

Mastering the Marketing Communications Mix: Micro and Macro Perspectives on Integrated Marketing Communication Programs

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Kevin Lane Keller¹ **Mastering the Marketing Communications Mix: Micro and Macro Perspectives on Integrated Marketing Communication Programs**

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One difficult challenge for marketers is the large, diverse means of communication and communication options that are available to support their brands (e.g. TV, print, and interactive advertising; trade and consumer promotions; arts, sports, and cause sponsorships; etc.). Consequently, marketers must understand what various marketing communication options have to offer and how they should be combined to optimize their marketing communications programs. Towards that goal, this paper considers issues in how to develop, implement, and evaluate an integrated marketing communication program. Specifically, to provide micro perspectives -- especially relevant for academic research -- we introduce the Marketing Communication Tetrahedron as a means of classifying and analyzing factors influencing marketing communication effectiveness along four broad dimensions (i.e. factors related to the consumer, communication, response, and situation). To provide macro perspectives -- especially relevant for managerial planning -- we provide criteria as to how integrated marketing communication programs can be designed and evaluated as a whole (i.e. according to coverage, contribution, commonality, complementarity, robustness, and cost considerations). We also describe how the two perspectives relate and conclude by discussing theoretical and managerial implications and outlining future research directions.

Introduction

Marketing communications are the means by which firms attempt to inform, persuade, incite, and remind consumers – directly or indirectly - about the brands they sell. Perhaps no area of marketing has seen more dramatic changes over the years than marketing communications. As a result, the challenges presently faced by marketers in designing, implementing, and evaluating marketing communication programs are markedly different from those faced by marketers 20 or 30 years ago.

One of the most important of these changes is the increase in the number and diversity of communication options available to marketers to reach consumers. In recent years, the marketing communication environment has

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experienced: 1) the fragmentation of traditional advertising media, as well as 2) the emergence of new, non-traditional media, promotion, and other communication alternatives. In terms of media fragmentation, television has seen the rise of new network, cable, satellite, and independent stations that have diminished the share of the traditional “big three” television networks, and magazines have seen a proliferation of narrowly targeted titles. In terms of the emergence of new media, ways to reach consumers and create brand value that have grown in importance in recent years include, among others, sports and other event sponsorship; in-store advertising; “mini-billboards” in out-of-home locations; product placement in television and movies; and interactive electronic media (web sites, banner ads, etc.).

As a result of these and other changes, a modern marketing communication program typically employs a host of different communication options. A *communication option* is any marketer-initiated form of communication that is related directly or indirectly to the brand (e.g. an ad campaign, sweepstakes promotion, concert tour sponsorship, web site, etc.). Communication options are often grouped into broad communication types or media types (see Figure 1 for a representative list). Researchers have traditionally studied the effectiveness of different communication options or media types - typically advertising of some form - in relative isolation, often failing to recognize that: 1) marketers must choose across communication options in developing their communication programs and 2) potential interactions may exist among the different options that make up a communication program that profoundly affect consumer response to any one particular option.

1. **Media Advertising**

- TV
- Radio
- Newspaper
- Magazines

2. **Direct Response and Interactive Advertising**

- Mail
- Telephone
- Broadcast media
- Print media
- Computer-related

3. **Place Advertising**

- Bulletins
- Billboards
- Posters

-
- Cinema
 - Transit
4. **Point-of-Purchase Advertising**
- Shelf talkers
 - Aisle markers
 - Shopping cart ads
 - In-store radio or TV
5. **Trade Promotions**
- Trade deals & buying allowances
 - Point-of-purchase display allowances
 - Push money
 - Contests and dealer incentives
 - Training programs
 - Trade shows
 - Cooperative advertising
6. **Consumer Promotions**
- Samples
 - Coupons
 - Premiums
 - Refunds/rebates
 - Contests/sweepstakes
 - Bonus packs
 - Price-offs
7. **Event Marketing and Sponsorship**
- Sports
 - Arts
 - Entertainment
 - Fairs and festivals
 - Cause-related
8. **Publicity and Public Relations**
9. **Personal Selling**

Figure 1. Alternative Marketing Communication Options

Recognizing this oversight, some commentators have advocated that academic researchers study and marketers employ integrated marketing communications (IMC) to support their brands (e.g. Duncan and Moriarty 1997; Edell 1993; Keller 1996; Moore and Thorson 1996; Percy 1997; Schultz,

Tannenbaum, and Lauterborn 1994). As will be outlined briefly below, their writings and those of others have provided a number of useful insights into some key issues and guidelines for IMC. Although the particular approaches adopted by researchers studying IMC may vary, they all are generally consistent with the notion that an integrated marketing communication program requires that: 1) multiple types of communication options are employed and 2) communication options are designed in a way to reflect the existence and content of other communication options in the program.

The purpose of this paper is to provide additional insight into some of the theoretical and managerial issues in designing, implementing, and evaluating integrated marketing communication programs in the new, changing media environment. We approach this task from a consumer behaviour point of view - primarily from the perspective of how individual or groups of consumers are affected by marketing communications. Three priorities guide our discussion:

- 1) A more complete view as to the role of integrated marketing communications in the marketing program is needed.
- 2) A conceptual framework by which the effects of individual marketing communication options can be interpreted and compared is needed.
- 3) Critical guidelines for designing and evaluating marketing communication programs *as a whole* are needed.

In other words, our goal is to achieve a greater understanding as to what individual marketing communication options can do for marketers, how they work, and what makes different combinations of marketing communication options "better" or "worse."

We address each of these three areas in turn. First, we explore the role and challenges of marketing communications, providing a point-of-view on integrated marketing communication programs in the process. Second, we examine how individual communication options can best be characterized and understood. Specifically, the "Marketing Communication Tetrahedron" is introduced as a means of classifying and analysing factors influencing marketing communication effectiveness along four broad dimensions (i.e. factors related to the consumer, communication, response, and situation). The Tetrahedron provides a micro perspective of how to analyse the effects of integrated marketing communication programs that is especially useful for academic researchers. Third, we consider how marketing communication programs can be designed and evaluated as a whole, taking more of a macro perspective. The guidelines that emerge from this approach should be particularly relevant for marketing managers in industry. Finally, the paper relates these two perspectives, spells out some of the theoretical and

managerial implications of these various observations, and suggests areas for future research.

