

Chapter 1

The Focus and Architecture of the Study: An Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The objective of this introductory chapter is to present in essence, the focus and architecture of the study.

The focal point of the study, that is the concept of alternative brand contact and alternative brand contact planning, will firstly be addressed. The architecture of the study, as designed through six chapters, levels of literature and primary research and the development of an ultimate end product namely, a Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning will be presented thereafter.

1.2 The Focus of the Study

This study explores the concept of **Alternative Brand Contact**. The Alternative Brand Contact is introduced as a planned form of contact with the brand that is experienced by consumers as **unconventional** and **unexpected**.

The nature and role of the alternative brand contact and alternative brand contact planning is defined, based on the study of literature, as **to break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers to communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand**. It is this central proposition that presents the primary objective of the qualitative exploratory research that is conducted in this study.

The alternative brand contact is positioned in context of Integrated Brand Contact Management as it can only be considered effective if it contributes to

the integrated brand contact strategy to build the brand. Also, the alternative brand contact is defined from the perspective or mindset of integrated brand contact planning, that is from an outside-in and zero-base.

The alternative brand contact is essentially explored on two levels. Firstly through an investigation of literature and secondly, through a three-phased qualitative exploratory research study that engages with the opinions and attitudes of the marketing and communications industry in South Africa. Thus the title of the study – **The role of alternative brand contact planning in the South African marketing and communication industry**, is addressed.

1.3 The Architecture of the Study

The architecture of this study comprises of six chapters, the implementation of secondary literature research and primary industry research and the design of a model to alternative brand contact planning, to capture literature insights and research findings and ultimately to reflect in full, on the title of the study.

Chapters Two, Three and Four present the literature study. Chapter Two sets the foundation with the outside-in approach to Brand Contact Management. Chapter Three is devoted to the core construct of the study namely, the Alternative Brand Contact and the planning thereof. The research methodology to the primary research study is discussed in detail in Chapter Four of the study.

Chapter Five has the dual purpose of discussing the implementation of the primary research study and presenting the results and interpretation thereof. Closure is created in Chapter Six with the presentation of the key research findings and the design and discussion of a Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning.

A brief discussion of the focus of the individual chapters follows.

1.3.1 Chapter Two – The Outside-in Approach to Brand Contact Management

Chapter Two presents the context to and platform of this study. The Chapter commences with a brief investigation of the nature and role of the individual classical promotional tools (Advertising, Sales Promotions, Direct Marketing, Personal Selling and Public Relations), to present the overriding objective as brand building.

Businesses in today's competitive arena are driven to attain a distinctive and valued brand position in the minds of customers and potential consumers. The essential aim of marketing communications as an integrated force is therefore to build brands through consistent communication messages. Hence the concept of Integrated Marketing Communications.

Chapter Two however proceeds to argue that the brand is a complex strategic tool and involves the entire process of managing consumer perceptions and not only those created through planned marketing communications. A brand is built through every level of contact, through marketing and promotional activity, in consumer and customer markets. Thus the concept of **brand contacts**, as applied by Schultz and Barnes (1995:8), is introduced. Every form of contact communicates and either adds to, or erodes the value of the brand in consumers' minds.

Of significance is that the brand contact approach follows an outside-in (consumer oriented) thinking and planning pattern. Consumers do not differentiate between the myriad of contact point experiences. In brand contact planning the consumer's experience of the brand and its marketing and communications processes is consequently viewed as the point of departure in working towards a consistent, unified brand identity. Companies must therefore develop a holistic and integrated marketing and communications mindset to acknowledge the collective effect of all marketing and communication activities on the status and identity of the brand in consumers' minds.

Chapter Two essentially sets the strategic platform to this study as the process of brand communications is defined from the outside-in, that is from the consumer's point of view. The study is thus based on brand contact methodology.

Chapter Two then proceeds to argue the need for integrated brand contact management and the development of brand positioning strategies that are relevant, distinctive and single-minded. Brand identity is the cornerstone of brand strategy and the outside-in approach to brand contact methodology advocates that all points of brand contact must be integrated to reinforce and communicate the core identity of the brand. The identity of a brand is defined by its positioning and as is reasoned in this chapter, without a clear positioning there can be no true integration.

