Brand Attitude and Communication Media: 
High Involvement Services Context

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Abstract

In the modern environment, consumers have many options in obtaining information. Unfortunately for the company, not all the messages received by the consumers originated from Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) were created and controlled by the marketer. As a matter of fact the consumer also receives messages about brand from the non-company sources outside of marketing control.

This research is aimed to test the effect of several communication types (controllable vs non-controllable, personal vs massive audience; and combination of both) towards forming the brand attitude, in the context of high involvement services. It extends many researches in the field of marketing communication, specifically to confirm some knowledge of the determinant of brand attitude which is non conclusive in the dynamic digital market environment. The use of this research managerially is especially in setting up the IMC budget in high involvement services such as business school marketing. Since the communication costs are becoming very expensive, the marketers are enforced to be sharper in selecting the media.

Consistent with the previous study, research result describes that controlled communication has a higher role compared to the one towards brand attitude. For controlled communication, the message conveyed personally is more meaningful than that conveyed massively. Surprisingly, the messages conveyed personally from the non-company sources that thought to be significant in influencing brand attitude, is found not significant at all.

It was found that in the group with high brand familiarity, mass-media delivered controllable communication has no impact on brand attitude. Therefore, company needs to shift its IMC focus to the Mass-media Delivered Uncontrollable communication and Personal Delivered Controllable Communication.

Introduction

Strong brand equity is created through positive consumer attitude towards the brand (brand attitude). Quite a number of marketing communication strategies have been applied by companies to establish the positive brand attitude.

The convergence-in-media enforced the marketing practitioners to design more effective campaign by combining several marketing and sales activities simultaneously called Integrated Marketing Communication/IMC (Schultz, 1993).
One type of the uncontrolled communication media, word of mouth (WOM) communication, believed to be the most effective media for pushing the consumer choice (e.g. Kiel and Layton, 1981; Price and Feick, 1984). WOM is developing vastly through Internet and it is called viral marketing. The existence of new types of uncontrolled communication media creates complication by itself to the marketer who is continuously willing to increase the brand attitude through IMC.

There have been studies on the synergy of the combination among different communication media (e.g. Bhargava and Donthu, 1999; Chang and Thorson, 2004; Naik and Raman, 2003). Grace and O’Cass (2005) also have taken a theme of this communication effect in the context of service brand in relation with customer satisfaction. In their study, it was found that the controlled communication was still leading and more significant than uncontrolled communication. In our current research, the communication effect towards customer satisfaction is not included because this study is more focus on the impact of media at the stage of selection of the services.

Scholars have not done much research on whether uncontrolled communication media is still advancing where the online community has been developing very fast like the present situation. Questions still rise, such as: During product or service selection, is the communication conveyed personally more meaningful to the one conveyed otherwise, both in the controlled and uncontrolled media.

Brand familiarity is called as condition acting in the process of internalized communication message. The investigation of the familiarity brand action will give additional dimension to the brand manager. If the prospect consists of the groups which are relatively not familiar with services, the allocation of communication media types used should be adjusted again based on the effectiveness on the media mentioned.

**Research Objectives**

This research is aimed to test the effect of several communication media types towards forming the brand attitude, in the context of high involvement services. Academically, this study extends many researches in the field of marketing communication, specifically to confirm some knowledge of the determinant of brand attitude which is non conclusive in the dynamic digital market environment.

The use of this research managerially is especially in setting up the IMC budget in high involvement services, such as business school marketing. Since the communication costs are becoming very expensive, the marketers are enforced to be more accurate in selecting the media. The result of this study will give a clearer guide towards communication media budget allocation.
Literature Review

- Brand Attitude

Marketing communication is one of the aspects that influenced the consumer in making his decision towards the product or band (brand attitude). Stern and Zaichkowsky (1991) said that many different communication aspects, such as the advertising implementation, the mood formed in the advertisement, where it is published / what media is used, all of those influence the consumer’s attitude and feelings towards the product of brand. Brand familiarity or knowledge about the brand - which has already been formed earlier - is also included in the factor that influences the establishment of the brand attitude.

