

Integrated Marketing Communication
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Lecture - 57
Ethics and Marketing Communications

Hello friends, now we are reaching the last section of our discussion on this excellent subject of integrated marketing communication. I will be summarizing that in the last session, what we have gone through, what we should be learning, what we should do further, how we should develop our integrated marketing communication skills, and so on.

But before that, the subsequent three sessions, including this one, are related to ethics and evaluation, which are the essential elements of integrated marketing communication. Ethics should be seen as an essential element of almost everything. And marketing, you would realize that it is driven through the parameters of ethics or is benchmarked based on ethics, does wonders.

As we have seen, integrated marketing communication is one of the essential elements of marketing. You would recall that at one stage, I tried to express that marketing is an integrated marketing communication for many people. Hence, we must consider substantial ethical benchmarks and considerations required for proper communication because communication is power, as we have seen.

So I will take you through a brief understanding of ethics in association with integrated marketing communication and would be justifying the discussion around the conventions generated in due course of time. I will use the widely accepted source of the International Chamber of Commerce, wherein many advertising agencies and organizations are members and have mutually accepted some principles to be followed.

So this is how we will look into ethics and ethical understanding concerning integrated marketing communication. But first, we should think in terms of the importance of ethics. Why at all this subject has to be discussed. We must be ethical anyways. But in due course of time, we have realized many times that people complain that they have gone through losses, they have found things misleading.

These debates have come up in due course of time. And many times, discussions flow around such things. Litigations have been fought. Cases have been filed, and so on. And then we realize

that something somewhere went wrong. I would not be taking you through specific cases or situations of conflicts because those are available at relevant sources for you to be seen and understand concerning the context.

But laws are there. Those are strong laws, and people are taking care of those. Experts are involved in that. So that part is well taken care of. But let us focus on ethics because some interpretative perspective always keeps going around us here. So the most critical element of ethics associated with integrated marketing communication is related to extrapolation.

For example, there is a message that can be interpreted differently by many people, and the person who designs that message understands that. So what should be done? We should think in terms of extrapolating that message.

Extrapolating the resultants of that message, the perspective around that message. And we would realize that after a particular stage, we can visualize the positives and negatives associated with such kinds of messages, any message for that matter. This is one method for analyzing whether this is right or not.

The importance is that, if somehow some mistake is being committed, and we try to visualize the strength of that message in time, we can immediately realize that. This is one of those exercises and benchmarks which can be done in almost any case, for example. when a child is small and young, we try to watch the child's actions.

Why? Because we do not want any bad habit to germinate and develop in due course of time. We try to put off that bad habit right there. As simple as mothers often tell their children to keep washing their hands. So it is that if they somehow would have a habit of not washing their hands, and you extrapolate, that would contribute to the ill health of the child in later ages.

So extrapolation is straightforward. And we must all have a habit of doing this. So whenever you watch a message, try to visualize that in association with its strength and longevity. The other aspect is impact, and we all understand this impact perspective. It is not always necessary to break it into mathematics.

And to numbers and go for statistical analysis, how well it has impacted or how it has justifiably solved its purpose. Or we constantly are analyzing the sociocultural changes, which we are going through as against what we always wanted as against what it had been. So this is always there.

We have elders to talk to who constantly tell us that this world was like this, and this should have been like this. So this is a simple exercise, and we can look into messages from the perspective of the sociocultural changes those messages can bring. Or I should say, if the messages cannot alone bring in sociocultural changes, they can instigate or influence them.

And we can understand that very well. organizations related to monitoring communication-related ethics are there. Several organizations are doing their job very well. And then one of those, I am putting in front of you, the International Chamber of Commerce, and you visit their website, it is given there, and you would realize that they are doing a fantastic job.

And there are several national chapters also. And there are several other bodies which are doing an excellent job. So laws exist, though ethics is a subject of understanding and adoption. So laws are to be followed, and we should be cautious in following those. Ethics has to be seen from an adoption perspective. But why, as I said, why at all we are considering that we should monitor ethical perspectives. Why are there possibilities of getting deviated from the ethical path? Is it because of the stakes involved? Can the stakes divert our attention, or let us say, bring marketers or us to a situation wherein they slightly become short-sighted?

Can it? Is it possible? If possible, why are we putting significantly larger stakes is a fundamental question that organizations must address when they tend to put up those kinds of stakes in one, one go? So that is a very rational kind of thing to do. You can focus on several organizations comparatively.

At this stage, you very well understand how integrated marketing communication works. You can just think about looking into several organizations' communications and compare the intensity, the efforts, the address, the straightforwardness, or the aspects related to creativity but still putting up the right thing in front of you.

So that comparison can put you in a situation or understanding, which organization is trying to come up with what. Is their focus on just gaining the customer numbers? Or they are, wanting customer loyalty is one thing. Are they also loyal to the customers? Many organizations are. That is why they are growing, and they are doing exceptionally well.

