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The Communication Process



Source: Patrick Ta/Instagram, Inc.

Learning Objectives

LO 5-1 | Describe the communication process and its role in IMC.

- LO 5-2** | Describe the basic model of the communication process.
- LO 5-3** | Discuss the role of word-of-mouth influence and viral marketing.
- LO 5-4** | Analyze receivers' responses to marketing communications and their implications for promotional planning and strategy.
- LO 5-5** | Describe the influence of social media on the consumer decision process.
- LO 5-6** | Discuss consumers' cognitive processing of marketing communications.

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Influencer Marketing Explodes

Marketers have long used influential people to help sell their products and services. When we watch television or read a magazine, many of the ads feature celebrities such as actors, entertainers, or athletes. Companies often pay them large sums of money to attract attention to their advertising messages as well as to have their brands associated with them. However, many marketers are rethinking their use of celebrity endorsers and rather than using them in TV spots, print ads, or billboards, they are paying them to post messages about their brands on social media. And they are giving them large amounts of money to do so.

Hopper HQ, a company that schedules posts on Instagram, created an Instagram Rich list to highlight the top influencers on the social media site along with how much they charge per sponsored post. The Kardashian-Jenner family reigns supreme; three of the sisters made the top 10, with Kylie Jenner taking the top spot at a fee of \$1 million

per post to deliver a message to her 110 million followers. Kim Kardashian receives a cool \$750,000 per post and has 113 million followers; Kendall Jenner pulls down a half a million dollars every time she posts to her 107 million Instagram followers. Three athletes are in the top 10 and they are all international soccer stars—Portugal's Cristian Ronaldo, Brazil's Neymar da Silva Santos, and Lionel Messi from Argentina—who play for teams in the UEFA Champions League. Ronaldo, who receives \$750,000 per post, ranks number 3 on the list with 133 million followers, trailing only singer Selena Gomez, who has 138 million.

Most of the influencers on the Instagram Rich list do not receive the exorbitant fees that the A-list celebrities command, nor do they have tens of millions of followers. However, many of them are making a very nice living as social media influencers as more marketers use viral marketing campaigns that rely on influencers to help drive brand mentions, positive sentiment, and favorable associations for their brands. Social media influencers exist on all of the major social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, and YouTube, as well as on smaller platforms such as Musically. And many of them have their own blogs where they discuss fashion, sports, food, entertainment, business, and myriad other topics and interests.

The use of influencers has increased dramatically in recent years. Surveys have shown that nearly 90 percent of marketers use at least one viral or influencer marketing campaign each year, and nearly three quarters plan to maintain or increase their budgets for influencers. There are several reasons marketers are making influencer campaigns an integral part of their IMC programs. Not only is it difficult to reach consumers through traditional media advertising, it is becoming very challenging to reach them online as well. Nearly half of consumers are now using ad blockers, which means that marketers cannot rely on digital advertising through search, display, and social media to target them. However, it is possible to reach them through the Instagram, Twitter, or Facebook sites of influencers, because that is where many people now spend time when they go online. For example, makeup artist Patrick Ta, whose clients include celebrities such as the Kardashians, Kendall Jenner and Ariana Grande, has more than 1.5 million followers on Instagram.

Marketers view influencers as providing targeted exposure to the right kind of consumer: one who is already interested and likely to pay attention. They are also turning to influencers to leverage the authenticity embedded in the connections they have with their friends and followers on social media. Moreover, these followers don't feel they are being influenced when they scroll through their Facebook or Instagram feeds and look at pictures or videos from their favorite influencer or blogger. Many of the influencers have become very savvy about how to collaborate with marketers and share their experiences with or opinions about a brand in a subtle but effective way.

While the top celebrities and athletes with mega numbers of followers get much of the attention when discussing influencers, many marketers are turning their attention to micro-influencers who may have anywhere from 1,000 to 100,000 followers. This group of influencers includes everyday people, rather than celebrities, who have a real passion or high level of expertise in areas such as fashion, beauty, travel, or fitness, as well as other very specific areas. There are even social media influencers who focus on social media and provide information on how to stay up to date with the latest trends, developments, and content on sites such as LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

There are several reasons many marketers are allocating more of their budgets to micro-bloggers rather than to the macro-influencers with large fan bases. Many experts argue that while micro-bloggers have a smaller following, they often page 144 have higher engagement rates, and their content performs better than the posts of those with large numbers of followers. Research has shown that influencers with 1,000 to 10,000 followers have “like” rates of about 4 percent. This drops to 2.4 percent for those with 10,000 to 100,000 followers, and to just under 2 percent for those with more than a million followers. Many of the macro-influencers with large numbers of followers also have a very diverse fan base, which means marketers may be paying to reach people who are not viable prospects for their brands. However, micro-bloggers usually cater to specific, niche audiences that are very interested in the products, services, or topics and are looking for information to help them make purchase decisions. In addition, micro-bloggers often connect better with their followers, which makes them more trustworthy, authentic, and relatable. A survey by the market research company Collective Bias found that 60 percent of respondents had considered recommendations by a blogger or social media influencer post before making a purchase. The study also found that 20 percent of consumers said they were more likely to buy a product endorsed online by a noncelebrity than by a celebrity. Among millennials, preference for a non celebrity endorsement was 70 percent.

Another reason marketers, particularly those with smaller budgets, are collaborating with micro-bloggers is cost. Micro-bloggers charge less per post than do influencers with a large following, which makes them more affordable. Influenc.co, a company that connects influencers with brands, studied what influencers charge for a sponsored post and found that those with fewer than 2,000 followers charged an average of \$124 compared to the \$690 by those with 250,000 to 500,000 followers. However, brands will need to partner with a number of micro-influencers to reach a large audience, but the total costs will often still be lower than the fees required to use a macro-blogger.

The use of influencers will continue to grow and become part of the IMC programs for both large and small companies. However, one problem that marketers, as well as social media platforms, are dealing with is measurement of followers, which is an issue for the mega-influencers as well as micro-bloggers. Some influencers purchase followers or use bots, which is a piece of software that follows and unfollows, comments, and likes other accounts automatically to attract attention in the hope that their account will be followed. Follower count is meaningless if a substantial number of an influencer’s audience is fake. There are warning signs that marketers should pay attention to such as a sudden, erratic spike in followers, which indicates the influencer has purchased followers in order to command a higher price per post.

Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have been responding to pressure to eradicate the bots, but the problem is far from being solved. Ultimately, the influencers themselves must recognize that consumers’ willingness to follow them—as well as marketers’ willingness to use them—depends on their ability to build and maintain an active, authentic, and engaged audience of *real* followers.

Sources: Sarah Penny, “How Brands Can Spot Influencers with Fake Followers” *Marketing Week*, November 12, 2018, <https://www.marketingweek.com/2018/11/12/fake-followers-influencers/>; Myelle Lansat, “The 75 Celebrities and Influencers Who Make the Most Money per Instagram Post,

Ranked," *Business Insider*, September 27, 2018, <https://www.businessinsider.com/celebrities-influencers-who-make-the-most-money-instagram-2018-9>; Tamara E. Holmes, "Micro-Influencers: How Small Businesses Sidestep Traditional Advertising to Grow Sales," *USA Today*, March 29, 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/small-business/2018/03/29/micro-influencers-how-small-businesses-sidestep-traditional-advertising-grow-sales/465217002/>; "Micro, Not Macro: Rethinking Influencer Marketing," *Advertising Age*, December 12, 2016, <https://adage.com/article/digitalnext/micro-macro-influencer-marketing-kim-kardashian/307118>.

The function of all elements of the integrated marketing communications program is to communicate. An organization's IMC strategy is implemented through the various communications it sends to current or prospective customers as well as other relevant publics. Organizations send communications and messages in a variety of ways, such as through advertisements, brand names, logos and graphic systems, websites, press releases, package designs, promotions, and visual images. As was discussed in the chapter opener, companies are developing more innovative ways to communicate with consumers and deliver their marketing messages, as it is becoming increasingly difficult to do so through traditional media.

The way marketers communicate with their target audiences depends on many factors, including how much current and/or potential customers know and what they think about a company or brand and the image it page 145 hopes to create. Those involved in the planning and implementation of an IMC program need to understand the communication process and what it means in terms of how they create, deliver, manage, and evaluate messages about a company or brand. Developing an effective marketing communications program is far more complicated than just choosing a product feature or attribute to emphasize. Marketers must understand how consumers will perceive and interpret their messages and how these reactions will shape consumers' responses to the company and/or its product or service. And as the use of social media becomes more prevalent, it is important that marketers understand how consumers communicate with one another and how they can participate in and even influence these conversations.

This chapter reviews the fundamentals of communication and examines various perspectives and models regarding how consumers respond to

advertising and promotional messages. Our goal is to demonstrate how valuable an understanding of the communication process can be in planning, implementing, and evaluating the marketing communications program.

THE NATURE OF COMMUNICATION

LO 5-1

Communication has been variously defined as the passing of information, the exchange of ideas, or the process of establishing a commonness or oneness of thought between a sender and a receiver.¹ These definitions suggest that for communication to occur, there must be some common thinking between two parties and information must be passed from one person to another (or from one group to another). As you will see in this chapter, establishing this commonality in thinking is not always as easy as it might seem; many attempts to communicate are unsuccessful.

The communication process is often very complex. Success depends on such factors as the nature of the message, the audience's interpretation of it, and the environment in which it is received. The receiver's perception of the source and the medium used to transmit the message may also affect the ability to communicate, as do many other factors. Words, pictures, sounds, and colors may have different meanings to different audiences, and people's perceptions and interpretations of them vary. For example, if you ask for a soda on the East Coast or West Coast, you'll receive a soft drink such as Coke or Pepsi. However, in parts of the Midwest and South, a soft drink is referred to as pop. If you ask for a soda, you may get a glass of pop with ice cream in it. Marketers must understand the meanings that words and symbols take on and how they influence consumers' interpretation of products and messages.

Language is one of the major barriers to effective communication; there are different languages in different countries, different languages or dialects within a single country, and subtler problems of linguistic nuance and vernacular. The growth of bilingual, multicultural ethnic markets in the

United States is also creating challenges for domestic marketers. For example, while many marketers are recognizing the importance of appealing to the Hispanic market, they find that communicating with this fast-growing segment can be very challenging. They have to decide whether to use ads with a Hispanic-focused creative, dub or remake general market campaigns into Spanish, or run English-language ads and hope that they will be picked up by bilingual Hispanics. Many companies are creating ads specifically for the Hispanic market. Exhibit 5–1 shows an ad the California Milk Processor Board developed to target Hispanic consumers. Notice how the message in the ad focuses on how milk goes well with family traditions.

XHIBIT 5–1

This outdoor ad for milk targets Hispanic consumers by appealing to love for family.

Source: *The California Milk Advisory Board*



Communication can be particularly challenging to companies marketing their products and services abroad because mistranslations and faulty word choices have often created problems for companies in foreign markets. International marketers must also be aware of the connotations of the words, signs, symbols, and expressions they use as brand names or logos in various forms of promotion. Also, advertising copy, slogans, images, and symbols do not always transfer well into other languages. This not only impedes communication but also sometimes results in embarrassing blunders that can damage a company's or a brand's credibility or image. The challenges marketers face in using advertising and other IMC tools for international marketing are discussed in Chapter 19.

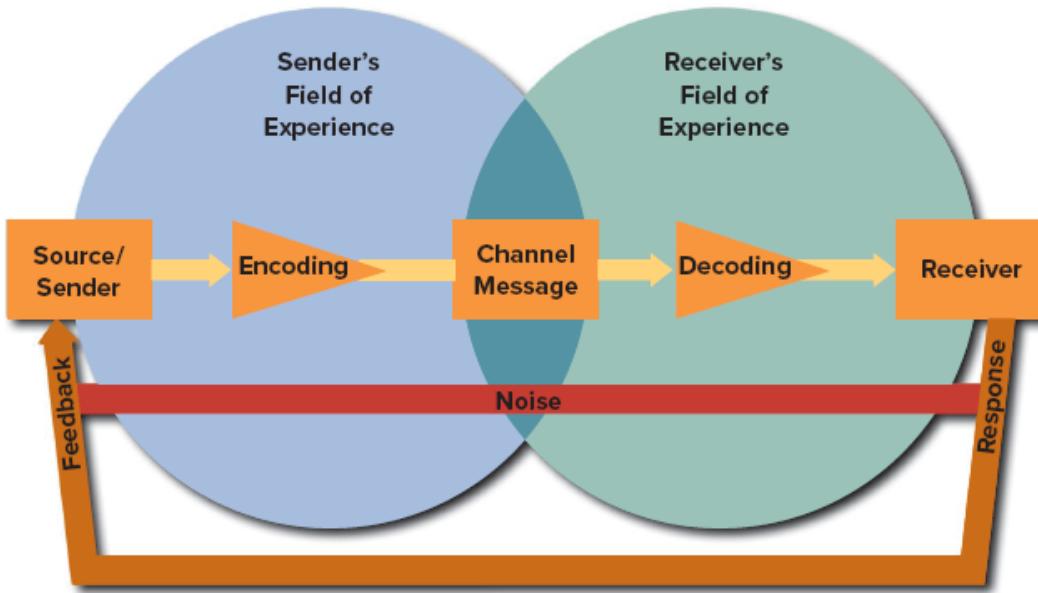
BASIC MODEL OF COMMUNICATION

LO 5-2

Over the years, a basic model of the various elements of the communication process has evolved, as shown in Figure 5–1.² Two elements represent the major participants in the communication process: the sender and the receiver. Another two are the major communication tools: message and channel. Four others are the major communication functions and processes: encoding, decoding, response, and feedback. The last element, noise, refers to any extraneous factors in the system that can interfere with the process and work against effective communication.

FIGURE 5–1

A Model of the Communication Process



Source Encoding

The sender, or **source**, of a communication is the person or organization that has information to share with another person or group of people. The source may be an individual (say, a salesperson or hired spokesperson, such as a celebrity, who appears in a company's advertisements) or a nonpersonal entity (such as the corporation or organization itself). For example, the source of many ads is the company, since no specific spokesperson or source is shown. However, many companies use a spokesperson to appear in their ads and to deliver their advertising messages. In some cases, a popular spokesperson can play a very important role in attracting attention to a company's advertising and delivering the message, as well as influencing how well it is received by the target audience. For example, the Citizen Watch Company has featured a variety of athletes and celebrities as brand ambassadors/spokespersons in the "Better Starts Now" global campaign for its Eco-Drive watches. Exhibit 5–2 shows one of the ads from the campaign featuring singer Kelly Clarkson.

Singer Kelly Clarkson is a source in this ad for Citizen Eco-Drive watches.