Chapter Two furthermore highlights that brand positioning is challenged in the modern market place by increasing competition, levels of product and brand parity and communication clutter. It is established that brand positioning strategies need not only deliver consumer relevance and meaningful differentiation, but also a single-minded thrust. Integrated brand contact management is governed by total focus in brand identity and positioning. The strategic aim is to take ownership of a consumer relevant and differentiated positioning on a clear-cut and singular level. The more focussed the brand positioning, the greater the brand contact synergy or integration.

In continuation and support of the brand contact approach and the concept of contact integration, the nature and scope of integrated brand contact planning is discussed and four levels or sources of brand contact are identified. These are product based, service based, planned (marketing communication messages) and unplanned (for example, word-of-mouth) sources of brand contact. It is argued that an integrated brand identity is achieved when the brand positioning communicated through planned points of contact, is consistent with the performance of product and service contacts and confirmed by unplanned points of contact.

Of significance is that the sources of brand contact can originate from several internal company sources as well as external sources such as the Advertising Agency. The process of integrated brand contact planning and management can not be defined to a single department. Chapter Two thus introduces and debates the value of a cross-functional orientation and the introduction of a Brand Contact Task Team, that will function as brand champions to promote the interests of the brand at all times and in all places.

It is within context of the outside-in approach to brand contact management and the cross-functional approach of a dedicated task group, that Chapter Two introduces a next mindset requisite to integrated brand contact planning. Inside-out preconceived contact ideas or judgements must give way to a zero-based planning platform that is based on consumers' current experience of points of brand contact. Chapter Two thus proceeds to present the Brand Contact Audit as a platform neutral foundation to brand contact planning. The aim of which is to identify the key contact issues facing the brand, from an outside-in and zero-based planning perspective and accordingly to develop appropriate brand contact objectives, contact strategies and bottom-up budgets.

In completion to the discussion of the nature and scope of integrated brand contact planning, Chapter Two addresses the need for a Brand Charter. The purpose of which is to capture brand learnings and to codify the brand identity and brand positioning strategy. The Brand Charter can accordingly be implemented by the Brand Contact Task Team as the strategic guide to the process of integrated brand contact planning and management.

Chapter Two concludes by arguing the role of the advertising agency in integrated brand contact planning. According to several authors outside-in, zero-based and cross-functional brand contact planning is enhanced as the advertising agency is involved as an objective and valued strategic partner in the process. However, to play a meaningful role and add value, the traditional advertising agency will have to evolve into a strategic partner that delivers integrated brand communications solutions.

Thus the need for Integrated Communications Agencies that provide holistic, integrated communications solutions and profound strategic advice is debated. To attain this goal and to practice outside-in and zero-based planning it is argued that the agency must be structured into cross-functional account teams rather than specialised departments. Strategic, creative, media and specialised promotional skills are thus integrated to deliver holistic brand contact solutions.

A partnership philosophy between the Brand Contact Task Team and cross-functional account team within the Integrated Communications Agency, will then ultimately optimise the process of integrated brand contact management. The truly Integrated Communications Agency thus delivers effective, integrated planned brand contact strategies and also has the skill and expertise to compliment and advise on the holistic integration of all points of brand contact.

With Chapter Two as a theoretical and strategic foundation, Chapter Three establishes the concept of alternative brand contact. The alternative brand contact is introduced in context of the scope of planned points of brand contact and clients increasing need for innovative planned brand contact solutions that will break through communication clutter barriers.

Of vital importance to this study is that the alternative brand contact is positioned as a means to break through commercial clutter barriers to communicate and reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand. It is for this reason, the ultimate purpose of achieving branded impact, that Chapter Two is viewed as a critical foundation to the study. It is argued that the alternative brand contact must add value to the integrated brand contact strategy and contribute to the process of brand building. The alternative brand contact is furthermore introduced on the grounds of integrated brand contact thinking, in other words, outside-in and zero-based thinking.

