

WHERE IS PR WITHIN MEDIA NEUTRAL PLANNING?

HALKLA İLİŞKİLER TARAFSIZ MEDYA PLANLAMANIN NERESİNDE?

Doç.Dr. Nihal PAŞALI TAŞOĞLU

Kocaeli Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi Halkla İlişkiler ve Tanıtım Bölümü Öğr. Üyesi

ORCID ID: 0000-0003-2985-5638

Tuncay ÖZDEN

FASELİS Şirketi Yöneticisi

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-0703-6183

Abstract

Media neutral planning attracts attention as a concept that emerges due to the increasing number of media and non-media communication activities and the difficulty in controlling the management of the increasing message crowd by the firm. Customer relationship management and integrated marketing communications are two areas that foster media neutral planning. The media should appeal to the consumer in an individualized manner, and the messages sent to the consumer should be compatible with each other and complement each other.

In this study, the extent to which the agencies dominate the media neutral planning perspective in media relations is revealed through face-to-face interviews with 14 agency employees responsible for media relations. Media relations practices were closely examined by asking questions to the subjects on the strategic planning of agencies, customer relations management and integrated marketing communication.

The study has revealed that companies still approach public relations agencies like an advertiser and that the opinion that the media coverage will be provided by the companies by broadcasting advertisements has been found to be dominant. As a result, the study reveals that although public relations practices have implemented media neutral planning in message design and content production, they cannot go a long way in terms of coordinated and monophonic coverage in the media and are far from providing the necessary coordination yet.

Keywords: Media Neutral Planning, Public Relations, Integrated Marketing Communication, Customer Relationship Management, PR Agencies.

Özet

Tarafsız medya planlama (media neutral planning), medyanın ve medya dışında kalan iletişim edimlerinin giderek artması ve artan mesaj kalabalığının yönetiminin firma tarafından kontrol edilmesinin zorlaşması nedeniyle ortaya çıkan bir kavram olarak ilgi çekmektedir. Müşteri ilişkileri yönetimi ve entegre pazarlama iletişimi, tarafsız medya planlamayı besleyen iki alandır. Medya, bireyselleştirilmiş bir biçimde tüketiciye hitap etmeli, tüketiciye giden mesajlar birbiriyle uyumlu ve birbirini tamamlar nitelikte olmalıdır.

Bu çalışmada ajansların medya ilişkilerinde tarafsız medya planlama bakış açısına ne derece hakim oldukları 14 ajansın medya ilişkilerinden sorumlu çalışanlarıyla yapılan yüz yüze görüşmelerle ortaya konmaktadır. Deneklere, ajansların stratejik planlanması, müşteri ilişkileri

yönetimi ve bütünsel pazarlama iletişim konuları üzerinden sorular yöneltilerek medya ilişkileri uygulamalarına yakından bakılmıştır.

Yapılan çalışma, şirketlerin halen halkla ilişkiler ajanslarına bir reklamveren gibi yaklaştıklarını ve medyada yer almanın şirketler tarafından reklam yayinallya sağlanacağı görüşünün hakim olduğunu ortaya çıkarmıştır. Sonuç olarak, çalışma, halkla ilişkiler uygulamalarının, mesaj tasarımindan ve içerik üretiminde tarafsız medya planlamayı gerçekleştirmiş olsa da medyada koordineli ve tek sesli yer alma konusunda pek fazla yol almadığını ve gerekli eşgündümü sağlamaktan henüz uzak olduğunu gözler önüne sermektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Tarafsız Medya Planlama, Halkla İlişkiler, BüTÜnleşik Pazarlama İletiŞimi, MüŞteri İlişkileri Yönetimi, Halkla İlişkiler Ajansları

INTRODUCTION

Although ‘media neutral planning’ has brought a broad new perspective to marketing communication planners, the attention it has received in the academic literature has remained low.

Especially with the customer relationship management, relational marketing, and customer-orientation approaches that emerged in the 90s and directed the marketing initiatives (Gordon, 1998: 138-141) (Brown, 2000: 3-7) (Grönroos, 2000) (Kotler et al. 2002:201-207) (Greenberg, 2002), the necessity has emerged that the media planning activities evolve as these transformations anticipated (Schultz, 2006).

So much so that, through media planning, media messages are tried to be communicated to the individuals in large masses in a personalized way as far as possible (Surmanek, 1993:17-19) (Clow - Baack, 2016: 20-21). In parallel with all these developments, it is clear that the efforts of businesses to systematically deliver the same message to their customers from different media require the integration of media planning studies as well as marketing (Geskey, 2015: 328-329) (Egan, 2015: 165).

As is known, when it comes to media planning, advertisers, advertising agencies and media buying agencies come to mind (Katz, 2008: 7-9). However, advertising is not the only marketing communication instrument that needs media planning. Many marketing messages such as public relations, direct marketing, and sponsorship meet their consumers through the media (Schultz, 2006: 13-29) (Pickton, 2010: 120-123).

The media neutral planning approach underlines the need for all disciplines in unified communications to serve for the integration strategy of the enterprise as a channel (Jenkinson, 2002) (Jenkinson - Sain, 2004a). Thus, public relations takes its place in the Media Neutral Planning approach as a channel.

The extent to which public relations can adopt and implement the role of ensuring integration in marketing communications is the main topic of this article. Also, this paper outlines the media neutral planning function within PR agencies in Turkey and examines the extent to which it is meeting the needs of marketing communications.

1. MEDIA NEUTRAL PLANNING

Media Neutral Planning is the belief that agencies and representatives of a brand as well as in-house teams can be briefed together on any given marketing and communications

objective and work together on the most effective solution, regardless of their own specialisms (Grounds, 2003: 202).