So one can just have this kind of comparison and see, we should also look at the organizational focus wherein, the communication approach and other relevant parameters as I am trying to say, what are they being led by? What are their considerations? So that is how we should be looking at the scenario.

Because this pertinent question would always focus on defining the budget for integrated marketing communication and the elements, we should be extensively following through with our communication. Defining the rationality of frequency, which the communication should follow. Defining the emphasis that communication should give.

So that kind of an element is to be decided through such an understanding related to stakes and the importance of ethics, as I just told you.

International Chamber of Commerce, marketing code, there are some fundamental principles. They have a marketing code of conduct. They have defined a code, which is available on their website. So there are fundamental principles, which are stated there, and I will be taking you through those fundamental principles slowly while emphasizing the importance of such principles.

These are defined after lengthy deliberations through exercises, with the support of many intelligent people who understand the subject very well. So we cannot doubt the wisdom of these principles. We would understand in due course of time that if some, somehow we try to follow and adhere to these principles, things would be much simpler in overall.

So, the core principles are legality, decency, honesty, and truthfulness in all our marketing communications. Now look at this, we should follow the law. So we should be well aware of the law. So all the marketing communication companies, all those related to marketing communications, should have support or legal people who understand such laws.

And then, we will be adhering to the legalities associated. Decency. We all understand decency. The decency of words, decency of visuals, decency of colors, in every way, the communication should be decent. Truthfulness. Should I be explaining what truthfulness is? I do not think so. See, and again it is my favorite example when I talk about such subjects, a mother teaches her children how to be truthful. Watch that, and you will understand what truthfulness is. She would never advise her child to lie. And she understands how to teach truthfulness. So if somehow we forget that, I would advise all of us to attend sessions by mothers on truthfulness. So it is a straightforward kind of, there is no expensive program to be attended, required to be attended, it is simple household programs, kind of.

Marketing communications should respect human dignity, as they say. That, again, is a self-explanatory kind of perspective. Every human has to be seen with dignity, and our communication should address everyone with dignity. So communication should respect human

dignity.

Should not incite or condone any form of discrimination based on race, national origin, religion, gender, age, disabilities, or sexual orientation. Social responsibility. Marketing communications should, without justifiable reason, play on fear or exploit misfortune or suffering.

Marketing communications should not appear to condone or incite violent, unlawful, or antisocial behavior. Marketing communications should not play on superstition. It is straightforward to gain people's attention if you incite fear in communication, and we all understand that. You put up an element of loss.

In the last session, we discussed Daniel Kahneman and Tversky's research on loss and gain. We mentioned that. You would be reading about that. And you understand that we are made like that. Our perspective is like that. Our understanding is like that. We focus on losses as against gains.

And that research is pivotal in terms of putting things in front of us, how we think. So understanding this very thing, if we try to put up fear of loss, that is not ethical. And that is what we should understand. That is why these principles have been formed, understanding human behavior and how humans can direct human behavior.

Then comes honesty and decency. Marketing communications should be framed so as not to abuse consumers' trust. Consumers are looking forward to marketers. For example, a student taking a course in a coaching center is looking forward to the right things that should be told to him in the proper perspective. Everything should be clearly stated. That is what honest marketing communication is.

And there are several examples. See pharmaceutical and healthcare, for example. And these are sensitive life-related things. You even go to a restaurant. So no relative discussion should be done. Clearly to be stated in front of the customer what he should expect. So that is where the honesty perspective comes in because a customer is coming forward and trusting you.

Often, a customer confides in marketers because they reveal their habits and behaviors, and that should not be exploited. So as it says, marketing communications should be framed so as not to abuse consumers' trust or exploit their lack of experience or knowledge. Relevant factors likely to affect consumers' decisions should be communicated in such a way and at such a time that consumers can consider them.

When the customer is in desperate need of purchasing a thing, and someone is told to him where he is in a situation to overlook, that kind of important information is not the right thing. Many times, we see that. Marketing communications should not contain statements or audio or visual treatments which offend standards of decency prevailing in the country and the culture concerned.

We should respect all cultures. And we should understand the cultures before marketing our products and sending our communications to those cultures and countries. Because after all, we wish those customers to get associated with us. Why should we be associating customers with us without offering decency to them? Truthfulness.

Marketing communications should be truthful and not misleading in terms of price, delivery, provision, exchange, return, repair and maintenance, guarantee, compliance, standards, etc. People spend their hard-earned money on things. It is not. It should not be a concern that it should end up in sales.

The concern should be that people should feel they have spent the money on the right product and service. And that should be the objective of all marketing communications.

Then comes substantiation. Descriptions, claims, or illustrations relating to verifiable facts in marketing communication should be capable of substantiation. In today's era, everything is available through different sources. We still have to think about these things because there is a deception in many things being communicated around us.