1.3.2 Chapter Three – The Alternative Brand Contact

Chapter Two essentially establishes that a relevant, differentiated and single-minded brand positioning must be communicated at every level of contact (product, service, planned and unplanned) with consumers, to achieve an integrated brand identity. Chapter Three introduces the alternative brand contact, as a planned form of brand contact on the premise of the outside-in and zero-based planning mindset of integrated brand contact planning.

Chapter Three commences to argue that the concept 'alternative' is greatly applied in the marketing and communications industry from the inside-out. That is, from the practitioner's point of view in context of industry media classifications, such as above-the-line mass media versus below-the-line 'alternative' media. In the context of the outside-in and zero-based brand contact planning philosophy, it is the nature of contact with the consumer that establishes the alternative brand contact appeal and not the use of one medium as opposed to another. In keeping with the outside-in and zero-based planning approach, the alternative brand contact is media neutral and qualifies as any unconventional or unexpected point of brand contact, whether in a traditional or non-traditional media environment.

Chapter Three identifies and investigates two key motivators for the growth of alternative brand contacts. Firstly, it is established that clients are increasingly seeking innovative brand contact solutions within and beyond the traditional scope of brand communications. Secondly, and also in support of the first motivating factor, rising levels of expected communications clutter is resulting in target audiences increasing their commercial defenses, in the form of selective exposure and attention measures.

It is reasoned that advertisers should not only rely on the creativity of the planned brand communications message to break through clutter, but that creative strategic thinking must be applied to produce alternative brand contacts that will reach audiences that have become jaded by the brand communications onslaught. The challenge is to move beyond, or to

manipulate traditional communication vehicles to target consumers in an unconventional manner, when and where they least expect to encounter a brand message and when they are in a susceptible state of mind. Within this context, Chapter Three demonstrates and discusses the growth of alternative brand contacts in the traditional media environments and in new media or ambient media environments.

To break through the clutter and produce alternative brand contact solutions, innovative thinking and creative strategic planning is required. The planning of alternative brand contacts is discussed in Chapter Three with this principle at heart. Dru's (1996:54; 2002:19) theory of disruption and the need to apply creative strategic thinking to develop contact solutions that will break through clutter to build the brand, is discussed in this regard. Of importance is Dru's disruption theory which reinforces that to develop alternative brand contact solutions, the account team will have to move from the outside-in, from a zero-base and media neutral planning platform and establishes that creative-strategic thinking needs to be applied in the process of doing so.

In further investigation of the concept of creative strategic thinking, Chapter Three also briefly explores the concept of creativity (that which is both novel and appropriate/relevant), in brand communications planning. The outcome reflects that the critical dimension is the mindset and sense of purpose of the team involved in the creative process. The mindset of the account team and its sense of purpose are more important in alternative brand contact planning than the development and implementation of creative techniques to produce creative solutions.

For this reason Chapter Three revisits the nature and role of the account team within the Integrated Communications Agency, as the make-up and planning environment of the account team will inevitably affect its mindset and sense of purpose in alternative brand contact planning. Chapter Three establishes that the integrated and cross-functional account team, with the confluence of strategic, media and creative resources, presents an organic environment conducive to innovative creative strategic thinking and thus alternative brand

contact planning. It is also argued that to produce alternative brand contact solutions, an environment or culture that welcomes and stimulates exploration and experimentation is required.

Finally, in order to ensure that an objective assessment of the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact is achieved, also in context of the purpose of integrated brand contact planning, Chapter Three identifies a number of barriers to the concept and process. These are identified as:

- The departmentalised agency structure
- Inside-out thinking in brand contact planning
- Media-biased and commission based brand contact planning
- Total reliance on message creativity
- Reliance on media planning systems and measurement data

An integrated assessment of the barriers to alternative brand contact planning reveals that the greatest collective barrier is mindset. An inside-out, departmentalised, media-biased and research bound strategic planning mindset, lacking in creative strategic purpose and thinking is certainly not conducive to alternative brand contact planning.