Source: Citizen Watch Company of America, Inc.

The advertisement features a portrait of singer Kelly Clarkson with long, wavy blonde hair. She is wearing a black lace top and a large, ornate Citizen Eco-Drive watch with a rose gold case, white dial, and a two-tone bracelet. The watch is labeled "Ceramic 32 Diamonds". In the bottom left corner of the photo, there is a signature that reads "© 2010 Citizen Watch Company Kelly Clarkson Three-Time Grammy Award Winner". Below the photo, there is a small vertical text "dCitizenWatch" followed by a Facebook icon and the text "CitizenWatch". To the right of the photo, the Citizen logo is displayed with the tagline "BETTER STARTS NOW".

Because the receiver's perceptions of the source influence how the communication is received, marketers must be careful to select a communicator the receiver believes is knowledgeable and trustworthy or with whom the receiver can identify or relate in some manner. (How these characteristics influence the receiver's responses is discussed further in Chapter 6.)

The communication process begins when the source selects words, symbols, pictures, and the like to represent the message that will be

delivered to the receiver(s). This process, known as **encoding**, involves putting thoughts, ideas, or information into a symbolic form. The sender's goal is to encode the message in such a way that it will be understood by the receiver. This means using words, signs, or symbols that are familiar to the target audience. Many symbols have universal meaning, such as the familiar circle with a line through it to denote no parking, no smoking, and so forth. Many companies also have highly recognizable logos—such as McDonald's golden arches, Nike's swoosh, or the Coca-Cola trademark—that are known to consumers around the world. Marketers must pay very close attention to the symbols associated with their company or brand such as logos as they often become a shorthand way for consumers to identify them. In some cases marketers may change their logos as way of sending a different message to consumers. For example, Starbucks changed its logo and dropped the green ring with the text "Starbucks Coffee" to more prominently display its iconic siren. The change was made to help consumers "think beyond coffee" when they see the Starbucks logo because the company is broadening its strategic focus to include other product categories.³ The change was also made so the logo would work in countries that do not use Western letters. In some cases consumers may become very attached to a company's logo and react negatively when they change it. The Gap experienced this a few years ago when the retail chain introduced a redesigned logo that it felt was more contemporary. Responses to the new logo on social media were very negative and Gap returned to its old design after just four days.⁴ Digital and Social Media Perspective 5–1 discusses the role of logos and how they have become increasingly important in the digital era.

Message

The encoding process leads to development of a **message** that contains the information or meaning the source hopes to convey. The message may be verbal or nonverbal, oral or written, or symbolic. Messages must be put into a transmittable form that is appropriate for the channel of communication being used. In advertising, this may range from simply writing some words or copy that will be read as a radio message to producing an expensive television commercial. For many products, it is not the actual words of the

message that determine its communication effectiveness but rather the impression or image the ad creates. Notice how the Coach ad shown in Exhibit 5–3 uses only a picture to deliver its message. However, the use of the brand name and picture is an effective way to communicate [page 148](#) Coach's intended message of aspirational heritage mixed with an urban attitude. The ad is part of a campaign for the new Coach 1941 luxury line of handbags, apparel, and footwear which it describes as reinventing luxury and authenticity for a new generation.⁵

XHIBIT 5–3

The image projected by an ad often communicates more than words.

Source: Coach, Inc.



Digital and Social Media
Perspective 5–1 > > >

Logos in the Digital Age

Before reading any further, pause for a moment and think about the logos used by well-known companies and brands. Which ones come to mind and are your favorites? Perhaps it is Nike's swoosh, McDonald's golden arches, or Starbuck's siren. In a recent survey, the brand strategy and design firm Siegel+Gale asked 3,000 people in the United States and United Kingdom to name the most memorable brand marks. Four companies received the majority of the votes: Nike (16 percent), Apple (15.6 percent), McDonald's (11.1 percent), and Coca-Cola (9.7 percent). Logos for some of the other leading global brands such as Google, Microsoft, Amazon, and Adidas all received less than 3 percent.

Nike's famous swoosh, considered the most recognizable logo in the world, was created in 1971 by Carolyn Davidson, a graphic design student at Portland State University, for the company then known as Blue Ribbon Sports. Company founder Phil Knight contacted her to design a logo, telling her only that he wanted "something that evokes a sense of motion." Davidson produced a number of design sketches, and eventually Knight settled on the swoosh, which he thought looked like something a runner might leave in his or her wake. In his memoir book, *Shoe Dog*, Knight writes that he was not crazy about it but lacked the time and budget to develop another logo. A short time later, Knight changed the name of the company to Nike, after the Greek goddess of victory, and launched his athletic shoe brand with the swoosh on the side. Davidson was paid \$35 for her 17 hours of work and went on her way, although she continued to do some design work for the company.

The use of a logo or visual symbol to distinguish one maker's wares from another has been around for hundreds of years. However, over the years, the practical notion of a logo or trademark as something that identifies the source of a product or service evolved into a more abstract idea of corporate identity. Companies began viewing logos and other visual communication elements as capturing the essence of their brand and adding value to it. They also became very protective of them, developing *standards manuals*, which delineate in very precise detail how company or brand names, logos, and other forms of visual communication can be used.

One of the reasons marketers are so protective of their logos is that consumers often develop an emotional attachment to them, which can factor into their perceptions of a company or brand as well as their purchase decisions. Marketers also can face backlash when they make changes to them. A logo or other type of package design change can create trust issues among consumers as they wonder if what is inside has changed as well. For example, PepsiCo decided to change the symbol on the packaging of its popular Tropicana orange juice brand from its longtime image of an orange with a straw protruding from it to a more modern and abstract design showing an image of juice in a glass. Consumers complained about the makeover in letters, e-mails, and phone calls, arguing that it made Tropicana look like a generic or store brand and clamored for a return to the original design. After a 20 percent decline in sales in one month, PepsiCo bowed to public demand and returned to the original package design.

The way marketers think about logos has also changed, particularly for digital technology companies—such as Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, Uber, Airbnb, and

Amazon—whose services are accessed primarily through apps on smartphones and whose logos are viewed every time a user swipes through a screen. These companies have become *interaction-design-centric* when developing logos and other visual symbols to make them functional as well as aesthetic. A logo or name on a digital device must be more than a branding element; it must be easy to recognize on a small screen where it may be one of many icons.

An example of a digital company that carefully considers how its logo functions on smartphones is Uber, the leader in the ride-sharing market. Over the 10 years it has been in business, Uber has redesigned its logos several times, with each being a variation of the letter U. In 2016, Uber unveiled a new logo design—a small rectangle within a circle with the two elements connected by a thin line. The idea was to create a pure and simple symbol that could be used for the decade and would page 149 work in global markets, where the U letterform has no meaning.

However, just two years later, after ousting its controversial founder Travis Kalanick as CEO, Uber changed its logo once again as part of a global rebranding effort designed to communicate a new set of ideals: safety, accessibility, and global ambitions. The new logo shows the Uber name in white letters against a black background with only the letter U capitalized. The creative director at Wolff Olins, the global brand consultancy that led the rebranding efforts, explained the rationale behind the change. “It makes ‘Uber’ more legible to everyone, as it’s easier to read letters of different shapes and sizes—and crucially, it enhances the difference between the first and last letters of the word, which your brain scans first, and keeps words legible even when misspelled.”



slyyellow/Shutterstock

Some branding experts argue that while the design of a logo is important, it is really the “logo lockup”—or its use in the context of advertising messages, sponsorships, and other forms of marketing communication—that makes it recognizable and meaningful.

Debbie Millman, one of the leading designers and host of the podcast *Design Matters*, notes, “it’s not the mark, but rather the marketing” that allows a logo such as the Nike swoosh to stand on its own. However, some companies do achieve the holy grail for their logos, which is the ability to be recognized outside of the logo lockup pairing. For example, in early 2019, Mastercard changed its logo by removing its name from the interlocking red and yellow circles. The change was part of a shift in branding strategy in preparation for a post–credit card world where digital payments will dominate. The company’s chief marketing and communications officer explained the change by noting: “Reinvention in the digital age calls for modern simplicity. And with more than 80 percent of people spontaneously recognizing the Mastercard symbol without the word ‘mastercard,’ we felt ready to take this step into our brand evolution.”

Redesigning logos and other visual communication elements can be very expensive and often requires a great deal of time and effort. For example, Mastercard conducted nearly two years of research to make sure people could identify its wordless logo. Tech companies such as Uber also go through a long, iterative process that includes extensive user research when redesigning their logos. However, at the other extreme are companies like Snap whose founder, Evan Spiegel, said he designed the original Snapchat logo, which features a white ghost against a yellow background on his personal computer one evening in his dorm room. Spiegel chose the background color after researching the top 100 apps and noticing that none of them were using yellow.

After reading this, you might be feeling bad for Carolyn Davidson, who received only \$35 for designing Nike’s iconic logo. If so, you will be happy to know that she was eventually honored by Nike and given a generous amount of stock in the company (estimated to be worth nearly \$1 million) as well as a diamond and gold ring featuring the swoosh design.

Sources: Mike Snider, “Mastercard Ditches Letters for Its New Logo in Iconic Brand Move,” *USA Today*, January 8, 2019, p. B1; Mark Wilson, “Uber Has a New Design. Again,” *Fast Company*, September 12, 2018, <https://www.fastcompany.com/90235065/uber-has-a-new-brand-again>; Rob Walker, “How Logos Became the Most Important Quarter-Inch in Business,” *Fortune*, June 16, 2017, <http://fortune.com/2017/06/16/business-logos-evolution-importance/>; “The \$35 Nike Logo and the Woman Who Designed It,” *Creative Market*, May 2, 2016, <https://creativemarket.com/blog/the-35-nike-logo-and-the-woman-who-designed-it>.

Marketers must make decisions regarding the *content* of the messages they send to consumers as well as the *structure* and *design* of these messages. Content refers to the information and/or meaning contained in the message while structure and design refer to the way the message is put together in order to deliver the information or intended meaning. More attention will be given to issues regarding message appeal and structure in the next chapter. Message design is discussed in the chapters on creative strategy (Chapters 8 and 9).

Channel

LO 5-3

The **channel** is the method by which the communication travels from the source or sender to the receiver. At the broadest level, channels of communication are of two types: nonpersonal and personal. *Nonpersonal channels* of communication are those that carry a message without direct, interpersonal contact between the sender and receiver. Nonpersonal channels are generally referred to as the **mass media** or mass communications, since the message they contain is directed to more than one person and is often sent to many individuals at one time. For example, a TV commercial broadcast on a prime-time show may be seen by 10 million people in a given evening, while a print ad appearing in a popular magazine may be seen by millions of readers over the course of a week or month.

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Nonpersonal channels of communication consist of two major types: print and broadcast. Print media include newspapers, magazines, direct mail, and billboards; broadcast media include radio and television. The Internet has characteristics of both nonpersonal as well as personal forms of communication. It has become a mass-media vehicle as it is now an important source of information for most consumers and many advertising messages are delivered through various forms of online advertising including banner ads, videos, paid search, and ads on social media sites. In many ways the Internet is nonpersonal in nature because consumers are often just consuming the information or content provided online and there is no personal contact between them and the companies that disseminate this information on their website or through online advertising. However, the Internet is increasingly becoming a form of personal communication since consumers can interact with marketers online as well as communicate and share information with one another through the use of various forms of social media.

Personal channels involve direct communication between two or more persons and can occur through interpersonal contact (face-to-face) or via other methods such as e-mail or through social media. Salespeople serve as personal channels of communication when they deliver a selling message or presentation to a buyer or potential customer. A major advantage of personal channels of communication is that the message or presentation can be tailored to the individual or audience, and the sender receives direct feedback from them. Members of one's social networks, such as friends, neighbors, associates, co-workers, or family members, are also personal channels of communication. They often represent **word-of-mouth (WOM)** influence that involves informal communication among consumers about products and services and is a very powerful source of information.⁶

The way WOM occurs in a marketing context has changed over the years with the emergence of the Internet and social media in particular. Andrew Baker and Naveen Donthu note that there are different forms of word-of-mouth in marketing including WOM conversation, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), online reviews, and engineered WOM.⁷ *WOM conversations* involve an interactive dialogue between two or more consumers about a marketing-relevant topic with no apparent motive for either party. *Electronic word-of-mouth* is the transmission of information or consumer sentiment about a marketing-relevant topic using a digital device such as a computer or smartphone. This form of WOM generally occurs through social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. *Online reviews* are a consumer's evaluation of a marketplace offering submitted through an online platform purposefully designed to aggregate such evaluations. *Engineered WOM* occurs if there is an explicit commercial motive for a consumer to engage in a word-of-mouth conversation such as to earn some type of reward. Social media influencers who receive product samples or other rewards to share information or sway opinions about a brand is an example of engineered WOM that is often considered to be *artificial* in nature.

