

Connectivity: A Prism for the Identification of IMC Constructs in the Ethiopian Beer Market

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ABSTRACT

This study revisits the constructs of integrated marketing communication (IMC) by assessing the customers of Habesha Breweries in Ethiopia. A customer-driven view of IMC is developed around the concepts of customer-dominant logic, value-in-use and communication-in-use. The findings support customer-integrated marketing communications that emphasise customers' purchasing decisions that arise from internal and external brand communication contacts. This study revisits the Duncan and Moriarty (1997) and Grönroos (2015) categorisations of IMC as sources of brand contacts by introducing and developing constructs such as physiological needs, product technical quality and complementary goods. The originality of this study also lies in the conceptualisation of physiological needs and their relationship to the construct of connectivity. The suggestion is that the starting point for marketers' implementation of IMC should be a thorough understanding of the customer's context, and more specifically, that the diverse constructs of IMC align with either the communal or the individual dimensions of connectivity. These findings should drive interest in future large-scale quantitative tests.

Keywords: connectivity, physiological needs; product technical quality; complementary goods; brand contact

INTRODUCTION

Due to globalisation, technological developments and the emergence of communication modalities in the late 20th century, integrated marketing communication (IMC) has emerged as a significant paradigm of marketing communications (Finne & Grönroos, 2017; Kitchen, 2017). Amongst the strongest drivers of IMC research and practice are the understanding and management of active customers who base their purchasing decisions on brand contacts that may originate from diverse sources (Bruhn & Schnebelen, 2017; Finne & Grönroos, 2017; Kitchen, 2017; Kitchen & Burgmann, 2015).

Scholars agree that IMC holds the status of a business imperative in an increasingly competitive world (Angelopulo & Barker, 2005; Angelopulo & Barker, 2013; Kitchen & Schultz, 2009). Companies such as Nike, AB Inbev and Coca-Cola, to name a few, implement IMC programmes in order to distinguish their products and brands from those of their competitors (Burgmann, 2007; Keller, 2016; Schultz, 2010). IMC is a frequent theme in the marketing literature, and there is a persistent call for papers on the topic (Kitchen, 2017). To encourage its theoretical development, academics such as Duncan (2002), Kliatchko (2008), McGrath (2010), and Šerić, Gil-Saura & Ozretić-Došen (2015) have explored the definition, nature and parameters of IMC. Additionally, Adetunji, Nordin & Noor (2014), Barker & Angelopulo (2004), Reinold & Tropp (2012), and Šerić, Gil-Saura & Ruiz-Molina (2014) have empirically tested and applied IMC frameworks and models. Angelopulo and Barker (2005), Lee and Park (2007), Porcu, Garcia and Kitchen (2017) and Wang, Wu and Yuan (2009) have contributed to the field by developing instruments for the measurement of IMC.

While IMC has progressed as an accepted paradigm in marketing, Kitchen (2017) and Šerić (2016) believe that research into the topic must extend to a broader range of industrial and geographical contexts. Thus, the focus of this study is to gain an understanding of customers' integration of brand contacts when making purchasing decisions by examining the case of customer brand contacts at Habesha Beer in Ethiopia.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

The proliferation of brand communication sources and the growing power of customers are challenges that marketers face in the implementation of IMC (Keller, 2016; Kitchen, 2017). Finne & Strandvik (2012) hold that everything about a company communicates, and that unplanned contacts extending beyond the visibility line of a company challenge the implementation of IMC (Finne & Strandvik, 2012; Heinonen, Strandvik, & Voima, 2013). Therefore, Batra & Keller (2016), Finne & Strandvik (2012), Keller (2016), Kitchen (2017), and Šerić (2016) call for greater empirical evidence to inform IMC implementation. Kitchen et al. (2004) question whether the locus of such integration should be outside the realm of a company because marketing consultants and communication agencies rarely understand the complete spectrum or complexity of a company's customer contacts, and therefore the full spectrum of IMC.