Saunders's study "The Communications Challenge" provides a holistic view of the meaning of being media neutral. For customers, the buying process is not just a couple of steps but many different touchpoints in their journey towards a purchase. With customers interacting with different media throughout, it follows that the roles each play will vary depending on the point in the journey. (Meadows-Klue, 2004: 202)

According to Rivett (2003), media neutral planning (MNP) is being 'based on a detailed understanding of key relationships between the consumer, the brand and all potential media options'. (O'regan, 2003: 291)

A media neutral approach is more important in today's digital world as today the platform and the message can quickly change and the emphasis is rather on dialogue than targeted outreach. Besides, direct communication in today's digital world is increasingly taking the place of media relations (McNabb, 2013). In this regard, media-neutral planning means picking the best media for reaching the target audience before even before you start thinking about creative (Summerfield, 2003).

The brand is communicated and defined by the experiences of customers and other stakeholders. Therefore communications planning should extend beyond traditional broadcast and push media. MNP begins with this wide scope and seeks to make decisions about relative priority for investment, as well as objectives and use within an 'integrated marketing communications' and 'customer relationship management' context. (Institute of Data & Marketing, 2021)

Therefore, in order to understand media neutral planning, it is necessary to examine it from a customer-oriented perspective and to look closely at its integrated structure that combines marketing communication efforts through media. In addition, before focusing on the media relations of the agencies, it would be appropriate to examine the relationship between the media planning applications implemented by the advertising agencies and expected to be integrated into the integrated structure.

1.1. Media Planning or Media Neutral Planning?

Most large companies handle the media planning and buying functions through an advertising agency, while smaller firms will usually handle this task themselves, through their marketing director, or public relations coordinator (Katz, 2008: 7).

Media planning begins with an analysis of the target market and involves understanding the consumer behavior. A method of approaching media planning is to initially conduct a study of the media preferences, taking into account that choices of the target market might differ throughout the day (Clow - Baack, 2016: 210).

Every channel of communication is a medium, and considering all points of contact with customers becomes a communication challenge. As a result, the media planning challenge exists, and by 2004, all major UK-based media agencies were already offering or planned to offer services based on this concept. (Jenkinson, 2006: 51-52)

In media neutral planning, the market communicators see media planning from the consumer's standpoint. The necessity to use qualitative research to comprehend the target audience renders media-neutral evaluation complicated. Although in theory agencies should

assess all media, many of them are not designed to be neutral due to the industry's nature, agency remuneration, and long-term habitual behavior (Egan, 2015: 165)

People nowadays do not consume media forms singly and individually. They consume them in a variety of combinations which rapidly change depending on their needs (Schultz, 2006: 22). When consumers access media systems instantaneously, or even in close sequence, what matters the media value is not the number of messages distributed by the marketer but rather the one consumed most by the target audience (Schultz, 2006: 23). In Media Neutral Planning, the type of media must be taken into account as a part of the planning process. (Grannell, 2004: 50).

According to Tapp, media decisions are regarded in a position side-by-side with segmentation or positioning considerations. While, in fact, choosing a medium should be one of the last steps in the planning process, deciding which medium to use is best done after determining the strength of the company, the customer's position, the target market and how to segment it, and against its competitors. "The next planning level is communications mix: of which advertising, PR, sales promotion, and direct marketing are a major part. These are often, wrongly, described as media. In fact, they are communications techniques. Only once the communications mix is decided is the company properly ready to decide on media" (Tapp, 2005a: 134-135).

1.2. Media Neutral Planning and Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC)

IMC is defined as a process that incorporates the management and organization of all 'agents' in the analysis, planning, implementation and control of all marketing communications contacts focused at selected target audiences as to derive the greatest enhancement and coherence of marketing communications effort in achieving determined product and corporate marketing communications objectives (Pickton, 2010: 4).

All marketing elements such as manufacturing, distribution, sales, public relations, must be dancing to the same tune: all communication efforts need to be orchestrated so the consumer hears a symphony, not a collection of different bands each playing its own music (Surmanek, 1993: 245-246). The objective of channel integration has been to improve the efficiency of media that have been pre-specified due to budgetary constraints or pre-existing strategies. As opposed to integrated marketing, this process, which is generally called media-neutral planning (MNP), places a greater reliance on data resources (Orr - Cano-Lopez, 2005: 141).

Integrated communication works better and needs MNP to work best (Jenkinson, 2002: 3). To establish synergy, the most effective marketing communications involve a diverse mix of communication types and media, as well as the use of all the communication tools. Reaching and targeting are more effective when communication is coordinated and mixed. Simply adding another medium will typically increase reach and effect by 10-20% (Jenkinson, 2002: 3).

With the proliferation of media alternatives, especially on the digital side, figuring out how to construct integrated plans that use both old and new media stands out as a perplexing challenge. Traditional and new media can and must complement and synergize each other in order to be effective (Geskey, 2015: 327).

The first step in the IMC planning process is to translate the marketing strategy into media tasks, which should be followed by the identification of marketing and communications priorities. Once the tasks are defined, certain marketing communications options can be

prioritized against others depending on the task and the instruments chosen (Geskey, 2015: 330).

Some planners have conducted customized research to guide them in finding a medium that has the greatest sales potential. However, determining the impact of each medium on sales poses a problem in this kind of research initiatives because, after all, media are not the only factors contributing to sales. The blend of marketing choices contributes to this process with each of its components. Distribution, positioning, personal selling, sales promotion, public relations, and packaging can be counted as the other media mix factors that contribute to a sale (Sissors - Baron, 2010: 57).