Many marketers work hard to generate positive word-of-mouth for their companies or brands using one or more of these forms of WOM. For example, a marketer may encourage consumers to discuss their product or service with other consumers in person, on social media, or by rating and/or writing a review about it on a site such as Yelp or Amazon. However, with

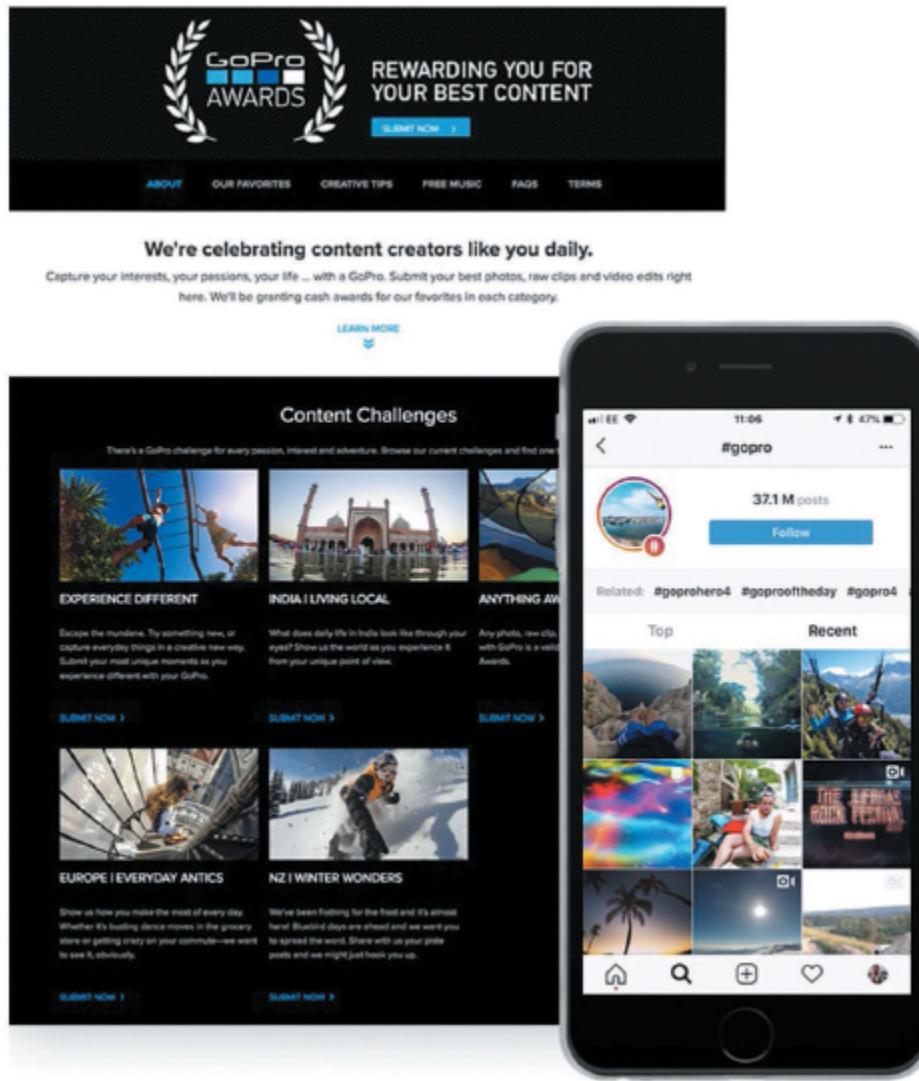
the growth of digital and social media, many marketers are using engineered WOM to bring attention to or generate discussion about their company or brands. **Buzz marketing** is a term used to describe word-of-mouth communication about a company, its products, services, and/or brands, as well as its advertising messages, and is often encouraged by a marketer. Efforts by marketers to generate word-of-mouth discussion about their brands is really nothing new, as tactics such as handing out samples and providing products to influential people and encouraging them to recommend the brand to others have been used for many years. For example, alcoholic beverage marketers have long understood the value of getting bartenders and servers to hype their brands, while pharmaceutical companies often encourage influential physicians to discuss the benefits of their products with peers.

Viral Marketing In the era of digital media, traditional word-of-mouth and buzz marketing techniques have given way to more systematic and organized efforts to encourage people to speak favorably about a [page 151](#) company or brand and to recommend it to others in their social network. Many marketers are using **viral marketing**, which refers to the act of propagating marketing-relevant messages through the help and cooperation of individual consumers.⁸ Marketers, along with their agencies, work to draw attention to their brands in a variety of ways such as encouraging consumers to create user-generated content (UGC)—pictures, videos, product usage ideas—that can be shared with others on their websites or through social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. For example, GoPro uses viral marketing successfully by encouraging its loyal users to upload their best and most inspirational videos and photos to social media sites such as Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram using the dedicated #GoPro hashtag. User-generated content captured using a GoPro camera can be entered into various challenges and contests where creators are rewarded with cash prizes and merchandise (Exhibit 5–4). Go Pro also re-posts its “Photo of the Day” to Instagram to recognize work submitted by its users and has more nearly 7 million subscribers to its YouTube channel.⁹

XHIBIT 5–4

GoPro encourages users of its camera to share content such as videos and pictures.

Source: GoPro, Inc.



Successful viral marketing can be very difficult to achieve, as the process is affected by many factors that are often beyond a marketer's control. Researchers have identified three major factors that affect the success of a viral marketing program: message characteristics, individual sender or receiver characteristics, and social network characteristics.¹⁰ Message characteristics relate to the content and creative design of a viral message and include factors such as whether the information is entertaining, engaging, novel, humorous, and/or informative. For example, many videos and commercials have a strong viral component that make them popular and

encourage consumers to watch as well share them. One of the most shared ads in recent years was a commercial for Amazon's Echo smart speaker called "Alexa loses her voice." The entertaining spot shows a world gone awry when the voice of the personal assistant device loses its voice and the company replaces her with celebrities such as actress Rebel Wilson, rapper Cardi B., actor Anthony Hopkins, and international chef Gordon Ramsey. The ad was the most popular commercial on the 2018 Super Bowl and the most talked about campaign on Twitter before and after the game, with 720,000 mentions. Over the next 10 months, the commercial was viewed over 50 million times on YouTube, making it the most-viewed ad of the year.¹¹

In addition to the message, characteristics of the individual consumer also play an important role in the viral marketing process. Factors such as demographics, personality traits, and motivation for sharing content and messages as well as receiving them impact the effectiveness of viral campaigns.¹² For example, female and younger consumers tend to exert more influence on their target recipients and be more susceptible to viral influences than do male and older consumers, while traits such as extroversion, innovativeness, and altruism are related to tendencies to share messages.¹³ Insight into motivations for social sharing comes from a study done by Unruly, an ad marketing technology company that focuses on what is watched and shared online. Its analysis of over 430 billion video views and 100,000 consumer data points revealed that the two most powerful drivers of viral success are psychological response (how the content makes you feel) and social motivation (why you want to share it).¹⁴ Unruly has identified 10 motivations for social sharing, which are shown in Figure 5–2.

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FIGURE 5–2

Motivations for Social Sharing of Videos

Source: Adapted from "Why Some Videos Go Viral" from *Harvard Business Review*, September 2015. <https://hbr.org/2015/09/why-some-videos-go-viral>.

Opinion Seeking

I want to see what my friends think

Shared Passion	It lets me connect with my friends about a shared interest
Conversation Starting	I want to start an online conversation
Social Utility	This could be useful to my friends
Self-Expression	It says something about me
Social in Real Life	It will help me socialize with my friends offline
Social Good	It's for a good cause and I want to help
Zeitgeist	It's about a current trend or event
Kudos: Authority	I want to demonstrate my knowledge
Kudos: Cool Hunting	I want to be the first to tell my friends

With regard to social network characteristics, the structure of networks through which a message spreads as well as the consumers' position in the social network, as defined by relationships with others, can influence the diffusion of a viral message. Many marketers try to identify individuals who are very influential in various social media domains, such as bloggers and persons with a large number of Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter fans and followers; then they work hard to get their messages to them in hopes that they pass them on to others in their social network.

Another important aspect of viral marketing is what is often referred to as **seeding**, which involves identifying and choosing the initial group of consumers who will be used to start the diffusion or spreading of a message.¹⁵ Companies that utilize viral marketing must develop a *seeding strategy*, which involves determining how many initial consumers or “seeds” are needed and selecting the right consumers to start the viral process. For example, Jeep developed a social media campaign to promote its Wrangler SUV to a segment of the millennial market—adventurous young professionals who are ready to purchase their first mid-priced vehicle. To reach them, the company teamed up with a group of professional surfers, photographers, and

social influencers during the World Surf League event in Hawaii. As part of the viral campaign, Jeep had them post pictures and videos on Instagram and share them using the hashtag #JeepWSL. The goal of the campaign was to associate the Wrangler with the surfing event and position it as the right vehicle for those interested in adventure and chasing experiences.¹⁶

There are advertising agencies and other companies that specialize in working with clients to develop viral marketing programs. Some companies are also building web communities so consumers can chat about their product experiences online. For example, Procter & Gamble, which is one of the world's largest advertisers, operates a word-of-mouth brand community called Vocalpoint to reach the most influential group of shoppers in America: moms. Recently P&G has broadened the focus of Vocalpoint to include women aged 28 to 45 and now has more than 670,000 members. These women are very involved with their social networks through social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and various blogs and speak or interact with a number of other women during a typical day. P&G has also used the success of Vocalpoint to develop a new brand community called Orgullosa that targets Spanish-speaking women in the United States. Vocalpoint and Orgullosa are the flagship brand communities for P&G and are likely to be used as models for reaching other target audiences in the future (Exhibit 5–5).

XHIBIT 5–5

Vocalpoint and Orgullosa are online communities where women can share information about products and various issues.

Source: Procter & Gamble



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Integrating Word of Mouth with IMC While viral techniques have become a popular way to generate buzz about a brand, research conducted by the Keller Fay Group—a market research company that focuses on word-of-mouth marketing—has shown that some 90 percent of conversations about products, services, and brands take place offline.¹⁷ Face-to-face interaction accounts for the vast majority of word-of-mouth communications (75 percent) about a brand; phone conversations rank second (15 percent). Only 10 percent of word of mouth takes place through online channels such as e-mail/instant messages, blogs, and chat rooms. Their research also shows that nearly half the word-of-mouth conversations contained references to the various IMC tools used for a brand, including print and television ads, websites, and other marketing tools such as point-of-sale displays and promotions.

Another important finding was that word-of-mouth conversations influenced by advertising are significantly more likely to involve recommendations to buy or try a brand when compared to other WOM-induced discussions about brands. Moreover, these WOM discussions are

very powerful, as consumers ascribe a high credibility to the information they hear from others; 50 percent say they are very likely to buy as a result of these conversations.¹⁸

Subsequent research by Keller Fay has found that the role of advertising in WOM is even stronger, as a quarter of all consumer conversations about brands involve discussions about advertising. And of the brand conversations in which consumers talk about advertising, television advertising is the most prevalent form, which is not surprising given that more money is spent on TV ads than any other medium. However, collectively, other forms of advertising including magazines, newspapers, the Internet, radio, and outdoor are about equal with respect to generating conversations about advertising, which suggests that a variety of IMC tools can be used to drive word of mouth.¹⁹

These findings are very important from an integrated marketing communications perspective in several respects. First, they show that there can be powerful “pass-along” benefits from consumers talking favorably about a brand and referencing various elements of its IMC program. However, with consumers being bombarded by so many irrelevant marketing messages each day, it is very difficult to get them to talk about them. Thus, marketers must develop creative advertisements and other forms of communication that can trigger conversations and are worthy of sharing. They also reinforce the importance of marketers recognizing that all of the IMC elements work in unison to impact how consumers perceive a brand and the word-of-mouth discussion that is generated by it. The fact that consumers appear to be influenced the most by their conversations with other people shows that marketers need to find ways to favorably influence these interactions. However, as Keller and Fay note, since most WOM discussions take place offline, marketers cannot rely only on social media to drive these conversations; they need to deploy a more robust set of IMC tools to drive brand advocacy.²⁰

Marketers must be careful about the assumptions they make when using buzz marketing techniques. For example, a study conducted by David Godes and Diane Mayzlin on the effects of a word-of-mouth campaign for a chain store examined the characteristics of the most successful “agents” so that firms could better understand at whom they should target their buzz marketing

efforts.²¹ They found that agents who were not loyal customers of the store were more effective at generating sales through word of mouth than were loyal customers. The explanation offered for these somewhat counterintuitive findings is that loyal customers have already told their friends and acquaintances about a product and are already generating positive word of mouth. On the other hand, nonloyal customers may be more responsive to buzz marketing campaigns designed to encourage them to spread the word about a product. However, marketers still have to identify the best generators of buzz among both loyal and nonloyal customers such as those who are considered opinion leaders by their peers and “social butterflies” who have a high propensity to meet new people and connect with friends.

While the use of buzz and viral marketing campaigns is becoming more prevalent, concern has been expressed over its use and whether the person spreading the product message should disclose his or her affiliation. The Word of Mouth Marketing Association was formed in 2004 to page 154 promote and improve the use of word-of-mouth marketing and protect consumers and the industry by providing ethical guidelines for its use. WOMMA has developed a set of rules and guidelines that mandate that marketers must make sure that people recommending products or services disclose whom they are working for. Gary Ruskin, the former executive director of Commercial Alert, a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting consumers from commercial exploitation, notes that without such disclosures there is “a danger of the basic commercialization of human relations, where friends treat one another as advertising pawns, undercutting social trust.”²²

Experts note that viral marketing techniques are very resistant to manipulation and marketers must be careful about how they use them. Several companies have had viral marketing campaigns backfire when consumers recognized that the companies were artificially trying to promote buzz for their brands. Some argue that the growing popularity of viral marketing could well spell its downfall, because when consumers recognize that everyone is trying to create a buzz for their brand, they are likely to be turned off to the technique.²³ However, with the growth of social media and consumers becoming less attentive to and interested in traditional media advertising, it is likely that marketers will continue to seek ways to develop and deliver

branded content and messages that consumers will share with one another. This will extend the reach and impact of their marketing messages and may add an implicit consumer endorsement as well.

The effective use of viral marketing requires that marketers take a strategic approach in the development and implementation of campaigns that are designed to have strong WOM and viral components. For example, Keller and Fay note that marketers should think in terms of social consumers rather than just social media and focus on the stories that consumers share with one another about a brand or a product or service category to ensure that there is a good fit between the consumer story and the brand story. They also suggest that it is the job of brand strategists to identify the people who are most likely to talk about their brand or category and seek to understand when, where, and why people talk.²⁴

It is also important for marketers to recognize that online and offline conversation channels often work independently of one another, and strategies and tactics may be needed for each. Fay and Larkin analyzed over a decade's worth of research to determine if there are relationships between online and offline conversations and found almost no correlations between the two. They concluded that the online and offline worlds behave like separate ecosystems, with their own features and characteristics. Thus, marketers should make the mistake of assuming that a social media strategy can substitute for a social influence strategy through offline word-of-mouth conversations.²⁵

Receiver/Decoding

The **receiver** is the person(s) with whom the sender shares thoughts or information. Generally, receivers are the consumers in the target market or audience who read, hear, and/or see the marketer's message and decode it. **Decoding** is the process of transforming the sender's message back into thought. This process is heavily influenced by the receiver's frame of reference or **field of experience**, which refers to the experiences, perceptions, attitudes, and values he or she brings to the communication situation.

For effective communication to occur, the message decoding process of the receiver must match the encoding of the sender. Simply put, this means the receiver understands and correctly interprets what the source is trying to communicate. As Figure 5–1 showed, the source and the receiver each have a frame of reference (the circle around each) that they bring to the communication situation. Effective communication is more likely when there is some *common ground* between the two parties. (This is represented by the overlapping of the two circles.) The more knowledge the sender has about the receivers, the better the sender can understand their needs, empathize with them, and communicate effectively. Exhibit 5–6 shows an ad for the Pew Environmental Group’s Campaign for America’s Wilderness that uses the concept of common ground by noting how both Republicans and Democrats agree on the importance of protecting the American page 155wilderness by passing legislation to give permanent protection to wilderness land in 13 states.

XHIBIT 5–6

This ad uses the concept of common ground.

(d) Source: The PEW Charitable Trusts; (photo): Courtesy of Ken Stinnett Photography

Something both parties can agree on ...

Wilderness Is Our Common Ground.

More than twenty wilderness bills are now before Congress, thanks to Republicans and Democrats alike. Together, these bills would give permanent protection to more than two million acres of breathtaking landscapes in thirteen states – from Washington State's Alpine Lakes to Idaho's Boulder-White Clouds to Tennessee's Upper Bald River.*

Hunters, anglers, business leaders, conservationists and other local citizens who've worked together to get these measures this far are counting on Congress to take action before it adjourns.

Photo: New Mexico's Organ Mountains, one of the many wilderness areas awaiting protection by Congress. © Ken Stinnell

Act Now to Expand Our Wilderness Legacy.



LeaveItWild.org

*Alpine Lakes Wilderness Additions and Pothole and Middle Park Scenic Rivers Protection Act (H.R. 1799/S.721) – Rep. David Reichert (R-WA) and Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA); Central Idaho Economic Development and Recreation Act (H.R. 5202) – Rep. Mike Simpson (R-ID); Tennessee Wilderness Act of 2010 (S.3470) – Sens. Lamar Alexander and Bob Corker (R-TN).

While this notion of common ground between sender and receiver may sound basic, it often causes great difficulty in the advertising communications process. Marketing and advertising people often have very different fields of experience from the consumers who constitute the mass markets with whom they must communicate. Most are college-educated and work and/or reside in large urban areas such as New York, Chicago, or Los Angeles. Many of them are young, fashionable, upwardly mobile people with busy professional and social lives, avid interest in music and movies and the latest clubs and restaurants, and few distractions like children or elderly parents who need looking after. Yet they are often creating ads that must communicate with millions of consumers who have never attended college, work in blue-collar

occupations, and/or live in rural areas or small towns. The executive creative director of a large advertising agency described how advertising executives become isolated from the cultural mainstream: “We pull them in and work them to death. And then they begin moving in sushi circles and lose touch with Velveeta and the people who eat it.”²⁶

Another factor that can lead to problems in establishing common ground between senders and receivers is age. As the population of the United States and many other countries grows older, concern has been expressed over the potential problems that might arise because of age differences between advertising agency personnel and older consumers. It has long been argued that there is a youth bias in advertising and related industries.²⁷ The claim is that marketers are fixated with reaching younger consumers while paying less attention to those over the age of 50, despite the fact that older consumers control half of the wealth, spend trillions of dollars on products and services each year, and comprise a large percentage of the population in most countries. Studies have shown that professionals working in advertising agencies in the United States, as well as other countries, are much younger than the adult population. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 63 percent of the workers in advertising, public relations, and related services are under the age of 45, with a media age of 39. The youth bias is particularly evident in creative departments because many of those who work in this area are under the age of 40.

There are several reasons agencies hire younger personnel. One reason is basic economics: Younger employees cost less, and in an industry notorious for taking every opportunity to cut costs, a 20-year veteran copywriter is more expensive than a recent college graduate. (That younger, less experienced employees are paid less is, of course, true in most industries, not just advertising.) A second reason is creativity; many agencies feel that younger employees are better suited to creative thinking, especially under tight deadlines and high pressure to perform. A third reason is the digital divide, since much of the bias toward younger workers is the result of the advancements in digital technology that have transformed the industry over the past two decades. Agencies, as well as marketers, are looking for tech-savvy youth who are digital natives and understand how to reach and engage

consumers through mobile marketing, social media and other digital platforms (Exhibit 5–7).

XHIBIT 5–7

Ageism is an issue in the advertising industry.

Jerry King Cartoons



“You use tech language that I don’t understand, so I brought an interpreter.”

Critics argue that most advertising is really about the people who create it, not about the consumers who actually buy the products and services being advertised. It is important that marketers and their agencies understand the frame of reference and perspectives of the consumers in the target markets that are receiving their messages. Many companies spend a considerable amount of time and money pretesting advertising messages to page 156 make sure consumers understand them and decode them in the manner intended. Pretesting advertising messages is discussed in more detail in Chapter 18.

Noise

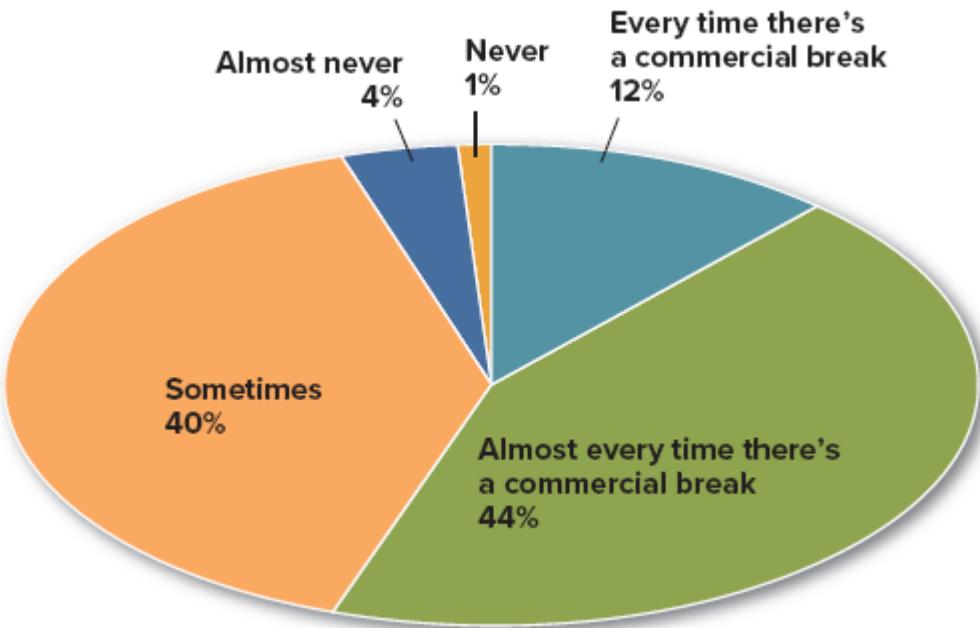
Throughout the communication process, the message is subject to extraneous factors that can distort or interfere with its reception. This unplanned distortion or interference is known as **noise**. Errors or problems that occur in the encoding of the message, distortion in a radio or television signal, and distractions at the point of reception are examples of noise. When you are watching an ad on TV or listening to a radio commercial and a problem occurs in the signal transmission, it will obviously interfere with your reception, lessening the impact of the commercial. Over the past decade a new type of noise has become prevalent in the television viewing environment: the distraction of technology such as laptops, tablets, and mobile phones/smartphones. The majority of people now multitask while watching television, with most of them doing so on a digital device such as a smartphone, tablet, or desktop/laptop computer. Studies by eMarketer have found that nearly three-quarters of the adult population regularly uses another digital device while watching television.²⁸ Several studies have found that completely undistracted viewers are a minority, as only around 10 percent report doing nothing else while watching television.²⁹ Figure 5–3 shows the results of a survey conducted by digital television technology company TiVo, which found that more than 80 percent of respondents multitask almost every time or sometimes during a commercial break. With increased use of mobile devices, it is very likely that multitasking by television viewers is even higher than shown by the TiVo study.

FIGURE 5–3

Frequency of Multitasking by Television Viewers

Note: $n = 856$ ages 18+; numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Source: TiVo, “Second Annual Social Media & Multitasking,” October 16, 2014.



While some types of multitasking involve activities such as reading a magazine or book, the use of digital devices is particularly troublesome for advertisers. A recent study found that nearly half of the marketing executives surveyed feel that consumers being distracted by a second screen is one of the top factors that limit the effectiveness of their television advertising. The vast majority of the executives noted that it has become difficult to capture consumers' attention solely through TV advertising, which is why many marketers are allocating more of their budgets to digital and social media.³⁰

Noise may also occur because the fields of experience of the sender and receiver don't overlap. Lack of common ground may result in improper encoding of the message—using a sign, symbol, or words that are unfamiliar or have different meaning to the receiver. The more common ground there is between the sender and the receiver, the less likely it is this type of noise will occur.

Response/Feedback

The receiver's set of reactions after seeing, hearing, or reading the message is known as a **response**. Receivers' responses can range from nonobservable actions such as storing information in memory to immediate

action such as clicking through an online ad to go to a marketer's landing page or website or dialing a toll-free number to order a product advertised on television. Marketers are very interested in **feedback**, that part page 157 of the receiver's response that is communicated back to the sender.

Feedback, which may take a variety of forms, closes the loop in the communications flow and lets the sender monitor how the intended message is being decoded and received.

For example, in a personal-selling situation, customers may pose questions, comments, or objections or indicate their reactions through nonverbal responses such as gestures and frowns.³¹ The salesperson has the advantage of receiving instant feedback through the customer's reactions. But this is generally not the case when mass media are used. Because advertisers are not in direct contact with the customers, they must use other means to determine how their messages have been received. While the ultimate form of feedback occurs through sales, it is often hard to show a direct relationship between advertising and purchase behavior. So marketers use other methods to obtain feedback, among them customer inquiries, store visits, coupon redemptions, and reply cards. Research-based feedback analyzes readership and recall of ads, message comprehension, attitude change, and other forms of response. With this information, the advertiser can determine reasons for success or failure in the communication process and make adjustments.

Successful communication is accomplished when the marketer selects an appropriate source, develops an effective message or appeal that is encoded properly, and then selects the channels or media that will best reach the target audience so that the message can be effectively decoded and delivered. In Chapter 6, we will examine the source, message, and channel decisions and see how promotional planners work with these controllable variables to develop communication strategies. Since these decisions must consider how the target audience will respond to the promotional message, the remainder of this chapter examines the receiver and the process by which consumers respond to advertising and other forms of marketing communications.

ANALYZING THE RECEIVER

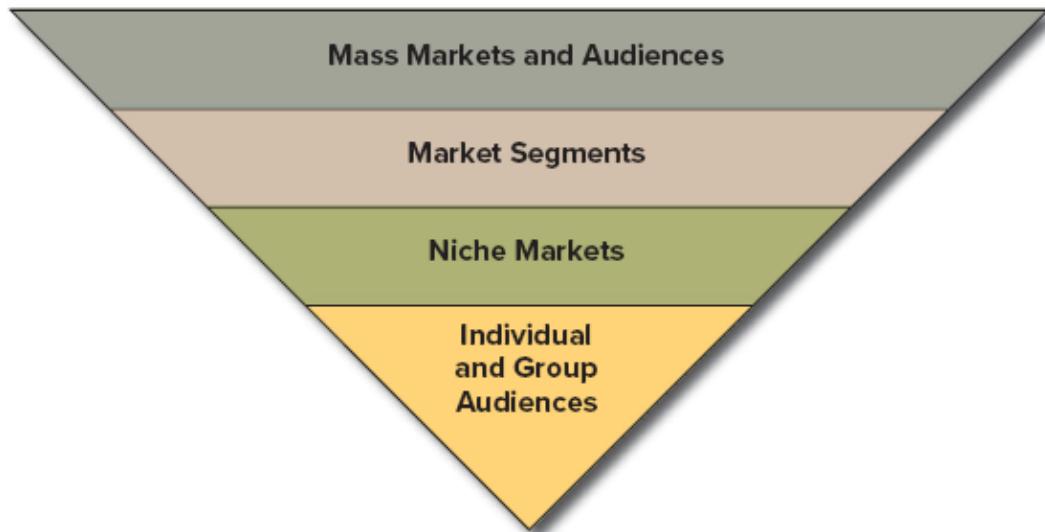
To communicate effectively with their customers, marketers must understand who the target audience is, what (if anything) it knows or feels about the company's product or service, and how to communicate with the audience to influence its decision-making process. Marketers must also know how the market is likely to respond to various sources of communication or different types of messages. Before they make decisions regarding source, message, and channel variables, promotional planners must understand the potential effects associated with each of these factors. This section focuses on the receiver of the marketing communication. It examines how the audience is identified and the process it may go through in responding to a promotional message. This information serves as a foundation for evaluating the controllable communication variable decisions in the next chapter.

Identifying the Target Audience

The marketing communication process really begins with identifying the audience that will be the focus of the firm's advertising and promotional efforts. The target audience may consist of individuals, groups, niche markets, market segments, or a general public or mass audience (Figure 5–4). Marketers approach each of these audiences differently.

FIGURE 5–4

Levels of Audience Aggregation



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The target market may consist of *individuals* who have specific needs and for whom the communication must be specifically tailored. This often requires person-to-person communication and is generally accomplished through personal selling. Other forms of communication, such as advertising, may be used to attract the audience's attention to the firm, but the detailed message is carried by a salesperson who can respond to the specific needs of the individual customer. Life insurance, financial services, and real estate are examples of products and services promoted this way.

A second level of audience aggregation is represented by the *group*. Marketers often must communicate with a group of people who make or influence the purchase decision. For example, organizational purchasing often involves buying centers or committees that vary in size and composition. Companies marketing their products and services to other businesses or organizations must understand who is on the purchase committee, what aspect of the decision each individual influences, and the criteria each member uses to evaluate a product. Advertising and other forms of marketing communication may be directed at each member of the buying center, and multilevel personal selling may be necessary to reach those individuals who influence or actually make decisions.

Marketers look for customers who have similar needs and wants and thus represent some type of market segment that can be reached with the same

basic communication strategy. Very small, well-defined groups of customers are often referred to as *market niches*. They can usually be reached through personal-selling efforts or highly targeted media such as direct mail. The next level of audience aggregation is *market segments*, broader classes of buyers who have similar needs and can be reached with similar messages. As we saw in Chapter 2, there are various ways of segmenting markets and reaching the customers in these segments. As market segments get larger, marketers usually turn to broader-based media such as newspapers, magazines, and TV to reach them.

Marketers of most consumer products attempt to attract the attention of large numbers of present or potential customers (*mass markets*) through mass communication such as advertising or publicity. Mass communication is a one-way flow of information from the marketer to the consumer. Feedback on the audience's reactions to the message is generally indirect and difficult to measure.

TV advertising, for example, lets the marketer send a message to millions of consumers at the same time. But this does not mean effective communication has occurred. This may be only one of several hundred messages the consumer is exposed to that day. There is no guarantee the information will be attended to, processed, comprehended, or stored in memory for later retrieval. Even if the advertising message is processed, it may not interest consumers or may be misinterpreted by them. Studies by Jacob Jacoby and Wayne D. Hoyer have shown that nearly 20 percent of all print ads and even more TV commercials are miscomprehended by readers.³²

Unlike personal or face-to-face communications, mass communications do not offer the marketer an opportunity to explain or clarify the message to make it more effective. The marketer must enter the communication situation with knowledge of the target audience and how it is likely to react to the message. This means the receiver's response process must be understood, along with its implications for promotional planning and strategy.

