Rajeev Batra & Kevin Lane Keller

Integrating Marketing Communications: New Findings, New Lessons, and New Ideas

With the challenges presented by new media, shifting media patterns, and divided consumer attention, the optimal integration of marketing communications takes on increasing importance. Drawing on a review of relevant academic research and guided by managerial priorities, the authors offer insights and advice as to how traditional and new media such as search, display, mobile, TV, and social media interact to affect consumer decision making. With an enhanced understanding of the consumer decision journey and how consumers process communications, the authors outline a comprehensive framework featuring two models designed to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of integrated marketing communication programs: a "bottom-up" communications matching model and a "top-down" communications optimization model. The authors conclude by suggesting important future research priorities.

Keywords: marketing communications, marketing integration, integrated marketing communications, traditional media, digital media

I n designing integrated marketing communication (IMC) programs, marketers face many challenges as a result of the fact that consumers, brands, and the media are fundamentally changing in profound ways. With the explosion of new media, consumers are dramatically shifting both their media usage patterns and how they utilize different media sources to get the information they seek, which thus influences when, where, and how they choose brands.[1] Perhaps more than ever, their attention is divided, often due to multitasking, and they are seemingly in a perpetual state of partial attention.

The consumer "path to purchase" is also fundamentally different today—often shorter in length, less hierarchical, and more complex (Court et al. 2009). Consumers do not necessarily passively receive brand information strictly through legacy mass media such as print or TV and store it in memory for later use. Rather, they now actively seek it when needed, through search engines, mobile browsers, blogs, and brand websites. Much more consumer-to-firm, consumer-to-consumer, and consumer-about-firm communication exists. Because of increased social influences on purchase, word of mouth (WOM) and advocacy have become

especially important; brand messaging is even less under the marketer's control.

These new ways of communicating, however, also facilitate greater personalization of message content, timing, and location, enabling marketers to utilize more media types to accomplish specific communication objectives. Previously, marketers had only a small quiver of communication modalities at their disposal to try to accomplish multiple brand communication objectives. They could, for instance, use broadcast television ads to reach a large target audience and make them aware of the brand and its offerings; use radio and outdoor ads to build and maintain brand salience; use print ads in newspapers and magazines to provide details about the brand's features and competitive superiority; generate public relations (PR) for third-party credibility; use newspaper coupons and co-op ads to offer limited promotional price discounts and communicate points of purchase; and use frequently mailed newsletters and catalogs to build long-term relationships and loyalty.

Today, in contrast, marketers are blessed with a much richer array of communications possibilities. In addition to those traditional means, a brand can reach (and send reminders to) a large number of consumers through mass or targeted Facebook ads, banner or display ads on thousands of websites, or paid and organic search ads. It can use its own website, third-party websites, and bloggers to provide persuasive content to create brand preference; offer short-term promotions through tweets and targeted e-coupons; and create online brand communities through its own and social media–type web properties. Second-by-second media-usage data allow for micro and dynamic segmentation and targeting; media and message changes can be made much more quickly.

By using the distinctive strengths of the greater number of media choices available today, a marketer can potentially

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[1]Throughout this article, we use the term "brand" in a broad sense; it refers not only to commercially marketed products and services but also to organizations, nonprofit causes, and any other offering that consumers may seek information about so that they can make a choice among alternative options.

Rajeev Batra is S.S. Kresge Professor of Marketing, Ross School of Business, University of Michigan (e-mail: rajeevba@umich.edu). Kevin Lane Keller is E.B. Osborn Professor of Marketing, Tuck School of Business, Dartmouth College (e-mail: kevin.keller@dartmouth.edu). The authors thank the *JM* review team for helpful feedback and suggestions.

sequence them in more powerful ways to move consumers more quickly along their decision journey or funnel than was ever possible before. Although these paths to purchase may be faster and less linear today, there is still a beginning and an end to them, with identifiable stages in between. To influence prospective and existing consumers over this complex path, multiple communication attempts are usually required to inform, persuade, or propel action or advocacy, pushing consumers on to the next stage in the process.

Crucially, none of these individual communication attempts is likely to accomplish the complete "sales" or "loyalty" job by itself. One message often needs to "set up" or "build on" another, such as prior trade advertising opening the door to subsequent personal selling, as the famous McGraw-Hill "man in the chair" trade ad (created in 1958) vividly showed. In other words, what each communication attempt needs to do well depends on the messages that came before and the ones that will come after. Marketers thus must be concerned not just with what each message can accomplish in isolation (its "main effect") but also with what it needs to accomplish in the context of this entire sequence or stream of messages (its "interactive effects").

Recent academic research has confirmed the existence of interactions and cross-effects across new and old media options such as search, display, mobile, TV, social media, offline WOM, and so on (e.g., Joo et al. 2013; Mayzlin and Shin 2011). However, although research has empirically established the existence of media interactions and cross-effects, it has not yet clearly explicated the relative strengths and weaknesses of different media in influencing different communication outcomes. Nor does the existing research really help marketers decide the best sequence in which to use old and new media so that they can deploy these media in a coherent and integrated manner.

Successful integration of different marketing communications is critically important to drive short-term sales and long-term brand building (Luo and Donthu 2006; Osinga et al. 2011; Reid, Luxton, and Mavondo 2005). Not surprisingly, when the Marketing Science Institute (MSI) recently surveyed its 70+ corporate members as to their most critical marketing questions, a set of questions emerged related to IMC, providing useful insight into managerial priorities in the area. These priorities included the development of better models and frameworks to understand and integrate the full range of consumer touch points for a brand to both generate short-term purchases and build long-term loyalty and brand value. These touch points included marketer-controlled and consumer-driven media, offline and online media (particularly mobile), and sales force efforts. The MSI priorities also called for explication of the organizational processes (including training) required to achieve marketing integration within and across marketing and sales.

The MSI priorities make clear that the always-existing challenge of creating IMC is even more difficult today and thus requires new tools and theories. Therefore, after reviewing the existing literature, we argue that this integration challenge can be met more easily through the use of a conceptual framework that analytically considers consumers' most pressing brand-related information needs at different points in their decision journeys and then matches the particular media and messages

that are strongest in their ability to meet each of those different specific needs. The planning and sequencing of multiple communications must also account for the costs involved to create the most effective and efficient IMC program possible (Briggs, Krishnan, and Borin 2005; Madhavaran, Badrinarayanan, and McDonald 2005, Naik, Raman, and Winer 2005).

Our article is organized as follows. We first review academic research on IMC related to the main effects as well as the interaction effects that can be created by different communication options. Although this research is extremely insightful, it does not provide enough overall guidance to address the challenge of crafting a well-integrated marketing communications plan today. Toward that goal, we suggest that marketers employ a set of two research-inspired (but empirically untested) communication models as part of a comprehensive IMC framework. We develop these models (with supporting submodels) in depth subsequently. Next, we briefly introduce the basic functioning of model:

1. A "bottom-up" communications matching model, which identifies the communication options that have the greatest ability to satisfy consumers' brand-related information needs at different stages of the consumer decision journey.
2. A "top-down" communications optimization model that helps marketers evaluate the overall design or makeup of a marketing communication program with relevant criteria to judge how well it is integrated to both drive shorter-term sales and build longer-term brand equity.

Drawing on these learnings and models, we conclude by considering the broad themes and managerial implications that emerge from our analysis as well as develop key future research priorities.

Prior Academic Research on IMC

Academic Approaches to IMC

Different disciplines have different views or approaches toward IMC that have evolved through the years (see, e.g., Madhavaran, Badrinarayanan, and McDonald 2005; Naik 2007). These different viewpoints are reflected in how IMC has been defined. Appendix A presents some notable definitions used by relevant organizations. There are some common elements in these definitions, however, that reflect our approach to IMC. As we explain in greater detail next, we take a consumer-centric approach and focus on how marketers can optimally combine all available communication options.

In academia, researchers have put more emphasis on certain areas depending in part on their disciplinary background. Communication and journalism academics have tended to place more emphasis on internal factors, such as organizational processes that promote or inhibit optimal coordination and sequencing of message content (Schultz and Kitchen 1997). In contrast, marketing academics have tended to place more emphasis on factors external to the firm, such as the optimal design of marketing communication programs based on their effects on consumers. Two streams of research are notable within marketing academia:

1. More *micro* approaches that use consumer psychology and consumer information-processing principles to study multimedia

campaigns (e.g., Edell and Keller 1989, 1999) and the strengths and weaknesses of different media (new vs. old) in achieving different communications goals (e.g., Chang and Thorson 2004; Dijkstra, Buijtels, and Van Raaij 2005; Pfeiffer and Zinnbauer 2010).

2. More *macro* approaches that use econometric techniques to assess multimedia effects at the brand level (e.g., Naik, Raman, and Winer 2005). A topic of enduring importance in this line of research is the allocation of resources across media (Naik and Raman 2003; Raman and Naik 2004).

