

# BTL ADVERTISING TOOLS AND MARKETING COMMUNICATION - A LITERATURE REVIEW

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## ABSTRACT

*This Paper is based upon the Literature Review which seeks to understand and make an exhaustive list of Effective BTL tools identified by researchers through research Papers. It discusses how BTL practices are helping brands, increase consumer awareness and thus brand awareness enhancing its sales revenue. This paper further tries to understand the probable key variables in effectively using BTL as a strategic marketing tool and how its effect varies with the broad Category of Product and Service offerings. It has described theories and research opportunity in the area of BTL and its associated field. A conceptual framework has been worked out by studying various concepts and factors. This paper will help the future researcher to identify new areas of research in case of BTL and integrated communication.*

**Keywords:** BTL, Marketing Communication, Marketing, Consumer Buying Behaviour, Consumer Purchase Decision.

## INTRODUCTION

### Importance of Communication

Promotion is mainly involves communicating the Utility, Added Value and Benefit to consumers or to potential customers. Thus the objective is getting the Right Product, Brand or Service to the Right Consumer at the Right Time and Place in order to enhance the sales incidences from its consumers. Models like 4Ps Model which was later stretched to 7Ps of Marketing Mix i.e. Extended Marketing Mix. Communication Models, AIDA STP Model (Segmenting, Targeting and Positioning), Push and Pull Marketing, Porter's Five Force Model and so on tread on this relationship. All these Marketing models and strategies help to design more suitable Marketing Strategy which allows the marketer to connect closely with the consumer, understand their needs and influence their buying decision or their Consideration Set of Purchases or Consumer Perception, thereby enhancing Sales. Kotler, Armstrong, Sounders and Wong as early as 1996 state that "*modern marketing calls for more than just developing a good product, pricing it attractively, and making it available to target customers. Companies must also communicate with their customers, and what they communicate should not be left to chance.*"Kotler (2001). Thus communication of the product and service to the right segment or target population and its correct interpretation by the population targeted is critical as a Marketing Strategy. A major tool for such directed communication is Advertising and Promotion which gained a radical momentum to create an image in the minds of the consumer.

### Integrated Marketing Communication

A Marketing Mix consists of Product, Price, Place, and Promotion (4Ps). In the 60's, Borden identified twelve controllable marketing elements for a "*profitable business operation*" if

managed properly. This was further reduced to the aforesaid four elements by McCarthy (1964). In designing a Marketing Strategy, while the 3 other P's are handled through Product Management, Pricing Strategy and Distribution Strategy and plan, the 4th P i.e. Promotion is where Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) steps in as a strategy. Kotler & Armstrong (2012) said, Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) is a concept which involves "*How a company carefully integrates and coordinates its many communication channels - mass media advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, public relations, direct marketing, packaging, and others - to deliver a clear, consistent, and compelling message about the organization and its products*". These translate into better communication that increases customer loyalty and relationships on long-term basis.

Palevski & Rusiti (1857) said that integrated marketing helps in building, maintaining and improving the reputation (image). It also creates a recognizable brand identity, awareness of its existence, qualities among target consumer groups and a climate for achieving desired results.

According to Aaker (1996), advertising, promotion and packaging are for continuous positioning of a product. The communication of the Product, its brand, its features, benefits and thus value is leveraged which has three parts of Above the Line (ATL), Below the Line (BTL) and the recent, Through the Line (TTL). Loosely, Communication involving the four major media (press, television, radio and cinema) is referred as ATL. Rest is usually called Below the Line advertising (BTL). They are Non Media Communications like Direct mail, sponsorships, Road shows, One to One meetings, Telephonic conversation, Billboards, Sign boards, On Ground Campaigns, Discount offers, Experience Sharing (Word of Mouth), Online Marketing, Point-of-Sale, Sampling etc. Anderson (1998).

## Objective

The major objectives of the paper is to study various literatures with respect to BTL and to critically analyse its importance in marketing communication and increasing sales.

