

The Impact of Marketing Communications on Consumer Behavior in The Saudi Arabian Telecom Industry

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Abstract

Marketing plays a central role in helping organizations retain existing customers and attract new ones in an increasingly competitive and rapidly evolving environment. Advances in communication technologies have expanded the ability of firms to reach and engage consumers through a mix of traditional and digital channels. This study investigates how Saudi telecom operators leverage these channels to influence consumer behavior, shape perceptions, and stimulate purchasing decisions. A qualitative case study methodology was adopted, incorporating four in-depth, semi-structured interviews with marketing communication and product management specialists from major local telecom operators. These interviews provided rich, practitioner-level insights into strategic communication practices. The primary data were complemented by secondary sources, including industry reports and prior academic literature, and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and to compare them with established theories of marketing communication and consumer behavior. The results show a strong and purposeful relationship between marketing communication channels and consumer behavioral responses. Telecom operators in Saudi Arabia are increasingly dependent on digital platforms - particularly social media - for targeted engagement, real-time interaction, and influencing consumer motivations at the consideration stage. Meanwhile, traditional channels such as television and outdoor advertising continue to dominate large-scale brand-building campaigns due to their broad reach and credibility. The findings further reveal that communication style, message framing, and cross-channel

integration play an essential role in shaping consumer attitudes, perceptions, and intentions. Consumers' motivations are driven primarily by utilitarian factors such as pricing, network coverage, and data speed; however, emotional and hedonic elements are strategically incorporated to reinforce brand identity and enhance customer affinity. Overall, the study underscores the critical importance of marketing communication in shaping consumer behavior within the Saudi telecom industry and highlights the deliberate strategic alignment between communication activities and desired behavioral outcomes.

Keywords: Marketing Communication, consumer behavior, Traditional marketing, Digital marketing, and Communication Channels

Introduction

The varied marketing strategies adopted by local Saudi telecom operators make it crucial to inform them about effective marketing communication practices and how to integrate them to alter behavioral patterns. Operators must understand when and how to use specific marketing channels to target different customer groups and send and receive different messages.

Background and Area of Focus

Being an employee in the marketing department in a telecom company that recently has gotten a unified communication license from the Communication and Information Technology Commission CITC, after 10 years of serving the business sector, has opened eyes to work closely with understanding the consumer market, its competitive landscape, and marketing communications activities that are conducted to drive growth in revenues from the consumer sector.

The importance of the marketing communication concept in the telecom sector stems from its ability to influence and shape consumer behavior. In the telecom sector, marketing communication has become an essential part of organizations seeking wealth and success. Telecom organizations recognized the importance of marketing communications channels in influencing consumer behavior to increase revenue, especially after the Saudi initiative to diversify economic sources. Consequently, telecom companies in Saudi Arabia spend billions of riyals on various marketing activities to attract consumers to their products and increase their market share.

In 1990, marketing channels and sources were limited to traditional marketing communications tools such as newspapers, TV, Radio, and Magazines. However, technological development has helped change consumer behavior across different channels. Moreover, it has changed the

way organizations communicate with consumers. Thus, the increasing number of channels changed how organizations handle different behaviours.

One of the steps is first to understand the relationship between marketing communication and consumer behavior. Hence, this step can be accomplished by an academic dissertation that understands these relationships and emphasizes the models of both marketing communication and consumer behavior in the consumer sector.

Research Question

To identify the local marketing communication models most adopted by telecom operators in Saudi Arabia to influence consumer behavior and motivation toward telecom services, the research will answer the question of how marketing communication impacts consumer behavior in the telecom industry in Saudi Arabia.

Research Objective

The purpose of this study is to identify the relationship between marketing communication and consumer behaviour by highlighting the factors that influence consumer behaviour and the strategies adopted by the marketing communication department in the telecom industry to encourage consumers to buy new products and services. The research aims to analyse the relationship between marketing communication and consumer behaviour.

Theoretical Framework

Various studies have examined the relationship between marketing communication and consumers in general, such as Oancea (2015), who developed a model of Integrated marketing communication and identified the role of influencers in consumer behavior. Keller (2009) identified approaches to building brands in the modern marketing communication environment, and many other scholars in this field identified the factors in consumer behavior that can be influenced and the models of marketing communications that serve to influence behavior in the telecom sector. The theory of planned behavior by Ajzen (1991) shows how human behavior is being shaped, Maslow, (1954) negotiates the hierarchy of human needs that must be taken in consideration when organizations want to deal with humans whether to sell or to announce messages, these theories have helped the researcher to understand what is behind human behavior to understand the complexity of the relationship between marketing communication and consumer behavior.

Method of Research

This research employs a qualitative case study approach and draws on multiple sources of evidence to address the main research question. The

primary method of data collection consists of semi-structured interviews with staff from the marketing communication and product management departments of major Saudi telecom operators. To complement the primary data, the study also incorporates findings from previous research in the same field, as well as relevant bank and industry reports on telecom operators in the Kingdom.

To address sampling concerns, participants were selected through purposive sampling, targeting individuals with direct involvement in marketing communication planning, campaign execution, and product strategy. This approach ensured that each participant possessed the expertise necessary to provide rich and relevant insights. Four interviews were conducted in total, reflecting representation from different telecom operators. Each interview followed a semi-structured format, using an interview guide covering topics such as communication channel selection, message design, campaign objectives, consumer response, and cross-channel integration. Interviews were conducted either in person or virtually, depending on participant availability. They ranged from 45 to 60 minutes and were audio-recorded (with the participants' consent) and then transcribed verbatim for analysis.

The study applied a thematic analysis framework. The analytical process involved: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts, (2) generating initial codes reflecting communication practices and consumer behavioral outcomes, (3) grouping codes into broader themes, (4) comparing themes with insights drawn from secondary sources, and (5) interpreting the findings in relation to established theories of marketing communication and consumer behavior.

By detailing the sampling process, interview procedures, and analytical steps, the methodological description now provides sufficient transparency and structure to allow replication and meet qualitative research standards.

Analysis of the Research

Interviews with Saudi telecom operators are recorded, and the findings are analyzed against the literature review and reports on the telecom industry. Quotes of the interviewee are used to identify the differences in strategies among operators. The operator name is not mentioned in the discussion and data analysis chapter; instead, the company name is replaced by codes, for example, the market leader is named as Company A, the second entrant is named as Company B, the third entrant is named as Company C, and Business Provider, an early entrant to consumer segment is named as Company D.

Key Concepts of the Study

This article examined the relationships among marketing communication, cross-marketing, consumer behavior, and consumer motivation and illustrated that marketing communication is strongly linked to consumer behavior. The study answered the main question: which models are most adopted by telecom players for marketing communication activities. There is a clear sign that local players consider consumer behavior when designing their marketing campaigns. Thus, most of their marketing activities are behavior-driven and aimed at increasing consumers' motives to purchase telecom services. Print media as a marketing channel appears to be dead and replaced by digital blogs and news websites. TV and Outdoor communication channels are still active, though telcos' spending on them has decreased dramatically compared with last year. Social media platforms and video communities have replaced reliance on TV channel advertisements and are primarily used to shape and influence consumer behavior.

Chapter II: Literature review

Introduction

In this literature review, the author will expand on the external and internal factors that influence consumer motivations, thereby informing the design of an effective marketing communication strategy. Additionally, to create marketing content that captures consumers' attention in the telecom sector. However, choosing the right communication channel and style depends on understanding these factors to establish profitable customer relationships through integrated marketing communication (Keller, 2009).

The researcher will discuss the concepts of marketing communication and consumer behavior, focusing on motivation - the motor of human behavior - and on communication style, which is designed to influence consumer behavior. Consequently, different theories and models of marketing communication that profoundly influence consumer behavior to purchase telecom services are explored. The author will identify the various marketing concepts and effects that construct the communication style that governs the relationships between marketing communication and consumer behavior.

Marketing communication style and motivation have been found to interact to shape consumer behavior. The importance of consumer behavior stems from its relation to marketing communication. Thus, understanding it will help in creating an effective marketing communication plan.

Marketing communication

Marketing communication is an efficient way to influence consumer decision-making through the messages they receive from their brands. These messages should be behaviorally driven. According to Blythe (2000),

communication is the process of converting the original messages into symbols that can be understood by the receiver when shared in a common language.