Our approach continues in the tradition of marketing academics and their concern with the optimal design of communication programs based largely on external, consumer-driven factors (Pilotta et al. 2004; Voorveld, Neijens, and Smit 2011). Although the notions of IMC are applicable to all the touch points through which a marketer communicates with the targeted consumer—including the implicit communication that takes place through product features and design, employee service, and retail environments—we do not cover such non-media-related consumer touch points for brands in this article.

As we detail next, several considerations come into play in developing a well-integrated marketing communications program for a brand. Three of the most important considerations are consistency, complementarity, and cross-effects among media and communication options, as the following example for the Volvo automotive brand shows.

Consistency. To facilitate learning and induce action, the exact same persuasive message can benefit from being reinforced in different ways across different communications. For example, Volvo's key "safety superiority" message is communicated consistently through print and TV ads, PR, and corporate communications; on the company's website and through other digital means; and through sponsorships with the American Trucking Associations to promote various key safety outreach programs for the trucking industry.

Complementarity. At the same time, different communication options have varied strengths and weaknesses, which can meet different brand-related information needs for consumers and, thus, complement each other. Volvo sponsors golf, cultural events, and an ocean race to help improve the brand's visibility and contemporary status, raising initial salience and consideration. Their various sales promotions and financing programs then push safety-concerned consumers to take action. Each communication option addresses a different brand objective, all of which are needed to successfully persuade consumers and build brand equity and drive sales.

Cross-effects. Communication effects from consumer exposure to one communication option can be enhanced when consumers have had prior exposure to a different communication option. For Volvo, the good feelings and awareness engendered by one of its sports or arts sponsorships may later increase consumer predisposition to consider the brand or color any impressions that a consumer forms in evaluating a Volvo vehicle.

All three considerations are important. However, given the substantial prior research reporting the benefits from message consistency, that area would not seem to be a priority for further investigation. We therefore focus more in this article on the complementary main effects as well as the many cross-effects and interactions that can exist in today's digital media environment—in which search, tweets, Facebook feeds, and so on meet consumers' communication needs as they move along their decision journey or path to purchase, a process we describe next.

Consumer Decision Journey or Path to Purchase

In working to understand how different messages and media can be optimally combined and sequenced, it is first necessary to develop a model of the different stages or steps consumers might go through in their evolving relationships with a particular brand—before, during, and after purchase. The stages in such a model can help suggest different communication objectives and metrics depending on what stage the consumer is in and, thus, which combination of media and messages might be most appropriate there.

Building on classic early models from social and cognitive psychology (McGuire 1978), many marketers have found it useful to portray the different stages involved in consumer decision making in terms of the well-known "purchase funnel." A simple version of the funnel is the classic "hierarchy-of-effects" models (Wijaya 2012; e.g., AIDA [Awareness, Interest, Desire, and Action]). In today's rich communication environments, these more traditional funnels, however, no longer adequately capture the different stages involved in consumer decision making and the more complex, nonlinear paths to purchase that consumers might follow when choosing among multiple options.

Recently, researchers from McKinsey & Company (Court et al. 2009) have suggested a "consumer decision journey circle," in which consumers begin by considering a preliminary set of brands to form an initial consideration set, modify this consideration set (often adding more brands) as they gather and evaluate more brand information, select a brand (at the moment of purchase), and then utilize their postpurchase experiences to shape their next decision. Consistent with that reasoning, "attribution modeling" of actual consumer paths to purchase has shown that consumers often go through complex, long, and interacting steps before conversion and purchase, with organic and paid search, retargeted display and banner ads, price comparisons and e-mails, and visits to marketer websites and physical stores all playing a part in getting consumers from their initial starting points to the point of conversion (Anderl et al. 2014; Smith, Gopalakrishna, and Chatterjee 2006).

Although consumers today interact with many more media types, and do so in more nonlinear and circular ways, it seems reasonable that consumers still go through a sequence of steps or stages as they engage *with a particular brand*. For instance, consumers can go through a series of stages such as those in Appendix B: they (1) feel a need or want for the overall category of which the brand is a part; (2) recall the brands they associate with meeting that category-level need; (3) further evaluate a smaller subset of those brands not only with respect to performance quality but also about their trustworthiness; (4) develop a preference and make a tentative choice; (5) decide how much they are willing to pay for the preferred brand; (6)

take the action step of trial or purchase; (7) form an assessment of postconsumption satisfaction with the brand, which determines repurchase intentions and loyalty; and hopefully, over time, (8) increase their usage amount or purchase frequency; (9) engage in postpurchase interactions with the brand; and (10) become a loyal and willing advocate for it.

Because each of these steps is probabilistic, a successful consumer decision journey for a brand can be derailed by failure at any stage (e.g., ignorance of the existence of the brand, a negative product experience at trial). Across brands and for any one brand, consumers may backtrack, skip steps, or implicitly or explicitly choose to reject the brand. Figure 1 displays the dynamics involved in a consumer decision journey with multiple stages and the potential to move forward or backward across stages or drop out of the decision process altogether.

Each of these steps puts the consumer in a particular information-processing state of mind, which makes any one media type more or less appropriate for deployment by the brand to satisfy that consumer's information needs and ensure movement to the next stage. Subsequently, we elaborate on these likely "states of mind" and their IMC implications. First,

FIGURE 1
A Dynamic, Expanded Consumer Decision Journey
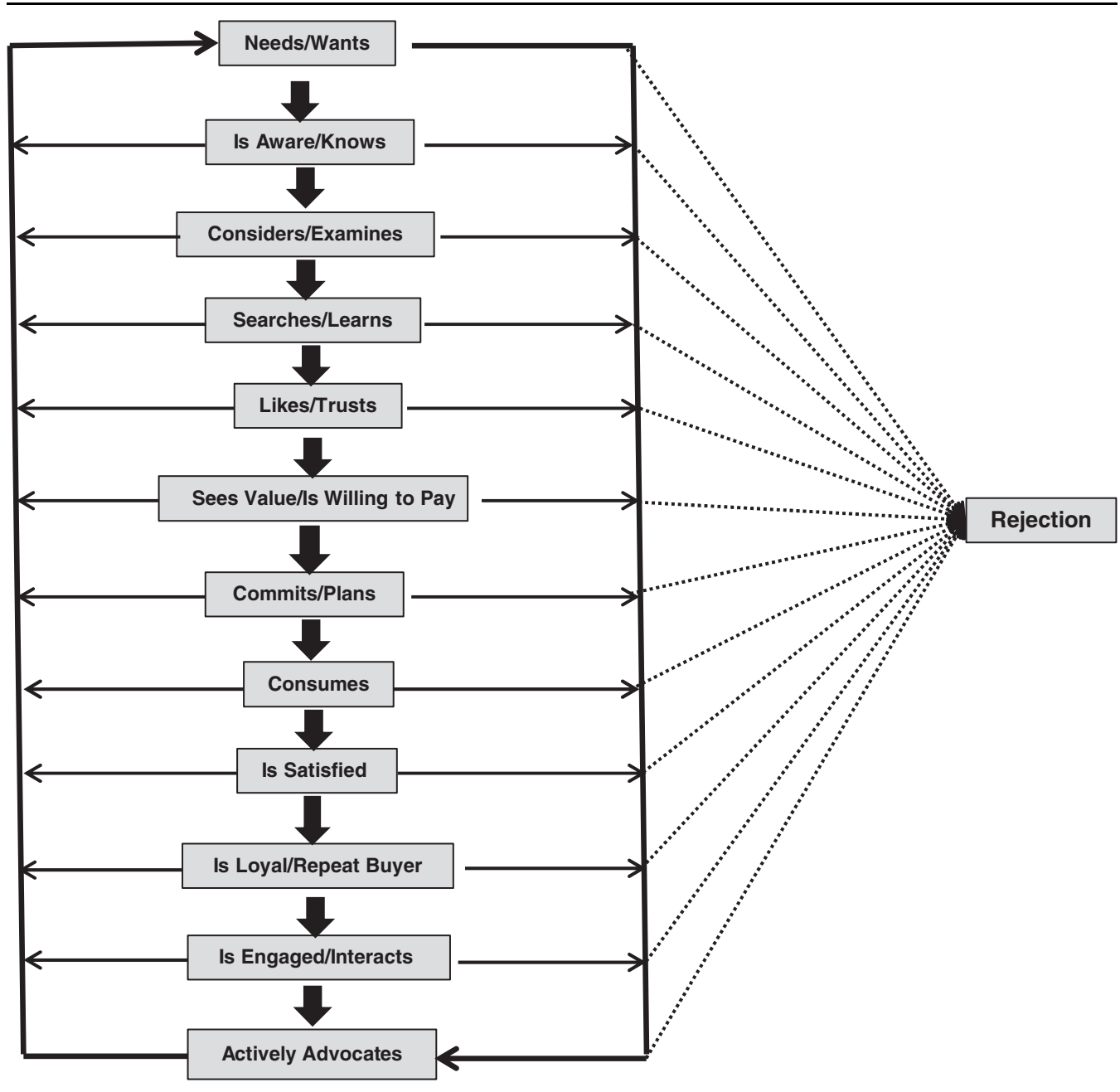
we review some of the relevant research on main (direct) as well as interactive (indirect) effects across different media.

