



Social media: The new hybrid element of the promotion mix

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Abstract The emergence of Internet-based social media has made it possible for one person to communicate with hundreds or even thousands of other people about products and the companies that provide them. Thus, the impact of consumer-to-consumer communications has been greatly magnified in the marketplace. This article argues that social media is a hybrid element of the promotion mix because in a traditional sense it enables companies to talk to their customers, while in a nontraditional sense it enables customers to talk directly to one another. The content, timing, and frequency of the social media-based conversations occurring between consumers are outside managers' direct control. This stands in contrast to the traditional integrated marketing communications paradigm whereby a high degree of control is present. Therefore, managers must learn to shape consumer discussions in a manner that is consistent with the organization's mission and performance goals. Methods by which this can be accomplished are delineated herein. They include providing consumers with networking platforms, and using blogs, social media tools, and promotional tools to engage customers.

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1. Social media, the promotion mix, and integrated marketing communications

Integrated marketing communications (IMC) is the guiding principle organizations follow to communicate with their target markets. *Integrated marketing communications* attempts to coordinate and control the various elements of the promotional

mix—advertising, personal selling, public relations, publicity, direct marketing, and sales promotion—to produce a unified customer-focused message and, therefore, achieve various organizational objectives (Boone & Kurtz, 2007, p. 488).

However, the tools and strategies for communicating with customers have changed significantly with the emergence of the phenomenon known as *social media*, also referred to as *consumer-generated media*. This form of media “describes a variety of new sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated and used by consumers intent on educating each other about products, brands,

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services, personalities, and issues” (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2004, p. 2).

Social media encompasses a wide range of online, word-of-mouth forums including blogs, company-sponsored discussion boards and chat rooms, consumer-to-consumer e-mail, consumer product or service ratings websites and forums, Internet discussion boards and forums, moblogs (sites containing digital audio, images, movies, or photographs), and social networking websites, to name a few. As illustrated by Table 1, social media outlets are numerous and varied.

The 21st century is witnessing an explosion of Internet-based messages transmitted through these media. They have become a major factor in influencing various aspects of consumer behavior including awareness, information acquisition, opinions, attitudes, purchase behavior, and post-purchase communication and evaluation. Unfortunately, the popular business press and academic literature offers marketing managers very little guidance for incorporating social media into their IMC strategies.

Table 1. Examples of social media

- Social networking sites (MySpace, Facebook, Faceparty)
- Creativity works sharing sites:
 - Video sharing sites (YouTube)
 - Photo sharing sites (Flickr)
 - Music sharing sites (Jamendo.com)
 - Content sharing combined with assistance (Piczo.com)
 - General intellectual property sharing sites (Creative Commons)
- User-sponsored blogs (The Unofficial Apple Weblog, Cnet.com)
- Company-sponsored websites/blogs (Apple.com, P&G’s Vocalpoint)
- Company-sponsored cause/help sites (Dove’s Campaign for Real Beauty, click2quit.com)
- Invitation-only social networks (ASmallWorld.net)
- Business networking sites (LinkedIn)
- Collaborative websites (Wikipedia)
- Virtual worlds (Second Life)
- Commerce communities (eBay, Amazon.com, Craig’s List, iStockphoto, Threadless.com)
- Podcasts (“For Immediate Release: The Hobson and Holtz Report”)
- News delivery sites (Current TV)
- Educational materials sharing (MIT OpenCourseWare, MERLOT)
- Open Source Software communities (Mozilla’s spreadfirefox.com, Linux.org)
- Social bookmarking sites allowing users to recommend online news stories, music, videos, etc. (Digg, del.icio.us, Newsvine, Mixx it, Reddit)

Therefore, many managers lack a full appreciation for social media’s role in the company’s promotional efforts. Even though social media is magnifying the impact consumer-to-consumer conversations have in the marketplace, methods for shaping those conversations have not yet been articulated.

The purpose of this article is threefold. First, we propose that social media be considered a hybrid component of the promotional mix and therefore be incorporated as an integral part of the organization’s IMC strategy. The second purpose of the article is to compare and contrast the traditional communications paradigm that relied on the established promotional mix, elements which were developed and refined over the past 100 years, with the new communications paradigm which incorporates social media. Finally, we discuss methods by which marketing managers can shape the consumer-to-consumer conversations which are now driving the marketplace to a greater extent than ever before.

2. Social media’s hybrid role in the promotion mix

It has long been acknowledged in marketing management circles that successful IMC strategies clearly reflect the values articulated in an organization’s mission statement and contribute to the fulfillment of the organization’s performance goals. To accomplish these objectives, the elements of the promotion mix are carefully coordinated so the information transmitted to the marketplace through these elements consistently communicates a unified message that broadly reflects the organization’s fundamental values.

For example, the promotional efforts conducted by Procter and Gamble (P&G) or General Electric (GE) illustrate the underlying values of these organizations as articulated in their respective mission statements and statements of strategic principles (General Electric, 2008; Procter and Gamble, 2008). When these two organizations entered the social media arena, they carefully crafted their communications with the marketplace to consistently reflect their organizational values. By doing so, both organizations acknowledged the importance of incorporating social media into their IMC strategies and promotional efforts.

GE and P&G’s use of social media demonstrates that this media has two interrelated promotional roles in the marketplace. First, social media enables companies to talk to their customers, and second, it enables customers to talk to one another. Social media also enables customers to talk to companies;

however, this role is market research-related rather than promotion-related and, therefore, is outside the scope of this article.

The first role of social media is consistent with the use of traditional IMC tools. That is, companies can use social media to talk to their customers through such platforms as blogs, as well as Facebook and MySpace groups. These media may either be company-sponsored or sponsored by other individuals or organizations.

The second promotion-related role of social media is unique: customers can use it to communicate with one another. In his book *The New Influencers*, Gillin (2007) points out that "Conventional marketing wisdom has long held that a dissatisfied customer tells ten people. But that is out of date. In the new age of social media, he or she has the tools to tell 10 million" (p. 4) consumers virtually overnight. Gillin illustrates this potential power by recounting the story of Vincent Ferrari, a blogger who posted an audio recording of his encounter with an AOL customer service representative. The representative's persistent attempts to convince Ferrari not to cancel his account offended listeners' sensibilities to the extent that approximately 300,000 of them requested to download the audio file. The story went "viral" as it was picked up by thousands of other bloggers and websites. It eventually drew the attention of such mainstream media as *The New York Post*, *The New York Times*, and NBC. It can be presumed that AOL's management was embarrassed, to say the least.

In a sense, this second role of social media—enabling customers to talk to one another—is an extension of traditional word-of-mouth communication. But as the Vincent Ferrari story illustrates, the uniqueness lies in the magnitude of the communication. Instead of telling a few friends, consumers now have the ability to tell hundreds or thousands of other people with a few keystrokes! The question for managers becomes: "How can this power be harnessed for the benefit of the organization?" While companies cannot directly control consumer-to-consumer messages, they do have the ability to influence the conversations that consumers have with one another. Methods for accomplishing this are presented in section 4.

We argue that social media is a hybrid element of the promotion mix because it combines characteristics of traditional IMC tools (companies talking to customers) with a highly magnified form of word-of-mouth (customers talking to one another) whereby marketing managers cannot control the content and frequency of such information. Social media is also a hybrid in that it springs from mixed technology and media origins that enable instantaneous, real-time

communication, and utilizes multi-media formats (audio and visual presentations) and numerous delivery platforms (Facebook, YouTube, and blogs, to name a few), with global reach capabilities. The emergence of a highly educated, historically affluent, and an increasingly skeptical and demanding consumer population facilitates its acceptance in the marketplace.

Consumers' ability to communicate with one another limits the amount of control companies have over the content and dissemination of information. Christopher Vollmer and Geoffrey Precourt (2008) underscore this in their book, *Always On*. As they note, in the era of social media "consumers are in control; they have greater access to information and greater command over media consumption than ever before" (p. 5).

This shift in the information control needle is dramatically influencing the way consumers receive and react to market information (Ramsey, 2006; Singh, Veron-Jackson, & Cullinane, 2008). Consequently, marketing managers are seeking ways to incorporate social media into their IMC strategies (Li & Bernoff, 2008). The traditional communications paradigm, which relied on the classic promotional mix to craft IMC strategies, must give way to a new paradigm that includes all forms of social media as potential tools in designing and implementing IMC strategies. Contemporary marketers cannot ignore the phenomenon of social media because it has rapidly become the de facto modus operandi for consumers who are disseminating information on products and services.

3. Paradigms: Traditional vs. new communications

In the traditional communications paradigm, the elements of the promotional mix are coordinated to develop an IMC strategy, and the content, frequency, timing, and medium of communications are dictated by the organization in collaboration with its paid agents (advertising agencies, marketing research firms, and public relations consultants). The flow of information outside the boundaries of the paradigm has generally been confined to face-to-face, word-of-mouth communications among individual consumers, which has had minimal impact on the dynamics of the marketplace due to its limited dissemination (Mayzlin, 2006). This paradigm has served as a framework for developing IMC strategies during the post-World War II era (Muniz & Schau, 2007). Its long shelf life appears to be largely due to the high degree of control over the communications process that it affords businesses.

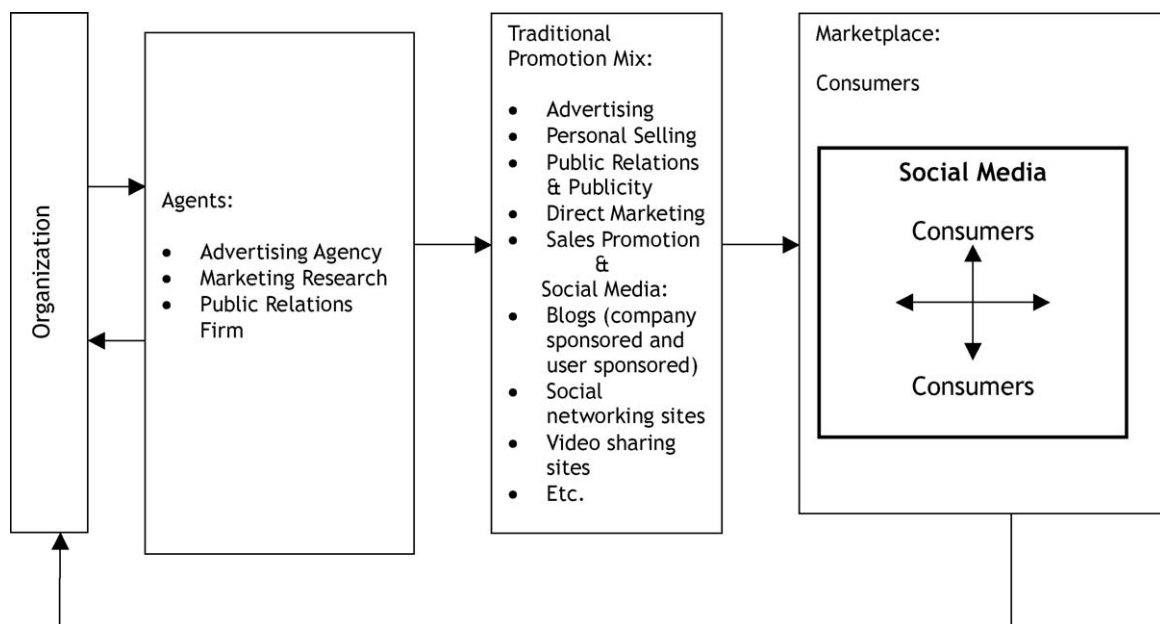
However, in the era of social media, marketing managers' control over the content, timing, and frequency of information is being severely eroded. In the new paradigm, information about products and services also originates in the marketplace. This information is based on the experiences of individual consumers and is channeled through the traditional promotion mix. However, various social media platforms, many of which are completely independent of the producing/sponsoring organization or its agents, magnify consumers' ability to communicate with one another. This "groundswell" (Li & Bernhoff, 2008) has profoundly affected all aspects of consumer behavior, and has bestowed consumers with power they have not previously experienced in the marketplace.

In the new communications paradigm (see Figure 1), marketing managers should recognize the power and critical nature of the discussions being carried on by consumers using social media. The impact of the interactions among consumers in the social media space on the development and execution of IMC strategies is illustrated by the following points:

- The Internet has become a mass media vehicle for consumer-sponsored communications. It now represents the number one source of media for consumers at work and the number two source of media at home. The Internet reaches more than 60% of all United States consumers for an average weekly usage rate of more than 100 minutes (Rashtchy, Kessler, Bieber, Shindler, & Tzeng, 2007).
- Consumers are turning away from the traditional sources of advertising: radio, television, magazines, and newspapers. Consumers also consistently demand more control over their media consumption. They require on-demand and immediate access to information at their own convenience (Rashtchy et al., 2007; Vollmer & Precourt, 2008).
- Consumers are turning more frequently to various types of social media to conduct their information searches and to make their purchasing decisions (Lempert, 2006; Vollmer & Precourt, 2008).
- Social media is perceived by consumers as a more trustworthy source of information regarding products and services than corporate-sponsored communications transmitted via the traditional elements of the promotion mix (Foux, 2006).

The above trends have severely diminished the usefulness and practicality of the traditional communications paradigm as a framework for developing IMC strategies. The new communications paradigm, on the other hand, requires several important changes in management's attitudes and assumptions about IMC strategy formulation. First, marketing managers must accept the reality that a vast amount of information about their products and services is being communicated by individual consumers to other consumers via social media forums. Second, consumers are responding to this information in ways that directly influence all aspects of consumer behavior, from information

Figure 1. The new communications paradigm



acquisition to post-purchase expressions of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Third, consumers are turning away from the traditional elements of the promotion mix; in particular, they are reducing their reliance on advertising as a source of information to guide their purchase decision-making. Finally, managers who are accustomed to exerting a high level of control over company-to-consumer messages must learn to talk with their customers, as opposed to talking at them, therefore influencing the discussions taking place in the social media space.

4. Shaping the discussions

As indicated earlier, social media has amplified the power of consumer-to-consumer conversations in the marketplace by enabling one person to communicate with literally hundreds or thousands of other consumers quickly and with relatively little effort. Managers cannot directly control these conversations. However, they can use the methods delineated below to influence and shape these discussions in a manner that is consistent with the organization's mission and performance goals. These methods have been gleaned from a review of the popular business press and academic literature, as well as from discussions with representatives from advertising agencies, public relations firms, and corporations that have begun to use social media successfully.

4.1. Provide networking platforms

Consumers like to network with people who have interests and desires that are similar to their own. Organizations can leverage this desire by creating communities of like-minded individuals. These communities can center on shared interests and values. For example, Unilever's *Dove* (2007) brand beauty products launched a "Campaign for Real Beauty" to bring together like-minded people who wish to enhance girls' and women's self-esteem by helping to establish realistic standards of beauty. Roadrunner Records' website, www.roadrunnerrecords.com, includes a forum section to bring together fans of rock and metal music. The Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and John McCain 2008 presidential campaigns used their online presence to gather supporters together and provide information. Facebook groups and other forms of online communication have sprung up around Steven Spielberg's movie *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*, and other films.

Similarly, a number of online communities exist to serve the needs of new mothers, including BabyZone.com, Michiganmoms.com, and Kentuckiana-

moms.com. These sites provide various types of information for mothers and parents, along with opportunities for interaction through message boards, forums, and chat rooms. Companies that can benefit from communicating with moms may want to have their employees contribute to the conversations that are occurring there, under conditions of full-disclosure. Such sites may also provide excellent sponsorship opportunities.

Networking opportunities do not have to be based in social media in order to be effective. For example, Harley-Davidson sponsors rallies for motorcycle enthusiasts who are members of the Harley Owners Group[®], and Jeep sponsors Jeep Jamborees for off-road enthusiasts. A recent Harry Potter book was released in bookstores at 12:01 a.m. to adoring fans who had lined up for hours waiting to purchase the book. The experience of participating with like-minded individuals in these highly anticipated events becomes memorable and is likely to be talked about for years to come. Many of these individuals will choose to talk about their experiences through social media as well as through traditional word-of-mouth.

The Harley-Davidson rallies and Jeep Jamborees, like many networking opportunities, are intertwined with opportunities for consumers to experience the companies' products, as well as get to know the people who use them. Such experiences can also be vicarious in nature. Toyota provides a link from its website to a blog written by a father and son team who have embarked on annual 5,000 mile adventures to the Arctic Circle, Baja Mexico, and other unusual destinations in their Toyota FJ Cruiser (Toyota, 2008a). Readers can respond to each blog by posting their own observations and insights. They can also post their own stories from the road at www.ToyotaOwnersOnline.com.

4.2. Use blogs and other social media tools to engage customers

Consumers feel more engaged with products and organizations when they are able to submit feedback. For example, Toyota enables its customers to provide feedback on a broad range of issues via its "Open Road Blog" (Toyota, 2008b). The feedback comes in the form of criticism, accolades, and helpful suggestions. Taken as a whole, this feedback contributes to a sense of community in which honest, open communications are encouraged and customer engagement is enhanced. Interestingly, Toyota identifies the constituency of its blog as extending beyond customers to include other bloggers, journalists, automotive enthusiasts, consumers, and even competitors.

Roadrunner Records' website enables consumers to submit feedback through a poll section in which readers respond to various questions posed by the website administrators. It also enables and encourages fans to review concerts and albums, and to even submit photographs and various forms of visual art.

4.3. Use both traditional and Internet-based promotional tools to engage customers

People are more likely to communicate through both word-of-mouth and social media when they are engaged with the product, service, or idea. This engagement may come naturally for supporters of causes, political candidates, and trendy new technological products. However, it can also be creatively stimulated for products and services which generate less psychological involvement of customers.

For example, [Pepsi \(2008\)](#) uses its Pepsi Stuff online customer loyalty program to engage consumers by enabling them to redeem points for MP3 downloads, television show downloads, CDs, DVDs, electronics, and apparel. Campaign participants are also allowed to participate in sweepstakes drawings for larger prizes, such as home theater systems and trip giveaways. [Coca Cola \(2008\)](#) has a similar campaign entitled "My Coke Rewards."

Contests can be used to engage customers. Procter and Gamble's Gillette brand sponsored the \$30,000 GillettePhenom contest, in which online participants were asked to create a short video showcasing their skill in a ball sport. The sport could "include the biggies—basketball, baseball, soccer, football, golf, tennis—the less obvious ones—volleyball, water polo, cricket, rugby, croquet—and even the foosballs and Super Balls of the world." Videos were submitted and evaluated by a panel of judges after being uploaded via the individual's YouTube account. The top 25 videos were then voted on by website viewers to determine the ultimate winner.

Such online voting gives Internet users a sense of ownership and increased engagement. American Idol, Dancing with the Stars, and similar television shows have successfully engaged their viewers by enabling them to either go online to vote for their favorite performer or submit their votes via text messaging. [Dove's 2007](#) "Campaign for Real Beauty" enabled consumers to create advertisements which were voted on by a panel of judges. Online viewers were then allowed to vote on the five semi-finalists, with the winning entry being shown during the 2008 Oscars ([Greenberg, 2007](#)).

Jamba, Inc. and Dole Food Company have joined together to ask customers to submit their favorite smoothie recipes to the [jambafruit.com](#) website. Entrants are eligible for a "Healthy Escape Get-away" at a Four Seasons hotel in Westlake Village, California, where they will be offered spa treatments and various healthy living consultations. The 7-Eleven convenience store chain successfully drove its Slurpee product's 18-24 year-old target market to the [Slurpee.com](#) website through a joint promotion with Guitar Hero, a product which focuses on a similar target market. In this campaign, buyers of the Full Throttle Frozen Blast Slurpee product were able to go to [Slurpee.com](#) to enter codes found on their drink cups. Winning codes were randomly selected, and the winners received such prizes as "Guitar Hero: Aerosmith" games, Xbox 360 consoles, Microsoft Points, and posters featuring the promoted products.

Similarly, [FLW Outdoors \(2008\)](#) is a major organizer of fishing tournaments, including the well-known Wal-Mart FLW tour. It also sponsors the \$1 million online FLW Fantasy Fishing competition in conjunction with the Wal-Mart FLW tour. Participants in the online competition identify the professional anglers they believe will place highest in each Wal-Mart FLW Tour event. The winners of the Fantasy Fishing competition are those who most successfully select the pro anglers.

Enabling consumers to see others using the product can entertain and engage customers while communicating product benefits. BMW utilizes both its own website, [www.bmw.com](#), and YouTube to provide breathtaking pictures and videos of BMW automobiles in use. Some companies have encouraged consumers to submit photos or recorded footage of the product in action. A recent promotion for Procter and Gamble's quick-clean product [Swiffer \(2008\)](#) challenged consumers to create short videos describing "how they left their old cleaning method for a new romance with Swiffer." The contest itself drew a considerable amount of attention. Then, the top 10 videos were posted to YouTube and consumers were allowed to vote on the winner.

Online games provide a natural and obvious venue for engaging and entertaining. [Mattel \(2008\)](#) makes available a variety of online games for its Hot Wheels® line of toys. These games are designed to entertain its target audience while selling the product. "Send to a friend" links make it easy to tell others about the games. In addition, a link for parents explains Mattel's policies regarding the games and suggests parental guidelines for those concerned about their child's Internet safety.

Warner Brothers did a masterful job of engaging its young audience in preparation for the release of

its 2008 film *The Dark Knight*. The studio used an approach sometimes referred to as “alternate reality gaming” (ARGN, 2006) to present a complicated concoction of multiple websites, a virtual scavenger hunt, a non-virtual scavenger hunt, and role playing to keep the audience engaged and talking to others about the movie.

4.4. Provide information

Consumers are more likely to talk about companies and products when they feel they know a lot about them. For example, Mattel’s website, www.mattel.com, is replete with information about its many toy products. While much of the information is intended for the children who use the toys, an unobtrusive “Grown-Ups & Parents” section offers valuable information about the company’s website practices and things parents can do to keep their children safe while they are online.

Procter and Gamble’s “Ask Julia” portion of its website, www.pg.com, provides detailed information on a variety of subjects that may be of interest to consumers of the company’s products. Subject categories include personal and beauty, house and home, health and wellness, baby and family, and pet nutrition and care. Similarly, the “Science Behind the Brands” portion of the website provides detailed information about the company’s product innovations, its research and development efforts, and the scientific foundations for products in such categories as hair care and dandruff treatment, skin care, beauty care, and fabric and home care.

DuPont also provides a great deal of detailed information about its products, as well as information related to the use of its products. For instance, consumers seeking information about its StormRoom™ in-home shelter product can visit a website to find information about the DuPont™ KEVLAR® which reinforces the StormRoom™ (Dupont, 2008). Links are also provided to sites that offer in-depth information about storm preparedness.

4.5. Be outrageous

People talk about things they find to be somewhat outrageous. For example, Burger King played a joke on its customers by telling them that its lead item, the Whopper, was no longer being sold. Their reactions were then recorded on video. Abbreviated versions of these reactions became the focal point of a new advertising campaign. Viewers were also encouraged to go to the related company website, WhopperFreakout.com, to see expanded video versions of customers’ reactions.

4.6. Provide exclusivity

People like to feel special. Feelings of being special can be produced by offering products, information, and special deals that are available exclusively to a subset of consumers. For example, Unilever offers its readers coupons and product samples from Dove’s “Campaign for Real Beauty.” Roadrunner Records enables online participants to subscribe to weekly e-newsletters and to preorder new albums. It also provides daily news pertaining to the heavy metal music community and an updated list of heavy metal tours. Participants are also allowed to hear new songs before they are released to the general public and to watch various artists’ music videos.

4.7. Design products with talking points and consumers’ desired self images in mind

Products and services should be designed with talking points in mind, to stimulate word-of-mouth and social-media-based conversations. For example, in his book *The Anatomy of Buzz*, Emmanuel Rosen (2002) pointed out that Apple intentionally designed the iMac to be different from Windows-based personal computers. He also suggested that digital cameras should be designed to look different from traditional film cameras in order to leverage the power of word-of-mouth communication. Similarly, JetBlue Airlines has stimulated a considerable amount of communication by making leather seats and televisions available to its customers, a practice not usually encountered on budget airlines.

Products that are fun, intriguing, highly visible, easy to use, and which engage the emotions are more likely to stimulate conversation than products that do not meet these criteria (Dobele, Lindgreen, Beverland, Vanhamme, & van Wijk, 2007; Dobele, Toleman, & Beverland, 2005). Therefore, the communication element must be considered when deciding on the product concept, as well as colors, shapes, sizes, packaging, and other factors.

Organizations seeking to build talking points into their product design should also remember that simple things are easier to remember and communicate than complicated things. They should also make sure their competitive advantage is clear. Price, quality, and value propositions often underlie such competitive advantage. In fact, some research suggests that price, quality, and value are common talking points in traditional word-of-mouth communication (Mangold, Miller, & Brockway, 1999). If customers clearly understand why they should buy one product instead of another, their understanding is likely to be

communicated through consumer-generated media, as well as through traditional word-of-mouth.

Finally, people are more likely to talk to others about products when those products support their desired self-image, or the way they want others to see them. For example, the iPhone is likely to be bought, used, and discussed among consumers who want to be seen as “cool” or comfortable with the latest technology. BMW automobiles are likely to be discussed among those auto enthusiasts who value performance and “the ultimate driving experience.” This suggests that both product design and promotion efforts should be undertaken with the desired self-image in mind.

4.8. Support causes that are important to consumers

People tell others about things to which they are emotionally connected. Organizations can leverage emotional connections by embracing one or more causes that are important to their customers. For example, ice cream producer Ben and Jerry’s is known for supporting various causes that are important to the company’s founders and, presumably, to its customers. These causes center around such priorities as investing in the nation’s children, promoting social and environmental concerns, supporting family farms, and avoiding the consumption of meat from cloned animals.

“Product Red” (2008) is among the best known cause-related campaigns. Participants in the campaign sell products that are red in color and then dedicate a portion of the revenue from those products to the Red campaign. The money raised is used to fight AIDS and other diseases in Africa, and to support the communities in which those diseases are in an epidemic state. Corporate participants include Motorola, American Express, Gap, Converse, Hallmark, and Dell. Specific products and brands include Emporio Armani, Apple iPod, and Windows Vista.

Customers may also be emotionally linked to finding cures for such diseases as cancer, diabetes, and heart disease. These linkages may be related to their personal health conditions or to the health conditions of those around them. Other emotional linkages include environmental issues, animal rights, education, and child welfare.

4.9. Utilize the power of stories

Stories can be memorable. The more memorable they are, the more likely they are to be repeated. When one of the authors of this article visited a local shoe repair shop for the first time, its proprietor told

him the story of how he got into the shoe repair business. It seems that as a child, the owner of the shop had an annoying habit of loitering in front of a shoe repair shop in his Chicago neighborhood. The old Italian cobbler who owned that shop told the boy, “If you are going to hang around all day, your time can be spent more productively inside the shop than outside.” Consequently, he began giving the boy odd jobs after school, which eventually led to greater involvement in the repair of shoes. As the story unfolded, it became clear that the Italian cobbler’s old-world craftsmanship had been transmitted to his young apprentice. Such stories create vivid memories that are likely to be repeated in social media, as well as traditional word-of-mouth.

5. From one-way traffic to multiple avenues

IMC has traditionally been considered to be largely one-way in nature. In the old paradigm, the organization and its agents developed the message and transmitted it to potential consumers, who may or may not have been willing participants in the communication process. The control over the dissemination of information was in the hands of the marketing organization. The traditional elements of the promotion mix—advertising, personal selling, public relations and publicity, direct marketing, and sales promotion—were the tools through which control was asserted.

In this article, we argue that marketing managers should include social media in the promotion mix when developing and executing their IMC strategies. This is consistent with Boone and Kurtz’s (2007) assertion that the objective of integrated marketing communications is to “coordinate *all* [emphasis added by authors] promotional activities of the firm to produce a unified, customer focused promotional message” (p. 488).

Accomplishing this requires the adoption of a new communications paradigm that acknowledges the pervasiveness of information now being exchanged among consumers in the social media space. This new paradigm considers social media to be a hybrid element of the promotion mix in that it combines some of the characteristics of traditional IMC tools with a highly magnified form of word-of-mouth communications in which marketing managers cannot control the content and frequency of such information. This contrasts sharply with the hegemony managers are accustomed to exercising over all aspects of information distribution in the traditional paradigm. However, marketing managers

do have the ability to shape the discussion by using the methods described in this article.

Although marketing managers cannot control information disseminated through social media, ignoring the realities of the impact of information transmitted through these forums on consumer behavior is tantamount to surrendering the communications process to the vagaries of the marketplace. By including social media in the promotion mix, these new communication formats are given a home in standard marketing management practices and theories. This new-found home for social media provides managers with a better understanding of social media and a framework for incorporating it into their IMC strategies, thus more effectively communicating with their target markets.

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