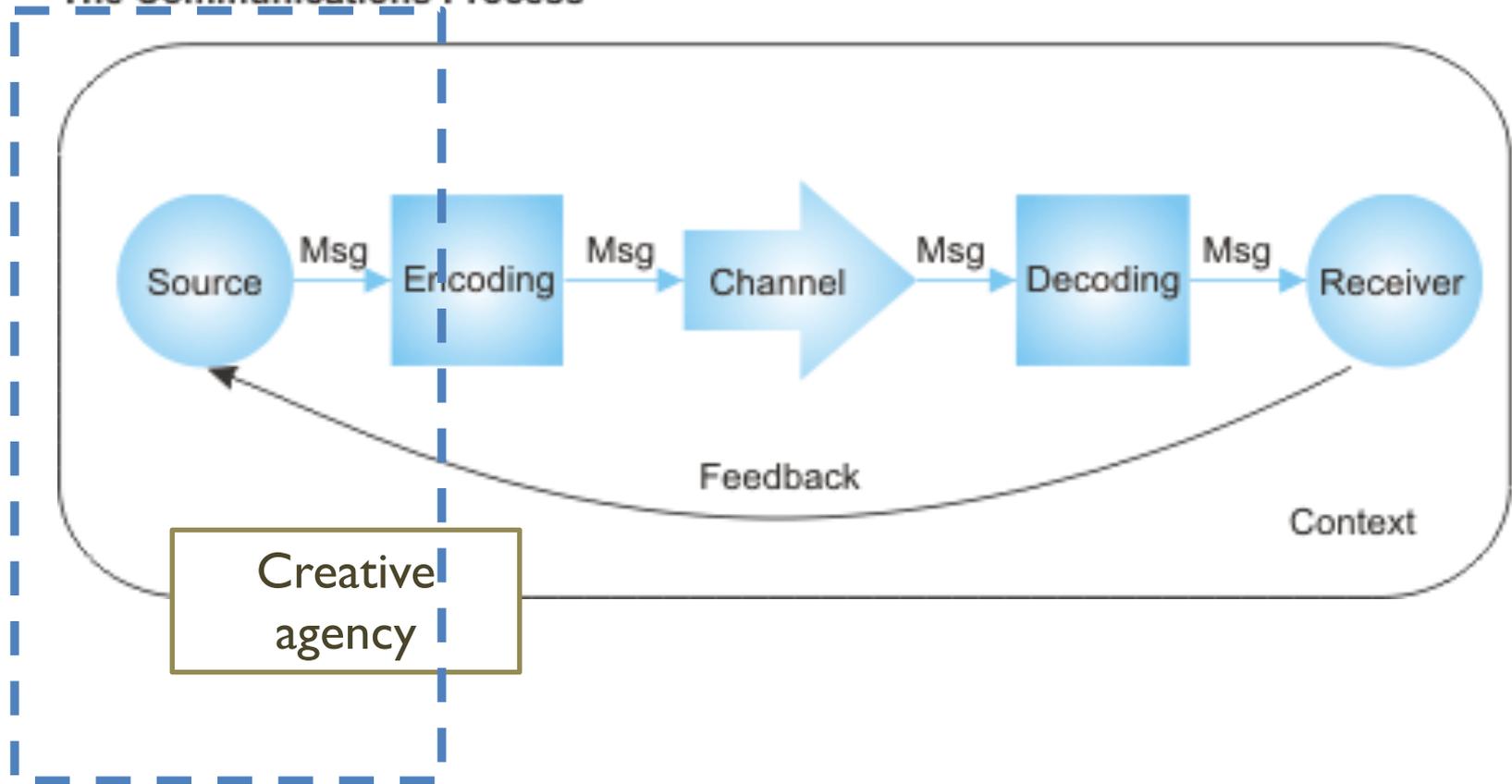


IMC

Definitions, strategy and tactics

Hedon Blakaj
2021

The Communications Process



AGENDA

- Definitions
- Strategy vs. tactics
- IMC as a strategic endeavor
 - Two strategy perspectives