Schultz, D.E. et al (1993) defined IMC as the strategic framework within the marketing function that plans the various marketing activities to provide clarity, consistency, and substantial impact on consumers, thereby affecting consumer behavior in purchasing telecom products/services. McArthur & Griffin (1997) defined marketing communication as a tool to reach consumers. Duncan & Everett (1993); Duncan & Moriarty (1998) described IMC as a way of communicating with customers using a single voice. Garber & Dotson (2002) defined their role as providing consistent efforts that unify the organization and reduce the risk of consumer choice in the service sector, using all available communication tools. Oancea (2015) defined IMC as the strategic process used by different business types to design, develop, and execute persuasive, measurable marketing messages for potential or existing consumers. Gronstedt (2000) described IMC as the strategic processes organizations use to create healthy, lasting, and profitable relationships with stakeholders.

Howard-Sheth (1969) developed a model that assumes consumers classify the inputs to their buying process before deciding on a purchase. After extensive empirical research, Howard-Sheth identified four types of stimuli that help consumers during the procurement process: external sources of information and critical stimuli that provide information about product characteristics, such as quality, price, and features. Symbolic stimuli that include information transmitted from visuals and symbols to the mind of consumers, and Social stimuli, which involve the social sources of information that can be from family and friends.

Marketing communication, as a result, and by agreement of the previous theories in the field, is considered to be the strategic tool in the marketing function that shows the entire picture of the organization using one uniform voice directed to improve the organizational positioning in the market and influence consumer buying behavior in various ways to accomplish revenue growth.

Communication style

Williams and Spiro (1985) advanced the concept of communication style as a significant factor influencing consumer behavior. Different communication styles - colorful, less colorful, passive, personal, energetic, etc. - can trigger different consumer responses and influence the receiver's behavior. Thus, communication style plays a vital role in transferring messages that reliably represent consumers. Chang (2005) highlighted that the congruence between the marketing message image and the consumer's ideal

self is directly linked to and influential on consumer behavior toward brands. Marketing messages are designed to trigger changes in consumers' needs, which are shaped by their norms, values, and focus on their cognitive and affective states.

Emotions are feelings that occur and provide information about human relationships with the surrounding environment and explain the interpretations occurring in these relationships (Achar et al., 2016). Jovanovic et al. (2016) explained two main appeals of marketing messages: rational or emotional, depending on the impact marketers seek to produce in consumers' minds. Rational appeals can be called logical or informative. These appeals highlight the main characteristics of a product, its prices, and the benefits consumers gain. In contrast, emotional appeals are directed to influence consumers emotionally. They may be used to provoke fear or stimulate positive emotions, depending on the product type. I disagree with the research by Kazmi and Batra (2009), which found that emotional appeals cannot be used with products with technical characteristics, because emotional appeals can be used in different situations and with a variety of products and brands. It is not only used to stimulate the motive to purchase. I argue that emotional appeals can stimulate consumers' motives to be loyal to brands, or to be more engaged with it. For example, Procter & Gamble created an advertisement that emphasizes the importance of mothers taking care of children participating in the Olympic Games and getting injured to promote their various consumer goods, while also strengthening the brand image in consumers' minds. The same applies to the services sector; emotional styles are used to influence consumers' loyalty to a brand. As a result, it is not necessarily that companies use emotional appeals to spur consumer intention to purchase. However, rational appeals provide information about the brand; their role is only to present facts so consumers can compare marketed products to competitors with the same functionality. Therefore, the use of rational appeals in marketing is primarily intended to provide consumers with information. On the other hand, the role of emotional appeals is to influence the purchase intention or to stimulate and produce feelings towards a product. For example, stimulating social or personal feelings can be achieved by distributing emotional appeals across different marketing channels. Personal feelings include security, safety, fear, love, attraction, excitement, and pleasure. While social feelings occur across various social circles, for example, feelings of belonging, recognition, and respect. According to Jovanovic et al (2016), emotional appeals can be classified into positive and negative appeals. Positive emotional appeals highlight the advantages and benefits of using the product, while negative emotional appeals highlight the dangers and risks of not using it, which spurs a fear motive and emphasizes the need to purchase the marketed product. Schwarz et al (1991) stated that consumers' emotional states influence the

strategies they use to process received marketing messages, and thus consumers prefer responding to emotionally toned messages. Kang et al (2014) stated that focusing on hedonic benefits when sharing marketing messages - such as fun, enjoyment, and pleasure - will increase consumer engagement and participation with those messages when shared on traditional or non-traditional media. Furthermore, the more energetic and conversational the communication style, the greater the firm's financial benefits. Hence, focusing on consumers' hedonic value will foster a healthy relationship between consumers and brands, thereby increasing customer retention over the long term. This will establish the brand in the customer's mind and memory, enabling positive behaviors.

Use of Cross-Media Channel

The use of cross-media channels by telecom operators to announce marketing messages is essential. Naik & Raman (2003) noted that utilizing different media to publish marketing messages would increase company sales. On the contrary, Dijkstra et al. (2005) highlighted that the use of multi-marketing channels might negatively affect the effectiveness of marketing messages and dissipate consumer attention. Differences in consumer behavioral characteristics and demographic characteristics shape the media choice of consumers.

Information Processing

Understanding how consumers process information for specified marketing messages is crucial for choosing the appropriate marketing option for message announcement and for marketing communication planning. To design marketing communication plans, marketers should consider communication options, though effective, during the processing of information presented, and manage relationships with one another (Batra & Keller, 2016). Furthermore, marketers should be able to understand which marketing option mix is suitable for a particular customer type, brand, etc. They should use distinct yet easily processed marketing options.

MacInnis & Jaworski (1989) argue that the understanding of the different processing mechanisms will help in marketing communication planning. Various information processing models focus on consumers' mental processes and mindsets; they measure consumers' ability to understand marketing communication messages. Marketers should be able to produce knowledge, behavior, and attitude through marketing messages. Once messages can provide insight, precise, continuous, and positive responses and views, they are called compelling marketing messages. Consumers' processing of information depends on the characteristics of the marketing message, such as the amount of knowledge it provides, the feelings, emotions, and judgments

it elicits. Consequently, communication processing is critical for identifying changes in learning about a particular brand and for determining the effects of the marketing message on consumers, thereby informing subsequent handling. Thus, the content of marketing messages should concentrate on simplifying content processing in the mind of consumers. For example, the design should use different symbols that help convey the message more comfortably in consumers' minds. Using simple words in the content will also simplify consumers' understanding of marketing messages and, therefore, help achieve desirable results.

Knowledge and marketing communication

Knowledge is the basis for understanding consumer behavior, and it is crucial to know how consumers seek information. Newman & Staelin (1972) stressed that understanding search behavior is significant for planning marketing communication strategies. Demographic factors such as education and experience play a significant role in understanding how people search for information. Information technology is a fast-growing field where many products are placed quickly. Surprisingly, consumers love staying up to date with ICT developments. Information and research about ICT products are profoundly affected by education. Donthu & Garcia (1999) highlighted that less educated people will have difficulty searching the internet, indicating they will have trouble understanding ICT products and services, particularly the more complex ones, such as cloud computing. Less experienced researchers tend to be more information seekers than highly skilled professionals.

Furse et al. (1984) stressed that experience negatively impacts the information search. On the other hand, Jacoby et al (1978) found that purchase experience reduces information search. However, by considering individuals' search behavior and the sources of knowledge, organizations can design messages aligned with consumers' search preferences. Whether companies use physical or online stores, understanding human motivations is critical to meeting consumers' demands. Blackwell et al. (2006) highlighted that consumer demand can come from two sources: first, external sources, such as product characteristics that guide consumers toward fulfilling a specific purpose; and second, internal sources that steer consumers toward hedonic benefits, such as experience, attainment, and comfort.

Consumer Behavior

Scholars, social scientists, and psychologists have done extensive research about consumer behavior and the significant predictors of attitudes by innovating consumer behavior-related theories and practices in the different fields of social studies. According to Ajzen (1991), one of the theories that explains the formation of human behaviors, attitudes, and habits

is the theory of planned behavior, which holds that human behavior is mainly determined by intentions to perform specific actions. Intentions are presumed to capture the motivational factors that drive human behavior. In other words, it is the primary predictor of the efforts humans can make to produce behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1969). The Theory of Planned Behavior is a development of the theory of reasoned action by Ajzen and Fishbein (1969) in the late 60's, which analyzes the relationship between human intentions and behavior. Human intention leads individuals to engage in specific behavior; this is called behavioral intention.