The integration of IMC research with the Nordic School research tradition highlights a further gap in the development of IMC theory. The Nordic School of Service Marketing pursues research that is guided by the principle of "think for yourself, step aside from the mainstream, do what you think is best in any given situation, be original, but be valid" (Grönroos, von Koskull & Gummerus 2015:29). The Nordic School questions the established way of thinking and investigating phenomena, endorsing a value-in-use perspective that generates fresh conceptualisations from insiders (Gummerus & von Koskull, 2015). Attempts to integrate IMC and the Nordic School theories is evident in the concept of communication-in-use, which emphasises integration and sense-making of all brand contacts, from any source that the customer perceives as communication, forming value-in-use for a specific purpose. However, Finne & Grönroos (2017:445) have noted that the "analysis in communication-in-use is conceptual and should trigger future empirical grounding" (Finne & Grönroos 2017:445). In response to this, this study endeavours to offer an empirical grounding for its further consideration.

The other challenge regarding theory development in IMC is that most IMC researchers appear to prefer quantitative over qualitative research. Šerić (2016:25) suggests that "studies should focus more on a qualitative approach to explore new constructs, as a considerable number of IMC studies seem to prefer a quantitative approach". In response, this study undertakes a qualitative exploration of planned, product, service and unplanned brand contacts in the context of the customer.

In contemporary market conditions where customers can choose from any number of available brand communication sources, the question that arises is what brand contacts – whether originating from the company or any other source – are most valuable to customers in their purchasing decisions. This study explores how customers perceive, integrate and assess the value of brand contacts in their purchasing decisions, and the significance of these findings in managerial decisions around the strategy options of IMC.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS: THE NORDIC SCHOOL PERSPECTIVES OF IMC

This study draws from the Nordic School's notions of value-in-use, customer-dominant logic and communication-in-use for a more customer-driven view of IMC. Customer value is more narrowly defined as value-in-use (Lähteenmäki & Nätti, 2013; Grönroos, 2011), proposing that services, products and information individually render value to the customer (Edvardsson, Tornvoll, & Gruber, 2011). Finne & Grönroos (2017) show that marketing communications render value-in-use and that, by extension, brand contacts have value-in-use for customers. This perspective signifies interpretations of IMC and value-in-use that are more inclusive than traditionally more company-oriented views of IMC (Finne & Grönroos, 2017; Heinonen et al., 2013).

Customer-dominant logic suggests that value-in-use emerges within the customers' ecosystem and emphasises the rationality of customers who determine their brand contacts from the array of different sources that exist in their ecosystem (Finne & Grönroos, 2009; Grönroos, Strandvik, & Heinonen, 2015). Thus, the concept offers a new

viewpoint on IMC by advocating that the focus should be on what customers are doing with brand contacts to achieve their goals and what management inferences can be drawn from this (Finne & Grönroos, 2017; Heinonen et al., 2010). The application of customer-dominant logic in the study of IMC has managerial implications in that it helps marketers understand how to encourage customers to engage with the brand (Strandvik & Heinonen, 2015).

Communication-in-use, or “customer’s integration and sense-making of all messages from any source, company-driven or stemming from other sources the customer perceives as communication, form[s] value-in-use for him or her” (Finne & Grönroos, 2017:454). Incorporation of the concept of value-in-use manifests in a more customer-oriented IMC that is based on active customers using any sources, and could include an offering, product, brand, service, company or person (Finne & Grönroos, 2017). The concept is much wider than traditional communication, as it includes whatever the customer wants to include, shifting the focus from the company’s communication offerings to the customer’s multi-contextual communication processes (Finne & Strandvik, 2012).

