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Covert Marketing Strategy and Techniques

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**Abstract**

Growing rivalry has increased the tendency of firms to use messages to persuade consumers, more intensively. However, as the consumer is exposed to more messages every day, this has resulted in insensitivity on the part of customers towards commercial messages. Traditional marketing communication has failed to solve this problem. New models and strategies are needed. Under these conditions a new strategy, covert marketing has emerged. In this strategy, commercial messages are transmitted to consumers using unexpected times and styles so that they are not even aware of it. This may be a solution to the problem of communication with the consumer.

The purpose of this study is to firstly explain the concept of covert marketing strategy and its techniques and secondly to suggest a communication model which can be used in this process.

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**1. Introduction**

Firms traditionally carry out their marketing activities with a mutual communication they establish with the customer. This communication is established with the help of messages. This strategy was beneficial for firms in the period when the level of rivalry was relatively low. Nowadays, conditions have totally changed. Customers at the present time attach importance to the value they receive in return for their money and at the same time they request high quality products (Roy and Chattopadhyay, 2010, p. 69). While consumers' sensitivity to price is greater than before, it is known that brand loyalty has decreased and, accordingly, the tendency to change brand has increased. On the one hand, the features of consumers have changed to the detriment of firms. On the other hand, the conditions of the market have become much more difficult. The increase in rivalry and the number of consumers and, at the same time, too many market segments have made it difficult for firms to communicate with consumers and attract their attention.

Firms in particular, try to communicate with the consumer and sell their products by using advertising tools. According to the report of the Turkish Association of Advertising Agencies (TAAA), advertising investments increased

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by approximately 3 percent all around the world and by 2 percent in Turkey in the first nine months of the year 2013 (TAAA, 2014). The figures in the report are significant in the sense that they show the importance of the marketing communication dimension to which consumers are daily exposed. According to researchers, consumers are exposed to between 200 and 5000 commercial messages every day (Silverman, 2006, p.40; Kirby and Marsden, 2006, p.201; Pringle, 2007, p. 98). It is known that the consumers consciously cannot perceive a major part of these messages.

In the market in which the number of the messages has increased so much, the success of a marketing campaign is evaluated by the transmission level of the campaign to consumers and the level of change in their attitude and behavior. However, research shows that only a small part of the messages sent actually lead consumers to the stores for shopping (Jurca, 2010, p. 323).

The most important tool in transmitting a message process is advertising. The problems in the usage of this tool are as follows: the increase in the number of critics about advertisement (Kaikati and Kaikati, 2004, p.7), the consumers having serious doubts as to reliability (Weisberg et al., 2007, p. 93; Solomon, 2003 p. 220), a previous feeling of being deceived causes a negative attitude to all other advertisements (Darke and Ritchie, 2007; Calfee and Ringold, 1988; Obermiller and Spangenberg, 1998), and an unconscious reluctance and feeling of discomfort to the brand logo in the consumer persuasion process (Teixeira, 2012, p. 25). In addition, because of excessive advertisement costs, and because more educated consumers can use technological tools in order to avoid the commercial messages sent by firms and find ways to desensitize themselves (Petty and Andrews, 2008, Martin and Smith 2008, p. 46) this has caused firms to look for alternative methods to persuade consumers without disturbing them (Kuhn et al., 2010, p. 59).

Covert marketing, which was developed as a result of this search, is a strategy, in which there are no direct verbal and written messages (Milewicz and Herbig, 1997, p. 46), and the nature of the communication is not explicit to the consumers (Campbell et al., 2012, p. 483) and it has advantages for the solutions of the problems.

The purpose of this study is to explain the concept of covert marketing and the techniques that can be used in the application of this strategy by using specific examples and then to suggest a model. The study is organized under the following titles.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Covert Marketing Strategy

In the literature, the covert marketing concept has been given different names, such as secret, under the radar, masked, buzz, bait and hidden marketing (Nebenzahl and Jaffe, 1998; Can en, 2011; Kaikati and Kaikati, 2004; Martin and Smith, 2008; Ahmed, 2000; Scanlon and Hearn, 2006; Weisberg et al., 2007; Petty and Andrews, 2008; Kaya, 2009; Roy and Chattopadhyay, 2010; Sprott, 2008). The common point of these concepts is that the identity of the message and/or the sender of the message are not indicated and so the message is transmitted to the consumer.

The process and the features of covert marketing are summarized as follows:

- This strategy aims to reach consumers by determining their weakest defense points (Kaikati and Kaikati, 2004, p. 6).
- It is necessary that consumers do not realize that the message is commercial (Roy and Chattopadhyay, 2010, p. 70) or know the firm sending the message (Milne et al., 2008). In this way it is more probable that consumers will avoid a skeptical approach to the message and accept it much more easily (Darke and Ritchie, 2007).
- This approach aims to be out of the consumers' perception threshold (Ahmed, 2000).
- Such a strategy does not primarily aim to increase sales. Instead, it is aimed at ensuring that consumers have positive attitudes towards advertisements about products, thus building a substructure for future purchases and starting a positive word of mouth communication (Taylor, 2003).
- In this communication method, people's relations with the firm are not clear and they talk about the products of the firm (Kaikati and Kaikati, 2004, p. 6; Weisberg et al., 2007, p. 93).
- During the application, the informative message is transmitted to the target consumers by using an appointed person and way.
- In this communication, the first goal is that the product is purchased by the consumers but more than that, it is wished that the consumers disseminate the message about the product (Leung, 2003).

