



Marketing and influence

military-Earth thinking notebook

le Chef d'escadron Benoît OLIÉ

Published on 19/07/2018

Défense & management

Marketing^[1] and military operations of influence^[2] are two totally distinct arts, belonging to two different worlds. However, this is not a sufficient reason to turn one's back on an academic discipline whose teachings, although not directly transposable, can improve the design and preparation of military operations of influence, and sometimes even of an entire campaign.

1) Marketing: a set of actions whose purpose is to identify, forecast and, possibly, stimulate the needs of consumers with regard to goods and services and to adapt production and marketing to the needs thus specified (online Larousse dictionary).

2) Influence: the ability to obtain effects through action on perceptions, representations, attitudes and behaviour (Concept Interarmées 3.10 Influence; 2012).

In their book "Behavioural Conflict"¹⁾, Steve Tatham and Andy McKay explain that, contrary to popular belief, marketing and influence are two distinct and different crafts. Influence aims to generate, or at least change, behaviour in a targeted population, whereas marketing aims to direct the consumer towards a brand, but for a behaviour (purchase, consumption) that already exists. In other words, marketing makes you buy a particular brand of peas, whereas influence seeks to make you simply eat them. They explain that civilian marketing may have a military interest in how to create and deliver messages, in short, a practical application at the tactical level, but that's all.

Their opponents might retort that there are examples of behaviour created by marketing, such as the PDA (personal digital assistant), the electronic diary that was a resounding success in the late 1990s or, more recently, the iPhone. In reality, these are not counter-examples: these new products simply responded to a market expectation that consumers themselves were not aware of, but which was present nonetheless.

So we should forget about marketing, that insidious art reserved for merchants, and focus

on influence, that noble art of the military strategist. Or not.

Of course, influence is not lattice marketing, but marketing techniques can help improve the design and conduct of an influence plan and even, by extension, a campaign plan, especially in a situation of war among populations. Comparing marketing and influence operations at the operational and tactical levels helps to develop more thoughtful thinking when designing an influence plan and then to improve the planning of military influence operations.

At the operational level, first of all, marketing distinguishes between four main orientations according to which companies define their approach to operations: product-orientation, sales-orientation, advertising-orientation and market-orientation.

- Product orientation consists in proposing a product whose intrinsic qualities are sufficient, or are supposed to be sufficient, to sell it. "Let me introduce you to our new invention: the car. You won't need your horse any more".
- Sales-orientation consists in canvassing the consumer to sell as many products as possible. "Do you already have a car? Then buy a second one."
- Advertising is about sending messages to consumers to encourage them to buy a particular brand.
- Market orientation is the study and understanding of the market to be able to respond to real expectations. "Do you need a faster means of transport than a horse? Let me introduce you to the car". This is the most effective orientation, but the most difficult to implement.

Sometimes orientations are lined up. The car, PDA or iPhone started with a product orientation that happened to be aligned with the market orientation. This explains the illusion of creating a consumption behaviour that we rejected above.

This classification of a company's behaviour can be useful for reflection and the elaboration of an operational decision. Let us take the example of Afghanistan [2]. Mullah Omar and the Taliban began their popular success by rescuing two young girls from the hands of a warlord whom they executed. They offered the Afghan people - or "sold" if we consider their accession to power as a price paid by the population - security and justice, which the "market" wanted but could not find. Then they moved from a market orientation to a product orientation: whatever you need, now that we are in power, you will take what you are given. This explains why Afghans welcomed Western forces so well in 2001.

But these western forces also showed a product orientation: western-style democracy, governance. Steve Tatham believes that the Taliban have won hearts and minds in many parts of Afghanistan because they are delivering justice there, while the government has not. The Taliban have won hearts and minds in many parts of Afghanistan because they are delivering justice, but the government is failing to do so, and that is precisely what the people want rather than Western-style governance they don't understand[3]. 3] This is an example of market orientation. It is also reminiscent of the change of orientation initiated by General Petraeus in Iraq when he decided to give priority to security rather than political development[4].

At the level of tactical planning, there are three phases that can be useful in developing a plan of influence: segmentation, targeting and positioning. Segmentation consists of identifying the different sub-categories (or segments) of the market, differentiating and

discriminating between them. It is a phase in which observation, analysis and understanding of the market, or what we would call the population, is paramount. This phase is reminiscent of the concepts of reconcilable and irreconcilable used by General Petraeus at the beginning of the application of counter-insurgency principles in Iraq in 2007 [5]. 5] We can assume that he then identified three segments: the reconcilable, who wished to participate in the security of their territory; the irreconcilable, who wished above all to drive out Western forces and take advantage of their position of strength; and finally the neutral population, whose adherence became the stake of the campaign.

