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Media Management Tools: UK broadcast media executives' perspective

Abstract

The UK broadcast **media** landscape provides an interesting context to understand and explore the competitive dynamics of media organisations'. As an industry characterised by uncertainty and turbulence, this paper considers the process by which broadcast **media organisations** develop their strategies and the type of analytical tools that they use to underpin this process.

This paper presents the findings of a survey of UK broadcast media executives and their views on the outlook for the UK **Media Industry**; the influence that the competitive environment has on developing **media strategy**; and the management tools that they use and their levels of satisfaction with these tools.

It concludes that UK broadcast media is a competitive and turbulent environment, and that **media strategy** is developed using a number of **media management** tools that have varying degrees of success in terms of helping broadcast media executives to manage their media organisations' in uncertain and complex conditions.

Media Management Tools: UK broadcast media executives' perspective

The media landscape is changing, and fast. Its future size and shape in the medium to long term is unknown and that is a daunting prospect for those responsible for managing media firms and developing strategy. This dynamic competitive environment also "represents a real challenge to managers tasked with planning a strategy" (Kung, 2008, p.8) where the existing business models, and practices are under pressure to deliver audiences, revenues and profits.

The strategic drivers of change have been extensively covered in existing literature, and as Picard (2004, p.12) pointed out "Strategic planners need to attend to these lessons as they develop responses to the turmoil and opportunities caused by changes in the environment and markets in which their media firms operate". What we can conclude is that the media industry is operating in a significantly different competitive environment than it was just a few years ago; and that it will operate in a different type of environment in five years' time compared to what exists today. In these shifting and uncertain conditions (Oliver, 2012), one has to consider the process by which media organisations develop their strategies and the type of analytical tools that they use to underpin this process.

These tools are often used to develop strategy, organisational policy and inform management decision making. This paper presents the findings from a survey of UK broadcast media

executives and their views on: the outlook for the UK media industry, the influence that the competitive environment has on developing media strategy, the management tools that they use, and their level of satisfaction with these tools.

This type of survey has an enviable heritage. In 1993 US management consultancy Bain & Company started a similar survey whose purpose was to understand the changing nature of competitive environments, management practices and tools. Starting with only 30 respondents, their survey is now one of the leading instruments to gauge corporate executive attitudes and behaviours in the global business environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical frame for this paper draws on strategy literature which Pettigrew, Thomas and Whittington (2007, p.40) argued “provides a range of different tools to frame and analyse strategy, competition and competitive dynamics”. In particular this paper draws on literature from two areas; the strategy making process and the limited knowledge on the use and satisfaction of management tools.

Strategy making as a process

A recurrent theme in strategic management literature has been the need to understand an industry, particularly in terms of; structure (Porter, 1980; 2008), evolution (Tushman and Anderson, 1986), lifecycle (Deans, Kroeger and Zeisel, 2002), change (Van de Ven and Poole, 1995) and consolidation (North and Oliver, 2010) in an attempt to assess an organization's strategic fit with the competitive environment at both macro and micro levels. This findings presented in this paper also add to the knowledge of our understanding of the media industry by exploring the media management tools that are used by executives within UK broadcast media.

The concept of strategic fit, mention above, leads into a consideration of how best to adapt an organisation and its strategy in line with strategic environmental changes. The process of making media strategy centres on whether strategy is ‘formulated’ through a prescribed and linear process of formal, rational planning, implementation and control, or, whether a media firm's strategy simply ‘forms’ and emerges over time as a result of trial, error and learning about the competitive environment to the point where patterns of behaviour converge on successful working practices.

Kung (2008, p.110) argued that the rationalist (formulated) approach is “essentially a plan, formed through methodical, sequential analysis of the environment” and that “the uncertainty and complexity present in the strategic environment can be reduced through comprehensive analysis”. The arguments for this deliberate process of strategy making have been extensively covered in strategic management literature relating to The Design School (Chandler 1962; Andrews, 1981), The Planning School (Steiner 1979; Ackoff, 1983) and The Positioning School (Porter, 1985).

