BALANCED MESSAGING FOR EXPERIENCED LAPTOP CONSUMERS

PENYAMPAIAN INFORMASI BERIMBANG PADA KONSUMEN LAPTOP BERPENGALAMAN

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to obtain empirical evidence about the impact of "balanced messaging" (a marketing communication practice where both strengths and weaknesses of a product are communicated to consumers) in marketing communication on consumers' brand loyalty. With three laptop brands being the subjects and university students in Indonesia being the sample, surveys with an experimental design were conducted. Participants (n = 90) were randomly grouped into those being exposed to product's strengths only (Group A), product's weaknesses (Group B), and product's strengths and weaknesses (Group C) – with 30 participants in each group. Using ANOVA, the results indicate that balanced messaging can be as constructive as imbalanced messaging, which focuses merely on strengths in the context of brand loyalty. With several limitations, this preliminary study is expected to benefit marketers to create fairer marketing communication.

Keywords: balanced messaging, consumers, marketing, laptop

ABSTRAK

Riset ini bertujuan untuk memberikan data empiris tentang pengaruh dari "penyampaian informasi berimbang" (suatu praktik komunikasi pemasaran yang mengomunikasikan keunggulan dan kelemahan suatu produk kepada konsumen) dalam komunikasi pemasaran terhadap loyalitas merek konsumen. Riset ini dilakukan kepada tiga merek laptop sebagai subjek penelitian dan dilakukan dengan metode survei kepada mahasiswa di perguruan tinggi di Indonesia sebagai sampel penelitian. Peserta dikelompokkan secara acak (n = 90) ke dalam kelompok yang hanya diberikan informasi mengenai keunggulan produk saja (Grup A), kelompok yang hanya diberikan informasi mengenai kelemahannya saja (Grup B), dan kelompok yang diberikan informasi mengenai keunggulan dan kelemahan produk (Grup C) – masing-masing grup terdiri dari 30 peserta. Dengan menggunakan ANOVA, hasilnya mengindikasikan bahwa penyampaian informasi berimbang dapat sekonstruktif penyampaian informasi tidak berimbang yang hanya mencantumkan keunggulan saja dalam konteks loyalitas merek. Dengan beberapa keterbatasan, riset awal ini diharapkan bermanfaat bagi pemasar untuk menciptakan komunikasi pemasaran yang lebih adil.

Kata kunci: penyampaian informasi berimbang, pemasaran, laptop

INTRODUCTION

Technological developments and advances, including the case of computers or laptops, have caused significant changes in human life. These changes include the ways in which people operate and see themselves (Hansen et al., 2014). Despite the pros and cons of technological uses in many different contexts (e.g. Diaz et al., 2012; Kay & Lauricella, 2011; Kemp et al., 2014; Wingfield, 2008; Yunus et al., 2013), IT and gadget-based industry has become one of the most thriving, fast-moving, industries (e.g. Dewati, 2017; Mendelson, 2000; Wang & Lee, 2007). As in the process of structuration involving technological uses (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994), the world's development in infrastructure and people's way of living may have arguably been supporting the IT industry's growth (Dewati, 2017). With increasing demand (TechAdvisory.org, 2019), the growth is especially true for personal computers (IDC.com, 2019).

With demands comes competition (Adner, 2002). While competition is argued to be good in the long run (Shleifer, 2004), various studies have documented the effects of competition or rivalry on unethical behaviors (e.g. Cai et al., 2009; Kilduff et al., 2016; Pierce et al., 2013; Rigdon & D'Esterre, 2015; Schwieren & Weichselbaumer, 2010). In the midst of the growing Laptop industry, especially the high tier laptop industry, it makes sense to think that the competitive environment may force manufacturers to create the best laptops possible to compete with other brands and communicate their products, including through deceptive practices (Aditya, 2001; Kaptein, 2008). This paper addresses the somewhat "opposite" ideal of deceptive marketing practices, something termed here as "balanced messaging" in marketing communication. The notion emphasizes a fairer representation of a product that includes both their strengths and weaknesses proportionally communicated to consumers. We would like to understand whether balanced messaging (compared to imbalanced messaging) in the case of laptop products or brands could have some impact on consumers' brand loyalty.