Main Effects of Different Media: Research Findings

Much academic research has shown the effectiveness of different communication options and media, as well as the value of a multimedia campaign (Koslow and Tellis 2011; Sethuraman, Tellis, and Briesch 2011; Wind and Sharp 2009). For example, Danaher and Dagger (2013) provide evidence of the effectiveness of multimedia advertising for a chain of department stores. Specifically, they found that among traditional media options, catalogs most strongly influenced sales and profit, followed by TV and direct mail. For digital media options, only e-mail and sponsored Google search had an influence on purchase outcomes. In their setting, magazines, online display advertising, and social media had no significant association with purchase incidence or outcomes.

Collectively, prior research has revealed some of the inherent strengths and weaknesses of different communication options and how they can be most effective (Belch and Belch 2015; O'Guinn et al. 2015). Much research has examined the short- and long-term effects of traditional advertising media (Assmus, Farley, and Lehmann 1984; Hu, Lodish, and Krieger 2007; Lodish, Abraham, Kalmenson, et al. 1995, Lodish, Abraham, Livensberger, et al. 1995; Stewart and Furse 1986; Vakratsas and Ambler 1999) or has compared those effects with those of promotion (Jedidi, Mela, and Gupta 1999; Mela, Gupta, and Lehmann 1997). To illustrate some of the issues involved, it is useful to briefly contrast some of what we have learned from academic research on advertising in traditional media (e.g., print, TV) with what we have learned from academic research on newer online media (for some empirical comparisons between the two, see Draganska, Hartmann, and Stanglein [2014] and Trusov, Bucklin, and Pauwels [2009]).

Traditional media. Even in today's media environment, the power of traditional advertising media endures (Nunes and Merrihue 2007). Advertising research continues to address many interesting, important topics—showing, for example, (1) how informative advertising can create brand awareness and increase knowledge of new products or new features of existing products (Amaldoss and He 2010; Barroso and Llobet 2012), (2) the role of ad creative in persuasion (Reinartz and Saffert 2013), (3) the effects of comparative advertising (Thompson and Hamilton 2006) or competitive advertising (Danaher, Bonfrer, and Dhar 2008), (4) estimates of response functions (Freimer and Horsky 2012; Tellis, Chandy, and Thaivanich 2000; Vakratsas et al. 2004), and (5) the effects of ad repetition (Malaviya 2007).

Concrete guidelines have emerged from this work (Hanssens 2015). For example, a review of academic research has found that advertising elasticities were estimated to be higher for new (.3) than for established products (.1) (Allenby and Hanssens 2005; see also Sethuraman, Tellis, and Briesch 2011; Van Heerde et al. 2013). Research has also found that what a message says (e.g., the emotional vs. attribute content of ad copy or of online WOM) is typically more important than the number of times a message is communicated (e.g., the volume of ad exposures or online WOM conversation) (Gopinath, Thomas, and Krishnamurthy 2014). Research has also explored newer topics such as "open sourcing" or "crowdsourcing" and the use of consumers as a creative team (Lawrence, Fournier, and Brunel 2013; Thompson and Malaviya 2013; see also *Marketing Science*'s 2012 Special Issue on the Emergence and Impact of User-Generated Content).

By identifying various factors that moderate advertising effectiveness, this prior research also offers relevant insights into how older and newer media interact with each other. Advertising effects certainly vary by medium. For example, consumers process broadcast (TV and radio) advertising differently from print (newspapers and magazines) advertising. Because of its pervasiveness and expressive nature, TV advertising is highly effective at creating awareness, interest, and consideration—the front end of the funnel or consumer decision journey. In contrast, print advertising allows for detailed exposition and is well-suited for mid-funnel information provision (see, e.g., classic comparisons of the "information content" of different media by Stern and Resnick [1991] and Abernathy [1992]).

Newer online media. A company chooses which forms of online communications will be most cost effective in achieving sales and brand equity objectives (Katona, Zubcsek, and Sarvary 2011; Risselada, Verhoef, and Bijmolt 2014). The wide variety of available online communication options means companies can offer tailored information or send messages that engage consumers by reflecting their special interests and behavior. We next highlight six key online communication options that are receiving increased research attention and some illustrative research findings that have emerged for each.

- *Search ads* (Berman and Katona 2013; Jerath, Ma, and Park 2014; Rutz and Bucklin 2011; Rutz, Bucklin, and Sonnier 2012). Because consumers who search for less popular keywords expend more effort in their search for information and are closer to a purchase, they can be more easily targeted through sponsored search advertising. Higher positions of paid search ads can increase both the click-through rates and, especially, the conversion rates.

- *Display ads* (Danaher, Lee, and Kerbache 2010; Hoban and Bucklin 2015; Manchanda et al. 2006). Display advertising can positively affect visitation to a firm's website for users in most stages of the purchase funnel but may not do so for those who previously visited the site without creating an account. In one application, expected visits increased by almost 10% when display ad impressions were partially reallocated from nonvisitors and visitors to authenticated users.

- *Websites* (Danaher, Mullarkey, and Essegaier 2006; Hauser et al. 2009; Steenkamp and Geyskens 2006). Websites can be better liked and can increase sales if their characteristics (e.g., more-detailed data) match customers' cognitive styles (e.g., more analytic). Differences in consumers' age, gender, and geographical location can also affect successful website characteristics.

- *E-mail* (Aufreiter, Boudet, and Weng 2014; Li and Kannan 2014). The rate at which e-mails prompt purchases has been estimated to be at least three times that of social media, and the average order value has been estimated to be 17% higher. E-mail effectiveness has been shown to improve with personalized emails—though, even then, repeated e-mails can backfire—as well as with customized landing pages when someone clicks.

- *Social media* (Kumar et al. 2016; Naylor, Lamberton, and West 2012; Schweidel and Moe 2014). Three key characteristics of firm-generated content—valence, receptivity, and customer susceptibility—have been shown to positively affect customer spending, cross-buying, and profitability, though the effect of receptivity was shown to be the largest. Approaches to monitoring social media that ignore the multiple social media venues that exist for the brand and either focus on a single venue or ignore differences across venues have been shown to produce misleading brand sentiment metrics.
- *Mobile* (Bell 2014; Fang, Luo, and Keith 2014; Hwang, McInerney, and Shin 2015). When and where consumers use a mobile phone to shop has been shown to have important implications for how they shop (e.g., proximity to physical stores for a brand, physical presence of other brand users). Mobile consumers have been shown to be more likely to go directly to a retailer's site or app than to use a search engine; moreover, they deliberate less and make purchases more by impulse than by product features. Research has found mobile ads and coupons to be more effective when customized (to reflect, e.g., a person's tastes, geographic location, time of day).

Marketers can trace the effects of online marketing communications in various ways (Bonfrer and Drèze 2009), such as by noting how many unique visitors click on a page or ad, how long they spend with it, what they do on it, and where they go afterward. Although some traditional media also allow for placement (e.g., newspaper sections, special interest magazines), online media offers even more targeted placement, through the placement of ads on sites related to a company's offerings and the ability to place ads on the basis of search engine keywords, to reach people who have started the buying process. Marketers can also emphasize certain types of newer media to signal that the firm has a particular competence or personality, making the choice of medium itself the message (McLuhan 2001; e.g., a firm such as Delta Airlines may use Twitter for customer service in part to signal its utmost responsiveness to immediately solving customer problems).

Mixing and matching online media. As with all forms of communication, each online option has pros and cons, suggesting the need to mix and match. For example, given that Internet users may spend only 5% of their time online searching for information, display ads still hold great promise compared with search ads. These display ads, however, need to be more attention-getting and influential, better targeted, and more closely tracked to fully realize that potential (Braun and Moe 2013; Lambrecht and Tucker 2013; Schumann et al. 2014; Urban et al. 2014).

Social media has received much academic and practitioner attention (Lamberton and Stephen 2016). Three main social media platforms enable consumers to become engaged with a brand at perhaps a deeper and broader level than ever before (Van Den Bulte and Wuyts 2007): (1) online communities and forums, (2) blogs (individual blogs and blog networks such as *PopSugar* and *TechCrunch*), and (3) social networks (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube).

Although marketers can encourage willing consumers to engage productively with their brands on social media (Lee and Bell 2013; Naylor, Lamberton, and West 2012), research has shown that social media should rarely be the sole source of marketing communications for a brand for the following reasons:

- Social media may not be as effective as more traditional forms of communications in attracting new users and driving brand penetration.
- Research by DDB and others has suggested that brands and products vary widely in how social they are online. Consumers are most likely to engage with media, charities, and fashion and least likely to engage with consumer goods (Schulze, Schöler, and Skiera 2014).
- Although consumers may use social media to get useful information or deals and promotions or to enjoy interesting or entertaining brand-created content, a much smaller percentage of consumer want to use social media to engage in two-way "conversations" with brands.

