniformity and effective marketing performance derived to from campaigns being implemented, and further minimise barriers.

2.3 Previous studies on marketing communication

Previous studies have overlooked barriers that are experienced by organisations in the planning and implementing of their marketing communication strategies. With regard to the motor vehicle retail sector, previous studies such as those by Bruce, Peters, and Naik, 2012; Simester, Hu, Brynjolfsson and Anderson, 2009; and Szmerkovsky and Zhang, 2009; have focused more on advertising. The empirical evidence suggests that advertising as a marketing communication mix element has a positive effect on sales, brand equity and the image of organisations (Breuer, and Brettel, 2012; Buil, de Chernatony and Martínez, 2013). Studies by Bruce, Peters and Naik (2012) and Buil (2013), highlighted that although advertising has a role in building brand knowledge, it has led to huge levels of marketing communication expenditure. Moreover, Simester *et al.* (2009) argued that although advertising does affect future sales, the effect is not always positive, and the outcome in the long run could be negative. Barraso and Llobet (2012)

assessed the dynamic effects of advertising on consumer awareness and sales, and the results show that the effect of advertising on awareness is dynamic and accounts for changes in sales over the product's life cycle.

Various studies have examined the efficiency of advertising (Segijn, Voorveld, & Smit, 2017; Van Cauwenberge, Schaap, & van Roy, 2014; Pergelova, Prior and Rialp, 2010; Crespo- Cuaresma, 2012; Singh, Sharma and Mahendru, 2011). Using information made available by the Spanish Association of Manufacturers of Cars, Pergelova, Prior and Rialp (2010) examined the relationship between advertising spending and its efficiency in achieving marketing communication objectives. Their results have shown that an increase in advertising spending, whether for off-line or online advertising, is highly efficient. In addition, the results of previous studies investigated how advertising can be effective. For example, Segijn, *et al.* (2017) discovered that multi-screening and advertising effectiveness are related and multi-screening of advertising leads to improved advertising outcomes. In another study, Van Cauwenberge *et al.* (2014) uncovered that combining multiple media simultaneously has shown that combining multiple tasks increase cognitive load and therefore negatively and impact cognitive outcomes, such as recall, recognition, and comprehension. Crespo-Cuaresma (2012) measured the relationship between marketing communication expenditure and sales in the premium car segment. The results showed that an increase in marketing communication expenditure, specifically advertising spending, resulted in high sales. In India, Singh, Sharma and Mahendru (2011) used various models, including regression and econometric models, to find out what the cause and effect relationship between advertisement expenditure and sales is, and the results showed that there is a positive relationship between advertising expenditure and sales.

Despite the benefits that can be derived from implementation of marketing communication strategies and campaigns, marketing communications result in increased marketing expenditure, where the largest expense is usually incurred by marketing communications, more specifically, advertising (Feng and Purushottam, 2012). However, the marketers are accountable for marketing communication spending and other marketing expenditures (Pergelova, Prior and Rialp, 2010). This is supported by Raithel, Scharf, Taylor, Schwaiger and Zimmerman (2011) when they highlight that marketers are under pressure to demonstrate the financial return associated with marketing expenditures. Due to this pressure, marketers have been reducing their marketing communication spending, specifically on advertising, and have been selecting other marketing communication elements/approaches (Feng and Purushottam, 2012). Luxton, Reid and Mavondo (2015) investigated how an integrated marketing communication (IMC) capability drives a brand's financial performance by influencing the effectiveness of communication campaigns and the brand's market-based performance. Luxton *et al.* (2015) discovered that an IMC capability has a significant direct effect on campaign effectiveness and significant indirect effect on a brand's market-based performance and financial performance. In another study, Batra and Keller (2016) revealed that the development of marketing communication competencies is necessary in development of effective campaigns, which in result in improved business performance. However, Yoga, Korry and Yulianti (2019) investigated the adoption of information technology focusing on digital channels such as websites and social media by organisations and their investigations revealed difficulty in integrating traditional and digital channels. Hewett and Lemon (2019) explored the internal processes that can enable organisations to identify and effectively respond to brand crises, with various stakeholder groups, and discovered that scanning the environment and gathering insights regarding crises, informing or disseminating these insights throughout the organisation contributes towards transparency. In another study, Sheiner and Lahav (2020) investigated on how brands manage customer-initiated contact (CIC) on Facebook when customers are more concerned with brand communications than product-related issues, price or distribution, and revealed that organisations are not always prepared to engage in online CIC involving advertising issues, the response rate tend to be moderate, and the reponse manner is inconsistent. Most recently, Laurie and Mortimer (2019) examined the the impact of integrated marketing communication on the client/agency relationship and revealed the need for clients to provide stronger leadership in defining agency roles and responsibilities, more transparent remuneration systems to encourage teamwork across agencies as well as individual input and an increased emphasis on the strategic contribution from agencies. Previous research studies focused more on the value derived by organisations from marketing communications, but neglected to investigate challenges or barriers to the planning and implementation of effective campaigns. This study aims to address the gap in literature by investigating the challenges or barriers experienced by car dealerships in planning and implementing marketing communication strategies and campaigns.

