

WHEN TO MAKE INNOVATION TRADITION? USING SUPPORT MEDIA: A CASE STUDY FROM THE UAE

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ABSTRACT

Emerging countries are embracing a market based culture; locally, service provision by municipal and other government organisations is not well embedded into the consumer and business cultural mindset. These organisations are new to the service provision culture and as their range increases, so must their exposure and reach. In the United Arab Emirates (UAE) some agencies are utilising support media to gain brand awareness. This case study discusses support media's use to gain competitive scope and segment reach. Media Link provides an alternative to traditional media in an effective way within the UAE market.

Keywords: Competitive scope, market reach, support media, advertising and promotion in the UAE, national culture.

INTRODUCTION

The global marketplace consists of a complex set of competitors battling for customers in a rapidly changing environment. Marketers in today's turbulent market recognise customers are an important element in value creation particularly in the provision of services where customers are often an integral part of the production process. Marketers also know that customers' perception of value is relative to their perception of value of competitors' offerings. Hence, offering better perceived value than competitors helps a company create a sustainable competitive advantage (Ho 2010). An equally pressing question for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) especially, relates to competitive scope rather than competitive advantage. Competitive scope includes segment reach and awareness across the spectrum of mass market strategies to niche market strategies. Building brands through maximising awareness does not necessarily focus on

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profitability but on increasing the customer base and therefore the competitive clout of the firm. Their competitive power is necessarily linked to the segments the business will serve, their needs and their geographic location (Mooradian, Matzler & Ring 2012).

To compete within this dynamic market, marketers need to better leverage customers' perception of value through continuous improvement to benefit their existing and potential customers. Service providers in their efforts to achieve improvement should consider Schmenner's (2004) proposition to gain economies of scale and scope by moving from a professional service to a service factory approach. Leaning toward a service factory approach requires that a market of adequate size is priorly established and the existing infrastructure allows for expansion of the range of services (Kass 1998). To achieve this goal market exposure is essential, as is some assurance of superior value as perceived by customers. An important antecedent to the creation of superior value, especially in the services sector, is brand awareness (Armstrong, Kotler & Silva 2006).

Additionally, most customer value studies have been conducted within a business-to-consumer (B2C) background even though for many small operations the business-to-business (B2B) environment is substantially more lucrative than the B2C environment. As claimed by Ulaga (2001), "Research on customer value is of increasing importance in the marketing discipline. Yet, few researchers have investigated the construct and its operationalisation in the business-to-business setting" (p. 319).

This paper explores how brand awareness can be created and customer value delivered by a new advertising firm in a B2B setting, by using an innovative support media. The following sections provide an overview of advertising and other forms of promotion in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) followed by an exploration of the central themes in this paper which are the relationship between national culture, support media and value creation processes in business to business markets.

SUPPORT MEDIA

Traditional advertising and other forms of promotion directed at a mass audience plays a lesser role than previously due to its far higher production costs as weighed against its benefits and its lack of flexibility to respond to today's unpredictable audiences (Pride, Rundle-Thiele, Waller, Elliot, Paladino & Ferrell 2007). Therefore, marketers in countries with well established traditional forms of media are using more creative and innovative ways to advertise their products and services using newly emerging creative support media specifically tailored to their targeted segments. As claimed by Shimp (2010), the result of advertisers' fear that the traditional media such as television advertising is no longer as effective as previously has forced marketers to consider alternate methods including support media to approach their target audience.

A consideration that arises when discussing support media is that the general term 'support media' is difficult to define. Consequently, various researchers provide different sets of definitions and terms when discussing support media. The majority of the researchers (Belch & Belch 2011; O'Guinn, Allen & Semenik 2011; Shimp 2010) claim that support media includes

out-of-home media. Using this parameter it includes any type of advertising that reaches the consumer while they are outside the home (Belch & Belch 2011; O'Guinn et al. 2011). Using this broad definition it follows that media used by marketers to communicate in public places is to be included as support media.