Accordingly, the question is how customers integrate brand contacts that they perceive as valuable for their purchasing decisions. These may include but not remain limited to the planned, product, service and unplanned sources proposed by Duncan & Moriarty (1997) and Finne & Grönroos (2017). Planned sources of brand contacts consist of traditional marketing communications over which the company can control message content. Product sources include all contacts that generate messages on the brand including its usefulness, design, raw materials and pricing. Service sources include contacts generated through interactions with service processes or other customers, deliveries and claims handling. Unplanned sources encompass word-of-mouth, news in various media, and gossip (Finne & Grönroos, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

Research Paradigm and design

The perceptual nature of IMC, the exploration of customers’ subjective decisions on what to integrate and which brand contacts to prioritise, all point to an alignment with qualitative research. This study follows an inductive approach in order to explore IMC from the perspective of customers, their actions and interpretations. This is in line with the viewpoints of Finne & Strandvik (2012) and Grönroos (2015) who believe that IMC is “internal” to the customer, with the customer deciding how it should develop. The complexity inherent in IMC supports the utilisation of qualitative methodology in a study such as this: “IMC is a more complex process than traditionally understood marketing communication of the old type associated with planned marketing communication” (Pluta-Olearnik, 2018:127). Unplanned, contextual and temporally based brand contacts increase the complexity of IMC (Finne & Grönroos, 2017), and as Gummesson (2000:171) notes, “qualitative research helps in addressing the complex reality” of brand contacts from the customer’s perspective.

In this study, an exploratory research design is adopted. The reason is that “IMC is a rather new phenomenon and the exploratory research design is necessary for its better understanding and building of IMC theory” (Šerić, 2016:25). It allows participants to express their perceptions of IMC through their own narratives and gives them the opportunity to elaborate on their responses. Similar to deductive research, exploration in this study begins with previously formulated theories (Silverman, 2017), helping to attend to details and nuances which otherwise might be overlooked (Flick 2018a; Kennedy & Thornberg, 2018).

In exploratory IMC research, it is vital to understand how customers perceive, integrate and assess the value of brand contacts in their purchasing decisions. It is the customer who ultimately has to make sense of the various marketing messages from a variety of sources, and who will subjectively decide what is to be integrated and which sources of brand contacts are valuable (Finne & Grönroos, 2017). In this case, the exploratory research design allows for the exploration of any contacts that may influence customers’ purchasing decisions.

Participants were purposefully selected by determining who could best address the research questions and enhance understanding of the phenomenon under study (Maison, 2019; Schreier, 2018). Similar to the studies conducted by Creswell & Poth (2018) and Creswell (2014), two focus groups of six Habesha Brewery customers each were included in the study. The intention behind their selection was to understand the range of perceptions on brand contacts from any source, the influence of these on their purchasing decisions, and their processes of integration.

Data collection method and analysis

Focus groups were used to generate detailed and diverse insights into IMC from the context of the customer (Flick, 2018a; Maison, 2019; Morgan & Hofmann, 2018). Information from the existing literature was incorporated with local and sectoral insights as references to customise questions in the discussion guide and to structure a “funnel” procedure in the discussions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The funnel technique is consistent with the guidelines provided by Morgan & Hoffman (2018) and Flick (2018b) for focus group interview guides. Beginning with a broad question that engages participants, questions become successively narrower to hone in on the specific aims of the study, allowing for the emergence of different themes and the probing of specific sensitising concepts (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Flick 2018a; Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2020).

A set of relatively standardised practices that are commonly applied in focus group discussions were also employed in this study, including relative homogeneity in each group, a semi-structured interview guide, and less-structured approaches to group moderation. These were incorporated into the study to ensure the high probability of productive focus group outcomes, as indicated by Creswell and Poth (2018), Flick (2018a), Morgan and Hoffman (2018) and Maison (2019).

Small-scale pilot tests with two focus groups of four Habesha Breweries customers were conducted before tackling the actual focus groups. The outcome was measured against the objectives of pilot testing as identified by Barbour (2018) and Maison (2019). The pilot test ensured that the focus groups would elicit the type and range of responses sought. The focus groups commenced following ethical clearance from the University of South Africa with reference number 2019-COMMSCIENCE-CHS-58557997.