## 2.2. Covert Marketing Techniques

Consumers are constantly faced with covert marketing techniques in the flow of daily life. Implementation of the strategy is limited by the imagination of marketers and can be applied at anytime and anywhere that involves interaction with the consumer. According to the level of cover which is used to hide the real source and/or message at the communication process, a typology of covert marketing techniques is presented in Table 1. The proposed typology is classified by the authors as to whether the message/real source is overt or covert by 2x2 matrixes.

**Table 1. Typology of Covert Marketing Techniques**

		Real Source	
		Overt	Covert
Message	Overt	<p><i>Traditional Techniques</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advertisement</li> <li>• Public Relations</li> <li>• Personal Selling</li> <li>• Direct Marketing</li> <li>• Sales Promotion</li> </ul>	<p><i>Masked Techniques</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Celebrities</li> <li>• Viral Marketing</li> <li>• Editorials &amp; Video News Releases</li> <li>• Brand Ambassadors</li> <li>• Youth Marketing</li> <li>• Infomercials</li> </ul>
	Covert	<p><i>Indirect Techniques</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Product Placement</li> <li>• Artificial Crowds and Dialogues</li> <li>• Frightening</li> <li>• Manipulation</li> <li>• Brand Communities</li> <li>• Social Networks</li> <li>• Conditioning</li> </ul>	<p><i>Fox Techniques</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subliminal Message</li> <li>• Amateurs</li> <li>• Cookies</li> <li>• Curiosity</li> <li>• Flogs</li> <li>• Forums &amp; Chat Rooms</li> <li>• Ambush Marketing</li> <li>• Marketing with Senses</li> </ul>

In typology, the element that is specified as the real source is the owner of the message and company which initiated the communication process. The real source can explain or disclose its true identity to the recipient in the message transmission process or it is possible to hide it. The prepared message can also be transmitted explicitly or implicitly to the recipient. Each cell was named as traditional techniques, indirect techniques, masked techniques and fox techniques depending on the level of cover.

### 2.2.1. Traditional Techniques

Both the real source and message are overt in this field and the recipient can perceive the company and message clearly. These techniques include traditional marketing communication methods or a mix, and as such are represented by the cell labeled as Traditional Techniques. Advertising, public relations, personal selling, direct marketing and sales promotions make up these techniques\*.

\* These are the traditional techniques and they are not given in detail.

### 2.2.2. *Indirect Techniques*

Covert techniques which are represented in this field mostly use cover on the message but not on the real source. It is not easy to perceive and understand the transmitted message. Many factors such as the recipient's intelligence, education level and personality, may affect the perception and understanding of the message. The real source does not use cover but even so it is not easy to see the direct connection of the firm with the product. Product placement, artificial crowds and dialogues, frightening, manipulation, brand communities, social networks, and conditioning techniques are included in this group.

#### 2.2.2.1. *Product Placement*

Product placement is not a new phenomenon, it dates back to the 19 century, in the novel "Around the World in Eighty Days" written by Jules Verne, but it is unknown if he was paid for it (Bushati, 2011, p. 61). However, this technique has been implemented commercially since the 1920s in the United States (Yolcu, 2012b, p. 297). Product placement has been accepted as one of the covert marketing techniques by several authors (Rotfeld, 2008, p. 65; Martin and Smith, 2008, p. 46; Weisberg et al., 2007, p. 93).

In the literature, product placement is defined as the inclusion of a brand name, logo of the product, or any concrete or abstract objects that recall the product, in any medium that interacts with the consumer in a conscious, planned and organized manner (Weisberg et al., 2007, p. 2; Balasubramanian, 1994, p. 31; D'Astous and Chartier, 2000, p. 31; Gupta and Lord, 1998, p. 47). It is possible to encounter product placement in daily life and it is often difficult to understand whether there is a commercial message.

The main objectives of this technique are to increase consumer awareness and sales, influence attitudes towards brands, have a positive impact on consumer preference and intention and to overcome the problem of attracting the attention of the consumer in the message clutters of traditional advertising (D'Astous and Chartier, 2000). Although this technique has been limited to television programs and films by Balasubramanian (1994) and D'Astous and Chartier (2000), it finds a wide range of application fields for itself. This technique can be used in many areas like computer games, music, songs, books, novels, videos etc. (Schneider, 2005, p. 322; Gupta and Lord, 1998, p. 47). There are two conditions for product placement: the sponsors should perceive that they offer value and the media should be motivated by the economic incentives they provide (Balasubramanian, 1994, p. 34). Marketers use this technique, because the message is delivered to many people and also movies and programs are shown again and video games are played continuously.

#### 2.2.2.2. *Artificial Crowds and Dialogues*

In this technique, the aim is to influence consumers by dialogues and artificial crowds that are prepared and created by a company. There is no direct interaction with consumers during the application. However, the crowds are formed where the consumer can see them and dialogues are used where the consumer can hear them.

