Marketing Humanitarian Space:

Argument and Method in Humanitarian Persuasion

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I. Introduction

The 19th century Scottish writer and traveller, Robert Louis Stevenson, once observed that "everyone lives by selling something". This is no less true of humanitarian workers who live by selling the humanitarian idea of restraint and compassion in war. But humanitarians do not simply sell this idea to make their own living. The main purpose of selling humanitarian norms is to ensure that their successful promotion will mean that many others live. If those who hold economic, social, political and military power in a war can be persuaded to "buy" the humanitarian norms and principles of international humanitarian law (IHL) then civilians are more likely be protected than killed.

The rights of civilians are well protected on paper in international law, but humanitarian agencies have long recognised that peoples' actual protection is determined by the level of humanitarian commitment on the ground. What agencies have come to describe as humanitarian space is not a given in any war but has to be actively negotiated, agreed and achieved. In this effort, the importance of humanitarian *persuasion* has come to be particularly prioritised in the emerging new model of humanitarian protection.[1] Alongside its more robust counterpart, *denunciation*, humanitarian persuasion is regarded as one of two key instruments in the practice of humanitarian negotiation that are required in any attempt to agree, expand and maintain the humanitarian space required to protect civilians in war. In all too many situations, the tragedy of much humanitarian work is that neither persuasion nor denunciation is sufficient to bring about the protection of civilians. However, more coercive and forceful measures are not open to non-violent and impartial humanitarian agencies. This means that the art of persuasion must remain the focus of their ability to negotiate the successful recognition of humanitarian norms.

A. Purpose of the Paper

The purpose of this paper is to draw a comparison between the practice of marketing and the practice of humanitarian persuasion. In doing so, it has two main objectives. First, it examines the main kinds of arguments that humanitarians can use as they promote and negotiate humanitarian space. Secondly, it draws on marketing practice to set out some key principles and methods of humanitarian persuasion.

I am aware that many humanitarians are already concerned that humanitarian practice is being overtaken and distorted by an unthinking transfer of commercial practice and an excessive managerialism. I have a real sympathy with this view. Humanitarian action is not commerce and marketing is obviously not the only way to think about humanitarian persuasion. The theory and practice of diplomacy and peace work is the more usual inspiration for humanitarian negotiation and may indeed be closer to it. Nevertheless, humanitarians may gain

[1] ICRC (2001) Strengthening Protection in War, Geneva.

some useful insights from the marketing approach. Most humanitarians are open-minded and creative people who are instinctively inter-disciplinary, eclectic and pragmatic in their approach. They tend to value "what works" more than dogma. In this paper, I am not suggesting that humanitarian negotiation and persuasion is simply marketing. Rather, I am suggesting that the practice of commercial marketing may offer certain ways of thinking and techniques that can inform and confirm good practice in humanitarian persuasion.

The paper sticks throughout to the essentially mercantile idea that humanitarians need to *sell* the humanitarian idea and so need to be constantly aware of how best to sell it in a particular situation. But the approach to marketing in this paper is not simply deal-centred. It takes a more long-term and integrated approach to marketing that recognises that humanitarian norms need to be promoted continuously. Every aspect of a humanitarian agency's work should speak eloquently of humanitarian values, not just the negotiations of the humanitarian deal-maker. Nevertheless, this paper is aimed primarily at front-line humanitarian negotiators who are engaged in face-to-face humanitarian selling with officials at all levels - global, national and local.

Current humanitarian thinking regards humanitarian persuasion as involving both hard and soft advocacy that are aimed at many different targets at many different political levels from Heads of State to young men with guns. In its softer and more private forms, humanitarian persuasion is part of an ongoing and constructive relationship in common pursuit of humanitarian norms that is analogous with what is known as *relationship marketing* and *personal selling* in marketing speak. In its hardest and most public forms, humanitarian persuasion moves into outright denunciation that is more like the confrontational *guerilla marketing* techniques of the so-called "new marketing".[2] For all these different approaches the power of humanitarian *brands* is central in promoting the value of humanitarian norms and in transmitting consistent humanitarian messages at every point of contact with potential buyers of the idea.

B. Four Ps But Many Cultures

The paper is organised into five main parts. Section two looks at what humanitarians are marketing and to whom. Section three identifies four key principles of modern marketing that resonate with current thinking on humanitarian negotiation. Section four examines the main rational arguments humanitarians can use to sell humanitarian norms to different types of people at different levels of authority. Section five explores the various principles of good practice in the particular art of personal selling and what lessons these might hold for face-to-face humanitarian negotiators. Finally, section six looks briefly at a

[2] Indeed, it seems highly likely that decades of hard-hitting NGO advertising campaigns have been the inspiration behind many of the more aggressive and personalised campaigns that many businesses have begun to run against their competitors in recent years.

range of more coercive hard-sell techniques that are being used in contemporary marketing and that may have relevance to humanitarian negotiation.

Together, these sections of the paper will cover the conventional four ingredients of marketing known as the 4Ps: product; price; place and promotion. But, equally importantly, the paper will constantly seek to recognise the cultural diversity of humanitarian selling that comes about because of the many different countries in which wars are fought. A critical concern of the paper will, therefore, be with *inter-cultural marketing* as it is played out between people of different cultures.[3] International humanitarian workers and their national staff counterparts come from many different cultures with different communicative styles and will be negotiating and selling the humanitarian idea to people from similarly diverse backgrounds. Awareness of this most basic aspect of any negotiation context is fundamental to humanitarians.

[3] Jean-Claude Usunier (2000) Marketing Across Cultures, 3rd edition, FT Prentice Hall, Harlow, UK.