## Methodology

Various literature were collected and reviews were conducted in a systematic way on below the line advertising and Marketing Communication. In this review process basically two aspects are considered. In the first case, various articles were collected from the online data base sources. Special care has been taken to find the articles especially to below the line advertising and it related areas. In the second case, majority of articles were from 1991 to 2021. However, some of the important articles were from the year 1960, 1984, 1987 and 1988 where it has covered the fundamental concept and theories with respect to Advertising.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Promotional Mix has also gone through a lot of research and iterations. The effort was to identify the key factors which influence consumer purchase decisions involving all Non- Media Communications Modes thus termed under BTL.

## Promotional Mix

A marketing strategy may include an analysis of the situation, target segmentation, creative execution, advertising, promotions, direct and online marketing and evaluation Kotler & Armstrong (2012). They proposed a Promotional mix with 6 elements: Advertising, sales promotion, events and experiences, public relations, personal selling and direct marketing. Belch

& Belch (2004) suggested seven aspects of promotional mix, which includes tools used to carry out a company or organization's communication objectives. Further the marketing communications mix was elaborated into eight major modes of communication where the authors said that “*Marketing Communications was the voice of the Company and Brands helped them start a conversation and a relationship with the consumers.*”

However Smith & Taylor (2004) tried to make an exhaustive list of tools which would be critical part of the mix and which are widely accepted in theory and practice: 1. Selling; 2. Advertising; 3. Sales promotion; 4. Direct marketing; 5. Publicity (and public relations); 6. Sponsorship; 7. Exhibitions; 8. Packaging; 9. Point-of-sale and merchandising; 10. Word of mouth; 11. E-marketing; 12. Corporate identity. The list is ever increasing but with a common objective to promote the Company's identity and its Products/ Services amongst consumers. Thus in this study, it was concentrated on all BTL Tools and Marketing Activities which influence sales and evaluates their impact on Consumer Purchase Decision Martínez & Montaner (2006).

With this shift towards Consumer Centricity by companies, another change was proposed by Lauterborn (1990). He placed the customer in the centre of the marketing planning. Thus the 4Ps became the 4C's indicating customer orientations. This translation of Consumer behaviour being directly proportional to resulting Sales is major assumption of this review paper which is substantiated by numerous research and empirical articles referred herein.

### **BTL Tools - An Effective part of the Promotional Mix**

BTL has been traditionally taken as a supporting Marketing tool. Companies like Canon India's BTL share now stands at 70%. Canon India strategic decision is to forge a direct and closer relationship with its customers by educating them with the technical knowledge. The company has developed a comprehensive BTL strategy which touches all parts of its marketing value chain comprising of consumers, dealers or trade partners and promoters.

In case of LG Electronics, 60% of the company's marketing budget is going towards BTL activities, against 35-40% three years ago. PepsiCo India, labels the increase in his company's BTL spends. Same was noted for Parle products and Dabur who saw notable growth in sales after BTL activations.

In the year 2019-2021 saw the boom of the Edtech industry. As markets open up in 2022, BTL activations again have become an integral part of promotions and communication. The customer involvement and direct touch allows companies to convince parents to try their services, resulting in demo classes through the Digital medium combines with Experiential Marketing (Live Online Screening). Similar is the case with Healthtech, Fintech and even E-Commerce. However with markets opening up, combining Online and Digital Marketing ideas with ground visibility.

Siddiqui et al, 2015, said, “*BTL activities*” are direct consumer facing marketing efforts which creates relationships between consumers and marketers, and provides value added benefits. BTL activities thus help building consumer brand perception through various promotional activities which helps to enhance sales, brand equity, brand experience and brand recall.

Davidson (1997) defined BTL sales promotion as an immediate or delayed incentive to purchase, expressed in cash or in kind, and having short duration. It is efficient and cost-effective for targeting a limited and specific group. It uses less conventional channels of communication, typically focused communication De Bono (2006).

Palevski & Rusiti (1857) listed the benefits of BTL marketing and describes it as a two-way communication between the company and consumers. It targets to a well-defined market. It implies a quick response or reaction by the consumer. The results of BTL marketing is also measurable.