The study focuses on premium laptops, which are expected to be manufactured using the best material and able to have a long-life cycle despite its heavy and demanding daily use. However, the truth may not be as good as the manufacturers claim to be, resulting in product harm crises (Dawar & Pillutla, 2000), prompting managers to respond accordingly (e.g. Van Heerde et al., 2007; Liu et al., 2017). According to the study's preliminary survey, it is found that many end users experience problems (e.g. overheating, thermal throttling that causes the CPU performance to drop, and problems related to the material used to manufacture the laptops) they should have not experienced as a premium class laptop user.

Studying brand loyalty can be insightful in the midst of the growing laptop industry, especially in the premium tier laptop market. Due to its high price, consumers tend to be very selective when deciding to buy a premium class laptop. They expect the laptop to be free of flaws or at least they know the flaws or risks before they decide to spend a lot of money on it. On the other hand, manufacturers (and marketers) are afraid of losing their customers, thus impacting sales, if they admit the flaws of a certain laptop model in their advertisement. Facing this dilemma, they may potentially resort to lying (Takala & Uusitalo, 1996). Even though manufacturers (and marketers) are compelled to always inform their consumers of their product, employing a marketing communication strategy that involves imbalanced messaging could result in damages to the brand's reputation in the long run. The question is whether this kind of marketing is necessary. Does knowing certain flaws of a certain laptop model have the chance to reduce brand loyalty? Given the current scope, the study put forth here is contextualized as preliminary, in the context of Indonesian consumers. Put more formally, the research question of the current study is whether balanced messaging (versus imbalanced messaging) will function constructively or destructively on brand loyalty.

Marketing Communication and Business Ethics

Marketing is fundamental to a business process, assuming "the task of guaranteeing the conditions of communication and information that allow demand for need fulfilments to be met through production of goods and services" (Varey, 2002: 1). Integral to the practice is communication, the process of transferring messages to the intended audience, pointing to the importance of aspects such as consistency, continuity, flexibility, and customization (Gurău, 2008; Kitchen & Burgmann, 2010). Marketing communication is also expected to rely on relationship building with the audience (Gummesson, 1987), focusing on meaning creation (Finne & Grönroos, 2009), emphasizing the meeting point among multiple factors (including individual and societal factors and future and historical factors).

Nevertheless, it is not impossible that the message conveyed in marketing communication is unrealistic, thus deceptive (Aditya, 2001; Kaptein, 2008). The "actual" content about which the marketing communication attempts to convey becomes the concern. There is an assertion that the message conveyed in marketing communication must be "truthful" (Takala & Uusitalo, 1996) without misleading or omitting necessary information (Hastak & Mazis, 2011). It is perhaps inarguable that any product is naturally flawed (Kotler & Mantrala 1985), making sellers "decide whether the flaw is dangerous, whether it should be mentioned, and whether it is correctable… whether to reduce the price or offer an additional incentive to overcome the buyer's resistance" (p. 35). At the very end, what is at stake is trust, argued to be "the foundation for the efficiency and effectiveness of the market system and it is nurtured with high ethical standards" (Laczniak & Murphy, 2006: 48).

The notion of balanced messaging advanced in this paper is similar to that of the two-sided messaging in marketing communication, pointing to the messaging of the positives and negatives of the product marketed. Across various studies, such messaging has been shown to be useful, such as in improving advertising credibility (Kamins et al., 1987), facilitating greater attitude certainty of consumers (Rucker et al., 2008), and reducing skepticism towards green advertisements (Van Wijhe, 2015). Considering that the amount of messages displayed may interfere with people's decision making process (Eisend, 2006), the term "balanced messaging" is used in this paper in order to highlight the assumption of the balanced nature of the messages being studied.

