Promotion Tactics (Integrated Marketing Communications)

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Introduction

In this chapter, we explore promotion tactics used by consumer marketers as part of the marketing mix. This aspect of consumer marketing is the most visible, which is probably why people often confuse marketing (as a whole) with promotion (which is a tactical subset). While *promotion* is a common term for the phenomena we discuss in this chapter, the phrase we use to describe promotional tactics is termed *marketing communication* (later discussed as *integrated marketing communications*). In South African consumer marketing, this is the naming convention that is used most often. The term advertising is also often used to group promotional activity.

Many people get caught up in thinking that advertising is primarily about the creative images and slogans that catch their eye as they scroll through a website or pass a billboard. Advertising is, however, a highly strategic field of great value to businesses and involves a significant amount of analysis and high-level skills in numerous areas. Today's consumers face a point of near saturation when it comes to advertising messaging, so advertisers have to become more creative and strategic in order to gain and keep the attention of their target audience.

This chapter starts by defining marketing communications by looking at the theory of communication in general, so we get a better understanding of the job that our marketing communication needs to do. We then look into the various marketing communications at a marketer's disposal, how to select them and the need for integration in order to amplify the brand's messaging effectiveness.

What is marketing communications?

To understand what advertising is, you need to understand the term *marketing communications*. Marketing Communications (or *MarCom*) is a term used to describe the tools and techniques used to communicate with a target market.

Integrated marketing communications is a communication process that entails the planning, integration and implementation of the various forms of communication tactics used in implementing a marketing strategy. The field of marketing communications includes specialised areas, such as advertising, branding, design (for example, graphic design and packaging), direct marketing, sponsorship, public relations, publicity, online marketing (including social media) and sales promotion. Marketing communications practitioners use strategic elements of branding to ensure the consistency of message delivery throughout an organisation, resulting in the consistent look-and-feel of a brand, no matter where and how the message is delivered. This consistency is one of the objectives of integrated marketing communications and is essential in the implementation of differentiation and distinctiveness (discussed in Chapter 12).

Product or brand information is typically delivered via some form of media channel in exchange for payment, but can also be 'delivered' by a salesperson, a call centre operator, or by the way the truck carrying the product from the factory looks and is driven. The fact that there are so many opportunities for a consumer to receive and interpret a message makes it important for marketers to manage this process as much as they can, so as to ensure that the message remains true to the marketing and corporate strategy.
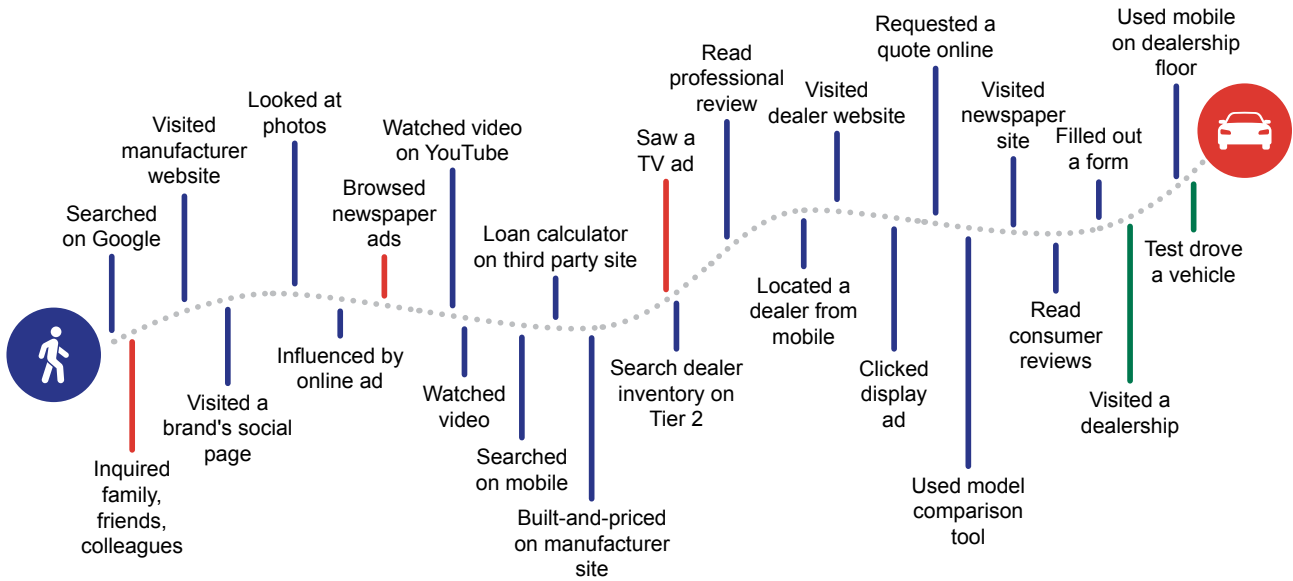
Brand touch points