Because each element could transmit a separate message and hence limit communication efficacy, the employment of numerous marketing mix communication elements often requires integration (Sissors - Baron, 2010: 148).

Consistent, coherent, and congruent messages have positive effects, while mixed, contradictory or confused messages are dysfunctional, diluting the message or creating negative ideas about the brand (Jenkinson, 2006: 47). IMC is an increased emphasis on ‘integration’ and, more recently, ‘media neutrality’, with many brands and agencies reorganizing practices in response to fragmentation and thinner segmentation (Jenkinson, 2006: 48).

Despite the emphasis on the word “media” in the term “media neutral planning”, the planning challenge in this regard extends beyond advertising channels. Indeed, this stands at the heart of the emerging technical implementation issues. Practitioners are also concerned with the choice of ‘disciplines,’ or the communication strategy or instrument utilized with the medium, in addition to media (Jenkinson, 2006: 48).

According to Billet (2002), media-multiplier effects, which result in increased communication power through synergies between communication channels when they work in harmony, come as a benefit of IMC (Jenkinson, 2006: 49).

Grounds states that a shared understanding of the relationship between MNP, integrated marketing and, equally important, integrated evaluation is still a long way off to being achieved (Grounds, 2003: 203).

“An organization’s brand is perceived as a broad set of experiences by its audiences, through every single contact with that organization. Whether speaking on the telephone to a member of staff, seeing an advertisement or reading an article in the newspaper it is the totality of the communication which forms the audience’s brand picture. That being the case, failure to integrate every aspect of an organization’s communication, internal and external, will quickly lead to dissipation of brand strength and a stream of missed opportunities.” (Grounds, 2003: 203).

According to Grannell (2004: 50), there are two main challenges to being applied MNP: “The first of these is structural. Marketing strategy is classified, and agencies are categorized. Marketing students are encouraged to consider each of several boxes such as direct marketing, sales promotion in turn. The other challenge is vested interest. Participants who stand to gain from a particular outcome may be required to excuse themselves during decision-making. Besides, agencies are largely remunerated through production rather than planning, with the result that each is expected to recoup its costs through delivery rather than strategy. This, in

turn, encourages each agency to develop an in-built bias to maximize the proportion of its favorite specialty in the final mix.” All these factors constitute important obstacles against integration.

1.3. Media Neutral Planning and Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

The practice of designing marketing communications and brand message without any preconceived notions about the marketing tools a company employs is known as media neutral planning. MNP is a customer-centric marketing process that is driven by research, analysis, and creative thinking (Career Moves PR, 2019).

Expressing the marketing mix as 4C in the examination of the customer-oriented approach is of importance in terms of understanding the communication function of media neutral planning. The traditional 4P of marketing is now being replaced by 4C with the adoption of a customer-oriented approach. The reason for this is that the concept of 4P reflects the view of the market from the perspective of the seller, not from the perspective of the buyer (Kotler et al. 2002: 130).

It is required to organize a separate category for each purchasing behavior of the consumer. There are no market segments anymore, but only individual customers (Gordon, 1998: 5). CRM is a marketing strategy for selecting and managing customers in order to gain value in the long term. Accordingly, CRM predicts that businesses should have a customer-oriented service approach (Greenberg, 2002: 39). Parts of CRM include sales force automation, marketing automation, e-mail management, data analysis, and data storage. However, CRM is not software. However, it is possible to define it as “a combination of sales, service, and marketing automation” (Grönroos, 2000: 41-42). CRM is neither a concept nor a project. It is a business strategy whose aim is to understand, anticipate, and manage the needs of current and potential customers of an organization (Brown, 2000: 339).

The challenge for the brand, in this regard, is to stand in a position that is desired by the customer and be there with the necessary equipment when the customer wants them to provide specific information. Therefore, each touchpoint to be formed with the customer will create value for both the brand and the consumer. This strategy must apply to all touchpoints, in both online and offline media, and as a result, it must be media-neutral (McNabb, 2013).

According to Hartell, ‘media-neutral planning’ is ‘content neutral planning,’ putting a fresh twist on the traditional ‘media at the start of the process’ debate. The new term, however, is a broader and more integrated one that defines media as any point of interaction with a consumer, such as a 30-second TV commercial, a letter, packaging, or an article in a magazine. It also suggests that the communication channels, and thus budgets allocated to them, can be determined before the development of the actual content (Summerfield, 2003). Asscher (2003) states that the term “media-neutral planning” is incorrect as in this context the solution lies in the media, and this term shifts the attention away from both the consumer and brand. Alternatively, customer or brand communications planning would be a better name (Zambardino - Goodfellow, 2003: 430).

The increase of consumer-generated media, on the other hand, is reshaping the media landscape. Anyone with a video camera may now record an advertisement and upload it to the web. Today blogs, which are online published personal journals, allow anyone to freely comment on anything (Kelley et al. 2015: 8).

According to Spencer (2003), dividing knowledge into a number of specialized disciplines—advertising, public relations, sales promotion, direct marketing, and so on—each placed in different "silos" is a common source of frustration (Zambardino - Goodfellow, 2003: 425).

Butterworth (2002) states that "no single job discipline involves all the skills needed to do this channel-planning job". Specialists in specialized channels can do so within the context of their disciplines. However, no one has the knowledge to advise customers on how much their communications budget they should be spent on the many channels available to them (Zambardino - Goodfellow, 2003: 430)

When it comes to media planning, using MNP as the link between integrated marketing communications and customer relationship management provides a consumer-first approach. Marketers who opt to look beyond the marketing channel and into the parts of the strategy that will press the customer develop holistic brand awareness (Career Moves PR, 2019). Media neutrality begins with customer insights, bringing together disciplines in an open-minded and well-informed understanding of media potential and creative characteristics (Jenkinson, 2002: 2).