Hypothesis Development

The study addresses whether *balanced messaging* (a form of marketing communication that emphasizes both a product's strengths and weaknesses or flaws) may have some impact on consumers' brand loyalty, referring to a strong commitment to subscribing or buying a brand consistently in the future (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2000). While the terms 'product' and 'brand' are different (Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995), they are used interchangeably in the current study. They signify a collection of similar products from the same business entity. The notion of loyalty is especially central given the objective of marketing communication to have a long-term engagement with consumers (Gummesson, 1987). In terms of consumers' purchase intention, studies in different settings have documented that certain forms of marketing communication are impactful (e.g. Danaher & Rossiter, 2011; Huang et al., 2010; Jiang et al., 2010; Kim & Ko, 2012). However, these studies focus more on the communication means, rather than the variation in the content or the message itself. While the notion of balanced messaging can be construed as a means in and of itself, it also speaks about the content or the actual message.

Prior to being exposed to certain forms of messaging (balanced vs. imbalanced), consumers may have certain prior knowledge about a product, especially when they have used the product. It has been found that product knowledge affects – directly or indirectly – consumers' purchase intention (e.g. Hanzaee & Khosrozadeh, 2011; Nysveen & Pedersen, 2005; Wang & Hazen, 2016; Wang et al., 2013), while certain forms of advertising can also

influence product knowledge (e.g. Li et al., 2002). Everything exposed to the consumers that turns into their knowledge becomes product knowledge. Overall, product knowledge is a collection of various kinds of information about the product; this knowledge sometimes includes product categories, brands, product terminology, product attributes or features, product prices and trust regarding products and its strengths and weaknesses (Engel et al., 1994).

In our context, product knowledge includes prior knowledge and knowledge that is exposed via further messaging (balanced versus imbalanced messaging). Balanced messaging is a form of marketing communication that exposes a product's strengths and weaknesses while imbalanced messaging is one that exposes either strengths or weaknesses. It has been argued that products' flaws can harm image (Kotler & Mantrala, 1985; Shang et al., 2006). Therefore, exposing weaknesses of a product is generally detrimental. Since no one expects a flawed product, exposing strengths of a product is generally constructive. But what will happen if both strengths and weaknesses are exposed to consumers? Intuitively, we argue that balanced messaging may have a "somewhere in the middle" effect. It is potentially constructive and destructive.

Here, we turn to cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) to try to understand the utility of balanced messaging on brand loyalty. Cognitive dissonance is defined as "the existence of non-fitting relations among cognitions" (Earl, 1992: 2). Argued to be especially relevant in the context of advertising, such dissonance may occur "1) after making an important and difficult decision, 2) after being coerced to say or do something which is contrary to private attitudes, opinions, or beliefs, and 3) after being exposed to discrepant information" (Oshikawa, 1969: 44). The point with cognitive dissonance theory is that people will have the tendency to reduce such dissonance, regardless of how it is done, and avoid circumstances that elevate it (Festinger, 1957). At its core is a violation to the ideal of one's self-concept (Aronson, 2012).

Therefore, it can be argued that balanced messaging – where strengths or weaknesses are presented – represents a situation that will likely prompt such cognitive dissonance. The question is whether the dissonance or reduction of such dissonance will lead to a better or worse assessment of the products or brands in question. Our current context involves experienced consumers or users of the laptop brands. While the study does not focus on their level of involvement in their purchase decision, how it functions ameliorates cognitive dissonance by relying on their preconceived product knowledge as opposed to the new information (George & Edward, 2009); a similar analogy can be made in the case of experienced consumers. Thus, people's experience entails their involvement in the laptop product or brand they have owned and used, allowing them to reduce their dissonance by trusting their experience more. Moreover, such experience or use will constitute a part of people's identity (Oyserman, 2009). Given that identity is centrally about one's self-concept, which is argued to be a core mechanism for reducing dissonance, experienced consumers will deal with cognitive dissonance by relying on their identity, which is centrally embedded in product or brand use. Overall, it can be suggested that balanced messaging given to experienced users will be more constructive, rather than destructive. Therefore, the following hypotheses are formulated:

Brand loyalty will be significantly higher for consumers exposed to imbalanced messaging focused on strengths than for consumers exposed to imbalanced messaging focused on weaknesses.