Every opportunity of engagement between a brand and a customer or a potential customer is called a *brand touch point*. Examples of touch points include everything from a television or radio advertisement (or an advertisement in any other form of media), the brand's Facebook or Twitter profile, personal selling (as is the case with car dealerships, office equipment, insurance, etc), collateral (brochures), sales promotion (buy one, get one free, etc), public relations, sponsorship (for example, of sports events), the brand's website, trade show presentations, the product's packaging, and even the company's receptionist.
Regis McKenna once said that,

> *'Marketing is everything and everything is marketing. Marketing today is not a function; it is a way of doing business. Marketing is not a new ad campaign or this month's promotion. Marketing has to be all-pervasive, part of everyone's job description, from the receptionists to the board of directors. Its job is neither to fool the customer nor to falsify the company's image. It is to integrate the customer into the design of the product and to design a systematic process for interaction that will create substance in the relationship'.*[1]

Every experiential opportunity (any opportunity for the consumer to physically or emotionally experience some aspect of the brand) that an organisation creates for its stakeholders or customers is a brand touch point. It is vital for brand strategists and managers to survey all of their organisation's brand touch points and manage these for the stakeholder's or consumer's benefit. Figure 16.1 illustrates brand touch points along a consumer journey (in this case purchasing a used car). The illustration shows 26 touch points with 21 of the touch points being digital. From the illustration, one can clearly see that different types of communication, messages and media channels can be used at different places in the decision making journey to influence the consumer.

Figure 16.1: Of the 26 brand touch points, 21 are digital (in blue) and only 2 are on premises (in green)

Marketing communications is therefore concerned with the promotion of an organisation's brand and products or services to stakeholders and prospective customers through critical touch points. Most importantly, these are planned messages that a business uses to support its marketing activities.

Marketing communications is focused on the product or service, as opposed to corporate communications, for which the focus of communications work is the company or enterprise itself. Marketing communications is primarily concerned with demand generation and product or service positioning (against competitors).

The marketing communication process

To understand the job of marketing communications, it is helpful to take a step back and look at how communications works in general. In any type of human communication process, the source (person communicating) formulates an idea, encodes the idea as a message, and sends the message via a medium or communication channel to another person. This other person, known as the receiver, decodes the message and sends feedback. Figure 16.2 illustrates this very simplified process of communication.

The marketing communication process is slightly more complex. Prof Barbara Stern at Rutgers University in the USA developed a more sophisticated communication process model for advertising, known as the Stern model[2]. She defines advertising as composed commercial 'text', rather than informal speech, and recognises that, in advertising, the source, message and receiver all have multiple dimensions. Some of these dimensions exist in the real world, while others exist in a virtual world within the text of the advertising message itself. Figure 16.3 depicts the Stern model. Notice that the overall process is similar to the basic model in Figure 16.2, with a source, message and receiver. The model has a number of added layers to show the fact that a commercial message has multiple layers.

Figure 16.2: A simple depiction of the human communication process
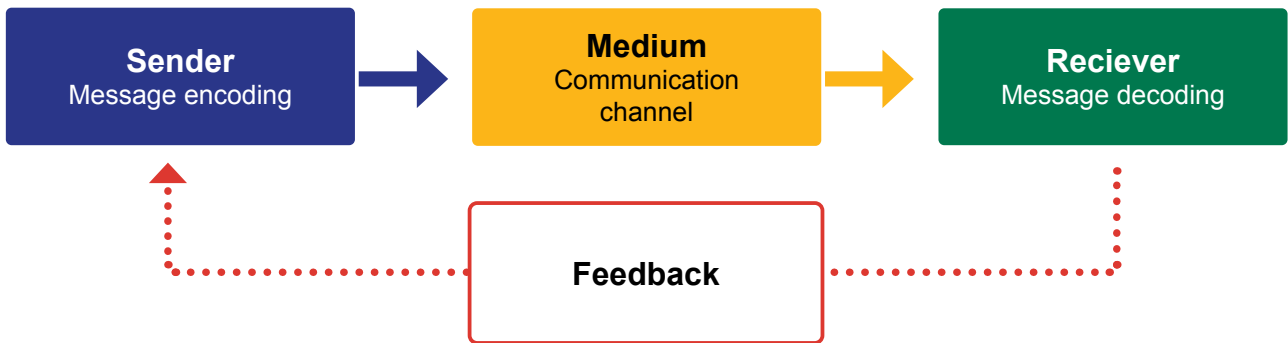
When applying the Stern model to advertising, the **source** is ultimately the **sponsor** (brand owner), the **message** is the advertisement (in whatever form) and the **receiver** is the consumer or potential consumer, or even influencer. The message (text) is relayed via a chosen channel or medium, often obstructed or buried by **noise** (the term used for the clutter of competitors' messaging and other entertainment in the media). Some specific points related to each component of the Stern model are described below.