2. THE ROLE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS ON MEDIA NEUTRAL PLANNING

Because of the advent of integration, marketers who have been disillusioned with media advertising as a solution to all marketing problems are taking a fresh look at all aspects of marketing, particularly the distinctive dimension that public relations brings to the marketing mix. Public relations professionals, for their part, are seizing the chance to make a difference that integration offers to them (Harris, 1998: 3).

Marketing public relations is often integrated with a company's advertising, marketing, direct mail, and promotion communications. As a result, firms have developed the concept of integrated marketing communications, in which they control all sources of information about a product or service in order to achieve maximum message penetration (Wilcox - Cameron, 2006: 466).

Persuading a reporter to produce a news story is less expensive than buying advertising space. Furthermore, because of the increased credibility that comes with news coverage, public relations has a significant advantage (Bobbitt - Sullivan, 2005: 105). According to Ries and Ries, publicity is a more credible instrument for raising brand awareness compared to advertising (2002: XI): "You can't launch new brands with advertising because advertising has no credibility. ... You can launch new brands only with publicity or public relations. PR allow you to tell your story indirectly through third-party outlets, primarily the media." (Tench - Yeomans, 2017: 272).

Marketing and advertising executives believe that public relations is lending credibility to their messages. While many companies still have marketing and public relations silos, others are tearing them down, and clients are also demanding that they be torn down (Diggs-Brown, 2012: 367).

Within the communications mix, public relations has three important responsibilities to play: the building and maintenance of corporate goodwill; the continuity required for strong

product support; and, through these, the establishment and maintenance of appropriate connections (Fill, 2013: 471).

Public relations is a management function that traditionally focuses on long-term patterns of engagement between a company and its target market. Public relations aims to strengthen these bonds, resulting in mutual understanding, goodwill, and support (Smith, 2005: 4).

Reaching target publics through news media exposure is a common practice in public relations as it is a fairly effective method in reaching the masses through mass media, being credibility of the message it broadcasts in reputable media, creating an agenda, and communicating messages economically (Lamb - McKee, 2005: 101-102).

Direct marketers are in the best position lead the debate on the media neutrality. This is because they are more aware of neutral testing than advertisers and they have strong test, measure, and learn methodologies to apply (Tapp, 2005b: 219). All marketing communication elements, not just direct marketing, should be aware that they contribute to the integrated structure. According to Marquis, "We all have to be media-neutral - not just the media people. We now live in a marketing world that demands greater and greater accountability and effectiveness and has spawned more and more specialists to help achieve them, but which seems to have fewer and fewer certainties. Advertising or PR or direct marketing alone cannot be the whole answer. We need to strive harmoniously together for the best solutions." (2003).

A qualitative judgment is required when making a major media choice. In this regard, the target audience stands as the primary influencer on media selection. Another factor is the content of the message. If the creative idea is so powerful that it generates PR, it will reach the target audience anyway, and the chosen media will provide a robust helping hand to the message (Tapp, 2005b: 220).

2.1. Media Neutral Planning and Public Relations Strategy

Public relations professionals who are focused on marketing are looking for free positive media coverage for their organizations and brands. The media, on the other hand, want to sell their broadcasts or increase their ratings by getting useful and provocative news stories and catch the attention of their audience (Harris - Whalen, 2009: 217).

As a "management function," public relations is a well-thought-out, well-structured, and well-reviewed process that entails more than just tracking newspaper mentions. Keeping in mind that public relations, as a persuasive process, need measurable objectives, otherwise it would devolve into a random information diffusion activity (Watson - Noble, 2005: 104-105).

Kitchen et al.(2004: 1417-1436) found that there is a major obligation placed on both types of agencies to work with other agencies in developing and implementing integrated solutions for customers in their research of how PR and advertising firms coordinate and evaluate IMC. This form of contact has issues because agencies would prefer to work either alone or with trusted colleagues. As a result, the decision is made to bring all services in-house. This shift is far more obvious for advertising companies in the process of transitioning to a communications agency than it is for PR firms that communicate with a broader range of stakeholders (Kitchen, et al. 2004: 1431).

Even if the contacts are said to be mostly one-sided – and mainly the approach often comes from the PR sphere – the process might well be turned into a two-way communication. PR agents raise awareness among journalists of their existence through networking activities,

which boosts their chances of being approached by reporters seeking information (Larsson, 2009: 144).

Journalists are increasingly sourcing and verifying story leads through digital means such as blogs and Twitter. That isn't to argue that 'conventional' public relations strategies aren't effective. Almost two-thirds (62 percent) of the journalists claimed that they sourced stories from PR agencies, with 59 percent citing corporate spokespeople as their sources of information. Sixty-one percent of respondents said they employed public relations firms to verify information, and 57 percent said they relied on business spokesmen (Oriella PR Network, 2011).

"The challenges include performance gaps in: listening to and understanding stakeholders and developing effective stakeholder typology; understanding the brand and organizational identity; achieving coherence between promise and delivery; consistency and coherence across contact points and organizational units; achieving customer-centered brand and agency marketing organization and infrastructure; collaboration and co-operation in client-agency and agency-agency relationships; accurate, unbiased beliefs about communications channels; quality databases and data; effective tools for communication-mix planning and lean marketing processes." (Jenkinson et al. 2005: 81).