3. The purpose of the study

The purpose of this research was to identify the barriers experienced by car dealerships in planning and implementing marketing communication strategies and campaigns.

4. Contributions of the study

In reviewing the secondary research available, it appears that the marketing communication topic is not comprehensively covered in the South African context, specifically in the car retail sector. This study contributes to

literature on the topic by adopting a broad approach by focusing both exogenous (outside the organisation) and endogenous (inside the organisation) factors that hinder the effective planning and planning of marketing communication strategies and campaigns. Furthermore, this study benefits dealerships operating in the car retail sector within the motor vehicle industry by revealing both internal and external barriers or challenges in planning and implementing marketing communication strategies and campaigns. This study adopted a broad organisational approach perceiving the planning and implementation marketing communications as a task that involves the entire organisation. Furthermore, this study provide recommendations to address the identified barriers in planning and implementation of marketing communication campaigns and strategies.

5. Research methodology

An exploratory qualitative approach was followed in order to address the research objective. Malhotra (2010) highlights that an exploratory research design is useful when the researcher requires more in-depth information about a specific problem, opportunity or phenomenon. The aim of using a qualitative approach was to collect data more effectively and to gain richer information by enabling participants also to express their opinions regarding the barriers in planning and implementing marketing communication strategies and campaigns. Marketing personnel or executives of dealerships were chosen as the unit of analysis considering their involvement in planning and execution of marketing communication campaigns. Car dealership principals, dealership assistant managers and senior sales managers of car dealerships were interviewed since they were holders of the data needed to answer the research questions. In the current study, the Retail Motor Industry (RMI) member list was used as a sample frame from which to select accredited dealerships included in the study. The dealerships operating within the borders of Gauteng were contacted. The researcher used the e-mail addresses and telephone numbers obtained from the RMI member list to contact dealerships to get contact details of marketing personnel involved in planning and execution of marketing communication strategies and campaigns. Based on the contact details provided by dealership managers or principals, other participants were contacted via e-mail to request their consent to participate. In-depth interviews were scheduled with those who consented to being part of the study. According to Malhotra (2010), an in-depth interview refers to an interaction between an individual interviewer and a single participant, and the semi-structured in-depth interviews allow the interviewer to uncover underlying motivations and to probe a particular topic. The researcher used a research guide containing research question topics during the interviews with participants. The researcher had to arrange times and dates most suitable for each participant to conduct the interviews. A qualitative content analysis is used to analyse the primary data with the aid of Atlas. ti version 8 computer software was used to generate themes. The trustworthiness or validity of the qualitative data can be assessed by the care taken and practices adopted during the data collection and analysis procedures. Following these techniques, the length and depth of the interviews, as well as the level and experience of the participants, resulted in rich information discussions.

6. Findings

The primary objective of this paper was to identify barriers experienced within the dealerships in planning and implementing marketing communication strategies and campaigns. Marketing executives were asked about barriers they experience when planning and implementing marketing communication strategies and campaigns, which may render marketing communication strategies or campaigns ineffective. The findings indicated the barriers raised by participants in their responses to the research question. However, the listed challenges or barriers differed amongst participants, and each barrier listed is identified is supported by the quotation or quotations taken from participants in the attached Appendix A. The following barriers or challenges were identified by participants: limited marketing communication budget, expensive media costs, poor internal communication, undedicated marketing personnel, difficulty in measuring media effectiveness, poor internal communication, lack of transparency by media owners, and social media management.