According to Webster et al. (1994), consumer attitudes can determine behavioral intentions and the subjective norms associated with the behavior, and they are related to personal feelings toward performing a specific action. Thus, the Consumer behavior setting is formed by the antecedent events that led to the behavior in the first place. Learning experiences, punishments for wrong choices, or reinforcements that lead to attainment will influence consumer behavior.

Anderson and Sullivan (1993) and Schiffman & Kanuk (1997) argued that economic theory is the basis for all types of consumer decisions, in which consumers seek to get the most out of organizations at the lowest prices when they intend to purchase products and services. Consequently, organizations should align their products and services with consumers' expectations and perceptions to achieve consumer loyalty and satisfaction. Robinson (2009) demonstrated that the effectiveness of marketing communication lies in integrating all marketing communication tools across all stages of the consumer purchase decision process. Marketers should direct their messages to consumers in various ways to alter consumer behavior and reveal the efficiency of marketing communication. According to Algesheimer et al. (2005), consumers interpret communication messages differently, so to demonstrate effectiveness, companies should tailor their messages to different audiences through various channels and focus on the most profitable channels. For example, focusing heavily on traditional forms of communication while forgetting the influence of digital channels may not always be a good idea. Thus, we cannot neglect the Importance of digital communication channels. Social media, mobile marketing, email marketing, and web-based marketing are considered less costly than traditional channels and can quickly reach large numbers of targeted consumers. However, content in digital marketing channels should stimulate favorable behaviors. It is not necessarily that content should only contain offers and promotions for telecom services and provide benefits-based content; more importantly, it should focus on stimulating different behaviors that lead to purchase.

Marketing messages should be crafted to manipulate consumer behavior in ways that help organizations grow, enabling companies to plan

marketing communication strategies that target different behavioral characteristics. Thus, marketers should develop messages that emphasize the actual needs of humans for telecom services by addressing factors that affect human behavior.

Consumer Motivation

The concept of motivation in human behavior is derived mainly from Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Maslow (1954) initiated the humanistic theory, postulating that natural human needs are built up of psychological needs, such as Safety, Hunger, and thirst, which evolve to different levels of needs gradually as required upon completion of basic needs of this hierarchy, and then move toward psychological needs such as belongingness, recognition, love, and esteem. Maslow's theory is the basis of human motivation; the different needs of humans are the primary drivers of their motives to purchase specific products or services. However, at any given time, when motivation arises in a human, one of these need categories will emerge more quickly than the others, a phenomenon called a prepotent need.

Prestont et al (2014) proposed that there are two general categories of motives in humans, ultimate and proximate. Proximate motives are the main reasons for purchasing a product or responding to a marketing message in a particular way. Additionally, all products purchased by consumers are influenced by proximate motives. Such proximate motives include preferences, social norms, values, feelings, and incentives. According to Preston et al (2014), focusing solely on proximate factors of buying behavior is insufficient without an ultimate explanation. The ultimate motives in humans are evolutionary-based; they explain that human behavior is composed of multiple motive systems. The author categorized the motive systems into self-protection, disease avoidance, affiliation, status, mate retention, mate acquisition, and kin care. Each motive system is activated by different events in human life, producing cues that spur human tendencies to act in certain ways. These two categories of motivation are connected, and neither can explain human behavior without the other. Ultimate motives, or, in other words, ancestral motives, are the shaping forces of modern consumer preferences and decision-making.

Understanding motivation requires marketers to question why consumers behave the way they do. Before understanding why consumers act the way they do, we should realize that motivation is the process of satisfying a need that has been aroused in the consumer's mind. However, marketing is the effort to meet these needs by developing products and services that respond to them and create value for customers. Psychologists negotiate the classification of human needs. Bayton (1958) classified psychogenic needs into three broad categories. First, affectional needs - those needs closely

related to human emotional states - create warmth and compatibility with others. Ego-bolstering needs which create the state of enhancement in human personality, and in another way, these human needs to dominate and control others through personality traits. Ego-defensive needs are the third category of needs classified by Bayton (1958). These needs are the protection of personality when dealing with others and require humans to avoid any psychological harm to their character.

Motivation is the central driver of human behavior derived from personal needs. Therefore, marketers' messages should target these needs to appeal to different consumers' motivation patterns. Bayton (1958) stated that human behavior can be classified into three categories: motivation, cognition, and learning. Motivation is defined as the "urges, wishes, and desires" of an individual to initiate a behavior and is considered the motor of human behavior. Cognition is the mental process that occurs when dealing with specific brands and is mainly based on consumer experiences; these processes can include memory, perception, judgment, and learning. Therefore, these three concepts - motivation, cognition, and learning - are interrelated in a way that one cannot occur without the others. Thus, marketers should be able to extract these factors in their messages to consumers.

The change in consumer behavior was driven by external stimuli. For example, for consumers to be motivated by a message, there should be a prior relationship with the brand in their minds. If this contact did not occur before, consumers should learn about it through external stimuli prepared by organizations, such as advertising.

The source of motivation

Belk, Askegaard, & Scott (2012) assumed that motivation is a social character shaped by desires. Desire is the interaction between the social environment and individuals, composed of wants and needs, and it contributes to a consumer's behavior by satisfying either hedonic or utilitarian needs. Utilitarian needs might be identified by examining the tangible attributes of products. On the other hand, hedonic needs are more evident through products that produce excitement, self-confidence, or fantasy for individuals. Telecom services are considered to meet both utilitarian and hedonic needs, but the messages communicated to consumers emphasize a more utilitarian than a hedonic view of products and services.

Categorizing needs depends on the value it brings to individuals. Some needs relate to power and control over others. While other needs concern people who desire to be different from others, for example, the need for uniqueness. Uniqueness appears in the tangible products arena, such as using a luxury car. I assume the need for specificity is not limited to physical products; it should also apply to messages from telecom services, and most of

the content written should reveal this attribute to people using telecom services. In the telecom industry, consumers should be differentiated by the messages they receive to purchase the service. Therefore, messages sent to a group must be considered directed to each individual in the group.

Types of Human Motivations

Ryan and Deci (2000) propose that human motivation can be classified into two types: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation occurs when humans are highly engaged with things that are naturally enjoyable, and there is no need for external stimuli to stimulate their feelings toward them. For example, for a player, it is naturally enjoyable; there should be no external reinforcement. In contrast, extrinsic motivation occurs when external reinforcement or punishment is provided by the surrounding environment. In the telecom services scenario, motivation can be extrinsic through loyalty programs and gift items based on daily usage, or intrinsic through hedonic images in messages communicated to customers to create intrinsically motivated consumers.

The role of motivation in message Involvement

The strong relationship between consumers and brands is called involvement, and involvement is part of motivation, as motivation is the motor that drives the satisfaction of consumer needs. Consumers ignore information that might not meet their needs, while, on the other hand, they may engage with information that is useful for attaining specific goals; this is called involvement. As mentioned in the marketing communication section, the effort put into seeking information about a brand depends mainly on the level of consumer involvement with a specific name. Different levels of engagement, shaped by consumer motivations to read about some products and services, are highly dependent on access to information about a particular brand. Consumers mainly seek a safer choice over an unknown one because they lack knowledge about unknown products. There are different marketing strategies to increase consumer involvement. For example, engaging consumers in creating the content they like in telecom messages, or developing spectacles that contain joyful substances and fun stories, to spark imagination by telling consumers about the benefits they gain from owning the product. These efforts are said to encourage consumer message involvement and motivate consumers from diverse backgrounds to search for the product and become highly involved with it (Solomon et al. 2016). More emphasis has been put by Sheehan, and Morrison (2009) compared the effectiveness of traditional and online communication channels. They found that the effectiveness of traditional channels has decreased dramatically after the release of online media. This is because consumers became more engaged with

brands evaluated by friends and family, and thus online reviews have helped the trend of online media evolve more than traditional media.

Consumer Motivation Toward Social Media Marketing

The popularity of social media sites, especially in the Arab world and around the globe, has made it mandatory for companies to use these platforms as marketing communication tools. The high adoption of social media has made it sometimes more powerful than other traditional marketing tools. Hence, companies' investment in social media has risen dramatically compared to other traditional marketing activities due to its lower cost and high reach. Social media sites allow users to present themselves and establish and maintain relationships with others. Kwon et al. (2014) emphasized that there are four primary motivations to follow brands in social networking sites: "to seek incentives, social interaction, usage/ likeability, and information seeking". Other motivational studies have highlighted the main reasons consumers adopt social networking sites. For example, Dholakis et al. (2004) focused on five main reasons to adopting social networking sites: purposive value, self-detection, human social interconnectivity, social enhancement, and entertainment. These five motivations are major drivers of individuals' use and participation in social media sites. The purposive value, such as informational value, has made it clear that companies should establish a social media presence for those motivated by information. Thus, organizations began establishing their presence to share product-related information with followers, considering consumer motivations to attract as many followers as possible. In return, these followers will drive brand popularity with their friends, family members, and community, so the company's products will get high popularity and reachability in a short time.