Brand loyalty will be significantly higher for consumers exposed to balanced messaging than for consumers exposed to imbalanced messaging focused on weaknesses.

Brand loyalty will not be significantly higher for consumers exposed to imbalanced messaging focused on strengths than for consumers exposed to balanced messaging.

METHOD
Preliminary Survey

A preliminary survey (open-ended) was distributed to gather information about consumers' concerns and complaints regarding the premium laptop(s) they had or owned. Three premium laptop brands (Brands A, B, C) were used as the subjects (non-Apple products). Employing convenience sampling, the survey was distributed via personal chats to family members and friends, who were also asked to help distribute the survey to their direct connections. The respondents must meet the following criteria: 1) university students (undergraduate/postgraduate) studying in Bandung and Jakarta (Indonesia), 2) coming from middle to upper economic family background, and 3) owning and having used a premium class laptop (Brand A, B or C) for at least 1 year (this was intended to control prior knowledge about the product) – the final criterion is used for the qualification as experienced laptop consumers. With over 100 respondents providing inputs, the top 4-5 weaknesses (those mentioned the most) were kept. It should be noted that the list signifies a general sum of flaws of unspecified premium laptop models associated with Brands A, B, or C. Tables 1 and 2 summarize the list of strengths and weaknesses respectively for the three brands.

TABLE I LIST OF PREMIUM LAPTOP BRANDS'S STRENGHTS

Brand A	Brand B	Brand C
Great Cooling System	Cooling Fan which allow the system temperature to stay cool	Latest Design and the best in it's class
Top Quality Material	Using Copper Pipe to ensure the heat cooling system	1080p HD monitor with 240hz refresh rate
Responsive Keyboard	1080p HD monitor with 144hz refresh rate	Intelligent cooling system with self-cleaning anti-dust tunnel
Best Quality Speaker and Monitor	Stylish Design	Wi-fi range boost to ensure you get the best signal possible
Stylish Design	Best sound system with 5 built-in Speaker	Best audio quality with speakers that produce sound 3 times louder than normal speaker

(Source: Official Website of Respective Premium Laptops)

TABLE II LIST OF PREMIUM LAPTOP BRANDS' WEAKNESSES OR FLAWS EXPERIENCED BY USERS

Brand A	Brand B	Brand C
Bad Quality screen hinge	Overheating	Unstable Frame per second
Bad quality body material	Thermal Throttling	Overheating
Overheating	The monitor quality is not as good as they claim to be	Bad quality body material
Thermal Throttling	Unstable Frame per second	Thermal Throttling
Drops in Frame per second	Bad quality body material	

TABLE III DEMOGRAPHICS OF PARTICIPANTS (N=90, 30 PARTICIPANTS FOR EACH GROUP

	Gender				Degree of Education		
	Group A	**Group B**	**Group C**		**Group A**	**Group B**	**Group C**
Male	20 (66,7%)	14 (46.7%)	16 (53.3%)	Bachelor	23 (76.7%)	19 (63.3%)	12 (43.3%)
Female	9 (30%)	16 (53.3%)	11 (36.7%)	Master	2 (6.7%)	2 (6.7%)	2 (6.7%)
Prefer not to answer	1 (3.3%)	0	3 (10%)	Other	5 (16.7%)	9 (30%)	15 (50%)
Total	30 (100%)	30 (100%)	30 (100%)	Total	30 (100%)	30 (100%)	30 (100%)