The setting for both focus groups was a quiet venue conveniently accessible for all participants. The duration of Focus Group 1 was 2 hours and 41minutes, and of Focus Group 2, 2 hrs and 58 minutes. The discussions were transcribed and subjected to an inductive content analysis in accordance with the exploratory nature of the study. In line with the inductive procedures proposed by Silverman (2017), Hennick, Hutter and Bailley (2020), Braun and Clarke (2006), coding followed the iterative process of interpreting participants’ transcribed perceptions and then relating these responses to the literature, reverting to the transcribed text, etc.

Codes were developed into subthemes and then categorised into themes and concepts related to the phenomena under investigation. For instance, codes such as clan leaders and elders in community that appeared in the focus groups’ transcribed discussions were grouped to form a subtheme titled cultural leaders. Codes such as priests and religious heads were grouped to signify the subtheme religious leaders. The consolidation of these subthemes then generated a theme titled societal brand contacts, signifying brand contacts from society.

The analysis process entailed listening to the audio recordings of the interviews with the participants. The researchers variously transcribed the discussions verbatim, checked these against the recordings, translated into English from the original Amharic, and finally reviewed the derived text. This provided the opportunity to gain familiarity with the text at the beginning of the process, before generating codes from the data set. Three steps were followed: generation of a detailed line-by-line series of codes that fractured the data into segments; organisation of the fractured data into conceptual categories; and the generation of a summary of the most meaningful dimensions in the data.

CUSTOMER-INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION

The findings show that customers integrate any number of the brand contacts planned by the company and perceived by customers to be valuable. Integration may include planned, product and service contacts but may also include contacts from any other sources. All sources of brand contact do not constitute equal value to customers and do not necessarily constitute the value anticipated by the company. Their value lies in their importance to the customer and their impact on customers’ purchasing decisions. A number of dominant contact points were identified in the study and these are elaborated in the discussion that follows.

Planned brand contacts

These are the marketing communication instruments used by Habesha Breweries and perceived to be valuable by its customers. The findings show that include elements that include television and transit advertising, banners and refrigeration branding. The findings are similar to those identified in the literature in the case of advertising, but somewhat different in the case of other instruments. For instance, elements amongst the planned brand messages identified in Grönroos (2015) that include forms of sales promotion, direct marketing, product publicity, sponsorship and personal selling are not uniformly recognised at the same level of value. This is illustrated in text drawn from the focus groups. As with all focus group quotations, these are translated into English from the original Amharic.

“The Habesha Beer advertising is appealing, and is quite different from other beer advertising. I understand the advertisements in this way. Some contents indicate diverse things, and it is possible to say that it has an impact on my choice. Even, you feel something positive about how they made the advertisement and associate the beer with cultural values”.

“Yes, it protects the beer from sunlight. I understand that the beer is protected from heat. I even feel as if the vehicle is a refrigerator. The van seems to me a refrigerating shipping van. Yeah, this is appealing. When you are walking on the road and see the Habesha vehicle, you feel like going and drinking it”.

“I have seen the logo of Habesha Beer on leather. It is artistic work. You cannot find other similar companies using such artwork as advertising. This handmade banner is very fascinating. I wish I had bought some of these ... I like it very much and it made me love Habesha Beer”.

“It is when I see the beer bottles placed in orderly fashion in the refrigerators that I want to drink it. I get particularly attracted in the evenings when the refrigerators are full of Habesha bottles and look so shiny”.

Product brand contacts

Product brand contacts include, among others, the physical product and complementary goods associated with the product. The findings show that the technical qualities of the product such as beer colour, taste, product satisfaction, performance and alcohol content hold value for customers. Additionally, branded glassware was identified as a brand contact that influences customers' purchasing decisions and is strongly associated with the consumption of beer. This indicates that it is not only the physical product that adds value in customers' purchasing decisions, but that value-in-use also exists in materials and products that complement the product itself.