The MNP Best Practice Group established a new planning framework for both integration and media neutrality that includes concepts, processes, and tools (Jenkinson, 2006: 56). This model clearly displays public relations' corporate communication function in media neutral planning, as well as its role in ensuring that agencies operate together as a team.

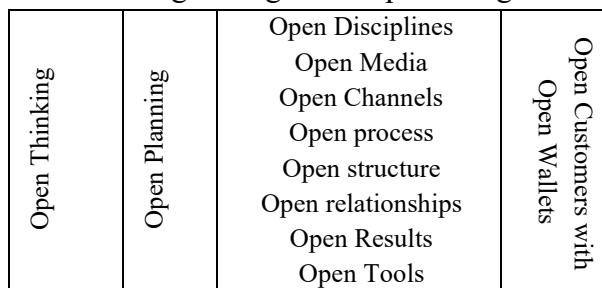


Figure 1: Open Planning Framework

Open Planning creates Channels from the Media-Discipline mix, removing misconceptions about media and disciplines and allowing them to function better together (Jenkinson - Sain, 2004b). Leaders must guarantee that the integrated communications planning involves a holistic approach to communication, media-neutral planning, and media-neutral payment to agencies, a media-neutral creative idea, recognition that all communication is brand defining, and integrated thinking across mass and one-to-one communication (Jenkinson - Sain, 2004a: 368).

In order to maintain integrated communication, both agencies and institutions have important responsibilities. In addition to being competent in media relations, it is necessary to examine the media neutral planning strategy of public relations companies, who share responsibility with the institution's communication department in the coordination of all communications aimed to the internal and external target audiences.

2.2. Media Strategies of PR Agencies and Reflection of Media Neutral Planning to Agencies

In order to learn how PR agencies evaluate media neutral planning, how effectively the customer-oriented approach is used in the presentation of the messages produced by the agency to the target audience, and how they ensure coordination with advertising agencies, a series of interviews were held with the public relations professionals in the media departments of the agencies.

All 14 agency employees work as media relations directors or managers. All of the agencies are based in Istanbul and offer services for Turkey's national brands. There are nine (9) women and five (5) men among the participants. Only two (2) of them do not have a communications degree. Eight (8) of them have previously worked in the media, and none of them has less than five years of experience in the field. The participants were asked questions about the axis of integrated marketing communication, media planning, and customer relationship management approaches, which constitute the infrastructure of media neutral planning.

To begin, participants were asked what types of one-to-one communication alternatives they generated in the media when managing their media relations, as well as how they classified target audiences.

Tracking the media, their editors, writers, production schedules and posting schedules may be the most challenging aspect of managing your media relations program (Howard et al. 2013: 33).

One of the professionals we interviewed summarizes the target setting efforts as follows:

"On LinkedIn, we conducted research. We debated for a year about which content should be paired with which jobs in which organizations. If we can make a reasonable prediction in advance, we concentrate on the target audience that consumes that media, and this time, the style and format of the broadcast. What type of information does he/she publish and when does he/she publish it? For example, we have energy-related news. Is he/she in possession of an energy sheet? What sort of announcements does he/she make? Is it a business-to-business or a business-to-consumer relationship?"

One of the participants explained the strategy of the agency to reach the target audience through a recent event:

"We recently held the MAKTEK machinery fair. The companies were promoting their machines for Industry 4.0. First, we tried to get to know all three sides thoroughly. 1. The TÜYAP fair 2. Turkish Machine Manufacturers Association 3. Machine Manufacturers. We shared 88 questions with these groups. At first, they winced. It was three months before the fair. We had prepared the communication plan. When the answers came, we started to decorate. From there, the data we will give to both the economy and technology press came out. We also produced special interview topics. We published 13 press releases in a 3-month period. Except for the interviews we did. The press releases all contained different topics." As it is clearly seen in this example, agencies try to make the target audience specific by making micro-groupings as much as possible in communication.

Another participant drew attention to the role of trips in media relations:

"Media trips are the most developed option in media relations, traveling with them. What kind of potential news are waiting for me on the trip? How can I take their attention? We usually think about these factors."

Trips create important opportunities to deal with press members one-on-one. In this way, it is possible to provide information that will attract more attention to the target audiences that they will reach after detailed attention to each person.

One participant stated that they are trying to make the bulletins unique to the media organization by saying "We cannot make the same news in every newspaper with the same topic and the same headline. Journalists have a responsibility to their target audience. The news should be previously unpublished and the content should be suitable for the audience." Another participant, who said, "We divide the bulletins into three groups called economy, general and life style", also clearly reveals the targeting perspective.

Another participant stated that she is trying to adapt the message to target audiences by saying that "We routinely confirm all our newsletters by making calls. If you want your message to reach everyone and get a wide coverage, you have to do this. But instead, if you say that this message should appear not everywhere but in a few places that are important to me, then you are doing sorting or looking at the weight of the messages in your hand."

The participant clearly stated that she focuses on her work from the consumer's point of view by saying, "The brand wants special news the most. It must tell about their brand, focusing only on it. But the consumer likes comparative news. Comparison with other brands or something. The consumer can access a lot of information about the product with a single click. I have to make a difference. Editors should put this out. Original content should be produced. Otherwise, it does not satisfy the consumer. The brand often asks, 'Well, all necessary messages have been provided.' But let's see what the consumer thinks? Did he/she receive all the messages he/she was expected or wanted to receive?"

In the customer relationship management strategy, it is emphasized that the customers should be treated individually as much as possible and the target audience should be grouped according to individual needs and expectations. Therefore, it is seen that public relations agencies are making an intense effort to achieve this segmentation and personalization.