	Residence				Age		
	Group A	**Group B**	**Group C**		**Group A**	**Group B**	**Group C**
Jakarta	10 (33.3%)	13 (43.3%)	10 (33.3%)	15~20 Years old	3 (10%)	8 (26.7%)	11 (36.7%)
Bandung	13 (43.3%)	13 (43.3%)	17 (56.7%)	20~25 Years old	20 (66.7%)	17 (56.7%)	13 (43.3%)
Other	7 (23.3%)	4 (13.3%)	3 (10%)	Above 25 Years old	7 (23.3%)	5 (16.7%)	6 (20%)
Total	30 (100%)	30 (100%)	30 (100%)	Total	30 (100%)	30 (100%)	30 (100%)

Main Survey
Design
To test the hypotheses, a survey method with an experimental design was employed. Invited by email, prospective respondents were asked to randomly choose to participate in one of the three links provided, each representing one of the three messages. As a result, respondents were randomly divided into three observation groups (Group A, Group B, and Group C), with each consisting of different respondents and different messages – A exposed to strengths, B exposed to weaknesses, and C exposed to both strengths and weaknesses. Respondents did not know what was in each of the links. Informed consent form was electronically provided in the beginning to indicate their agreement to participate before they proceeded to the survey. Before being exposed to the message (strengths, weaknesses, or strengths and weaknesses), respondents were asked to fill out questions about (prior) product knowledge about their own laptop product.

After the message was exposed, respondents were given questions related to brand loyalty. Demographic questions (age, gender and degree of education) were asked approaching the end. Before completion, respondents were given an explanation of the survey, especially about the message that was provided to them and other messages that were being tested in the other survey links. This was intended to neutralize the experiment's effect.

Sampling
The criteria for the respondents are the same as in the preliminary survey. Given the focus on brand loyalty, it is especially important to recruit respondents who have experienced the product. The survey was distributed via personal chats to friends and family members who owned Brands A, B, or C. They were also asked to help distribute the survey. Table 3 summarizes the demographics of the respondents.

Measurements

Brand loyalty was also measured using four questions (Awaludin 2015; Kurniawan 2011). It was measured after the message (as product knowledge) was exposed. Likert scaling was used for the variables (5- point scale that ranges from one extreme attitude to another, from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"). The questions were proven to be valid, and Cronbach's alpha for the scale was found to be above 0.80 (reliable).

Data Analytical Methods

The hypotheses were tested using ANOVA to see mean differences for brand loyalty between two groups, involving Group A, Group B, (weaknesses), and Group C (Hypotheses 1 a, b, and c). Generally, ANOVA is robust to violations of normality (Schmider et al. 2010). Further, our sample size across groups is equal or balanced (N = 30, for each group), thus supporting the use of ANOVA.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of variance was performed to see the mean difference between two groups. The results (see Table 4) indicate that there is significant difference in the means for brand loyalty between Group A (strengths) and Group B (weaknesses) and between Group B and Group C (strengths and weaknesses). No significant difference is spotted in the means between Group A and Group C. Overall, based on ANOVA, there is evidence that exposure to strengths is constructive while exposure to weaknesses appears detrimental. Exposure to both strengths and weaknesses is shown to be as constructive as exposure to strengths only.

We find evidence for the utility of balanced messaging. That is, there is a significant difference in the means of brand loyalty between the group exposed to balanced messaging and the group exposed to imbalanced messaging focused on weaknesses; this difference is more or less similarly significant as in the difference of means between the group exposed to strengths only and the group exposed to weaknesses only. It can be theorized that exposure to strengths

(versus weaknesses) may act as a catalyst for trust, thus boosting brand loyalty (e.g. Ramesh & Advani, 2005; Matzler et al., 2008; Wel et al., 2011) while exposure to weaknesses (versus strengths) may harm image (Kotler & Mantrala, 1985). What is interesting is that balanced messaging appears to be rather constructive.