The constructs identified in product brand contacts include the performance of the product, its appearance, durability, price, design and distribution. This confirms only in part the observations of Duncan & Moriarity (1997) and Grönroos (2015) in that both product technical quality and complementary goods act as valuable product brand contact points. The constructs of product brand contacts emerging in this study differ from previous work in that they include product technical quality and complementary goods. The following quotations reflect this observation:

“When the beer is poured into a glass, its colour looks more golden than other beer products. This colour attracts me a lot. Therefore, whenever I want to drink a beer, I order this product. Especially, I am delighted when I pour the golden and well-refrigerated beer into a glass”.

“I tasted the beer for the first time when company sales people were sponsoring the product in a bar. Afterwards I continued to drink it because of its taste. It is flavoursome in the mouth. I need no more evidence regarding the quality of the beer. That is why I am still a loyal customer of the brand”.

“Whenever I order a beer, I look at the alcohol content on the product bottle. I am comfortable with its alcoholic content.”

“The drinking glasses of Habesha Beer with their shape and brand logo look attractive. I bought a Habesha Beer glass and use it at home. I even use the glass to drink water”.

Service brand contacts

Service sources of brand messages refer to messages that originate from interactions between customers and company employees. This includes the company’s customer service representatives, receptionists, secretaries, delivery personnel and drivers (Duncan & Moriarity, 1997). The findings of the current study show that the service brand contacts that have value to customers’ purchasing decisions are, more narrowly than is evident in the literature, salespeople and drivers of Habesha Breweries trucks.

Considerable differences are noted between the constructs of service sources of brand messages and service brand contacts, with findings only somewhat consistent with the literature. Service sources of brand messages identified in the literature such as receptionists, secretaries and other personnel are not evident in this study. This may be attributed to the fact that, unlike with services, the customers of fast-moving consumer goods (FMCGs) exist in large numbers and are heterogeneous, making direct interaction between FMCG customers and Ethiopian firms relatively difficult.

“...The person I met was a driver of Habesha Breweries. They brought the product, unloaded it from their truck, and then delivered it into the hotel...Later, they held a short conversation about customers’ perceptions. Finally, they offered us some bottles”.

“I had some contact with the Habesha Beer salesperson who coordinates sponsorship activities. I also saw a driver of the company who was driving a loaded truck to the store of a beer retailer. I heard, once, the salesperson and the retailer chatting about the amount of beer sold, and about the progress of the market. Before the salesperson departed, he freely offered beer all customers”.

Unplanned brand contacts

Unplanned brand contacts refer to brand contacts that have value-in-use for customers in their purchasing decisions, but which originate with senders other than Habesha Breweries, in this case. Unplanned sources of brand contacts identified in this study include other customers, competitors, and what may be described as societal and physiological contacts.

Customers

The findings show that a range of contacts at point of sale influence customers’ purchasing decisions. These include waiters and waitresses, commercial sex workers and, most significantly, other customers of Habesha Beer. These constructs of IMC do not gain the same emphasis in the literature, except for the generic reference to “other customers”. The following extracts illustrate this finding:

“You go and may wait for the waiter [...and...] even if you ordered other beer, sometimes the waiter may suggest you drink Habesha beer”.

“Commercial sex workers are also determinants...I drink more if there are commercial sex workers in the hotel, like in the night club. Sometimes, if you see she is drinking Habesha Beer, you also order Habesha Beer”.

“If you go with someone who invites you, you just drink what he ordered. In most cases, my friend, for instance, ordered Habesha beer for us when we get together in the Hotel. I drink the beer even if I was not interested. This shows intimacy and respect toward the one who invites you”.