IMC

(some definitions from over the years)

“A concept of marketing communication planning that recognizes the added value of a comprehensive plan that evaluates the strategic roles of a variety of communication disciplines (*promotional tools*) – for example, general advertising, direct response, sales promotion, and PR – and combines them to provide clarity, **consistency** and maximum communication impact through the seamless integration of discrete messages.” (AAAA*, 1989 definition of IMC)

*AAAA → American Association of Advertising Agencies

“Companies communicate with everything they do.” (Olins, 1989)

“One look, one voice.” (e.g. Miller & Rose, 1994)

“IMC is essentially a matter of consistency.” (Fill, 2001)

“IMC is the concept and process of strategically managing audience-focused, channel-centred, and results-driven brand communication programmes over time.” (Kliatchko, 2005)

“IMC is a process for planning, executing, and monitoring the brand messages that create customer relationships.” (Duncan, 2007)

“There do seem to be common elements in the various definitions and uses of IMC, which involve managing marketing communications in some holistic manner to achieve strategic objectives.” (Gould, 2009)

“There are so many different definitions and ideas of what IMC is about and what it entails, right through to its implementation.” (Kitchen, 2005)

So what is IMC
really, REALLY
about?

IMC's key themes*

1. *Consistency* of communications
2. (Strategic) control of communications
3. Media neutrality
4. Constant optimization of media and channel portfolios and synergy seeking
5. Measuring and connecting to sales and customer relationships

(*Derived from multiple sources)

Other noteworthy themes

- **IMC and “leveling”**
 - Successful IMC is about connecting it all the way up to a corporate strategy
 - From strategy you get an IMC strategy, from there tactical implementation etc.
- **“IMC is a process”**
 - Both as how it is implemented, but also how it is developing theoretically (Schultz, 2007)

No single definition

- Despite some effort, no single definition for IMC or model of implementation (unlike, say, “Kotler’s 4 Ps”)
- IMC is developing to different directions, with many champions → an indication of theoretical novelty and practical emphasis

Theoretical Concept or Management

Fashion?

Examining the Significance of IMC

Particularly throughout the last decade Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) appeared to have found increasing acceptance as a theoretical concept, idea, technique, or simple rhetoric with advertising agency executives, marketing, and advertising practitioners, as well as with writers in the popular and academic marketing and management press. Despite its pervasive penetration in the marketing and communication management world, little has been said, however, about IMC's theoretical robustness as well as its *actual* significance for marketing and advertising thought and practice. In an attempt to help remedy this situation, this article examines IMC as a body of theory and hypothesizes its influence upon practice—as a theoretical concept, general idea, management technique, or simple rhetoric. The analysis and argument presented in this article suggests that IMC is a management fashion, apparent in its lack of definition and transient influence, and that its influence upon practice should be conceived accordingly.

IMC as Theory and as a Poststructural Set of Practices and Discourses: A Continuously Evolving Paradigm Shift