Social networking sites offer a new landscape for companies' marketing communications activities, where consumers take on the role of marketers and companies act as observers of products and services' messages. Sheehan & Morrison (2009) and Mulhern (2009) suggested that marketing communication practices have changed by social networking from message execution to expanding consumer understanding. Marketing communication on social media has further expanded the purpose of message communication to a view of consumers as content creators rather than viewers. Messages communicated through social media are created after understanding consumers' ambitions and needs. Content is created on social networking sites based on consumers' willingness and attitudes regarding when it should be released.

Gao & Feng (2016) covered 35 countries and concluded that 50% of social media users are connected to brands, 42% communicate with brands on social media, and 36% write posts about brands or companies. However, given

the large number of people using social media platforms, we should be able to identify the preferred content types for each platform. Facebook and Twitter are the most widely used platforms in the world, attracting businesses, political, non-governmental, and non-profit organizations to use social media as a communication tool for users worldwide.

Facebook and Twitter were text-based services that focused on written content rather than images when they were established. Russmann & Svensson (2016) analyzed how social media evolved to enable people to share videos and images more effectively than Facebook and Twitter. The use of images & Videos, over time, became a necessity for different users and organizations.

A new platform called Instagram has been created to fill this gap. The prevalence of images and videos on Instagram has made it very popular worldwide, including in the Middle East. Organizations increased its spending on Instagram in the Middle East, besides Facebook and Twitter, due to the simplicity of the platform and its visual communication features, that is more effective than other platforms. Russmann & Svensson (2016) emphasized the importance of visual communication to users, as it enhances how information is disseminated and used, and how text is understood. Visual communication is the ability to convey messages in iconic form. It plays a complementary role, helping people understand the text and suggesting a reality that builds consumer trust. Furthermore, the use of images helps users achieve coherence in their communication messages more quickly. Blair (1996) and Fahmy, et al (2014) elaborated more on visual communication. They added that the use of images grabs consumers' attention and retention more than text communication. Its eloquent impact on consumers, enabling marketers to create frequent relationships, enhances consumers' views toward different products and services. Additionally, visual communication images help enhance emotional appeals and enlarge brand images in consumers' minds; when used with text, they are suggested to be more effective than standalone images. However, as a visual communication platform, Instagram enables users to upload pictures and videos, with text attached to images and videos only; users cannot post text as a standalone message, which distinguishes Instagram from other social media platforms.

Users of Instagram comprise two groups: posters and followers. Posters are the companies, and followers are the platform's normal users. In the Middle East, Instagram is primarily used by middle-aged women and serves as a marketing channel to showcase companies' products and services.

Chapter III: Data Analysis and Discussion

Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher will highlight the Saudi telecom market landscape, introduce the cases of local telecom providers in Saudi Arabia, and their marketing communication practices, taking into consideration their presence in Saudi Arabia, year of establishment, service offerings, and their position as market players. For ethical reasons, companies' names will not be revealed, and instead each company will be interviewed, differentiated with a letter as follows:

Company Status	Company Code
Market Leader	Company A
Second Entrant to the market	Company B
Third Entrant	Company C
Business Provider, early entrant to consumer segment.	Company D

Analysis of data collected from interviews and documents will be conducted, and the findings will be further analysed against the earlier literature review to evaluate marketing communication in practice and the extent of its compliance with academic standards. Furthermore, the research will analyse marketing communication on social media in the telecom industry in Saudi Arabia, using local players' channels, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, and link these practices to consumer behaviour. Kozinets (2010) proposed a new research methodology that plays an excellent role alongside interviews, focus groups, and other methodological approaches. This methodology is called netnography. Netnography is defined as the analysis of people's natural communication in a digital media context. It is a way of discovering people's responses to different digital posts, thereby enabling the researcher to differentiate between real and fake consumer responses. Additionally, this study will present data on the relationship between marketing communication and consumer behavior, particularly how marketing communication plans incorporate consumer behavior factors.

The data were collected through interviews with local major telecom players in the market. Also, the data collected in this study from research documents were released by other university students who have discussed this topic in more detail. Additionally, the researcher used published reports from banks and financial groups. These three sources of evidence used in the article will help the researcher gain a clearer view of the marketing communication practices of local telecom players. The questionnaire used to research this relationship contains 15 questions. In the findings chapter, the presentation of the results and analysis of all interviews.

Saudi Telecom Landscape

Al Jazira Capital (2016) noted that the Saudi Telecom sector began 2016 with slow economic growth, driven by weak oil prices, new fingerprint registration requirements for SIM card subscribers, low growth in telecom services, and declining government spending. Mobile subscribers stood at around 54 million, with a 171% penetration rate, while mobile data subscribers stood at 36 million in 2015, driven by low mobile data subscription prices and increased promotional offers following the entry of new mobile operators into the industry. Fixed Broadband subscriptions have shown significant growth in recent years, with a high household penetration rate of 53%. The local telecom providers consist of three main operators, A, B, and C, and Company D is expected to enter the Fixed broadband market as a new entrant in late 2017. Market share is still considered to be a major issue among local operators with company A occupying 49 – 52% of the market, while the remaining 48% of the market is distributed among companies B, C & D according to Jubran, 2016; Abaalkhail, & Potrik 2016) Company C market share stood at 23% depicting a subscriber base of 12.4 million subscribers, leaving company B with around 25 – 28% market share.

Company A

Company A was established in 1998 as the first telecom service provider in Saudi Arabia, expanded to become the number one operator in the Middle East, and now has a presence in more than 9 countries. It serves more than 27 million subscribers in Saudi Arabia. The company demonstrated strong financial stability in 2014, generating more than \$12 billion, according to Riyadh Bank (2015). After its success in the Saudi market, the company identified strong opportunities in Gulf markets with strong economic and population growth, such as Kuwait and Bahrain. It acquired 100% ownership of a famous telecom company in Kuwait.

According to Nazar (2015), Company A spent approximately \$1 billion on marketing activities in 2014 and is forecast to spend \$1.84 billion in 2018. Company A utilizes both traditional marketing channels, such as TV, Radio, Magazines, and Outdoor, and digital marketing channels, including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The company began increasing its spending on social media channels during 2015 and 2016, publishing messages mainly on Twitter to attract Saudi consumers, Instagram to attract Female consumers, and Facebook for the expatriate segment. Additionally, it established its presence on YouTube by creating a channel to publish TV-advertisement videos, measuring the effectiveness of its ads and better understanding consumers' reactions to the videos, since the platform is interactive. Company A marketing channels used according to Prince Mohammed bin Fahad

University study conducted by Al-Dossary et al. (2012), as shown in the table below:

Communication Channels	Percentage of budget for 2012
Advertising	60%
Sales Promotion	25%
Events	10%
Direct Marketing	5%

Company A Marketing channels use (Al-Dossary et al., 2012)

In the same study, the writer concluded that 60% of company A's budget is dedicated to advertising and distributed across different channels, while the sales promotion budget is 25%. The remaining 15% is distributed to direct marketing and events. Accordingly, Company A considers advertising as the primary marketing form for the consumer segment, followed by sales promotions, which were continuously launched throughout the year for voice and data services. Events and direct marketing, however, are used to target business consumers.

According to AlDossary at al. (2012), Company A spent 50% of the dedicated advertising budget on TV, 20% on radio advertising, while on newspapers, magazines, and social networking, Company A spent around 10% for each activity. After the meeting with Company A, it was decided to reduce newspaper advertising, and only a very small amount is spent on it.

I think the company considers TV advertising the baseline for its advertising activities, followed by other channels, because TV and outdoor channels deliver a higher return on investment than other media. According to this study, the company is currently reconsidering social media marketing as an alternative to traditional marketing channels such as newspapers and magazines.

The researcher will investigate Company A's presence in traditional and digital media in the following sections. Additionally, he will analyze how Company A relates its marketing activities to consumer behavior.