II. The Humanitarian Product

What is the product you are selling as a humanitarian in war? It is, of course, the various legal obligations and humanitarian norms found in international humanitarian law and the necessary programmes of humanitarian protection and assistance required to realise these responsibilities with endangered civilians on the ground.

A. A Triple-Sell

Essentially, therefore, you are selling three things. First you are selling *a moral idea* that is formalised in international law - the protection of civilians in war. Then you are selling *a form of behaviour* that requires those in power to act responsibly to take up this idea and respect international humanitarian law. Finally, you are selling a range of your own *practical services* in humanitarian assistance that will enable those in power to change their behaviour and protect people from violence, hunger, destitution and illness.

This may sound complicated but it is no more than most salespeople have to do. For example, if I work for a bicycle company I will have a similar triple-sell when confronted with a habitual and somewhat obese car user in a polluted and overcrowded city.

- First, I need to interest him in the idea of a faster, cheaper and healthier journey to work.

- Secondly, I need to persuade him to change his behaviour and reduce his reliance on his car by working with him to recognise his own good reasons for using a bike. These may be reasons of finance and health but I may also be able to elicit and meet some other needs he has like vanity and self-image. He may want to be seen by others in a more physical, dashing and outdoors light.

- Thirdly, I have to offer him a quality product and level of continuing service that meets his needs and desires, so justifying his decision. This means being able to make his new bicycle life-style as comfortable, easy, efficient and sexy as possible. I have to provide a sporty, colourful, lightweight bike with excellent gears, an efficient repair service, a personal stereo headset to match the one in his car and, in England, a set of top quality waterproof clothing.

  In all, I must work out with him *why* he wants to make the change, *what* he needs to make the change and then *how* I can enable him to make it.

B. Customers and Consumers

To whom are you selling this idea, its requisite behavioural change and your practical humanitarian services? In humanitarian jargon that more frequently follows diplomatic rather than commercial discourse, these people are usually described as *interlocutors*. But, in marketing terms they are your *customers*. The term customer verges on the banal in the terrible context of war and human rights violation, but it is important in helping to remember that you are usually dealing with a range of people who can either choose to buy what you are offering or not. This is the reality of power in war and international relations.

These interlocutors may be government officials and military officers, warlords and their henchmen, factionalised citizens from opposing warring groups, the diplomatic officials of third party states, journalists and leading members of civil society. All are the legitimate targets of your humanitarian marketing. But there is an important marketing distinction between these people as your customers and the much larger civilian population as your ultimate *consumers*. Most humanitarian negotiation with organisational interlocutors is more in the nature of business-to-business marketing, known in the trade as B2B marketing. This is different to retail marketing where one targets the consumer directly.

Interlocutors are seldom your consumers. They are less likely to need humanitarian protection themselves. But you rely on them as the intermediary organisations that can buy your idea and sell it on. They have the power to distribute humanitarian services themselves and/or to give you the humanitarian space that will enable your organisation to act as a humanitarian retailer dealing directly with civilian consumers. In other words, these interlocutors dominate the market structure that you want to break into and develop. They control much of the capital, permission and outlets you need to finally reach your consumer.

C. Low Customer Demand

The tragic fact in so many wars is that most of the forces pursuing war have no or little desire to buy the humanitarian norms that you are selling. Current and recent wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Bosnia, Liberia and Angola all provide evidence of such low demand. Often, your interlocutors may either actively despise the value of your product or be profoundly resistant to it. They may want to buy it only to exploit it for themselves without passing any real benefits on to the civilians you regard as your consumers. Or, they may have highly partisan distribution priorities that are very different to your own. Your humanitarian product may simply not be what they want or need. Indeed, their own preferred product of inter-group hatred, civilian atrocity and personal enrichment is one that would be undermined by your product.

As a result, your so-called customers and their organisations may be fundamentally disinterested, deeply corrupt or more like competitors who want to close you down. This frequently makes for a deeply challenging marketing environment. Lamentably, in some wars, humanitarians' market penetration and market share may always be very small or confined to certain sections of the "market".

D. Creating Consumer Demand

One important - but deeply challenging - way to get round your interlocutor's reluctance is to help build consumer demand around the world for the humanitarian product. This means focusing on the people who need the product most - civilians. They need support to demand the product. This is a difficult process that may even render people more vulnerable to attack. Yet, this is the principle behind the Humanitarian Charter and Sphere Standards that encourage people to see humanitarian protection as their right and to demand it as such. Wherever possible, humanitarian agencies should be trying to build a popular movement that demands humanitarian norms in war.

The emphasis of this paper is on marketing to interlocutors. Much of your sales energy will be directed at these business customers but you will also need to market directly to the consumers whenever you possibly can. Humanitarian agencies need skills in consumer marketing too. Enabling them to demand the product then needs to be followed by recognising what different people need from the product. This involves differentiating your market, understanding the various needs of particular groups of civilians in war like women, men, children, the elderly and marginalised groups and responding accordingly with the appropriate services. In humanitarian terms, this is referred to as needs assessment, vulnerability and capacity analysis, programming, impact assessment and accountability. In commercial terms, it is market research and consumer relations.

III. Four Key Principles in Humanitarian Marketing

There are perhaps four key principles of modern marketing that might usefully inform humanitarian negotiation and which might be valued in any attempt at humanitarian persuasion. All four are likely to be intuitively understood by most humanitarian negotiators but giving them a label and an explanation might serve to ensure that they are consciously held in mind.

A. Responsive Marketing

In recent years, marketing has moved from a simple approach of "make and sell" to a more socially sophisticated principle of "sense and respond".[4] The difference lies in seeing marketing as starting before rather than after production and being a continuously collaborative relationship with customers that constantly develops your product and the way you sell it to meet their needs. Responsive marketing dictates that you do not simply start marketing after you've made your product. You start marketing as a key way to shape your product.