So far the research is more on the attitude towards the advertisements which are clearly found influencing brand cognition and brand attitude (e.g. Mitchell and Olson, 1981; Batra and Ray, 1986 ; MacKenzie, Lutz and Belch, 1986, Brown and Stayman, 1992; Bruner and Kumar, 2000; Stevenson et al., 2000). The research is still rarely discussing the different influences of the consumer’s attitude towards communication using advertisement or other media. Another thing that the researchers have not seen extensively is the way how to convey that communication. With more and more discussion on word–of–mouth communication in the modern world, is it true that brand attitude is easier to form with WOM conveyed personally compared to the one massively.

- High Involvement Services

High Involvement describes audience situation which has perception that choosing the brand is a high risk one so that it needs a deeper information comprehension process about the brand (Park, Jaworski and Maclnnis, 1986, Rossiter and Percy, 1987; Rossiter, Percy and Donovan, 1991). A message from an independent source is appreciated higher than that from the source derives from the company. Services generally belong to the high involvement category, and in this context, the consumer’s attitude towards the communication media is much more selective. This is the assumption background that uncontrolled communication has a bigger role than the one from the company.

In the high involvement services, an informational – rational advertisement is confirmed to be able to give a kind of credibility and improve the will to buy (Stafford and Day, 1995). Cobb–Walgren, et al. (1995) also explains that advertisement is useful to improve perception towards product quality / services. Swanson and Kelley (2001) belong to those who say that compared to controlled communication, the influence of uncontrolled communication will just be stronger for the consumers. This is caused by the consumer’s assumption that information from outside the company will be more trustworthy (Mangold, et al., 1999), especially when we talk about service type that belongs to the high involvement category. Bansal and Voyer, 2000; Hauss, 1993 confirms that brand attitude is formed from the positive WOM and communication form outside of other companies (unpaid publicity, discussion on mailing list, etc.).
- Different types of Communication media

Hoyer and MacInnis (2004) divides 4 communication types from 2 different aspects i.e. (1) From the delivery point of view (massively or personally); and (2) From the source domination point of view (derives from company or non-company). From the delivery point of view, the more massive the communication media used the higher the reach towards the target audience. While from the information source point of view is - the more independent the source is, the higher the credibility of the message delivered.

Based on the above communication media types of Hoyer and MacInnis matrix (2004), the following new matrix is made as a platform in this study.

Type 1:
*Mass – media Delivered, Controllable Communication, Dominated by Company Sources (MCC).*
The same as described by McInnis & Hoyer, the communication type belonging to this category are Advertising, Sales promotions, publicity, special events, e-mails and websites, and direct mail. In addition to this type are corporate blogs - that is a new type of digital media which is more supple and digestible, and the content of which is still controllable by the company.

Type 2:
*Mass – media Delivered, Uncontrollable Communication, Dominated by Non – Company Sources (MUC).*
The example of this type is the journalist’s report on the mass media, written independently, either in the conventional or digital media, like website and portal. This is including the analysis directly delivered by the consumers in the consumer generated media, like personal website, personal blogs, website containing product review / services, discussion on forums in online community, etc.

Type 3:
*Personal Delivered Controllable Communication, Dominated by Company Sources (PCC)*
The example is all communication activities directly, either by sales and marketing team of the company as an organization, or by the agent and customer services appointed by the company. All other format of direct communication, such as by phone (direct marketing or call center) and by e-mail are also included. These latest format of communication are not covered in the McInnis and Hoyer matrix (2005).

Type 4:
*Personal Delivered Uncontrollable Communication, Dominated by Non – Company Sources (PUC)*
This type is more known by Word – of – mouth communication (WOM), can be from friends, families, opinion leaders, and whoever in someone’s network chain.
From the company source point of view, communication type 1 and type 3 is controlled communication because the message can be arranged in such away to reach the goal according to the company’s guideline. Type 2 and type 4 are difficult to control, and they are categorized as uncontrolled communication.