Nevertheless, consumers can be influenced by the online opinions and recommendations of others. The informal social networks that arise among consumers complement the product networks set up by the company (Goldenberg, Oestreicher-Singer, and Reichman 2012). Online "influentials" who are one of a few people (or maybe even the only person) to influence certain consumers are particularly important and valuable to companies (Katona 2014; Trusov, Bodapati, and Bucklin 2010). Although online communications may be more influential than mass communication for many consumers, mass media might be the major means of stimulating it (Bruce, Foutz, and Kolsarici 2012; Gopinath, Thomas, and Krishnamurthy 2014).

Interaction and Cross-Effects Across Different Media: Research Findings

Understanding the direct or main effects provides valuable insight into possible components of an IMC program. To be able to decide on exactly which communications to employ, however, it is also necessary to understand the interaction effects that may arise. However, very few academic articles have taken a macro, "big picture" perspective to examine such interactions. Before presenting our two models to help with this goal, we first review some relevant academic research on media interactions.

Several different academic works have provided useful insight into the nature of cross-media effects, typically focusing on just a few communication options at a time. As a general rule, this research has contrasted cross-media synergies with corresponding within-media effects to find the incremental value of coordinating communication strategies across media in some fashion. Next, we next highlight some representative cross-media research in three different areas.

Traditional media synergies. Some of the earliest research on IMC showed how traditional advertising and promotions—such as TV, radio, and print advertising; price promotions; and others—interacted with each other to lead to more favorable consumer response.

- Several researchers empirically demonstrate how coordinated TV–radio and TV–print campaigns can improve recall and lead to more favorable attitudes (Edell and Keller 1989, 1999; Jagpal 1981; Naik and Raman 2003).
- Lemon and Nowlis (2002) show that synergies between displays and price promotions, as well as between feature advertising and price promotions, were greater for low-tier brands than high-tier brands.

Sales force and personal selling interactions. Much research has shown that personal selling efforts and the sales force are more productive when preceded by or combined with other forms of marketing communications.

- Smith, Gopalakrishna, and Smith (2004) show that follow-up sales efforts generate higher sales productivity when firms have already exposed customers to its product at a trade show. Trade show exposure reduced sales force expenses by approximately 50% to generate a given level of sales (p. 70).
- Gopalakrishna and Chatterjee (1992) find an interactive effect of advertising and personal selling on sales of a mature industrial product of low complexity. This interaction was more than half the size of the main effect of advertising itself (p. 192).
- Gatignon and Hanssens (1987) show how personal selling effectiveness in Navy recruiting increased with local advertising support (Mantrala 2002).
- Narayanan, Desiraju, and Chintagunta (2004) report that direct-to-consumer advertising and detailing interacted to affect brand shares in a pharmaceutical category.
- Naik and Raman (2003) demonstrate positive interactions between advertising and several different marketing activities: Advertising effectiveness increases with improved product quality (Kuehn 1962), greater retail availability (Parsons 1974), increased salesperson contact (Swinyard and Ray 1977), and a larger sales force (Gatignon and Hanssens 1987).

Online and offline synergies. Marketers are increasingly attempting to coordinate all their online and offline communications activities. Recent research has provided much evidence as to how online and offline communications can interact by tapping into different stages of the consumer decision journey (Chang and Thorson 2004; Havlena, Cardarelli, and De Montigny 2007).

- For a major German car company, Naik and Peters (2009) found synergies within the offline media types (TV, magazines, radio and newspapers) for offline dealer visits, while for online website visits, they found both these within-media synergies and cross-media synergies with online media types (banner and search ads). Direct mail only contributed to the online visits, without any synergies.
- Wiesel, Pauwels, and Arts (2011) found multiple online–offline synergies in a model that examined multiple funnel outcomes and also utilized time delays (lags) and feedback relations. They found the maximum profit impact for Google AdWords was 17 times higher than that for faxes, which were the highest-impact offline medium studied. The sales elasticity for Google AdWords was a sizable 4.35. Notably, in their study, 73% of the effect of Google AdWords took place through offline orders.
- Dinner, Van Heerde, and Neslin (2014) found that, for a high-end clothing and apparel retailer, paid search and online display advertising had the greatest impact on both online and offline sales, and both were more effective than traditional advertising primarily because of strong cross-effects on the offline channel. Clearance promotions had even higher effects on online sales. They also found that traditional advertising decreased paid search click-through rates, thus reducing the net cross-effect of traditional advertising.
- Drawing on customers' path of visits and purchases at a travel and hospitality firm's website, Li and Kannan (2014) found significant carryover and spillover effects across online channel options. If customers visited the website through e-mail and display channels (firm-initiated channels), it increased visits to the website through customer-initiated channels (e.g., search,

direct, referrals) but increased purchase probabilities (conversions) only through paid search and direct visits (but not through referrals).
- Stephen and Galak (2012), in studying the microlending website Kiva, found that traditional earned media activity (e.g., press mentions in newspaper articles and on television programs) flowed from social media (e.g., posts made by consumers on online communities, social networking websites, or blogs), but not the other way around. The per-event sales impact of traditional-media earned mentions was greater than that for social-media-earned mentions—presumably because of the former's greater reach—but because the frequency of the latter was much higher, social-media-earned mentions ended up having greater overall impact on sales.
- Kumar et al. (2016) found that firm-generated content in social media worked synergistically with both television advertising and e-mail marketing.
- Gopinath, Thomas, and Krishnamurthy (2014) reported that emotion-oriented advertising drove online WOM recommendations and thus sales.

Development of a Conceptual Framework

As the previous section's review shows, prior academic research has persuasively documented that significant cross-effects do occur across media. At the same time, this prior research has several limitations.

First, it has not illuminated the full range of outcomes that may arise from consumer exposure to communications along different stages of the consumer decision journey, as we show in Appendix B and Figure 1. Many different dependent variables have been identified and examined collectively across studies, but in any one study, the focus has typically been on only one or a few outcomes. Because marketers are potentially interested in many of the outcomes shown in Appendix B and Figure 1, this narrow focus of current research is clearly an important limitation.

Second, current research has tended to study only message effects that occur at the same point of time, rather than to also incorporate lagged and downstream effects. Thus, it has not really provided a fully dynamic, longitudinal view of when and how cross-effects occur across different media and the temporal sequences (downstream effects) involved. Consumers view messages in sequence, and research should therefore study the effects of multiple messages viewed in sequence, with the ordering (sequence) potentially making a difference. Some prior research has already demonstrated that media effects can vary depending on the sequence or order in which they are seen. For example, Kim, Yoon, and Lee (2010) experimentally show that the interactive effects of advertising with positive or negative publicity vary depending on which is seen first (see also Edell and Keller 1989, 1999; Stammerjohan et al. 2005; Voorveld, Neijens, and Smit 2012).

A third drawback of prior research is that it generally pools all consumers together during analysis, implicitly assuming that they have the same response elasticities to every communication or media option. Because consumer needs vary by their stage in the decision journey, their brand-related information needs and response elasticities also likely vary with their stage in the consumer decision journey; therefore, the stage of their

decision journey should be used as a moderator variable to allow for heterogeneity in effects. For example, the high effectiveness of search advertising found in prior research (e.g., Wiesel, Pauwels, and Arts 2011) may be because it perfectly fits the needs of those consumers in that particular stage of the decision journey. As Dinner, Van Heerde, and Neslin (2014, p. 542) note: "The strong effects for search advertising are probably due to the medium's 'value proposition,' in that *search advertising targets customers who are already in the process of buying*. As a result, paid search expenditures translate more readily into purchases" (emphasis added).

In one of the few studies that has attempted to address these shortcomings, Smith, Gopalakrishna, and Chatterjee (2006) developed a three-stage model of the communications of a manufacturer of replacement windows that captured the effects of their expenditures and the exposure sequence for communications for nine different media on multiple outcomes (e.g., lead generation, appointment conversions, sales conversions). Their analysis incorporated main and interactive effects, individual-media time lags, and delayed decay effects. They found that follow-up sales efforts were more effective if consumers had already been exposed to media communications, with media type and timing of exposure making a difference; they state that "the indirect effects of increased radio spending on the level of response to newspaper ads and exhibition are substantial" (p. 570). Another study that utilizes multiple outcome metrics and examines time-delayed effects and feedback relationships is Wiesel, Pauwels, and Arts (2011).

Such incorporation of many more outcomes as dependent variables, lagged and downstream sequence effects, and effect heterogeneity (varying with consumer stage in the decision journey) is required not just in future empirical research but also in the development of more relevant conceptual frameworks. To guide managerial decision making and academic research for IMC, an updated comprehensive, dynamic framework is needed that captures the full range of outcomes of interest as well as the various temporal sequences involved. With a goal of providing insight into which combinations of media are best

used at different stages of the consumer journey, in the next section we propose two different communication models as part of such an improved conceptual framework. These models address two specific questions:

1. What are the effects or outcomes created by different types of communication options or platforms? Which of these communication options best help achieve the communication objectives associated with each stage in the consumer decision journey?
2. How do you ensure that those communication options are well-integrated to collectively maximize the communication effects created?