While you are shopping, if you see a crowd at any stand, the possibility of being directed towards it is very high at that time. Fake shoppers stand close to people who come to the store to shop and chat loudly about a CD in the presence of unsuspecting store customers. The real customers are inclined to buy the talked-about CD as a result of overhearing such chat (Kaikati and Kaikati, 2004, p. 11). As seen, this technique raises quite successful results and can be used on the street, in the mall or store.

#### 2.2.2.3. *Frightening*

Fear has always been the easiest way to get money from people (Tuncer, 2007). Marketing by means of frightening is used to direct consumers, very broadly. The fear factor can be either physical or social in marketing communication (Odaba ı and Bari , 2007, p. 175). Fear is instilled with the message, but the real message lies beneath the fear. For instance, you might see statements such as "limited to stocks" or "do not miss the opportunity" in market inserts. In this way, fear of missing out is imposed on consumers as a priority, but the real message that lies beneath fear is that consumers should come and buy the product. Fear is widely used by politicians. To exaggerate an existing threat or to create a threat and then to position his/herself as a remedy against that threat is a common tool used to obtain votes from

citizens or to gain legitimacy. Also, calling citizens to unite against a threat and blaming opponents as they are pure even betrayed (Tuncer, 2007) are intended to further consolidate the fear.

#### 2.2.2.4. *Manipulation*

This is a deliberate redirecting technique used to direct targeted consumers to a particular situation, an event or a behavior. Manipulation can be used by companies to redirect consumers to their products; it can also be used to highlight the negative sides of competing products. This technique has similarities to artificial crowds and dialogues but there are major differences when implementing the technique. For example, at the beginning of preschool education, a list of requirements of certain brands is given to the parents of children and parents are requested to buy specified brands from specified stationers. In Turkey, voters are manipulated by public opinion poll results at the beginning of the election campaign until the day before election end of election. This technique can be also seen in a wide range of applications to manage the perceptions of consumers such as “bestsellers list” for book sales, “top 10 lists” for music and videos or as a “Vodafone bestseller stand”, or in capital markets where the impression is given that the price of stock has begun to rise.

#### 2.2.2.5. *Brand Communities*

Brand communities are different from the concept of virtual communities mentioned in the literature, because virtual communities are personal relationship networks that are formed by people coming together on the internet (Uzkurt and Özmen, 2006, p. 23). Brand communities are sets of social relation communities that are special, have no geographical boundaries and are structured by brand enthusiasts (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001, p. 412). Members of the brand community are groups of friends of well-developed social identities that use collective action to express their enthusiasm and mutual feeling and to achieve collective goals (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006, p. 45).

Consumers identify and associate themselves with brands, because they think that these brands reflect their personalities (Ventura, 2012, p. 202). For instance, in the Harley Owners Group –HOG members have made the brand an important part of their lives and identities. HOG members purchase a newsletter issued every two months and participate in motorcycle trips organized by galleries and in weekly meetings (Aaker, 2009, p. 156).

Brand communities are places that people who have a specific interest, idea or a passion, meet under the roof of a particular brand. These communities offer people the opportunity to socialize through using emotions such as belonging, sharing, trust and commitment. Therefore, this technique has a greater contribution to the promotion and sales of the brand to people who are not members of the community.

#### 2.2.2.6. *Social Networks*

With the transition from the industrial society to the information society, today people can meet all kinds of needs in an electronic environment, such as socializing, having fun, sharing, training, etc. This new structure is called social networks and people spend lots of time using these networks. Social networking sites are web-based services and with these sites users can make contact with other people or can view lists of connections that have been created by other users. To do this, the user has to create a public or semi-public profile and this profile can be viewed by others (Boyd and Ellison, 2007, p. 211). Therefore, social networks are a tool that allows the sharing of one’s private life, daily events and news with different people (Gülbahar et al., 2010). Social network services allow the establishing of relationships with other people by collecting useful information from online media and sharing it with others (Özmen et al., 2011, p. 43). These networks were initially used to find friends but then various developments were presented to users over time such as the opportunity to create lists, see content, share pictures, music, audio files and content creation.

Social networks offer a unique opportunity for the marketing world because of their high penetration rates and the number of active users on these sites, a direct link can be established with other people by creating official, unofficial, real or fake profiles. When the connection is established, marketers are able to convey the message without disclosing the firm. Hence, social networks offer an environment that extends the range of movement of covert marketing strategy.

### 2.2.2.7. *Conditioning Techniques*

This technique is based on the Russian Physiologist Ivan Pavlov's works and is a kind of learning that is used extensively. According to this learning theory, learning does not take place without stimulus (Odaba 1 and Barı , 2007, p. 79). Conditioning is considered as the attitude change strategy in consumer behavior. When providing a positive impact on the emotional component to be monitored to change attitudes, like can be increased and positive beliefs and purchasing behavior can occur. The best way to affect the emotional component is by classical conditioning. If the music which people like is paired with a brand, after a time positive feelings for the music will be reflected on the brand (Odaba 1 and Barı , 2007, p. 180). With this technique, it is expected that consumers will match the two elements together and these elements will have another connotation. There are two important examples which use two elements, namely sound and brand. For example, the sound that occurs when the Magnum ice cream is bitten and when the lid of Coca-Cola is opened. When consumers hear these sounds, they will be able to remember what the brand is, even if the product is not seen. Conditioning can also be applied to the cognitive component. For example, the 'smoking causes cancer' statement is used continuously, and it is written on cigarette packets. When we encounter a cancer patient, our first question is whether he smokes or not. However, the disease may be caused by other reasons. This conditioning is an example of cognitive component. The reason for asking this question is that individuals are conditioned and associate cancer with smoking. Similarly, on days which are regarded as special occasions, like Valentine's Days, Mother's Day or New Year's Eve, people are conditioned to buy gifts.

### 2.2.3. *Masked Techniques*

In some covert techniques, the company's identity will not be disclosed to the recipient, but the message can be transmitted explicitly. The presence of the company will be masked in this technique and so this cell is labeled as masked techniques. These techniques include the use of celebrities, viral marketing, editorial articles and video news releases, brand ambassadors, youth marketing and infomercials.

#### 2.2.3.1. *Celebrities*

The use of celebrities in marketing is a common practice. The concept of celebrities encompasses people such as athletes, politicians, journalists, models, artists or businessmen.

The effects of using a celebrity are seen in many areas of daily life. The opportunity to learn about the private lives of celebrities has increased due to the media, thus people will feel much closer to their idols (Pringle, 2007, p. 29). Any messages that will be created or transmitted by celebrities are expected to perceive by consumers and affect them, because consumers' interest in celebrities. Celebrities are used for promotional purposes to increase attention and to ensure the products are kept in mind ( im ek and U ur, 2003, p. 351). In this technique, the celebrity is paid secretly and is requested to promote a company's products.

Consumers will not see the celebrity's clothes, accessories or other similar objects as a commercial. The world-renowned sports brand Nike paid Tiger Woods to wear the Nike brand of sports clothing and to use a Nike golf club (Yıldız, 2013). Consequently, the choice of celebrities should be appropriate to the image of the brand and be qualified to reach the target audience (Kaya, 2008). In this technique, if the use of celebrities is done in a balanced way, it will add credibility to the brand and ensure adoption of the product.

#### 2.2.3.2. *Viral Marketing*

Viral marketing is a technique that encourages people to transfer positive messages to other people, namely those they have received from the mass media (Dobele et al., 2005, p. 144; ler and Andıç, 2011). Therefore, it is defined as the realization or attempt to start of word of mouth spreading on the electronic media (Argan and Argan, 2006, p.233). The concept was first used to explain marketing strategy of Hotmail's free mail service by Jurvetson and Draper in 1997 (Swanepoel et al., 2009, p.10). Messages from people we know and are familiar with are always considered more effective and reliable than those unknown from people.

Today, promotional activities carried out by the viral marketing method have become extremely accelerated with entertaining visuals and permanent aspects in mind. The important thing to remember is that prepared messages should have content, visuals and audio which will initiate viral spreading. Viral marketing aims to deliver personal recommendations to consumers, impressively ( ler and Andıç, 2011). For example, it was seen that the video clip of

the song named ‘Gangnam Style’ reached over 2 billion hits in a popular video sharing site. The content of the clip and usage of visuals initiated a viral effect in a short time. Then, the presence of celebrities and sharing the video via social networks increased the viral effect exponentially. This example is also extremely important in terms of demonstrating the size of the synergy that covert marketing techniques can achieve if they are edited correctly and are applied at the right time and right place.

#### *2.2.3.3. Editorial Articles and Video News Releases*

This technique is referred to as product description (Wang, 2006; Hallahan, 1999). In this technique, the media articles located in a newspaper, magazine or videos prepared by firms as news format are used as promotional tools. Editorial articles are a technique in which marketers do not make payments and it usually shows itself in a news article or in editorial comments (Wang, 2006, p. 160). News has more impact than ads (Hallahan, 1999, p. 293). Therefore, these promotional messages, transmitted to the recipient in news format, have more influence. For example, while a columnist is sharing information about a place or a product (cinema films, books etc.) in his corner with readers, he may actually transmit the company’s message to readers. Similarly, the news in a newspaper has the potential to make a promotion likewise. Video news is media content that appears as prepared independently from the company. Actually, it is prepared by marketers and is shown to the recipient during the newscast (Petty and Andrews, 2008, p. 9). This technique is used not only in the news but also in programs. The travelling programs that are presented cities or countries on television channels can be evaluated in this context. An example is Vedat Milor’s program on NTV or Gülhan’s Galaxy Guide on TV8.

#### *2.2.3.4. Brand Ambassadors*

Brand ambassadors are ordinary people who promote the company’s products to other people as volunteers in their environment. While doing this, they do not depend on any scenario or fiction. They are known as trendsetters and influencers (Walker, 2004, p. 70). Many consumers listen to these people’s advice before buying anything (Solomon, 2003, p. 73). Brand ambassadors are asked to explain products to other people, which range from toothbrushes to perfumes and from books to clothes which are sent by the company. A campaign called *Al Fresco* that was launched in 2004 for chicken sauce products was conducted by brand ambassadors. The sauces were sent for trial to people and then, volunteers promoted the products (Walker, 2004, p. 70). The manufacturer of Palm gave marketing tools and t-shirts to selected people and they were requested to promote Palm products (Solomon, 2003, p. 73). This technique can be applied in different ways. For instance, a brand ambassador may read a new book in a crowded place and hold its cover so it is seen by other people. Pharmaceutical companies often encounter problems in promotion. In this regard, they are known to make use of people who have the capability to affect others, namely brand ambassadors to help them with product promotion. These people talk about the positive features of the drugs in the seminars, congresses and meetings that they attend.

#### *2.2.3.5. Youth Marketing*

Talented young people, who are identified by a company, transfer the company’s messages to other young people in their social environments. The company gives the product to a young person and this person interacts with other young people. Thus, he/she promotes the product in this group, but while doing so the young person should be natural and not reveal any company connection. In return, for example the company pays money or gives items to the young person. A well-dressed, friendly and polite young girl may try to advise other young people in her environment about clothes, accessories and cosmetics. In the youth marketing technique, it is desirable to establish a longer and deeper relationship with target people and become involved in other people’s lives.

#### *2.2.3.6. Infomercials*

This technique is of program length and can last from thirty minutes up to two hours (Chapman and Beltramini, 2000). In this technique, both information is given and commercial messages are transmitted to the recipient.

Infomercials have become an important element of the contemporary world of television, and the market is considered to be a three hundred billion dollar industry (Bogle, 2014). Informational commercial messages are widely used in

television in the USA. This concept has been proposed as a critique of the new sales format that tries to obscure the boundaries between commercial and non-commercial messages (Rotfeld, 2008, p. 64). For example, in a food program, while a chef is preparing food, at the same time he may talk about the quality of the blade and say it is preferred by master chefs. Finally, infomercials can also be used in children's programs and daytime programs.

#### 2.2.4. Fox Techniques

Fox is cunning creatures in nature. These techniques are similar to this of the fox, because despite the company and message being hidden, these techniques deliver the company's commercial message to recipients without them even realizing it. Therefore, this cell is labeled as 'fox techniques'; these techniques listed as follows: subliminal message, amateurs, cookies, curiosity, flogs, forums and chat rooms, ambush marketing and marketing with the senses.

##### 2.2.4.1. Subliminal Message

Many methods which are used in order to create awareness influence and persuade target consumers in product promotion activities are detected in the level of the consciousness. The subliminal involves the space unmanaged by the consciousness; this space is the area of the unconscious where actions and activities have taken place. The subconscious mind is more active than consciousness and records constantly (Levinson and Hanley, 2007, p.21). Marketers have discovered the important role of the subconscious in human life and communication efforts have been directed to this area. In practice, the messages are sent to below the level of consciousness and thereby go beyond people's perceptual defense. The main objective is to influence people via these stimuli which are masked, hidden or remain outside the perception, then extract this effect to the consciousness and ensure the mobilizing of people for the product (Sungur, 2011, p. 178). The stimulants are well below the threshold the person can perceive. Therefore, people are not aware of their exposure to messages, but the brain saves the message at that time (T1 lı, 2002, p. 356). Therefore the subliminal message involves the placing of messages that people are not aware and which are prepared in visual, auditory or literary form, by using a number of methods, such as their being too fast, too slow or too masked by other messages, into the subconscious (Yolcu, 2012a, p. 203; Hawkins and Mothersbaugh, 2010, p. 293). Subliminal stimulus is divided into three species: first, accelerated speech with a low tone of voice in visual messages and advertisements; secondly, stimulus that is shown in cinemas and ads which is so fast that a human eye cannot track it and finally, the placement of the words or sexual images to printed advertising materials (Sungur, 2011, p. 178). Visual, auditory and electromagnetic wave methods are used to give consumers this stimulus (T1 lı, 2002, pp. 360-361; Lindstorm, 2009, p. 76). In Hollywood films, while Apple brands are used by good characters, undesirable characters usually use ordinary computers. The message emphasizes to Apple's quality.

##### 2.2.4.2. Amateurs

These people are called brand pushers or buzz agents and consist of non-professional players who are hired; their wages are paid by the company (Rotfeld, 2008, p. 65). They try to generate buzz and approach unsuspecting people in real life situations by personally slipping commercial messages in trendy bars, music stores and hot spots. (Kaikati and Kaikati, 2004, p. 10). In the implementation of this technique, the message that is prepared by the company is transmitted to the recipient in a natural way and natural environment by these amateur players, who have the appearance of ordinary people, in line with a scenario that is edited by the company.

One of the best examples of this technique is the promotional campaign of the Sony Ericsson T68i mobile phone with the combination of a digital camera (Kaikati and Kaikati, 2004; Roy and Chattopadhyay, 2010). The company hired sixty amateur players in 2002. These amateur players played the role of newly married couples who were on honeymoon and they wandered in crowded places and at tourist hot spots in a city. They asked unsuspecting people to snap their picture using the T68i mobile phone. In this way, people who used this new technology phone discovered the product and tested it.