In the last decade, total spending on support media has increased significantly in many countries. As claimed by Nelson and Ebel (2010), advertisers in the United States spend more than six billion dollars per year in support media to reach their target audiences across the nation. The number of support media continues to increase with advertisements appearing in ever increasing sites and in more creative formats. The Outdoor Advertising Association of America (OAAA) groups such forms of promotion into four major categories; billboards, street furniture, transit and alternative (Outdoor Advertising Association of America 2012). Support media has become popular for advertisers in part because these media can be tailored to local markets, hence they can have value to any organisation that wants to reach customers in a particular venue, neighborhood or metropolitan area. This tailored approach means that wastage of the advertising message is likely to be reduced, presenting an appealing incentive for most advertisers.

ESTABLISHING BRAND AWARENESS

Customer value has proven to be a difficult concept to define and measure (Woodruff 1997; Zeithaml 1988). Throughout the decades, authors have proposed various explanations about what customer value actually means. Three different perspectives of customer value, which are broadly accepted among researchers, are presented in the following paragraphs.

The first perspective, value construction, is 'independent of the timing of the use of a market offering' (Parasuraman 1997; Woodruff 1997) and can be considered as a pre or post purchase construct. Most importantly, the judgment, perceptions, preferences and evaluations of customer value will be based on what the customer receives from the supplier during or after the purchase or during the use situation.

The second notion of customer value, desired value, is 'a reflection of what clients would like when interacting with a supplier and using their goods or services', (Flint, Woodruff, & Gardial 1997, 2002). 'This perspective is more towards client wishes, requirements and demands during the buying process. How organisations react or respond will directly affect client perceptions as to how well their needs are met'.

Finally, most researchers judge customer value as 'the results or benefits (of goods or services) customers receive in relation to total costs (such as price paid plus other costs related to the benefits)', (Armstrong et al. 2006; Christopher 1996; Kotler, Adam, Brown & Armstrong 2003; McNaughton, Osborne & Imrie 2002; Pride et al. 2007; Williams 2007; Zeithaml 1988). In simple terms, customer value is value assessment associated with the customer evaluation of the benefits derived from owning the goods or services and compared to the amount of money paid (Ho 2010).

Customer perception of value is more critical with respect to future purchase intention or customer behaviour (McDougall & Levesque 2000). It is more about the assessment of how value can be better created and delivered to customers, and how a supplier's market offering can best reach the target markets or achieve an individual customer's requirement. From a marketer's perspective, it is necessary to take a broad view of value creation and delivery. The case study in this paper provides an example of how a successful marketing organisation can identify and create better value for their client's organisation by using innovative and targeted media such as outdoor promotion in the emerging market of the UAE.

DELIVERY OF CLIENT VALUE WITHIN THE B2B MARKET

In the current B2B market the customer has become more sophisticated, experienced, and technically skilled and competition is heavily drawn from new global players; therefore, marketers should have their marketing strategy strongly focused on creating and delivering customer value. To achieve this marketers firstly have to learn and understand the value requirements of their target market segments, and even the individual customer, and strive to provide better solutions to fulfill the customer's needs. Compared to the consumer market, business markets tend to seek more customisation and are characterized by complex products and complex business structures. In the business market, buyers or purchasing managers buy because of both economic and personal factors. Therefore, customer value is a pivotal factor in business marketing (Armstrong et al. 2006; Eggert & Ulaga 2002; Kotler et al. 2003).

Business buyers are dependent upon the quality of inputs from their suppliers to improve their saleable products and services and to increase the overall profitability of their firm (Ulaga 2001). This is one of the many factors that shape the buying decision process into being more calculated, complex, deliberate and far more formal and controlled than the decision process in consumer markets. Marketers need to understand that business buyers are subject to many influences nested under the major factor of national culture such as 'environmental factors (economic outlook, political and regulatory), client organisational factors (objectives, policies and procedures), interpersonal factors (authority and persuasiveness) and individual factors (personality and job position)' every time they make their buying decisions (Armstrong et al. 2006; Kotler et al. 2003; Pride et al. 2007). All these factors directly influence the B2B customer when perceiving the value provided by their supplier's organisation.