How far do this uncontrolled media influence the brand attitude? It is still a question mark either in the academic level or in the practitioners’ level. The thought is, the more independent a media or news source is, the higher the chance to form the brand attitude. And also the more personal the way the message is conveyed, is thought to be more effective the communication is.

- Brand Familiarity

Brand familiarity is the awareness consumers have of a particular brand. Previous brand familiarity or brand knowledge is known to have some influence to the internalization process of the messages conveyed through the media (Stammerjohan, et al., 2005). For the less familiar brand, company need to invest more on the integrated marketing communication (IMC) activities.
The previous understanding of the brand positioning will affect consumers’ choices, especially for the high involvement services. Once a brand is familiar, expenses can be cut by reducing the number and types of media and communication tools used to maintain brand familiarity. The question raised in this research is which type of communication should be less allocated in the IMC budget? Is that true that when consumers are familiar with the brand, the company should emphasize the activity toward public relation or non-company sources media activity?

**Hypotheses**

Based on the reference study and the above discussions, several hypotheses among others are:

H1. Controlled communication (that delivered massively and personally) has a stronger impact on brand attitude, compared to uncontrolled communication

H2. For the controlled communication, messages that delivered through mass-media will have a stronger impact on brand attitude compared to the message that delivered personally

H3. For the uncontrolled communication, messages that delivered personally will have a stronger impact on brand attitude compared to the messages that delivered through mass-media

H4. There are differences on the strength of each communication media in influencing brand attitude between prospects that have high brand familiarity and prospects that have low brand familiarity.

**Method**

In this study, business school is considered as a good example of high involvement services, since the decision making process for prospective customers is quite long and complex. The fact that prospects are coming from the middle up class income and highly educated, increase the complexity for the company to communicate to them effectively.

The main research method conducted for this study is survey. Survey is the most popular method by which to conduct quantitative research. It can be defined as the administration of questionnaires to a sample of respondents selected from some population and can be used for the purpose of making descriptive or explanatory assertions about the population under study (Babbie, 1990). It is also a viable method for collecting data from a population too large to observe directly and so is suitable for this research.

Data were collected from postgraduate students of 4 prominent business schools in Jakarta, which are active in their marketing and promotion activities. A non-probability
self-selected sampling design was used and the sample was recruited using various techniques. Students were approached independently or approached through the faculty members of the business school with special permission from the Institution. Access to the survey was via a link from email to the individuals.

The use of online survey instruments is growing in popularity in both commercial and academic research for many reasons. These include: fast transmission and rapid response time, a large sample is easy to obtain, cost savings in distributing and receiving surveys, ability to reach geographically diverse respondent groups, ease of data entry, flexibility and control over the format, and convenience. Although there are disadvantages, given the nature and purpose of the research the approach was deemed suitable for this study.

To increase the response rate, besides waiting for the online responses to come, researcher approached the students directly in the classroom. Students, who have not responded to the online survey, were asked to respond to the same questions as elaborated in the online survey. From all the responses collected, 335 responses were used for the data analysis.

The majority of the respondents are males (75%), in their mid - late 30’s (68%). Most of the respondents are experienced Internet users, since the data shows us that 75% of them are involved in mailing list forum, 62% talk to colleagues through Instant-messaging, 41% are members of online communities, 15% have personal blogs and 6% have personal websites.

**Results**

Although respondents searched information from various sources, this study indicated that websites were the most common Mass-media delivered Controlled Communication among respondents. As detailed in Figure 1, of all the respondents surveyed, 71% visited the school website. Other important media for them were newspaper (39%) and magazines (20%).

![Figure 2. Type of Mass-media Controllable Communication (Company Sources) Used by Respondents when searching for information.](image-url)
The information sources originated from the non company delivered to the mass audience is much enough especially with the increased use of internet and the appearance different forms of consumer generated media. In this study, for the respondents searching information about business school, the most preferred media is information in the portals and journalistic coverage published in the mass media, as detailed in Figure 3.