THE RESPONSE PROCESS



Perhaps the most important aspect of developing effective integrated marketing communications programs involves understanding the *response process* the receiver may go through in moving toward a specific behavior (like purchasing a product) and how the promotional efforts of the marketer influence consumer responses. In many instances, the marketer's only objective may be to create awareness of the company or brand name, which may trigger interest in the product. In other situations, the marketer may want to convey detailed information to change consumers' knowledge of and attitudes toward the company/brand and ultimately change their behavior.

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Traditional Response Hierarchy Models

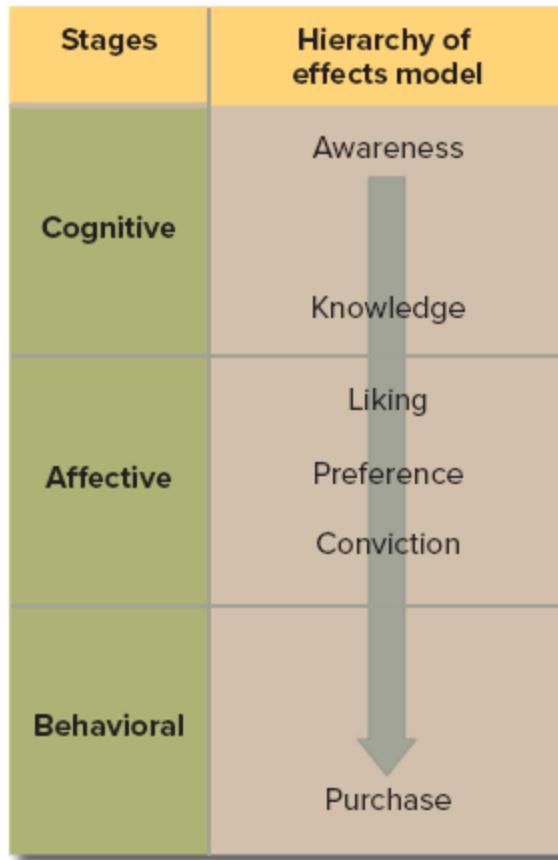
A number of models have been developed to show the stages a consumer may pass through in moving from a state of not being aware of a company, product, or brand to actual purchase behavior. These models were developed for different reasons and have different stages. For example, the **AIDA model** was developed to represent the stages a salesperson must take a customer through in the personal selling process.³³ This model depicts the buyer as going through attention, interest, desire, and action stages. The **innovation adoption model** evolved from work on the diffusion of innovations and shows the stages a customer passes through in adopting a new product or service.³⁴ The steps preceding the final decision to adopt a new product or service include awareness, interest, evaluation, and trial.

Perhaps the best known of these response hierarchies is the model developed by Robert Lavidge and Gary Steiner as a paradigm for setting and measuring advertising objectives.³⁵ Their **hierarchy of effects model** shows the stages a consumer goes through in transitioning from being unaware of a brand, to learning about it, forming favorable attitudes or feelings toward it, and ultimately purchasing the brand. The various stages of

this model are shown in Figure 5–5. It assumes a consumer passes through these stages in sequential order from initial awareness of a product or service to actual purchase. The model was developed to show how advertising can influence the stages of the response hierarchy. A basic premise of this model is that advertising effects occur over time. Advertising may not lead to immediate behavioral response or purchase; rather, a series of effects must occur, with each step fulfilled before the consumer can move to the next stage in the hierarchy. The hierarchy of effects model is also the basis for the classic *purchase funnel* metaphor that is often used to depict the decision process consumers go through. The consumer starts at the top of funnel with a number of brands in mind, methodically reduces that number as he or she becomes familiar with and evaluates these alternatives, and then emerges with the brand he or she chooses to purchase.³⁶ As we will see in Chapter 7, the hierarchy of effects model as well as the purchase funnel have become the foundation for setting objectives and measuring the effectiveness of advertising and other form of marketing communication.

FIGURE 5–5

Hierarchy of Effects Model



Alternative Response Hierarchies

The hierarchy of effects model, as well as the AIDA and innovation adoption models, view the response process as consisting of movement through a sequence of three basic stages. The *cognitive stage* includes what the consumer knows about the brand. This stage includes awareness that the brand exists and knowledge, information, or comprehension about its attributes, characteristics, or benefits. The *affective stage* refers to the consumer's feelings or affect level (like or dislike) for the particular brand. This stage also includes stronger levels of affect such as preference or conviction. The conative or behavioral stage refers to the consumer's action toward the brand such as trial, purchase, and ultimately a decision to repurchase or reject it.

The various response process models assume a similar ordering of these three stages. Cognitive development, such as becoming aware of and

knowledgeable about a brand, precedes affective reactions or feelings, which in turn precede behavior such as trial or purchase. While this logical progression is often accurate, the response sequence does not always operate this way. Over the years, considerable research in marketing, social psychology, and communications has led to questioning of the traditional cognitive → affective → behavioral sequence of response. Several other configurations of the response hierarchy have been theorized. For example, Michael Ray developed a model of the response hierarchy based on product/service differentiation and the consumer's level of involvement with the product or service. We will focus on two that are particularly relevant to advertising and promotion—the standard learning model and low-involvement models.

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The Standard Learning Hierarchy In many purchase situations, the consumer will go through the response process in the sequence depicted by the traditional communication models. Ray terms this a **standard learning model**, which consists of a learn→ feel→ do sequence. Information and knowledge acquired or *learned* about the various brands are the basis for developing affect, or *feelings*, that guide what the consumer will *do* (e.g., actual trial or purchase). In this hierarchy, the consumer is viewed as an active participant in the communication process who gathers information through active learning.

Ray suggests the standard learning hierarchy is likely when the consumer is highly involved in the purchase process and there is much differentiation among competing brands. High-involvement purchase decisions such as those for industrial products and services and consumer durables like personal computers, printers, cameras, appliances, and automobiles are areas where a standard learning hierarchy response process is likely. Ads for products and services in these areas are often detailed and provide customers with information that can be used to evaluate brands and help them make a purchase decision. They also may focus on a specific product attribute or feature that is important to consumers in market segment they are targeting. For example, the ad for the new Honda Insight shown in Exhibit 5–8

addresses both cognitive and affective steps in the standard learning hierarchy by showing how the styling and features of the car make it more appealing than traditional hybrid vehicles.

XHIBIT 5–8

This ad for the Honda Insight hybrid addresses both cognitive and affective stages in the standard learning hierarchy by focusing on styling and important features.

source: American Honda Motor Co., Inc.



The Low-Involvement Hierarchy Perhaps the most intriguing of the response hierarchies proposed by Ray is the **low-involvement hierarchy**, in which the receiver is viewed as passing from cognition to behavior to

attitude change. Ray suggests this learn→ feel→ do sequence may occur when involvement in the purchase decision is low, there are minimal differences among brand alternatives, and mass-media (especially television) advertising is important.

The notion of a low-involvement hierarchy is based in large part on Herbert Krugman's theory explaining the effects of television advertising.³⁷ Krugman wanted to find out why TV advertising produced a strong effect on brand awareness and recall but little change in consumers' attitudes toward the product. He hypothesized that TV is basically a low-involvement medium and the viewer's perceptual defenses are reduced or even absent during commercials. In a low-involvement situation, the consumer does not compare the message with previously acquired beliefs, needs, or past experiences. The commercial results in subtle changes in the consumer's knowledge structure, particularly with repeated exposure. This change in the consumer's knowledge does not result in attitude change but is related to learning something about the advertised brand, such as a brand name, ad theme, or slogan. According to Krugman, when the consumer enters a purchase situation, this information may be sufficient to trigger a purchase. The consumer will then form an attitude toward the purchased brand as a result of experience with it. Thus, in the low-involvement situation the response sequence is as follows:

Message exposure under low involvement →
Shift in cognitive structure → Purchase →
Positive or negative experience → Attitude formation

In the low-involvement hierarchy, the consumer engages in *passive learning* and *random information catching* rather than active information seeking. The advertiser must recognize that a passive,

page 161 uninterested consumer may focus more on nonmessage elements such as music, characters, symbols, and slogans or jingles than actual message content. The advertiser might capitalize on this situation by developing a catchy jingle that is stored in the consumer's mind without any active cognitive processing and becomes salient when he or she enters the actual purchase situation.

Advertisers of low-involvement products also repeat simple product claims such as a key copy point or distinctive product benefit. A study by Scott Hawkins and Stephen Hoch found that under low-involvement conditions, repetition of simple product claims increased consumers' memory of and belief in those claims.³⁸ They concluded that advertisers of low-involvement products might find it more profitable to pursue a heavy repetition strategy than to reach larger audiences with lengthy, more detailed messages. For example, Heinz has dominated the ketchup market for over 30 years by repeatedly telling consumers that its brand is the thickest and richest. A variety of advertising campaigns have been used for the brand over the years. However, they all have communicated the same basic message that Heinz is the best and most preferred brand of ketchup (Exhibit 5–9).

XHIBIT 5–9

Clever advertising has helped make Heinz the leader in the ketchup market.

Source: Kraft-Heinz, Inc.



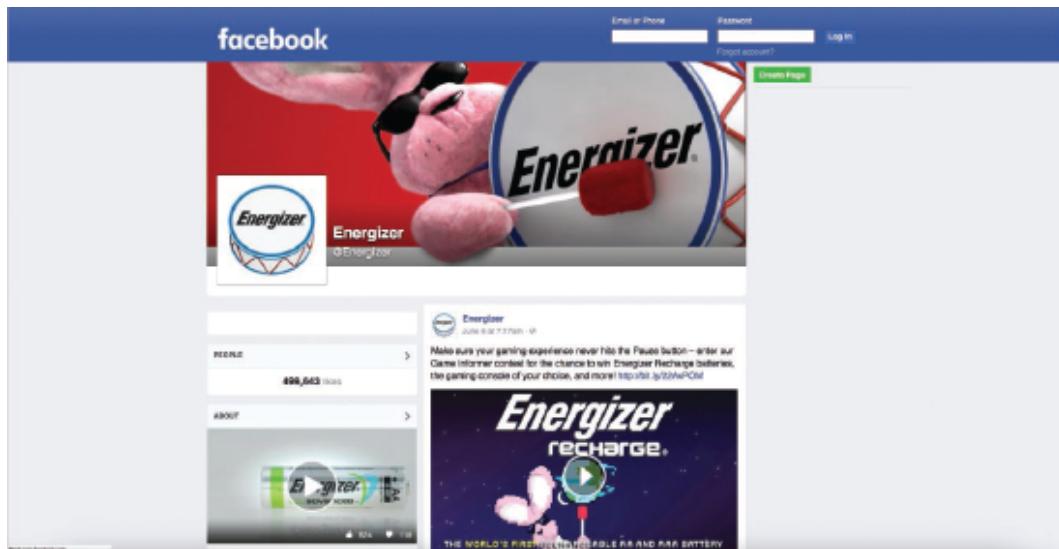
Low-involvement advertising appeals prevail in much of the advertising we see for frequently purchased products such as consumer packaged goods: Advertising for Coca-Cola invites consumers to “Taste the feeling” or “Share a Coke.” Bounty paper towels claim to be the “quicker picker-upper.” Oscar Mayer uses the catchy jingle “I wish I were an Oscar Mayer wiener.” Each of these slogans is designed to help consumers maintain top-of-mind awareness that can influence their purchase decisions when they are in the store and trying to complete a shopping trip.

Another popular creative strategy used by advertisers of low-involvement products is what advertising analyst Harry McMahan calls *VIP*, or *visual image personality*.³⁹ Advertisers often use symbols like the Pillsbury Doughboy, Morris the Cat, and Mr. Clean to develop visual images that will lead consumers to identify and retain ads. Eveready began using the pink bunny in ads for its Energizer batteries in 1989, and he has helped sales of the brand keep going and going for over 30 years. As can be seen in Exhibit 5–10, the Energizer Bunny even has his own Facebook page, with nearly half a million fans.

XHIBIT 5–10

The Energizer Bunny is still a popular personality symbol for the brand.

Source: Eveready Battery Company, Inc.



Implications of the Response Process Models

The hierarchy models of consumers' response processes are useful to promotional planners from several perspectives. First, they delineate the series of steps potential purchasers must be taken through to move them from no awareness of a brand to readiness to purchase it. For example, marketers must not only develop IMC campaigns that make consumers aware of a brand, they must do so in a manner that compels them learn more page 162 about it and/or develop an emotional connection with it. Second, potential buyers may be at different stages in the response hierarchy, so marketers will face different communication challenges. For example, a company introducing an innovative product such as a smartwatch may use advertising in traditional media to make people aware of the product along with its features and benefits. The marketer can provide information about the product in its ads and use digital and social media to encourage consumers to visit its website or go to a retail store to learn more about the product. Consumers who visit the website or go to a retail store for a product demonstration will progress through the response hierarchy and move closer to purchase than will those who see only an ad. Marketers of a mature brand that enjoys customer loyalty may need only supportive or reminder advertising to reinforce positive perceptions and maintain top-of-mind awareness for the brand.

The hierarchy models can also be useful as intermediate measures of communication effectiveness. The marketer needs to know where audience members are in the response hierarchy. For example, research may reveal that one target segment has low awareness of the advertiser's brand, whereas another is aware of the brand and its various attributes but has a low level of liking or brand preference. For the first segment of the market, the goal of the IMC program involves increasing the awareness levels for the brand. The number of ads may be increased, or a product sampling program may be used. For the second segment, where awareness is already high but liking and preference are low, the advertiser must determine the reason for the ambivalent or negative feelings and then attempt to address this problem in future advertising.

Advertising and consumer researchers recognize that not all response sequences and behaviors are explained adequately by either the traditional or the alternative response hierarchies. Advertising is just one source of information consumers use in learning about products, forming attitudes, and/or making purchase decisions. Consumers are likely to integrate information from advertising and other forms of marketing communication as well as direct experience in forming judgments about a brand. For example, a study by Robert Smith found that advertising can lessen the negative effects of an unfavorable trial experience on brand evaluations when the ad is processed before the trial. However, when a negative trial experience precedes exposure to an ad, cognitive evaluations of the ad are more negative.⁴⁰ More recent research has also shown that advertising can affect consumers' objective sensory interpretation of their experiences with a brand and what they remember about it.⁴¹

The various response models offer an interesting perspective on the ways consumers respond to advertising and other forms of marketing communication. They also provide insight into promotional strategies marketers might pursue in different situations. A review of these alternative models of the response process shows that the traditional standard learning model does not always apply. The notion of a highly involved consumer who engages in active information processing and learning and acts on the basis of higher-order beliefs and a well-formed attitude may be inappropriate for some types of purchases. Sometimes consumers make a purchase decision on the basis of general awareness resulting from repetitive exposure to advertising, and attitude development occurs after the purchase, if at all. The role of advertising and other forms of promotion may be to induce trial, so consumers can develop brand preferences primarily on the basis of their direct experience with the product.