Role of Marketing Communications

Marketing communications represent the voice of a brand and the means by which companies can establish a dialogue with consumers concerning their product offerings. Marketing communications allow marketers to inform, persuade, incite, and remind consumers. Marketing communications can provide detailed product information or ignore the product all together to address other issues. Product attributes can be translated to benefits and related to higher-order values. Consumers can be told or shown how and why a product is used, by what kind of person, and where and when; learn about who makes the product and what the company and brand stand for; and be given an incentive or reward for trial or usage. Marketing communications can associate a brand with a specific person, place, experience, or thing. In these and other ways, marketing communications allow marketers to transcend the physical nature of their products or the technical specifications of their services to imbue products and services with additional meaning and value. In doing so, marketing communications can contribute to greater brand purchases and sustained consumer loyalty.

The importance of marketing communications has grown in recent years for several reasons. More and more products and services are seen as being at "parity," having arrived at the maturity stage of their life cycle. As a result, points-of-difference to distinguish brands related to inherent qualities of the product or service have become harder to come by. By transcending these inherent qualities, marketing communications can provide information to create points-of-difference that otherwise would not be possible. In a cluttered, complex marketplace, marketing communications can allow brands to stand out and help consumers appreciate their comparative advantages.

Understanding Integrated Marketing Communication Programs

Because of the large number of important -- albeit complicated -- decisions involved, one of the most heavily researched areas in marketing has been marketing communications -- especially advertising. As a result, many general perspectives exist by which communications can be interpreted, and a host of specific insights have emerged concerning "best business practices" with respect to different types of communications (Schultz 1998). For example, researchers studying advertising have identified a number of different factors related to executional characteristics, media schedules, etc.

to characterize what makes a successful ad campaign (Stewart and Furse 1986; Lodish et al. 1995). Similar guidelines have emerged for promotions (Blattberg and Neslin 1990), sponsorship (Association of National Advertisers 1995), and so on.

Much of this past research, however, has been applied to the study of a particular kind of communication option. To the extent that marketing communication programs employ multiple options, however, it is important for marketers to understand the collective contribution of the program as a whole. This collective contribution will depend not only on the “main effects” of each communication option but also the “interaction effects” among communication options. In other words, the key questions are:

- 1) What effects do communication options have in isolation (i.e. when consumers are not exposed to any other communication option)?
- 2) What effects do communication options have in combination (i.e. when consumers are also exposed to one or more other communication options)?

These latter interaction effects can be further classified according to the number and nature of different communication options involved, as well as the temporal order by which they are exposed to consumers.

This broader focus is critical given that an increasing number of firms have become interested in integrating their marketing communications in some fashion. Prior research has suggested a number of relevant topics in the study of integrated marketing communications and how marketers should best manage the IMC process to develop truly integrated communication programs (Cook 1997; Gould, Lerman, and Grein 1999; Kitchen and Schultz 1999; McArthur and Griffen 1997; Schultz and Kitchen 1997).

Schultz and Schultz (1998) define IMC as a “strategic business process used to plan, develop, execute and evaluate coordinated, measurable, persuasive brand communication programmes over time with consumers, customers, prospects and other targeted, relevant external and internal audiences.” Arguing that marketing and marketing communications are in a transition due to technological advances, they describe a four level transition process by which organizations move from one stage of integrated marketing communication development to another as a result of organizations’ ability to capture and manage information technology. From bottom to top, these levels are tactical coordination, redefining scope of marketing communication, application of information technology, and financial and strategic.

Picton and Hartley (1998) also provide a very broad, comprehensive view

of integrated marketing communications, suggesting the following dimensions of integration: promotional mix, promotional mix with marketing mix, creative, intra-organization, inter-organization, information and data base systems, target audience, corporate & unitised, and geographical. They discuss how each of these dimensions may vary in their degree of integration.

Thus, integrated marketing communications have been approached from many different directions, but we concentrate on the programmatic aspects of IMC (i.e. the tactical level identified by Schultz and Schultz and the promotional mix dimension suggested by Picton and Hartley) and adopt the following point of view. An ***integrated marketing communications program*** involves the development, implementation, and evaluation of marketing communication programs using multiple communication options where the design and execution of any communication option reflects the nature and content of other communication options that also makes up the communication program.

Several aspects of the definition are important. First, the basic premise of integrated marketing communications is that there are a number of communication objectives for a brand and a number of different means of communication to achieve each of those different objectives, suggesting that it therefore makes sense to employ multiple communication options in marketing communication programs. Second, and more importantly, marketing communication programs must not be developed in isolation. The effects of any communication option will depend, in part, on the communication effects engendered by other communication options. This realization poses a challenge to marketers as how to collectively design and execute marketing communication options so that they reflect aspects of other communication options in an optimal manner. These two aspects or realizations with IMC programs have important implications for marketing researchers and marketing managers which we address by taking a micro and macro perspective, respectively, as follows.

Micro Perspectives on IMC Programs

One implication of the above discussion is the importance of taking a broad view of marketing communication programs. The complexity of studying the effects of IMC programs shares the challenges of studying memory in psychology. Recognizing the context sensitivity of memory research, the famed psychologist J.J. Jenkins (1979) made the following observation concerning factors affecting memory performance: "The memory phenomena that we see depend on what kinds of subjects we study, what kinds of acquisition conditions we provide, what kinds of material we choose to work with, and what kinds of criterial measures we obtain. Furthermore, the

dependencies themselves are complex; the variables interact vigorously with one another (p.431).”