However, existing literature on the process of strategy making in the unfamiliar and complex environmental conditions that characterises UK broadcast media is concentrated within the 'Learning School' of strategic management. This school of thought suggests that strategy making is a process of emergent learning over time, where strategy makers critically reflect on past experience, and current events, and adapt their strategies accordingly. Kung (2008, p.120) argues that this adaptive approach "is an evolutionary process where change takes place progressively as firms undertake a series of strategic readjustments in response to a changing environment". A significant body of literature (Quinn, 1980; Mintzberg 1987; Senge, 1990; Leavy, 1998; Mintzberg, Ahlstrand and Lampel, 1998, Argyris, 2004; Rees and Porter, 2006) advocates this view arguing that competitive environments are complex and unpredictable, and as such, media organisations can only hope to learn from changing environmental conditions and adapt their strategies accordingly. Indeed, Kachaner and Deimler (2008) suggested that organisations need to 'stretch their strategic thinking' by challenging their prevailing assumptions and planning routines, rather than using the same strategic planning tools each year as these tend to produce strategies that are incremental and do not take advantage of new market opportunities.

This strategy making perspective concludes that a media firm's strategy is only obvious when viewed retrospectively, since the series of minor adjustments produce "major changes in direction" (Mintzberg et al, 1998, p.178) over time in order to remain in touch with the environment.

Media Management Tools

Pettigrew, Thomas and Whittington (2007, p.37) argued that "a significant feature of work in strategy has been the development of tools for analysis in the world of practice, with parallel development taking place in the world of academia". The use of diagnostic tools in strategic development is common place and Bowman, Singh and Thomas (2007, p.37) stated that these tools were used largely (although not mutually exclusively) to consider;

- strategic direction (eg. Visioning, SWOT, Industry Forces, Portfolio Matrices)
- strategy creation (eg. Scenario Planning, Balanced Scorecard)
- strategic choice (eg. Risk Analysis).

In 1993 US management consultancy Bain & Company started a multi-year research project with the purpose of understanding the changing nature of competitive environments, management practices and tools. Starting with only a 30 respondents, by 2013 their survey had grown to 1,208 responses from global executives in what would be their 14th survey of Management Tools and Trends. This survey is now one of the leading instruments to gauge executive attitudes and behaviours in the global business environment.

Management tools are now common in many firms in a range of industries as executive's attempt to devise competitive strategies that will increase revenue, improve efficiency, and plan for the future, amongst many other corporate objectives.

The authors of the Bain & Company report, Rigby and Bilodeau (2007, p.9), argued that “by tracking which tools companies are using, under what circumstances and how satisfied they are with the results, we’ve been able to help managers make better choices in selecting, implementing and integrating the tools to improve their performance”.

They previously noted in their work (Rigby and Bilodeau, 2000, p.272) that “satisfaction with a management tool or technique can be driven by many factors:

- The tool’s fitness for use
- The level of organisational effort applied
- The general health of the business
- The specific needs of the business
- The influence of other tools and programmes
- The readiness of the organisation
- The accuracy of expectations”.

In terms of the direction for this research, the author was curious to know how management tools performed in a fast changing and dynamic environment, such as the one characterised by the UK media industry. As such, Rigby and Bilodeau’s (2007a, 2007b) work identified the effectiveness of each management tool in terms of their usage and satisfaction. As such, they represented each tool within a 2x2 matrix and noted that each tool could be identified as being;

- Rudimentary Implements - these are low usage, low satisfaction tools that tend to be under developed in an organisation. Using and developing these tools to the specific needs of an media organisation may be too difficult, or that the issues they are meant to address are not worth the investment.
- Speciality Tools – tend to be highly effective, but are used infrequently as they tend to address specific problems.
- Blunt Instruments - score high in usage, but low in terms of management satisfaction. These tools tend to be used by executives to meet a widespread need in their media organisation to address a problem, but they are unlikely to be the best tool for the job.
- Power Tools - are high usage, high satisfaction management tools that managers use frequently and with highly satisfactory results.

In positioning the value of this paper, the research has applied a well known series of studies by Rigby and Bilodeau and adapted their approach to the specific context of the UK Media Industry. In doing so, its purpose was to understand the outlook for a highly dynamic competitive environment and to investigate how media executives were using management

tools to understand and make conclusions about their industry in order to develop strategy and manage their media organisation.

METHOD

The research design for this study drew heavily on the work Rigby and Bilodeau (2007a, 2007b and 2013) in so far as the aim of this research was to explore the media outlook and management tools used by UK broadcast media organisations. The survey wanted to investigate four key questions:

- What is the outlook for the UK media industry in the next 12 months?
- How is media strategy being affected by uncertain market conditions?
- To identify the management tools that media organisations' were using.
- How satisfied media executives were with the management tools they were using.