Business buyers are more likely to stay with their existing supplier if they believe that the relative customer value delivered by their current supplier is better than what could be provided elsewhere (Christopher 1996) and more so if switching costs are high. As with final consumers, business clients and suppliers are seeking to maximise value in achieving their organisational goals. The critical considerations in B2B transactions are efficiency, value for money and effectiveness, especially with respect to market reach and exposure. Promotional goals are diverse but for many enterprises market exposure is the first step towards establishing a market base for their products and services. Innovative ways to capture the market interest are frequently being devised but in emerging markets and particular cultural settings the use of support media can be more penetrative than the mainstream media particularly if national culture dimensions are considered.

ADVERTISING AND OTHER PROMOTION IN THE UAE

The UAE is a federation of seven independent states located in the Middle East. The most populated city of the UAE is Dubai, with approximately 1.7 million people follow by Abu Dhabi – the capital of the UAE. In 2010, the UAE's population was 'estimated at 8.2 million, of which less than 20% were UAE nationals or Emiratis' (UAE Interact 2011). Abu Dhabi and Dubai have a multicultural society due to migrant workers and tourism. In the Middle East, there is strong growth in advertising spending and in opportunities to place advertisements in the expanding and developing broadcast and print media (Rice & Al-Mossawi 2002). Both Dubai and Abu Dhabi have been ranked as the top two cities in the Middle East region for quality of life. Foreign companies are attracted to the UAE because there are no corporate taxes and only a 4% flat tariff on imports. Also, a wide range of multinational companies have set up their regional headquarters in the UAE due to the degree of political stability of the country when compared with other Arab Countries.

In the UAE as in all national divisions, culture, custom, religion and tradition have a strong influence on the shaping of the marketing mix and specifically the choice of products and services offered to the market. The majority of Emiratis are Muslim (Hofstede 1994; Kabasakal & Bodur 2002) who are influenced by the Koran in conducting their daily activities (Ali, 1999), and religious beliefs acting as a brake and restraining effect on social and business affairs is considered culturally acceptable. Religion has for many millennia helped define what is proper and fitting, and has frequently prohibited the use of certain marketing appeals (most notably those of a materialistic or sexual nature) within the UAE (Rice & Al-Mossawi 2002). Marketers are well aware of the fact that the advertisement of products (or even access to particular products), are unlikely to be the same in the Middle East as in Europe or North America.

Despite the fact that the UAE is one of the more liberal in the Middle East, there are still some controversies about what should be advertised to the general public. For example, the advertising of contraceptives is forbidden. In brief, any content that is supposed to be against the moral code and social propriety is absolutely not permitted in the UAE leaving marketers to operate cautiously when developing products and campaign content. Whilst there are no religious based objections to the form of medium used to deliver the promotional message there are most certainly cultural influences that dispose both the marketer and the audience to look more favourably upon more traditional forms.

The two primary outlets for advertising in the UAE are daily print publications and satellite television (Buffenmyer 2007). Spending on print advertising is three times greater than satellite television while other traditional media such as radio is an underdeveloped medium in the UAE. Currently, there are approximately only a dozen radio stations in the country. This presents opportunities for marketers to explore the possibilities of using creative and innovative media to better reach their target audience in the UAE.

The following case study seeks to explain how an innovative advertising firm in the UAE assists their clients to reach the target audience in real time by using the support media in the form of trailer-based advertisements. This is informed by discussion on the influence of the national

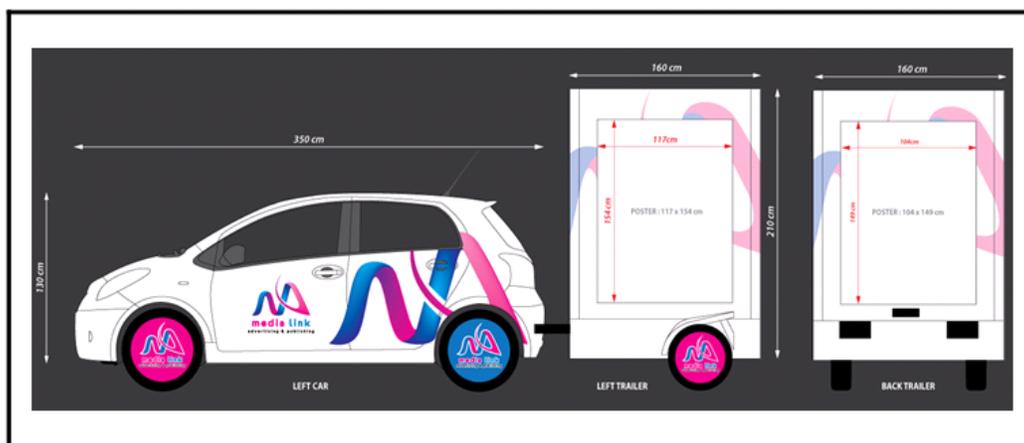
culture as measured by Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, (Hofstede 2001) and supported by recommendations on how perceived limitations within the culture can be overcome.