TABLE IV RESULT OF ANOVA

Groups	Brand Loyalty (A vs. B)*
A	3.90
B	2.81
	Brand Loyalty (B vs. C)*
B	2.81
C	3.80
	Brand Loyalty (A vs. C)
A	3.90
C	3.80

Note: *$p < 0.001$

TABLE V SUMMARY OF SUPPORT FOR HYPOTHESES

Hypotheses	Result
(a)	Supported
(b)	Supported
(c)	Supported

Notes: (a) strengths vs. weaknesses; (b) balanced vs. weaknesses; (c) strengths vs. balanced

Theoretical Implications

From a theoretical point of view, our study generally aims to promote the integral inclusion of ethics in consumer marketing through the notion of balanced messaging, termed to signify fairer exposure to a product or brand by pointing out both the strengths and weaknesses. It has been argued that a business entity that wishes to apply ethics into its process may need to sacrifice its material or economic interest to a certain extent (Elias & Dees, 1997; Hicks,

2018; Le Menestrel, 2002). Our preliminary study of balanced messaging reveals that such a marketing communication practice can potentially be constructive, without necessarily harming the products or brands.

Practical Implications

For businesses that are deontologically oriented (i.e. holding on to certain ethical principles such as fairness), it is clear that one needs to be willing to make such initial sacrifices. For those who are rather consequentialist, however, the question is whether providing balanced messaging will be beneficial in the long run (for the parties that are involved). Given the material sacrifice that one may have to do in exchange for providing a fairer representation of a product, our study provides an incentive for business practitioners in their managerial approach to marketing communication; that is, providing information about products' weaknesses may not be detrimental if balanced with information about their strengths. We argue that such a practice can also be coupled with what is termed as relationship communication.

Relationship communication is defined as "any type of marketing communication that influences the receiver's long-term commitment to the sender by facilitating meaning creation through integration with the receiver's time and situational context." (Finne & Grönroos, 2009: 193). It is further explained that time context refers to the receiver's perception of the history and envisioned future of his/her relationship with the sender. Meanwhile, the situational context deals with other elements that are internal or external to the receiver. Such an attempt is in accordance with a brand loyalty program that is focused more on trusting customers rather than asking them to trust (Shugan, 2005). Trusting consumers or customers means allowing them some space to explain their case, thus engaging in meaning making that is key to relationship communication.

It is understood that, realistically speaking, businesses or marketers may first resort to imbalanced messaging, focused on delivering strengths as the values delivered to consumers.

In other words, balanced messaging may not be immediately realistic. Nevertheless, businesses should be open to discuss their product's weaknesses. In communicating their products, they can even actively point out some of the weaknesses and offer alternative solutions to overcome such weaknesses. This can be done through various virtual means (Maclaran & Catterall, 2002), such as helping establish virtual communities where consumers and businesses can co-participate in the discussion of the related products (Shang et al., 2006), within which weaknesses of a product can be discussed constructively. The point is not about displaying just the flaws or weaknesses, but rather about communicating and making sense of the position of strengths alongside weaknesses in a way that is transparent (Le Menestrel, 2002). After all, deceptive marketing may hurt a business that commits such an act (Song et al., 2019).

Lastly, what does the study mean for the laptop industry, especially in an emerging market like Indonesia? One local study (Lubis et al., 2018) points out the positive brand image and awareness of a laptop brand that is also included as the subject of the current study. Another local study points out to the ineffective promotion of one of the other brands (Chianasta & Wijaya, 2014). With the limited data, we assume that these brands are more or less perceived well in the market. Nevertheless, the very fact that we obtained a list of "negatives" of such premium brands proves that they are part of the working of the market; they are in the market for people to discuss and make sense of. The question is whether these negatives are exposed to people as much as the positives and whether there is a marketing agent that communicates these qualities. Realistically, these non-Apple premium brands are sold in regular computer stores (not in their own stores). They are displayed together with other brands or products. While consumers may get prior information or knowledge about such brands online or others, the main reference will be the sellers who sell various laptop brands in their stores. Therefore, the practical implication of our study is also directed at such sellers.