This research used a quantitative survey which was divided into three sections. Firstly, Section 1 investigated media executives' views on the 'Outlook for the UK Media Industry in 2013'. It had 21 questions, using a five point Likert scale, and one open question (What other media trends do you see emerging in the next 12 months?). These questions were largely derived from the Rigby and Bilodeau (2013) with additional questions relating to: the EU Audiovisual Media Services Directive, UK regulatory environment, and product placement. Section 2 of the survey, used a three point Likert scale that asked media executives what media management tools they had used in the previous 12 months. Section 3 used a five point Likert scale and asked media executives to rate their satisfaction with each media management tool.

The sampling design was non-probability and purposively based, thus allowing the researcher to select and target specific respondents (Sekaran, 2003; Saunders et al, 2009). A sampling frame was generated from the online professional network LinkedIn using the label 'Broadcast Media (UK)' as an umbrella term. We do not currently know whether a sampling frame generated from LinkedIn has any inherent bias, and it would be interesting to review studies that had used the same method of respondent recruitment. The sampling frame was then populated with 60 senior broadcast media executives having responsibility for strategy, including roles such as; Head of Strategic Planning, Director of Strategy, Senior Planner, and Head of Segments Planning. It also included a number of functional areas with roles such as; Head of Commercial Policy, Head of Business Development, Vice President Marketing, Director of Programming, Chief Technologist, General Manager, Senior Vice President, Director of Operations, Head of Customer Insight and Director of Sales. The questionnaire was sent out via Survey Monkey.com in December 2012 and resulted in 24 responses (40% response rate), which corresponded favourably with the first Bain & Company survey conducted in 1993.

Every attempt was been made to ensure that the data collected, analysed and presented in this paper is credible. As such, a number of validation methods have been used to ensure that the

research is trustworthy. Firstly, the axiological question of the values of the researcher (Sykes, 1990; Silverman, 1993) has largely been addressed by staying as closely as possible to the format and structure of the work presented by Rigby and Bilodeau (2007a, 2007b, 2013). The additional questions in Section 1, on the 'Outlook for the UK Media Industry in 2013' were devised in conjunction with senior executives from the BBC and Virgin Media. In addition, the researcher contacted Bain & Company for a 'thick description' regarding their process of analysis to ensure that the findings were credible. The third method of validation was the use of an 'independent audit' whereby the entire process, from research design and analysis of the findings were presented to a Senior Director at a US based, multi-national, management consultancy. This audit concluded that the process was consistent with the work of Bain & Company.

RESULTS

What is the outlook for the UK media industry in the next 12 months?

The overall attitude for the UK media industry was optimistic, with 70% of media executives agreeing that their 'outlook for the industry was positive'. The source of this confidence can be found in the types of strategic and tactical activity that media organisations' would be engaged in going forward. For example, almost all of the respondents (88%) said that their companies were expecting to launch new products and services in the coming year. The basis of this innovative activity would come from 'seeking collaborative partnerships' since 21% 'Strongly Agreed' and 63% 'Agreed' with this statement. The majority of media executives (75%) said that their company would 'focus more on innovation than cost reduction for competitiveness'. This positive outlook was further enhanced by 71% of respondents who thought that their brand and content would be 'successfully leveraged through new platforms' in the coming year.

However, not all of this optimism was shared by broadcast media executives. For example, 38% agreed that their 'core business was running out of steam' and needed new capabilities. Also, 25% 'Agreed' or 'Strongly Agreed' that it was difficult to 'protect their core business whilst building new revenue streams'. In addition, 33% said that it their 'company is adapting to change too slowly'.

How is media strategy being affected by uncertain market conditions?

The question of whether an executive's ability to develop media strategy was being 'hampered by uncertain market conditions' provided a mixed response. Since 38% of media executives 'Agreed' with this statement, 21% Disagreed or 'Strongly Disagreed', and 42% were 'Neutral' in their opinion. This division in opinions also translated into the responses for a question that asked about their 'planning assumptions assuming economic growth'. The responses here were 29% who had assumed economic growth, 33% had not assumed economic growth and 38% were 'Neutral' in their response. This uncertainty was also reflected in their views on whether or not 'advertising revenues were likely to fall'. Whilst only 13% 'Agreed' with this statement, 46% 'Disagreed' and nearly half (42%) were 'Neutral' in their response.

To identify the management tools that media companies were using

The survey investigated the usage and satisfaction of 21 of the most popular management tools used in businesses across the globe. The usage of each tool largely depends on user knowledge of that tool; it's relevance to task or project at hand, and the changing competitive conditions at the time of use.