Figuratively, these four factors and the dependencies can be represented in what Jenkins calls the “Theorists Tetrahedron” or “Problem Pyramid”: Each vertex of the pyramid includes all the variables associated with one of the four main factors that affect memory performance; each edge of the pyramid represents two-way interactions between factors; each plane of the pyramid represents a three-way interaction; and the entire pyramid, or tetrahedron, represents a four-way interaction of all the variables.

The Marketing Communication Tetrahedron

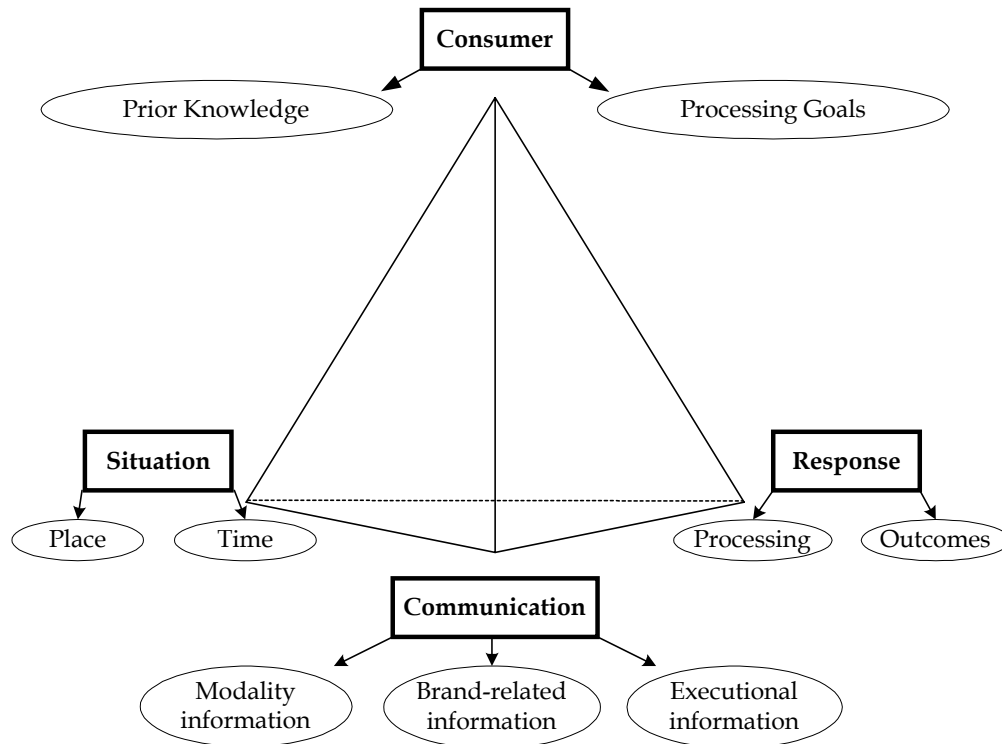


Figure 2. The Marketing Communication Tetrahedron

Jenkins’ notions can be adapted to characterize the effects of marketing communications. The “Marketing Communication Tetrahedron” (MCT) portrays four set of factors that influence marketing communication effectiveness (see Figure 2). The MCT implies that, in the most general sense, studying the effects of individual marketing communications requires understanding how different types of consumers, under different processing circumstances, exposed to different types of communications, respond to

different brand- or communication-related tasks or measures. We review each of these four sets of factors in turn.

Consumers

Consumers obviously vary on a host of different characteristics - demographic (e.g., age, gender, race, etc.), psychographic (e.g. attitudes towards self, others, possessions, etc.), behavioral (e.g. brand choices, usage, loyalty, etc.) - that often serve as the basis of market segmentation and the development of distinct marketing programs. Any one of these characteristics may impact consumers' response to marketing communications (MacInnis and Jaworski 1989). Many of these characteristics, however, can be related to a few key dimensions that have an important impact on the effectiveness of marketing communications, as follows.

First, consumers may differ in their prior knowledge, especially in terms of what they know - moving from the general to the specific - about 1) the product or service category, 2) the company or organization that makes the product or provides the service for the brand, 3) the brand, and 4) past communications for the brand. For example, the content of knowledge may include functions of the product, salient attributes or benefits or overall evaluations of certain brands, past experiences with the company, product, brand, and/or its marketing communications (Alba and Hutchinson 1987; Olson 1978). Knowledge in each of these areas can be distinguished in terms of amount and nature - consumers may know a little or a lot - and what they know may reflect well or poorly on the brand.

Second, consumers may differ in their goals or stage of readiness with respect to the brand or product category at the time at which they are exposed to the marketing communication. In terms of the classic "hierarchy of effects" (Ray 1982), consumer's goals may range from a need or desire to: 1) make a purchase in the category; 2) identify appropriate candidate brands; 3) obtain benefit or feature information about specific brands; 4) judge or evaluate the merits of certain brands; or 5) buy chosen brands. Each of these goals may vary by their sense of urgency, the informational or memory requirements involved, and so on (Alba, Hutchinson, and Lynch 1990).

Third and relatedly, consumers may also differ in their processing goals in terms of what they would want to get, if anything, out of the specific marketing communication to which they are being exposed. One distinction often made (Mitchell 1981) is whether consumers want to attend to the brand information (e.g. to obtain information about or evaluate a brand) or, instead, only want to attend to more executional, non-brand-related information (e.g. because they do not want to make a purchase in the category or do not view the marketed brand as a viable candidate).

In short, in a general sense, consumers may vary in terms of both what they know and what they *want* to know about the product category, particular brands within that product category, or specific marketing communications themselves (MacInnis, Moorman, and Jaworski 1991).

Communication

Communication factors relate to characteristics of the communication option under consideration itself. There are a number of relevant dimensions by which communication options could be contrasted. Fundamentally, marketing communications differ on various aspects of modality - e.g. the number (sight, sound, motion, spoken or written words, etc.) and nature (static, dynamic, interactive, customized, etc.) of modalities involved (Wright 1981; Edell 1988). These very basic aspects of a marketing communication are extremely important in how they interact with consumer characteristics and the surrounding context to create different responses. For example, the ability of interactive web sites to present information in virtually any modality in a customized fashion has profound implications on communication effectiveness and the ability to build strong relationships with consumers.