From a promotional planning perspective, it is important that marketers examine the communication situation for their product or service and determine which type of response process is most likely to occur. They should analyze involvement levels and product/service differentiation as well as consumers' use of various information sources and their levels of experience with the product or service. Once the manager has determined which response sequence is most likely to operate, the integrated marketing

communications program can be designed to influence the response process in favor of the company's product or service. Several planning models have been developed that consider involvement levels as well as other factors including response processes and motives that underlie the attitude formation and subsequent brand choice.⁴² These models can be of value to marketers as they develop IMC strategies because they recognize that page 163 advertising and other promotional tools work differently depending on the type of product involved and the decision process sequence that consumers are likely to follow.

In the past, most marketers of low involvement products such as consumer-packaged goods (CPG) have spent a large portion of their IMC budgets on traditional media such as television and print to build and maintain brand awareness as well as on consumer promotions such as coupons and promotional offers. However, the age of digital marketing has definitely arrived for CPG marketers, as many of them are recognizing that they can connect with consumers through social media as well. Digital and Social Media Perspective 5–2 discusses how Procter & Gamble has adapted its IMC strategy for Charmin, the leading brand of toilet tissue, and has been using social media very effectively to engage consumers.

The Social Consumer Decision Journey

LO 5-5

The response models discussed in the previous section have dominated much of the theorizing, research, and planning regarding how consumers respond to advertising and other IMC tools. However, over the past decade the environment in which consumers evaluate brands and make purchase decisions has changed dramatically as digital content—including social media—has become pervasive in our daily lives and is influencing consumer behavior. With the advent of social networking tools and the availability of digital devices such as smartphones and tablets, consumers are more empowered than ever before as they can access and retrieve information,

connect with one another to share it, discuss products/services and brands, and interact with marketers quickly and easily.

A major study commissioned by the Advertising Research Foundation (ARF) examined how digital and social media are used in the purchase-decision process along with how and when consumers turn to them to help manage this process. One of the major findings of this study is that “consumers, in effect, are always on as they are constantly considering potential purchases and evaluating the various providers of products and service” and that they can be in both an active and passive shopping mode.⁴³ When they are in a “passive” shopping mode, the information and advice consumers need to make a purchase comes to them unsolicited, such as a comment on a social media site; an ad seen on a TV show, in a magazine, or on a website; or by observing someone using a product or service. At other times, consumers are in an “active” shopping mode whereby they are purposefully seeking information and/or assistance so they can make informed purchase decisions with confidence. Consumers in an active shopping mode may visit the website or Facebook page of a company or brand; go to a search engine such as Google, Yahoo!, or Bing; go to a retail store; or have a conversation with a friend or associate (either online or in person).

Another important conclusion from this study, as well as research conducted by the McKinsey & Company’s Global Digital Marketing Strategy practice group, is that consumers do not make purchase decisions in the linear manner depicted by the traditional hierarchy of effects and purchase funnel models whereby they start at the wide part of the funnel with many brands in mind and narrow them down to a final choice.⁴⁴ The research conducted by McKinsey as well as the ARF study show that consumers go through a much more iterative and less reductive process and that they can enter a purchase path at various points, depending on whether they first engage with a brand, research a product or service, or hear about a product through their social networks. Based on these findings, David Edelman and his associates at McKinsey proposed a “consumer decision journey” framework for understanding how consumers interact with companies and brands during the purchase decision process. The decision journey has four basic stages: *consider, evaluate, buy, and enjoy-advocate-bond*.⁴⁵ This

framework views the consumer decision-making process as a winding journey with multiple feedback loops rather than a linear, single uniform path to purchase based on active shopping and influenced by marketer-dominated and controlled touch points such as media advertising.

page 164

Digital and Social Media Perspective 5–2 > > >

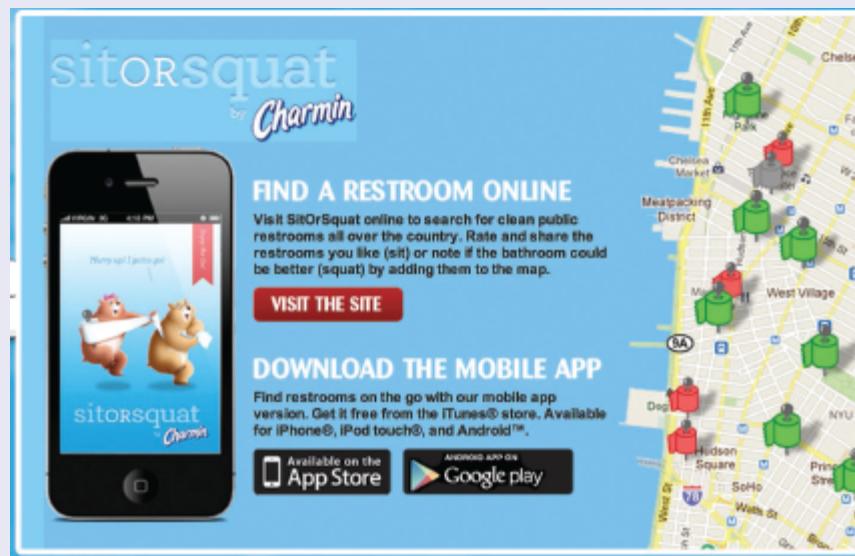
Charmin: The sassiest brand on Social Media

If you were to ask consumers to name one of the most creative and engaging brands on social media, it is unlikely they would name Charmin toilet tissue. Many consumers might still associate Charmin with the iconic Mr. Whipple and the “Please don’t squeeze the Charmin” advertising campaign. The campaign ran for more than two decades and has been recognized as one of best ads campaign of the 20th century. Creating interest and excitement is very challenging for marketers when they are selling a product that is not exactly glamorous and is associated with one of life’s less savory necessities, not to mention one that is often joked about and is not at the top of the list of most social conversations. Nonetheless, consumers spend more than \$9 billion a year on toilet paper, and Charmin has become the market leader in its product category by using an IMC strategy that is anything but seat-of-the-pants, so to speak.

While gentleness and softness have always been key product attributes for toilet tissue, P&G’s advertising agency initially struggled to find a way to convince consumers that Charmin was gentler and softer than competing brands that were making similar claims. However, in 1964 the agency came up with the creative idea of developing an advertising campaign around a prissy supermarket manager who would become upset at his customers for squeezing packages of Charmin so they could feel the softness. A character named Mr. Whipple was created to promote Charmin’s “squeezable softness,” and the TV commercials featured him scolding shoppers for squeezing packages of Charmin, but then sneaking a pleasure-filled squeeze himself. The “Please Don’t Squeeze the Charmin” campaign ran for more than 20 years, and Mr. Whipple appeared in more than 500 TV commercials as well as magazine and newspaper ads.

In 1999, after a 14-year hiatus, P&G brought back Mr. Whipple for a campaign promoting a major improvement in the brand. However, at the beginning of the new millennium, P&G and its advertising agency, Publicis New York, took the advertising for Charmin in a new direction by launching a new animated campaign called “Call of Nature,” featuring a bear in the woods experiencing the comfortable feeling of Charmin. The campaign originated in the United Kingdom but was brought to the United States; a year later, the Charmin animated bears welcomed three cubs to the family.

While the cute and clumsy animated bears have been the advertising symbol for Charmin for the past two decades, the IMC campaign for the brand has evolved in new directions that might make anyone raised in the Mr. Whipple era a little uncomfortable. Publicis New York created an integrated campaign using the tagline “Enjoy the go,” which included ads featuring the animated bears as well as a microsite, mobile apps, social media, branded bathroom breaks, and charitable/cause marketing components. As part of the campaign, P&G brought Charmin-branded public bathrooms to Times Square in New York City for the holiday season. The website included a countdown to New Year’s and let consumers interact with the “Charmin Go Team,” a group of actors who entertained people at the restrooms. The restrooms featured a giant toilet for photo opportunities, a digital graffiti wall, a video “can-fessional” booth, as well as themed toilet seat covers ranging from boxing to disco.



Source: Charmin by Procter & Gamble and Publicis Worldwide

Charmin has become one of the most active brands on social media, with more than 1 million fans on Facebook and more than 80,000 Twitter followers; it also has a presence on video platforms such as YouTube and Instagram. The Charmin social media team, which includes five members from the P&G brand management team as well as eight from the agency side, continually monitors fan feedback across the various platforms to assess consumer sentiment and fine-tune its messaging. The social media strategy for Charmin has evolved along with the social media landscape and has created one of the most engaged brand communities by using content that is both relevant and entertaining and relies on humor as its key ingredient. Charmin

engages consumers on social media by not just focusing on toilet paper, but rather on the human experience of everything bathroom related. A key component of Charmin's "Enjoy the Go" campaign is the popular hashtag #tweetfromtheseat where followers can contribute potty protocol thoughts.

Charmin has also moved into mobile marketing by sponsoring and then acquiring the SitOrSquat app that helps consumers find the cleanest public restrooms worldwide and also provides user-generated listings of bathroom locations, ratings, hours of operation, and other details. Nearly a million consumers have downloaded the app, and it has generated a tremendous amount of earned media from bloggers on social media and news stories in traditional media.

Charmin's brand team and Publicis New York understand the importance of having entertaining as well as relevant content to connect with consumers on social media. They continue to utilize a variety of channels to develop an IMC program that creates interest in the Charmin brand and helps differentiate what could easily be a highly commoditized product. Their work has not gone without notice; *Time* magazine selected Charmin as "the sassiest brand on Twitter" a few years ago based on recommendations from a panel of social media and marketing experts who rated brands that tweet the best quips, digs, and smackdowns. Developing creative campaigns to sell toilet paper may not be one of the most coveted jobs in marketing for many people. However, don't tell that to those who market Charmin and continue to find creative ways to get consumers to "enjoy the go."

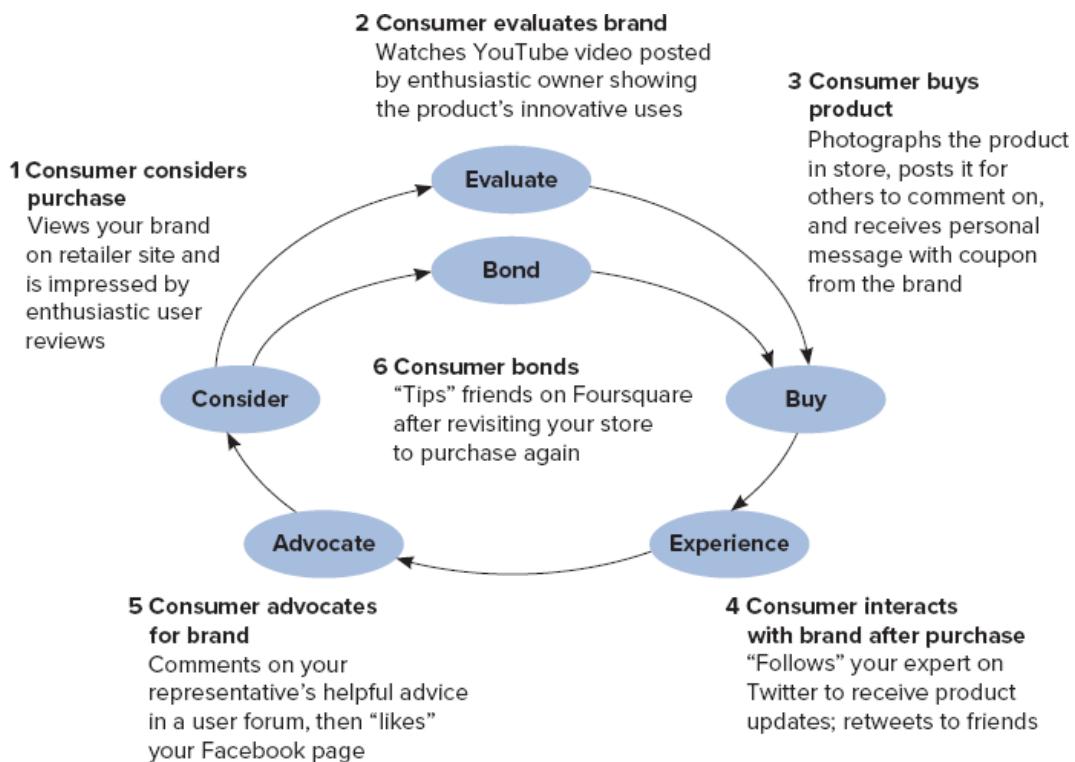
Sources: David Kirkpatrick, "Charmin Drives Toilet-Equipped Vans to New Yorkers Feeling the Call of Nature," *MarketingDive*, June 22, 2017, <https://www.marketingdive.com/news/charmin-drives-toilet-equipment-vans-to-new-yorkers-feeling-the-call-of-nature/445574/>; Alina Gorbatch, "5 'Boring' Brands with Amazing Social Media Strategies," *awario*, June 14, 2017, <https://awario.com/blog/5-boring-brands-amazing-social-media-strategies>; Chris Syme, "How Charmin Became the Sassiest Brand on Twitter," *SocialMediaToday*, March 4, 2014, www.socialmediatoday.com/content/how-charmin-became-sassiest-brand-twitter.

Recognizing the increasing importance and influence of social media on consumer behavior, Edelman and his colleagues expanded the consumer decision journey framework to include social media, as shown in Figure 5–6. The social consumer decision journey framework recognizes that consumers connect with large numbers of brands through digital and social media channels that are often beyond the marketers' or retailers' control, evaluate a shifting array of them, and often expand the pool before narrowing it. After a purchase, consumers may remain very engaged and publicly promote or disparage the products or services they have purchased, often through digital and social media.⁴⁶ The McKinsey group notes that "social media is a unique component of the consumer decision journey: it's the only form of marketing

that can touch consumers at each and every stage, from when they're pondering brands and products right through the period after a purchase, as their experience influences the brands they prefer and their potential advocacy influences others.”⁴⁷ As can be seen in Figure 5–6, there are a number of ways various digital and social media tools such as YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and Foursquare can influence consumers at various stages of the decision journey.

FIGURE 5–6

The Social Consumer Decision Journey



The consumer decision journey framework has a number of implications for marketers as they develop their IMC programs. Edelman notes that instead of determining how to allocate spending across the various IMC tools such as various forms of media advertising, marketers should target stages in the decision journey. Marketers often spend a large percentage of their IMC budgets on advertising and sales promotion which are designed to influence consumers at the consider and buy stages. However, consumers may often be influenced more during the evaluate and enjoy-

advocate-bond stages. For many consumers the most important incentive to buy may be another person's advocacy or recommendation. He notes that it is also important for marketers to focus not only on the portion of their budget allocated to paid media—or what is sometimes referred to as “working media spend”—but also consider the role of *owned* media that a brand controls (such as websites and Facebook fan pages) as well as *earned media* (customer-created content on blogs, forums, and social media platforms).