Peter Drucker has identified the two key questions for marketing as: "what does the customer want to buy?" and "what are the satisfactions the customer is looking for?"[5] The key to this approach is putting the needs and interests of the customer at the centre of any persuasive strategy. This contrasts with an older marketing idea that assumes that the product is right because you have researched and invented it - or in the case of humanitarian norms because they are legal - and the customer needs to be "brought round" to it somehow. The latter is marketing as conversion while the former is marketing as response and persuasion. Most marketing theory now agrees that people seldom buy because they are somehow converted or brainwashed into a product but because that product answers a need or a desire they have already.

This principle (which is now so central to marketing practice) is often - but not always - problematic to humanitarian work precisely because violent interlocutors can be completely averse to any kind of humanitarian product and have no need, desire or interest in it. In such cases, humanitarian persuasion does probably need to be more like conversion and coercion or is quite simply doomed to failure. If what your interlocutor really wants is more guns and machetes then he is unlikely to have an interest in humanitarian aid unless, perhaps, he feels he may be able to conceal his new supply of weapons under the sacks of grain in your food convoy.

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[4] Haeckel in Randall, G (2001) Principles of Marketing, Thomson Learning, London, p15.
[5] Cited in Randall p2.

But in many humanitarian situations, there is more room for manoeuvre. Many interlocutors have a variety of wants and needs and these can be explored and responded to by an adept humanitarian sales team. The principle of "sense and respond" remains a good one. In most humanitarian situations, an investment in "market research" to understand your customer is critically important. The International Council of Human Rights Policy has developed a useful framework for analysing the "character" and "interests" of different armed groups that might well be described as good market research[6].

B. Relationship Marketing

If the customer's needs are recognised as central to the art of persuasion, then the principle of *relationship marketing* is a second imperative that naturally flows from this approach to marketing. In recent years, marketing and sales practice has moved away from a focus on individual transactions and deal-making to "building strong value-laden relationships with customers and other stakeholders".[7] This is the idea that good marketing and selling involves developing long-term relationships in which you really know your customers and they know you. On one hand, this means discovering what he or she wants and working with them on how best to provide it. On the other, it means making sure your customers understand what you stand for and what you can offer them. Strangely, humanitarians have often been particularly bad at the latter. They tend to assume that they do not need to explain themselves and that their values, role and organisations are self-evident to military forces, armed groups and civilians alike. Yet, all the evidence shows that people do not usually understand humanitarian agencies and have particular views of them. For example, a recent study by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue revealed that most people in Central Asia assumed that humanitarian agencies are Christian missionaries[8]. Humanitarian marketing must involve better efforts at making oneself known effectively and openly to customers and consumers alike.

In the commercial sector, this approach has seen marketing and sales staff redefined primarily as "relationship managers". This new principle of sales intimacy seems central to humanitarian work. The conception of marketing and sales as primarily about relationships rather than deals will come as no surprise to humanitarian negotiators who spend long periods cultivating and developing relationships with key interlocutors. At the same time, however, the rapid staff turnover in many humanitarian agencies actively works against relationship-centred strategies of persuasion. Similarly, staff recruitment and placement does

[6] International Council of Human Rights Policy, Ends and Means: Human Rights Approaches to Armed Groups, Geneva 2000, pp14-25.
[7] Kotler et al (2002) Principles of Marketing, FT Prentice Hall, Harlow, p406.
[8] Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Humanitarian Engagement with Armed Groups: The Central Asian Islamic Opposition Movements, Case Study 1, Geneva, 2003.

not perhaps pay enough attention to who is the best person to manage specific relationships in a given situation.

C. Adaptive Marketing

From these responsive and relationship-based marketing principles comes the idea that humanitarians, like commercial companies, need to adapt their products to some degree for different customers in different settings. The fundamental legal norms of the humanitarian product are not negotiable - you could not tailor a humanitarian product so that you accept an armed group killing half rather than all of a village. This notion of fundamentals is the same for the bicycle salesman whose product will always have two wheels and be open to the rain. But, like the bicycle salesman, humanitarian negotiators can shape the way they design and promote the humanitarian product, so tailoring it to the particular interests of their customers and interlocutors.

Such tailoring needs to take account of customers' different interests and needs on one hand and their different cultural characteristics and communicative style on the other. It requires you to think hard about how you promote humanitarian norms and how you might need to adapt your marketing style and your product for particular markets.

Questions about the adaptation of both product and marketing style is one of the great issues in cross-cultural and intercultural marketing. Does the same toothpaste need to be a different colour, have a slightly different taste and come in a different sized tube in Switzerland and India? When can a product sell in a standardised form across different cultures? When does a product need to be adapted to sell better in different markets? How does one culturally adapt a product and its promotion? Finally, what are the cost-benefits and the risks of an adapted product? Adapting a product may be more expensive and mean less profit. Or, it may require cheaper production and mean poorer quality. This last question is perhaps particularly important for humanitarians. If one lowers principle and quality to negotiate price and preference in one place can this lead to wider reputational damage? Or, when does an overly adapted product simply cross the line into becoming a bad humanitarian product?

Every big global industry like soft drinks and car-making grapples with this question as it enters different markets. For example, Toyota stole the African and Asian market in four-wheel drive vehicles from Landrover because they adapted their product and its marketing while Landrover did not. Toyota recognised that people in these countries had different needs and different conceptions of travel and comfort. They appreciated different levels of speed, simplicity, suspension, toughness and price to the standardised European Landrover. Toyota made a range of simpler, cheaper, faster and more durable vehicles. They also offered a choice of basic or comfortable vehicles and always provided a very efficient spare parts service. In contrast, Landrover produced a standardised model that was

primarily serving a European luxury market. There may be important lessons in adaptive marketing here for humanitarians. Standards are important. Standardisation and mono-marketing can be fatal.