7. Discussions and conclusion

The research study sought to identify the barriers or challenges experienced by dealerships in developing and implementing marketing communication strategies and campaigns. The results revealed that cost constraints and limited marketing communication budgets serve as limitation barrier in planning and implementing marketing communication strategies and campaigns. The limited budget impacts the planning process of marketing communication strategies in terms of which elements and media types to use as part of the marketing communication strategy or campaign. This finding coincides with Raithel *et al.* (2011) who indicated that marketers are under pressure to demonstrate financial return due to limited marketing budgets. The study found that the dealerships experience challenges in managing their dealership websites and social media networks. Therefore, dealerships tend to outsource these activities or appoint specific persons tasked with managing the

dealerships' websites and social media networks. The findings regarding difficulty to manage dealerships websites is significant to academic literature as has not been found in discussed previous studies.

The study revealed that developing unique marketing communication messages is a challenge in developing marketing communication strategies, considering the competition in the sector. The findings regarding the difficulty in developing unique marketing communication messages is also significant to academic literature as has not been found in previous studies. This finding supports the views of Roberts-Lombard and Nyadzayo (2014) that dealerships operate in a competitive market, which require these dealerships' abilities to motivate existing customers to increase service usage and to purchase additional products. In addition, the study discovered a lack of transparency by media owners. This finding is not found in literature, and therefore, it contributes to the body of knowledge in marketing communication. The lack of dedicated marketing personnel is seen as a challenge in implementing the marketing communication campaigns of dealerships. This finding is not covered by existing literature, and it adds insight regarding how to plan programmes that will encourage marketing personnel to be motivated and encouraged to put more effort into carrying out marketing communication campaigns.

Finally, the study discovered that the difficulty in measuring media effectiveness and poor internal communication serve as challenges to dealerships' marketing communication campaigns. The findings of this study add insight by revealing that it remains difficult to measure accurately from which media type sales are derived, and highlighting the challenges relating to the management of online content on dealerships' websites and social media. This finding supports the findings of Bansal, Masood and Dadhich (2014) who discovered that measuring the return on investment (ROI), the lack of sufficient resources, and monitoring social media pose challenges to marketers.

8. Recommendations

The results of this study indicated that during the planning of marketing communication campaigns and the selection of marketing communication tools/elements, the limited marketing communication budget served as a limiting factor. Based on these results, it is recommended that dealerships should allocate sufficient budget to the marketing communication elements to allow for the choice of media type that would offer more exposure and the ability to attract the target audience's attention. Secondly, it is recommended that dealerships should develop and incorporate unique selling propositions in their marketing communication activities that will differentiate them from competitors and also capture target audiences' attention with their marketing communication messages. Participants indicated that developing unique marketing messages that will drive the customer to visit a particular dealership rather than going to competitors. Thirdly, it is recommended that dealerships should appoint a dedicated employee internally or an external company that will be responsible for website and social media management. Participants indicated that website management is important and social media can build or break an organisation's image if the content is not properly managed and regularly monitored. Fourthly, it is recommended that dealerships should ask media owners about the marketing communication contents of a newspaper or magazine publication before accepting any special deals from such media owners in order to avoid having similar competing dealerships advertising in the same publication. Participants identified lack transparency by media owners as a challenge and added that these media owners tend to neglect dealerships' interests. Fifthly, dealerships should ensure that dedicated and motivated salespeople are appointed to lead the execution of promotion campaigns. Participants alluded that marketing communication campaigns fail, for example, shopping mall displays due to lack of dedicated salespeople assigned to the campaign. The recommendation is that car dealerships should use media tools that can be measured. In addition, it is recommended that dealerships should use questionnaires to establish how the customers got marketing information. The recommendation is that these questionnaires can either be self-administered or be administered by salespeople to get the mentioned information from customers. The last recommendation is that managers of car dealerships should ensure existence of effective internal communication relating marketing communication strategies and campaigns to ensure consistency, and synergy amongst all employees. The dealerships should involve marketing personnel at all levels of planning of marketing communication strategies and other promotion campaigns to obtain their inputs and to further communicate the approved marketing communication strategy or promotion campaigns to all internal marketing staff.