Societal contacts

Societal brand contacts refer to a range of points in society that affect customers' consumption behaviour. These include significant individuals, groups and organisations, as is evident in these excerpts from the focus group discussions:

“I am glad when I see influential people like cultural and religious leaders. I feel impressed, and I tend to do things that they do. Therefore, when I see such leaders consuming a brand of beer, I immediately stick to this brand as a way of identifying myself with the leaders. For instance, I saw the cultural leaders drinking Habesha Beer. As a result, I felt honoured to order the same. I had the same reaction the moment I observed my religious leaders drinking the beer”.

“Whenever I meet political leaders in hotels, I want to order similar brands. I think this is keeping your status up to their popularity level. Even if you do not like what they order, you just try to be the same at the table. I believe that these people have an impact on my preference”.

“The Ethiopian Coffee Football Club is sponsored by Habesha Breweries. Whenever the club has a match and wins, the fans get together and celebrate in groups while having Habesha Beer. We – all the fans – drink Habesha Beer. You do not order other beer brands if you are with the group”.

These findings are consistent with studies in consumer behaviour that suggest that consumers' purchasing behaviour is influenced by culture, sub-culture, locality, religion, ethnicity, family, social class, lifestyle and similar reference groups (Belch & Belch, 2018).

The findings are also consistent with the relationship communication model of Finne & Grönroos (2009) and in the later communication-in-use concept advanced by Finne & Grönroos (2017), which emphasises the influence of factors that originate in society and affect customers' purchasing decisions. Communication-in-use suggests that through regulations and norms, various institutions in society send brand messages to influence customers' purchasing and behavioural decisions. Though communication-in-use provides a new conceptual dimension, its constituent concepts “regulation” and “norms” are not evident in the findings, possibly because the limited scope of the empirical study could not contain sufficient variation to reflect the full range of behaviours of all cultural groups.

In brief, the empirical findings that identify individuals and groups in society as brand contacts from the perspective of value-in-use are a tangible contribution to the theoretical domain of IMC. Firstly, few empirical studies have explicitly dealt with such constructs from a value-in-use standpoint. The work of Turner (2017) is a singular example of a study on the role of ambassadors, religious and community leaders in communication campaigns, but the study is not developed from a value-in-use point of view. Secondly, the present findings offer a response to Kitchen (2017), who suggests an investigation of religious and community leaders connected to communication campaigns in the domain of IMC. Thirdly, the findings yield a segmented view of societal sources of messaging as suggested in the communication-in-use concept of Finne & Grönroos (2017). Finally, Šerić (2016) argues that cultural issues are becoming a new parameter in IMC research – as is evident in this study – and attempts to address cultural values in marketing communication that warrant greater attention.

Competitors

Unplanned brand contacts are extended to contact points that originate from competitors in the market. Defects in the product of competitors or the unavailability of competitors' products in the market affects customers' preference

for Habesha's products. The findings suggest that competitors' product brand contacts act in themselves as an additional set of unplanned brand contacts for Habesha Breweries.

The integration of competitors' brand contacts that is evident in the present study is rarely identified in recent IMC literature. Some reference to competitors is evident in the relationship communication model of Finne & Grönroos (2009) and the concept of invisible communication proposed by Finne & Stradvick (2012), who argue that factors originating from competitors can be integrated into IMC, as it influences customers' purchasing decisions.

Physiological needs

Brand contacts external to customers originate from the focal company, society or competitors in the market. What becomes apparent in this study is that customers also point to a class of "brand contacts" that are internal to themselves. For instance, the findings show that customers' purchasing decisions are influenced by internal motivations that originate with customers' physiological needs, and may be a form of social hedonic or non-social needs.

The relationship between physiological needs and unplanned brand contacts has not been explicitly discussed in the IMC literature. However, physiological needs are dominant in Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, which argues that physiological needs can act as drivers of behaviour, and hence as a motivation in purchasing decisions. According to this theory, hedonic needs are one type of physiological need, they reflect inherent desires for sensory pleasure, and can be classified as non-social hedonic and social hedonic needs (Maslow, 1943). Non-social hedonic needs include needs for sensory stimulation, cognitive stimulation and novelty, while social hedonic needs include social support and reinforcement, sex and play.