After the segmentation phase comes the targeting phase. Once the different segments of the consumer population have been discriminated against, the company must identify the one that it will target, the one that is most likely to respond favourably to the product. It will also be a matter of keeping the undesirables away, and even of managing to avoid selling the product to segments that are not targeted. Again, this principle is reminiscent of what General Petraeus did in Iraq: three different segments will be treated in three different ways, as we will see later. If we go back to Afghanistan, it is the duality of targeting, that is, defining who to seduce and who to push aside, that is of interest for reflection. Have we been able to clearly identify those to whom we can offer our "product" and have we been able to keep out those who are not in the targeted segment? This marketing concept also sheds light on the issue of negotiating with the Taliban.

The third phase, positioning, follows on from the previous one. Each targeted segment must have its own unique positioning, otherwise it will be ineffective. The positioning of the brand corresponds to its message and its image: it is a question of defining "what it does, for whom, and in a unique way to respond to an urgent need" [6]. Brand positioning will attract the target population and keep out undesirable segments. The lessons that this phase can bring to military thinking on influence are mainly the two risks it presents. One is the risk of brand dilution when the message of the positioning - or the positioning itself - is not constant. On the other hand, there is the risk of overpromising or, in French, not allocating sufficient resources to achieve the promises of service and satisfaction that the brand's positioning contains. If we take the example of General Petraeus, we can observe that he carried out, for example for the neutral population, a positioning on security that he accompanied by appropriate behaviour - the establishment of camps within cities and the multiplication of foot patrols - and for which he allocated the necessary resources - the famous surge. The risk of overpromising, the risk that penalises a brand most severely, and moreover in the long term, seems to be directly transposable to the military, if not politically. The debate on the number of troops and the resources deployed in Afghanistan is an illustration of this.

In conclusion, there is no question here of falling back into a fashion that has lived and has no reason to revive, which was that of seeking to transpose civil and commercial business plans and business models as they stand into the military sphere. The objectives and means of action are different, and the models must, by definition, be different. On the other hand, it is a question of not falling into the opposite excess and of wanting to remain impervious to an academic discipline that could improve operational thinking. It is, however, a question of not falling into the opposite excess and of remaining closed to an academic discipline that could improve operational and tactical thinking and provide examples capable of inspiring influential actions whose importance at theatre level is no longer in doubt.

Beyond the few aspects covered by this article, marketing can also provide ideas in the field of implementation, such as applied ethnography or direct and scientific observation

of consumers by specialists, which inspired the American Human Terrain System[7]. 7] This discipline also teaches how to balance instinct and facts, particularly through statistical studies, in observing and understanding a population. Finally, we could conduct a study at the strategic level and ask ourselves whether the unsuccessful product orientation applied in Afghanistan is not in fact the constrained result of a strategic sales orientation[8].

8] Andrew MacKay and Steve Tatham "BehaviouralConflict" . Saffron Walden: Military Studies Press, 2011. See in particular Chapter 6.

2] Analysing in hindsight is a much easier art than acting and deciding in the uncertainty of the moment. This example does not therefore aim to criticize what our brothers in arms have accomplished, but rather to provide some pointers on how to improve our performance if we find ourselves in this situation again.

3] Conference at the Joint Services Command and Staff College on March 15, 2012.

4] See especially Thomas E. RICKS. The Gamble. Penguin Books UK, 2010. Chapter 2.

5] Ibid.

6] "What you do, for whom, to uniquely solve an urgent need." Quote from Anne-Laure Sellier's marketing course, HEC MBA professor, second semester 2012. The explanations of marketing concepts in this article are taken from this course.

7] The Human Terrain System is an American program developed in 2005 and implemented in 2007, which consists of creating teams of experts in social sciences (anthropology, sociology, economics, etc.) to work together to develop a human terrain system. The Human Terrain System is a US programme developed in 2005 and implemented since 2007, which consists of creating teams of experts in social sciences (anthropology, sociology, regional and linguistic studies) to serve major military commanders in order to provide them with a better understanding of the population in the theatre of operation. This programme became permanent in 2010.

8] Interview with Battalion Commander Tugdual Barbarin, 23 October 2012.

An air delivery officer, the OLIÉ Squadron Leader is a graduate of the British Advanced Command and Staff Course. He is currently studying for the Master in Business Administration at HEC Paris.

Title : le Chef d'escadron Benoît OLIÉ

Author (s) : le Chef d'escadron Benoît OLIÉ

Release date 09/07/2018