I am not denouncing anything here, but this is what we should look for. And many of you will be becoming marketers in times to come. You would be getting associated with personal selling exercises, direct marketing, direct sales, and those professions you would be chosen in due course of time.

And believe me, if you are truthful, you have that context, you are adhering to principles, and your customers would remain with you for a very long time. Identification and transparency. The actual commercial purpose of marketing communication should be transparent and not misrepresent their true commercial purpose.

Hence communication promoting the sale of a product should not be disguised as, for example, market research, consumer surveys, user-generated content, private blogs, private postings on social media, or independent reviews. Many times for supporting an argument. You always say

research says. And many a time, you may find messages here and there claiming that.

And some research would have said that. But was that research credible? Can all the target people rely on that kind of research whose basis we are trying to take? We should be cautious about that. Then the identity of the marketer. The identity of the marketer should be transparent. Marketing communication should include contact information to enable the consumer to contact the marketer without difficulty.

And Marketers should respond whenever the consumer wants to communicate with them. There are many situations wherein we say that we will refund, we will do this, we will do that, but after the sales materialize, the customer tends to run after the organization. Things settled down, but that is a painful exercise. And we have found thousands and hundreds of thousands of people complaining about these things and sharing such experiences. So many of you might have gone through such things.

Use of technical-scientific data and terminology. Marketing communications should not misuse technical data, research results, or quotations from technical and scientific publications. Remember, we should not be interpreting the researchers beyond their stated conclusions in our favor. Marketing communications should not present statistics in such a way as to exaggerate the validity of a product or claim.

And there is a thin line between stating it very clearly and slightly exaggerating that by putting up a very creative element and a word associated with that. And we all know and understand this. From human physical care or consumer products to automotive to tourism, any product or service, education, or health, we may find this thin line available in almost all forms of communication.

Further marketing communications should not use scientific terminology or vocabulary in such a way as falsely to suggest that a product claim has scientific validity. You say whatever is verifiable. Use of free as a word and guarantee as a word. The term free. For example, a gift or free offer should be used only where the offer involves no obligation or where the only obligation is to pay the delivery costs, which should not exceed the cost estimated to be incurred by the marketer.

These are particular things wherein one can be careful actually. And then a free offer or gift should be used only in conjunction with the purchase of another product, provided the price of that product has not been increased to cover all or part of the cost of the offer. It should be

accurate when you say free.

Then comes comparisons, denigration, and testimonials. Marketing communication containing comparisons should be designed so that the comparison is not likely to mislead and should comply with the principles of fair competition. This is a vast area of understanding and interpretation, and misinterpretation. So here, there is a lot of scope for developing our understanding. Testimonials, we all understand.

Then comes in portrayal or limitation of persons and references to the personal property. It should be accurate. It should not, marketing communication should not portray or refer to any person, whether in a private or public capacity, unless prior permission has been obtained. Nor should marketing communication, without prior permission, depict or refer to any person's property in a way likely to convey the impression of a personal endorsement of the product or organization involved. There should not be any exploitation of goodwill.

The communication should not take undue advantage of another firm's individual's or institution's goodwill in its name, brand, or other intellectual property or take advantage of the goodwill earned by other marketing campaigns without prior consent. Several detailed descriptions of these principles are available on this site, and other portals wherein several things have been discussed and demonstrated.

For example, no imitation. Marketing communication should not imitate those of another marketer in any way likely to mislead or confuse the consumer. For example, the general layout, text, slogan, visual treatment, music, or sound effects. Then there are aspects related to safety and health.

Data protection and privacy are essential; much debate is going around that. And we all understand what the meaning of data protection and privacy is. We should bring in methods that are fair and acceptable to all.

Environmental behavior. This is a lot of a discussion going around because integrated marketing communication can lead to a situation where things would go away as far as sustainability is concerned. Responsibility is a critical element. Whatever the nature of the activity, medium, or technology, responsibility is shared by all parties concerned, commensurate with their respective role in the process and within the limits of their respective functions.

Ultimately, the message is clear that customers may get misled. Marketing communication should not let the customers get misled. Marketing communication should follow ethics. Communicators should think that if they were the customers themselves, the only thing one can remember is that we should refrain from doing something we do not want to do to us.

And that is where the fundamental principle of ethics lies. And it is not complicated to follow. It is elementary. Just focus on telling the truth to the customers and retaining them based on the truth and the right thing. Gain their loyalty based on the right thing. And many things would come your way as marketers in due course of time. Let us all follow ethics.

Let us all adhere to ethical principles. Let us keep on telling ourselves that we should live our lives ethically. With this message, I leave you with lots of thoughts. I will be returning to you with a discussion on the evaluation part of integrated marketing communication in the next session. Till then, goodbye.