CASE STUDY – MEDIA LINK ADVERTISING AND PUBLISHING

Media Link Advertising and Publishing (Media Link) established itself in the UAE as the pioneer of trailer based advertisements (see Figure 1). It was founded in June, 2009 in Abu Dhabi. Their original and still in use tagline is 'We'll drive your brand forward'. This is a promise that Media Link constantly endeavours to achieve, in terms of building a strong brand preference for its clients' products. The company is owned by two entrepreneurial brothers who identified a gap in the market for this cost-effective brand awareness method and brand building enterprise specifically targeting SMEs in the services sector. Currently, the company employs 56 staff and runs 12 vehicles shared between the two offices of Media Link in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, the two largest cities in the UAE.

As with many advanced countries and developing countries alike, the use of support media is becoming more common. However, the use of trailer-based advertisements in particular is new to both the advertisers and the general public in the UAE. With the use of trailer-based advertisements, both owners of Media Link believe they can offer clients a highly personalised advertising campaign and give consumers an unexpected marketing medium and an opportunity to interact with the brand. Overcoming national cultural attributes that inhibit the adoption of this innovative medium is therefore of great importance.

Figure 1: Car and trailer advertising



Source: <http://www.medialink.ae/>

The use of trailer-based advertisements come with many advantages. In particular, it is useful for reaching a target audience who may not consume mainstream media such as print or TV (for example, locals, tourists, and business travelers). Also, it can reach anyone who uses the streets arguably, this is almost the entire population. At the same time, the cost of using trailer-based advertisements is relatively low and therefore affordable as compared with the use of other traditional media such as TV and radio (see Table 1), with TV ad rates on average costing \$3,300

for a 30 second slot at peak viewing times (ArabianBusiness.com) with a growth rate for 2011 - 2012 of 5.6 percent.

Table 1: Price of trailer-based advertisement

Advertising Option (per car)	Price One Unit	
	Three Sided Trailer	Car Full Wrap (optional)
One Week	\$6,000 AED (\$1,630 USD)	\$2,900 AED (\$790 USD)

**All fees in relation to printing and designing of the campaign.*

**The advertising will be 10 hours per day during the duration of the contract term.*

Since the launch of the trailer-based advertisements in their served market, the company has successfully attracted many for-profit and non-for-profit organisations to use their vehicles for advertising and promotions. Some of their business clients have included:

- Abu Dhabi Police GHQ
- Al Ahli Club
- Al Ain Municipality
- Emirates College of Technology
- Health & Beauty Polyclinic
- Red Crescent – Eid Adha
- Swedish Medical Center
- Sama Dubai Television
- Sharjah Theatre Group

Media Link believes that through their creative marketing and advertising techniques, the advertiser's brands will more readily be top of mind for their current and potential consumers.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