The survey asked media executives to identify the tools that they had used in the previous 12 months. The tools that were being used the most were Strategic Alliances (90%) and Benchmarking (90%), closely followed by Social Media Programmes (86%), Outsourcing (86%) and Strategic Planning (86%). However, it is the picture that is painted by a second group of tools that provides a unique insight into the current and future state of the UK Media Industry. As we have seen in the Media Outlook findings above, media executives appear to be looking closely at the future direction of the industry, their company and their competitive position. As such, they are using tools like Scenario and Contingency Planning (81%) to consider possible alternative futures as a basis for managing uncertainty. The least used tools were Business Process Re-engineering (43%), Supply Chain Management and Total Quality Management (both at 48%).

How satisfied were media executives with these management tools?

The survey asked media executives to rate the level of satisfaction with these tools. The tool with the highest level of satisfaction was Customer Relationship Management, with an average satisfaction rating of 3.93 (out of 5) and 64% of respondents being either 'Satisfied' or 'Extremely Satisfied' with this tool. This was closely followed by Customer Segmentation, with an average 3.87 (out of 5) and 63% being either 'Satisfied' or 'Extremely Satisfied'. From the findings, it would appear that media companies are segmenting their audiences effectively and building productive relationships with them.

The findings also indicated that Strategic Planning as a media management tool delivered high levels of satisfaction as it achieved an average satisfaction rating of 3.76 (out of 5). However, perhaps more surprising was that Social Media Programmes achieved an average satisfaction rating of 3.75 (out of 5), with more than 56% of respondents being 'Satisfied' with this tool. With continued discussion over the effectiveness of social media, the UK Media Industry appears to be using this tool in a way that delivers tangible results.

The management tools that scored the lowest in terms of satisfaction were Knowledge Management, Supply Chain Management and Total Quality Management. This could be explained by the fact that of all the tools available to media executives, these were the least used and respondents were largely Neutral when it came to expressing an opinion.

Media Management Tools: usage and satisfaction

Diagram 1 below shows each tool in terms of usage and satisfaction. Those tools with higher usage and satisfaction rates are called 'Power Tools'. For example, Strategic Planning has both a high usage and satisfaction rating with media executives; and this finding concurs with

the results consistently reported by Bain & Company, in so far as, many companies from different industries across the globe found this to be a highly effective management tool. Those tools with higher satisfaction and lower usage are referred to as Speciality Tools. These tools are used in certain circumstances and tend to be effective when used for a specific situation. The findings of this research show that Change Management Programmes and the Balanced Score Card are such tools.

Some tools, however, have a high usage, but result in lower levels of satisfaction by their users, and these are referred to as Blunt Instruments. These tools tend to be used incorrectly for the circumstances at hand, and may even be used as result of a fad that is so often persuasively presented by management gurus. Finally, those tools that are used infrequently and have lower satisfaction ratings are known as Rudimentary Tools. These tools may be new to a company, so limited usage could be explained by a lack of knowledge and understanding of the tool, or relevance to the company during the previous 12 months.

Diagram 1: **Media Management** Tools: usage and satisfaction

Blunt Instruments		Power Tools	
Higher usage	Outsourcing	Benchmarking	
	Mission & Vision Statements ♦	♦ ♦ Strategic Alliances	♦ Strategic Planning
	Open Innovation ♦	♦ ♦ SMP	♦ CRM
	Lean Operations ♦	♦ SCP	♦ Core Competencies
			♦ Customer Segmentation
Rudimentary Implements		Speciality Tools	
Lower usage	Knowledge Management ♦	♦ Loyalty Management Tools	♦ Change Management Programmes
	Downsizing ♦	♦ Balanced Scorecard	
	M&A ♦		
	TOM + SCM ♦		
	BPR ♦		
Lower satisfaction		Higher satisfaction	

Key:

Balanced Scorecard (BS), Benchmarking (BM), Business Process Reengineering (BPR), Change Management Programmes (CMP), Core Competencies (CC), Customer Relationship Management (CRM), Customer Segmentation (CS), Downsizing (D), Knowledge Management (KM), Lean Operations (LO), Loyalty Management Tools (LM), Mergers & Acquisitions (M&A), Mission & Vision Statements (MVS), Open Innovation (OI), Outsourcing (OS), Scenario & Contingency Planning (SCP), Social Media Programmes (SMP), Strategic Planning (SP), Strategic Alliances (SA), Supply Chain Management (SCM), Total Quality Management (TQM).