Figure 16.3: The Stern model of communication (adapted by author)
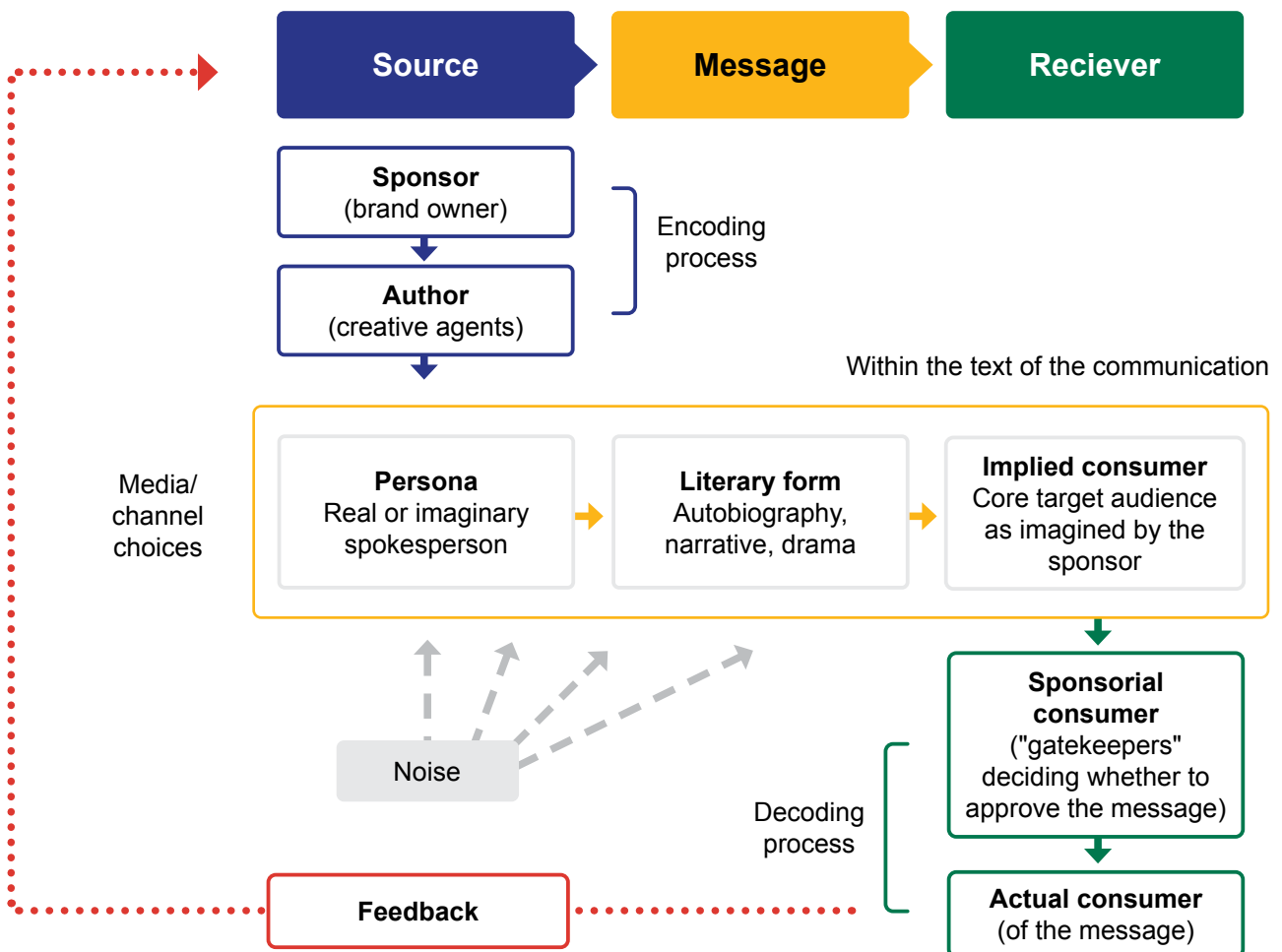
Source

The Stern model illustrates that the source is not always the author of the message, and the creator of the message is in fact often invisible to the receiver. A sponsor (or brand owner/advertiser) often communicates the objective of a message to an advertising agency (author), which creates the message (such as an ad, website, or brochure) on the sponsor's behalf. The sponsor has a legal obligation to be truthful, and to ensure that the message is carefully designed for maximum effectiveness.