Some of the findings from the ARF-commissioned study also are relevant to the role of social and digital media on the consumer decision journey. This study found that consumers like to tout their effectiveness and prowess as shoppers to others, which means that marketers can leverage this desire by providing forums for consumers to share their stories and experiences with others. The study also found that much online activity occurs after products are purchased, which points to an opportunity for marketers to develop a dialogue with consumers, engage them in discussions, and deepen their loyalty and affinity for their brands. The ARF study noted that the purchase journey of consumers varies by product or service category because high-risk/involvement products have longer cycles than do lower-risk/involvement products. It is also important to note that the ARF research indicates that brand perceptions and offline advertising are still important in driving consideration throughout the cycle. Thus it is important for marketers to build and maintain strong brands and be visible and pervasive throughout the decision journey.

COGNITIVE PROCESSING OF COMMUNICATIONS

LO 5-6

The hierarchical response models were for many years the primary focus of approaches for studying the receivers' responses to marketing communications. Attention centered on identifying relationships between

specific controllable variables (such as source and message factors) and outcome or response variables (such as attention, comprehension, attitudes, and purchase intentions). This approach has been criticized on a number of fronts, including its black-box nature, since it can't explain what is causing these reactions.⁴⁸ In response to these concerns, researchers began trying to understand the nature of cognitive reactions to persuasive messages. Several approaches have been developed to examine the nature of consumers' cognitive processing of advertising messages.

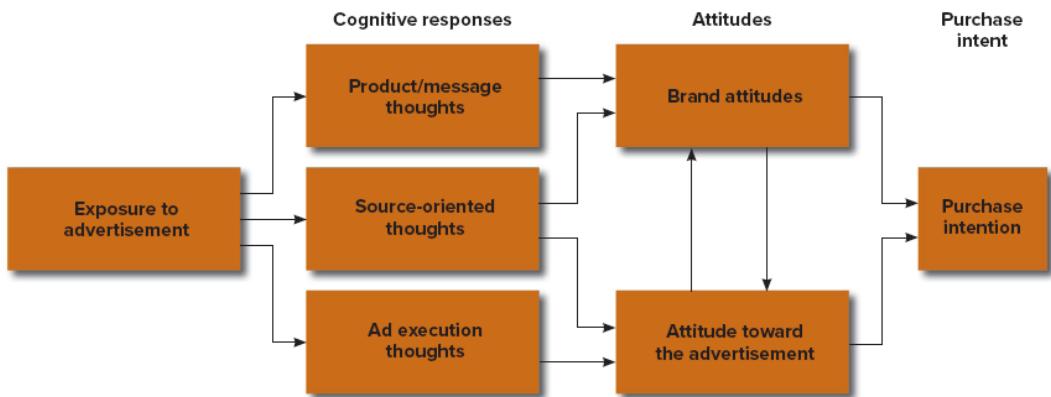
The Cognitive Response Approach

One of the most widely used methods for examining consumers' cognitive processing of advertising messages is assessment of their **cognitive responses**, the thoughts that occur to them while reading, viewing, and/or hearing a communication.⁴⁹ These thoughts are generally measured by having consumers write down or verbally report their reactions to a message. The assumption is that these thoughts reflect the recipient's cognitive processes or reactions and help shape ultimate acceptance or rejection of the message.

The cognitive response approach has been widely used in research by both academicians and advertising practitioners. Its focus has been to determine the types of responses evoked by an advertising message and how these responses relate to attitudes toward the ad, brand attitudes, and purchase intentions. Figure 5–7 depicts the three basic categories of cognitive responses researchers have identified—product/message, source-oriented, and ad execution thoughts—and how they may relate to attitudes and intentions.

FIGURE 5–7

A Model of Cognitive Response



Product/Message Thoughts The first category of thoughts comprises those directed at the product or service and/or the claims being made in the communication. Much attention has focused on two particular types [page 167](#) of responses: counterarguments and support arguments.

Counterarguments are thoughts the recipient has that are opposed to the position taken in the message. For example, consider the ad for Ultra Tide shown in Exhibit 5–11. A consumer may express disbelief or disapproval of a claim made in an ad. (“I don’t believe that any detergent could get that stain out!”) Other consumers who see this ad may generate **support arguments**, or thoughts that affirm the claims made in the message. (“Ultra Tide looks like a really good product—I think I’ll try it.”)

XHIBIT 5–11

Consumers often generate support arguments in response to ads for quality products.

Source: Tide by Procter & Gamble



The likelihood of counterarguing is greater when the message makes claims that oppose the receiver's beliefs. For example, a consumer viewing a commercial that attacks a favorite brand is likely to engage in counterarguing. Counterarguments relate negatively to message acceptance; the more the receiver counterargues, the less likely he or she is to accept the position advocated in the message.⁵⁰ Support arguments, on the other hand, relate positively to message acceptance. Thus, the marketer should develop ads or other promotional messages that minimize counterarguing and encourage support arguments.

Source-Oriented Thoughts A second category of cognitive responses is directed at the source of the communication. One of the most important types of responses in this category is **source derogations**, or negative thoughts about the spokesperson or organization making the claims. Such thoughts generally lead to a reduction in message acceptance. If consumers find a particular spokesperson annoying or untrustworthy, they are less likely to accept what this source has to say.

Of course, source-related thoughts are not always negative. Receivers who react favorably to the source generate favorable thoughts, or **source**

bolsters. As you would expect, most advertisers attempt to hire spokespeople their target audience likes to carry this effect over to the message. Considerations involved in choosing an appropriate source or spokesperson will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Ad Execution Thoughts The third category of cognitive responses shown in Figure 5–7 consists of the individual’s thoughts about the ad itself. Many of the thoughts receivers have when reading or viewing an ad do not concern the product and/or message claims directly. Rather, they are affective reactions representing the consumer’s feelings toward the ad. These thoughts may include reactions to ad execution factors such as the creativity of the ad, the quality of the visual effects, colors, and voice tones. **Ad execution-related thoughts** can be either favorable or unfavorable. They are important because of their effect on attitudes toward the advertisement as well as the brand.

page 168

Much attention has focused on consumers’ affective reactions to ads, especially TV commercials.⁵¹ **Attitude toward the ad** ($A \rightarrow ad$) represents the receivers’ feelings of favorability or unfavorability toward the ad. Advertisers are interested in consumers’ reactions to the ad because they know that affective reactions are an important determinant of advertising effectiveness, since these reactions may be transferred to the brand itself or directly influence purchase intentions. A number of studies have found that people who like an ad are more likely to have higher purchase intentions toward the product or service.⁵²

Consumers’ feelings about the ad may be just as important as their attitudes toward the brand (if not more so) in determining an ad’s effectiveness.⁵³ The importance of affective reactions and feelings generated by the ad depends on several factors, among them the nature of the ad and the type of processing engaged in by the receiver.⁵⁴ Many advertisers use emotional appeals designed to evoke positive feelings and affective reactions as the basis of their creative strategy. The success of this strategy depends in part on the consumers’ involvement with the brand and their

likelihood of attending to and processing the message. Another way marketers try to create favorable attitudes toward their ads is by using humor, which can put consumers in a positive mood and increase their liking of not only the ad itself, but also the brand. For example, many of the ads shown during the Super Bowl each year use humorous appeals since marketers know consumers will be watching them closely and discussing them with others both during and after the game.

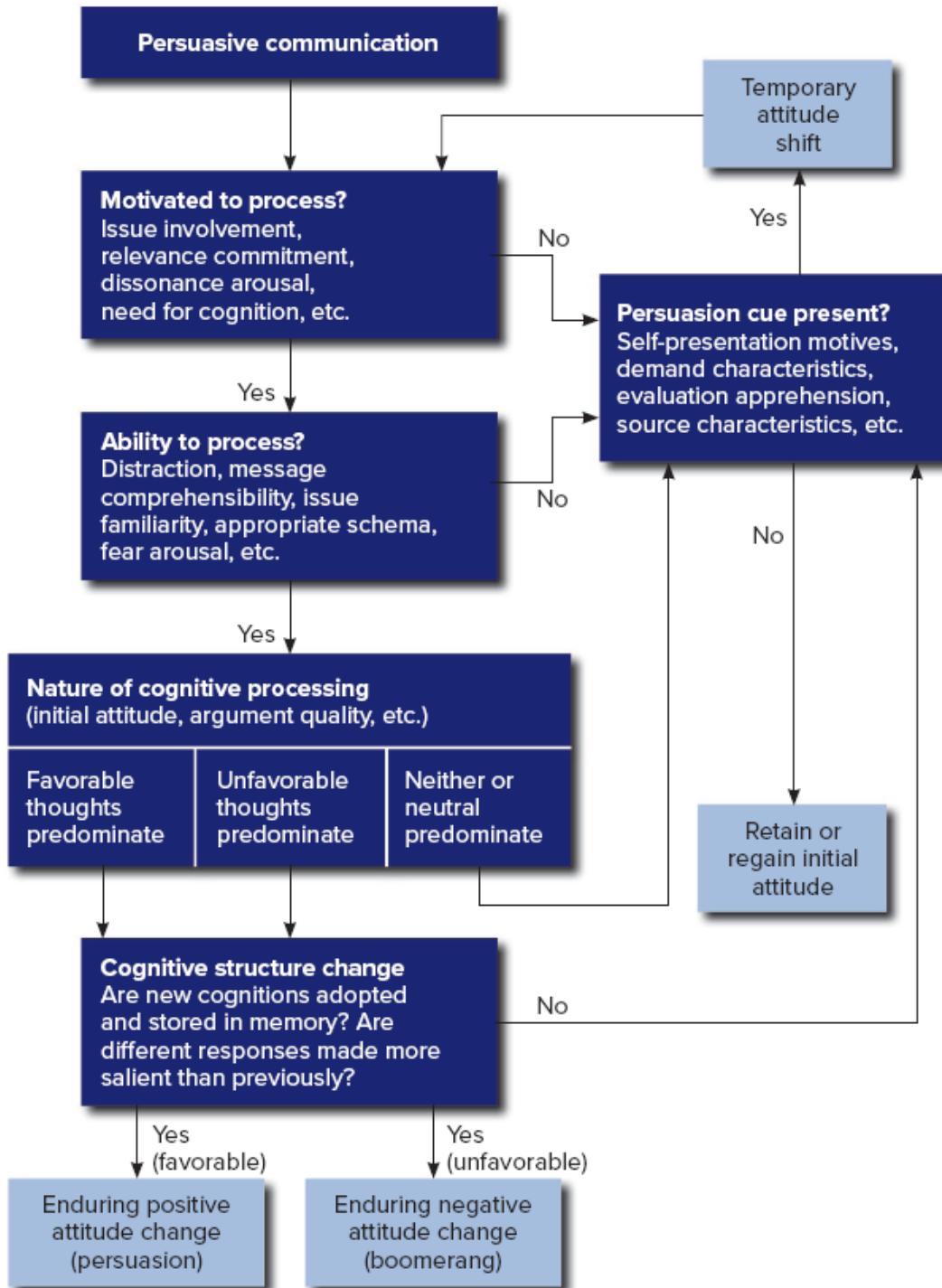
We end our analysis of the receiver by examining a popular model that considers how involvement and other factors that may influence the route to persuasion consumers follow and their cognitive processing of a message.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model

Differences in the ways consumers process and respond to persuasive messages are addressed in the **elaboration likelihood model (ELM)** of persuasion, shown in Figure 5–8.⁵⁵ The ELM was devised by Richard Petty and John Cacioppo to explain the process by which persuasive communications (such as ads) lead to persuasion by influencing attitudes. According to the ELM, the attitude formation or change process depends on the amount and nature of *elaboration*, or processing, of relevant information that occurs in response to a persuasive message. High elaboration means the receiver engages in careful consideration, thinking, and evaluation of the information or arguments contained in the message. Low elaboration occurs when the receiver does not engage in active information processing or thinking but rather makes inferences about the position being advocated in the message on the basis of simple positive or negative cues.

FIGURE 5–8

The Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion



The ELM shows that elaboration likelihood is a function of two elements: motivation and ability to process the message. *Motivation* to process the message depends on such factors as involvement, personal relevance, and individuals' needs and arousal levels. *Ability* depends on the

individual's knowledge, intellectual capacity, and opportunity to process the message. For example, an individual viewing a humorous commercial or one containing an attractive model may be distracted from processing the information about the product.

According to the ELM, there are two basic routes to persuasion or attitude change. Under the **central route to persuasion**, the receiver is viewed as a very active, involved participant in the communication process, whose ability and motivation to attend, comprehend, and evaluate messages are high. When central processing of an advertising message occurs, the consumer pays close attention to message content and scrutinizes the message arguments. A high level of cognitive response activity or processing occurs, and the ad's ability to persuade the receiver depends primarily on the receiver's evaluation of the quality of the arguments presented. Predominantly favorable cognitive responses (support arguments and source bolsters) lead to favorable changes in cognitive structure, which lead to positive attitude change, or persuasion.

Conversely, if the cognitive processing is predominantly unfavorable and results in counterarguments and/or source derogations, the changes in cognitive structure are unfavorable and *boomerang*, or result in page 169 negative attitude change. Attitude change that occurs through central processing is relatively enduring and should resist subsequent efforts to change it.

Under the **peripheral route to persuasion**, shown on the right side of Figure 5–8, the receiver is viewed as lacking the motivation or ability to process information and is not likely to engage in detailed cognitive processing. Rather than evaluating the information presented in the message, the receiver relies on peripheral cues that may be incidental to the main arguments. The receiver's reaction to the message depends on how he or she evaluates these peripheral cues.

The consumer may use several types of peripheral cues or cognitive shortcuts rather than carefully evaluating the message arguments presented in an advertisement.⁵⁶ Favorable attitudes may be formed if the endorser in the ad is viewed as an expert or is attractive and/or likable or if the consumer likes certain executional aspects of the ad such as the way it is made, the music, or the imagery. Notice how the ad in Exhibit 5–12 for Pantene

shampoo contains several peripheral cues, including an attractive and relevant celebrity endorser (singer Selena Gomez) and visual imagery that is consistent with the brand positioning. These cues might help page 170 consumers form a positive attitude toward the brand even if they do not process the message portion of the ad.

XHIBIT 5-12

This ad contains peripheral cues, most notably a celebrity endorser.

