

**A CASE STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS
AND CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES IN AN
OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING
UNIVERSITY IN MALAYSIA**

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**ASIA e UNIVERSITY
2016**

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AND CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES IN AN
OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING
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NG SOO LEE

A Thesis Submitted to Asia e University in
Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
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ABSTRACT

This research study found that marketing communications (Marcoms) can act as brand touchpoints to generate positive customer experiences of doctoral students in the PhD decision journey to produce positive results in terms of overall brand satisfaction and brand advocacy. Research findings of this case study indicated that the open and distance learning (ODL) University known as The Study University used a combination of brand touchpoints to deliver its brand of PhD degree programmes by research to doctoral students/customers, and that ‘Marcoms’ as an independent variable had a large effect on customer experiences. In addition to the significant positive relationship between Marcoms and customer experiences, statistical results also showed that customer post-purchase experiences affected overall brand satisfaction positively, which in turn affected brand advocacy positively as well. This study has broken new grounds by uncovering twelve significant brand touchpoints of Marcoms in eliciting audience responses to The Study University’s brand of offer and introducing a new theoretical model labelled as ‘Customer Experiences with Brand Touchpoints of Marketing Communications Model’ for advancing scholarship in the specialist field of Marcoms/experiential marketing. This theoretical model is offered to the academia to deepen investigation into the linkages between Marcoms and the underlying dimensions of customer sensory, emotional, physical, intellectual and relational experiences as well as their interlinks with brand satisfaction, brand advocacy and brand sales.

Keywords: marketing communications, customer experiences, brand touchpoints, overall brand satisfaction, brand advocacy, PhD decision journey

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised/read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in quality and scope, as a thesis for the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis submitted in fulfilment of the PhD degree is my own work and that all contributions from any other persons or sources are properly and duly cited. I further declare that the material has not been submitted either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university. In making this declaration, I understand and acknowledge any breaches in this declaration constitute academic misconduct, which may result in expulsion from the programme and/or exclusion from the award of the degree.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Ad	Advertising/advertisement
Apps	Applications
AIDA	Awareness, Interest, Desire and Action
BES	Brand Experience Scale
BTP/BTPs	Brand touchpoint/Brand touchpoints
BA	Brand advocacy
BS	Brand satisfaction
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CPPE	Customer pre-purchase experiences
CPE	Customer purchase experiences
CPSPE	Customer post-purchase experiences
CEM	Customer experience management
CES	Customer Experience Scale
CRM	Customer relationship management
CSS	Customer support services
CTM	Customer touchpoint management
E	Emotional dimension of customer experiences
e-Advertising	Electronic advertising
e-Media	Electronic media
EMEA	Europe, Middle East and Africa
EPF	Employee Provident Fund
ETP	Economic Transformation Programme
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HEIs	Higher educational institutions
I	Intellectual dimension of customer experiences
ICEM	Integrated customer experience management model
IMC	Integrated marketing communications
LCD	Liquid crystal display
LED	Light emitting diode
Marcoms	Marketing communications
MVs	Marketing communications variables
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOHE	Ministry of Higher Education
MEdO	Malaysia Education Online
NAPEI	National Association of Private Educational Institutions
NEM	New Economic Model
ODL	Open and distance learning
OOH	Out-of-Home
OECD	Organisation for economic Cooperation and Development
P	Physical dimension of customer experiences
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PhD (Arts)	Doctor of Philosophy in Arts
PhD (BA)	Doctor of Philosophy in Business Administration
PhD (Edu)	Doctor of Philosophy in Education
PhD (ICT)	Doctor of Philosophy in Information & Communication Technology

POP/POS	Point-of-Purchase/Point-of-Sale
QR	Quick response
R	Relational dimension of customer experiences
RM	Ringgit Malaysia
S	Sensory dimension of customer experiences
SD	Standard deviation
SEO	Search engine optimisation
SP	Student portal
SPSS	Statistical package for the social science
SMEs	Small medium enterprises
THE	Times Higher Education
QS	Quacquarelli Symonds
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UK	United Kingdom
URL	Uniform resource locator
US	United States of America
USD	United States Dollar
WOM	Word-of-mouth
WWW	World Wide Web
YOY	Year-on-year

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH STUDY

1.0 Chapter Organisation

As the first chapter of this thesis, it provides an overview of the research framework which sets the boundary for systematic investigation into the research problem. Content of this Chapter is organised into sections as shown in Figure 1.1.