![Figure 3. Type of Mass-Media, Uncontrollable Communication Used (Non Company Sources) by Respondents when searching for information](image)

Out of so many communication types delivered personally by the company, the most selected by the respondents is from the alumni (see Figure 4). The next important source of information is the one they obtained from the marketing or sales personnel. The same response given by the respondents about the number of messages received or searched through direct marketing activities directly by phones, directly with the front liners or directly from the program director (in the info session or open house in the campus).
Figure 4. Type of Personal Delivered Controllable Communication (Company Sources) Used by Respondents when searching for information

- Scale testing

Exploratory factor analyses (varimax rotation) and reliability analyses (Cronbach’s Alpha) were conducted to assess the unidimensionality of all constructs. As detailed in Table 1, results indicated all items for each construct loaded onto one factor, providing evidence of unidimensionality. Extracted variance for B2C sites ranged from 66% to 76%. Reliability analyses indicated all constructs were reliable, with Cronbach’s alpha values ranging from 0.73 – 0.87. Although some constructs had relatively low variance and alpha values, they were still above acceptable levels, ensuring that the item groupings for the variables in this study are reliable (Hair, et al, 1998). Most constructs reliability has not reached the value above 0.90 should be understood, given that the items for each variable are not yet well established and have not been widely used in previous studies.

Table 1. Factor Loading and Reliability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
<th>Variance Explained (%)</th>
<th>Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mass-media Delivered Controllable Communication (MCC)</td>
<td>Company</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>74.3</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Clear message</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Informative advertising</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Likeability</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass-media Delivered Uncontrollable Communication (MUC)</td>
<td>Non Company</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>68.0</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Create positive impressions</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Bring new perspective</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Help formulating new ideas</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Delivered Controllable Communication (PCC)</td>
<td>Company</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Useful information</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Clarifies queries</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Obtain overall understanding</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Delivered Uncontrollable Communication (PUC)</td>
<td>Non Company</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>75.9</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Informative source</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Form new perspective about the school</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Part of the discussion topics</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Regression analysis was conducted to investigate H1 to H4 – the impact of Mass-media Delivered Controllable Communication (MCC), Mass-media Delivered Uncontrollable Communication (MUC), Personal Delivered Controllable Communication (PCC) and Personal Uncontrollable Communication (PUC), on brand attitude. Each of the variables had a significant and positive impact on brand attitude (p<0.001), except for PUC. Thus, H1, H2 and H4 are supported while H3 is not supported.

Table 2. Multiple Regression Results of Media Impact on Brand Attitude (All Respondents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependant Variables</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mass-Media Delivered Controllable Communication</td>
<td>MCC</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass-Media Delivered Uncontrollable Communication</td>
<td>MUC</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Delivered Controllable Communication</td>
<td>PCC</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Delivered Uncontrollable Communication</td>
<td>PUC</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R Square</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 provides the regression results for the total respondents. The results are interesting and somewhat surprising. Three of the four hypotheses are supported. Controllable communication (both massive and personal) was proven to have a significant influence on brand attitude, much more than the uncontrollable communication. Company should not rely on the advertising only, especially in the high involvement services, because the personal contact direct telephone, direct email, and through discussion with key persons in the organizations will bring more confidence to the prospects. On the other hand, company needs to make sure that the content and quality of contact is up to the required standard, otherwise prospect could be directed into negative attitude towards the brand.

One surprising result is that personal delivered uncontrollable communication (PUC) does not have the significant influence on brand attitude, as predicted. Although companies do not have complete control over this type of communication or publicity through word of mouth communication, it has always been recognized as an efficient, credible means of communication. One possible explanation is the long process of decision making in high involvement services. The role of WOM might just be at the beginning, at the time the prospect has just searched for the alternative brand, but not at the time to decide to use that service.