D. Integrated Marketing

The fourth key principle of current marketing practice is that of *integrated marketing*. This is the idea that marketing is not just done by marketing staff. Nor is it only done when you are marketing. Instead, it is the idea that everything a company does is marketing and promoting itself in some way. Every point of contact between a company and a customer, consumer or stakeholder should deliberately communicate the values and quality of that company.

The idea of integrated marketing where every point of the company is marketing and communicating all the time is often described as *total marketing* or *360 degree marketing*.[9] It is the belief that "everything matters" in the way a company communicates. Increasingly, this realisation has become associated with a more developed understanding of *brand* and the recognition that a strong brand can communicate a continuous and consistent message to all who come into contact with it[10].

Certain humanitarian brands like the Red Cross, the United Nations, Oxfam and Médecins Sans Frontières are amongst the strongest in the world. In certain situations, this means that the very emblem or logo of an organisation on its vehicles conveys an enormous amount of meaning before a humanitarian negotiator even opens his or her mouth. The importance of making sure that the brand says what you want it to say is critical. The challenge of achieving, sustaining and developing a brand is vital to humanitarian agencies and a real asset to their negotiators.

Modern marketing sees the power and vitality of a brand as coming from the fact that the word brand is regarded by the company as a verb and not a noun[11]. A company or a humanitarian agency needs *to brand* all it does and not simply to rely on having a brand. For example, the power of the Red Cross brand is its eloquence of all the Red Cross stands for in war and disaster. Everything the Red Cross does should be actively reaffirming this message whenever and wherever it comes into contact with anyone.

For humanitarian negotiators, integrated marketing means that they should always be operating at one point - albeit it a forward point - of a much wider and continuous marketing and communications effort by their agency that aims to brand all its work and give off consistent humanitarian messages. The

[9] Blair, M et al (2003) The 360 Degree Brand in Asia, John Wiley and Son Asia, Singapore.
[10] Hart, S and J. Murphy (1998) Brands: The New Wealth Creators, Interbrand and Palgrave, London.
[11] Blair et al p?

surrounding branding of their organisation then gives their negotiation added clarity and strength.

IV. Arguing For Humanitarian Norms

A central part of any humanitarian negotiation is the argument you use to persuade your interlocutor of the value of your product - the protection of civilians in war. Although none of us is purely rational, we all need reasons to justify or explain our behaviour to ourselves and others. These reasons will work best if they relate directly to our own ideology, interests and idiom as well as being framed in a way that suits our personality and status.

A. Assessing Ideology, Idiom and Interest

A critical skill for any humanitarian negotiator, therefore, is to assess and understand the particular ideology, interests and idiom of your interlocutor so that you can match them with the most appropriate humanitarian argument. This a vital part of being able to show how humanitarian behaviour by the interlocutor and his organisation can meet their own needs as well as the needs of civilians as consumers. The basic rule here is simple and was well practiced by St. Paul in his extensive international sales operation in the first century AD: understand the person you are dealing with and be ready "to be all things to all men" in the service of civilians. To do this requires an assessment and judgement of several key characteristics of your interlocutors and other members of their organisation.

- **Ideological assessment** is essential to establish how your interlocutor and those who drive his organisation think and what they believe. What is their ideology? Are they motivated by an absolutist revolutionary ideology that justifies them sweeping all before them as a means to their glorious ends? If so, there may be little point in being idealistic and talking of moral duty with a person whose ideology makes him a realist who is prepared for others to pay the consequences of what he wants. Other arguments may play better. By contrast, you may face others who have a more balanced ideology that tolerates a sense of grey in human relations and does not see all as either black or white. With such people, talk of morality and rights may strike a chord.

- **Idiom assessment** is very important in determining how best to speak to people. The New York-based legal adviser to a delegation of a state currently on the Security Council will operate in a very different idiom to your 12th grade educated and harassed interlocutor in a regional town or the 17 year old illiterate and frightened child soldier at a check point that you need to cross. Talking detailed humanitarian law to the latter is unwise unless you have a lot of time. Talking a simple morality to the lawyer in New York may come across as deeply patronising.

- **Interest assessment** is similarly important in an effort to find out the particular needs and interests the people in your target organisations have in a conflict. What do they need that a relationship with you and a commitment to humanitarian norms might give them? These may be moral assets - the importance of being a good organisation. They may be political assets like legitimacy and allies. They may be more basic physical assets in the case of those who want to be humanitarian but do not have the capacity to be so.

B. Assessing Personality

A person's ideological beliefs, their needs, their status and the way they express themselves are all significant factors in making up that person but they do not account for the whole of that mysterious thing we call *personality* - the term that describes what a person is really like to be with and deal with.

- **Personality assessment** is another key judgement that humanitarian negotiators need to make as they seek to persuade people. Understanding what makes a person tick is essential to gauging how best to tick with them. Is your interlocutor essentially a loner or gregarious? Is he or she intrinsically happy or sad? Is she or he driven by power, insecurity, ideals or circumstance? What and who are important to his or her life? What makes them laugh and what makes them angry? Are they trustworthy? Are they sane?

C. Choosing From Four Main Types of Humanitarian Argument

There are perhaps four main types of argument in favour of the humanitarian idea. Humanitarian persuasion often involves a combination of all four and each one has relative strengths and weaknesses in the face of your different interlocutors and their respective ideologies, interests, idioms and personality.