## Type of BTL Tools

Below the Line promotions can be done in various ways. Some types or Tools of BTL promotions are:

### Sales Promotion

Sales promotions are usually short term methods conducted to attract new customers and encourage existing customers to buy more and thus increase sales Ashraf et al. (2014);. Though being short term, they directly contact consumers (Consumers and retailers) and induce product trials Karthikeyan & Panchanatham (2013). Conversion is also faster Ben Said et al. (2019). There is a great deal of literature and previous studies available which discuss sales promotion and its impact on consumer buying decisions, especially coupons and price reduction, since they are most extensively used Mittal & Sethi (2011), Krishnha and Zhang, 1999; Huff and Alden, 1998; Leone and Srinivasan, 1996; Bawa & Shoemaker (1987), 1989; Shamout (2016), “Ndubisi & Moi (2006).

Sales promotion has been defined and redefined by various researchers. Joncos (1909) defined Sales promotion is an effective way of competitive retaliation rather than marketing activities. Gardener and Trivedi, (1998), considered sales promotion as a direct inducement, proposing special added value for goods to target salesperson, customers or resellers. Brassington and Pettitt (2000) defined sales promotion as a range of marketing techniques designed within a strategic marketing framework to add extra value to a product or service over and above the “normal” offering in order to achieve specific sales and marketing objectives. This extra value may be short term or longer-term tactics. Mercer (2002) described promotion as a technique mainly used by marketer temporarily to create an attractive goods or services to encourage the customers to purchase goods or services in a specific time period by providing more benefits. Both Kotler (2002) and Totten & Block (1994) defined sales promotion as any activity by the producers, usually short term designed to encourage quicker or greater amount of trade from retailer or wholesaler as well as influence individual to buy the product. Cannon et al. (2008) and Shimp (2003) defined sales promotion as a communicating information within two parties, seller and potential buyers, which is obtained to effect customers decisions.

Naturally sales promotion is not without cost. Free trial packs and Discounts are a cost to the company and does hit the bottom line or profit margins but they do induce trails and customer evaluation. Thus some researchers voiced similar concerns on Sales Promotion being expensive and it may affect negatively on retailers profits (Walters and Mackenzie, 1988). Additionally, Martinez and Montaner (2006) indicated that there are some factors can induce customers to buy more or less, depends on his economic and hedonistic situation as well as his characteristics. This is quite evident from the coupons and discount sales, contests, point of purchase sales, refunds and rebates, free samples and trials, gifts and incentives.

### Direct Marketing and Direct Mail

Companies should develop direct marketing strategy to build relationships with their best and most profitable customers (Thomas, Lewison, Hauser, & Foley 2007). Direct marketing aims for best allocation of companies marketing dollar focussing on and communicates with micro market to reinforce the distinctive benefits that firm provide to those customers Arora et al. (2008). The vendor or store collects various information to sell their products and services are obtained from enrolment, registration, review or feedback form, discount coupon or online registration Familmaleki et al. (2015). These data are used to send or provide mailers, messages,

offers, calls and notifications, direct communications, brochures, events, phone calls, emails and digital contacts, mobile messaging, sms etc. Advertisers also felt it as a cost-effective and measurable medium to cut costs Suman et al. (2012). Some firms also communicate straight with consumers through fliers, catalogues, booklets, road shows, sampling and promotional literature or asking the customer to respond back by a missed call or visiting a website. Extensive use of Direct Marketing tools like uncontrolled calls often causes negative image and dissent for consumers as time progresses Simpson & Mortimore (2015).

Direct mail is a direct marketing technique where mails are sent over email or physically to available addresses. Known as junk mail, the customers or clients simply either delete it or tear it. But sometimes, if the mail is relevant to the need of the consumer, it may score a hit. For example, Personal Loan calls during Covid times when incomes are low Hussain et al. (2015).

## Digital Marketing and Social Marketing

Social Marketing is a new mode of communication which allows dissemination to a larger audience, direct dissemination and with measured possible response as well Voramontri & Klieb (2019). This uses Influencers and Social Networking sites such as FB, LinkedIn, Twitter etc. to communicate News and content about Company, promotes Campaigns, Contests and Initiatives etc. for consumers. Businesses must learn how to use social media in a way that is consistent with their business plan Mangold & Faulds (2009). Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) define social media as *“a group of Internet based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and allow the creation and exchange of user generated content.”*

Sinclair & Vogus (2011), Reilly's (2005) has described social media as a software tools that create content which are shared by the users Sasaka (2012). Marketers use Consumers' Sentiment toward Marketing (CSM) to measure how well consumers will perceive Social Media Marketing. CSM is defined as a concept which refers to the general feelings that consumers have for marketing and the marketplace (Lawson et al. 2001 as cited by Mady (2011). Social networks are used by a varied range of consumers, thus indicating the depth of reach to most target markets Cha (2009). Thus for producers, Social Media sites offer an effective platform to promote their brand and products to potential consumers El Dameh & Ghadeer (2021).