To alleviate and address the identified barriers to alternative brand contact planning, Chapter Three next identifies and discusses alternative brand contact requisites. Given the vital influence of mindset, the requisites are introduced on the premise that an outside-in, zero-based, media-neutral and creative strategic planning mindset and sense of purpose, is encouraged and practiced by the client, Integrated Communications Agency and account team. The requisites then are as follows:

- Impact and the novelty of the alternative brand contact
- Impact and the communication effectiveness of the alternative brand contact
- Impact and communicating a single-minded brand identity

- Impact and target audience relevance
- Continued impact of the alternative brand contact

Chapter Three ultimately presents the alternative brand contact as a planned form of brand contact, in the context of integrated brand contact planning. Its nature and role is explored on the premise of outside-in and zero-based thinking. The nature and role of the alternative brand contact is thus defined as to break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers to communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand.

In line with the core purpose of the alternative brand contact, the barriers and requisites to the unexpected and unconventional brand contact and the planning thereof, present the key insights gained from the literature study and vital constructs to the primary research study.

1.3.3 Chapter Four – The Research Methodology

Chapter Four presents a theoretical analysis and motivation for the working research methods applied in the primary research phase of this study.

The framework of this research study is created through motivated research steps, to present the process of research. For the purposes of this introductory chapter the steps will be identified and their application to the study briefly stated. A complete research argument is presented in Chapter Four of this study.

- **Defining the research problem**

The study of literature reveals that the brand communications arena today is highly competitive and cluttered. Consumers, as Ries and Ries (2000:26)

argue, live in an over-communicated society. In defense against the onslaught of commercial messages consumers increasingly erect selective awareness and attention measures. Marketers are thus challenged to break through the expected commercial clutter barriers to ensure that their brand communication messages impact on consumers.

The study of literature indicates that marketers are consequently expecting of their communication partners to develop unconventional and unexpected brand contact approaches that will break through commercial clutter barriers. The literature study ultimately proposes that the alternative brand contact can fulfill this role. The research problem exists in that it remains to be seen whether the marketing and communication industry in South Africa is in agreement that:

The unconventional and unexpected point of planned brand contact can break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand.

The above stated suggestion presents the **central proposition** to the primary research study. This study does not aim to produce inferences purporting to be conclusive but rather findings that can serve as guidelines to the development of hypotheses that, with further future research, can be tested to represent a proof.

The research problem is however more layered as the study of literature establishes that the ability of the alternative brand contact to break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce a single-minded positioning of the brand is found to depend on a set of requisites. These requisites consequently present the **integral propositions** to the primary research study and also need to be assessed to produce findings, that can in future be applied in the formulation of hypotheses for empirical research studies.

The purpose of the primary research study is to explore the central and integral research propositions in real world terms.

- **The research objectives**

To present clear-cut research objectives specific research questions must exist for the formulated propositions. Also, the scope or boundaries of the research study must be clearly defined. The latter presented the challenge. The literature assessment of the barriers to alternative brand contact planning indicates that an inside-out, media-biased and measurement bound planning mindset void of creative strategic thinking, inhibits the process of alternative brand contact planning. The barriers to alternative brand contact planning are consequently employed to set parameters to the primary research study. The primary research study therefore explores the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact as perceived by Integrated Communications Agencies and their clients.

It is not assumed that all Integrated Communications Agencies in South Africa exhibit a wholly outside-in, zero-based, media neutral and creative strategic planning mindset. The assumption however is that they are, based on an integrated brand communications planning focus, a great deal closer to a planning mindset that is conducive to alternative brand contact planning, than their traditional counterparts. Equally so, and as motivated in Chapter Four, it is assumed that the clients of Integrated Communications Agencies demonstrate a need to develop a relationship with a brand communications partner that will meet expectations and add greater value to the process of brand building.

Specific research questions are formulated in Chapter Four to address the central research proposition (primary research objective) and integral research propositions (supporting research objectives), based on the defined parameters. The primary research study will thus explore the primary and

supporting research objectives as perceived by Integrated Communications Agencies and their clients.