D. Moral and Religious Arguments

The essence of moral and religious argument is: *be humanitarian because it is right*. These arguments draw on moral or religious injunctions and prohibitions to show how international humanitarian law and the behaviour it demands are morally right or part of God's will. The purpose of these arguments is to show that humanitarian norms are indeed normal in the context, society and belief system of the interlocutor. He will prove himself to be good if he keeps them. He will do the right thing by being humanitarian. Such discussions might focus

on religious texts like the Bible, the Koran, the Torah, the.. and on local ethical behaviour and moral custom.

The distinctive feature of this line of argument is an attempt to talk directly to the heart of your interlocutor, to reach him as a human being and engage his humanity and compassion so that he can feel for those whose fate is in his power. When this approach works it can be the most persuasive of all. But using moral and religious argument can also be problematic for several reasons.

- It is difficult not to sound superior when one promotes moral and religious reasons, thereby alienating the interlocutor.

- Human nature is such that good intention can seem very real when religious feeling is running high and we feel close to God (as one might in a moral discussion with a virtuous humanitarian!) but it can easily lapse when life goes back to normal and we are with our comrades once again. As we all know, moral and religious promises are hard to keep and, as St.Paul observed, some days later we often end up "doing not what we want but what we do not want"

- In many wars, religion can often be co-opted to supply powerful "divine" arguments in favour of the very violence and atrocities that humanitarians are trying to stop. Complex forms of denial can also be constructed to justify, diminish or dismiss the violations in which one plays a part.[12] In such a case, you will end up arguing head-to-head about religion and might be seen to be taking sides. This may pose impartiality problems for a humanitarian.

- Many power-focused people are sceptical of morality. As one seasoned humanitarian worker, Gerard Ferrie, has observed: "ideals seldom impress warlords".

  Despite these risks, it is essential that humanitarians properly assess the potential of moral and religious persuasion. Most contemporary wars are fought in societies that are still predominantly religious and where ideas of the sacred and of religious duty carry significant weight. Many wars are driven by religious movements. Members of government and armed groups are often religious people and are also answerable to religious constituencies. Many understand the concept of religious duty better than international law. Some interlocutors may have a deep desire to do the right thing in their war and just need help to do so.

[12] Stanley Cohen (2001) States of Denial: Knowing About Atrocity and Suffering, Polity, Cambridge, UK.

E. Legal Arguments

The second form of argument is a legal one that states: *be humanitarian because the law demands it*. This line of argument is close to moral and religious ones because law is often derived from moral and religious belief. But the approach is different. The legal line of argument involves humanitarian negotiators making clear reference to the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, to the Conventions and Declarations of Human Rights Law and to Refugee Law. In such a process, these secular legal texts would be the focus of discussion and the impetus towards conformity usually derives from a desire to act legally and well, or from the threat of potential prosecution for war crimes.

In such a negotiation, you will also be addressing the heart of your interlocutors also his political sense as you emphasise the wider political world of states, laws, conformity and courts. This inevitably brings a different tone to the negotiation and there are two main challenges with a legal approach:

- Like religious injunction, respect for the law commonly involves a mismatch between intention, promise and practice. People can agree to things without a real interest in actually doing them or any real ability to do them. Legal paper also has very different values in different cultures so that paper-based agreements may mean very different things to interlocutor and humanitarian. This is particularly true in societies where inter-group behaviour is managed more on the basis of personal bonds of allegiance and tradition or when legal enforcement is neither feared nor feasible and where peer or political pressure to break the law is enormous.

- There may well be a problem of ignorance surrounding international humanitarian and human rights law that makes the legal argument sound complicated, obscure and irrelevant. In such a case, education in international humanitarian law becomes a key aspect of humanitarian persuasion and a potentially useful way of building a relationship.

F. Prudential Arguments

A third argument is a prudential one that suggests: *be humanitarian because it is politically wise*. There are a number of purely prudential reasons for conforming to humanitarian norms and protecting civilians that ignore moral and legal arguments. Agreeing to abide by international humanitarian law can bestow a useful political legitimacy and respectability on a government or armed group. More practically still, restraint in one's conduct towards the civilian population can ingratiate you to that population and so increase your influence over them. A humane conduct of war may also earn you more allies and cast your enemy in a

poor light. And possible punishment by higher authorities (your own or others) may also make it wise to respect humanitarian norms.

These arguments can be very powerful as arguments of explicit self-interest but adopting them openly as humanitarian negotiators has its risks.

- Despite the many ways in which respecting humanitarian norms may prove politically prudent, many of those pursuing violence find anti-humanitarian strategies much more politically persuasive. To them, humanitarian tactics simply do not carry political weight for politicians. In many situations, it appears far more politically obvious to ruthless politicians that civilian atrocity and extreme violence is a more guaranteed way of achieving maximum power fast than respecting humanitarian norms.

- It is also problematic for humanitarians to use prudential arguments explicitly as doing so might involve a failure of neutrality. Because prudential reasons are primarily political they are deployed tactically by combatants as a means to win the war or take an advantage in it. It would be wrong for humanitarians to advise combatants in such terms.   Nevertheless, it is essential that humanitarian negotiators are aware of such prudential motivation and the need for political survival, advantage or credibility they can represent. While humanitarians would often be unwise to shape these arguments themselves, they can perhaps elicit them and make the most of them in the interests of civilians.

G. Arguments of Reciprocity

The fourth argument is one of reciprocity that states: *be humanitarian to protect yourself*. The principle of reciprocity is regarded as the main reason for the relatively high level of success in a key area of international humanitarian law - the protection of prisoners of war. Many military forces protect enemy prisoners primarily because they know that they might one day become prisoners of war themselves and would like to receive similar protection.