Are sellers arguably in a neutral position of selling any one brand? Theoretically, yes. Yet, the ethical and practical dilemma of such sellers will be whether they are able to give a fairer assessment or valuation of brands or they are biased toward a particular brand. In other words, sellers may engage in valuation bias (Yu et al., 2017), which may be costly for both consumers and sellers themselves in the long run. Further, what is also interesting to note is the possibility for sellers to discover product faults less often than do consumers or buyers (Folkes & Kotsos, 1986). Overall, given that there is no conflict of interests, we argue that sellers of such premium laptop(s) are in the perfect position of practicing balanced messaging. Sellers can help protect fair market competition. Nevertheless, we also have to acknowledge whether sellers' belief of a particular brand is justified. Here, we resort back to the ideal of meaning making in relationship communication in marketing communication.

Limitations and Further Research

The study only highlights one aspect of ethical marketing communication in the form of balanced messaging. Nevertheless, ethical business practice is more than just its communication practice. This study does not highlight and discuss why such laptop products or brands have weaknesses or flaws in the first place. Even if any product is naturally flawed (Kotler & Mantrala, 1985), one could argue that the flaws should not be there in the first place or should at least be minimized. Therefore, fair marketing communication should only be relevant only after (some of) the flaws have been addressed or solved by the business.

Our study is largely exploratory, with our hypotheses not based on rigorous theoretical foundation that would allow us to understand the reasoning behind the constructive effect of balanced messaging on brand loyalty. Another line of theorizing can be related to deceptive advertising practice, in which people experience greater brain activity in a situation where they perceive the advertising as moderately deceptive rather than highly deceptive or believable (Craig et al., 2012). One can argue that balanced messaging allows for a similar kind of cognitive process that makes people think more. The question is how the process can lead to a desirable or undesirable outcome. Therefore, the results of our study should not be seen as preliminary, intending to spur conversations about the practice of balanced messaging.

It is also important to note that this study does not take into account the magnitude or relative importance of the strengths and weaknesses displayed to the respondents. We assume that each strength or each weakness has equal magnitude or level of importance. It is highly possible that one strength is a high selling point and one weakness is highly detrimental and not defensible to the extent where marketing communication should not be seen as a cover-up. Further, we do not take into account all strengths and weaknesses that may be of importance to include. Overall, what could have been done was to have respondents rate the significance of the strengths and weaknesses so that the list was already saturated.

Lastly, we have to highlight a couple of other limitations of the study. We could have benefited from a larger sample size in order to have more power or confidence in interpreting the results. During the data collection, because of the practical nature of the study (focused on laptops) with a rather restricted time frame, we were less ambitious in obtaining a larger amount of data. We also limit our sample to those who have experienced using the product or brand. Further research may wish to capture the behavioral tendency of those who have never experienced such a product or brand. Moreover, specifically with regard to brand loyalty, it would also be insightful to see whether balanced messaging (compared to imbalanced messaging) will be functional or constructive by looking at the before-and-after effect.

CONCLUSION

The majority of the world's products are purchased and sold under normal conditions with people finding them performing following their expectations. Some products, of course, will be affected by an intrinsic or extrinsic flaw

that interferes with their performance. "Some buyers will balk at this flaw and not buy the product. Other buyers might buy as a result of a price concession. Still others may be indifferent to the flaw, and a few may even see the flaw as enhancing the value of the product…" (Kotler & Mantrala, 1985: 35).

Finding the middle ground has to be a core foundation of virtue ethics (Crossan et al., 2013). The study has been about promoting balanced messaging as a form of a middle ground practice of marketing communication.

In the long run, we argue that balanced messaging has desirable effects, especially when coupled with relationship communication. Ethical marketing communication works in order to help in the process of meaning making without manipulation or deception. Despite the limitations of our study, we hope to spur more conversations and empirical studies about the notion and functionality of balanced messaging in marketing communication and how to practice marketing communication in a rather ethical way.

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