9. Limitations and future research directions

A purposive sampling method is used in this paper, therefore, the findings of this study cannot be generalised to a larger population. The study was confined to one sector and single province in the context of car dealerships operating within the borders of Gauteng province of South Africa. Based on this limitation, then the future research could aim to focus on more participants in other provinces of South Africa and other parts of the world. In addition, the replication of this study to motor vehicle manufacturers could yield different findings, which could be of advantage to the motor vehicle industry.

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Appendix A

Limited marketing communication budget	<p>“We sometimes propose that we do go to national radio stations (mentioned radio stations’ names). Those are national radio stations, but due to financial constraints, tight budgets we cannot ...” (P4) “Having a limited budget serve as a key challenge in planning and implementing marketing communication campaigns” (P9)</p> <p>“I think cost is an issue. If one could work around that. I think more so, you know, getting feedback or getting results, meaning I spent R10 000, 00 and I mentioned this earlier, but I don’t know how many people have either bought or contacted us at least because of that effort. I think managing and showing me what the result is. So I put so much effort in ...” (P11)</p>
Creating unique marketing communication message	<p>“The major challenges that one faces is to make your offer unique, because if I send out an advertisement whether it be in print media or over the radio and you hear it and you think that’s very interesting but you don’t necessarily remember which dealership was advertising that special, so you will get back to your office then and you will look for your closest dealership.” (P1)</p> <p>“Look, you’ve got to be careful when you do market and advertise your brand or your dealership that there may be a spin-off for somebody else.”(P11)</p>
Poor internal marketing communication	<p>“When I started working there because of my past experience the manager that I worked for he took it for granted that because where I came from my average was slightly higher, then it would mean that I know everything that I should do. So from that perspective even the product was not the same. There were no courses for product knowledge, nothing. Ever since I joined there I haven’t gone to even a single course.” (P6)</p> <p>“Like if we have limited brainstorming sessions affect effective planning of marketing communication campaigns negatively as it suppresses possible new ideas.” (P8)</p>
Lack of transparency by media agencies/owners	<p>“High costs charged by media companies limit the number of marketing communication campaigns a dealership can embark on.” (P10)</p>
Lack of committed marketing personnel	<p>“I think the only effective thing that could be done is to employ relevant people to relevant posts because now for marketing they have nothing in place and the reason for that I do not know why.” (P6)</p>
Poor marketing communication planning	<p>“Wrong choice of location or maybe we went during the wrong time of the month when people were not going that much into malls. Those are other things. Those are other factors that might have affected the whole thing.” (P3)</p>
Difficulty in measuring media effectiveness	<p>“However, the second part of the SMS is click on the link to go to our booking page, so that is very difficult to measure whether they actually went to the link on the booking page via the SMS or whether they went there directly from the website. So in a way, yes, we can measure how many responses we get from an SMS for the customers that hit the yes that is the response but obviously with the booking page that’s a little bit difficult to say whether they booked via our SMS or whether they booked via Google.” (P2)</p> <p>“That’s the thing. We’re a very busy dealership. The thing is, I wouldn’t say busy as in terms of helping clients, but I mean busy, we’ve got a lot of admin and work to do on the floor and everything. So for a client to call in, we forget to ask him, sir, but how did you hear of us or madam, how did you hear of us? It flies out of your head, you don’t think of it at that stage to ask him. All you think about is this customer wants to buy a car, I’m going to sell him a car. That’s all you think of. You don’t actually measure, we’ve never, I my personal self has never measured where my deals are coming from.” (P7)</p> <p>“Well, I’d say the biggest risk for us is obviously spending money on something that’s not going to work. That’s why we’re not doing any print, because we’d find that you spend R6 500 on a full page in the Newspaper (mentioned regional newspaper name) which doesn’t generate any, even if you have the greatest strategy, maybe you’re targeting it incorrectly. So, it’s difficult, especially if you can’t measure it, like if you go into print, nine out of ten times you can’t really measure it unless you set up a separate SMS line or a separate telephone number or something to try and measure it.” (P8)</p>
Social media management	<p>“We’ve started social networks. The only problem with social networks is, if you don’t have somebody doing it live or on-going, it can also hurt you, because remember, a social network is interaction. So you need to be careful for negative publicity on the social network side as well. Because it’s an open communication. So we have started, but we’re not very big on it yet.” (P8)</p>