The same kind of argument can be made about the protection of civilians. If your military forces are prepared to protect enemy civilians then it may be more likely that your enemy might also be more inclined to protect your civilian population. Without such commitments, the conduct of a war can deteriorate dramatically and irretrievably. There is one main problem encountered by humanitarians pursuing this line:

- To be convincing, these arguments often require a guarantee of reciprocity that humanitarian agencies are in no position to give. But where reciprocity does seem a possible humanitarian motivator, humanitarian negotiators can

alert the relevant state authorities and other influential political actors who could then negotiate such guarantees.

H. Non-Rational Persuaders

Finally, although as human beings we often espouse reasons and arguments as the basis for what we do, we are often really spurred on to act on the basis of more intangible and apparently "irrational" factors. Coincidence, loyalties, friendship, shared experience, admiration, envy, ambition and feelings awakened from our past can all make us take decisions and behave in ways that are not immediately rational.

Humanitarian negotiators need to be very open to the non-rational in their relationships with interlocutors and their organisations because these may be the real determinants of non-humanitarian and pro-humanitarian behaviour. On the positive side, the bond of a frightening or enjoyable shared experience between a humanitarian and his or her interlocutor may produce a desire to show and share more humane behaviour. Attraction, respect and real friendship may prompt a desire to cooperate beyond official policy. But all these things can work the other way too. A humanitarian's behaviour can connect with former feelings of humiliation, racism or rejection in an interlocutor and create obstructive behaviour at odds with a generally cooperative organisational policy.

Good humanitarian negotiators have the antennae to pick up these deeper influences and are also able to be self-critical enough to see how they play into them positively or negatively. But as reasons for humanitarian persuasion or rejection, they must never be under-estimated.

V. Personal Selling

If these are some of the main arguments and interests that you are likely to be exploring with your interlocutor, you are most likely to be doing so face-to-face. In marketing terms, this means that your main role and skill as a front-line humanitarian negotiator would be described as *personal selling*. This skill is "the interpersonal dimension of promotion".[13]

Personal selling is distinguished by being a two-way process of promotion between real people where there is an opportunity to adapt what you are offering, to be much more precise in your information and to build a long-term personal relationship between the company and the customer.[14] Personal selling is thus very different from one-way forms of promotion like advertising or media campaigning. Personal sales people operate as important intermediaries between customer and company. In humanitarian terms, they represent the agency to the interlocutor and the interlocutor to the agency.

The rest of the paper will concentrate on personal selling in humanitarian work to explore what marketing has to say about the main role, techniques and cross-cultural aspects of personal selling that may inform humanitarian practice.

A. The Role of the Personal Seller

The main role of face-to-face personal sales people can be characterised by the following main areas of their responsibility.

B. Relationship-building and Problem-solving

Most thinking on personal selling now recognises that the most important role of personal salespeople is relationship management and problem-solving. The problem-solving salesperson is now preferred to the hard-sell salesperson. As seen in the above principles of marketing, the problem-solver is driven by a concern for "customer benefit" and "need satisfaction" to develop a relationship that aims to inform, adapt and persuade.[15]

C. Managing the Three Phases of Buying

It is the particular business of the personal seller to guide the customer through the three phases of buying: the cognitive, the affective and the behavioural that can be summarised as follows:[16]

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[13] Kotler et al, chapter 20.
[14] Brassington, F and S. Pettitt (2003) Principles of Marketing, FT. Prentice Hall, Harlow, chapter 17.
[15] Kotler et al p705.
[16] Brassington and Pettitt, p576f.

- Cognitive - I *know* this product exists.
- Affective - I *understand* and *feel* what it can do for me.
- Behavioural - I *want* it and I am going to buy it.

While much of the cognitive phase is brought about by sharing information to create *awareness*, the affective and behavioural phases are more complicated and are reliant on a creation or development of *attitude*. Like social psychology, marketing recognises that attitude is shaped by a combination of social influence and desire.

Affective and behavioural change usually requires wider *social affirmation* of the product. Before making any decision, a customer might typically consult a reference group who might be a group of peers, seniors or experts who could confirm and justify his decision and so enable him to feel right to buy. A young man buying a mobile phone would canvas the approval of his friends. The interlocutor of an armed group who is considering granting humanitarian access will consult upwards and sideways with the opinion leaders in his organisation.

Alongside apparently rational corroborating influences, people are also typically influenced by their *desires*. If they associate the product with their desire as well as with peer approval, they are more likely to buy. This is why so much advertising involves mixing sexual desire and/or humour with the product. If people like what they see, they are more likely to want it and buy it. Better still, as advertisers know only too well, if you can mix a practical need with social approval and sexual desire, the mix is almost irresistible. The human urge to imitate the person they desire or envy (mimetic desire) is extremely powerful. This is why companies will pay sporting role models and sexually desirable celebrities so much money to promote their products.

You have a big advantage if you can link your product with a powerful desire in your customer. Such desire may be personal. As representatives of the humanitarian product in some way, the personal impression humanitarian negotiators make is very important. An interlocutor's personal admiration for a humanitarian negotiator can often play a critical role in making him desire to be more humanitarian and to want what the humanitarian has. Also, if they are frank, many humanitarians will admit that sexual attraction as well as envy and imitation can play an important role in humanitarian negotiation.

D. Persuading all the Right People

As a business-to-business salesperson, it is important not to get mesmerised by your main relationship with you interlocutor. Because customers and interlocutors seldom make buying decisions on their own, humanitarian negotiators, as personal sellers, need to have a precise and wide ranging sense of

the other key players involved in a humanitarian buy. These other players are naturally his or her wider targets for relationship-building. By selling to them directly if possible, or by being aware of how best the interlocutor could sell upwards to them, the humanitarian negotiator can work to persuade wider parts of the customer's network than his primary contact.