The advertising agency aims to transform the sponsor's required message into attention-grabbing advertisements designed for various media (television, radio, social media, etc). These creators might be art directors and copywriters, web designers or graphic designers: they are the authors, in what is known as the **encoding process**, and **remain unseen to the consumer**.

The Stern model developed the idea of a message being encoded in various forms, and being delivered by a persona who becomes a real or imaginary spokesperson for the sponsor. Within the ad, there is a real or imaginary spokesperson (a persona) who creates a voice or tone for the commercial. To the consumer, this persona, who represents the sponsor, is the **source** of the message. The persona's views and statements are, of course, not real; they are crafted by the ad's creators and authors for the sole purpose of getting a message across and this view exists only in the virtual world of the ad.

Message

There are different methodologies for getting a message across, from the source to the receivers. Stern identified three styles (or message dimensions) that rely on their literary forms:

- **Autobiography.** In autobiographical messages, 'I' tell a story about myself to 'you', the imaginary audience eavesdropping on my private personal experience. In the video advertisement in Figure 16.4, the model (Eva Longoria) acts as the 'I', telling 'you', the consumer, about the product through her experience of the product.

Figure 16.4: Eva Longoria in a 2018 autobiographical video message sponsored by L'Oréal[3]
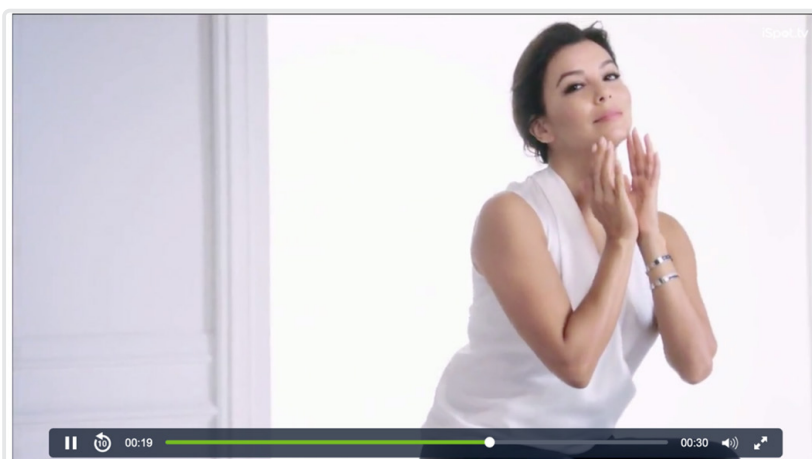
- **Narrative.** A narrative style is when a third-person persona tells a story about others to an imagined audience. Figure 16.5 shows an example of a television ad that employs this technique, a 2012 Santam commercial, in which Ben Kingsley addresses the audience.[4]

Figure 16.5: Santam advertisement using a narrative message[5]

Santam - Ben Kingsley "Sir Sneaky" - Vicci Turpin DOP
49,048 views • 18 Sep 2012   👍 82 👎 1 ↗ SHARE ≡+ SAVE ...

- **Drama.** An advertisement that uses drama attempts to use storytelling techniques to deliver a message (sometimes explicitly and sometimes in a more subtle way). Allan Gray's 'Beautiful' advertisement (Figure 16.6) demonstrates the wisdom of staying true to something (or in this case, someone), as a metaphor for their investment philosophy. The story is entirely dramatic, even to the extent that is in a language unfamiliar to most South Africans.

Figure 16.6: Allan Grey's 'Beautiful' advertisement using drama as its message[6]

Allan Grey Investments
11,900 views • 7 Mar 2008   👍 22 👎 3 ↗ SHARE ≡+ SAVE ...

A key factor determining how a message is received is the choice of channel or media platform through which the message is relayed. Media are chosen based on the target audience's media habits, and the best way to reach them (see Chapter 7 and 11). With the multiple media channels available today, the message may be screened on a television, be read on a cellphone, heard on a podcast, or accessed in different ways, at different times of the day, across a variety of media.