Source: Procter & Gamble



Peripheral cues can also lead to rejection of a message. For example, ads that advocate extreme positions, use endorsers who are not well liked or have credibility problems, or are not executed well (such as low-budget ads for local retailers) may be rejected without any consideration of their information or message arguments. As shown in Figure 5–8, the ELM views attitudes resulting from peripheral processing as temporary. So favorable attitudes must be maintained by continual exposure to the peripheral cues, such as through repetitive advertising.

Implications of the ELM The elaboration likelihood model has important implications for marketing communications, particularly with respect to involvement. For example, if the involvement level of consumers in the target audience is high, an ad or sales presentation should contain strong arguments that are difficult for the message recipient to refute or counterargue. If the involvement level of the target audience is low, peripheral cues may be more important than detailed message arguments.

An interesting test of the ELM showed that the effectiveness of a celebrity endorser in an ad depends on the receiver's involvement level.⁵⁷ When involvement was low, a celebrity endorser had a significant effect on attitudes. When the receiver's involvement was high, however, the use of a celebrity had no effect on brand attitudes; the quality of the arguments used in the ad was more important.

The explanation given for these findings was that a celebrity may serve as a peripheral cue in the low-involvement situation, allowing the receiver to develop favorable attitudes based on feelings toward the source rather than engaging in extensive processing of the message. A highly involved consumer, however, engages in more detailed central processing of the message content. The quality of the message becomes more important than the identity of the endorser. The ELM suggests that the most effective type of message depends on the route to persuasion the consumer follows. Many marketers recognize that involvement levels are low for their product categories and consumers are not motivated to process advertising messages in any detail. That's why marketers of low-involvement products often rely on creative tactics that emphasize peripheral cues and use repetitive advertising to create and maintain favorable attitudes toward their brand.

The ELM is one of the most frequently cited theories of how advertising impacts consumers and is considered one of the most influential theoretical contributions to the academic literature in advertising and other forms of persuasion.⁵⁸ However, the model has been the subject of debate and criticism by a number of academic researchers as attempts to replicate the findings from the study discussed previously have not been successful.⁵⁹ A recent effort to replicate this study with subjects from three countries (United States, United Kingdom, and Australia) was only partially successful and did not support the key finding that attitudes formed via the central route to

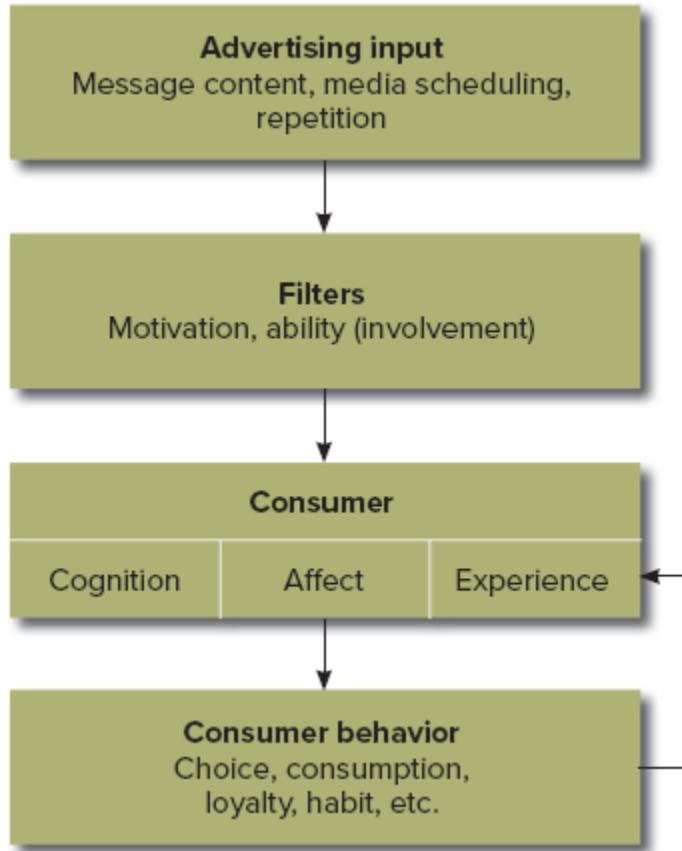
persuasion are more predictive of behavior than those formed via the peripheral route. The authors suggest that changes in the media environment, particularly the shift to the dominance of digital and social media, call in to question the relevancy of advertising theories developed during the era when traditional mass media was dominant.⁶⁰

SUMMARIZING THE RESPONSE PROCESS AND THE EFFECTS OF ADVERTISING

As you have seen from our analysis of the receiver, the process consumers go through in responding to marketing communications can be viewed from a number of perspectives. Vakratsas and Ambler reviewed more than 250 journal articles and books in an effort to better understand how [page 171](#) advertising works and affects the consumer.⁶¹ On the basis of their review of these studies, they concluded that although effects hierarchies have been actively employed for nearly 100 years, there is little support for the concept of a hierarchy of effects in the sense of temporal sequence. They note that in trying to understand the response process and the manner in which advertising works, there are three critical intermediate effects between advertising and purchase (Figure 5–9). These include *cognition*, the “thinking” dimension of a person’s response; *affect*, the “feeling” dimension; and *experience*, which is a feedback dimension based on the outcomes of product purchasing and usage. They conclude that individual responses to advertising are mediated or filtered by factors such as motivation and ability to process information, which can radically alter or change the individual’s response to advertising. They suggest that the effects of advertising should be evaluated using these three dimensions, with some intermediate variables being more important than others, depending on factors such as the product category, stage of the product life cycle, target audience, competition, and impact of other marketing-mix components.

FIGURE 5–9

A Framework for Studying How Advertising Works



Other researchers have been critical of the hierarchy models as well. For example, Hall argues that advertisers need to move away from explicit and implicit reliance on hierarchical models of advertising effects and develop models that place affect and experience at the center of the advertising process.⁶² The implication of these criticisms is that marketers should focus on cognition, affect, and experience as critical variables that advertising may affect. However, they should not assume a particular sequence of responses but, rather, engage in research and analysis to better understand how advertising and other forms of promotion may affect these intermediate variables in various product/market situations.

While a number of issues and concerns regarding hierarchy of effects models have been noted, many believe that they are of value to advertising practice and research. For example, Thomas Barry contends that despite their limitations, hierarchical models do help predict behavior. He notes that these models also provide insight into whether advertising strategies need to focus on impacting cognition, affect, and/or behavior based on audience or

segmentation experiences. They also provide valuable planning, training, and conceptual frameworks.⁶³

Those responsible for planning the IMC program need to learn as much as possible about their target audience and how it may respond to advertising, along with other forms of marketing communication. For example, William Weilbacher has noted that marketing communications programs include more than just advertising.⁶⁴ Consumers are continually immersed in brand-sponsored communications that also include public relations, a broad range of sales promotion activities, social media, direct marketing, event sponsorships, movie and TV show product placements, and other forms of marketing communication. He argues that hierarchy models must move beyond just explaining the effects of advertising and consider how, and with what effects, consumers synthesize information from all the various integrated marketing communications activities for a brand. As we have seen from the discussion of the social consumer decision journey, information from the numerous forms of social media and other digital sources is adding to the number of factors that influence the consumer response process and decision making.

The various models discussed in this chapter are important as they present the basic elements of communication and provide insight into how consumers process and respond to advertising and other IMC tools. It is vital to understand the communication process as it provides a foundation for studying and evaluating integrated marketing communications. Those involved in various aspects of IMC find that understanding the communication process helps them make better decisions in planning, implementing, and evaluating their marketing communication programs.

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Summary

The function of all elements of the IMC program is to communicate, so promotional planners must understand the communication process. This

process can be very complex; successful marketing communications depend on a number of factors, including the nature of the message, the audience's interpretation of it, and the environment in which it is received. For effective communication to occur, the sender must encode a message in such a way that it will be decoded by the receiver in the intended manner. Feedback from the receiver helps the sender determine whether proper decoding has occurred or whether noise has interfered with the communication process.

Nonpersonal channels of communication are those that carry a message without direct, interpersonal contact between the sender and receiver and are generally referred to as the mass media. Personal channels involve direct communication between two or more persons and can occur through interpersonal contact (face to face) or via other methods such as e-mail or through social media. Members of one's social networks such as friends, neighbors, associates, co-workers, or family members are also personal channels of communication and represent word-of-mouth (WOM) influence, which can be a very powerful source of information. Marketers often try to generate WOM through viral marketing, which refers to the act of propagating marketing-relevant messages through the help and cooperation of individual consumers.

Promotional planning begins with the receiver or target audience, as marketers must understand how the audience is likely to respond to various sources of communication or types of messages. For promotional planning, the receiver can be analyzed with respect to both its composition (i.e., individual, group, or mass audiences) and the response process it goes through. Several models of the response process have been developed, including the AIDA, innovation adoption, and hierarchy of effects model. Alternative orderings of the traditional response hierarchy are possible, including the standard learning and low involvement models.

The environment in which consumers evaluate brands and make purchase decisions has changed dramatically as digital content—including social media—has become pervasive in our daily lives and is influencing consumer behavior. The social consumer decision journey framework recognized that consumers can enter the purchase path at various points, depending on whether they first engage with a brand, research a product or service, or hear about it through their social networks.

The cognitive response approach examines the thoughts evoked by a message and how they shape the receiver's ultimate acceptance or rejection of the communication. The elaboration likelihood model of attitude formation and change recognizes two forms of message processing: the central and peripheral routes to persuasion, which are a function of the receiver's motivation and ability to process a message. There are three critical intermediate effects between advertising and purchase: including cognition, affect, and experience. Those responsible for planning the IMC program should learn as much as possible about their target audience and how it may respond to advertising and other forms of marketing communications.

Key Terms

- communication** 145
- source** 146
- encoding** 147
- message** 147
- channel** 149
- mass media** 149
- word-of-mouth (WOM) communications** 150
- buzz marketing** 150
- viral marketing** 151
- seeding** 152
- receiver** 154
- decoding** 154
- field of experience** 154
- noise** 156
- response** 156
- feedback** 157
- AIDA model** 159
- innovation adoption model** 159
- hierarchy of effects model** 159
- standard learning model** 160
- low-involvement hierarchy** 160
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- counterarguments** 167
- support arguments** 167

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ad execution-related thoughts	167
attitude toward the ad	168
elaboration likelihood model (ELM)	168
central route to persuasion	168
peripheral route to persuasion	169

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the reasons why more marketers are using influencers as part of their integrated marketing communications strategy. Why might a marketer choose to use micro-influencers rather than a popular macro-influencer such as a popular celebrity? (LO 5-3)
2. Discuss the importance of logos. Why have logos for brands such as Nike, Apple, McDonald's and Coca-Cola become so widely recognized and memorable? (LO 5-1, 5-2)
3. Discuss the role of logos for digital technology companies such as Uber, Amazon, Airbnb, and others. Why is the design of a logo for these companies so important? (LO 5-1, 5-2)

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4. Discuss the four types of word-of-mouth communication and how they are used by marketers. (LO 5-3)
5. Discuss the factors that influence the effectiveness of a viral marketing campaign. Find an example of an effective viral marketing campaign and discuss the reasons it was successful. (LO 5-3)
6. It is recognized that an age bias exists in the advertising industry and digital agencies against older people who may not be as digitally savvy as younger generations. Do you think it is acceptable for advertising and digital agencies to favor younger people in the hiring process? How might an older person address the age bias problem? (LO 5-1, 5-3)

- 7.** What is meant by noise in the marketing communication process? Discuss how mobile devices such as laptops, tablets and smartphones are contributing to the noise problem and the effectiveness of television advertising. What are some of the ways TV advertisers can deal with the distractions created by these devices? (LO 5-1, 5-2)
- 8.** Discuss how the implications of the social consumer journey might differ for a marketer of a high-involvement product such as an automobile or consumer electronic device versus a company marketing a low involvement product such as a soft drink or paper towels. (LO 5-5)
- 9.** Discuss Procter & Gamble's decision to make digital and social media an important part of the IMC program for Charmin. Why has P&G been successful in using social media for the brand? (LO 5-4, 5-5)
- 10.** Discuss how marketers can use the cognitive response approach to analyze consumers' reactions to and processing of their advertising messages. Choose a print ad or TV commercial and discuss the types of cognitive responses that it might generate using the model shown in Figure 5–7. (LO 5-6)
- 11.** Explain the differences between the central versus peripheral route to persuasion and the factors that determine when each might be used by consumers in response to an advertisement or other form of marketing communication. (LO 5-6)



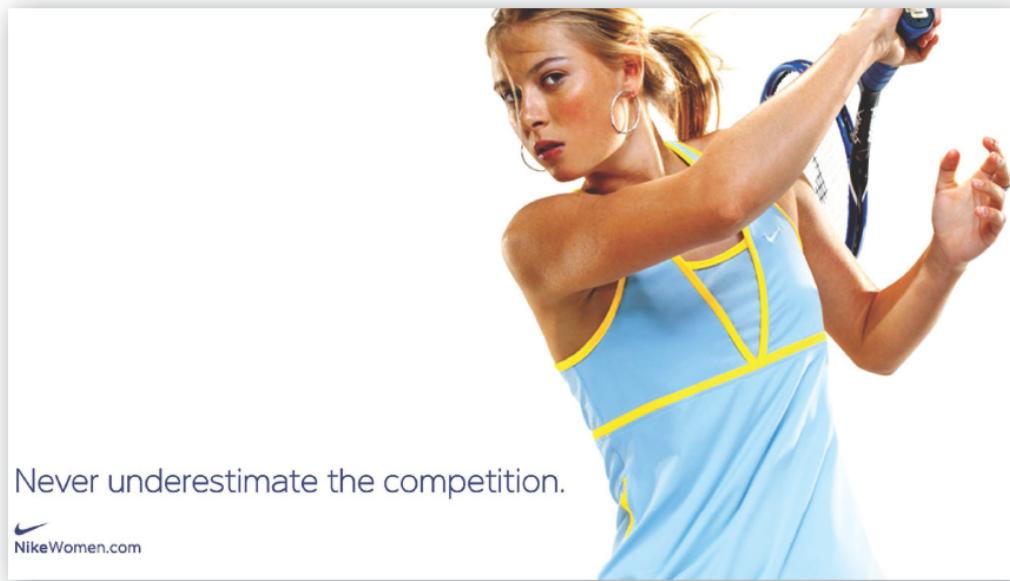
connect

Available only through your Connect course, help make key advertising and IMC concepts more meaningful and applicable:

- SmartBook 2.0
- Connect exercises, which may include: click-draggs, video cases, and case analyses.

6

Source, Message, and Channel Factors



Never underestimate the competition.

 NikeWomen.com

Source: NIKE Inc.

Learning Objectives

- LO 6-1** | Discuss the variables in the communication system and how they influence consumers' processing of promotional messages.