##### 2.2.4.3. Cookies

Files which are known as cookies in computer technology are used as a marketing tool. The collecting of data for tracking the online movements of consumers and the planning of behavioral targeting advertising with these data is one of the most important aspects of covert marketing strategy (Miyazaki, 2008). This technique is also known as tunneling

and behavioral targeting and these data are collected without the consumer realizing it. Later, this information is used in connection with marketing communication activities (Milne et al., 2008, p. 58). The main objective of this technique is to determine the interests of visitors by following the elements which are placed on the site, and then to convey commercial messages to visitors according to these interests.

#### 2.2.4.4. *Curiosity*

People's curiosity is the basis of this technique. Curiosity urges people to research and learn new things. The recipient follows the tracks which are left by the technique to satisfy his/her curiosity that has been awakened. After being directed towards a different medium the recipient learns the message and the real source. In 2002, Mercedes showed a trailer on television and in movie theaters, which was prepared in accordance with this technique. At the end of the trailer, viewers were invited to visit a web site which was called Lucky Star. People realized that the trailer was fictitious and Mercedes was behind it after visiting the site (Kaikati and Kaikati, 2004, p. 13). Another example is the campaign conducted by Unilever on its ice-cream brand Lion Max adventures. The campaign was carried out in a real environment and curiosity was awakened in the audience about joining the adventure on the website; people were then directed to that medium. On the other hand, consumers may be affected by prepared digital content, games, forum and films. The result of the campaign was incredible: web traffic was increased 55 percent, 25 thousand interactive banners were designed, and viewers played the game more than 300 thousand, and the fragment was watched 1.5 million times (Arslan, 2012). This technique entertains people as well as transmitting commercial messages without disturbing anyone.

#### 2.2.4.5. *Flogs*

Since the beginning of the internet there have been continuous personal websites on which users share comments on issues and information related to their own. Blogs offer users the opportunity to publicize their ideas on general and research topics to those who are interested (Thorson and Rodgers, 2006, p. 40). A following group that takes into account and takes care of these flogs and follows them is composed in time. Bloggers have the potential to influence the people who follow them and have the ability to persuade them. Marketers have recognized the power of network logs and tended towards logs which are appropriate for what they want to publish. Emerging in the blog is called as flog. A fake blog is an electronic communication form that appears credible but in fact is created by a company for the purpose of marketing (Roebuck, 2012). The blog known as 'Wal-Marting across America' is a successful example of this technique (Skene, 2014).

#### 2.2.4.6. *Forums and Chat Rooms*

Forums and chat rooms are leading communication tools with other people over the internet. Forums and chat rooms are referenced when information is needed about any topic; in this respect they are important sources. Bickart and Schindler (2001, p. 36) demonstrated that forums are highly effective in gathering information on consumers.

The Gaiaonline, one of the world's leading forum sites has about 28 million registered users (Gaiaonline, 2014). Turkey's leading forum site Donanım Haber has approximately 1.4 million registered users and there are about 7.5 million subjects (Donanımhaber, 2014). These sites are accessed by creating a profile. The users are also able to apply for the opportunity to ask questions about subjects that they are interested in and help other users.

Information obtained from forums and chat rooms is considered as reliable, because it is believed that the person who contributes has no commercial interest in the product and therefore has no reason to manipulate readers. Firms appoint their own staff on these platforms. These people explain and promote a company's products; when other users obtain information about a product, they recommend and redirect others to their products.

#### 2.2.4.7. *Ambush Marketing*

Ambush marketing is a new marketing technique which is designed to capitalize upon the awareness, attention, goodwill, and other benefits, generated by having an association with an event or property, without an official or direct connection to that event or property (Burton and Chadwick, 2008). This technique raises awareness of a brand in covert ways. During the implementation of this technique, the company wants to be at its most efficient; therefore it waits in

ambush until the conditions are appropriate. When the time comes, the company arises suddenly and transmits the message (Kaya, 2009, p. 12). It is difficult to realize in advance, because it is not known when and how this technique will emerge. When people realized what is happening it is too late to do anything, because the message has already been sent to the target.

Ambush marketing is defined as the efforts of an opponent brand to make itself known by raising its profile without payment of fee or violating the law, in sporting, social and political events, during an event that involves large number of people and at which the official sponsorship exists (Argan, 2004). The main objective is to divert interest or attention from the leader or sponsor brand to other brands by using creative methods (Minato, 2012). For example, after competitions during the interviews conducted with athletes, inserting a hat with a logo on the head of athletes is a kind of ambush marketing. Rona, a chain of home improvement products in Canada, placed a banner below Apple's iPod Nano billboard. With this banner Rona promoted its new service about recycling leftover paint (Minato, 2012).

#### *2.2.4.8. Marketing with the Senses*

Studies on the senses are frequently used for marketing purposes. Through senses such as smell, taste, sound, color and light perceptions, the consumer can be managed and can be directed to a product. The main objective of using the senses in marketing is to support sales, instead of making sales.

The desired effect can be created on the behavior of consumers with smell (Solomon, 2003, p. 245). Customers are affected by companies whose products have their own unique smell and thus consumers may stay longer in a store; it is possible to make the association between the company and the smell at any time (Küçükbezirci, 2013, p. 1887). We often encounter this technique when the smell of fresh coffee or freshly roasted peanuts comes to our nose while walking on the street.