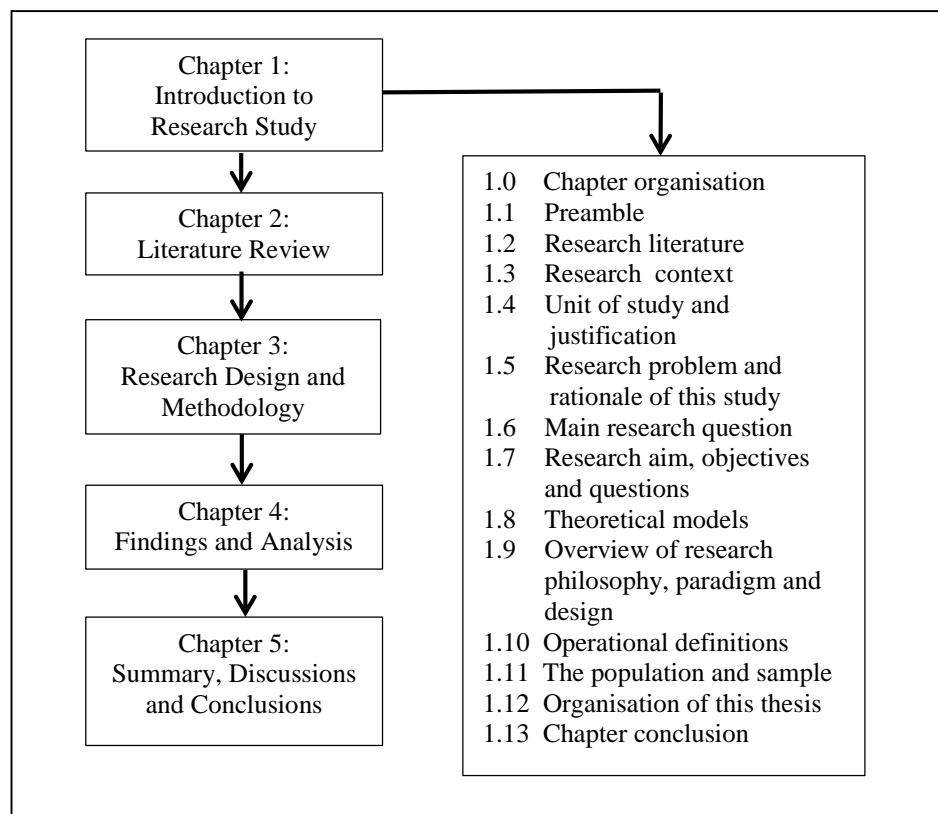


Figure 1.1: Organisation of Chapter 1

Source: Developed for this study.

1.1 Preamble

“How do marketing communications generate customer experiences with a university brand in a higher educational decision journey?”

The above generic question has been prompted by the fact that universities and other categories of higher educational institutions (HEIs) in Malaysia are among the heavy users of advertising which is a key component of marketing communications (Marcoms) mix for delivering brand messages to consumers/customers. The widespread use of marketing communications (Marcoms) by organisations in various sectors of an economy including universities/HEIs is a global phenomenon.

Universities/HEIs are posited in the education segment of the services sector of the Malaysian economy. They are instrumental to the development of human capital for economic growth and social transformation. The proactive role of the Malaysian government in liberalising higher education as demonstrated by the implementation of the Private Higher Educational Institutions Act 1996 has led to the fast emergence of private higher educational institutions (HEIs) (Malaysia, 1996-2006a; Sirat, 2005; Tham, 2013). Intense rivalry among public and private HEIs is reflected in the enormous amount of financial resources committed by them to support their brands of offer.

The secondary data generated from a literature search as part of the exploratory research of this case study indicate strongly that Marcoms play an important role in marketing higher educational programmes whereby universities were the 5th largest category of advertisers in Malaysia with an estimated total advertising expenditure of RM175 million in 2013 (Dentsu Aegis, 2013) (see Table 4.1 in Chapter 4). Apart from advertising, there are other types of Marcoms tools and media being used by universities/HEIs in Malaysia. Such rampant Marcoms practices among the players in the competitive higher education market in Malaysia have inevitably led to the assumption that there is a relationship between Marcoms and customer experiences.

1.2 Research Literature

The body of literature on how Marcoms can elicit the desired audience responses to the favour of advertisers is posited in the early theories of advertising which are collectively known as the ‘**Audience Response Hierarchy Models**’. Among the best known models in the marketing/Marcoms literature are: **AIDA**, an acronym for attention, interest, desire and action proposed by Strong (1925), Hierarchy-of-Effects (Lavidge and Steiner, 1961), and **DAGMAR**, an acronym for determining advertising goals for measured advertising results developed by Colley (1961) (see Figure 2.3 in Section 2.6 of Chapter 2).