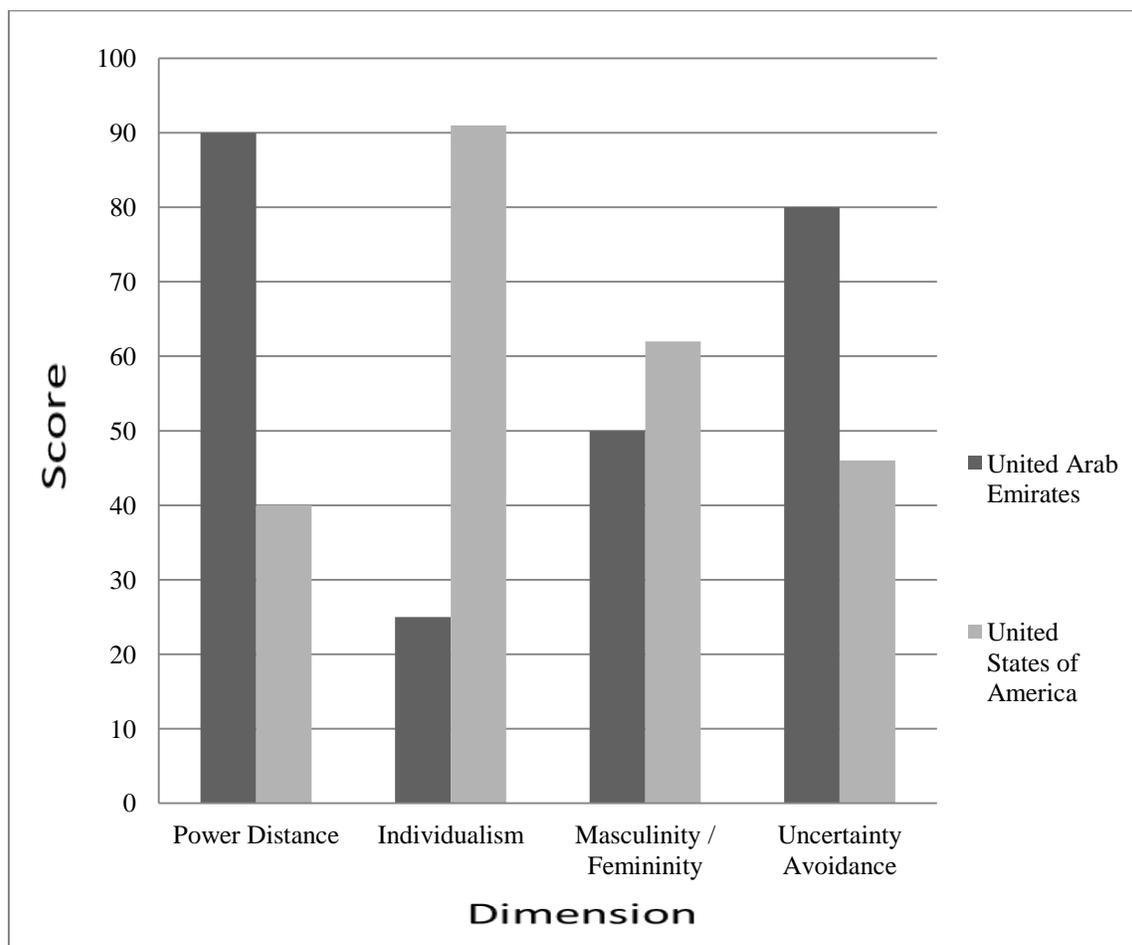
The clients of Media Link mainly comprise service organisations which include government agencies, community organisations and educational institutions in the UAE. For these organisations, some in their infancy, market awareness and brand recognition is the prime goal. Consumers are beginning to embrace the market economy and the expanding range of options that it can provide. Traditional media promotions are used, but these are often not cost effective or in their own way face cultural limitations, and achieve limited reach within the diverse market segments. Support media such as Media Link presents a viable alternative particularly so if its communication is managed to highlight its alignment with the national culture.

The senior managers of Media Link believe that the majority of the SMEs serving local markets have been slow to utilise innovative promotional strategies and largely rely on word-of-mouth. This is consistent with UAE's rating on Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions measure that shows a high score on Uncertainty Avoidance, suggesting greater reliance on the personal aspects of establishing a trusting business relationship. A score high on this dimension indicates that more appropriate communication between Media Link and their customers should contain elements of predictability and consistency such as very limited or no change of sales representatives. The conservative cultural mind set of many small businesses, which are beginning to face competition from many international operators, is a reflection of this national cultural preference and therefore a major influence on business behaviour for both the sell and buy side of the exchange.