On the other hand, it will not always be possible for these efforts to be reciprocated and target audience planning to yield results. Public relations need to do more to gain media visibility than advertising. The main difference between the two disciplines is that advertising pays to be featured in the media, and that public relations can only make news by producing newsworthy content.

A participant who pointed out that the leading communication agencies of the sector have taken important steps in this regard, conveys the point currently reached as follows: "In 2006, Zarakol gave great importance to the subject of target audience measurement. There was a company called AVEDA; it provided us with measurements. Just like in the advertisement, like 'it would be better if you use this channel and this media' and so on. But we cannot realize our plans. It is useful to know this in the advertisement. Because you buy the media you want to be in. But we cannot realize this commitment. We started undermining ourselves and stopped."

Another participant gives an example that supports this view: "We did this for a tea company. We said it would be great if your news appeared in X magazine. But there is normally no news about tea in that magazine. That's why there are times when we don't get results even though we do targeting."

The effort of public relations to develop relationships is an indication that it has a perspective that adopts customer relations management as a fundamental notion. One participant expresses this with the following words: "We have been intensely trying to develop relationships in recent years."

The participants, who drew attention to the fact that there are insufficient studies in our country regarding the studies conducted to determine the target audience, stated the following views: "Turkish companies are not willing to do study in terms of determining the target audience of the product and service. Why? Because it has costs and it takes time. Foreign companies are much better in this regard as they have international experience" and "Unfortunately, there is no extensive study in our sector. We are looking at the circulation. Or if customers do some research during the new product launch, we take advantage of it." "Targeting is easiest on social media. You are using hashtags; you are using bloggers."

The participants who stated that they try to send newsletters to other names every time with certain filtering, instead of targeting the masses, while sending newsletters to the media, avoid addressing all journalists at the same time. Therefore, crowded press conferences are now being replaced by more focused, sincere, and less-attended meetings.

One participant conveyed the style of his/her work as follows: "We do filtering when sending the newsletter. Instead of sending it to everyone, we send it selectively. Sometimes, if something interesting comes up, we make a special news on a single broadcast and then send it to everyone as a newsletter."

Companies frequently utilize press conferences and special events to garner media attention. News conferences, like press releases, are frequently abused. A news conference is an unstructured atmosphere in which the news you create may not be the news you desire. Special events should also be used sparingly and with discretion. (Guth - Marsh, 2005: 119)

Participants were asked what they thought of the press conferences and one of them outlined their communication styles with the press by speaking as follows: "Press conferences are very inefficient. We are preparing environments where our customers can reach brands more directly. We hold a roundtable or meet the columnist for lunch." Another participant shared the same views and stated that dividing the target audience increases efficiency with the following words:

"In the communication of a product, press conferences with 100 people are no longer held. We divide them into groups. As far as possible, we avoid combining sectoral publications with national or monthly publications. This may look like a disadvantage, but we have seen its advantage. Nationalists have little time. After our meeting, they will attend 2-3 more meetings. ... The sectoral press is very familiar with the issue. They scrutinize a lot, and the discussions gets longer as a result. If we prepare separately for economics managers, for editorial reporters, for sectoral publishers, and for monthly economy magazines, we get more efficiency. Thus, we propose four separate meetings."

Another participant stated, "If there is any news that no one can be indifferent to, we hold a press conference. If it is a more specific issue, and we believe that only experts will be interested in it, we try to reach out both as a publisher and an editor. One editor manages three or four separate pages today. That's why there is little chance of examining, researching, and meeting one-on-one. We take it into consideration."

Instead of sending formal media releases by e-mail, journalists are now used to receiving more personalized pitches from PR practitioners. This approach can often result in more in-depth, quality coverage in a few more influential titles (Theaker, 2013: 172).

Therefore, this behavior pattern in the sector is an extension of the approach that takes the consumer to its focus and sees each of them as an individual and can be accepted as an indicator that the agencies realize media neutrality. It is seen from the opinions of the participants that many agencies have this awareness. As a matter of fact, agencies that do not acquire this point of view are criticized by one participant with the following words: "From the point of view of the media, trying to come out anytime and anywhere is wrong in all formats. Public relations are suffocating at this point. If the media manages reputation, not relationships, it can save itself from this suffocating situation."

It is also an opinion shared by agency executives that relationships are of great importance in the long run. According to one participant, "Media relations have been established under the umbrella of media communications. When we hire someone in media relations, we ask him/her how aware he/she is of the industry. It's all about relationships. The more relationships you have, the more your news has a place."

Some participants also expressed a clear view on using Customer Relationship Management (CRM) data. One participant stated, "Public relations does not make use of CRM data. We request this information from the institutions, but they are unable to supply it. Only those working in the electronics industry can do it. They have the ability to locate and extract data. We can produce very good news content this way. Companies with more traditional business processes, on the other hand, cannot or are unwilling to do so. The institution's culture is also effective in this regard." Another participant expressed his/her thoughts as follows: "The institution should provide you with this data. There should be institutions that are aware and responsible enough to collaborate with you and provide you with the necessary data. When the agency is not fed by the institution, its resources are depleted." Employees of public relations agencies are aware of the importance of data collected through customer relationship management and are interested in continuing their work on the basis of these data.

While public relations manages relations with the media as a part of integrated marketing communication, its path mostly crosses with advertising. The use of mass media as a marketing communication component in advertising brings along the necessity of using these two disciplines in an integrated manner in terms of taking part in the media. Media neutral planning is an approach that suggests that scattered planning over media will prevent this integration.