Combining these models provides useful guidance and advice to answer academic and managerial questions as well as to suggest propositions for further research. Before we develop our models, however, it is helpful to first group the different media possibilities. One broad distinction many marketers and academic researchers have made (e.g., Stephen and Galak 2012) is between communications that appear in paid media (traditional outlets such as TV, print, and direct mail), owned media (company-controlled options such as websites, blogs, mobile apps, and social media), and earned media (virtual or real-world WOM, press coverage, etc.).

For our purposes, we focus more on paid and owned media, given that those are the areas over which marketers have the most control, though we also incorporate earned media (e.g., WOM advocacy) in our analyses. The most important examples of these different media types appear as column headings in Table 1 and are described more completely in the next section.

Understanding Consumer Processing of Communications

To develop a fully integrated marketing communication program, it is first necessary to understand how communications "work" over a consumer's decision journey—specifically, the resources and mindsets a consumer brings to the reception and processing of different messages, as well as the outcomes these

TABLE 1
Research Propositions Concerning Likely Communication Outcomes from Different Communication Options

Communication Outcomes	TV	Promos	Events	PR	Social Media	Website	Search	Display	Mobile	Direct	Selling
Create awareness and salience	+++	++	++	++	+++	++	+++	+++	+++	++	+
Convey detailed information	+	+	+	+	++	+++	+	+	++	+++	+++
Create brand imagery and personality	+++	++	++	++	+++	++	+	+	++	+	+
Build trust	+	+	+	+++	+++	+	+	+	++	+	+++
Elicit emotions	+++	++	+++	+++	+++	++	+	+	++	+	+
Inspire action	+	+++	+	+	+	++	+++	++	+++	+++	+++
Instill loyalty	++	+	+	+	++	++	+	+	++	++	++
Connect people	+	+	++	+	+++	+++	+	+	+++	+	+

Notes: +++ = greatest influence; ++ = medium influence; + = least influence.

messages can lead to in terms of consumer knowledge, attitudes, and action tendencies. Figure 2 organizes the key factors that interact to determine these outcomes into consumer characteristics, (message reception) context, and content of the communication itself. Figure 2 also makes clear that the outcomes of interest are many (Keller 2003), ranging from creating awareness, to conveying information or emotion and building trust, to taking action and even engaging in brand advocacy. The extent to which each of these outcomes occurs will depend on the interactive effect of the consumer characteristics, processing context, and message content factors, some which we highlight in the following subsections.

Consumer Characteristics

Much research has shown how consumer motivation, ability, and opportunity to process a communication determine the intensity and direction of that processing and the resulting outcomes that occur (Batra and Ray 1986; MacInnis and Jaworski 1989; MacInnis, Moorman, and Jaworski 1991; Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann 1983). If motivation, ability, or opportunity are lacking for any reason, consumer processing of a communication will be impaired or may not even occur. While motivation and ability to process information are consumer-level factors, the opportunity to do so is determined in large part by the nature of the medium itself, as well as the processing conditions (context) under which the message is

received (which we discuss separately in a following subsection).

The *motivation*, or desire, to process incoming information varies with the extent to which the consumer views it as potentially helping with the brand choice task at hand. This increases with the level of perceived risk (Cox 1967; Loewenstein et al. 2001; Mitchell 1999) and the degree to which the category-level need is salient or pressing—such as the geo-location of the consumer (affecting the processing of mobile messages) or the degree to which the consumer is in the search process (affecting the processing of retargeted online advertising). Situational factors may also matter in their potential to affect consumers' emotional state/mood and willingness or desire to seek information.

The consumer *ability* to process information depends, among other factors, on the amount of prior familiarity and knowledge with the brand and category. Thus, consumers at the earliest stages of category search might not be able to process in-depth attribute-level brand comparison information (Alba and Hutchinson 1987), though they should still be able to understand which brands are more versus less relevant for their brand choice decisions (Court et al. 2009).

Interactions across motivation, ability, and opportunity factors can have important implications for IMC planning. For example, mobile brand messages may tap into high-motivation processing situations but be low in processing opportunity; alternatively, social media messaging from

FIGURE 2
Factors That Affect Consumer Communication Processing
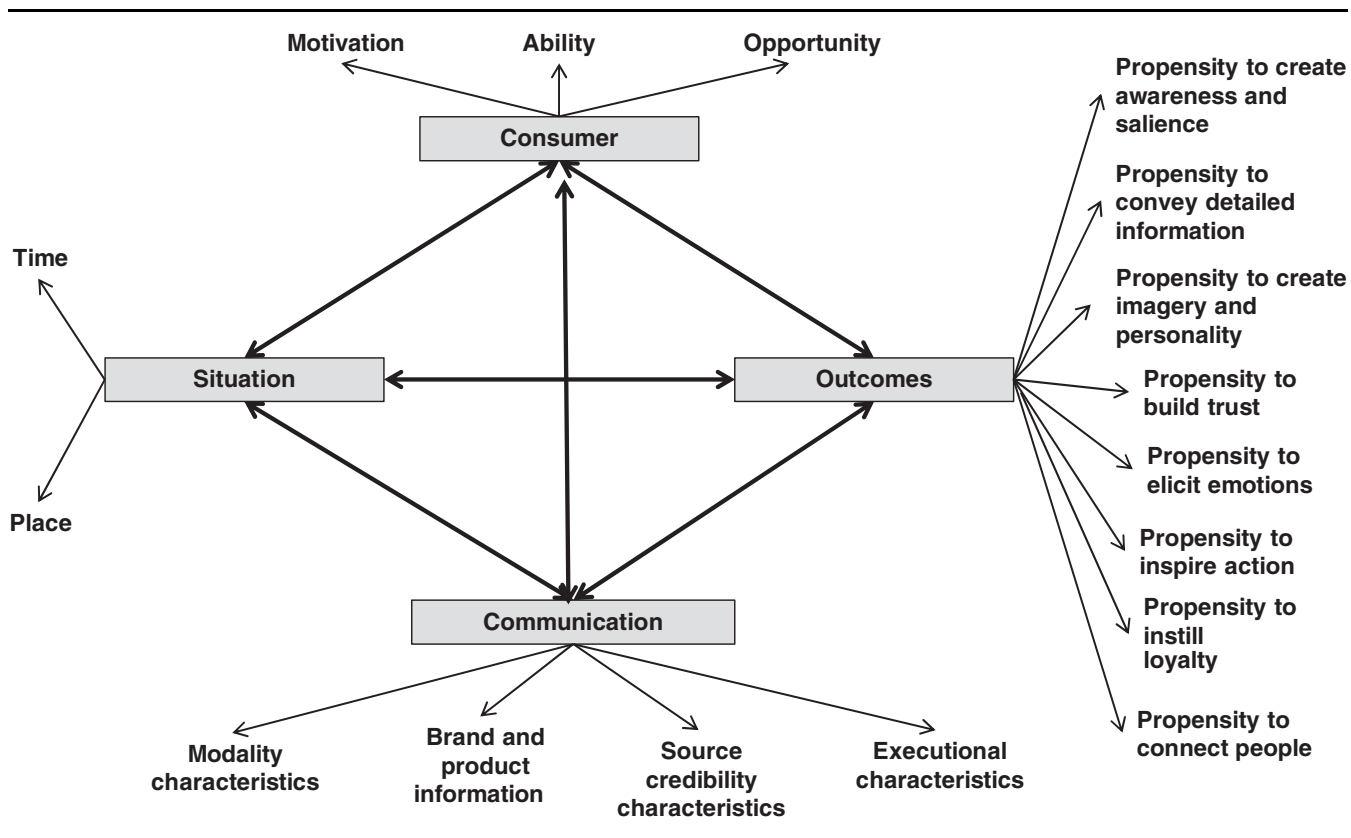
trusted peers might be very high in credibility but low in its ability to convey detailed information.

Characteristics of the Processing Context or Situation

As mentioned previously, the consumer's opportunity to process information is affected by several aspects of the time and place of message exposure, such as whether the consumer is under time pressure or in a physical setting where (s)he can process the communications in depth. Different media options vary in how strong they are along these processing factors. Thus, certain media, such as mobile or billboards, seem more suitable for messages that remind or trigger action rather than for messages that aim to persuade through detailed information. Other media, such as online video or TV, naturally lend themselves to messages that inject more emotion and imagery into brand perceptions.

Table 1 shows some of these plausible relationships. In doing so, it draws on prior research by Stern and Resnick (1991) and others who compared the "information content" across multiple media (e.g., TV ads typically having less product information than print ads). While textbooks on marketing communications provide useful descriptions of practitioner beliefs about the qualitative strengths and weaknesses of alternative media classes on various communication goals (e.g., O'Guinn et al. 2015), most of these relationships have, to our knowledge, not yet been subjected to formal empirical investigation by academic researchers.