In a more specific sense, marketing communications can also vary in their message content about the brand ("what is said") and creative execution ("how it is said"). A communication may contain much brand-related information (e.g. a detailed print ad or direct mail piece) or none at all (e.g., a titled sponsorship without additional marketing support). Brand-related information may focus on tangible aspects (e.g. physical product attributes) or intangible aspects (e.g. user or usage imagery, brand personality, the company behind the brand, etc.) of the product, as well as on the brand name itself. In terms of creative execution, brand-related information may be conveyed in virtually an infinite number of different ways (e.g. through informational or emotional means; employing fear, music, sex, appeals, special effects, etc.). Thus, marketing communications can vary tremendously in the amount and nature of brand-related information as well as executional information.

Response

Consumer response reflects the state changes that a consumer experiences - either temporally or on a more permanent basis - as a result of exposure to a marketing communication. Consumer response to any marketing communication can be broken down into a host of different categories reflecting the process or outcome associated with exposure to the communication which are only briefly highlighted here. In terms of processing, both cognitive and affective responses can occur. These

responses may vary in terms of their level of abstraction (specific vs. general), evaluative nature (negative, neutral, or positive valenced), product- or brand-relationship (none vs. high), and so on. For example, while watching an ad, a consumer may experience a certain emotion (e.g. warmth, pride, etc.), reach an overall judgment about the brand, and so on. In terms of outcomes, to the extent that some processing takes place, memory, judgment, or behavioral effects can occur and be measured. Memory measures can capture recall and recognition of any of the brand-related or executional information contained in the communication (Krishnan and Chakravarti 1993; Lynch and Srull 1982). Judgment measures can reflect perceptions (beliefs); evaluations or attitudes; intentions; and so on (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975). Behavioral measures can relate to choice preferences, the quantity and frequency of subsequent purchases; and so on (Bettman 1979; Nedungadi, Mitchell, and Berger 1993).

Situation

Situational factors relate to all the factors external to the communication itself that may affect consumers and impact communication effectiveness. A host of situational or contextual factors may come into play and influence the communication process. Representative factors include exposure location; the extent and nature of competing stimuli (advertising or otherwise) at communication exposure; the amount of time lag involved with measurements of response or outcomes (Hutchinson and Moore 1984); the type of retrieval conditions present during these measurements (Keller 1987); and so on.

Broadly, situational factors primarily relate to place and time. The key issue with these factors is whether they facilitate or inhibit processing and, as a result, enhance or detract from communication effects in any way.

Using MCT

The MCT is designed to be a comprehensive classification system and to capture the most important factors distinguishing marketing communications and their effects on consumers. In a broad sense, the four factors can be related to the classic journalism taxonomy for story-telling: "Who" and "Why" (Consumer); "What" (Communication); "When" and "Where" (Situation); and "How" (Response). The MCT also can be related to other consumer behavior concepts and theories. For example, the knowledge and processing goal dimensions highlighted for the Consumer factor can be related to the motivation and ability antecedents in Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) elaboration likelihood model. Similarly, the location dimension of the Situation factor could be related to the ELM's opportunity antecedent.

As a tool, the MCT is especially designed to help researchers gain perspective and insight into their studies. The main theme of the MCT is that few broad generalizations exist with respect to marketing communications and that, fundamentally, marketing communication effectiveness “depends.” That is, the MCT stresses that consumer response to any one marketing communication - and therefore the outcomes of any one research study examining marketing communications, - will be a multiplicative function of various factors: The same communication may be processed differently depending on characteristics of the consumer, the type of exposure situation, the extent and nature of competitive marketing communications, etc. Moreover, different types of communications may produce very different responses, even under the exact same set of circumstances.

Recognition of this fact is reflected in the importance placed on understanding interactions and moderator variables by academic researchers studying marketing communications today. Numerous studies have uncovered main effects and boundary conditions to communication effectiveness, although an exhaustive summary of such research is beyond the scope of this paper. Despite that fact, awareness of the four broad sets of factors for the MCT and their underlying sub-factors may be helpful to researchers by providing a more comprehensive view of moderators, suggesting potentially overlooked potential interaction effects.

In other words, specific communication options or more general communication types can and should be more systematically profiled in terms of the existence of interactions across a range of different consumer, situation, or response considerations. It should be recognized that the actual approaches adopted by researchers studying marketing communications may be fundamentally very different - e.g. ranging from very quantitative econometric studies to behaviorally-focused information-processing experiments to qualitative anthropological investigations. Nevertheless, recognition of the MCT will help to ensure the robustness and facilitate the comparability of these various research programs.

In addition to its importance to academic researchers, the contingent aspect of marketing communications suggested by the MCT is certainly critical for those marketing managers actually developing integrated marketing communications. For example, differences in knowledge and goals across consumers will require different types of communications whose effects will vary depending on the situation and response desired. This point will be elaborated on further after considering some more macro issues of IMC.

Macro Perspectives on IMC Programs

Although the Marketing Communication Tetrahedron yields research

insights into how individual consumers respond to various individual marketing communication options under different circumstances, ultimately, marketing managers must evaluate marketing communications programs as a whole. Other considerations come into play, however, when holistically evaluating an IMC program, i.e. when considering responses to a set of communications across a group of consumers. Our assumption is that the marketer has already thoroughly researched the target market and fully understands who they are -- their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors - and therefore knows exactly what needs to be done with them in terms of communication objectives.

In assessing the collective impact of an IMC program, the overriding goal is to create the most effective and efficient communication program possible. Towards that goal, six relevant criteria can be identified: 1) Coverage; 2) Contribution; 3) Commonality; 4) Complementarity; 5) Robustness, and 6) Cost. We consider each in turn.

Coverage

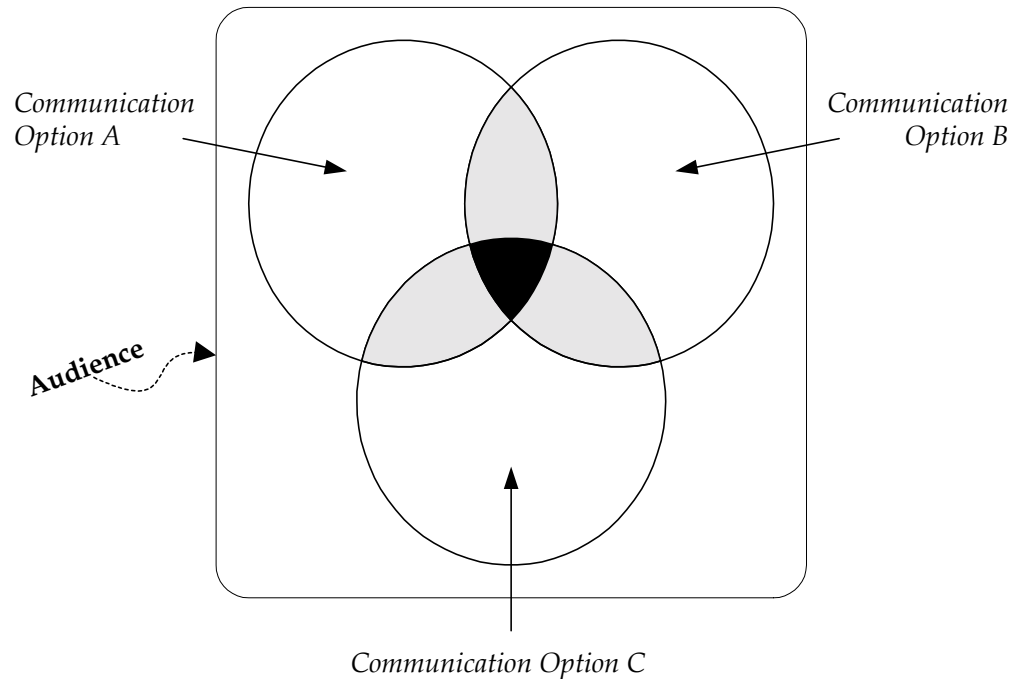
Coverage relates to the proportion of the audience that is reached by each communication option employed, as well as how much overlap exists among communication options. In other words, to what extent do different communication options reach the designated target market and the same or different consumers making up that market? As Figure 3 shows, the unique aspects of coverage relate to the "main effects"; the common aspects relate to the "interaction effects."

The unique aspect of coverage relates to the inherent communication ability of a marketing communication option, as suggested by the second criteria (i.e. contribution). To the extent that there is some overlap in communication options, however, marketers must decide how to optimally design their communication program to reflect the fact that consumers may already have some communication effects in memory prior to exposure to any other communication option. In terms of its effect on brand knowledge, a communication option may either reinforce associations and strengthen linkages that are also the focus of other communication options or, alternatively, address other associations and linkages that are *not* the focus of other communication options, as suggested by the third and fourth criteria (i.e. commonality and complementarity). Moreover, if less-than-perfect overlap exists - which is almost always the case - a communication option may be designed to reflect the fact that consumers may or may not have seen other communication options, as suggested by the fifth criterion (i.e. robustness). Finally, all of these considerations must be offset by their cost, as suggested by the sixth criterion.

Contribution

Contribution relates to the inherent ability of a marketing communication to create the desired response and communication effects from consumers *in the absence of exposure to any other communication option*. In other words, contribution relates to the “main effects” of a marketing communication option in terms of how it affects consumers’ processing of a communication and the resulting outcomes. As noted above, marketing communications can play many different roles (e.g. build awareness, enhance image, induce sales, etc.), and the contribution of any marketing communication option will depend on how well it plays that role.

Also as noted above, much prior research has considered this aspect of communications, generating conceptual guidelines and evaluation criteria in the process. Given that overlaps with communication options exist, however, other factors must be considered, as follows.



Note: Circles represent the market segments reached by various communication options.
Shaded portions represent areas of overlap in communication options

Figure 3. Audience Communication Option Overlap

Commonality

Commonality relates to the extent to which *common* associations are reinforced across communication options, i.e. the extent to which information

conveyed by different communication options share meaning. Most definitions of IMC emphasize only this criterion. For example, Burnett and Moriarty (1998) define integrated marketing communications as the “practice of unifying all marketing communication tools – from advertising to packaging – to send target audiences a consistent, persuasive message that promotes company goals.” Several issues concerning commonality are worth noting.

First, repeated exposures give consumers multiple opportunities to encode brand-related information. The encoding variability principle maintains that exposure to information in different formats or media may further facilitate learning (Unnava and Burnkrant 1991; Young and Bellaza 1982). Variable encoding of stimulus information is thought to result in multiple retrieval cues that improve retrieval ability and increase information accessibility.

Second, the more abstract the association to be created or reinforced by marketing communications, the more likely it would seem that it could be effectively reinforced in different ways across heterogeneous communication options (Johnson 1984). For example, if the desired association is “contemporary,” then there may be a number of different ways to make a brand seem modern and relevant. On the other hand, if the desired association is a concrete attribute (e.g. “rich chocolate taste”), then it may be difficult to convey in communication options which do not permit explicit product statements (e.g. sponsorship).

Finally, another commonality issue is the extent of executional consistency across communication options – i.e. the extent to which non-product-related information is conveyed in different communication options. The more executional information is coordinated, the more likely it is that this information can serve as a retrieval cue to other communication effects (Edell and Keller 1989, 1998). In other words, if a symbol is established in one communication option (e.g. a feather in a TV ad for a deodorant to convey mildness and softness), then it can be used in other communications to help trigger the knowledge, thoughts, feelings, images stored in memory from exposure to a previous communication.

Complementarity

Complementarity relates to the extent to which *different* associations and linkages are emphasized across communication options. Several issues concerning complementarity are also worth noting.

First, complementarity may involve the *content* of brand knowledge in terms of the extent to which different communication options are designed to convey different types of associations. In other words, different brand associations may be most effectively established by capitalizing on those marketing communication options best suited to eliciting a particular

consumer response or by establishing a particular type of brand association. For example, some media are demonstrably better at generating trial than engendering long-term loyalty (e.g. sampling or other forms of sales promotion).

Second, complementarity may also involve the *organization* of brand knowledge in terms of the extent to which marketing communications are designed to create or strengthen linkages between certain associations (Keller 1987, 1993). For example, for a number of reasons, television advertising often “brands” especially poorly such that brand links to communication effects created by the TV ad will need to be reinforced and strengthened with supporting media (e.g. print ads or point-of-purchase advertising material). Thus, complementarity may involve using additional communication options to strengthen the links to already existing - but weakly linked - communication effects.

Robustness

Robustness relates to the extent to which a marketing communication option is robust and “works” for different groups of consumers. The reality with any integrated communication program is that when consumers are exposed to a particular marketing communication, some consumers will have already been exposed to other marketing communications for the brand, whereas other consumers will not have had any prior exposure. The ability of a marketing communication to work at “two levels” - effectively communicating to consumers who have or have *not* seen other communications - is critically important.

That is, some communications will be ineffective unless consumers have already been exposed to other communications. For example, mass advertising or some type of awareness-creating communications is often seen as a necessary condition for personal selling. A marketing communication option is deemed robust when it achieves its desired effect *regardless* of consumers’ past communication history.

Besides this “communication robustness,” communication options may also be judged in terms of their broader “consumer robustness” in terms of how communications affect consumers who vary on various other dimensions besides their communication history, e.g. especially brand or product knowledge or processing goals. In other words, how well does one particular marketing communication option inform, persuade, etc. depending on the different market segments involved? Communications directed at primarily creating brand awareness (e.g. sponsorship) may be more robust by virtue of their simplicity.

There would seem to be two possible means of achieving this dual communication ability:

- 1) By providing different information within a communication option to appeal to the different types of consumers and/or
- 2) By providing information that is rich or ambiguous enough to work regardless of prior consumer knowledge.

In terms of the former, “multiple” information provision strategy, an important issue will be how information designed to appeal to one target market of consumers will be processed by other consumers and target markets. Issues of information overload, confusion, and annoyance may come into play if communications become burdened with a great deal of detail.

In terms of the latter, “broad” information provision strategy, the issue will become how potent or successful that information can be made. By attempting to appeal to the “lowest common denominator,” it may be that the information lacks precision and sufficient detail to have any meaningful impact on consumers. To be successful, consumers with disparate backgrounds will have to find information in the communication sufficiently relevant to satisfy their goals given their product or brand knowledge or communications history.

Cost

Finally, evaluations of marketing communications on all of these criteria must be weighed against their cost to arrive at the most effective *and* efficient communication program.

Using IMC Choice Criteria

The IMC choice criteria can provide some guidance into designing and implementing integrated marketing communication programs. To do so, however, involves: 1) Evaluating communication options, 2) Establishing priorities and tradeoffs, and 3) Executing final design and implementation.

Evaluating Communication Options

Marketing communication options or communication types can be judged according to the response and communication effects that they can create as well as how they rate on the IMC choice criteria. Figures 4 and 5 summarize some issues as to how five major communication types can be evaluated on the basis of these considerations and criteria. As the figure reveals, different communication types and options have different strengths and weaknesses and raise different issues. Several points about the IMC choice criteria ratings are worth noting. First, there are not necessarily any inherent differences across communication types for contribution and complementarity because each communication type, if properly designed, can play a critical and unique role in achieving communication objectives.

<i>Ability to...</i>	TV	Print	Sales Promotions	Sponsorship	Interactive
Attract attention or be intrusive	++	++	++	+	+
Convey product info	+	+++	+++	+	+++
Create emotional response	+++	++	+	++	+
Link to brand	+	++	++	+++	+++
Encourage or facilitate purchase	+	++	+++	+	+++

Figure 4. Micro Perspectives

<i>Ability to...</i>	TV	Print	Sales Promotions	Sponsorship	Interactive
Coverage	+++	+	++	+++	+
Breadth	+	++	++	++	+++
Depth					
Contribution	+++	+++	+++	+++	+++
Commonality	+++	++	++	+	+++
Complementarity	+++	+++	+++	+++	+++
Robustness	+	++	+	+	+++
Cost	+++	+++	+++	+++	+++

Figure 5. Macro Perspectives

Similarly, all marketing communications are seemingly expensive, although some differences in market prices with respects to CPM's can prevail. Communication types vary, however, in terms of their breadth and depth of coverage as a result of the audiences that they can deliver to. Communication types also differ in terms of commonality and robustness

according to the number of modalities involved: The more modalities available with a communication type, the greater its potential commonality and robustness.

Arriving at a final mix requires, in part, decisions on priorities and tradeoffs among the IMC choice criteria, discussed next.

Establishing Priorities and Tradeoffs

Deciding on which IMC program to adopt, after the various marketing communication options have been profiled, will depend in part on how the choice criteria are ranked. In addition to setting priorities, because the IMC choice criteria themselves are related, decisions must also be made concerning tradeoffs.

Priorities will depend in part on the objectives of the marketing communication program (e.g. short-run vs. long run concerns) and the marketing program more generally which, in turn, depends on a host of factors beyond the scope of this paper. A number of possible tradeoffs can be identified with the IMC choice criteria, primarily dealing with the three factors that are concerned with overlaps in coverage.

- 1) Commonality and complementarity will often be inversely related as the more it is the case that various marketing communication options emphasize the same brand attribute or benefit, all else equal, the less they can be effectively emphasizing other attributes and benefits.
- 2) Robustness and complementarity will also often be inversely related: The more a marketing communication program maximizes complementarity in content, the less critical is the robustness of any communication option. In other words, the more a communication program accounts for differences in consumers across communication options, the less necessary it is that any one communication is designed to appeal to different consumer groups.
- 3) Commonality and robustness, on the other hand, do not share an obvious relationship, as it may be possible, for example, to develop a sufficiently abstract message (e.g. "brand is contemporary") that can be effectively reinforced across multiple communication types (e.g. advertising, interactive, sponsorship, promotions, etc.).

Executing Final Design and Implementation

Once the broad strategic guidelines are put into place, specific executional details of each communication option must be determined, and the specific parameters of the media plan must be put into place. In terms of the former, communication options must be developed as creatively as possible to maximize the probability that they will achieve their desired objectives. In

terms of the latter, decisions must be made about the concentration and continuity of the different communication options in the IMC plan. Concentration refers to the amount of communications that consumers receive. Consumers may be exposed to a varying amount of the same or different communications. Continuity refers to the distribution of those exposures in terms of how massed or diffused they are.

Relating Micro and Macro Perspectives

The MCT should be especially beneficial to researchers who need to adopt a more micro or theoretical perspective to study individual effects of communications; the IMC choice criteria, on the other hand, should be especially beneficial to marketing managers who need to adopt more of a macro or applied perspective to evaluate and contrast IMC programs as a whole. At the same time, the two perspectives are complementary such that gaining an understanding from one perspective will also help to facilitate understanding from the other perspective, as follows.

Micro-Macro Transfers

The strength of the MCT is that it provides a comprehensive view of how communication options and types of communications work under different circumstances, how different communication options relate, and so on. Such insights are extremely useful in designing and implementing IMC programs. Examining any one communication option in such a broad fashion permits greater insights into the strengths and weaknesses of that particular option and how it should best be used. Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of different types of communications from this perspective also helps in terms of refining and applying the IMC choice criteria. For example, understanding how different types of consumers respond to a communication is useful for assessing the “robustness” of that communication. Thus, the research findings concerning interactions that emerge from the study of marketing communications according to the MCT should be help to provide the conceptual foundation for the IMC choice criteria.

Macro-Micro Transfers

The macro perspective can also be useful to marketing researchers studying marketing communications. Recognition of the IMC choice criteria reinforces the fact that marketing communications research must extend beyond studying individual communication options in isolation to consider the interactive effects of multiple communication options. For example, by recognizing that issues related to how marketing communication options interact according to commonality, complementarity, and robustness

considerations can be important in the design of IMC programs, researchers can hone in on those aspects. Thus, the broader macro perspective can help to extend thinking of communication effects.

Discussion

Summary

The motivation behind this paper was a belief that academic researchers and industry practitioners need to have a deeper and broader understanding of integrated marketing communications. Consistent with this belief, this paper began with the basic premise that a host of vastly different communication options now exist by which firms can inform, persuade, incite, and remind consumers and customers. The range and diversity of these options poses challenges to marketers. To develop an optimal marketing communication program, a means to characterize, evaluate, and choose among different communication options is necessary.

Towards these goals, after reviewing some relevant past research, this paper advanced two main concepts. The Marketing Communication Tetrahedron (MCT) highlights four sets of factors (with corresponding sub-factors) by which marketing communications can be characterized: 1) Consumer factors (e.g. knowledge and processing goals); 2) Communication factors (e.g. modality information, brand-related information, executional information); 3) Response factors (e.g. cognitive and affective processing; memory, judgment, and behavioral outcomes); and 4) Situation factors (e.g. place and time). These factors are characterized by interactions between and among themselves.

The MCT stems from research in cognitive, social, and consumer psychology. The rationale behind the MCT is that many different types of consumers encounter many different types of marketing communications under many different circumstances and that these differences matter and must be understood. By adopting this broad view of communications, the possible effects of different communication options can then be interpreted and compared in a way to facilitate the development of the best possible IMC program. The micro perspectives gained from systematically studying marketing communications with this approach are especially useful for academic researchers.

The second main concept that was developed was the IMC choice criteria. Specifically, six dimensions were identified by which an IMC program could be evaluated:

- 1) *Coverage* (proportion and overlap of target market(s) reached by a marketing communication);
- 2) *Contribution* (the inherent ability of a marketing communication to

- create the desired response and communication effects from consumers);
- 3) *Commonality* (the extent to which *common* associations are reinforced across communication options);
 - 4) *Complementarity* (the extent to which *different* associations and linkages are emphasized across communication options);
 - 5) *Robustness* (the extent to which marketing communication option is flexible and “works” for different groups of consumers); and
 - 6) *Cost*.

Issues in evaluating marketing communication options, defining priorities and tradeoffs, and executing the final design and implementation of IMC programs according to this choice criteria were discussed. The macro perspectives gained from systematically applying these criteria to marketing communications with this approach are especially useful for marketing managers from industry.

The paper concluded by considering how the micro and macro perspectives inter-related. It was argued that micro perspectives as to how consumer-related factors, communication-related factors, response-related factors, and situation-related factors interact can help to inform macro perspectives in terms of the development and application of IMC choice criteria. Similarly, macro perspectives highlighting the importance of understanding IMC choice criteria such as commonality, complementarity, and robustness of communication options can help to direct more micro analysis as to the effectiveness and versatility of various communication options.

Implications

Integrated marketing communication programs were defined above as involving marketing communication programs using multiple communication options *where the design and execution of any communication option reflects the nature and content of other communication options making up the communication program*. Evaluating IMC programs thus requires an assessment of exactly how “integrated” the program is from the standpoint of how well different marketing communication options “fit together.” In other words, just how much has the development of any one communication option reflected the development of other communication options?

Managerially, there are two chief implications of this view of integrated marketing communication. First, all possible communication options should be evaluated in terms of their ability to create the desired communication effects. Different communication options have different strengths and can

accomplish different objectives. The optimal communication program will depend on the particular objectives involved. Thus, it is important to employ a “mix” of different communication options, each playing a specific role in creating the desired communication effects or brand knowledge structures. Undoubtedly, a myriad of different sets of communications options can create nearly equivalent effects, suggesting there is not necessarily a singularly best communication program. Nevertheless, some combinations of communication options will work better than others.