Company B

Company B is the second telecom operator in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, founded in December 2004, and was granted a telecom license by the Communication and Information Technology Commission. Like Company A, Company B offers voice communication and data services to its consumers. Customers of company B are divided into two segments: business customers and individual consumers. At the beginning, Company B focused on the consumer segment and established its presence through robust marketing communications. Company B began focusing on its competitor's weaknesses, which mainly consist of after-sales services, high prices, and poor customer

experience. It benefited from consumers suffering for a long time under company A. The entrance of Company B enhanced the telecom industry competitiveness, reduced the prices of voice minutes and data packages, making them accessible to everyone. Company B, four years after its entry, announced that it had deployed telecom infrastructure across the entire kingdom. It was the first provider to offer 3G data packages to consumers (Arab News, 2007). At the start of its operations, Company B faced several challenges, including high debt with local and international banks, poor service quality in some areas of the kingdom, and poor customer experience. However, by that time, Company B had enhanced its quality of service to some extent by focusing on improving customer service quality in its call center.

Company B uses both traditional and digital marketing communication channels. In the beginning, the focus on tradition was high because social media was less prevalent than it is now. TV marketing messages mainly focused on the pain points local consumers face from its only competitor. The TV campaigns launched by Company B at the start of its operations were aimed at attracting competitors' customers by highlighting competitors' weaknesses and shortfalls in providing excellent customer and telecom services. For example, Company B launched TV ads claiming that competitors' routers were of poor quality and transmitted weaker signals than Company B's routers. However, the competition between the two companies through TV advertisements was evident and tough.

Company C

Company C is an international telecom provider based in Kuwait and entered the Saudi market in 2008. The company sells voice and data packages to businesses and consumers. When the company first entered the market, it faced several challenges. It paid the highest license price to enter a market with highly established competitors, which made it difficult for the company to acquire a substantial market share. According to Al Jazira Capital (2016), Company C spent \$530 million on its marketing and distribution activities in 2015 and expected to spend around \$690 million in 2018. The company promotes its products and services through different marketing channels, including traditional and digital media. In the forthcoming analysis, a detailed overview of the company's marketing practices will be presented. Company D

Company D is a mid-size telecom operator in the Saudi market, mainly focused on business customers. Company D has approximately 1,200 business customers, which account for 90% of its revenue, while consumer customers account for the remaining 10% (Kurdi, 2016). The company is well known to business customers for its data services. The company's marketing communications are limited to a few traditional channels, such as newspapers, business magazines, business emailers, and direct marketing. Moreover, the

company uses digital marketing channels to a limited extent for business customers. After entering the consumer market in late 2017, the company began using digital channels heavily to advertise its FTTH offerings to consumer segments.

Research Findings from interviews

Research findings is divided into themes to cover the main aspects of this research including, marketing communication structure for each company interviewed, marketing channels that interviewed companies depend on in announcing marketing messages, efficiency of different marketing communication messages in relation to consumer behavior, marketing communication styles used by interviewed companies to influence consumer behavior, consumer motivations toward telecom services, effectiveness of cross-channel communication, the role of unrelated product messages on consumer behavior toward telecom providers, and consumer responses to different content by telecom players. These sections are designed to demonstrate the relationship between marketing communication practices and consumer behavior and to analyze it further in the telecom industry.

Marketing communication structure

The marketing communication department is a fundamental function of the telecom sector in Saudi Arabia. Its main responsibility is to develop, launch, manage, and monitor marketing messages across traditional and digital media channels. Although all companies follow a similar marketing communication structure, each uses this unit in line with its main goals.

"Company A marketing communication unit consists of 40 employees and four subunits, which are traditional media, digital media, activation, and retail. Each subunit has its own employees and its own responsibility and plays a complementary role to the department's roles and responsibilities".

On the other hand, Company D's marketing communication department consists of only seven employees, each responsible for different marketing communication practices and activities. The interviewee commented on the low number of employees in the marketing communication department. He answered:

"Our main focus since our establishment has been business. We recently joined the consumer market to provide fiber-to-the-home internet service, FTTH. The need to hire a new marketing communication team was evident, and we started two months ago to hire new team members".

As I did not manage to interview the marketing communication manager at Company B, the product manager was interviewed to answer on behalf of the marketing communication manager, since part of his responsibility is to manage the marketing activities for his product in the market.

"Company B marketing communication department consists of 20 employees responsible for managing all marketing campaigns", he added, "those employees are responsible for developing and launching marketing messages for all our products in both segments, Business and Consumer."

The roles and responsibilities of the marketing communication department across the three companies are similar; the differences lie in the number of employees in the department, which is mainly dependent on the number of consumers they serve, the number of channels they use to target different consumer groups, and the marketing budget dedicated to marketing communications. Furthermore, marketing communication is determined by the target customers; for example, Company D serves the business segment more than consumers; therefore, the size of the marketing communication department is smaller than those of Company A and Company B, which serve large consumer segments. The need for marketing channels such as events, conferences, and traditional channels such as print media and digital press by Company D is greater than that of Companies A and B. Company D follows the same approach as Company A regarding business, as mentioned in the Company A overview: their channels include events and direct marketing.

Company C, like other operators, has a marketing communications department responsible for planning, designing, and managing marketing activities.

"Company C's marketing communication is divided into two main teams, creative team which is responsible to create advertisements after receiving briefs from the marketing department, the briefs contain the basic information about the advertised products for example new promotion, discounts, extra minutes or extra data offering, the second team in the marketing communication department is the media team which is responsible to identify the target audience for the new product or offering designed for example, gender to be approached, for the outdoor communication we identify the malls that we target for our promotions, sometimes we know that the mall's visitors we would put our outdoor message in are considered Class A, Class B would visit other malls types, so the type of communication and message will focus on prices more than other characteristics. The second responsibility for

this team is to specify the media type to be used for the offering, whether it's traditional or digital or both.” He added, “We determine and control the cost of each advertisement on the different channels”.

Although the structure of marketing communication does not differ from other operators, a surprisingly low number of employees in the media team under the marketing communication department is very low in comparison to other operators, and this is due to

“Company C has around three people in the media team. The reason behind this is that Company C partners with media agencies to manage the marketing activities for the company, and one of the responsibilities of the media team is to communicate with these agencies to manage the marketing activities for the company”.

The interviewee found that big companies and even companies in other industries follow the same model. Consequently, this shows that Company C's marketing activities are lower than those of other operators due to budget limitations, especially for TV and outdoor. The interviewee clarified that:

“TV and Outdoor communication need huge art and production costs, which Company C is trying to eliminate to control costs due to limited budget”.

Company C relies mostly on media agencies to announce its marketing activities, and the marketing communication department's structure is similar to that of other operators. The department's responsibility is to design and manage marketing activities for the external audience.

Marketing communication channels

Company A uses many media channels to announce its products and services, using both traditional and digital.

"For some campaigns we only depend on digital channels since the cost of traditional is very high, but on the contrary in big campaigns like 360 campaigns, we use traditional media, when traditional media is activated all other channels will be activated by default, in some cases digital and traditional will not be activated instead we launch our marketing promotions through activation channels available in retail stores". He added, "the activation goes into three steps, we go to retail stores or different malls, Company A rent a place for our booth and put our posters in the mall”.

When the interviewee was asked about their focus on different channels, he said:

“Turnout on TV in Saudi Arabia is less than before due to the revolution in technology, such as smartphones and tablets. We depend heavily on digital media rather than traditional media because it reaches us faster. The cost, production, and preparation of campaigns on traditional media specifically TV is much higher than digital media, on the other hand, digital media is more flexible, lower cost and requires lower production capabilities”. He added” traditional media however despite the high-cost factor, provides Company A with higher equity in return, for example when Company A wants to announce new products packages or new promotions, it uses TV and outdoor as the reach to our consumers will be stronger than digital media, TV and outdoor channels are used for big campaigns, and new product launches, while digital media is used to announce small messages that remind consumers of our products and services”

The use of traditional media by Company A decreased due to high costs and the emergence of digital media tools such as social media and digital magazines; however, the reliance on traditional media remains evident in large campaigns. On the other hand, digital media plays a complementary role in marketing, supporting traditional media content and aiding rapid pervasion. Other companies in the Saudi market, due to limited marketing budgets and a low focus on the consumer segment, prefer digital media, events, and business conferences over traditional media such as TV, Radio, and print. Although Company D used to use print media, they have reduced their budget for it, as it is not an efficient way of communication due to its high cost and low return on investment.