In the brand organization, there are frequently sharp divisions, such as the separation of responsibility for public relations and advertising agencies, as well as the division of communication and promotion budgets between marketing and sales. As a result, it is difficult for most organizations to manage a complete 'marketing' budget and even more difficult to decide how to use it optimally (Jenkinson, 2006: 51).

As a result, advertising and public relations should strive to act in a coordinated fashion as much as possible during their use of media. Therefore, the relations of the agencies with the advertising department and their attitudes and behaviors in ensuring this coordination were also among the main topics discussed during the interviews.

One of the participants drew attention to the difference between advertising and public relations: "A magazine advertisement can be very effective, especially if it appeals to your target audience. But being the news itself is much more effective even if it only appeals to the general audience. Because advertising does not encourage our people to buy, except that the offer is a clear price reduction. Assume that you are a ready-to-wear brand. Let's say you published a sophisticated ad that shows the autumn-winter creation. It doesn't seem to have much of an effect. However, if the same brand advertises two different combinations on the internet or in a newspaper, simply stating they are available in their new collection, it will have a greater effect on purchasing." Another participant emphasized the impact of public relations on sales, albeit indirectly, by saying: "Advertisements were placed in magazines for days to announce a local liquor company festival. There were few ticket sales. But when we make the news in the period we call Pre-PR, we see that both product and ticket sales have increased."

In terms of media coverage, public relations practitioners were also asked what kind of collaboration they had with advertising. One of the participants responded to the question of whether they have a better chance of being featured in the media if their company is advertised as the news itself: "No. We do not get into it. We do not commit to having you advertised if you attend the press conference." Another participant expressed his/her opinion as follows: "Yes, the institution forces you to do this, it has such expectations. But we don't want to get into this relationship. Then you give the money and leave. This is not my job. I have to do this with my creativity and expertise. That's why public relations experts don't prefer to work with big brands. Because they have the attitude that they do and control everything for you." Another manager, who stated, "We try not to confuse media relations with media buying. We don't mention whether we have advertisements in your media or not," shares the view that public relations should not be mixed with advertising.

On the other hand, some agencies welcome this type of collaboration: "We discuss the day and media of the advertisement with the manager of advertisements and accordingly send our newsletter." One participant expressed his/her views as follows: "When we talk about the messages that customers are sensitive to in our brands that work with media planning agencies, we specifically ask if they are going to do advertisement planning at this point. If they are, we either contact the agency directly or they send us their communication plans and we try to make that process so that we can support them, at least on behalf of the content. But this is not always that coordinated. When they work with 4-5 different agencies, it is impossible for them to all sit at the same table." Another participant stated, "Today PR and advertising must go hand in hand. In fact, we need to buy the places we target in the media with advertising."

Another official stated that only negative news is coordinated with advertising: "It is used as a threat. The company sends a warning to the ad purchasing department about this. It's like 'we won't advertise if the negative news keeps coming'. Or if it is on the internet, it is blocked before it can reach to the mainstream channels."

As can be seen, public relations and advertising agencies are not far apart and are not entirely independent of one another. Media buying agencies should likewise stay close to public relations and direct marketing. According to Summerfield, "Media agencies can implement media-neutral planning by starting to happen more and more with a range of people with backgrounds in DM, PR, and online all coming into the fold." (Summerfield, 2003).

However, when asked about their relationship with the advertising department, one participant stated, "As communicators, we do not like to be in contact with advertisers. These are two separate departments with distinct dynamics. In the media, editorial work and the advertising department are separate." Other participants stated that they were able to cooperate with advertising departments on certain issues and they found this necessary on occasion.

When asked about the attitude of the agencies towards the media if the brands they represent do not advertise at all, one participant responded: "Yes we send (our newsletter). They say 'we will consider', but of course you understand from their attitude. The only thing you can do is to have as cordial a relationship with the media professionals as possible." Another participant stated, "There are some key publications we care about. When working with them, we express our thoughts to the customer, such as suggesting them for future advertisements."

When asked if they exchanged data with advertising agencies, one participant stated, "It can happen if you have an organic bond. If it is part of a large structure that has the creative agency, media agency and public relations trio, this trio can discuss internally. This, however, does not occur in structures like ours, whose sole function is public relations. Other institutions, understandably, do not benefit from the service they outsource to you." Another participant's response was as follows: "It happens from time to time. Some of our customers provide us with this opportunity. But some are not even not advertisers, anyway."

When asked what differences exist between companies' perceptions of advertising and public relations agencies, one participant stated, "Companies treat PR agencies as advertising agencies, even if they do not advertise. In other words, the company thinks like, 'I pay to you so you should be present in places where I do not advertise'."

One participant also determined the position of public relations in relation to the advertisement with the following statements: "PR is a discipline that attempts to bring news to places other than advertising. It should leave a favorable impression of the brand it defends and represents. It must, however, earn it because it doesn't pay money to create impression. It should achieve it with hard work, intelligence, and relationships..." Another participant stated, "Companies put a lot of pressure on public relations firms. They even get the public relations out of the way and put pressure on the media. They are attempting to obtain the result that PR was unable to obtain from the newspaper by contacting the newspaper's advertising service. A common complaint is shared by the editorial offices of newspapers and public relations firms. The advertising party (company) and the newspaper's advertisement department are trying to fulfill the function of journalists and public relations."

Participants were also asked if they benefit from the TGI Survey, which has an important place in the industry and is mainly used by advertisers.