Marcoms are generally interpreted as the means by which organisations communicate with audiences/customers about their marketing offers with the intention of stimulating positive responses such as awareness, interest, desire and ultimately a purchase action. According to Fill (2009) the origin of many definitions of Marcoms arises from the need to promote or persuade people to buy products and services. The promotional- or product-centric orientation of Marcoms in the 1950s and 1960s (Kliatchko, 2005) was transitioned to a new stream of thought that is customer- or audience-centric with an emphasis on building relationships and experiences (Gronroos, 2000b; Vargo and Lusch, 2004b; Hughes and Fill, 2007).

Historically, advertising played the leading role in Marcoms (Yeshin, 2006, 1). Even until today, advertising is still the most popular tool used by organisations to engage the audience with their brands of marketing offers. Owing to the great emphasis on advertising in eliciting audience responses, Marcoms are strongly associated with advertising.

In practice, advertising is often used alongside with other Marcoms tools such as public relations/publicity, direct marketing, Internet marketing, personal selling, event marketing, sales promotion, sponsorship/partnership, customer support services, word-of-mouth communications and point-of-sale marketing in order to produce a powerful synergy in influencing customer purchasing experiences. Based on literature, an appropriate mix of Marcoms tools and media instead of using them in a fragmented manner has been recognised to be more effective in attracting audience attention, arousing audience to like the brand, intensifying audience desire to buy the brand and finally facilitating audience to take a purchase action.

This study adopted the term ‘marketing communications’ or ‘Marcoms’ in short instead of ‘marketing communication’ to denote a mix of tools and media which are commonly used by organisations for creating points of contact between their brands of offer and target customers in order to generate customer experiences and influencing purchasing decisions. Customer experiences occur as a result of exposure or response to brand messages delivered by Marcoms throughout the buying decision journey.

Marcoms have been conventionally termed as ‘Promotion’ under the marketing mix of 4Ps (an acronym for product, price, promotion and place) coined by McCarthy (1960) (see Figure 1.2).



Figure 1.2: Marketing Communications Within The 4 Ps of The Marketing Mix

Source: Adapted from McCarthy (1960) and Fill (2009).

As depicted in Figure 1.2, there are five (5) major Marcoms tools being proposed by Egan (2007) and Fill (2009), namely, (a) **advertising** is a paid-for, non-personal form of mass communication from an identified source, used to communicate information and influence consumer behaviour (Egan, 2007, 19), (b) **sales promotion** consists of a variety of short-term incentives to encourage trial or purchase of a product/service (Kotler, Keller, Koshy, and Jha, 2009, 459), (c) **public relations** is concerned with establishing and maintaining relationships with various stakeholders and with enhancing the reputation of the organisation (Fill, 2009, 21), (d) **personal selling** is face-to-face presentation of a product or an idea to a potential customer by a representative of the company or organisation (Burnett and Moriarty, 1998, 411), and (e) **direct marketing** is a system of marketing by which organisations communicate directly with targeted customers to generate a response or transaction (Belch and Belch, 2012, 470).

In summary, advertising, sales promotion and public relations are characterised by the use of mass communication involving non-personal media to generate desired audience responses. Personal selling uses face-to-face communication or personal contact to obtain an immediate response to a sales call. As for direct marketing, it uses non-personal media such as direct mail, email, voice mail, telephone, fax, marketing collateral, Internet and other electronic/mobile system to communicate directly with identified individuals/customers.

Subsequently over time with changing market environment, new creative ideas and innovation in digital/electronic technologies emerge to offer more options for marketers to reach out to a wide range of audiences in different geographical locations. For example, Duncan (2002) suggests fifteen (15) Marcoms tools as compared to five (5) Marcoms tools suggested by Egan (2007) and Fill (2009) (see Table 2.1 in Chapter 2).

Over the past two decades, the notion of Marcoms has eclipsed that of advertising (Egan, 2007, 1) as the nature and scope of Marcoms have expanded especially in the 21st century. Marcoms become more sophisticated in engaging audiences and sharing their experiences online. The role of Marcoms within an organisation's strategic plan has been recognised as relevant tools for corporate identity, branding, reputation and performance.

In contemporary marketing, new thinking about the role of Marcoms has emerged in the specialist field of '**Customer Experience Management (CEM)**' which is also known as '**Customer Touchpoint Management (CTM)**'. It is a sequel to 'Customer Relationship Management (CRM)' and 'Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC)' within the marketing domain. Seligman and Taylor (2009, 3) explain that in many ways, CEM is an extension of CRM but they make a distinction