Company B, as the second telecom provider, differs in its marketing communication strategy; it seems that it follows a similar but more organized and clear approach than Company A. Company B follows a structured approach to marketing communication; each campaign has its own objective that the company is willing to achieve, and every post on social media is designed for a purpose. At the same time, Company A uses a random approach to marketing communication, with heavy emphasis on announcing marketing messages at different times, as it has allocated a higher marketing budget than Company B.

Like Company A, Company B uses both media types, but each marketing activity has its own objective, for example, to create product and brand awareness. The company uses outdoor and digital media for communication, while for brand building, it uses TV more often than Outdoor. Social media is used to increase consumer awareness and build the company's brand.

The Company B interviewee said in the application of different channels and the purpose of using different channels:

“Depending on the objective of the campaign we choose our channels, for example if the objective behind a campaign is to build our brand then TV will be our channel of marketing, when we are approaching to increase our consumers’ awareness then we use outdoor communication, when company is looking at both perspectives then, the use of social media will be our choice”.

Company C uses both traditional and digital marketing channels to approach different market segments. The focus on digital channels, however, is greater than on traditional channels, since digital is cost-effective and easier to produce.

“According to the type of product and type of target segments, we choose the channels; we mostly depend on digital channels, followed by outdoor megacom and in-mall mupi. In digital channels, we use Google AdWords, followed by social media”.

Following what is done and which channels are used by Company C, what drew my attention is the use of Google AdWords as an advertising tool that displays ads based on consumers' most-searched items.

Consequently, by considering individuals' search behavior and knowledge sources, organizations can design messages aligned with consumers' search preferences. Telecom companies must study consumer search behavior to create campaigns that align with search behavior attributes and enhance consumer knowledge through their marketing programs.

Furse et al. (1984) stressed that experience negatively impacts the information search. On the other hand, Jacoby et al. (1978) found that purchase experience reduces information search.

The insights from previous interview quotes are drawn from companies that focus heavily on the consumer segment. Interviewing telecom companies that focus on business customers and have recently joined the consumer market will enable this study to shed light on another area of focus, and Company D is an example.

Company D, which recently joined the consumer segment, uses digital media more frequently than traditional media channels such as TV, Radio, print media, and outdoor. The interviewee concluded that:

"We mainly focus on social media, but on the other hand, we utilize traditional media such as print media and Radio. We do not go to TV due to its high cost, but instead we activate less costly media," he added, "Social media channels, Google AdWords are considered to be one of our most used tools”.

The focus of telecom companies on social media increased, and organizations began using platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to share messages. They are interactive channels that both companies and consumers use to interact with one another; by contrast, TV and traditional channels lack interactivity, which decreases their efficiency compared to digital channels.

In the telecom industry, channel choice is essential for shaping consumers' opinions about telecom brands; thus, using different channels to build brand image is equally important. Outdoor communication is not a good channel for building the brand because the available message space is limited. Consequently, for building brands, the best channel is TV due to its audio and video features. However, social media is a good channel for building brands, but market leaders can better guarantee original views on TV than on social media. On the other hand, market pioneers can use digital and social media more than traditional channels, as these are less costly and more effective at reaching consumers.

Efficiency of different marketing communication channels

In responding to the question of whether traditional channels are becoming less effective than digital channels, we have different views. The interviewee in Company A said that:

"I think that our spending on traditional channels decreased in comparison to the last years, as the results TV campaigns decreased dramatically now, and we can measure our marketing effectiveness through the social media tools, still there is focus on traditional channels when there is big execution for building brand, and increasing awareness marketing campaign, or when there is importance to announce new products or new solutions to the consumers. For example, we are currently working on a major campaign for our company application that enables our consumers to access all services online without visiting a physical branch. In these campaigns, we use both traditional and digital."

While Company B continues to argue that:

"We cannot say that traditional media channels are less effective, but it is used in a lower manner than other media channels. At Company B, we still use traditional media heavily, especially outdoor communication."

However, Company B sometimes runs social media activities when the company has a limited-time offer and wants to gain its benefits in the short term, an interviewee at Company B commented:

"In case we need to achieve short-term results, for example, increase sales, or increase turnout on internet products, for example, at the beginning we select outdoor as a communication media, and then post reminder campaigns on Social Media about the product that was already known by outdoor communication."

Outdoor communication is highly effective in Saudi Arabia, especially for food and automotive products; this effectiveness is increasingly evident in the telecom industry. Furthermore, print media began to decline in Saudi Arabia as readers shifted from print to digital newspapers. Although this shift influenced organizations' decisions to decrease marketing their products in print media, we still see some marketing activities on print media by Company D, as the interviewee commented:

"We still see an opportunity to market our products and services on print media, especially for business-to-business product offerings, although our spending on print media has receded in comparison to previous years, the use of print media, however, is compensating for our shortage in TV commercials".

Company C believes traditional marketing channels have become less effective, and companies are increasingly choosing digital channels, especially social media, to market their products and services.

"Spending on traditional media is declining year on year, pioneers in the telecom sector are those who utilize digital media channels more frequently than others, before consumers used to watch TV channels four hours a day, instead now consumers especially from age of youth are switching their habits to use social media four hours a day and even more, this trend has influenced the way of marketing communication on different channels."

As a result, I found that telecom operators in the Saudi market mainly focus on expanding their presence in digital media, as this is a promising channel for them. Although the big two telecom players in the market are still utilizing TV and outdoor channels and see that those two channels are the most influential marketing channels whether to announce different messages to consumer segment, or to promote their products and services, or to build product and brand awareness among consumers, there are however some companies who still focus on print media more often than TV and outdoor for the aim of attracting business customers. The big two companies see that the opportunity to use print media to deliver marketing messages is dying, as people nowadays use the internet more to read the news than traditional newspapers, and that companies should instead use traditional and digital

communication channels in a smart combination. Moreover, the increasing effectiveness of social media, given its high reach, is becoming a trend for the third entrant to the telecom industry.

The effectiveness of traditional marketing channels can be measured by calculating return on investment for each option and by tracking product and service sales before and after the campaign is launched. The return on investment in traditional channels is still more evident than in social media, suggesting their effectiveness. However, social media is a free space that enables companies to market their products and services in line with their view of the market situation, consumers' habits, and needs. Although tools exist to measure the effectiveness of social media marketing campaigns, evaluating consumer responses and distinguishing between paid, incentivized, and real consumers remains difficult, which can easily impact brand image (Kozinets, 2010).

Marketing Communication Style

Saudi Arabia is a young country with a youth population that constitutes around 70% of the overall population; telecom operators use comedy, educational, mysterious, and formal communication styles. However, Company A as a market leader uses comedy styles to attract young segment, educational styles when the company is willing to explain to consumers how to use specific product or added value services such as the company self-service application or portal, mysterious when company is willing to attract consumers to ask about products and services, and formal when announced to elderly or business segments. In their marketing messages to attract this segment, especially on social media, since most of the social media pioneers are from the young segment.

Company A commented on this:

"In most cases, we use the comedy style as there is a high percentage of youth in Saudi Arabia. We sometimes use educational styles using animations or infographics."

As evidenced by practice, Company A demonstrates its comedic communication style on YouTube; for example, it has released several comedy series to showcase its efficiency. For example, in the History of a Game - Tekken (2017), Rayan, the actor in the video, presents the history of the Tekken game. At the end, he demonstrates the efficiency of Company A's FTTH product in relation to the game. The educational style is used to explain how consumers can use Company A's new service, for example, a video on how to use Quicknet Mifi for the first time (2014). In Other videos, such as (What is Up with (Om Ali, 2017), Company A used a mysterious style of communication; the final message Company A wanted to tell is that they have

covered all areas of the kingdom with 4G technology in a comedic and mysterious way of communication to attract women consumers. Furthermore, Company A published several videos about unlimited home internet packages, highlighting the benefits of home internet service. This video aims to persuade consumers to adopt fiber-to-the-home internet service, as it brings family members together and builds strong ties among them. Company A tries to market these new products to family members, women, and young consumers. To conclude, most of these videos are published in traditional and digital media to ensure they reach every home in Saudi Arabia. Since competitors launched 4G data packages, Company A has intensified its internet-at-home commercials across all channels to reduce consumer uptake of 4G services, highlighting the unlimited keyword in its commercials, as 4G services are offered in limited packages. The use of game series is ingenious, as young consumers cannot play games on limited data plans.