STEPHEN J. GOULD

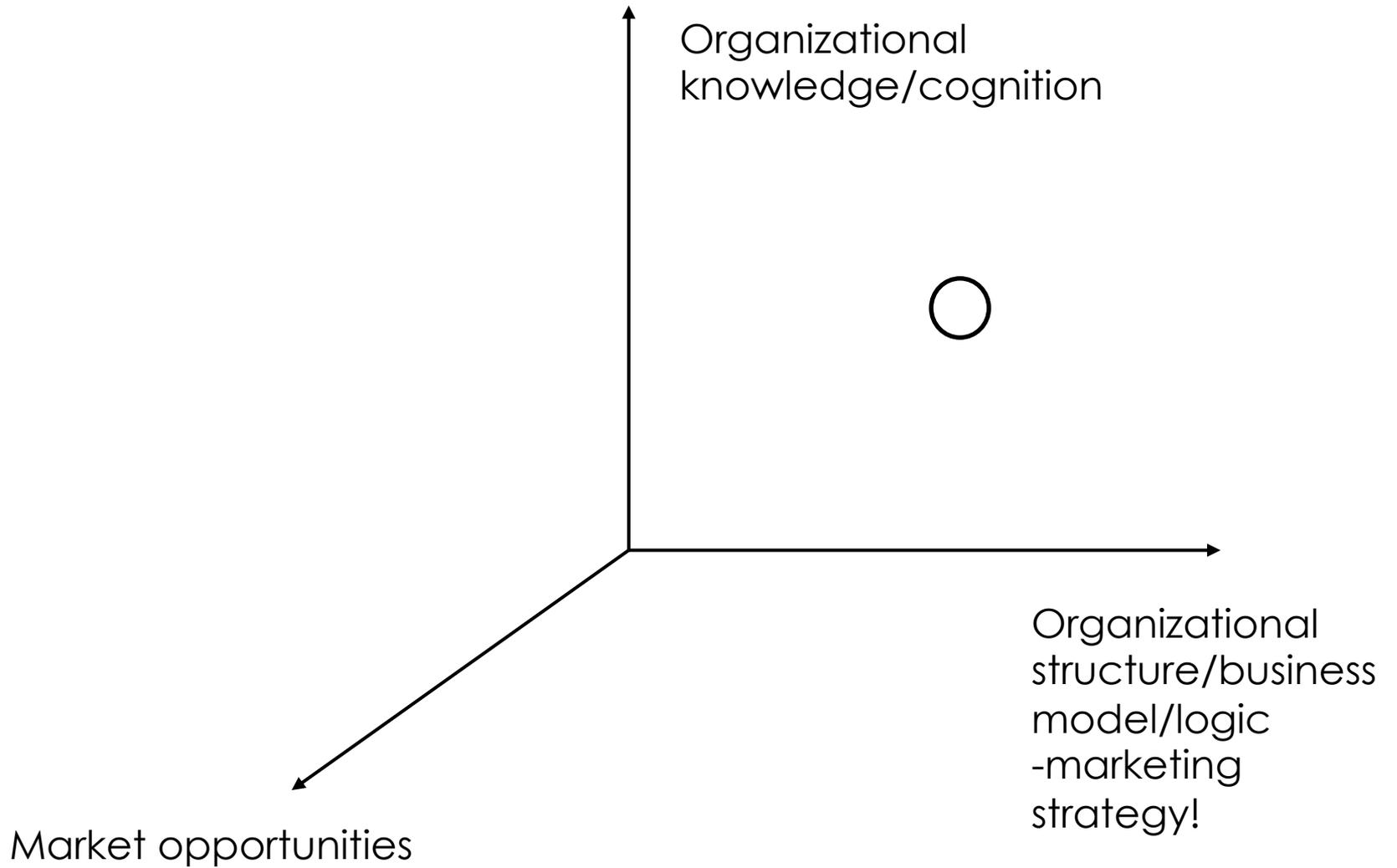
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As evidenced in this issue, IMC remains a controversial theoretical concept in terms of generalizing what it is and what it does. However, if IMC is viewed from a different paradigmatic perspective on theory, namely that of poststructuralism, then we might consider it as a set of contingently framed practices and discourses where localized, particular practitioner interpretations are just as important as general theoretic ones. When viewed this way, IMC emerges as a powerful tool that guides practitioners in developing and implementing marketing communications programs even if they apply it in disparate ways according to their own specific understandings and circumstances.

No "one way" to "do" IMC

- There are several approaches to getting started with an IMC strategy
- Understanding how it all "comes together" is more important than any one model
- ACHIEVING integration is the goal, really → getting all MC functions to work together
- Overall, understanding the strategic and process nature of IMC is key



Some key concepts

- Zero-based planning
- Media neutral planning
- Connecting strategy to marketing communications
- Measuring success

Zero-Based Planning

Start from scratch every year

Allocate budgets and make decisions based on communication objectives and realistic organizational capabilities, rather than relying on what we have done in the previous year(s)

Avoid inertia

- “Finally, there must be a process of zero-based planning for marketing communication that is driven by prioritized SWOTs (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats)
- Zero-based planning helps identify those marketing communication functions that are the most cost-effective ways to leverage critical strengths and opportunities and address key weaknesses and threats.”