Receiver

The receivers of a message are not limited to actual consumers. According to Stern, receivers (consumers) can be divided into three categories:

• **Implied.** Implied consumers are those who are imagined by the advertisement's creators to be ideal consumers who will relate to the message and be persuaded to behave in the way the advertisement requires them to. This is most likely the group of consumers who have been identified as the core target audience in the creative brief from the sponsor to the agency authors.

• **Sponsorial.** Before a message is released, the first audience may include the key decision-makers at the sponsor's company or organisation. These sponsorial consumers are the gatekeepers who decide whether to approve the message.

• **Actual.** Should the message get approved, the message is finally exposed to the actual consumers (after production and media choices have also been approved). The message is then released to people in the real world who hopefully comprise the sponsor's target market. The message may also reach those it had *not* intended to reach (for example, alcohol brands that sponsor sports teams may see their brand being exposed to children, technically something that they have to avoid).

Decoding occurs when the message reaches one or more of the receiver's senses. Most consumers both hear and see television or video ads (on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and other platforms). Other consumers may handle (touch) and read (see) a brochure. The advertiser's objective is made harder by the fact that the message is not always decoded by the receiver in the manner intended. The way in which the actual target audience encounters and decodes an advertisement is what ultimately determines the degree to which the advertiser's objectives are fulfilled. In other words, if the message is correctly decoded in the manner in which the advertiser intended, there is a good chance that the objectives for the campaign will be achieved. A challenge for consumer marketers (sponsors or authors) is that actual consumers often do not usually think or behave the same as the implied consumer, or even the sponsorial consumer. All elements of the message sender team must apply their thinking to how the actual consumer will decode, or interpret, the message. This is where understanding decision making (Chapter 10), consumer behaviour (Chapter 9) and research (Chapter 18) are helpful.

Noise and feedback

All along the process of sending and receiving messages there is the phenomenon of noise. This noise is the clutter of competitors' messages and other forms of attention taking entertainment. There is also noise from other people you trust (people you know well and whose opinions you value), when they dispense their advice or suggestions. Because of this internal and external noise, the advertising agency aims to eclipse these noise sources through techniques that make the consumer focus on the actual advertising message. This is often referred to as 'breakthrough' advertising.

Feedback is essential in the advertising process because it provides the sponsor with an indication of whether the message has been received and decoded correctly, and whether their original objectives have been achieved. Even if the feedback is negative or disappointingly low, it enables the sponsor to adapt the messaging and to try again. Feedback employs a sender–message–receiver pattern, and is then directed from the receiver back to the source. In advertising, feedback can take many forms, including:

- Increased or decreased sales
- Phone/website/social media enquiries or complaints
- Communication with the product dealer
- Requests for more information
- Viral chat (positive or negative)

Although marketing communications and advertising were traditionally one-way conversations (with the only feedback being sales, orders, redemption of coupons, etc), new technologies mean that audiences are no longer just passive receivers of impersonal mass messages. With the growth of interactive media, such as the internet, consumers can give instant, real-time feedback on the same channel used by the original message sender. It is expected that advertising will continue to evolve away from a one-way communication model to one that is highly interactive.

Integrated marketing communications

The goals of all marketing communications are to inform, remind or persuade consumers about goods, services or ideologies available to satisfy their needs or wants. Integrated marketing communications (abbreviated as IMC) refers to the:

process of building and reinforcing mutually profitable relationships with employees, customers, stakeholders and the general public by developing and coordinating a strategic communications program that enables them to have a constructive encounter with the company or brand through a variety of media and other contacts.[7]

To understand IMC, one has to look through the consumers' eyes to understand how they see advertising. In many studies, the average person is estimated to be exposed to anywhere between 500 and 5000 advertising messages per day. These brand contacts, sponsored or not, create an integrated message in the mind of the consumer. IMC gives the company the chance to manage these perceptions in a positive way.

The fragmentation and innovation of media has led marketers to realise that the efficiencies of mass media are not what they used to be. In the by-gone era of a small number of traditional media channels, you could easily reach your consumers through a simple combination of television, radio and print. Now, your consumer may be picking up a newspaper in the morning, reading an iPad at lunchtime, viewing outdoor ads and posters on the taxi ride home while surfing his mobile, and downloading a series to watch on a laptop. No matter who the marketer is talking to, it is more essential than ever to maintain the consistency of brand messages and brand behaviour through all channels. Consumers are more savvy, cynical and distrusting of advertising, and brand schizophrenia (when a brand constantly changes its voice or message, or its delivery is out of sync with its message) or worse, brand non-delivery, are easily picked up. Figure 16.7 summarises some of the points raised above.