Company B's style of communication is mainly youthful since the interviewee at Company B highlighted that:

“At Company B we are compatible with the market, so I think if young consumers constitute 70% of the Saudi market, 70% of our consumers are young” he added “ we use comedy styles with curiosity same like other operators sometimes formal style is combined with our commercials, Other than publishing comedy videos and series, Company B proved youthful in their advertisings and announced the six years' agreement with the famous Saudi sport club Hilal This sponsorship has supported Company B as a youthful brand in the kingdom. The contract between Hilal and Company B was terminated after the period of sponsorship ended. This sponsorship solidifies Company B's brand as a youthful brand in young consumers' minds and encourages establishing the brand name in the Saudi telecom market.”

Animation style was also adopted by Company B to announce messages about internet packages, for example, what can you do with a 300 GB data package? Video (2017), in this video, Company B creates animation videos and publishes it on various channels on the Internet to its customers to learn about the advantages of the packages offered to them. The comedian series style was also adopted by Company B to deliver marketing messages with a comedic flavor, using suspense before the series begins to signal to consumers that the series will be published soon. For example, (Park show series, 2017) in this series, Company B showcases stories happening in the park between actors and passes formal and comedic messages. Company B packages will be announced during the story. Company B's series is more

indirect than Company A's and, at the same time, sends and establishes the message to consumers, so they will remember it every time they go to the park.

It is essential to have Company C as an example of a company that invents appealing communication styles and combines formality with innocence. In a more charming communication messages appeals Company C chooses to produce advertisements messages with selective songs choosing girls aged between 12 – 15 years old and intensifies its advertisements in the holy month of Ramadan, and choose the TV channels as a media of communication more than other forms of communication that can be used in anytime with less cost restrictions, sends peace with its messages and an emotional style of communication that suite the Arab world and Saudi Arabia specifically (Ramadan Commercial, 2017). This style of communication was chosen by Company C headquarters a long time ago; it is more used to build brand image than to increase sales or promote a product. This has helped establish a strong brand name for Company C in the Gulf region and other Middle Eastern countries. Company C is an example of a company that uses emotional style to establish the brand in consumers' minds. Through these efforts, Company C group aims to build a worldwide brand closely associated with the wonderful world, aiming to make its brand image in consumers' minds more appealing than any other brand in the Middle East. On the other hand, Company C tries to isolate itself from the Company C group by adopting a new style that aligns with Saudi norms, which might be more formal than those in other countries where Company C operates. We will again see the typical commercial styles of other telecom providers in Saudi Arabia. A comedian with some formality is the preferred style.

After interviewing Company C and asking them why it chose other colors in their brands to the light green color instead of green and purple, and the style of communication in Saudi Arabia differs from the headquarters, which is a highly emotional style of communication, he answered:

"When we started our business in Saudi Arabia, the company logo was the same of the headquarters logo , but after a while, we discovered that we should be unique in this particular market to be able to compete with the local brands. We chose the color of light green to represent the Saudi flag to attract Saudi attention to the brand."

About the marketing communication style frequently used by Company C, the interviewee answered.

"We tried to be different than other brands that choose comedic style of communication, we rather use informative and formal styles, as being comedy all the time will diminish respect for the brand, we partner with opinion leaders in the Saudi market,

such as Faisal Al Saif, who gives technology information such as reviews of smartphones and we put it on our channels”

In my opinion, I don't think that Company C's efforts to isolate itself from the Company C group are a good idea. Adopting a comedic style like other players is not suitable, since their usual style is emotional and attracts different consumer groups. Furthermore, I think Company C changed its communication style in Saudi Arabia because it noticed that what attracts people in this market is the availability of promotions and benefits, especially since its market segments are mostly expatriates rather than Saudis.

Consequently, Company C needs to reach a significant percentage of Saudi consumers, which is the main reason for the transition to the Saudi style of communication. However, this will not be accomplished unless they change their communication style.

After I met with the senior marketing communication manager at Company C, Company D recently entered the consumer market to provide internet services using FTTH technology. However, the generic style of its communication is overly formal.

“We use formal styles most of the time, mysterious style of marketing, and create brand image-related campaigns to build our brand.”

Since Company D is a business-oriented company, they concentrate on announcing formal messages to businesses using curious styles to increase fear in business customers, for example announcing an emailer to customer that there are dangerous ransomware attack banks, government, etc., to promote security products Company D understanding to consumer market is still weak and therefore they don't use comedy marketing styles like other players, since they are still new in the consumer market.

The youth nature of the Saudi market has made telecom players adaptable to a humorous, friendly style of marketing communication. They found the most appropriate style to affect their consumers' intentions to purchase telecom services. In my opinion, telecom companies should diversify their styles to meet all consumers' expectations and increase the trustworthiness and likability of ads launched across different channels.

Consumer motivations toward telecom services

Consumers' motivations toward telecom services are intrinsically enjoyable, driven by the need to communicate with other people and a necessity to connect to the world via the internet, and extrinsically, because sometimes people need stimuli from the surrounding environment to use it at its optimum level. People need external reinforcement to use it and enjoy it, and to get more benefits than usual - for example, extra GB of data or extra call minutes to friends. Consumers should apply for offers and promotions that

grant these benefits. Likewise, Telecom services are treated as hedonic and utilitarian. Hedonic as it is, especially after the emergence of the internet, people became more familiar with online applications such as YouTube and social media sites. These services became a necessity in consumers' lives. On the other hand, although utilitarian motives are more focused on tangible attributes of the product, telecom services are still considered utilitarian because they are linked to tangible products, and telecom companies sometimes bundle tangible products, such as mobile devices, with their services. Thus, companies should not focus on one variable more than the other. Company A meets these consumer motives by targeting young segments and using different communication channels that appeal to both young and elderly consumers. A representative of Company A said in the interview:

"When sending a message to the youth segment, we should be friendly in designing the messages. We consider the color of our images, which are highly attractive, and we generally design our messages to help our audience remember our ads even though they have not yet decided to purchase the service. He added, " According to our different segments' needs and motives we design our messages on different channels, for example, we use Instagram to attract women segment and we create videos and images for them, we use Facebook to attract expatriates and we post different messages to them about our brand, and we use twitter to attract Saudi's using mainly images posts. On the other hand, we create TV commercials for elderly people who are not famous users of social media".

However, depending solely on these channels, without taking into account the types of content used in the different commercials and promotions, will not deliver high value to the brand and will only repeat the products' features, showing consumers that the only motive driving them to purchase is the promotional campaigns.

Company B, as a telecom player, used to run campaigns that drove consumer motives, but they made it when they first entered the market. They typically use promotional campaigns on different communication channels to increase sales. Company B said:

"Before taking into consideration the type of campaigns run by Company B, in telecom services there are few factors that will grab the attention of consumers, for example, internet services effectiveness can be measured by coverage, speed of the internet and the price, competitors will always play at the price level, so if Company A discount their prices, we at Company B will consider prices discounts, and so on."

While company C has a similar point of view that the main motive to telecom services is the price and size of data provided by the service.

"Company C sees that the main motivations toward telecom services are the data services, price, and promotions."

From the previous quote, we can say that the main motive for consumers to use telecom services is internet speed. Once the coverage factor is met, consumers will compare their internet speeds and then compare the prices of the offerings. Thus, we will find that telecom players focus more on price and features in their social media advertisements than on other factors. Therefore, Saudi operators focus on utilitarian motives more than hedonic.

Beyond utilitarian motives, which are evident in an operator's infrastructure, price is a strong factor influencing consumer decision-making to purchase a brand. Most telecom consumers in the Saudi market prioritize price over other features; therefore, promotions and price discounts are a major driver of consumer purchase of telecom products and services. As a result, prices should be included in most telecom operators' campaigns.

Effectiveness of Cross-Channel Communication

Chatterjee, P (2012) proposes that "the increase in sensory modes increases the probability on ad to be processed and increases the effectiveness of an ad". Sensory modes here refer to modes that can be read and heard, or heard and viewed. Local telecom operators publish their ads and promotions across all media at the same time to remind consumers of their products and services. Some channels, like social media, will play a supporting role to traditional marketing channels. For example, Company A uses cross-media marketing when launching a major campaign.

"We are currently working on the Company A Application to reduce the turnout on our physical branches and increase the Company A installed base. We will activate outdoor communication, together with social media communication, and the effect of outdoor with social media will be more powerful than using Outdoor only."