- **The research design**

To answer the research problem and objectives, a qualitative exploratory primary research study is pursued. As argued in Chapter Four, a qualitative exploratory research design is required because as a norm, only a fraction of existing knowledge in a field or industry is put into writing. Added to this, the research area of alternative brand contact planning is defined as fairly new, in which case many possible unknown variables may exist. Furthermore and importantly, a qualitative exploratory study is required because in-depth attitudes, opinions and motivations need to be revealed.

- **The research method**

Given the intention of this study, that is to explore the perceived nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact and the focus on a qualitative exploratory research design, self-report data source selection methods and in specific, exploratory focus groups and semi-structured depth interviews, are implemented.

Exploratory focus groups are firstly conducted with senior account teams (teams with range and depth of insight and experience) in Integrated Communications Agencies. The key motivator for using focus groups as a data source selection method is to explore a concept in context of group dynamics. The planning of the alternative brand contact, in turn is reliant on the dynamics of the account team as a cross-functional unit. The data produced and key insights gained from the focus groups are then employed to enrich the defined research propositions in preparation of the next two phases of research.

The final two phases of research involve semi-structured depth interviews with the key clients (Marketing or Brand Managers) of the senior account teams and then also with the thought leaders or key players (Strategic Planners, Media Planners and Creative Directors), in the senior account teams. The aim is to ensure that the fundamental reasons underlying respondents' attitudes are uncovered and that all personal opinions on the enriched research propositions are expressed on own terms. The semi-structured depth interviews with clients precede the semi-structured depth interviews with key players in the senior account teams. The research propositions are therefore again revisited before the final phase of research, to address the insights gained from interviews with key clients.

An Interview Guide to the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams is presented and discussed in Chapter Four. Likewise, a working format Interview Guide is designed for the semi-structured depth interviews with clients and thought leaders or key players in the senior account teams. The latter, as mentioned, is revisited in the process of research to address the development of enriched research propositions.

The data collection methods and process are comprehensively motivated in Chapter Four and are essentially based on the concept of integrated brand contact planning and the nature of alternative brand contact planning therein, as established through the secondary study of literature. The core purpose is to explore attitudes, opinions and motivations toward the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact, in depth.

- **Sampling procedure**

The population of interest and two target sub-groups to this study are senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies in South Africa and their key clients (Marketing or Brand Managers).

The sample frame, size and sampling method presented a particular challenge to the primary research study. The sample frames of Marketing or Brand Managers and thought leaders or key players in the senior account teams, as per the research methodology, would emerge organically from the frame of identified senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies. The latter two phases of research could thus be managed with relative ease in terms of sampling procedure. However, as a starting point, no frame or list of Integrated Communications Agencies in South Africa exists. The agencies that are positioned as Integrated Communications Agencies exist in and amongst the current frames of 680+ Advertising or Communication Agencies in South Africa. Consequently, screening was pursued as an option to research frame development. The opinions of six independent industry experts however negated this measure. Immediate doubt and skepticism was expressed as to the objectivity of screening agencies. Given the growing demand for integrated brand communications planning, every advertising agency will inadvertently profess to be operating as an Integrated Communications Agency. The independent industry experts did however identify, with considerable overlap in opinion, the agencies that they believe to be integrated or working towards developing integrated brand communications solutions.

With the value of information approach as a premise to setting sample size, three experts in the field of marketing and advertising research in South Africa were consulted. The following sample sizes were proposed and agreed upon:

- Six focus groups with senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies
- Ten semi-structured depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers and
- Fifteen semi-structured depth interviews with key players (Five Strategic Planners, five Media Planners and five Creative Directors), within the senior account teams.

The qualitative exploratory nature of this study, the challenge presented by the sample frame, the critical questioning of industry experts and the need to develop a sample size of six senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies, lead to the application of a non-probability sampling method. More specifically, purposive judgment sampling prove to be the appropriate sampling method to this study.