Marketing conventionally identifies a range of different players involved in any decision to buy by describing the particular function they each play in a purchase[17]. These roles are as follows and can be usefully applied to a humanitarian sell:

- **initiator** - responsible for leading a buying process (normally your interlocutor)
- **influencer** - opinion formers/stakeholders/experts with significant influence on a buy
- **gatekeeper** - one or more people who control access to key decision-makers
- **decider** - the key decision-maker (or makers) who alone can authorise the buy
- **buyer** - responsible for making the buy and negotiating the final deal
- **user** - who implements the buy and the resulting humanitarian responsibilities

As a personal seller, a humanitarian negotiator should aim to map and understand who plays what role in their targeted organisation and have a clear sense of the particular role and power of his or her interlocutor. You should then try to reach as many of these people as possible - directly or via others - and build relationships with them to elicit their own needs and interests so as to design the most persuasive strategy to match their particular function in the buy.

E. Judging Cross-cultural Adaptation

One of the biggest challenges for humanitarian negotiators is the role they play in judging how best to adapt their product and their marketing style cross-culturally. Most humanitarian negotiators are involved in some degree of intercultural selling that has to operate between their own culture and the culture of their international organisation on one side and the culture of their interlocutor and his or her organisation on the other.

This is where the critical idea of idiom comes into play most of all. Different cultures have different world views and different communicative styles that determine how they live, work, buy and sell. Different people in the same organisation come from different social classes and are more or less educated. It

[17] Randall, op cit.

is enormously important that, as a humanitarian negotiator, you analyse, understand and work in the particular cultural idiom of your target organisation as much as possible.

There are many different areas of potential cultural difference but there are perhaps 10 main factors that you need to watch in order to adapt your selling style accordingly[18].

- **Power-distance Measures:** this describes the patterns of power and nature of authority in a given society. Does the society you are working with have a very vertical approach to power with a considerable hierarchy and great distance between the powerful and the powerless? Or is it a flatter more horizontal society in which power operates on close contact and consensus? Is your interlocutor close to power or distant from it as someone under considerable authority? Does your interlocutor expect to deal with a person of considerable power in your organisation? How does he or she perceive the power-distance in your own humanitarian organisation? As a British humanitarian agency, for example, does he understand your organisation's structure and independence or does he assume that all decision-making in your agency is taken by Tony Blair and, ultimately therefore, by George Bush?!

- **Masculinity and Femininity:** How are respective male and female roles understood and operated in your buyer's culture? Where is decision-making located in gender terms on particular topics? Is public negotiation confined mainly to men? How can women influence decision-making? How does your interlocutor relate to the mixed gender teams in your organisation? Are there particularly important points of etiquette and custom around male-female relations that you need to know?

- **Individualism and collectivism:** Different cultures place different emphasis on the centrality of the individual in society and politics. If you are dealing with a person who places a higher emphasis on collectivism and group identity, it may not play well to continually focus on the idea of civilians as individual people. Instead, it may make more sense to adapt your offer to a focus on protecting a group, its way of life, its traditions and its communal rights.

- **Ambiguity:** Some cultures find it important and easier to live with greater levels of ambiguity and uncertainty than others. One culture might want everything written down and agreed in detail before a buy. Others prefer to operate within the general spirit of an agreement and negotiate the detail as events unpredictably take their course. Some cultures try to

[18] This section draws on Jean-Claude Usunier (2000) Marketing Across Cultures, 3rd edition, FT Prentice Hall, Harlow, UK.

minimise and avoid uncertainty in their way of working. Others find it absurd to expect anything other than uncertainty. They feel in no position to agree things for tomorrow let alone still further in the future. In the context of their lives, this often makes very good sense. However, it sometimes requires a particularly adapted operational approach and temperament in humanitarian workers.

- **Rules:** Different cultures have different attitudes to what is known as rule-related behaviour. Essentially, these usually refer to the margins that are acceptable around rules and the consistent or differentiated culture of enforcement. A northern European will usually expect a very small margin of tolerance around rule-breaking and approve of a consistent policy of enforcement. Other peoples operate differently. For example, 8kmh over a speed limit may be critical for a northern European whereas 20kmh may be the margin of negotiation for others. Some cultures feel strongly that the punishment should always fit the crime whereas others are more likely to fit it to the person - thus one person's warning might be another person's fine for the same offence. These different attitudes to rules are obviously deeply important in humanitarian work when the rules in question affect the protection of civilians. A particular appreciation of margins, tolerance and flexibility in the respect and enforcement of laws is central to any humanitarian negotiator's understanding of interlocutors' and their organisations.

- **Time and Timing:** Similar differences exist on the question of time in which some cultures are very precise and clock-bound while others are more flexible and seem to have more time than others. Time means different things to different people. To one person, making a meeting as brief and efficient as possible may be a sign of respect for the busy schedule of their interlocutor or customer. To others it might seem enormously disrespectful of their status to hurry through a meeting as if you had more important things to do than meet with them. Attitudes to waiting are similarly different depending on your ideas of work, leisure and quality. For some people, waiting is enjoyable. It is no hardship and quite literally puts them at their leisure in cultures where *being* is valued as much or more than *doing*. For others, it is an insulting and exasperating waste of working time. People may also feel that waiting is an inevitable and important part of receiving quality. So, you are bound to wait for a great person or, if you are Italian or French you will enjoy waiting together for good food because you know it is being carefully prepared to a high quality. In contrast, British and North American waiting thresholds for food are very low! Timing is also a key factor in cross-cultural selling. Timing in negotiation is always a fine judgement but it is also important to remember that different cultures reserve certain times for certain things. A particular time in the year, the religious calendar or the day might be better or worse for humanitarian negotiation.