-Duncan & Moriarty 1998

Zero-based planning

- The brand and the market environment are the “zero point” of all IMC planning (usually for the next 12 months)
- “Here we are now (*problem*), and here’s where we want to be (*objective*)”
- ZBP is a telling example of the analytic and goal-oriented nature of IMC

Zero-based planning

1. Recognize target audience(s)
2. SWOT-analysis on segments
3. Decide marketing communications goals
4. Strategic and tactical procedures
5. Define a budget
6. Measure success

(Duncan 2007)

Zero-based planning

- ZBP goes top down
- At the highest level is the corporate strategy, then business processes (organizational activities utilized to achieve an organizational goal), then sales goals
- Only after this will you start thinking about ad agency roles, responsibilities, budgets, goals and key performance indicators (KPIs)

Zero-based planning

- As the name suggests, it's important that we “renounce” last year's IMC decisions (what was our strategy, what was our main message, who was our main agency etc.)
- Re-planning the communications palette every year is also smart financially

Media Neutral Planning

Media neutral planning (MNP)

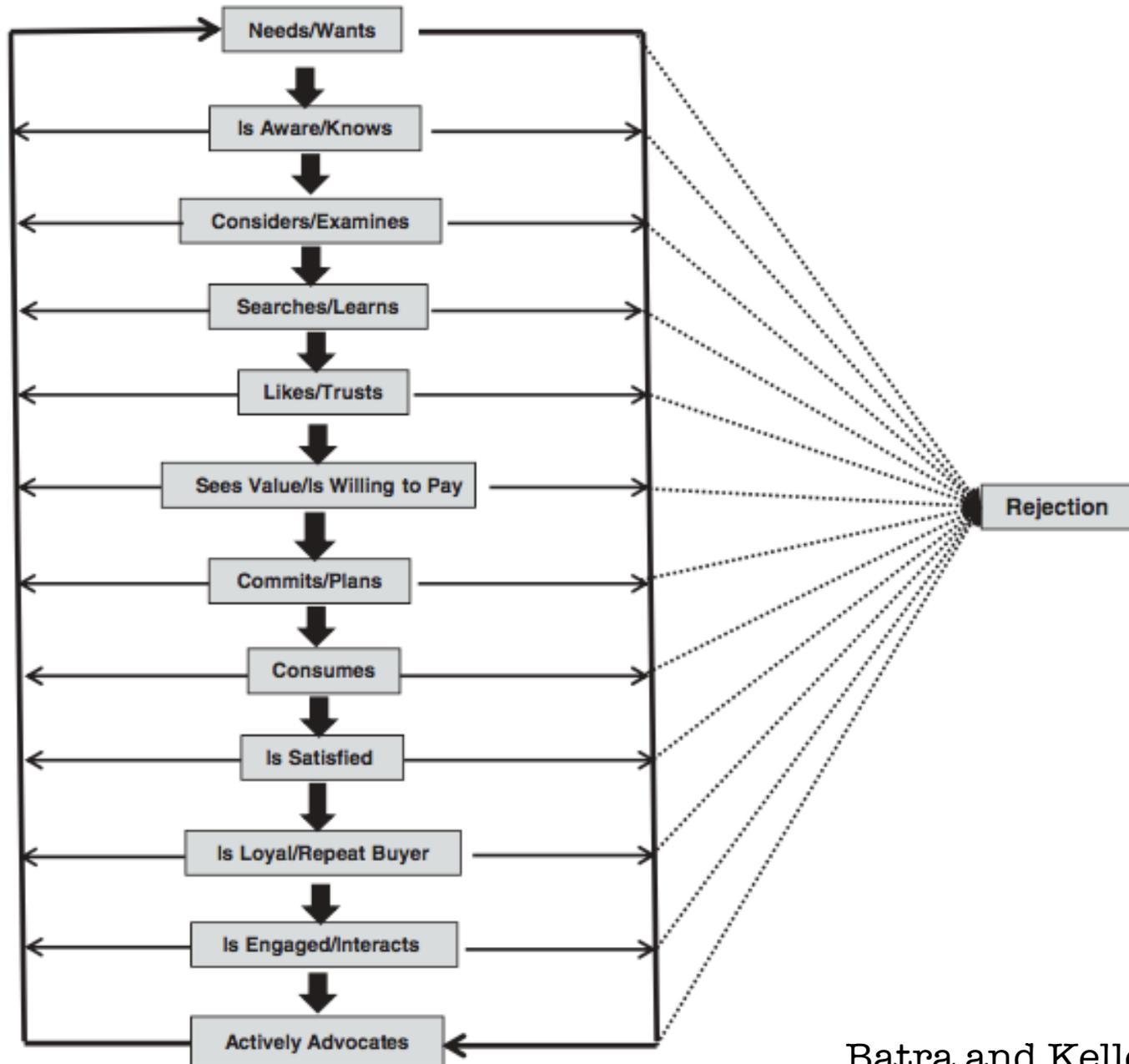
- Essentially: choose your communication methods according to your needs, not out of “habit”
- Each medium considered in terms of its strengths and weakness
- Examples:
 - a company that has an image problem → public relations
 - a company needs brand awareness → mass media advertising, sponsorship
 - a company needs people to visit stores → sales promotion etc.