DISCUSSION

Media outlook

Whilst there was a largely positive response regarding the outlook for the UK Media Industry, closer examination of the data suggests a more mixed and uncertain view. There is no doubt that the UK **Media Industry** is highly competitive and that making sense of such turbulent conditions is not easy. The findings of this research paint two pictures. On the one hand, there are a considerable number of media companies that are adopting dynamic responses to a challenging environment by focusing on innovation, investing in and launching new products and services, and forming collaborative partnerships and strategic alliances. This type of dynamism will enable these media organisations' to adapt and renew their resources, capabilities and competencies through deliberate resource investment. However, the data also revealed that there were a number of firms that were struggling to adapt to the pace of change. These companies thought that their current capabilities were not sufficient to meet their financial objectives and that their company was adapting too slowly to change.

Media Management Tools: satisfaction

Deregulated markets and technological convergence has resulted in fragmented value chains, so it is no surprise to see that Strategic Alliances and Outsourcing feature so highly in terms of usage. The high use of Benchmarking also suggests that media companies are not only looking to improve their performances and practices, but that they are attempting to beat their competitive rivals, or at least, ensuring that they are not being left behind in a competitive landscape that is changing rapidly.

We have seen that the outlook for the UK Media Industry was uncertain, and as a consequence media executives had regarded Scenario & Contingency Planning as a Power Tool. These scenario based tools are often used when conventional forecasting methods prove inadequate, and this combined with the fact that media executives had adapted their corporate Mission and Vision Statements was interesting. Particularly since these statements of intent provide the basis on which companies articulate their goals and direction.

The heavy use of this tool combined with the scenario planning tool suggests that the level of market turbulence that media companies are experiencing is significant.

Media Management Tools: satisfaction

It was no surprise to see that Strategic Planning was regarded a Power Tool by media executives, since it had consistently delivered high satisfaction results in the Bain & Company survey. Perhaps more surprising was that Social Media Programmes achieved a high average satisfaction rating of 3.75, with more than 13% of respondents being 'Extremely Satisfied' and 56% being 'Satisfied' with this tool. With continued discussion over the effectiveness of social media, UK media firms appear to be using this tool in a way that delivers tangible results.

Other Power Tools like Customer Relationship Management and Customer Segmentation indicate that media companies are not only effectively segmenting their audiences, but that they appear to be building productive relationships with them.

CONCLUSIONS

An interesting subject matter for **media management** researchers continues to be understanding various aspects of the **Media Industry**. The findings in this research paper provide some interesting insights into how UK broadcast media executives are managing their businesses and the different management tools that help them to understand and analyse the competition and competitive dynamics. Whilst the various works of Rigby and Bilodeau, on behalf of Bain & Company, have provided excellent insights into global businesses for a generation, no one to date has examined a specific industry in such a way.

What the findings of this research tell us is that the dynamics of the competitive environment are turbulent, with some broadcast media executives optimistic, some pessimistic and some unable to express more than a neutral opinion about their media organisation and the competitive environment it operates within.

As for the process of making **media strategy**, the usage of so many management tools indicates that strategy is being 'formulated' through formal, rational planning, using a range of diagnostic management tools. As such, the findings tell us that the view held by Kung (2008) whereby a wide-ranging analysis of the competitive environment can help media executives better understand the uncertainty and complexity that they and their media firms are exposed to.

Perhaps the most critical question to ask is whether or not the management tools that are used in the UK Media Industry are any different to those used by businesses in a range of industries across the globe? By comparing the findings of Rigby and Bilodeau (2013) we find that many of the Power Tools are the same (eg. Strategic Planning, CRM, Core Competencies and Benchmarking). However, the UK Media Industry have a higher incidence of using and being satisfied with Strategic Alliances, Customer Segmentation, Scenario Planning, and perhaps most interesting Social Media. In the latest

2013 Bain & Company report, Social Media Programmes are reported to have below average use and satisfaction levels. So one has to ask the question as to how UK media organisations' are managing to produce higher than average usage and satisfaction ratings? Perhaps as media firms they have better competencies in understanding the intricacies of social media uses and platforms.

There is no doubt that Bain & Company have a preeminent reputation of understanding the changing nature of competitive environments, management practices and tools. In particularly their multi-year survey has produced some interesting and perceptive longitudinal insights. The findings presented in this paper are based on an exploratory inquiry, and as such, the sample sizes are small, meaning that the results of this research cannot be generalised to the wider population of UK broadcast media executives. However, it is the intention of the researcher to extend this research on an annual basis in order to produce the type of longitudinal insight provided by the Bain & Company surveys. The future direction of the research may also extend into other sectors of the media industry in order to assess the similarities and differences in the management tools and practices that these firm exhibit.

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