

INTRODUCTION

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I was the author of Chapter 9 in the seminal and popular textbook, *Fashion Marketing*, edited by Mike Easey, which is currently in its third edition. This book is a response to a request for more on fashion marketing communications (FMC) at a time of growing interest in the subject as a distinct and yet integral part of the fashion industry. It has also come from my own needs as a lecturer in the subject of fashion marketing communications. Need is the mother of invention, as the saying goes.

For me, and probably for others, the interest in FMC was driven by traditional and online content in magazines; an exponential growth in PR, including advertorials, editorials, product placement, sponsorship and bloggers; pop-up stores; the cult of celebrity and the rise of social media. This has coincided with an economic downturn, in which 'getting more bang for your buck' is a key issue. The book was also conceived when 'fast fashion' was at its zenith. It also reflects the wider range of roles that students and fashion professionals are taking up in the industry.

So, the starting point of this book has been a long interest in the literature on marketing communications and finding, in my teaching of fashion marketing, that there was nothing really tailored to my needs. I cannot by any means say that I am an expert in the area of marketing communications but I have adapted seminal works to my interests in fashion and to my teaching purposes. I expect that some of you using this book have done the same.

Description of the book

I assume some level of knowledge, so that this text will fit with lecturers and students: having developed and understood the concept of the marketing mix, both audiences (lecturers and students) are now looking for details of the promotional mix to apply to FMC.

'Fashion marketing communications' and 'promotion' are terms that I use interchangeably; in some cases, FMC encompasses a wider and more professional remit than the traditional 'promotional mix' with which we may all be familiar.

This book follows a typical lecture schedule for an academic year of one or two terms or semesters, with some seminar input and student-focused exercises.

It, therefore, includes activities and some further reading. I hope these can be adapted by lecturers as appropriate.

I also hope that lecturers and students can use this book as a starting point, because it is by no means all-encompassing. By its very nature, fashion is about change and the fashion industry is different from many other industries; by the time you are reading this, things will have developed further. However, what has happened in the past is relevant for a historical understanding or underpinning of how we got to where we are today and, perhaps more importantly, why.

I know now why fashion is so under-represented in the academic literature found in text books and even journal articles (with their shorter lead times); they are often seen as outmoded because, as is the nature of fashion, it's all about change and obsolescence.

Structure of the book

The layout of each chapter follows the same format: chapter objectives; an introduction; a definition, if it is required; explanation and examples of the major themes and content; a summary; ideas for activities that can easily be adapted; and further reading, which can be a starting point for further research. There are also some in-depth case studies, which can be used at any stage in a programme.

Most terminology is explained within the text because many students will 'switch off' if they do not get an explanation immediately. Lecturers and students always like to start with a definition to set the scene; formal definitions don't always exist, so I have created them.

In Chapter 2, the book attempts to start at the beginning of the communications process, with the role of strategy in FMC: understanding where a company is now and wants to be in the future. This is fundamental to establishing promotional objectives that lead to promotional activities. I am acutely aware that an 'emergent strategy' is often the one which best suits what I have called the 'fast and fickle' nature of the fashion business in a busy, cluttered and

extremely competitive retail fashion environment. There are many books on general business strategy but none solely on FMC strategy so, for the purposes of this chapter, the major themes and concepts of strategy are applied to fashion communications.

Chapter 3 identifies the major tools of communication relevant to fashion retailing and marketing communications. Despite an exponential growth in social media during the writing of this book, traditional tools (such as magazines and PR) are still as important.

Despite new technology, no other channel has been able to display the luxury and elegance of print ads like magazines.

—‘Tatler tries on augmented reality to celebrate September Web relaunch’, www.luxurydaily.com, 1 August 2011

The tools and media channels available are discussed in terms of their advantages and disadvantages, as I find this is a useful way to analyse their relative merits. Students seem to like this checklist approach.

I make no apology for giving television advertising a wide berth. There are many texts that deal with television advertising but it is seldom used by fashion retailers (although highly targeted satellite channels, such as MTV, do have opportunities for wider exposure and ‘reach’ in fashion promotion), so I merely touch on it.

Chapter 4 looks at our emotional connection with magazines, how they work and what fashion consumers get from them in terms of a combination of information and entertainment, called ‘infotainment’. Magazines are often considered as a ‘light and fluffy’ aspect of fashion but I suggest that they remain a major communication channel, whether in glossy, two-dimensional, ‘have and hold’ format or in online content or moving both forward in parallel.

Chapter 5 looks in detail at public relations (PR), including product placement and the role of PR in various media and how it might be valued more robustly. PR was (until relatively recently) widely regarded as a poor relation to traditional promotional channels such as advertising. Chapter 5 demonstrates how important the role has become in a crowded and cluttered media environment; where the

role of editorial acts as a credible source of information, particularly for the fashion consumer.

Chapter 6 discusses the role of celebrity in fashion marketing communications. Despite the various announcements that celebrity culture has become 'tired' or is 'dead', the evidence in society and the media does not support this. A model of the celebrity lifecycle is introduced.

Chapter 7 makes no apologies for being a long chapter about the role of communications within the retail environment itself. Visual merchandising and the whole in-store experience that affects purchasing decisions is renamed 'visual marketing'. This is because I feel that this element in communications has not been covered in enough depth and rigour in relation to a holistic approach to marketing communications. It is much more important than simply 'dressing dummies'. This chapter also considers the difficulties of translating the in-store experience into an online experience.

Chapter 8 considers the role of trade marketing communications, that is, business-to-business (B2B) rather than business-to-consumer (B2C) communications. Much of the fashion industry is concerned with wholesaling and supplying the retail trade and this is an area which has hitherto been neglected. This chapter attempts to demonstrate the difference in communication strategy and tools, with a generally more knowledgeable trade or industry audience.

Chapter 9 takes a look at internationalisation in FMC and sets many of the preceding themes within the international context. This is most apposite considering the various push and pull factors that are driving fashion into the international arena.

Chapter 10 examines the often combatorial relationship that fashion promotion has with the regulatory frameworks that exist in many developed markets. This is not surprising, as fashion is associated with symbols of sex and issues of size, air-brushing, the sexualisation of minors and nudity. This will be a continuing tension as fashion so often reflects contemporary culture.

Chapter 11 looks at how the effectiveness of FMC can be measured. This has been a particularly difficult chapter to write; to this day, I do not know whether anyone has discovered a complete answer to this question. I describe some methodologies, but who actually knows what goes on in the 'black box' of the

subconscious? Many people have tried but all have failed to make a rational or foolproof case for what can be considered totally irrational behaviour in fashion purchasing and the influence of marketing communications in fashion purchasing decisions.

Chapter 12 contains some career guidance for people entering the fashion marketing communications industry. Knowing, understanding and being able to use the terminology is vital to demonstrating interest in the area. Work experience in whatever capacity is necessary and this begins with research, observation and an appropriate CV.