While shopping at the grocery store, you may be asked by someone to taste something. The main objective of taste is to persuade and redirect you to a company's products that are sold in the store. Other than that, businesses try to influence different consumer segments due to the taste element. Cigarette manufacturers who use different tastes and flavors added to tobacco are thereby targeting women and young people (Magee, 2006). Also fast-food chains provide consumers with regional flavors in local markets. For this reason McDonald's sell hamburgers with meatballs in Turkey; in India hamburgers are sold with curry; in Russia burgers are sold with shrimp and there is even green tea ice-cream in Singapore.

Solomon (2003, p. 247) stated that visual elements play an important role in a place's personality. The use of visual elements in covert marketing is composed mainly by the use of music. Music has features that can have a strong impact on the audience and help to awaken emotions (Uur, 2011, p. 3). Music, playing in the background in the shopping place, is used to encourage people to shop more (Yeoh and North, 2010, p. 368).

Colors have an important place in human life. In the marketing world, the symbolic meanings of colors are used frequently. Colors are used from the preparation of the store environment to packaging and logo design. Singh (2006, pp. 785-786) mentioned that colors affect sales. Companies want to make an impact on consumers with the colors used in the logo and packaging of branded products. Using red in restaurants stimulates the appetite. Some examples of how colors are used as a means of communication include Coca-Cola's red, Migros's orange and Erikli's blue.

A large majority of consumers purchase products they can see. Therefore the use of light has an important position in the formation of store image and the highlighting of the products. Examples include, car dealerships using special lighting or lighting of the fruit and vegetables section; all these actions increase the attractions of the product and attract the attention of consumers.

#### *2.3. Covert Marketing Communication Model*

It is difficult to explain covert marketing techniques with the current marketing communication model. In this regard, covers used on the real source and message must be shown in the current model and so making some changes to the model is compulsory. Created with these amendments, the covert marketing communication model is proposed below in Figure 1.