Many businesses serving local markets, often with imported products have not been faced with much outside competition and do not undertake brand building or raising awareness as a priority. However, international firms are active in brand establishment strategies, as UAE is for them, a new market. These firms tend to be providing goods rather than services and have tended to rely on traditional media as is consistent when endeavouring to appeal to a culture that desires to avoid new and innovative approaches.

As can be seen in Figure 2, the UAE score is high on the dimensions of power distance and uncertainty avoidance, low on individualism and moderate on the masculinity/femininity measure of Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions. These four dimensions will be discussed in regard to the UAE and the use of support media as used in this case.

Figure 2: Hofstede's cultural dimensions comparison - UAE and USA



Source: <http://geert-hofstede.com>

The first of the dimensions is 'Power' and is defined as the degree of equality of individuals in society as perceived by the less powerful members of that society. UAE's high score of 90 indicates that people accept a strict hierarchical order in which everybody has a place and inherent inequalities are reflected in business systems. Centralisation of business organisations is

popular so it is likely there will be a centralised marketing department and service providers would be advised to have an agent on a commensurate level as the organisational decision maker they approach.

The second dimension is 'Individualism'. In the UAE there is a low score indicating it to be a collectivist federation with an expected high sense of loyalty to any groups to which one belongs including those generated through business. As a newcomer it would be difficult to oust the current provider even with matching or superior service offerings. Greenfield businesses as the 'out' supplier (as described in B2B marketing) would therefore need to offer far superior products or services to be considered as a potential supplier. On this low scoring dimension (25) loyalty to the group is paramount and overrides most other societal rules. To build upon this dimension, businesses would be wise to offer loyalty programs as part of the marketing strategy.

The Masculinity score for UAE is 50, so it is considered a 'masculine' society driven by 'competition, achievement and success, with success being defined by the winner/best in field' (Geert Hofstede Official Site 2012).

To address this dimension the service provider would benefit from providing testimonials showing superlative service. The other aspect of a high score on this dimension is that people live in order to work so it would be advisable to match the service provision to the customer's work processes, for example matching office hours.

Of all the dimensions that of Uncertainty Avoidance is one of the most important in this case analysis. On this dimension UAE scores 80 showing a high preference for avoiding uncertainty. There are rigid codes of belief and intolerance of unorthodox behaviour and ideas. In this context the relative newness of transit advertising should not be emphasised. Instead transit advertising's 20 year international history should be communicated to clients. As innovation may be resisted mobile advertising should not be promoted as innovative and creative, but reliable and predictable. Security is an important element in individual motivation on this dimension so the offer of guarantees and set routes for the transit signs would help to alleviate some of these concerns. The offer of guarantees is more legitimately associated with risk reduction and as discussed by Quintal, Lee and Soutar (2010) is a distinct construct from uncertainty avoidance and although not positively correlated with information search is an important aspect of business to business marketing offers. The development of a business to business relationship in which trust is high would also help to ameliorate concerns about risk and uncertainty. Indeed, Holden (2004) in an effort to replace Hofstede's framework suggests that business culture is more accurately portrayed as a part of an ongoing and developing relationship between business partners and their markets. In the case of trailer advertising using testimonials from satisfied customers as a platform to build trust with new clients would be fitting. This is especially so given the problems with overcoming the incorporeal nature of services such as their non-searchability, abstractness and impalpability (Lovelock, Patterson & Wirtz 2011, p.236).

CONCLUSION

In the UAE, national culture, custom, religion and tradition seem to have great influence on products and services in the market as well as the way business operations are conducted. Over the last decade there has been a shift towards the 'westernisation' of the market but many national cultural barriers to Western marketing styles still exist, especially in the way promotional activity is conducted. The services provided by Media Link is clearly a market driven approach and provides a cost effective alternative means of introducing products and services to the market.

A successful marketing policy in the UAE and other Middle East countries should be approached in a strategic way. That is mindful of the social and cultural limitations faced by both traditional media and more innovative media providers. In a short time Media Link has captured a niche in the services market and provided its clients with wide market reach and exposure. The strategy used by Media Link has been based on personal selling and networking with the client organisations as consistent with Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions model.

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