Figure 16.7: The need for integrated marketing communications

The Strategic Consistency Model, developed by Prof Sandra Moriarty , shows us that people, from staff to consumers to shareholders, interact with a company or brand through four major sources: planned, product, service, and unplanned (see Figure 16.8). **Planned messages** are the marketing communication messages, strategically designed and disseminated through selected media channels. **Product messages** are inferred from engaging with the product itself (example, product design, performance, features and benefits, price and distribution experience). **Service messages** occur through interfacing with company representatives, such as sales reps, call centre operators, customer service agents on social media, and even receptionists, delivery people, messengers and drivers. **Unplanned messages** are the result of news stories (or chatter on social media), word of mouth or gossip, and can be positive or negative. The model suggests that there are three aspects at play: say, do and confirm.

What a brand says (packaging, advertising, sales force, PR, social media, and brand positioning) and what a brand does (product performance, executive and business performance and ethics, where the product is made, etc), are its so-called planned messages for product and service. However, if they are out of alignment (example: brand X is manufactured in sweat shops in Bangladesh), it creates unplanned messages (confirm) in the form of negative feedback and word of mouth. This is accelerated with the use of social media. The key relevance of this model is that integration is about consistency.

**Figure 16.8: The Strategic Consistency Model (say, do and confirm)**
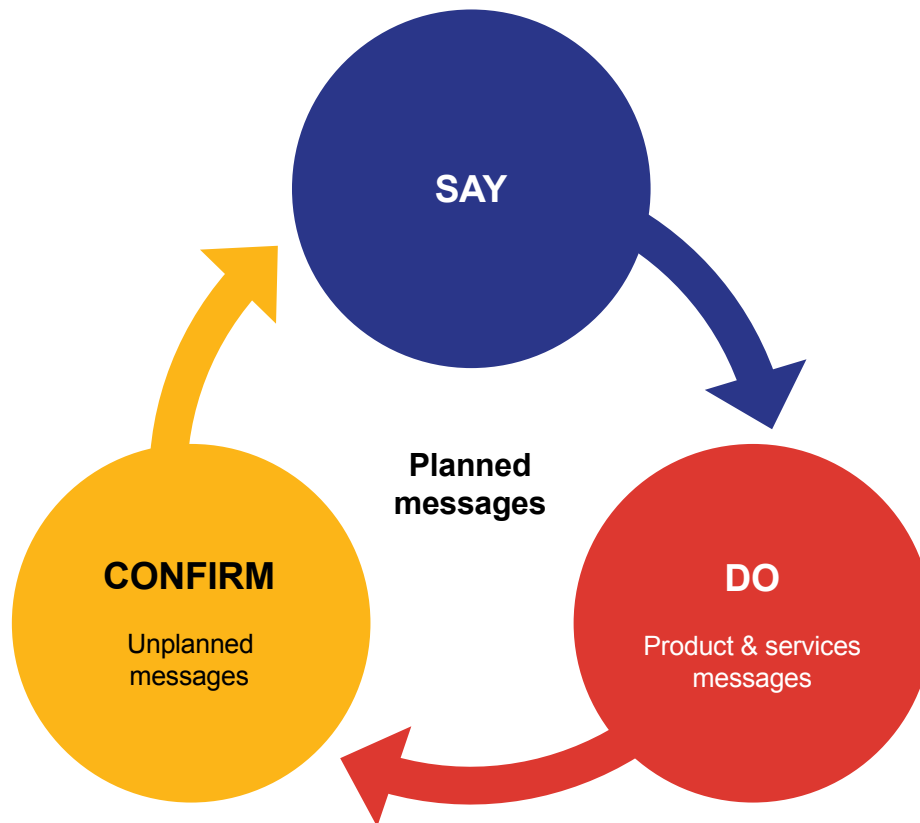
So, IMC is both a concept and a process. Synergy is the principle benefit of IMC, because each element of the communications mix reinforces the other for greater effect. The process of IMC means communication becomes the driving force of the marketing mix throughout the organisation. It also means that the consumer is at the centre of all planning.

Marketing communication is the driving methodology behind creating a unified, integrated message. We discuss briefly some of the different types of marketing communication tools listed in Figure 16.9.

