Integrated marketing communication: a spiritual and an ethical Islamic perspective

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to ascertain the importance of spiritual elements and ethics to marketing strategy. The study uses critical review of the literature for insights on the integrated marketing communication (IMC) as an example of marketing strategy and Islam as a representative of spiritual elements and ethics. The study discovers that IMC could be highly potential in creating quality relationship with the consumers when the consumers’ religious values are emphasised. IMC is also in line with the Islamic marketing concept that focuses on the rhetoric of common good and prohibits organisations from abandoning the personal value of consumer. Notwithstanding the fact, the Muslims’ perspective of an integrated approach in marketing comes together with the humans’ duty as vicegerent of Allah SWT in order to sustain a good personality in this world and hereafter.

Keywords: spiritual elements; ethics; marketing strategy; integrated marketing communication; IMC; religion; Islam.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows: Abdullah, S.A.C. and Sahad, M.N. (2016) 'Integrated marketing communication: a spiritual and an ethical Islamic perspective', Int. J. Islamic Marketing and Branding, Vol. 1, No. 4, pp.305–320.

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1 Introduction

According to the Business Dictionary (2015), marketing strategy is an organisation’s strategy that combines all of its marketing goals into one comprehensive plan. A good marketing strategy should be drawn from market research and focus on the right product mix in order to achieve the maximum profit potential and sustain the business. Thus, the marketing strategy is the foundation of a marketing plan.

Rather similarly, Haron and Wan Azmi (2005, p.6) stated that marketing strategy is commonly defined as a strategy employed by a firm to attain its marketing objectives, which in turn is related to the achievement of the firm’s business objectives. In other words, marketing strategy refers to the marketing goals and action plans that address matters of product or service price, distribution, communication, and the process of new product development. They added that the adaptation of any strategy depends much on factors such as management style and experience of the top management, age of the institution, economic environment, and regulations.

Meanwhile, Kotler (2002) defines marketing strategy as a social process where individuals and groups get what is necessary or desirable, by creating and maintaining the product as well as values with other individuals or groups. Close to that objective is Schultz’s (2004) definition of integrated marketing communication (IMC) which focuses on the business process that combines the variety of marketing communications (MARCOM) disciplines, such as advertising, public relations (PR), direct marketing, sales promotion, personal selling, internet, sponsorship, and conference, by putting into consideration and emphasis on the needs and goals of audiences.

Hence, Schultz’s understanding of the importance of communication in marketing strategy is a great contribution to the organisation’s structural management, and would be better still accompanied with the spiritual element, in particular the principle of business ethics in Islam as an added advantage to achieving greater impact for long-term relationship with bigger segments of audiences.

From the above definitions, it may be concluded that marketing strategy is a marketing plan which involves the social process of creating value and maintaining relationships with the audiences.

In the context of Islam, spirituality is an acknowledgement of faith to Allah subhanahu wa taala (SWT) for one to move and live according to His will and command (Nasr, 1987). This is in fact inseparable from the business ethics in Islam which consist of the teachings of Islam based on the al-Qur’an (revelation) and hadith. In the al-Qur’an it is stated about the importance of maintaining harmonious relationships, mutual pleasure in doing business, and freedom from prejudice or manipulation. Allah SWT says in Surah al-Baqarah [2]: 282:

Translation: O you who believe! When you deal with each other, in transactions involving future obligations in a fixed period of time, reduce them to writing, let a scribe write down faithfully as between the parties; let not the scribe refuse to write: as God has taught him, so let him write. Let him who incurs the liability dictate, but let him fear his Lord God, and not diminish aught of what he owes. If the party liable is mentally deficient, or weak, or unable himself to dictate, let his guardian dictate faithfully, and get two witnesses, out of your own men, and if there are not two men, then a man and two women, such as you choose, for witnesses, so that if one of them errs, the other can remind her. The witnesses should not refuse when they are called on (for evidence). Disdain not to reduce to writing (your contract) for a future