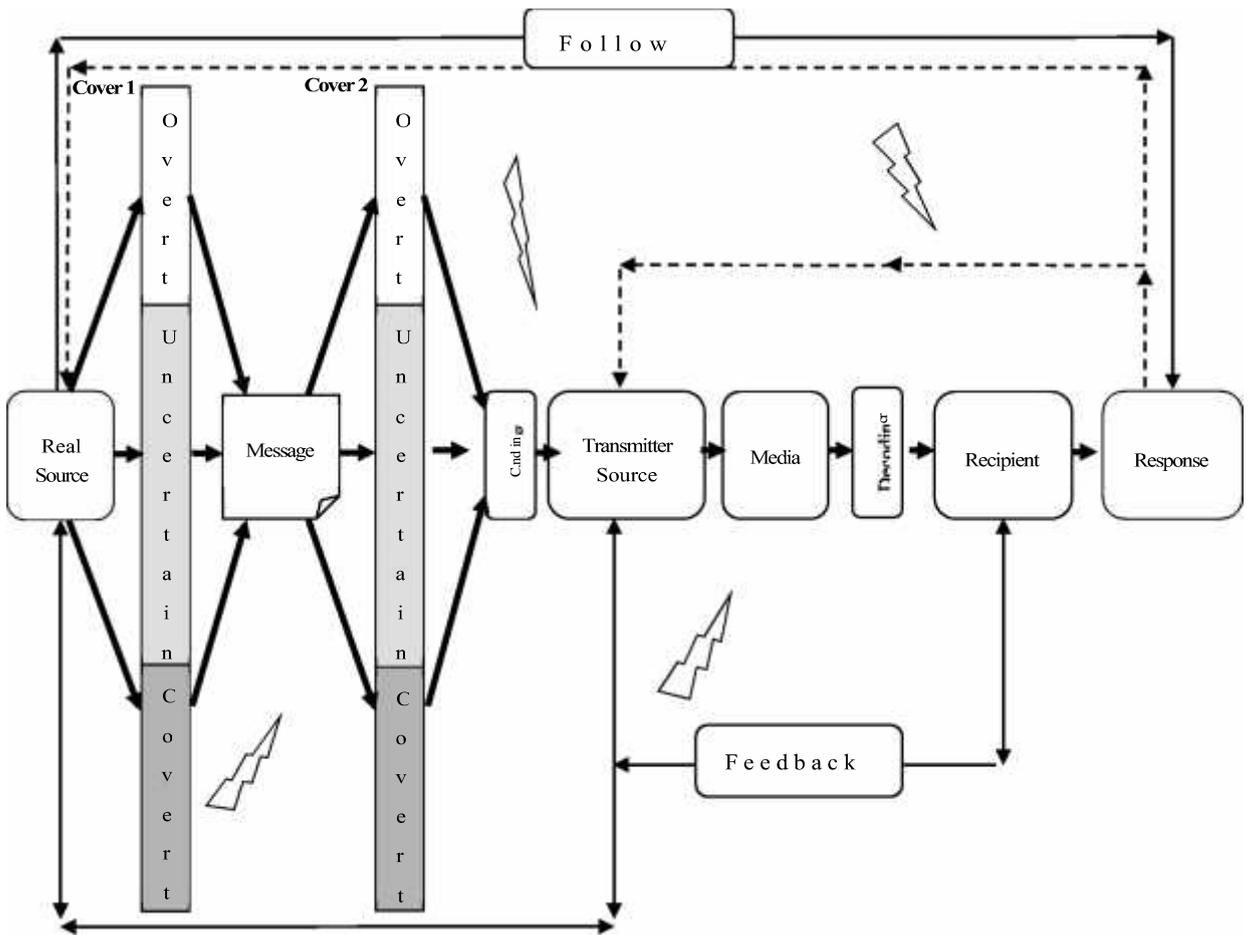


Figure 1. Covert Marketing Communication Model\*

At the beginning of the process the item named “Real Source” is the owner and creator of the message. The first cover is located on this item in the model. The aim of using a cover here is to determine at what level the real source identity will be disclosed to the recipient. After deciding what level of cover will be used on this item, the message is prepared with commercial intent. Here marketers determine, on the one hand, what information will be in the message and, on the other hand how the message will be perceived by the recipient and at what level this message will be open to the recipient. For this purpose, a second cover is used in this section. Once they have decided the level of cover on the message, then they start the encoding process. The encoding process is performed according to the level of cover. Then a secondary source is determined. This second source in the model is called the “Transmitter Source”, because the task of this source is only to convey the message to the recipient. The prepared message is directly delivered to this source because the transmitter source has been identified consciously by the real source. The transmitter source can vary. For instance, the product itself can be this source, the other marketing mix tools such as place or price can be this source, or advertising agencies can also be the transmitter source. In addition, applying the technique of choice film producers, artists, writers, clerics, doctors or educators as well as youths, politicians, athletes, celebrities or characters may be the source of the transmitter. The transmitter source conveys the message to the recipient in the preferred medium (virtual or real) by using a communication type (mass or interpersonal communication). The medium can vary and be affected by the preferred transmitter source: for example television, radio, newspaper, magazines, billboards, concerts, social environments, places of worship, theaters, cinemas, books, poems, lyrics, arts etc. After this stage, the message conveyed to the recipient begins the process of decoding the message in line with their personal values, information

\* \*Covert marketing communication model was inspired from the ‘Two-Stage Communication Model’ which was developed by Lazarsfeld in 1948 and this model was based on the basic communication model.

processing style, experiences and other personal characteristics. However, this decoding operation cannot always take place at that time. After decoding is performed, two elements will be revealed. The first element is ‘feedback’, and the second one is ‘response’. In case of ‘feedback’ occurring, it is considered that the recipient needed additional information to complete the missing data or in order to understand the message. This feedback is usually the first step to the transmitter source. If the recipient needs more detailed information or is concerned directly with the company and the real source can be determined then the feedback can be returned to the real source. The second element “response” can be detected by the transmitter source at the moment the message conveyed to the recipient, but sometimes response can be accessed to the real source. This response is about the recipient’s positive, negative or neutral attitude towards the message. The recipient may not respond frankly. For this reason to learn about this response, the real source has to follow the recipient. Therefore, the control element of the process is the follow-up mechanism. One of the responsibilities incumbent upon the real source is to constantly activate the follow-up mechanism and keep it up to date. At the end of the process, the recipient gives three types of responses to the message: positive, negative or neutral. In case of a neutral response, it should be understood that the techniques have not shown the desired effect. Therefore, the message should be repeated or a different covert technique should be preferred; otherwise this means that the communication process has ended. The second response, namely a negative response, is an undesirable condition. If the consumer has a negative attitude, it may cause irreparable damage. In this respect, the situation must be treated quickly. If there is a possible misunderstanding by the recipient it should be corrected and conditions that cause adverse reactions should be eliminated. Finally the third response may be positive; this is the desired and targeted state. The process leads to success. The beginning of the probability of a positive word of mouth information flow is quite high. It is now assumed that the recipient has become a transmitter source and will continue to process. However, the issue to be considered here is that the firm no longer has control of the process. The last item of the model is noise. This factor must be kept under control since it affects the process continuously from beginning to end. For this control, the follow-up function must be activated and solutions for noise, which may cause deterioration in the process, should be provided.

### 3. Conclusion

Covert marketing strategy can be implemented quite broadly. In this study only twenty-one methods are described. It is very possible that new techniques will be added to them in the near future. The boundaries of covert marketing strategy depend on the imagination of the marketer. In practice, any combinations of covert techniques can be used to introduce and to promote the product/firm. Thus, synergy can be created and the desired level of effect can be increased, as mentioned previously in the example of Gangnam style.

Covert marketing strategy reaches consumers using both mass and interpersonal communication. This strategy is softer and more personal compared to traditional marketing communication methods (Kaikati, Kaikati, 2004:6), also it offers some advantages to companies in terms of both efficiency and cost (Scanlon and Hearn, 2006). In this paper, covert marketing and techniques were given theoretically and a typology and model were proposed. Future researches could examine the perception of the consumer towards the strategy. It could also examine the efficiency of the techniques which are applied.

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