TGI is a wonderful product of huge potential value to the work of PR people, but, sadly, is hardly ever used by them. The annual subscription is unfortunately somewhat costly, but it

may be worthwhile. However, it may be worthwhile. If you work in an in-house PR department, it's possible that your company or agency already has one (Knights, 2001: 13).

One of the participant responded as follows: "We don't use TGI. Giants like Wal Mart use it. I haven't seen it used very much in Turkey." Another participant stated, "We do demographic psycho-graphic studies. What is read? What is watched? TGI is one of the survey results that we use." Others indicated clearly that they do not use TGI data.

Following this, the participants were asked how they evaluated media results. The participants reported that they lacked adequate measurement tools. One participant stated, "We have no measurement. We no longer use ad equivalents. Because we are a member of IDA. Quantitative and qualitative impact is looked at. Ajans Press is doing it." Another participant offered his/her opinion as follows: "It is very difficult to measure, but digital has made a difference here. It tells you how many clicks you have got. But we have no idea where he read, how much he perceived, how he arrived at that page, or what he was looking for." One participant said, "There is no such thing as measuring. We only get support from MTM in the print media." Another participant said, "In compliance with the Barcelona criteria, we aim to avoid pronouncing the advertisement equivalent as much as possible."

Finally, the participants' views on integrated marketing communication were asked. "There are very few organizations that can achieve integrated marketing communications, some capable institutions, but not agencies," one of the participants responded. "Even if their functions are distinct, agencies are nonetheless adversaries, striving for dominance."

"In order to do successful media planning in public relations, a system that believes in integrated communication or takes advertising and public relations together, or if it doesn't, a system that can sit both at the same table—which is very difficult—and plan together must be developed within the agency," another participant said. "This is what we call ideal, and it's something that only a few Turkish companies are capable of. Foreign public relations firms are now operating in Turkey. Some of them are attempting it. Because of their international power. At the very top, I'm talking about a 1% stake." A media relations manager with 11 customers nationwide expressed his/her views as follows: "We do nothing but serve newsletters. It consumes all of our available time. However, there are many materials we will use. We won't be able to manage integrated communication in this way." Another participant stated that the sector does not stand very close to integration by saying, "The ad equivalent is still being calculated. Certain points of view do not change. To summarize, there is a great deal of unconsciousness going on." Other participants responded that they did not believe integration could be accomplished and that it would be impossible.

CONCLUSION

The notion of media neutral planning has gained traction because of the growing number of media and non-media communication activities, as well as the difficulties of organizations managing the growing message crowd.

As a result, marketing communication specialists concentrate on how consumers react to the information they receive from various media, as well as how message confusion caused by various media is mirrored in the consumer.

As a marketing communication tool, public relations employs traditional media as well as advertising to communicate business messages to its target audience. All messages and media must be used at the same time and in the same way in an integrated marketing communication strategy. Corporate communication, on the other hand, tends to revolve around advertising as the primary mode of communication.

Media relations in public relations require a strategic planning. Just like in advertising, public relations should strive to have its visibility in the media at the right time and at the right place, delivering its messages to the masses in a manner coherent and consistent with the messages of other marketing communication disciplines.

Media neutral planning is an expression of the approach that media messages are consumer oriented and treated as an element of integrated communication in a way that does not create confusion in the minds of consumers. Therefore, in customer relations management, the target masses should be known as closely as possible, and the messages that will appeal to them should be conveyed through one-to-one communication or at least a personalized presentation through the media that can communicate the messages to them.

Customer relationship management and integrated marketing communication are two areas that feed media neutral planning. The messages provided to the consumer should be compatible with and complement each other, and the media should appeal to the customer in an individualized manner.

The responsibility of public relations in managing the relations that include all stakeholders of the institution, starting from within the institution, makes it a leading communicator in relations with target masses. Both the public relations department within the institution and the public relations agencies play a key role in the integration of marketing communication efforts on behalf of the institution. However, with the involvement of advertising and direct marketing in media relations, it is likely that problems will arise in the coordination of media messages. As a result, along with every message reaching the customer, every means and communication mechanism that transmits it should be treated with integrity.

It is inevitable that professionals responsible for media relations in public relations agencies bear responsibility in coordinating and guiding this relationship.

Through interviews with agency personnel, the extent to which the agencies are aware of the media neutral planning viewpoint in media relations has been disclosed in this study. In face-to-face interviews with personnel in charge of media relations of 14 agencies, questions were asked to determine whether they had the communication infrastructure and perspective to carry out media neutral planning, especially by asking questions on media strategic planning, customer relations management, and integrated marketing communication.

Agency employees segment target audiences in media relations as much as possible in line with their goals and desires and take care to design messages according to the communication needs of each group. Also, although they think that they have not yet accomplished an integrated way of communication, they are aware of the role they take to lead corporate communication and, as a result, marketing communication in collaboration with advertising agencies.

However, according to this study, companies still treat public relations firms as advertisers, and businesses still see media coverage because of advertising. Despite the fact

that public relations attempts to overcome this handicap through content management, advertising obviously dominates the media and overshadows public relations.

It is clear that public relations understands the importance of setting targets, but it does not do sufficient research. Furthermore, it was stated unequivocally that the primary goal of public relations is to build relationships.

Public relations agency media relations managers also stated that the agencies were unable to take the necessary steps toward integration, that they were unable to communicate their marketing messages in conjunction with advertising efforts, that their cooperation with advertising entities was mostly based on a "publish more advertisement, publish more newsletters" understanding, and that they were unaware of researches in the field.

In conclusion, although public relations has adopted the media neutral planning in message design and content production, it is revealed that they have not made much progress in terms of coordinated and monophonic coverage in the media and are far from providing the necessary coordination yet.

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