As hypothesized, in this study, the Mass-media Delivered Uncontrollable Communication (MUC) was found to have a significant role towards the brand attitude development. Out
of so many MUC types accessed by the respondents, at the most are discussions in the portals or websites and non-advertising publicities discussed in the newspapers and magazines. People have wide access to information through the Internet. Non-company sources information is very easy to be retrieved, through Google search, discussions in forums, etc.

This finding confirms the fact that company needs to be alert on what are being discussed or written in both the conventional and in the digital environment about their brand. Any indication on negative perceptions should be countered as early as possible. Special care should be taken within the consumer generated media, since there is limited third party reviewed and censored as what happened in the conventional media. No page limit and no censor from the company side that may be permitted in this consumer generated media, so that without any special attention on the content in what is written in this media, the brand attitude might just tend to be negative instead of positive.

- Brand Familiarity

For the purpose of analyzing the role of brand familiarity in this study, the respondents in the sample were divided into two groups: A) Respondents with high brand familiarity and B) Those that have low brand familiarity. To determine these, the answers to one question regarding brand familiarity in the questionnaire were examined. In this question, respondents had to answer the level of familiarity to the brand at the last stage of the final decision to join the business school. Thus, respondents who answered not familiar, somewhat familiar and familiar to certain degree were placed in sub-group 1 (60% of total respondents); the respondents who answered familiar and very familiar were placed in sub-group 2 (40%) of total respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3. Multiple Regression Results of Media Impact on Brand Attitude (sub-group analysis, low vs high brand familiarity)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependant Variables</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass-Media Delivered Controllable Communication MCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass-Media Delivered Uncontrollable Communication MUC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Delivered Controllable Communication PCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Delivered Uncontrollable Communication PUC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R square</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following regressions (shown in Table 3) were run separately for each group and the results compared, to check whether there were differences in the strength of each factor between these two groups. The result was interesting. In the first group (the low brand
familiarity), the result was consistent to the total respondents. All three constructs were also found significant in this group. However, there were differences in the strength of each factor as the dependant variable. The Mass-media Delivered Controllable Communication had a much stronger impact on the brand attitude (Beta equal to 0.33, while in total respondents, the beta is only 0.22).

In contrast, for the high brand familiarity group, Mass-media Delivered Controllable Communication had no significant impact on the brand attitude. This is a situation showing that the company needs to adjust their IMC budget allocation strategy to be in accordance with the profile of their prospect group. If the prospect group belongs to the group that has been familiar enough with the brand, the company had better reduce their advertising budget in the mass media. In accordance with what was found in this research, the message delivery by mass media from non company source will just be more effective to improve the brand attitude than the message delivery by direct or personal communication from the company source.

**Future Research**

The aspect that has not been studied is the interaction aspect of inter communication media. In accordance with the IMC principle, the synergy of several different communication types will produce a communication effect and more meaningful brand attitude. As what was done in Stammerjohan study, et al (2005), empirical investigation was done in the interaction between publicity and advertising. Also the continuation of this study, could be further directed towards the further checking on the communication effect of the inter variable interaction.

The communication delivered through the alumni turns out to be high enough in the business school prospect circle. In the context of wider services high involvement, alumni are persons who have interacted with a company which forms a group of very potential people to become brand ambassadors. Provided the experience with the brand is enjoyable, the communication through the brand ambassador could be especially designed to increase the prospect belief towards the services offered.

One thing should be further thought of is how far is the company control towards the communication content of the brand ambassador such as an alumni of this business school? Is the brand ambassador better place in the company source or controllable communication or non-company source / uncontrollable communication? Future research is supposed to be able to explore and identify this complication.

One surprising result is that personal delivered uncontrollable communication (PUC) does not have the significant influence on brand attitude, as predicted. Although companies do not have complete control over this type of communication or publicity through word of mouth communication, it has always been recognized as an efficient, credible means of communication. One possible explanation is the long process of decision making in high involvement services. The role of WOM might just be at the beginning - at the time the prospect has just searched for the alternative brand, but not at the time to decide to use that service.
References:


