11 A uses and gratifications approach to marketing communications

How to serve the interests of all stakeholder groups

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This study explores the uses and gratifications of different stakeholders regarding marketing communication messaging and how these uses and gratifications vary according to stakeholder loyalty. Marketing is increasingly recognising that in order to be effective, firms need to consider a broader range of stakeholders other than just consumers. However, current literature fails to identify how firms should interact with their various stakeholder groups and only identifies that such interactions should take place. In developing an understanding of how to interact with various stakeholder groups, the uses and gratifications approach was adopted and stakeholders were positioned on the extended ladder of stakeholder loyalty. The analysis of data emerging from a qualitative survey among 28 stakeholders of Philips Design demonstrates that the revealed uses and gratifications of various stakeholder groups regarding marketing communication messaging have much in common with classifications derived from studies of other mass media uses and gratifications. A wide range of uses and gratifications with regard to marketing communication messaging was revealed varying according to stakeholder loyalty. Based on their specific uses and gratifications the various stakeholder groups have different content preferences regarding marketing communication messaging. Based on these findings, companies can decide on *how* they should communicate with various stakeholder groups.

11.1 Introduction

Consumers are repeatedly confronted with substantial measures of advertising in multiple media. Everyone seems to hold an opinion about various aspects of advertising, ranging from amusement and admiration to cynicism and condemnation. Advertising is, as part of marketing communications, therefore an important social phenomenon. It both stimulates consumption and economic activity and models lifestyles and a certain value orientation (Pollay & Mittal, 1993).

However, stakeholders of companies might use advertisements as part of marketing communicating messaging for different goals, such as to learn more about the company itself or as a means of evaluation of the relationship between the company and its stake-

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holders. Additionally stakeholders might even learn more about themselves through marketing communication messaging. These uses may vary across stakeholder groups and therewith provide important cues for firms on how to communicate effectively with these various groups. Today, the question is not which stakeholder groups should organisations be communicating with, but how to manage communication strategies across stakeholder groups (Scholes & Clutterbuck, 1998). However, current literature falls short in determining how firms can or should interact with their stakeholders and only states that such interactions should take place (Polonsky, Schuppisser & Beldona, 2002). Moreover, current stakeholder theory examines stakeholder issues from a small number of viewpoints and interests, principally from the perspective of managers and company directors (Fitchett, 2005). According to Fitchett it is an irony, if not a contradiction, that stakeholder theory is rarely presented from the point of view of stakeholders themselves.

While exploring how to interact with various stakeholder groups from a stakeholder point of view, a uses and gratifications approach might be useful (O'Donohoe, 1993). The underlying theme of uses and gratifications is the idea that people use media to gain specific gratifications. According to O'Donohoe (1993) there is at least a quarter century of implicit support among British marketing practitioners for a uses and gratifications approach to the study of marketing communications. However, despite this implicit support, little work has explicitly addressed the uses and gratifications among various stakeholder groups (O'Donohoe, 1993). The uses and gratifications approach in communication research asks what people do with media instead of what different media do with people. According to Lowery and DeFleur (1995) people are not, as emphasised by previous theories, passive entities that are being acted upon by the media. To the contrary, they are active agents selecting material that best fits their interests and needs in order to gratify a certain need (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995).

Therefore, different types of stakeholder groups should have different uses to gain specific gratifications regarding corporation's marketing communication messaging. Marketing communication messaging concerns all communication of companies towards their stakeholder groups related to marketing goals and objectives, ranging from product advertisements to campaigning and corporate advertising. Based on their specific uses these stakeholder groups may also have different content preferences regarding marketing communication messaging. Therefore, insights into the uses of marketing communication messages and content preferences of different types of stakeholder groups are needed in order to find out *how* companies should communicate with various stakeholder groups. Consequently, the goal of this research study is to explore the uses and preferences of different groups of stakeholders regarding marketing communication messaging

11.2   Theory

Polonsky, Schuppisser and Beldona (2002) used the 'ladder of stakeholder loyalty' (Tuominen, 1995) to describe various stakeholder groups based on their ability to directly cooperate or threaten organisational activities. The names on the extended ladder of stakeholder loyalty do not significantly differ with the original version by Tuominen, and in fact these names are similar to those developed by Freeman (1984) and Savage et al. (1991) for stakeholders (Polonsky, Schuppisser & Beldona, 2002). However, the ex-

tended discussion of the underlying moderating dimensions enables consideration for all types of stakeholder influences and interactions. The extended ladder of stakeholder loyalty by Polonsky, Schuppisser and Beldona (2002) is summarised in Figure 11.1.

Starting at the top of the ladder, the internal intermediaries (e.g. account managers) and internal buyers are located within the allied loyalty box. Also, organisations with which the company has some sort of partnership or other form of collaboration can be ranked below internal buyers in the allied loyalty box as well. These are stakeholders with whom the firm shares a cooperative relationship orientation, where both parties understand that their own welfare is bound to the welfare of the other (Polonsky, Schuppisser and Beldona, 2002). The identification based form of trust has been achieved over time due to the argumentative and collaborative communication styles with an informal tone of voice and indirect content (Mohr & Nevin, 1990). The parties involved have shaped a true win-win relationship, which may continuously be adapted to external and internal requirements.

Second, moving down on the ladder, external buyers and external intermediaries are located within the cooperative loyalty box. Trust is based on the profound knowledge that parties have about each other. They make some commitments to the relationship, but are reluctant to make too specific commitments (Polonsky, Schuppisser & Beldona, 2002). Communication is not always argumentative, but in some instances it may be persuasive. Furthermore, communication may be more formal and of direct content than in allied stakeholder relationships.

Third, potential customers, consumer groups and the general public can be found in the upper side of the neutral loyalty box. However, the position of potential customers on the ladder is dependent on the relation between the organisation and the specific potential customer. When, for instance, the organisation and the potential customer have exploited some form of collaboration in the past or they are currently in the stadium of

	Relationship orientation and Evaluation mode	Trust	Communication	Learning	Power	Reciprocity and commitment
Allied	- cooperative - strategic	Identification-based trust	-argumentative - hi frequency - bi-directional - informal - indirect content	- single-loop - double-loop - triple-loop	- very low	- positive and weak - high commitments
Cooperative	- cooperative - strategic	Knowledge-based trust	-argumentative /persuasive - hi frequency - bi-directional - informal - in-/direct content	- single-loop, - double-loop	- higher -normative	- positive and weak/strong - limited commitments
Neutral	- individualistic - operative	Calculus-based trust	- persuasive/ informative - low frequency - bi-directional - formal - direct content	- single-loop	- high - normative /utilitarian	- positive/ negative and strong - low/no commitments
Competitive	-individualistic/ competitive - operative	Calculus-based trust	- persuasive - low frequency - unidirectional - formal - direct content	- single-loop	- high -utilitarian /normative	- negative and strong - low commitments
Threatening	- competitive - operative	Distrust	- persuasive/ manipulative - low/high frequency - uni-/ bi-directional - in-/formal - direct content	- single-loop	- very high - utilitarian/ normative/ coercive	- negative and strong - low/high commitments

Figure 11.1 Extended ladder of stakeholder loyalty (Polonsky, Schuppisser & Beldona, 2001)

negotiation, they may move themselves slightly up to the cooperative loyalty box. According to Polonsky, Schuppisser and Beldona (2002) the firm and stakeholders located in the neutral loyalty box share individual relationship orientations. They interact with each other to achieve their individual goals, although they perceive their goals as independent of the other party's goals. Communication is informative or persuasive and takes place when parties are negotiating about a specific transaction. The parties try to avoid actions that oblige them to commit to this specific relationship and insist on reasonable 'quid pro quo' exchanges (Polonsky, Schuppisser and Beldona, 2002).

Fourth, business press and media, business experts and peers can be located below previous mentioned groups in the neutral loyalty box as well. Ranking business press and media on the extended ladder of stakeholder loyalty is quite controversial since it is well known that the media are supposed to act as an independent vehicle within society (Croteau & Hoynes, 2003). Therefore it is reasonable to suggest that business press and media can be located within the neutral loyalty box. Business experts and peers also take a neutral stand against corporations within their business environment. They all interact with each other to achieve individual goals, try to avoid actions that oblige them to commit to a specific relationship and also insist on reasonable 'quid pro quo' exchanges.

Finally, competitors can be located within the competitive loyalty box. Polonsky, Schuppisser and Beldona (2002) argue that these stakeholders have a relationship with the firm that is based on an individualistic and sometimes competitive orientation, such that they not only try to reach their individual goals, but also strive to outperforming the other. Regular communication between the two is rare, but when it occurs it is distinctly persuasive in the sense that it serves to impress the other. In general, parties try to avoid any commitments to the relationship.

Crosier (1983), influenced by the work of May (1983), suggests that consumers use advertising for at least seven reasons, namely: product information, entertainment, implied warranty, value addition, post-purchase reassurance, vicarious experience and involvement. O'Donohoe (1993) adopted the uses and gratifications approach to study the consumption of advertising material. O'Donohoe argues that some uses (information, facilitating choice, reassurance, consumption stimulation, vicarious consumption, and added value) are directly related to marketing objectives, while others, such as learning, a topic of conversation and surveillance may or may not be related to these objectives.

Thus, as a part of the mass media, advertising offers its audience various uses and gratifications. As well as consumers, different types of stakeholder groups have different sets of expectations, needs and values. Consequently, it would be reasonable to suggest that they, as well as consumers, might have different uses and gratifications regarding a corporation's marketing communication messaging. Therefore, it would be legitimate to adopt the uses and gratifications approach not solely for the purpose of studying consumers and advertising, but also to study various stakeholder groups within the overall business environment in the face of marketing communication messaging.

It is hence important to explore the uses and gratifications of each stakeholder group in order to optimise stakeholder messaging. As the different stakeholder groups can be ranked on the extended ladder of stakeholder loyalty, stakeholder groups on the upper side of the ladder might have different uses and gratifications than stakeholder groups which are located on the lower side of the ladder. This study explores potential differences in uses and content preferences between multiple stakeholder groups and there-

fore also examines whether there exists a relationship between uses and gratifications and stakeholder loyalty. In order to accomplish the above, the following research questions need to be answered: What are the uses of various stakeholder groups regarding marketing communication messaging, how are these uses related to stakeholder loyalty and what are the content preferences of stakeholder groups in the face of marketing communication messaging?

11.3 Method

In contrast with much research on media uses and gratifications, which has relied on direct, structured, multiple-choice questionnaires, a qualitative survey approach is adopted for this study for several reasons.

First of all, since the uses and gratifications of marketing communication messages remain undefined to date (O'Donohoe, 1993), this study will be purely explorative in its nature. Little is known about this specific area within uses and gratifications research (O'Donohoe, 1993) and therefore hypotheses need to be formulated, rather than tested as in quantitative research. Marshall and Rossman (2006) argue that the explorative or descriptive nature of qualitative research is the unique strength of this genre of research.

Secondly, since stakeholder theory is very much a theory designed for stakeholders rather than by stakeholders, the question of how to interact with various stakeholder groups needs to be approached from the stakeholder's point of view. 'Experiencing the experiences of others' (Burns, 1989) and describing worlds 'from the inside out' (Flick et al., 2004) are key phrases within this context and are exactly describing what this study should embody.

Thirdly, according to Marshall and Rossman (2006), human actions cannot be understood unless the meaning that humans assign to them is understood. Because uses and preferences are involved in the research question of this study, understanding into the deeper perspectives is needed. Such an understanding can be more thoroughly captured through qualitative interviews than through any form of quantitative research. The objective of this study requires social explanations and arguments to be constructed with emphasis on depth, nuance, complexity and roundedness in data, rather than on surface patterns which, for example, questionnaires might provide. Therefore, in-depth interviewing is used as the core research method while applying the grounded theory approach (Wester, 1991).

The grounded theory approach describes the empirical process of qualitative analysis: the cyclical process in which the chain of reflection – observation – analysis is being continuously carried on through. Wester (1991) distinguishes four separate phases in the cyclical process of theory development: the exploration phase, the specification phase, the reduction phase and the integration phase. This grounded theory approach will be applied while making use of in-depth interviewing.

An interesting case in the context of exploring the uses of relevant stakeholder groups within the business environment is Philips Design. Philips Design is the in-house design and branding agency of Philips, headquartered in Eindhoven, the Netherlands, with branch studios in Europe, the USA and Asian Pacific. Philips Design offers a full range of design services to many different types of clients both within and outside the Royal Philips Electronics organisation. These services include design management, cor-

porate identity creation and innovation design, as well as design of products, communication materials, interfaces and solutions for Internet and new media.

The question of determining how to address various stakeholder groups plays a significant role within Philips Design these days. In concert with current stakeholder literature (Polonsky, Schuppisser & Beldona, 2002), Philips Design has identified that interactions with all kinds of stakeholder groups should take place, but the corporation has not succeeded yet in determining how. Within Philips Design, stakeholder issues are primarily examined from a small number of viewpoints and interests, principally from the perspective of management and company directors. While formulating new communication strategies in order to address all stakeholder groups simultaneously, Philips Design is striving to move from a 'one for all' strategy to a more customised communication strategy. Therefore, it is important to determine how to address various stakeholder groups by exploring their specific uses and messaging preferences.

11.3.1   Participants

According to Flick et al. (2004) exploratory studies are special in the context of sampling because their case is only constructed in the course of the investigation. A procedure that is oriented to the premises of grounded theory is recommended. Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Wester (1991) all refer to this method as 'theoretical sampling'.

Based on existing stakeholder literature, one might state that the stakeholder population of organisations can be subdivided into several stakeholder markets with multiple underlying stakeholder groups. Payne, Ballantyne, and Christopher (2004), for instance, distinguish a number of stakeholder groups that can easily be ranked on the extended ladder of stakeholder loyalty of Polonsky, Schuppisser, and Beldona (2002). Thus, ten different subgroups can be distinguished which are in line with the overall purpose of this study. These relevant stakeholder groups include: buyers, external intermediaries, potential buyers, business press and media, business experts, competitors, peers and partnerships, the general public and consumer groups.

However, while applying this methodological position to the research case Philips Design, a few adjustments need to be made. First of all, as stated before, Philips Design services clients from both the internal Philips segment as from the external market segments. Therefore it is mandatory to make a clear distinction between internal and external customers. Secondly, since Philips Design offers business-to-business services only, it might not be relevant to include consumer groups and the general public in this research study as these groups cannot be seen as relevant stakeholder groups for whom Philips Design needs to develop a customised communication strategy. The responsibility for communicating with these groups lies completely with the Royal Philips Electronics' corporate communications department. Thirdly, within such extensive multinational enterprises the categories peers, partnerships and competitors are characterised by substantial overlapping parts. While in some activities both parties could cooperate to gain mutual benefit, in other activities competition could take place. Therefore, one could simultaneously be a peer, a partner and a competitor of the organisation. Consequently, the decision has been made to solely include partnerships in this study.

In summary, the next relevant stakeholders ($N = 28$) are included which are in line with the overall stakeholder literature: internal customers ($N = 7$), external customers

(N = 6), potential clients (N = 2), peers / partnerships (N=3), business press / design media (N = 4), and business experts (N = 6). By comparing these groups with the stakeholder groups from the six markets model, they can be ranked on the extended ladder of stakeholder loyalty.

The names and contact information of internal, external and potential clients are acquired through the account managers of both the internal and the external markets. The information of other relevant stakeholders is obtained through the manager of communications, the press officer of Philips Design and other relevant internal key persons. In the face of balancing stakeholder interests and gathering enough input for the development of stakeholder theory, the relevant stakeholders are selected based on their ability to share all that the interviewer hopes to explore and their willingness to do so.

The 28 interviews all lasted approximately between 45 and 60 minutes. There was no attempt being made for an equal amount of interviewees per stakeholder group. The criterion of satisfaction with the information gained from a particular group was theoretical saturation. Figure 11.2 describes the names of the included organisations in the re-

	Position	Country
EC1	Director Global Brand Experience	Netherlands
EC2	Director LC, Living and Climate	Netherlands
EC3	Vice President Design	Finland
EC4	CEO	Netherlands
EC5	CEO	Sweden
EC6	Senior Product Manager	Sweden
IC7	Director Multi Region	Netherlands
IC8	Director Marketing Oncology	Netherlands
IC9	Director Marketing Cardiology	Netherlands
IC10	Director Upstream Marketing P&A	Netherlands
IC11	Senior Director Integrated Market Comm.	Netherlands
IC12	Director Marketing PC	Netherlands
IC13	Internal Communications P&A	Netherlands
PC14	Vice President Innovation	Netherlands
PC15	Creative Director	Denmark
P16	CEO Eindhoven	Netherlands
P17	CEO	Netherlands
P18	CEO	Netherlands
M19	Reporter	United Kingdom
M20	Freelance reporter	Netherlands / USA
M21	Freelance reporter	Netherlands
M22	Reporter	Netherlands
B23	Dean Faculty Industrial Design	Netherlands
B24	Staff member Faculty Industrial Design	Netherlands
B25	Staff member PR	Netherlands
B26	Member Board of Directors	Netherlands
B27	Prof. Design Studies / Helen Hamlet Centre	United Kingdom
B28	Director Centre of Design Research	United Kingdom

Figure 11.2 Overview respondents (N =28)

search sample, the position of the interviewed stakeholders and their country of residence.

11.3.2   Research instrument

In this research study a semi-structured interview guide is used. The semi-structured interview guide has been constructed through literature research and multiple interviews with account managers and members of the management team of the organisation in question.

The interview guide in this research study can be subdivided into three separate phases. *Phase one* is conducted in order to let the interviewee start talking about the organisation and to set the mood for an open and thorough conversation. During *phase two*, the contact of the interviewee with the organisation is discussed. While the interviewee is sharing everything he or she wants to share about the professional relationship he or she has with Philips Design, underlying factors that might indicate their uses are revealed. Furthermore, the extent to which the interviewee has contact with the organisation might strengthen, or perhaps diminish, their opinion regarding the communication of the organisation. *Phase three* explores the preferences of the interviewee regarding the communication instruments to be used. Following the discussion of general media habits and preferences, respondents describe in this phase what they find interesting, what they like, what they dislike, how their needs have changed over time and their satisfaction with current communication supply. Subsequent discussion of attitudes, interpretation and uses emerge from, and are grounded in, their own experiences with the communication messages of Philips Design and other organisations in general. Thus respondents' thoughts are not directed immediately or explicitly towards uses, nor are they required to report on these at an abstract, generalised level.

11.4   Results

This section discusses the results that arose from the analysis of the transcribed interviews. First, the uses of various stakeholder groups regarding marketing communication messaging will be presented in the form of sensitizing concepts. Second, the position of these uses on the extended ladder of stakeholder loyalty will be explicated. Finally, the accompanying specific messaging preferences will be revealed.

11.4.1   Uses of various stakeholder groups

In response to the first research question, a wide range of uses of marketing communication messaging emerged from analysis of the transcribed interviews. Some uses may be seen as directly facilitating marketing transactions, while others are used to either broaden or deepen the relationship with the organisation.

11.4.2   Reconfirmation

Principally external clients argue that receiving information periodically would reconfirm the relationship they have with the organisation. They state that coming across suc-

cess stories of the organisation in the media, would make them feel more secure that they are working with a professional organisation. According to the external clients, personal contact remains the most important form of contact within the business-to-business industry. However, marketing communication material can actually reconfirm and therefore intensify the relationship as a whole.

> EC6: "Sometimes it makes me feel more secure that I'm really working with professionals, because I can then see that others have also chosen this organisation."

11.4.3 Inspiration

Several stakeholder groups use the organisation's marketing communication messaging for inspiration for the benefit of their own organisation. Both internal and external clients argue that receiving information about projects or recent developments provides them with ideas for the solution of similar issues within their organisation.

> EC6: "I could also get some ideas that this is good. For example, you say that you have done something for a company, maybe we could do something similar, it's giving ideas, it's inspiring."

Besides the inspiration clients gain from the marketing communication messaging, business press and media claim that they use the messaging to get inspiration for the creation of articles, both in magazines and on their websites.

11.4.4 Exploration of opportunities for collaboration

Almost all stakeholder groups use company's marketing communication messaging to explore possibilities for potential collaboration. Clients, whether external, internal or potential, are continuously exploring opportunities for collaboration in order to move themselves forward as an organisation.

> EC5: "So this customer says AHA, you know ... we could apply that! We could do something like this, but it's really up to you to engineer this [...] So it's not only to inspire, but we both have a clear objective there too."

Besides clients, partners and business experts are seeking opportunities for potential collaboration through marketing communication material as well. Partners and / or peers are scanning the marketing communication material to reveal opportunities to broaden or deepen their current partnership. They use the material to uncover their partner's direction for the near future and to explore whether or not they can be of some assistance along the road.

11.4.5 Support customer contacts

Internal clients state that marketing communication material (in case of business-to-business selling) can support their customer contacts. They argue that, if well communicated, success stories and best practices create 'appetite' and 'mindshare' with their customers.

> IC7: "There are multiple, yet realised ideas which we can use in our customer contacts. These examples immediately create appetite with lots of our customers."

11.4.6 Synchronisation of vision

Another use of the marketing communication messages by internal clients that differs from the uses of external clients is the synchronisation of the company's vision of the future for relevant products and services that they are offering. Communicating certain ideas about where their products and / or services might be standing a few years from now, may provide internal clients with a vision of the future for their own products and / or services.

11.4.7 Building a frame of reference

Before potential clients move into the phase of exploring possibilities for potential collaboration, a frame of reference needs to be established. Potential clients naturally need to have more general information about the company before they consider any form of collaboration. Furthermore, business press and media use the organisation's marketing communication messages for the refinement of their frame of reference regarding the industry being covered.

> M19: "Everything I come across as a reporter, goes into my database [...] it becomes a part of my frame of reference of the design industry."

11.4.8 Anticipation

Partners and peers of the organisation use marketing communication messaging to enable themselves to be pro-active partners. Through the messaging they are able to uncover their partner's direction and main focus points for the near future. This provides partners and peers with the opportunity to think along with the organisation, to provide pro-active service and to anticipate to its strategic direction.

> P18: "As a supplier you want to be able to think along with the client. To me, it's important to be a pro-active partner, to surprise the client at certain times. If you're not aware of the direction in which the client is heading, it will be hard not to make mistakes."

11.4.9 Mediation

Partners and peers use the organisation's marketing communication messaging for mediation purposes as well. In case a client of the partner / peer has an organisational issue that the partner or peer cannot resolve, they will mediate between their client and the organisation in order to jointly service the client. This will allow the partner to deepen his relationship with their client and to better satisfy their overall needs.

> P16: "If one of my clients has, for instance, an innovation issue and I know that you have the capabilities to solve this problem, I would simply bring both parties together."

11.4.10 Gaining the opinion of a professional

Besides the inspiration for new articles that reporters gain from an organisation's messaging, reporters often find out about new developments and trends within the industry

by themselves or through their network. When they do, they seek the opinion of a professional about these topics or trends in order to gain more information for the creation of an article. In this case, they will use the organisation's website or other marketing communication material to see whether or not the organisation has a statement or opinion about these topics and to what extent they are participating in these developments.

11.4.11 Learnings

To business experts such as universities and research agencies, marketing communication material from an organisation within their industry forms a vehicle for learning. Since business experts are operating within the same industry, they are continuously seeking best practices of successful organisations in order to develop their own skills and processes and to pass this information on to their students and to other members of the organisation.

> B27: "We're seeking information about basically all projects using technology; it's all part of our learnings [...] we share it with our researchers, send it to people and those kinds of things."

11.4.12 Agenda-setting

Business experts argue that the marketing communication material of organisations within their industry helps them with the agenda-setting and prioritisation of relevant subjects for the benefit of their own organisation. According to business experts, the messaging helps them with the calibration of relevant subjects and issues within the industry. It supports the determination of relevant subjects within their organisation and the positioning of the school or organisation in general. Furthermore, the marketing communication messaging is being used to scrutinise and direct the research that business experts do.