Communication Content Characteristics

Research has also examined how various characteristics of the communication itself (e.g., its modality, its executional and message information, its source credibility) influence the resulting outcomes from exposure (Stern and Resnick 1991). Creative strategies such as music, celebrities, special effects, sex appeals, and fear appeals are all examples of attention-getting devices to increase consumer motivation to process a communication and build awareness and salience, though they may direct processing away from the brand or its message in the process, hurting preference formation (McGuire 1978). While much of the prior research using traditional media should also apply to the newer media, marketers need to think about communication content idiosyncrasies in today's digital environment, such as different processing implications and outcomes for different types of Facebook posts, tweets, and so on (e.g., De Vries, Gensler, and Leeflang 2012; Lee, Hosanagar, and Nair 2015; Stephen, Sciandra, and Inman 2015).

The nature of the medium can itself affect opportunity to process: the smaller screen size of a mobile message can limit processing depth, while detailed information can be provided on a website that permits extensive brand-related processing by consumers, assuming that they are attracted to the website to begin with. Yet this detailed information may lack credibility and may not motivate consumers unless it is attributed to a trustworthy message source (McGuire 1978).

Communication Outcomes

As stated previously and reflected in Appendix B, the consumer processing that results from exposure to a communication—contingent on the characteristics of the communication, consumer, and context involved (see Figure 2)—can create several different possible communication outcomes. Depending on the stage of the consumer's processing journey, these multiple possible outcomes vary in importance to a particular brand marketer. These communication outcomes or goals include the following:

- *Create awareness and salience.* The foundation of all brand and marketing efforts is creating awareness and ensuring that the brand is sufficiently salient and thought of in the right way at the right times and right places. Salience occurs when the brand is associated with a wide variety of cues—categories, situations, need states, and so on—such that the brand is recalled easily and often (Keller 2001a). In some cases (e.g., with really new products), awareness of both an unmet need and the brand to satisfy that need may be required.

- *Convey detailed information.* After creating that basic awareness, marketers must convince consumers of the advantages of choosing the actual products or services identified with the brand. Persuading consumers about brand performance requires that they appreciate the benefits of the products or services and understand why the brand is able to better deliver those benefits in terms of supporting product attributes, features, or characteristics that function as "proof points." In today's crowded, limited-attention-span communication environment, effectively conveying such detailed information to consumers is more and more challenging.

- *Create imagery and personality.* Most successful brands have a duality—what they offer in terms of tangible and intangible benefits. All kinds of user and usage imagery may be created in terms of the type of person who uses the brand, when and where the brand could be used, and so on. Brand personality reflects the human-like traits consumers attribute to a brand (e.g., sincerity, competence, excitement; Aaker 1997) and influences how consumers view themselves (Park and John 2010) and the brand relationships/bonds that consumers form (Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi 2012; Fournier 1997; Swaminathan, Stilley, Ahluwalia 2009).

- *Build trust.* Even when the consumer receives and processes the information in the message, (s)he might not use it in judgment and decision making if it is not sufficiently credible and trustworthy or "diagnostic" (Lynch, Marmorstein, and Weigold 1988). There is a vast stream of literature on "source effects" (Janis and Hovland 1959; Ohanian 1990), which has highlighted the important role of source credibility, expertise, likability, and similarity in facilitating the acceptance of messages. Consumers are increasingly knowledgeable and skeptical about marketer influence attempts (Campbell and Kirmani 2008; Friestad and Wright 1994), and there is an increasing desire for product and message "authenticity" (Brown, Kozinets, and Sherry 2003). The increasing usage of social media communications from friends and peers is indicative of the greater importance of messages that come from similar and trusted, rather than distant and motivated, sources.

- *Elicit emotions.* The importance of emotional, social, and symbolic benefits and purchase motivations for branded products has been known for decades (Batra and Ahtola 1990; Belk 1988; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Levy 1959). Brands can increase their total perceived value by adding such benefits to the usual functional/utilitarian ones. Brand messages can increase these

perceived "added value" benefits, for example, through mechanisms such as the transfer of cultural meaning (Batra and Homer 2004; McCracken 1989; Torelli et al. 2012). A broad array of benefits also helps elicit different types of emotions that affect consumer decision making (Edell and Burke 1987; Holbrook and Batra 1987; Olney, Holbrook, and Batra 1991; Richins 1997; Westbrook and Oliver 1991).

- *Inspire action.* Brand message information that is received, processed, and accepted may shape brand preference and choice but still not lead to action and behavior because of the inherent disconnect that can occur between cognition, affect, and behavior (Bagozzi and Dholakia 1999; Johnson, Chang, and Lord 2006). Therefore, particular kinds of messaging are often required when the goal is the inducement of action and behavior from consumers who are already favorably predisposed to the brand.

- *Instill loyalty.* After actual consumption, consumers form an assessment of how satisfied they are, in which their expectations are compared with their interpreted consumption experience, with the latter itself being potentially influenced by marketing communications (Bloemer and Kasper 1995; Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; Hoch and Ha 1986; Oliver 2014). Shaping satisfaction is part of a larger objective of reinforcing loyalty and avoiding customer defections (Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello 2009; Johnson, Hermann, and Huber 2006; Park et al. 2010).

- *Connect people.* High consumption satisfaction should lead to brand repurchase behavior and loyalty, but this may not, by itself, create brand advocacy. Such brand advocacy and WOM are especially important for service brands, for which the consumer cannot otherwise obtain tangible and credible evidence of product quality and trustworthiness (Berry 2000). For WOM and advocacy to occur, the consumer might need to engage and interact frequently with the brand and develop a sense of "brand love" (Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi 2012), arising in part from the brand becoming meaningful in a symbolic and emotional (not just functional) manner. Furthermore, the brand might need to send consumers the types of brand messages that would motivate them to pass these messages along to others (Berger 2014; Brown and Reingen 1987; Chevalier and Mayzlin 2004; Godes and Mayzlin 2004).

Rationale for the Communications Models

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. After reviewing that model, we then present our communications optimization model, which takes more of a "top-down" view of the communications program as a whole to consider how efficiently it has been assembled and how well it has been integrated overall.

Communications Matching Model

The communications matching model matches the expected main and interactive effects of different media options with the communications objectives for a brand, sequencing the former to best match the dominant need at different stages along the consumer decision journey. The communication matching model thus considers the needs/gaps in consumer knowledge and behaviors in terms of where different targeted consumer segments are versus where they need to be, relative to the brand's needs, and then suggests the most appropriate media combinations that should best meet these needs/gaps at each stage along the journey.

When combined with prior research on media strengths, our description of consumer processing factors (Figure 2) suggests the kinds of processing effects or outcomes that would likely be created by different types of communications (see Table 1). To develop the communications matching model, it is also necessary to identify the communication outcomes marketers actually desire at different stages of the consumer decision journey. Table 2 offers such a characterization on the basis of the likely communication needs and objectives along the consumer path to purchase.

By knowing both (1) the kinds of outcomes that different communications create and (2) the kinds of outcomes that marketers want at different stages of the consumer decision journey, it is possible to derive the kinds of communications that would be most helpful to marketers as consumers move through their decision journey. Applying the logic and analysis from Tables 1 and 2 thus suggests the communications that might be needed at different stages, as we summarize in Table 3 (see also Young 2010).

Many of the linkages shown in these tables have not been empirically established by academic research; they should therefore be viewed as research propositions in need of empirical testing. In particular, within the category of "new media," additional research is required to confirm that (1) search advertising and display ads are the vehicles best suited to raising brand awareness and salience; (2) own websites are best for communicating brand benefits and features; (3) social media is best for creating preference and, later, loyalty; and (4) mobile is best for pushing persuaded consumers to action. Although these strengths seem intuitively plausible, and some are suggested in the research reviewed in the previous section (e.g., Naylor, Lamberton, and West 2012), these are important model assumptions that clearly require testing,

TABLE 2
Research Propositions Concerning Possible Communication Needs and Objectives at Different Stages of the Consumer Decision Journey

Decision Journey Stage	Communication Needs and Objectives							
	Awareness	Information	Imagery	Trust	Emotion	Action	Loyalty	Connect
Needs	+++	+++	+	++	++	+	+	+
Is aware	+++	+++	+	+	+	+	+	+
Considers	+++	+++	+++	++	+	+	+	+
Learns	+++	+++	+++	+++	+	+	+	+
Likes	++	+++	+++	+++	+++	+	+	+
Will pay	++	+++	+++	+++	+++	+	+	+
Commits	++	+++	+++	+++	+++	+++	+	+
Consumes	+	++	+++	+++	++	+++	+	+
Is satisfied	+	++	+++	+++	++	++	+++	+
Is loyal	+	+	+	++	++	+++	+++	++
Engages	+	+	+	++	++	+++	+++	+++
Advocates	+	+	+	++	++	+++	+++	+++

Notes: +++ = greatest influence; ++ = medium influence; + = least influence.

especially because the nature of the message and creative can also shape the nature of these relationships.