- **Space and place:** All cultures assign different value to different types of space. Some peoples operate much wider ideas of public space where everyone is welcome. Others extend notions of privacy much further. Some space is particularly gendered as male or female space. Ideas of sacred space carry different meanings and ritual requirements between cultures and groups. Some places are appropriate for selling, negotiation and business. Others are not. It is important for humanitarians to be aware of these factors and to make the most of them as they build relationships with the interlocutors.

- **Verbal and Non-verbal Language:** The whole area of language as spoken or body language is central in understanding the person you are dealing with. Good language skills or good interpreters are central to any humanitarian negotiation. Similarly, an ability to read and practice the non-verbal communication of your interlocutors is also vital.

- **Selling style:** Different cultures have different ways of selling things and so will have different expectations from you as a humanitarian negotiator. You need to understand and adapt to the selling style of your interlocutor's culture. For example, Jean-Claude Usunier sees significant differences in selling style in Europe alone. In Italy, vendors are expected to argue strongly to embody their confidence in their product and to prove the credibility of their claims. A Swiss salesman is rated for his ability to be very precise about his product and his claims will then be respected and taken literally as fact. The British respond to a soft-sell that is reasonable, polite, unemotional and avoids excessive claims for the product. Germans respond to a hard-sell grounded in fact and evidence.

- Different ideas of incentives, rewards and bribes are also integral to many selling cultures. The *bastarella* (little envelope) is a widespread part of Italian business culture and has its counterpart to differing degrees in every society. How you choose to relate to or adapt your interlocutor's culture of reward as he and others "oil the wheels" of your sale is an inevitable part of many humanitarian negotiations. Rewards of some non-financial kind can be devised that involve some special social recognition, some form of personal privilege or particular travel opportunities that are part of the negotiation process. These things are often important to the dignity of your interlocutor.

- **Pricing and Bargaining:** An extremely important aspect of selling culture operates around different ideas of pricing, bargaining and the rituals thereof. Different cultures have different ideas about prices as being "set" or being more flexible. In some cultures the vendor is expected to offer the first price while in many societies it is the buyer who begins the pricing process. In some cultures, negotiating price is

undertaken as an impersonal and austere ritual in which business is understood to be "nothing personal". By contrast, as Usunier points out, many bargaining and pricing cultures "mix economics and affection, friendship and self-interest" in a way that can be extremely confusing to people from other business cultures.[19] This same mix is often found in political bargaining and pricing too. Many humanitarian negotiators from northern Europe and North America have often found it deeply disorientating, and even wicked, the way people they know to be massive violators of human rights negotiate so personally and amiably in this way. If the rituals of bargaining are important to understand, so too are ideas of price. In certain situations, the price of humanitarian space may be set in a concessionary way to emphasise the power of the interlocutor. In others, humanitarians may be expected to pay a very high price to prove the value of what they are asking. Being able to read the kind of price you are being asked to pay and respond accordingly is critical if you are to be seen to appreciate the deal.

[19] Usunier, chapter 11.

VI. Other "New Marketing" Techniques

This paper has concentrated on the softer and more relationship-based forms of persuasion currently favoured by commercial marketing. There are more confrontational forms of marketing that are closer to humanitarian practice's notion of denunciation. For example, g*uerilla marketing* sees new innovative companies setting out to challenge the giants of their sector directly and to sabotage their image and capture their market share. The current attacking campaign by Ryan Air against its bigger airline rivals is a good example of this David and Goliath pitch whereby you challenge your competitors directly on the details of price and service in an effort to humiliate them and set your own terms for a debate. These aggressive one-way techniques are well known, well practiced and possibly founded by campaigning NGOs. They may well have a place when a humanitarian "customer" can only really be seen as a competitor and spoiler so that "harder" and more coercive strategies are needed in humanitarian persuasion.

e-Persuasion

But there is also an emerging range of IT-based forms of two-way direct marketing that may have relevance to softer kinds of humanitarian persuasion. The first - *texting, messaging* or *mobile marketing* is being increasingly used as a means of direct marketing to young people and has also recently been used by US forces in the Iraq war as a personalised way of trying to persuade Iraqi forces to surrender. Mobile marketing is an emerging field and centres on the mobile phone as "the most personal device we own"[20].

The similar idea of *viral marketing* or *word-of-mouse marketing* is also developing fast as part of email's expansion.[21] Companies and many campaigning NGOs send emails directly to known customers or supporters or "cold" to new prospects and ask that they forward them to friends and colleagues.

Mobile marketing and word-of-mouse marketing may have humanitarian applications that could usefully be explored by humanitarian negotiators in front-line roles with global, national or local interlocutors. Initially a one-way form of direct marketing they hope to engage people in a two-way e-relationship between company and customer. Although this e-relationship lacks the real personal connection of personal selling, it could lead on to it.

[20] Haig, M (2002) Mobile Marketing: The Message Revolution, Kogan Page, London.
[21] Randall, op cit.

VII. Conclusion

This paper has tried to introduce and adapt some of the principles of commercial marketing to the deeply important and difficult art of humanitarian negotiation. It is hoped that some of the principles of marketing and personal selling can be used in support of conventional humanitarian arguments and the more usual diplomatic skills practiced by many humanitarian negotiators. The process of persuading people to be more humanitarian in war is obviously more of an art than a science but marketing may well have some colours or some chords that creative humanitarians can add to their palettes and their tunes as they try to convince others to protect civilians in war.