> B28: "It allows us, as a university, to scrutinise and direct the kind of research that we do. As a university, we are not a sort of traditional university based on particular traditional disciplines; we are concerned with a kind of pure knowledge."

11.4.13 Uses and the extended ladder of stakeholder loyalty

With regard to the second research question of this study, the relationship with stakeholder loyalty, the following can be stated. Stakeholder groups on the upper side of the extended ladder of stakeholder loyalty have different uses than stakeholder groups which are located on the lower levels of the ladder. By comparing the stakeholder groups of Philips Design with the groups of the six markets model, the stakeholders could be positioned on the extended ladder of stakeholder loyalty. Figure 11.3 reveals the position of the included stakeholder groups on the ladder and summarises their principal uses regarding marketing communication messaging.

The uses of stakeholder groups within the allied loyalty box show that these groups have come to share goals, needs and preferences. Parties have shaped a true win-win relationship, which may continuously be adapted to external and internal requirements. For example, the support of customer contacts and the synchronisation of the vision on

Loyalty box	Stakeholder groups	Uses Marketing Communication Messaging
Allied	Internal customers	Inspiration Exploration of opportunities for collaboration Support customer contacts Synchronisation of vision
	Partners	Anticipation Mediation Exploration of opportunities for collaboration
Cooperative	External customers	Reconfirmation Inspiration Exploration of opportunities for collaboration
	Potential customers	Inspiration Building a frame of reference Exploration of opportunities for collaboration
Neutral	Business press / media	Inspiration Opinion of a professional Building a frame of reference
	Business experts	Learnings Agenda-setting Exploration of opportunities for collaboration

Figure 11.3 Extended ladder of stakeholder loyalty and uses

internal customers show that their uses are supporting this relationship and reflecting that their own welfare is bound to the welfare of the other. Also, the uses of partners of the organisation reflect that these parties are highly committed to the relationship through relation specific investments, such as anticipation and mediation.

Moving down on the ladder, stakeholder groups within the cooperative loyalty box are characterised by uses which reveal that parties make some commitments to the relationship, but are reluctant to make too specific commitments. The uses of external customers show that they are willing to adjust their goals when they see some opportunity to improve their cooperative relationship. They are continuously trying to get reconfirmation of the established relationship and cautiously seeking for opportunities to improve this cooperative relationship by means of potential collaboration.

The fourth stakeholder group on the ladder resides between the neutral and the cooperative loyalty box. The position of potential clients on the ladder is dependent on the specific relationship between the organisation and the potential client. While solely building the frame of reference regarding the organisation in question, the potential client remains in the neutral loyalty box. However, when having entered the stage of cautiously exploring possibilities for potential collaboration through further negotiation, the potential client crosses the border between these two loyalty boxes and enters the cooperative loyalty box.

Even further down on the ladder, the uses of stakeholder groups within the neutral loyalty box show that these stakeholders are characterised by individualistic relationship orientations. According to the literature, these stakeholders interact with each other to achieve their individual goals, although they perceive their goals as independent of the other party's goals. They try to avoid actions that oblige them to commit to this specific

Stakeholder groups	Marketing Communication preferences
External customers	Successful projects
	Vision of the future products and / or services
Internal customers	Successful projects
	Vision of the future products and / or services
	Translation vision of the future
Potential customers	Capabilities
	Successful projects
Partners	Strategic direction
	Capabilities
Business press / media	Innovations
	Vision on trends and developments
Business experts	Process and expertise
	Successful projects
	Strategic direction

Figure 11.4 Marketing communication preferences

relationship and insist on reasonable 'quid pro quo' exchanges. The uses of both the media and business experts reveal this individualistic relationship orientation in that they solely try to achieve their own professional goals, such as building a frame of reference regarding the industry, agenda setting and learning.

11.4.14   Marketing communication messaging preferences

To provide an answer to the third research question which addresses the marketing communication preferences, stakeholders spoke extensively about the type of information they would prefer to receive in order for them to raise their overall level of gratification. These preferences are summarised in figure 11.4.

11.5   Conclusion and discussion

This study explored potential differences in uses and content preferences with regard to marketing communication messaging between various stakeholder groups and the relationship of these uses and preferences with stakeholder loyalty.

This research study reveals a wide range of uses that emerged from analysis of the transcribed interviews. To summarise, these uses are: reconfirmation, inspiration, exploration of opportunities for collaboration, support customer contacts, synchronisation of vision, building a frame of reference, anticipation, mediation, gaining the opinion of a professional, learning, and agenda-setting. Furthermore, this study shows that the uses of marketing communication messaging vary according to the position of the group on the extended ladder of stakeholder loyalty. One may conclude that these positions elicit differences in uses regarding marketing communication messaging. The higher stakeholder groups reside on the ladder, the more their uses exist to support their true win-win relationship. When moving down on the ladder, one will come across all different types of stakeholder groups with an increasing level of individualistic orientated uses. Logically, stakeholder groups that reside on the lower levels of the ladder are character-

ised by uses that solely support the achievement of their own professional goals and objectives. Moreover, the different uses bring about different content preferences in order for the stakeholder to satisfy sought gratifications. Since failure on the part of companies to satisfy the interests of particular stakeholder groups may be detrimental to company performance, these various uses and accompanying content preferences will have to be kept in mind while communicating with all groups simultaneously. Moreover, current research study shows that the different uses by various stakeholder groups as outlined above elicit different content preferences in order for the stakeholder to satisfy sought gratifications. The following content preferences were found in this study: successful projects, vision of the future products and / or services, capabilities, innovations, vision on trends and developments, processes and expertise, and strategic direction.