To illustrate how such a model can operate, we next examine several of the possible steps along the consumer decision journey (see Appendix B). We discuss some of the likely needs/gaps in consumer knowledge and behaviors at each stage (combining a few) and propose media combinations that might therefore be most useful as part of an IMC plan for that stage.

Stage 1: The Consumer Recognizes That (S)he Has an Unmet Need or Want and Begins to Think About What Kinds of Products or Services Might Satisfy It

One communications implication is that larger-share brands ought to consider the enhancement of overall category demand as a possible communications objective. Appropriate media to utilize might be location-targeted mobile apps and ads, paid search ads triggered by proximate search keywords, or third-party website and blog native content promoting generic category demand. Appropriate messaging could make the category-level need conscious by showing how it could solve a problem or increase quality of life. Such messaging should then generate within the consumer the logical desire to figure out which brands best satisfy the now-recognized need. For example, the obstacle-course brand "Tough Mudder" targeted Facebook ads to consumers who were already into extreme sports, making them aware that this kind of product could meet their need for extreme sports.

Stage 2: The Consumer Then Begins to Consider Which Specific Possible Brands Might Best Satisfy That Need or Want

At this stage, the consumer is probably high on motivation and desire, but not on cognitive ability. Thus, the consumer will not be in a position to conduct extensive research but will

TABLE 3
Research Propositions Concerning the Relative Strengths of Different Communication Options Across the Consumer Decision Journey

Decision Journey Stage	Communication Options										
	TV	Promos	Events	PR	Social Media	Website	Search	Display	Mobile	Direct	Selling
Needs	+++	+	+	++	++	+	+++	+++	++	+++	+++
Is aware	+++	++	+++	++	++	+++	+++	+++	+	+++	+++
Examines	++	++	+	+	++	+++	+++	+++	++	+++	+++
Learns	++	++	+	+	++	+++	+++	++	+++	+++	+++
Likes	+++	++	+++	++	+++	+++	+	+	+++	++	++
Will pay	+	++	+	++	+	++	+	+	++	+++	+++
Commits	+	+++	+	+	+	++	+	+	+++	+++	+++
Consumes	+	+++	+	+	++	+	+	+	++	+	+
Is satisfied	++	++	+	++	++	++	+	+	++	+	+
Is loyal	++	+++	+++	+	+++	++	+	+	+++	+++	+++
Engages	+	+++	+++	+++	+++	+++	+	+	+++	+++	+
Advocates	+	+	+++	++	+++	+++	+	+	+++	+	+

Notes = +++ = greatest influence; ++ = medium influence; + = least influence.

simply be identifying the best few brands for further investigation.[2]

During this initial brand consideration process, the marketer's key communication tasks would logically be to increase the accessibility and salience of the brand's existence and its key reason for consideration. The marketer must thus ensure that the brand is highly visible through organic search and paid search ads, retargeted display and banner ads, targeted Facebook posts and paid ads, (re)tweets, location-targeted mobile apps and ads, high share of voice in targeted traditional advertising media, targeted events and sponsorships, high presence in high-traffic third-party websites (e.g., via "native content"), high and positive user-generated-content presence (e.g., in blogs and reviews), the creation and awareness-building of "thought leadership"–owned websites, and so on. An example is a campaign by Papa John's Pizza, in which the company sent tweets with coupons to Twitter users who were tweeting about pizza ("conquesting"), thus making the brand more salient among consumers demonstrating a high level of category need.

Stages 3 and 4: The Consumer Will Next Try to Actively Learn More About the Various Brand Options That Seem Capable of Satisfying the Category-Level Need or Want

The consumer's ability to process information will probably increase over this stage of the decision journey, so that the (s)he is likely to seek out more detailed and granular information and rely less on heuristics and peripheral cues such as endorsers or source/execution likability (Alba and Hutchinson 1987). Such information search could include visits to brand or third-party websites (e.g., *Consumer Reports*, the automotive website Edmunds.com), search engine queries (used to drive consumers to the brand's owned informative website), online and offline inquiries to friends and acquaintances, visits to dealer and retailer outlets to inspect options and talk to salespeople, and so on. Marketers could also use persuasive content in informative long-length TV ads or YouTube videos, informative online and offline WOM and viral content, and placement of key brand information on blogs and third-party websites.

For example, Lysol got mothers on Facebook to pass on information to their networks about how they could take care of cleaning tasks by using the Lysol brand instead of harsh chemicals; Dollar Shave Club has used detailed YouTube videos, and various law firms employ "thought leader" blogs. During this information search process (which may be quick and iterative), other brands may be added to the initial consideration set (Court et al. 2009), leading to a fresh cycle of information gathering.

[2]Depending on the nature of the consumer's consideration and decision processes for that purchase, such higher awareness may or may not be very important in driving eventual brand choice. So, whereas brands in some categories (e.g., restaurants) may need to expend maximum resources to lead in "top-of-mind awareness," brands in other categories (e.g., automobiles) might be adequately served by ensuring that they are always one of the three or four that are spontaneously considered for further evaluation.

Stage 5: The Consumer Then Decides Which Pieces of Information Are Both Credible and Diagnostic and, Thus, Relevant to Choice

In cases in which brands make specific performance claims, the information-searching consumer may be looking for credible evidence to substantiate the brand's claims (i.e., "reasons to believe"). These could be in the form of objective, third-party testing or endorsements and testimonials from current and past customers (as in published reviews), friends (via Facebook posts, e-mails, or personal conversations), or perceived experts or celebrities (via ads, blog posts, tweets, or in-store conversations with salespeople). Integrated marketing communication plans also need to be in place to solicit credible and positive reviews and ratings, endorsements, and testimonials in the brand's owned media as well as earned and shared media (Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006; Trusov, Bodapati, and Bucklin 2010).

Communications from a brand at this journey stage should also engender a feeling of overall trust and confidence in the brand and the organization and employees behind it. More credible information helps reduce purchase anxiety and build trust and confidence in the provider for service brands in particular (Berry 2000). Credibility can be signaled through the heightened prominence of the brand in the media, positive and public reviews and ratings, publicized awards, linkages with other trusted and high-quality brands and organizations, and so on.

Stage 6: The Consumer Next Has to Decide How Much the Preferred Brand Is Worth to Decide on the Extent of His or Her Willingness to Pay the Asked-For Price

Any brand communications for consumers at this stage needs to communicate that the price being charged by the brand is "fair," competitively reasonable, and indeed perhaps less than the actual "value" being delivered by the brand to its purchaser, relative to competing brands. Conventional media campaigns could do this (e.g., Jim Beam Black "8 Years Changes Everything" campaign).

It is also likely that at this willingness-to-pay assessment stage, the perceived value of the brand is influenced by its perceived emotional benefits and social appeal. Associating the brand with desired feelings and values through "meaning transfer" and creating desired social image value and social currency are thus important objectives for a brand at this stage. Media that are stronger in their ability to "transfer in" targeted brand associations, cultural meaning, and emotions could include long-form TV ads, associated high-prestige events, celebrity (re)tweets, YouTube brand videos (e.g., those that were used by Dove), Facebook pages or posts (e.g., Procter & Gamble's Cover Girl pages with Ellen DeGeneres), and blogs (e.g., Iams).

Stage 7: Even if a Favorable Willingness-to-Pay Judgment Is Rendered, Consumers Still Have to Follow Through and Make the Purchase

Brand communications at this stage need to explicitly impel action, letting ready-to-buy consumers know where the product

can be purchased conveniently, at an acceptable price, and with confidence. A preference, or the intention to choose a brand, does not automatically and immediately lead to a trial or purchase action. Delay is possible, sometimes because the purchase step is considered inconvenient or untrustworthy or because it is not available at the best price; such delay can reduce the extent to which brand purchases actually take place. Messages about retail or e-shopping locations, bolstered by reassurances about guarantees/warranties and return policies, can be combined with "actual prices paid" data that show that the price the consumer pays will indeed be "a good deal." "Limited-time" promotions and deals could be offered to close the sale.

These messages might need to be delivered through paid media, owned media (e.g., brand websites, Facebook pages, Twitter feeds, location-triggered mobile apps), and/or earned media (e.g., third-party sites offering shopping advice, coupons, price comparison smartphone apps), as well as through the message modalities of distribution (trade) partners, possibly utilizing co-op advertising and linked-to-retailer websites. Examples of campaigns incentivizing quick action include the use of Groupon and videos on YouTube and on brand websites that reduce barriers to action, using client case studies and brand specifics.