However, Company B launches 4 major campaigns per quarter, each using our full capacity. During the year, we keep on posting them on social media to remind our consumers of our products and promotions."

As a telecom leader, Company A used to activate cross-media channels such as TV and Radio. According to Chatterjee (2012), this practice will lead to effective synergies between ads, even when sensor modes remain the same, by facilitating consumer processing and increasing memory effects in subsequent ads. Furthermore, increasing or decreasing information across different media will gradually lead to synergy among ads.

In most cases, cross-media channel communication should be favored by all operators and implemented. Due to budget limitations, some operators may use certain channels more frequently than others. Consequently, this act may impact the effectiveness of marketing campaigns.

Unrelated product messages

Saudi telecom players may sometimes produce messages that do not necessarily belong to its products and services, but at the same time, they represent their brand image and personality. With the aim of increasing consumer knowledge, enhancing its brand image, and improving its social responsibility, Company A continuously posts information about historical sites and mosques. After asking Company A's interviewee about such activities, he said:

"This is the Saudi Arabia campaign, which consists of a history of old places in Saudi Arabia posts, videos, and images, while at the end we pass a coverage message."

Demers (2014) posted on Forbes an article titled "why your company blogs shouldn't be about your company" (page 1) and concluded that consumers do not like companies that post related products and services information all the time, and companies feel that their investment on their social media pages about products and services fails, because they do not simply post unrelated product information that enriches consumers' knowledge and bring benefits to consumers rather than products and services.

Company B, at its entrance, began doing what Company A is doing now to inform its customers that it has covered the entire kingdom with its network. Company B said:

"We stopped doing such practice, and I don't know why. I believe it is a good strategy, but we stopped it, I can't say that Company A is wrong by doing so."

At the end, this type of post relates indirectly to telecom services, but I believe we need to emphasize posting pure information that is entirely unrelated to products and services, and to become a source of knowledge rather than a source of product and service information. This has not been achieved so far by local telecom operators. Furthermore, these practices will enrich the information-seeking motives of social media pioneers, as seeking information is one of the main drivers of social media use among consumers. Ramadan campaigns by local telecom players mostly consist of unrelated product messages. Company A emphasizes this month on Islamic religious principles, such as charity and forgiveness (Company A Video on YouTube, 2017). This is an unrelated product message that represents the brand's image and personality, enhancing brand perception among its consumers and further motivating them to choose the brand over others. However, Company B

enhances its brand image during Ramadan by highlighting Saudi cultural traditions.

“Most of the time in Ramadan, our messages on different channels are brand image-related more than product and services information.”

On the other hand, Company C posts unrelated product messages on its social media platform, like Company A, but in a less prominent manner. Company C answers that by:

“We choose occasions such as the national day to post unrelated product messages, and sometimes we post information about cities in Saudi Arabia. We use the taste of emotion when posting unrelated product messages, especially in the National Day event.”

By this Company, Company A, Company B, and Company C use emotional appeals in their communication messages during Ramadan to attract consumers through hedonic motives rather than utilitarian motives, thereby improving brand image.

Enhancing consumer knowledge by posting unrelated product information to improve brand image and perceptions of the telecom brand is essential. Only one telecom company in Saudi Arabia is practicing this; competitors who don't will be seen as market followers, while those who do will be seen as market leaders. However, I think enhancing consumer knowledge with other creative ideas will develop their brand position in the market.

Consumer feedback on social media telecom marketing messages

Customer feedback varies depending on the type of content and how it is posted on different channels. Often, customer feedback is different from published content. Some customers have a questionable reaction, that is, a query about other services. In other situations, the reaction is a positive one when the consumer is not satisfied with the services provided. Company A tells about their consumer responses as:

“We can say that 60% of our consumer responses to our posts on social media are positive and 40% are negative comments, you can never satisfy all” he added “choosing the advertisements timing is important to avoid negative feedback, for example avoid posting related product messages after football match or after negative royal orders, comments on these posts during these situations will be negative”

The answer of Company A contradicts the answer of Company C, which said:

"Globally, we can say that feedback on telecom and other services provided on social media by consumers is negative; we rarely find that there is positive feedback, most of the comments are unrelated to the messages posted, and consumers mostly write their problems on the posts launched on social media pages."

This comment generalized that negative feedback on social media platforms outweighs positive feedback, since those who are happy with the service will not comment but will only rate the company based on their satisfaction with the brand.

However, these reactions by consumers affect how other consumers view the brand. For example, when Company D receives positive feedback, it will likely affect how other consumers view the company. Usually, when consumers are happy with the service, they are more motivated to share positive experiences with the brand. The interviewee in Company D, when asked a question about customer reactions to a post on social media, said:

"Of course, when posts on social media get positive feedback, this portrays or exposes us as a good brand; some consumers send their thanks and appreciation through social media."

Consumer behavior on social media shapes how other consumers perceive the brand, enhances positive brand perception, and encourages others to use telecom services from specific companies. However, companies must continually work to achieve customer satisfaction, as it is a key to enhancing brand image, since social media is a platform that reflects consumer behavior towards different products and services. Furthermore, when companies announce social media posts as marketing messages, they should be confident in their consumers' opinions by providing the best customer service and avoiding, as much as possible, any dissatisfaction, as this will affect the company's image and negatively impact marketing communication practices on social media.

Positive word of mouth on social media platforms benefits companies. However, not all comments on social media can necessarily be considered when evaluating a telecom brand, because there may be some fake comments and likes, and distinguishing between these types is hard. Thus, telecom companies should not trust all comments on their social media posts and should be able to differentiate between consumers' comments.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between marketing communication and consumer behavior within the Saudi telecom industry, a sector characterized by rapid technological advancements, intense competition, and an increasingly young and digitally active population.

Drawing on academic theories of communication, motivation, and consumer decision-making, and supported by qualitative data from interviews with major telecom operators, the research provides clear evidence that marketing communication plays a central role in shaping consumer perceptions, motivations, and purchasing intentions.

The findings reveal that telecom operators in Saudi Arabia are increasingly shifting from traditional communication channels toward digital platforms, reflecting broader changes in consumer media consumption habits. While television and outdoor advertising remain influential - particularly for large-scale campaigns aimed at building brand equity - digital channels such as social media have become indispensable due to their lower cost, interactivity, and ability to reach specific demographic segments with tailored messages. The effectiveness of these channels is heightened when used in integrated or cross-media strategies, which reinforce message retention and improve overall campaign impact.

The study also confirms that communication style is a powerful determinant of consumer engagement. Operators strategically adopt styles ranging from comedic and youthful to formal and informational, depending on the target audience and campaign objectives. The youth-heavy demographic of Saudi Arabia has pushed most operators toward comic, energetic, and visually engaging content - especially on social media. However, emotional and culturally resonant messages remain vital during key events such as Ramadan and National Day, helping companies strengthen brand image and foster deeper emotional connections with consumers.

Motivation emerged as a critical driver of consumer behavior. Consistent with theories of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, the research shows that consumer decisions about telecom services are influenced by both utilitarian factors - such as price, data size, and network quality - and hedonic factors linked to lifestyle, entertainment, and social identity. However, operators tend to emphasize utilitarian motives in their communication, suggesting an untapped opportunity to leverage hedonic appeals more intentionally to enhance loyalty and long-term engagement.

Moreover, the study highlights the growing importance of content that is not directly tied to product offerings. By sharing culturally relevant, educational, or socially meaningful content, operators can enhance brand credibility, increase consumer trust, and strengthen their position as meaningful contributors to the community. This approach aligns with global best practices in content marketing and reflects a more mature understanding of consumer expectations in the digital era.

Consumer reactions on social media further demonstrate the complex relationship between communication practices and brand perception. While negative comments are common for telecom operators globally, the study

suggests that positive word of mouth - when present - can significantly influence public perception. This reinforces the need for operators to maintain high service quality, respond effectively to consumer feedback, and design communications that anticipate public sentiment.

In summary, the study concludes that marketing communication in the Saudi telecom sector is deeply intertwined with consumer behavior. Operators that combine strategic channel selection, culturally attuned communication styles, motivational insights, and integrated media approaches are more likely to achieve strong consumer engagement and competitive advantage. The research contributes to a deeper understanding of how marketing communication can be effectively used to influence behavior in a rapidly evolving market. Future studies may build on this work by investigating quantitative measures of communication effectiveness, examining emerging platforms such as TikTok, or exploring behavioral differences across specific demographic subgroups within the Kingdom.

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