Similarly, the findings of this study indicate that sensory stimulation (e.g. taste or digestion) and cognitive stimulation (varying states of awareness or sleep) are non-social hedonic needs that may influence customers' purchasing decisions. Additionally, sexual stimulation is a social hedonic need that appears to influence customers' consumption of beer. While some elements in the findings have ethical implications for marketing, they have been identified and should be noted for the significant effect that they have on certain customers' processes of integration. The following extracts from participants' discussions illustrate the point:

"I like to have Habesha anytime I take heavy food. In this area, it is common to eat raw meat. Therefore, after having raw meat, I like to drink two or three bottles of Habesha Beer as I have found it so good for digestion. I need it for my metabolism. I drink the beer for this reason rather than the influence of other individuals, advertisements or promotions".

"Since I started drinking Habesha Beer, the number of Habesha bottles which I had to drink is increasing. I think I have already developed an addiction to drinking too much of the beer. Therefore, in order to get satisfied, I need to drink much. Those waiters and waitresses in the bars know well that how much I drink".

"I used to chew Khat, a stimulant plant. Right after chewing Khat, drinking Habesha Beer is what comes to my mind. To get into the normal state of mind after chewing Khat, I need to drink Habesha Beer more than other brands. I usually drink four to seven bottles of cold Habesha. For me, Habesha Beer and Khat are complementary".

"I usually drink too much Habesha Beer in the evening as it is bedtime afterwards. To get a night of good sleep, I need to have a large amount of alcohol. Otherwise, the night is not going to be comfortable for me. I drink Habesha as I have found it appropriate to avoid sleepless nights on my bed".

"When I am planning to spend a night or have sex with my girlfriend, I need to drink Habesha Beer. I have already noticed how strong I become during the moment I make love with my girlfriend after drinking Habesha Beer. Though

I have seen rich people and politicians consuming the beer, it has so far been my favourite for this reason”.

The concept of connectivity is in line with the findings that customers’ purchasing decisions have physiological traces. Angelopulo (2014:213) argues that “the decisions to connect with others have physiological traces and physiological benefits – the human body is hot-wired for connectivity”. This concept points to a physiological link in the origins and effects of human connectivity. In the same manner, the decision to consume Habesha Beer could in part be attributed to physiological factors.

Customers’ integration of brand contacts

The findings indicate that in their purchasing decisions, customers integrate valuable brand contacts, both internal and external, forming an integrated outcome of planned, product, customer and societal brand contacts with their physiological needs. As the findings indicate, customers undertake ‘commonality’ and ‘contribution’ integration of brand contacts. In this regard, it is important to reflect on a quotation from the transcribed text:

“The advertisement suggested checking the phrase cold gold on the bottle before consumption. It was advertised that the colour of cold gold changes to blue when the temperature of the beer gets cold enough. We also heard other customers talking about the cold gold on the bottle. We tried to prove the reality of the advertisement and information from other customers. First, we observed the label of the bottle. Before placing it in the refrigerator, we confirmed that the cold gold was not blue. Then we placed it in the refrigerator. Just 15 minutes later, the cold gold turned blue. This happened to be a miracle and attracted me to drink it.”

As Keller (2016:292) indicates, commonality integration such as that referred to by the participant exists in the “extent to which communication options are designed to explicitly work together such that interaction or synergy occurs, and enhanced communication effects emerge as the result of exposure by consumers to both options”. At the same time, customers are exposed to a range of brand contacts such as other customers, banner and transit advertising, product labelling, cultural leaders, quality, satisfaction, and their own physiological needs. These contribute to what Keller (2016:292) refers to as contribution integration, the “inherent ability of a communication option to create the desired communication effects and achieve the desired communication objectives, independent of prior or subsequent exposure to any other communication options for the brand”.