Some of the uses for marketing communication messaging are brought to life for the benefit of their own organisation or for the benefit of the industry as a whole, while others are used to either broaden or deepen the relationship with the organisation in question. Therefore, the uses may also be described as personal, interpersonal, or in the terms of Katz et al. (1973), oriented towards the social environment. This is not to say that each use falls neatly into one of these categories. For example, a stakeholder group may use a specific marketing communication message for inspiration at a personal level while exploring possibilities for collaboration at an interpersonal level.

Although this study entered a so far unknown territory, several resemblances with consumers' uses of advertising can be found. However, consumers use advertising to achieve personal goals, while stakeholders are using marketing communication messaging for the achievement of their professional goals. This being said, several similarities can be revealed at a more abstract and general level.

O'Donohoe (1993) has made a distinction between marketing and non-marketing uses of advertising. With regard to marketing uses of advertising, O'Donohoe (1993) argues that respondents use advertising to some extent at least for information about the existence of new products, and the price and availability of established products. As outlined in the theory section, various stakeholder groups prefer to receive information about capabilities and successful projects of the organisation in order for them to build their frame of reference regarding the organisation and to explore possibilities for potential collaboration. Both uses, whether regarding specific products for consumers or business-to-business services, serve the sole purpose of gaining information about the organisation's offering.

As Crosier (1983) suggests, advertising can be used as an implied warranty, in that a company which advertises its brands is seen to vouch for them. This finding is in line with the argument of external clients that coming across the organisation in the media would make them feel more secure about the professionalism of the company. Therefore, implied warranty (Crosier, 1983) and reassurance (O'Donohoe, 1993) have quite some resemblance to the use for reconfirmation by external clients.

O'Donohoe (1993) argues that there is some recognition that advertising can be used to stimulate consumption, though not necessarily of the actual product being advertised. Respondents claim that while not being interested in the actual product, they might be stimulated to think about buying something similar (O'Donohoe, 1993). This use of advertising falls completely in line with the use for inspiration by various stakeholder groups since marketing communication messaging inspires them to see whether or not they could apply 'something similar' in their own organisation as well.

In addition to using advertising for purposes related to marketing transactions, O'-Donohoe (1993) distinguished other uses of advertising. Some of these non-marketing uses for advertising are applicable to the findings of present study as well. First of all, a limited educational role for advertising was recognised by the respondents. This use obviously corresponds with the argument of business experts that they are using marketing communication material for learning purposes, both for gaining knowledge themselves and for passing the information on within their own organisation to stimulate the learning cycle. Moreover, as Lull (1990) and Anderson and Meyer (1988) have pointed out, the mass media facilitate communication in that they provide common ground, and an immediate agenda for talk. Also, O'Donohoe (1993) found that a significant use of advertising appeared to be a topic for conversation with the generation of comments, discussion and discourse. Therefore, passing the information on to students and to other members of the organisation can be interpreted as facilitating communication in terms of Lull (1990) and Anderson and Meyer (1988) and as a topic for conversation in terms of O'Donohoe (1993).

Finally, consumers find advertising a useful source for information about their environment in order to find out 'what's new these days'. Advertising is therefore being used as a form of surveillance by consumers. This finding is quite similar to the aim of business press and media; to uncover 'what's new in the industry' and with that to build their frame of reference regarding the industry as a whole. Moreover, surveillance can also be interpreted as agenda setting in order for business experts to uncover relevant subjects within their industry to focus on.

It is interesting to see that these categorisations have much in common with classifications derived from studies of other mass media uses and gratifications. If marketing communication material serves multiple similar functions for stakeholders as advertising serves for its consumers, this in turn suggests that marketing communication messaging from companies towards their stakeholders seems at least as fruitful an area for the application of uses and gratifications theory as any other element of the mass media.

Concerning the preferences of stakeholders for particular types of marketing communication messages, Slater (1997) suggested that marketers need to provide superior customer value while considering the interests of other key stakeholders. In addition, Freeman (1984) postulates that failure on the part of companies to satisfy the interests of particular stakeholder groups may be detrimental to a company's performance. Therefore, these uses of the stakeholder groups and accompanying messaging preferences will have to be kept in mind while providing superior customer value, in order for the organisation to enhance its long-term business return on investment (Berman et al., 1999; Caulkin, 2002).