“In developing an IMC program, the implication of the previous discussion is that marketers should be “**media neutral**” and evaluate all communication options on the basis of effectiveness (How many desired effects does a communication create?) and efficiency (At what cost are those outcomes created?). In other words, marketers ultimately only care about achieving their communication goals and moving consumers along in their decision journey—any means of communications that would facilitate those goals should be considered.

For example, whether a consumer has a strong, favorable, and unique brand association of Subaru with “outdoors,” “active,” or “rugged” because of a TV ad that shows the car driving over rough terrain or because Subaru sponsors ski, kayak, and mountain bike events, the impact in terms of Subaru’s brand equity should be similar unless the associations created are materially different in some ways. Research has shown that “direct experience” communications (e.g., event-created ones) can create stronger associations than can mass-mediated communications (e.g., through TV commercials) (Smith and Swinyard 1983).

This kind of analysis is facilitated by our communications matching model, a “bottom-up” approach to choosing communications according to their effectiveness in achieving the right communication effects at different stages of the consumer decision journey.” Batra and Keller (2016: 132)

A Dynamic, Expanded Consumer Decision Journey

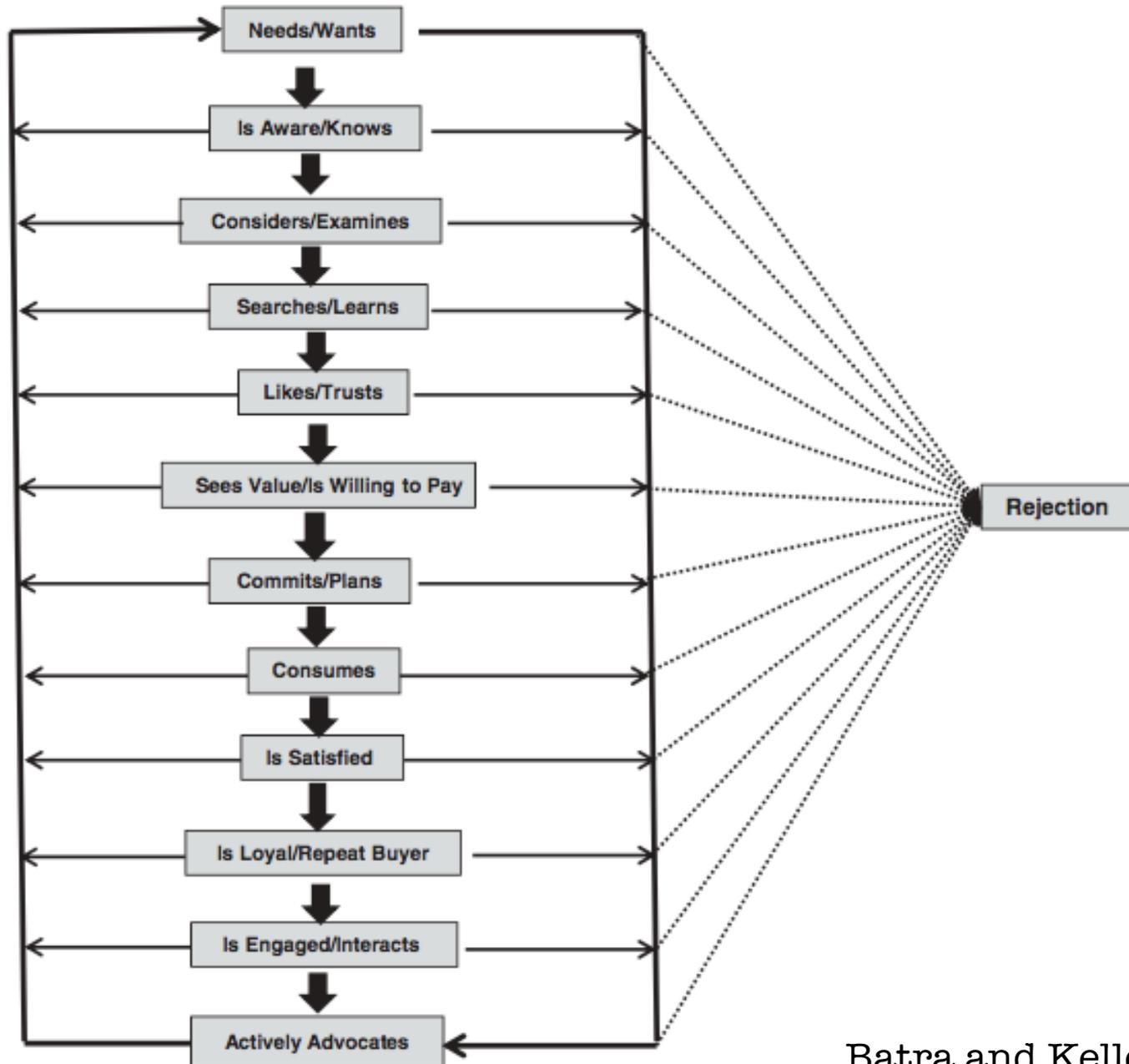


Measuring IMC success

Mark. Comms. goals

- Another way is to think of IMC through behavioral consumer decision making models
 - E.g., the classic AIDA-continuum:
 - Awareness → communication goal (associative metrics)
 - Interest → communication goal (associative metrics)
 - Desire → communication goal (associative metrics)
 - Action → marketing goal (associative metrics)
 - “+25% awareness → +10% more visits to our retail stores → +2% in sales”

A Dynamic, Expanded Consumer Decision Journey



IMC and management

- Business has become increasingly dominated by numbers
- "Prove that this works and I'll approve it"
- Measuring MC accurately, however, is *REALLY* hard
- Digital environments, analytics and big data, have considerably advanced this aspect of IMC management

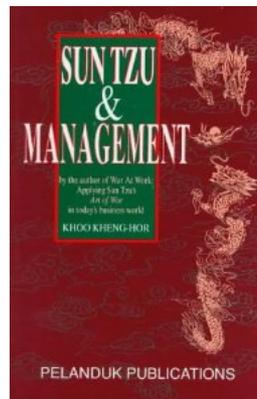
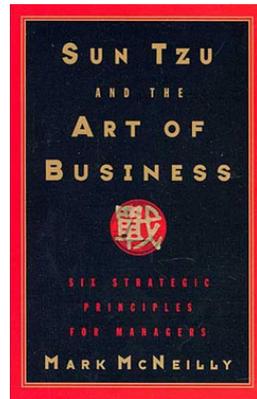
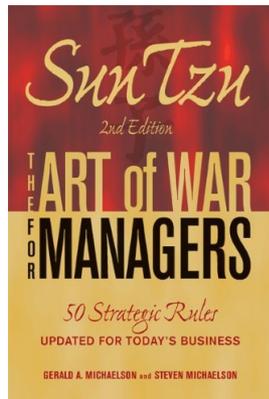


Strategy
(and tactics)

Strategy vs. Tactics

- The distinction is sometimes lost on people, but...
- “Strategies are ideas about how to accomplish objectives”
- “Tactics are specific actions to be taken to execute a strategy”
- Hopefully this becomes clearer as we learn about different tactics and how they relate to strategy

”Strategy, a word of military origin, refers to a plan of action designed to achieve a particular goal.”



Three levels of strategy

- **Corporate**
 - Directional, broad, parameters
- **Competitive**
 - How the company competes, resources
- **Functional**
 - **Marketing**, financial, production etc.
 - Integration to corporate important!

Three levels of strategy

- **Corporate strategy**
 - What business are we in? What's our growth plan? What products are we offering?
- **Marketing communications strategy**
 - What are our communications goals? What is the big message for next year? Communications mix?
- **MC tactical undertakings**
 - Buying ad space, promotional mix, delivering on the message...

Two paradigms of corporate strategy:

Planning vs Emergent

Planning school

- Planning school more prominent and established
- Long history in capitalism in general, all the way to Taylorism and the birth of the corporation
- "Minimizing human error"
- Again, numbers numbers numbers...

Emergent paradigm

- Emergent school more about incremental steps, trial and error, organisational learning etc.
- "Empower people to do the right thing when things go weird"
- Google's 70-20-10 policy is an indication of sorts of emergence logic
- → today's trend: "design thinking concept" see: Kolko 2015



Management is, above all, a practice
where art, science, and craft meet

— *Henry Mintzberg* —

AZ QUOTES

The role of the brand strategist (CMO) and brand management will likely be conceived differently, depending on the marketing strategy paradigm as well as the logic underguiding firm/company/organizational marketing practices

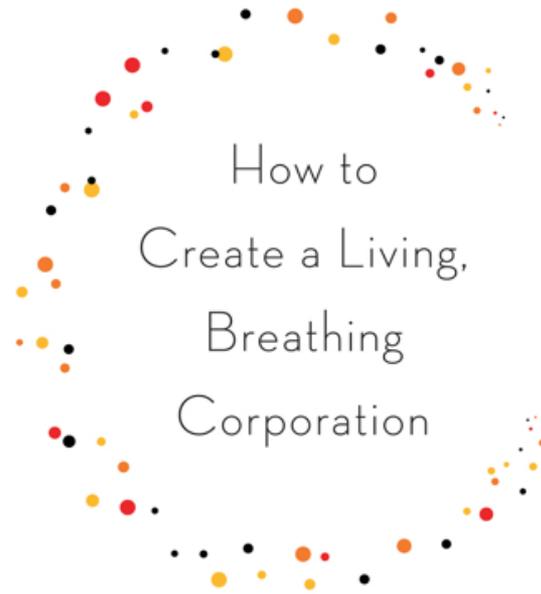
A combination of the two...

IMC and the two paradigms?

- IMC sort of balances between the two strategic view
- On the one hand, a lot of planning but also there needs to be room for intervention, creativity, and tinkering

THE
AGENDA
WITH STEVE FAHON

tvo



CHIEF
CULTURE
OFFICER

Grant McCracken

IMC and the two paradigms?

- The increasing relevance of digital environments necessitate a move to more emergent strategy (without neglecting planning, of course)
- Fast reactions to PR crises, competitor moves, change in consumer taste and preferences, social media events (*user generated content*), → contingencies and opportunities etc.

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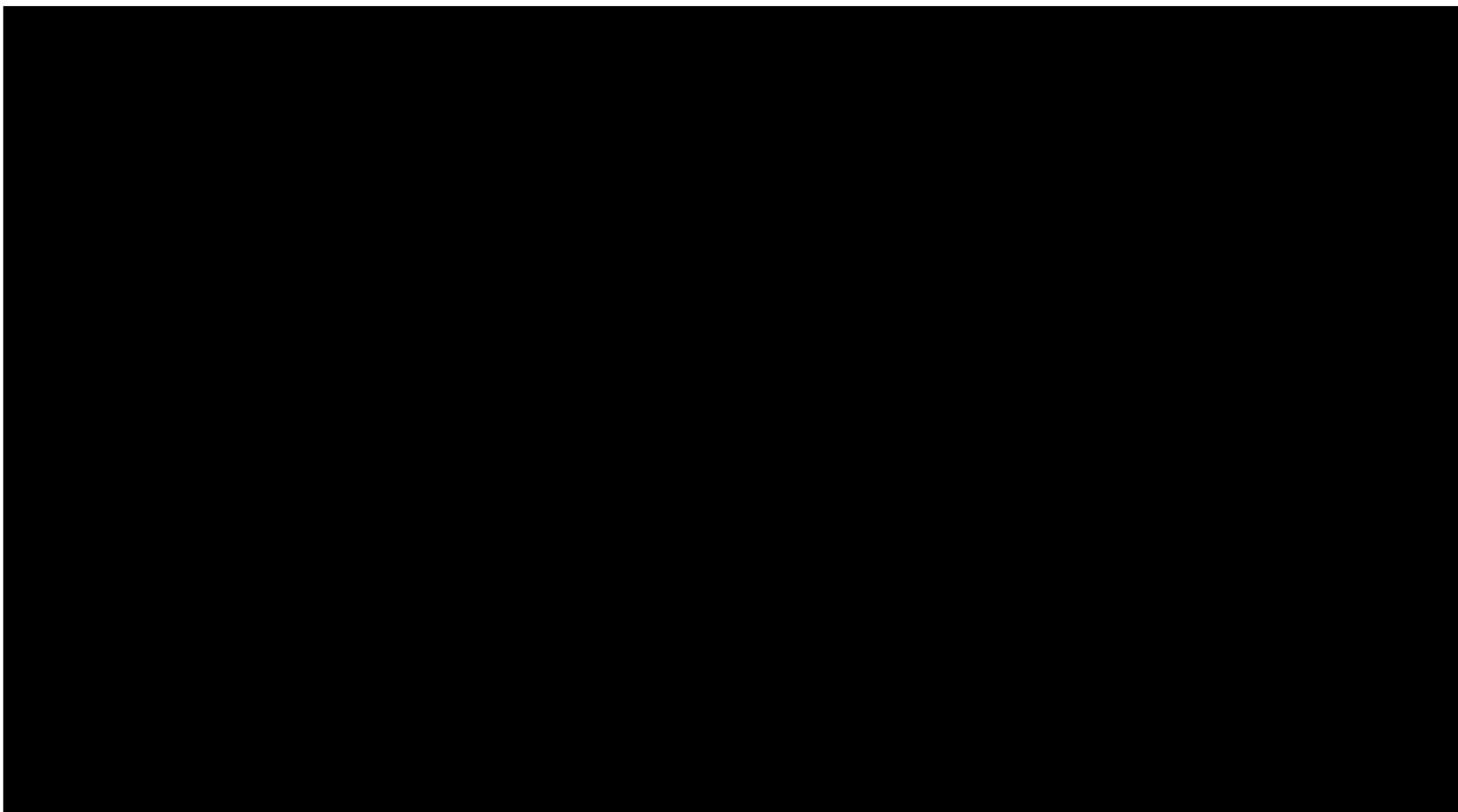
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Summary

- IMC definitions reflecting change in the IMC thought (paradigm shifts)
- Nonetheless, all assume some sort of a holistic view ...
- IMC as a strategic endeavor closely linked to the corporate strategy
- How organizations are structured may influence IMC practices and assumptions about the role of the CMO and IMC in general
- Planning vs. Emergence schools
- As a brand strategist, you want to make sure that the brand or brands you and your team manage, are in line with the corporate strategy, then, manage and embark into brand communication programs by utilizing different tools like zero-based planning, media planning and so on...
- Your role as a CMO, CCO, or a brand strategist is important. Understanding “where you come from” beneficial
- Markets more dynamic than ever
- Constant attention to brands and branding inevitable

Q&A!