Connectivity dimensions of brand contact integration

Brand contacts can be identified in areas that are internal and external to the customer. These dimensions are discussed in relation to a supportive framework that can be identified in the concept of connectivity. The theoretical origin of the concept of connectivity can be traced to information science, which holds a core position and is deeply located in the theory of communication (Angelopulo, 2014). The concept stresses that “you have to be connected to communicate, but once connected there is still the question of the quality and quantity of connectivity” (Angelopulo, 2014:212). If customers are connected to the brand at some point, then the question of quality and quantity of connectivity remains at each point of contact.

To begin with, there is the atomistic dimension of the connectivity. According to Angelopulo (2014), at the atomistic level, individual human beings are genetically predisposed to connectedness. Thus, the decision to connect with others has physiological traces and physiological benefits – the human body is hot-wired for connectivity. This points to a physiological link in the origins and effects of human connectivity (Angelopulo, 2014). If so, physiological brand contacts point to the atomistic dimension of connectivity, which implies that customers’ purchasing decisions have

physiological traces and physiological benefits, that is, to satisfy social and non-social hedonic needs.

Added to this, the communal dimension of connectivity implies that human beings, in the collective or societal dimension, also appear to be hot-wired for connectivity (Angelopulo, 2014). In this dimension, customers in groups are influenced by factors external to them, unlike with physiological needs, which have internal influences. For instance, customers' purchasing decisions are influenced by advertisements, banners and overall product appearance. Further, customers' brand contacts relate to collective factors that originate with religious leaders, political leaders, cultural leaders and even football club fan groups. These individually refer to the quantity of connectivity.

Brand contacts, internal and external to the customer, form part of communication processes that encompass individuals' physiological needs, the customer's everyday life and ecosystem, and trends in society that influence his or her purchasing decisions. These cluster together and contribute to the customer's unique perspective of the brand, forming the active connection between the customer and the range of drivers that may be internal and individual, or external and communal.

Unlike Duncan and Moriarity (1997) and Grönroos (2015), who point only to sources of brand contacts that are external, the current findings incorporate brand contacts that are also internal to customers. In the literature on IMC, physiological needs as sources of brand contacts have not been adequately explored. Finne and Grönroos (2017) mention internal needs and motivations as having a possible effect on customers' purchasing decisions, but such observations retain a generic view of need and motivation. The current study, however, points to specific types of internal, physiological needs that affect purchasing decisions, confirming their value-in-use.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The traditional approach to IMC has a company-focus, and a concentration on areas of marketing communication over which the company has greatest control. From the customer's perspective, however, the factors that determine brand consumption extend somewhat further to include customers, competitors, societal and physiological needs. Traditionally, the company perspective rarely includes these as points of brand contact, and if they have, it has generally been at a superficial level. This is understandable because the company has little power to influence these communication processes or the values that they generate, but despite this, they remain extremely important.

The brand contacts that have value for customers and affect their consumption of Habesha Beer originate from various sources, both external and internal. Many originate from the company, but many originate from other sources noted in the discussion. Customers also integrate a wide array of brand contacts that can be identified in the individualistic and communal dimensions of connectivity – a finding that calls for additional research. One way of conceptualising the full spectrum of brand contacts may be to do so in terms of the individualistic and communal dimensions of connectivity. The 'receiver', or customer, has indeed become central to the communication process and, as suggested in this study, it is important to develop a better understanding of how the customers, through the integration of internal and external brand contacts, forms purchasing decisions. Further research is needed on the ecosystems of customers in their everyday lives and to establish how these determine the integration of contacts and the messages that they convey.

In conclusion, how communication value formation occurs for the individual customer, and the processes by which sources of brand contact become more or less significant in the customer's purchasing decisions, are key issues to be considered in the practice of IMC. Future studies should pursue a broad-based, quantitative format that allows generalisable findings that confirm or refute the findings of the small-scale qualitative study undertaken in this work. As importantly, the unique constructs of IMC that have emerged in this study regarding the dimensions of connectivity should be considered in ensuing work.

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