11.5.1   Scientific contribution and practical application

Current literature failed to identify how firms can or should interact with their stakeholders in either the short-term or long-term and only identified that such interactions should take place (Polonsky, Schuppisser & Beldona, 2002). This study identified how to interact with various stakeholder groups by revealing their uses and content preferences regarding marketing communication messaging.

Furthermore, practically all stakeholder theory examines stakeholder issues from a small number of viewpoints and interests, principally from the perspective of manage-

ment and company directors and from the perspective of the supposed principal objectors, namely stockholders. This study has made an effort to present stakeholder theory from the point of view of the people who form the basis of this theory, the stakeholders themselves, and therewith reduced undeniable contradiction within current literature.

While exploring how to interact with various stakeholder groups from a stakeholder point of view, the uses and gratifications approach appeared to be very useful. Despite an implicit support among British marketing practitioners, the uses and gratifications approach has never been applied to the study of marketing communication messaging before. Since marketing communication messaging appears to serve similar functions for stakeholders as advertising does for its consumers, a new and fruitful area for the application of the uses and gratifications theory by communication scientists has been discovered.

Besides this scientific contribution, this study also has practical relevance to marketing management. It has been demonstrated that moving away from the customer orientation (Kotler & Armstrong, 1999) to a stakeholder orientation may improve businesses return on investment (Berman et al., 1999; Caulkin, 2002). This study provides organisations with a uses and messaging preferences framework which helps them to identify the interests of their specific stakeholder groups in order for them to optimise communication goals and objectives.

Also, the placement of the revealed uses on the extended ladder of stakeholder loyalty will help firms to link these uses to their specific stakeholder groups. Of course the categories on the ladder are ideal, in business it is not always easy to place every relationship in exactly one category. However, the described uses and preferences may offer the organisation some guidance on the placement of their stakeholder groups on their own extended ladder of stakeholder loyalty.

To conclude, current research study offers organisations some guidance on the identification of the uses and messaging preferences of their stakeholder groups while optimising stakeholder messaging. However, it should be kept in mind that business is a combination of both the stakeholder's interests and the organisation's objectives. Balancing interests therefore does not solely refer to the interests of stakeholders, but also to the interests of the organisation itself. This implies that organisations should not just 'simply' try to meet the needs of all of their key stakeholder groups, but they will have to find as much linkages as possible with their own communication objectives in order to support business growth.

11.5.2   Limitations

Present study has certain limitations that need to be taken into account when considering the study and its contributions. Some of these limitations can be seen as fruitful avenues for future research.

First of all, in order to explore the uses and messaging preferences of all stakeholder groups, Philips Design was chosen as a case in this research study. However, Philips Design only offers business-to-business services and does not service consumer groups and / or markets. With regard to the overall purpose of this study, consumers form a valuable stakeholder group within the overall business environment of other, consumer oriented organisations. The uses and messaging preferences of consumer groups might differ from the ones of the internal and external clients who were involved in this study.

Thus, the empirical setting, Philips Design and its present stakeholder groups can only be seen as a pilot study in the context of determining their uses accompanying messaging preferences.

Secondly, competitive and threatening stakeholder groups were not taken into consideration. The extended ladder of stakeholder loyalty includes these hostile groups and states that, whether threatening or not, the firm should not resist the inclusion of adversary groups such as competitors. Thirdly, this study solely included stakeholder groups situated in Europe. It should be pointed out that it is hardly possible to create an optimal global message since regional influences elicit differences in uses and messaging preferences. A globally oriented organisation, such as Philips Design, should keep regional influences in mind while communicating with their various stakeholder groups.

11.5.3 Future research

The conclusions as well as the limitations of this study bring forth some fruitful and interesting possible avenues for future research.

Firstly, the outcomes of present study could serve as hypotheses for further quantitative research. Including multiple organisations in future research would enable one to further test the conceptual framework of present study. It would be interesting to include both business-to-business organisations and consumer oriented organisations from multiple industries in order to develop thorough statements about the differences in uses and messaging preferences between clients and across industries in relationship to their position on the extended ladder of stakeholder loyalty.

Secondly, it would be interesting to explore the uses of adversary groups, such as competitors and environmental groups, as well. The exploration of their uses and content preferences would be useful in order to complete the conceptual framework and to replenish the extended ladder of stakeholder loyalty and accompanying uses of marketing communication messaging.

Thirdly, in order to optimise stakeholder communication globally, it is important to explore the uses and gratifications of stakeholder groups in other continents as well. This exploration will expand the extended ladder of stakeholder loyalty with uses and messaging preferences of various stakeholder groups per continent. By doing so, a more complete, in- depth and useful framework for stakeholder interaction will be established which answers the question how to interact with various stakeholder groups globally.

Finally, there is much scope for integrating studies of marketing communication uses and gratifications within broader theoretical frameworks. In terms of the analysis of these data, the next phase will seek to link the uses identified here with interpretations of specific messages, and look for differences in patterns of use and interpretations between various stakeholder groups. Such differences, while interesting in themselves, may well have implications for market segmentation and communication strategies.

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