Digital Marketing is the fastest growing fields today where the effort of every company is high visibility on the World Wide Web. With onset of Google, Bing, Yahoo, Rediff etc. the race for higher ranking of pages through the maze of algorithms is further enhanced through proper use of Analytics, SEO (Search Engine Optimization) and SEM (Search Engine Marketing). This is more so proved in COVID times when Internet based services like Grocery, Shopping and Food Deliveries, Education, Consultations etc. have grown multi-fold. Digital has helped in launch of services, products and enhanced visibility for many. However, opening of markets post COVID has seen resurgence of Brick & Mortar model as a very helpful supplement to online sales models.

## Brand Endorsements

People often follow certain celebrities as some celebrities evoke a feeling of motivation, faith and trust based on the reputation, they have garnered maybe in Films, Sports, Arts, Industry or anywhere. Companies often ride this wave of faith to lure the followers and believers of those celebrities into using their products. However, sometimes with an overdose of brand endorsement of celebrities across categories, confuse the consumer perception and this is greatly used in ATL.

Roll (2006) loosely defined Celebrity Endorsement as a brand message through a celebrity who presents him or herself as the brand's representative and verifies the brand's claims due to his/her personality fame, recognized in the society or in a specific area related to the brand.

Zipporah & Mberia (2014), Malik & Qureshi (2016) explained that celebrity endorsement influences the opinion of the customers to purchase a product. McCracken's (1989) defined celebrity endorser is an individual who enjoys public recognition and use this recognition for advertisement. Aaker (1996) reinforced the concept and said that Brand and celebrity endorsement are fundamental component of effective marketing. When celebrities are used in an effective manner, they have the ability to improve brand's competitive perspective and increasing brand equity Alperstein (1991). The effect is studied as 4 models Pandian (2020):

1. Source Attractiveness Model: Erdogan (1999) says that customers on seeing an endorser, who is physically attractive, form favourable perception. The feature of attraction includes the lifestyle and also personality dimension of the endorser.
2. The Product Matchup Hypothesis: The above model explains that there has to be an almost ideal match between the celebrity characteristics of the personality and the features of the brand. (Erdogan 1999).
3. The Meaning Transfer Model: When customers counter a celebrity endorsed product, they immediately correlate some characteristic with the endorser and ultimately transmit it (reflect it) to the product (McCracken 1986).
4. The Elaboration Likelihood Model: Here, there are two key ingredients:- The Consumer's motivation to understand and their ability to process and comprehend the message. Thus if the endorser's Credibility and Matchup happen with the product, endorsement can be successful or else it may not work, Mukherjee (2009).

## Sponsorship

Sponsorship is where a company gets associated with an event, cause or image in lieu of payments Azadi (2016); Crimmins & Horn 1996). It may be a sports, cultural, musical or any event which is due to be witnessed by a large mass directly or with aided media Speed & Thompson (2000). The event usually features performance by a star or group of celebrities or features an important point which is critical and is of interest of masses Theofilou et al. (2014), Chebli & Gharbi (2014). Lagae (2005) defines sponsorship as a business agreement between two parties. The sponsor provides money, goods, services or know-how and the sponsored party (individual, event or organisation) offers rights and associations that the sponsor utilizes commercially O'reilly (2009). In case of sports entity (athlete, league, team or event), sponsorship is to support the overall organisational objectives, marketing and promotional strategies (Shank 2009, p. 324). Jobber (2007) States that there are five major sponsorship objectives. They are creating promotional opportunities, improving community relations, fostering favourable brand and company associations, creating entertainment opportunities and gaining publicity. Andreff & Szymanski (2006) also found two objectives in case of sponsorship, such as i) Changing the Consumer Behaviour rapidly and ii) Enhancing Visibility to both brands and products. Thus a Baby Diapers or toys company prefers to get associated with children or parenting related events as their target segment is clearly defined. Amis et al. (1999) said Sponsorship is to enhance Brand image through right association.