Second, marketing communication programs should be put together in a way such that the “whole” is greater than the “sum of the parts.” In other words, as much as possible, there should be a “match” among certain communication options so that the effects of any one communication option is enhanced by the presence of another. These enhanced effects may involve stronger or more favorable associations, greater number of associations, greater likelihood of purchase, and so on.

According to the IMC choice criteria, the ideal integrated marketing communication program would be one that retained a core of consistency across communication options but designed these various options so that the strengths in one option helped to negate the disadvantages of another option. Moreover, this communication program would cover the target market in a way such that it communicated effectively regardless of consumers’ knowledge about the brand, its communications, the product category itself, etc. Finally, all of this would be done at the lowest cost possible.

This broader perspective on IMC has additional implications as to how marketing communications should be managed. From a marketing research perspective, given that an increasing number of diverse communication options are employed, it may be difficult and cost-prohibitive to research the effects of each option individually. Thus, there need to be techniques and approaches that provide some breadth and comparability in the assessment of individual communication options. One possible research strategy might be to devote greater attention to tracking approaches that monitor consumers over time. In other words, rather than have the focus of research efforts on individual communication options, the focus should instead shift to the consumer. For example, tracking measures could tap into consumer brand knowledge structures over time and attempt to assess the impact of different communication options on that knowledge as a means of arriving at some kind of “common denominator”. Regardless of which methods are employed, there must be some attempt to put the various marketing communication options on an equal footing so that “apples are compared to apples.”

Another area impacted by this broader view of IMC is media planning. First, media planning must determine how to more formally incorporate less

traditional or alternative communication options. Specifically, there must be an explicit recognition of the need to develop and employ algorithms to allocate the communication budget optimally across a wide and diverse range of communication options. To do so will require an understanding of the “main effects” and “interaction effects” of communication options. Research advances emerging from academic researchers taking a micro perspective and more practical learning from tracking and other means will clearly help in this regard.

Future Research Directions

The range of research topics with integrated marketing communications is vast. Broadly, the main managerial research questions posed by the paper are how to best understand and evaluate: 1) the effects of individual marketing communication options as well as 2) the effects of integrated marketing communication programs as a whole. The main theoretical research questions raised by the paper are how different characteristics of consumers respond along different dimensions to different types of communications under different situations. These are obviously enormously complex issues. In this concluding section, we highlight several specific directions for future research, recognizing that many other important future research areas exist and should be pursued.

Micro Directions

One research priority is to continue to intensively study the effects of individual communication options. More attention needs to be paid, however, to the effects of non-traditional advertising vehicles and other communication options such as interactive advertising, direct response advertising, out-of-home advertising, event sponsorship, and product placement. The MCT developed here provides one structured approach to guide these efforts. Other perspectives should be adopted, however, to provide additional interpretations and means of understanding and to facilitate comparisons to past communications research.

In terms of the MCT itself, often, quite appropriately, to understand some effect, researchers may choose to examine only a restricted part of the tetrahedron, e.g. how fear appeals affect brand persuasion; how children process sales promotions differently; or what sponsorship effects linger under low levels of processing. Nevertheless all four types of variables – and individual variables within each type – may interact to affect the response and success of marketing communications. Future research should recognize and explore the interactions suggested by this representation. Such an investigation will require programmatic research efforts with individual

studies controlling some factors while allowing others to vary. It is important in sequencing these research studies, however, that certain factors are not consistently overlooked or ignored. Thus, although it may be appropriate to fix the level of a factor in any one study, it would be a mistake not to explore possible moderating effects in other studies. Only through such a systematic and comprehensive approach can the richness and complexity of consumer response to integrated marketing communications be satisfactorily addressed. As part of these investigations, the MCT itself may be refined, and the individual factors or sub-factors may change in different ways.

One area of particular interest is the effects of exposure to one communication option on the processing of another communication option. In particular, researchers can strive for a more complete account of how individual marketing communication options “work” that reflects the fact that consumers may have already been exposed to other communication options and thus have existing knowledge about the brand and its other communications prior to exposure.

Macro Directions

In terms of future research from a more macro perspective, relevant topics include criteria to facilitate the development of optimal creative strategies as well as models to assist budget allocation across communication options. For example, one interesting line of research would be to explore how advertising creative strategies (e.g. fear appeals, warmth appeals, humorous appeals, etc.) “transfer” to interactive advertising on the internet where consumers have much greater opportunity to process and control over exposure to information. What exactly is the role of creative strategies with interactive advertising?

Another potentially useful direction is to broaden the notion of IMC to incorporate other forms of implicit brand messages. For example, Schultz, Tannenbaum, and Lauterborn (1994) view the effects of integrated marketing communications in terms of “contacts.” They define a *contact* as any information-bearing experience that a customer or prospect has with the brand, the product category, or the market that relates to the marketer’s product or service. According to these authors, there are numerous ways in which a person can come in contact with a brand:

For example, a contact can include friends’ and neighbors’ comments, packaging, newspaper, magazine, and television information, ways the customer or prospect is treated in the retail store, where the product is shelved in the store, and the type of signage that appears in retail establishments. And the contacts do not stop with the purchase. Contacts

also consist of what friends, relatives, and bosses say about a person who is using the product. Contacts include the type of customer service given with returns or inquiries, or even the types of letters the company writes to resolve problems or to solicit additional business. All of these are customer contacts with the brand. These bits and pieces of information, experiences, and relationships, created over time, influence the potential relationship among the customer, the brand, and the marketer.

This broader view of IMC than even reviewed in this paper suggests a number of possible research areas in terms of the effects of more indirect forms of brand contacts.

Conclusions

One of the keys to the success of many brands and one of the culprits leading to the failure of many brands is marketing communications. Effectively designed and implemented marketing communication programs are invaluable for building and managing brand equity. The complexity of that task, however, is enormous. This paper attempted to provide some fresh new perspectives as to how to view marketing communications and how integrated marketing communication programs can be developed to help to address that challenge

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