Advertising

Any form of promotional activity designed to inform, remind or persuade a consumer is usually grouped under advertising. Advertising can communicate the benefits, cost or availability of a product or brand. This includes messages in the media (the say messages) but also includes aspects of the design of 'collateral materials' (also called marketing collateral), which are meant to support the sales of a product or service. Examples are brochures, business cards, stationery, booklets, websites, and digital content. This could be expanded to include packaging, signage/banners, sale representative's clothing and any other visible forms of branding designed to encourage more information and a sale.This broad definition of advertising includes digital marketing, such as search engine optimisation, and promotional tools, such as Google AdWords.

Figure 16.9: A selection of some IMC tools
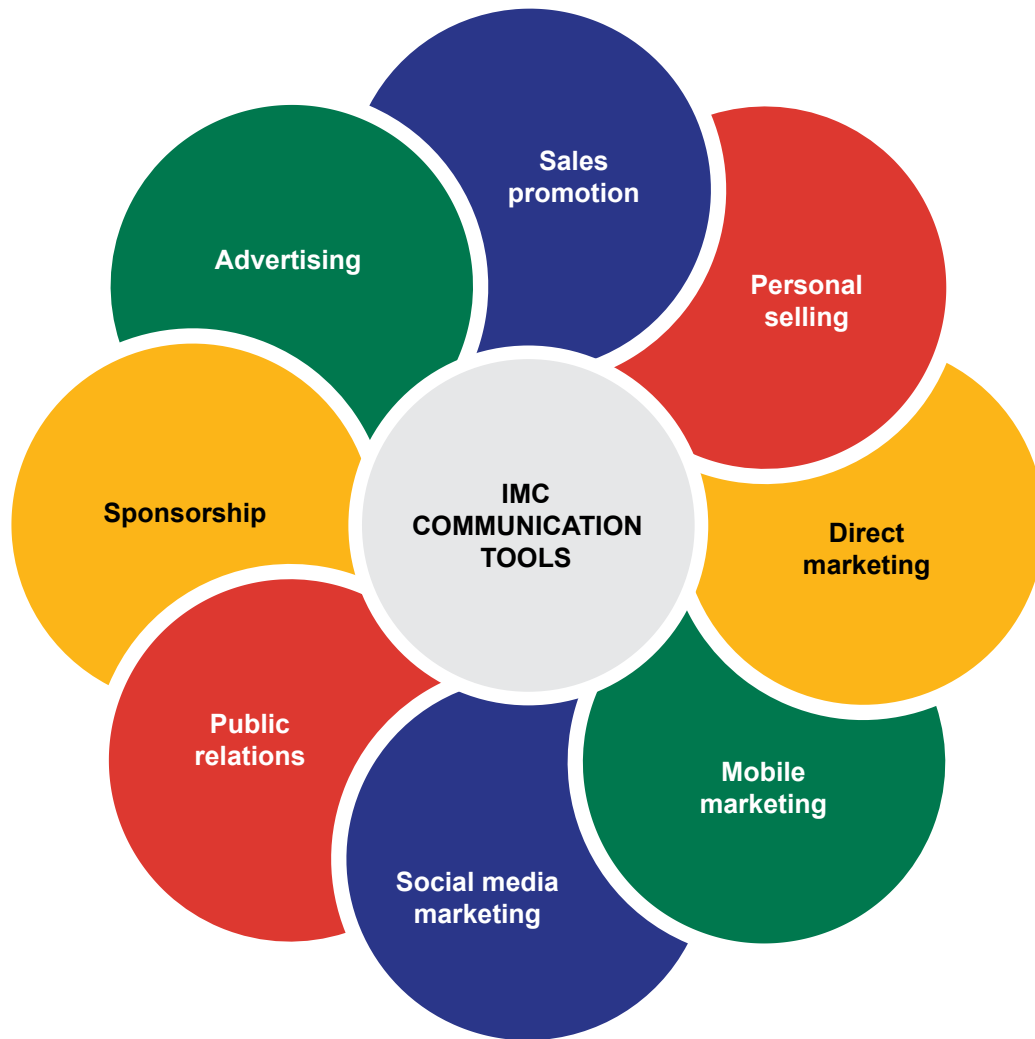
Sales promotion

A sales promotion is an incentive designed to encourage the consumer to buy the product. This incentive is aimed at persuading the consumer to make a purchase earlier that they might otherwise or even to try a new brand. Sales promotions might also incentivise purchasing more than a consumer would regularly buy. Promotional activity is usually instore (but the communication of the promotion may be in the media). Examples include discounts or giveaways like 'buy two and get one free' or 'buy a car and you could win a trip to Namibia'.