## Packaging (Design and Logo) and Merchandising

Packaging and packaging design are significant factors in the marketing of consumer goods and have a key role in communicating product and perceived benefits, quality benefits and premiumness to the consumers (Ali, Noreen & Ahmad 2015). Czinkota & Ronkainen (2007) deem that product packaging is connected to other variables in the marketing mix. However, consumers are the key factors in planning and implementing packages. So, the key issue for packaging design is to understand the consumer (Stewart 2004). Packaging also influences the purchase decision of the consumer Zekiri & Hasani (2015), Kumar (2014). Therefore, the package

itself is the only marketing communication, the consumer may receive while evaluating the product, Holmes & Paswan (2012). Companies spend quite a lot to ensure that the packaging is attractive and stand out so that consumers notice it. Therefore, Packaging, a separate P in the marketing mix helps highlight both the logo and brand name and provide necessary information on Price, ingredients, weight, usage, compliance and functions.

Logo or symbol reflects in the recognition of the brand. When a Logo itself speaks about the brand, it often becomes more valuable than the brand. A Yellow 'M' means McDonalds, a 'Tick' is Nike, 'A Panther' is Jaguar and 'a sweet looking girl toon' is Amul .

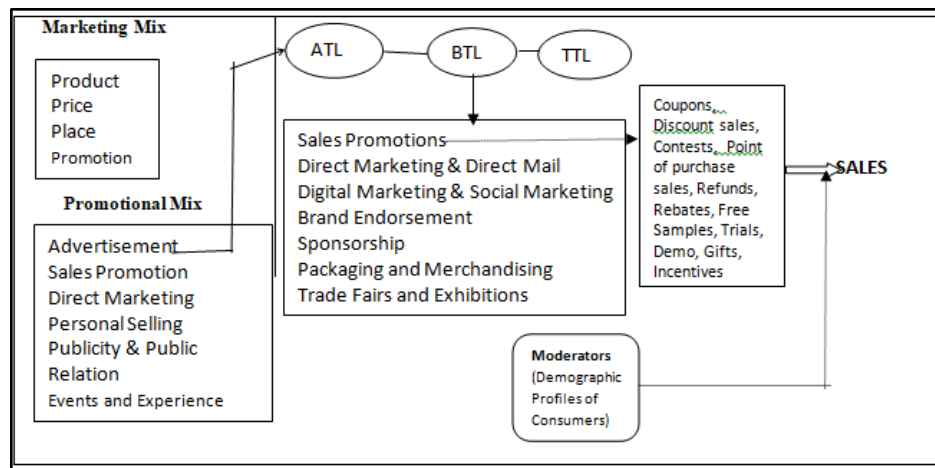
Visual Merchandising is done to make consumers aware and familiarize with the product visual at the stores and do impulse buying Bhatti & Latif (2014). Mills, Paul and Moorman (1995) defined visual merchandising as the presentation of store and its product to the customers through team work of the company's staff, retailers and merchandising departments with a purpose to sell and merchandise products. So, visual merchandising is an art of creating visual displays and arranging merchandising assortments within a store to improve the layout and presentation to increase the sales and profitability, Kaur (2013).

### **Trade Fairs and Exhibitions**

Hansen (1996), Tafesse & Korneliussen (2012), Situma (2012) & Gottlieb et al. (2014) told trade shows as a catalyst to economic productivity in the markets. Kirchgeorg et al. (2010) agrees that trade show is an events that are held at specific days, where a large number of companies present their new products and sell them to both existing and potential customers. Organizing trade show requires the support of the whole industry, convenient place and target class of customers to establish and cultivate future business relationships (Sharma and Patterson, 1999).

Trade Fair is an opportunity for business transaction directly with consumer and trade partners. It gives a platform to have a congregation of consumers and trade partners at a defined location for a defined period of time. It also brings all competition to the same platform and hence helps assess competition moves, new products, offers and innovations in a product category or service.