The Delphi Approach to Forecasting guided the process and assessment of industry experts' judgement, to identify six Integrated Communications Agencies and the sample to this study. The Managing Directors of the sample of Integrated Communications Agencies in turn identified a senior account team in the agency. As previously stated the sample of Marketing and Brand Managers and the sample of key players within the senior account teams, evolved organically from the identified sample of senior account teams.

Chapter Four presents the research methodology to the qualitative exploratory research study. The primary objective of which is to determine:

If the nature and role of the alternative point of brand contact is perceived by Integrated Communications Agencies and their clients to be to break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand.

The identified integral propositions or supporting objectives, originally defined as requisites to the alternative brand contact and the planning thereof, are also addressed in the process of research. The implementation of the research process, the analysis of data and the results produced through the three-phased research design, are presented in Chapter Five of this study.

1.3.4 Chapter Five – Research Implementation, Results and Interpretation

Chapter Five commences with a brief discussion of the real world dynamics encountered in the process of implementing the three phases of this qualitative exploratory research study. The Chapter is thereupon devoted to the research results and the interpretation thereof.

The data produced through the research study is analysed through thematic content analysis as the tool of analysis. Each of the three phases of research is treated as individual phases in the process of content analysis and the presentation of research results and interpretations. This measure is applied in accordance with the research methodology, to ensure that the central and integral research propositions are revisited, reflected upon and enriched in preparation of the next phase of research. The data analysis and results are thus presented in terms of the identification and discussion of main themes that were produced and results that were gained per research phase, to address the proposed interview guide to the next planned phase of research.

The main themes identified through thematic content analysis, essentially reflected in both the case of the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams and the semi-structured depth interviews with clients, on the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact and the requisites and barriers to alternative brand contact planning. The exploratory focus groups naturally produced these main themes and consequently the semi-structured depth interviews, as guided through the revisited interview guide, naturally revolved around these main themes.

The high levels of correlation encountered in attitudes, opinions and motivations through these first two phases of the research process resulted in the development of a far more focussed interview guide to the final set of semi-structured depth interviews with key players in the interviewed senior account teams. Consequently, key areas that required greater depth in exploration could be focussed upon.

It is revealed in Chapter Five that the qualitative exploratory design of this research study has indeed been successful. Depth of opinion and thought was gained and fresh thinking was produced in the process. The central and integral research propositions and related primary and supporting objectives to the primary research study are consequently addressed in full.

1.3.5 Chapter Six – Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

Chapter Six commences with a brief reflection on the focus and architecture of this study, whereupon the key findings to the qualitative exploratory research study are presented. Thus, sound guidelines to the development of plausible hypotheses for future research are produced and a solid platform is created for the design of a Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning.

This study is concluded with the design and discussion of a Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning. It is envisaged that those agencies and clients, who recognise and acknowledge the experimental nature of alternative brand contact planning, will find the model of immediate value in the planning of alternative brand contact strategies.

It must be noted that the lack of evidence of the effectiveness of the alternative brand contact did emerge in the study of literature and the primary research conducted in this study, as a potential barrier to alternative brand contact planning. The majority of key clients interviewed in this study, nonetheless reasoned that they are prepared to invest in alternative brand contact strategies, despite the lack of evidence of their effectiveness, if they do demonstrate the potential to break through clutter to achieve branded impact. The proposed Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning places branded impact at its heart.

However, some marketing and communication professionals in South Africa may not share in this outlook. Those agencies and clients who are in need of conclusive evidence of the effectiveness of the alternative brand contact, can then apply the key findings that are presented in this chapter, in the development of hypotheses for further research studies. The proposed Conceptual Model to Alternative Brand Contact Planning can thus be confirmed, altered or improved upon.

The theoretical foundation to the study, is the point of departure. As discussed, the theoretical foundation is established through Chapter Two – The Outside-in Approach to Brand Contact Management, Chapter Three – The Alternative Brand Contact and Chapter Four – The Research Methodology. All references made can be found in the reference list to the study.