Personal selling

Personal selling is when an intermediary is hired to sell or represent the product, brand or service. Examples are a pharmaceutical sales representative who visits doctors to encourage them to prescribe their new drug, or a broker who sells insurance policies. Many are commission based.

Direct marketing

Direct marketing is any activity that is addressed directly to the consumer, via letter, email, SMS or social media.

Mobile marketing

Mobile Marketing is any activity that utilises the medium of the cellphone. This can be direct marketing as above, but it can also be mass messaging. Mobile marketing includes the design of apps that will help to communicate directly with the consumer, and in some instances, sell off the mobile platform.

Social media marketing

Social media marketing is any promotional activity that is channelled through the various social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, Snapchat or LinkedIn. These can take the form of branded posts, the use of influencers to talk about and promote the brand, or white papers on LinkedIn. A leading use of social media is for customer service, and the measure of how a brand responds to complaints or questions on their social media platforms is a key component of relationship building.

Public relations

Public relations is the managing of reputation, goodwill and stakeholder relationships, through the managing and release of information. PR may include building a positive image for an individual (such as the CEO), or managing crisis communications, or developing press releases for media around a product launch. It is not as controlled as advertising in its execution and the media use the information as they choose.

Sponsorship

Sponsorship is the attachment of a brand or corporate name, for a fee, usually in sports, arts, entertainment, causes, or venues, with the intention of unlocking commercial return. While sponsorship can deliver brand awareness and brand building opportunity, even the opportunity to make a sale, it differs from advertising in that it does not communicate specific product attributes. Sponsorship also requires media support.

The golden thread

Integrated marketing communications combine all of these types of communication, to form what is termed 'the golden thread' of marketing communication. Much of what we attempt to do with our IMC strategies is to build ongoing, loyal relationships with our consumers, and for them to form relationships with our brands.

One of the more recent attempts at defining IMC in a consumer centric way is provided by Prof Jerry G Kliatchko of the University of Asia and the Pacific. He defined IMC as:

> *the concept and process of strategically managing audience-focused, channel-centered and results-driven brand communication over time.*[8]

His main theme is that the process must be customer-centric or audience-driven, which acknowledges the shift of power that has taken place over recent years due, to some extent, to changes in technology.

A simpler but no less powerful explanation is this statement from Jeremy Bulmore, former Chairman of global ad agency JWT:

> *Consumers build brands like birds build nests. Out of the scraps and straws they chance upon.*

IMC gives us the opportunity to manage as many of the contacts our consumers have with the brand as possible, so we actively manage their perceptions of our brand.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we explored promotion tactics used by consumer marketers as part of the marketing mix by understanding how communication works, and the challenges faced and techniques used by marketers. We unpacked the concept of integrated marketing communications and the notion of strategic consistency. Finally, we looked at some of the tools that an integrated marketing plan would utilise; these have been covered more extensively in other chapters.

[1] McKenna, R., 1991, 'Marketing Is Everything' in *Harvard Business Review*, viewed 11 July 2020, from https://hbr.org/1991/01/marketing-is-everything

[2] Stern, B.B., 1994, 'A Revised Communication Model for Advertising: Multiple Dimensions of the Source, the Message, and the Recipient', *Journal of Advertising*, 23(2), 5-1

[3] iSpotTV, 2018, L'Oreal Paris Revitalift Hyaluronic Acid Serum TV Commercial, 'Reduce Wrinkles' Featuring Eva Longoria, viewed 11 July, from https://www.ispot.tv/ad/d3LC/loreal-paris-revitalift-hyaluronic-acid-serum-reduce-wrinkles-featuring-eva-longoria

[4] Turpin, V, 2012, Santam - *Ben Kingsley 'Sir Sneaky' - Vicci Turpin DOP*. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GR-UOzewD5A

[5] Turpin, V, 2012, Santam - *Ben Kingsley 'Sir Sneaky' - Vicci Turpin DOP*. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GR-UOzewD5A

[6] Velocity Films Online, 2009, *Allan Gray Beautiful Directed by Keith Rose*. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0VIyaVgqqGE

[7] Arens, W.F., Weigold, M.F. & Arens, C., 2010, *Contemporary Advertising and Integrated Marketing Communications*, McGraw-Hill Higher Education

[8] Kliatchko, J., 2008, 'Revisiting The IMC Construct – A Revised Definition and Four Pillars', in I*nternational Journal of Advertising*, 27(1), 133-160