Exhibitions are more about displaying products, new entries, new innovations, technologies etc. to consumers, B2B clients and partners as well. They are focussed and provide a measured consumer feedback. Exhibition is directed towards specific segments of the market and consumers. It helps co. branding, increase awareness and trials Figure 1.



**FIGURE 1**  
**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

### BTL- PROS AND CONS

BTL offers the benefit of Touch and Feel to consumers, educates them first-hand about the product features, USPs, performance, thus building an immediate perception of the product, a product loyalty, Brand Recall and consumer satisfaction and thus translation into Sales. Some of the pros and cons of the BTL are given below Table 1.

Table 1 PROS AND CONS OF BELOW-THE-LINE PROMOTION (BTL)	
Advantages	Disadvantages
Easily measured response & ROIM	Price-discounting can cheapen brand image
Quick achievement of objectives	Short-term advantages only
Flexible application	Can cause stress with retailers
Can be extremely cheap	Difficulty in communicating brand message
Direct support of sales force	Limited Reach at one execution

Source: Marketing Comparatives- Above and below the line promotion, Geoff Lancaster (2012)

### MODELS AND THEORIES OBSERVED IN REVIEWED PAPERS

A no of models have given support to the development of BTL. Communication Models such as AIDA, STP Model, Push and Pull Marketing, Porter's Five Force Model etc. provide a strong base for the formation of BTL these are the foundation of marketing communication and promotions Lancaster & Massingham (2010).

Aaker (1996) has laid the foundation of Below the Line Advertising where the communication was targeted to various customer segments through different media. Further to add, Aaker (1996) had reflected that brand and celebrity endorsement are closely associated and have an impact on effective communication. This effect is visible by the four important models. They are a) Source Attractiveness Model by Erdogan (1999) b) The Product Matchup Hypothesis which explains that there has to be an almost ideal match between the celebrity characteristics of the personality and the features of the brand. (Erdogan 1999) c) The Meaning Transfer Model where the consumer immediately correlate some characteristic with the endorser and ultimately reflect it to the product, if he/she come across with a product d) The Elaboration Likelihood



Model. It states that the motivation of the consumer to comprehend the message successfully, if the endorser's Credibility and Matchup happen with the product.

Smith & Taylor (2004) found out eight critical tools of marketing mix such as 1. Selling; 2. Advertising; 3. Sales promotion; 4. Direct marketing; 5. Publicity (and public relations); 6. Sponsorship; 7. Exhibitions; 8. Packaging; 9. Point-of-sale and merchandising; 10. Word of mouth; 11. E-marketing; 12. Corporate identity. All these provides a platform for below the line advertising.

## SCOPE OF FUTURE RESEARCH

In advertisement huge money is spent and the same happens with BTL. John Wanamaker (1838-1922) also echoed on that and indicates the measurement of return on investment into marketing (ROIM). This is a question from about 200 years. The measure effectiveness of ATL vs BTL for product segments to have a fair assessment of how much budget to put in ATL or BTL is still a gaping hole for any Marketing Manager, Company top brass and researchers.

However the assessment can be done on various parameters and variables within the BTL perspective. The factors like Product, Consumer Demographics, the Pricing Strategy, Communication of the product USP, The Promotional Vehicle used, Frequency, Budget or Scale etc. have a direct bearing on the effectivity of BTL as a Marketing tool and thus effects the results it brings as Sales response. A study on analysis of these parameters thus has its own value. This research aims to lead us towards this gap in research.

On another perspective, an analysis on the spends by companies in a particular product category on BTL and its measurable results to form a possible relationship between increment in Sales and Consumer response with corresponding increase in BTL activity i.e. trying to establish a correlation between BTL Activity Levels and corresponding Response and Sales would be a valuable contribution to the industry which could not come across in the present review of literature.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

BTL is an important advertising tools to induce sales among the consumers, retailers and other trade partners. Many authors have given their positive insight into it. Some authors have cited the inefficient part of this mode of advertisement. However, the different elements or component needs to be balanced considering the cost. The second aspect is its impact on sales which needs a quantitative approach to know the exact influence. This review paper also collects the views of various researchers on BTL and its impact to the sales.

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