Stages 9 and 10: A Consumer Then Has to Weigh Whether (S)he Wants to Repurchase the Brand over Time

Because repeat purchases (increasing the lifetime value of the customer) only occur if the consumer feels highly satisfied with the product or service and his or her initial decision to purchase it, the brand's ongoing communications need to convince the buyer that the brand is, in fact, performing well when compared with "reasonable" expectations. To increase this real and perceived customer satisfaction, companies can also use many of the newer media for internal employee communications that improve the quality of their customer interactions, such as internal YouTube channels (e.g., Best Buy's "Blue Shirt Nation").

Appropriate media at this stage for "purchase reinforcement" messaging might be postpurchase direct mail, e-mail, and outbound telemarketing; targeted traditional media ads and even retargeted banner and display ads; social media reinforcement; Facebook pages and Twitter direct communications for customer service support (e.g., as with Zappos, Delta, and UPS); and online sentiment and review tracking. Brands can also increase the frequency and amount of consumption, as well as cross-selling and up-selling, through targeted discount offers to existing customers from their loyalty program communications.

Stages 11 and 12: Some Consumers May Then Choose to Engage in Positive WOM for the Brand or Even Become Brand "Advocates" and "Missionaries" for It

Here, brands need to make it easy to get their consumers to recommend the brand to others, through Facebook likes, (re)tweets, viral branded content, Instagram comments, and so on (e.g., Duane Reade got its loyal followers to retweet its women's hosiery stories using the hashtag #DRLegwear).

Through such media tactics, a brand not only can reach many more potential consumers but also can do so in credible, low-key ways that are less likely to evoke hostility and skepticism.

Consumers are more likely to take advantage of these WOM opportunities if they genuinely love the brand—that is, believe that the brand reflects their deeply held life values and helps them communicate "who they are" and "who they want to be," among many other things. Brand communications are therefore needed that touch consumers in deeply meaningful ways and make the brand symbolic of the targeted consumers' life values, identities, and aspirations (Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi 2012). Creating such communications requires the utilization of emotional, cultural, and symbolic cues—delivered through "authentic" messages and "close-to-consumer" media (e.g., Four Seasons tweeted about wine tastings to some of its top customers).

To facilitate brand love, marketers also need to create easy and attractive ways for consumers to engage and interact with the brand in multiple and frequent ways, through Twitter hashtag events, Facebook pages, online and offline brand communities, the presence of helpful and inspiring native content on websites and blogs, and voting-type contests (e.g., Electronic Arts asked fans to pick a player for the cover of a game; American Express had members vote on charitable projects it should support).

Summary

Utilizing the previous analysis and other research inputs, Table 3 offers an illustration of how different types of media vary in their effectiveness at different stages of the consumer decision journey. A brand thus needs to form an overall or segment-level assessment of where its target consumers are on this decision journey. It needs to quickly and automatically aggregate data from various sources to decide how its media dollars should be allocated at that moment, what kinds of messages and tonality should be used, and at which locations and times these messages should be sent.

After these decisions have been made and a communication plan has been tentatively developed, the communication optimization model provides a top-down evaluation of the proposed communication program in terms of how efficiently it maximizes main and interaction effects. It helps fine-tune the communication program to ensure optimal integration by helping marketers answer the question: "How do I know if I have a fully integrated marketing communications program?"

Communications Optimization Model

Although several criteria may be relevant to assess integration, the following seven criteria ("the 7Cs") have been found to be particularly helpful in terms of capturing the key considerations raised by much prior IMC research (e.g., Keller 2001b, 2013). The first two criteria are especially relevant to the financial efficiency of the communication plan. Some of these criteria have been addressed in previous sections and, thus, are not elaborated in great detail.

Coverage

Coverage is the proportion of the target audience reached by each communication option employed, as well as the amount of overlap among those options. In other words, to what extent do different communication options reach the designated target market and the same versus different consumers who make up that market?

Cost

Marketers must evaluate marketing communications on all these criteria against their cost to arrive at the most effective *and* most efficient communications program. To increase the cost efficiency of an IMC program, marketers can conduct A/B split (multivariate design) field experiments, using tracking metrics on business metrics that feed into return-on-investment assessments. For instance, do those customers who are fans on a firm's Facebook page or followers of its Twitter account have a sufficiently higher purchase frequency? Do they spend more, with fewer discounts? Ideally, such tests would use a randomized test versus control design to obviate issues of causality (e.g., Facebook page/Twitter followers could otherwise be consumers who already feel high brand affinity).

There are several brands that already conduct such tests. U.K. retailer Marks & Spencer found that its YouTube channel video watchers (vs. nonwatchers) had a 25% higher basket size, had higher conversion rates, had fewer returns, and spent twice as much time on the company website, which they visited twice as often. Volvo compared the percentage of times that it was in people's consideration set of prospects in areas where it ran (vs. did not run) a Facebook campaign, with controlled equality in the other-media campaigns in both areas.

The coverage and cost criteria thus reflect the efficiency of the media plan to cost effectively reach the right consumers (Lin, Venkataraman, and Jap 2013). The next five criteria home in on the success that the IMC program has in actually influencing those consumers along their decision journey to drive sales in the short run and build brand equity in the long run.

Contribution

Contribution reflects direct "main effects" and 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. How much does a communication—by itself—affect consumer processing and build awareness, enhance image, elicit responses, induce sales, or affect any other stage along the consumer journey?

Commonality

Commonality is the extent to which *common* associations are reinforced across communication options; that is, the extent to which different communication options share the same meaning. Information processing research has found that a repeated message is more effective when it is presented in two different modes rather than in one (Unnava and Burnkrant 1991; Young and Bellezza 1982). McGrath (2005) empirically shows how communication programs with a common theme executed across multiple media in a visually consistent manner can induce stronger attitudes toward the brand than the same executions with less visual consistency.

Complementarity

As noted in previous sections, communication options are more effective when used in tandem, ideally in the most appropriate sequence. Complementarity is the extent to which *different* associations and linkages are emphasized across communication options. For effective competitive positioning, brands typically need to establish multiple brand associations. Different marketing communication options may be better suited to establishing a particular brand association (e.g., sponsorship of a cause may improve perceptions of a brand's trust and credibility, but TV and print advertising may be needed to communicate its performance advantages).

Cross-Effects

Communications used in tandem are more powerful when they interact and create synergistic cross-effects with other communications through proper sequencing. Our review has illustrated many such effects within and between online and offline media. For example, promotions and online solicitations can be more effective when combined with advertising (Neslin 2002).The awareness and attitudes created by advertising campaigns can increase the success of more direct sales pitches. Advertising can convey the positioning of a brand and benefit from online display advertising or search engine marketing that sends a stronger call to action (Pfeiffer and Zinnbauer 2010).

Conformability

In any IMC program, consumers will encounter communications in different orders or sequences, or perhaps not at all. Any particular message may be new to some consumers, but not to others, and, for any one consumer, it may be preceded or followed by a completely different set or sequence of communications from the brand. Conformability refers to communication versatility and the extent to which a particular marketing communication "works" for many target consumers in many times and places. In other words, how well does the communication conform to the different characteristics and communication needs of different consumers? The ability to work at two levels—effectively communicating to consumers who have or have not seen a communication and will or will not see other communications—is critically important. A highly conformable or versatile communication achieves its communication goals regardless of the communications path consumers have been on or will be on. Note that one of the benefits of new media and programmatic advertising efforts is that there may be a more accurate record of prior communication exposures for consumers and, thus, greater ability to adapt a communication accordingly.

A fully integrated communications program should perform well on each of these seven integration criteria (coverage, cost, contribution, commonality, complementarity, cross-effects, and conformability). Several points about the specific criteria are

worth noting. First, there are not necessarily inherent differences across communication types for contribution and complementarity because, in theory, any communication, if properly designed, can play a critical and unique role in achieving certain communication objectives. Communication types vary, however, in their breadth and depth of audience coverage and in terms of commonality and conformability according to the number of modalities they employ: the more modalities available with a communication type, the greater its potential commonality and conformability. In other words, the more a communication employs multiple modalities (e.g., audio, video, images), the more opportunities there are to match that communication with another communication and to appeal to different audiences.

Summary

Conclusions

Integrated marketing communications are the coordinated, consistent means by which firms attempt to inform, incent, persuade, and remind consumers—directly or indirectly—about the products and brands they sell. Technological advances and other factors have transformed the marketing communications environment and present new challenges and opportunities to marketers. Digital media, in particular, offer tremendous potential through their greater versatility and precision, but they also create greater integration challenges.

To capitalize on these new media opportunities, marketers need new tools and ways of thinking that can provide structure to an increasingly complex communications environment. To better understand how to develop and deliver fully integrated communication programs in today's changing marketing world, we reviewed academic research and substantive findings to date. Appendix C displays five main themes that emerged from this review.

With these main themes in mind, we propose two communication models as part of a broad conceptual framework to address key IMC questions of interest to both academics and marketing managers and researchers. Figure 3 shows how the two conceptual models combine to assist in the development and delivery of IMC programs.

- Building on an understanding of the consumer, contextual, and content factors that shape communication outcomes, the communications matching model considers the specific objectives and desired outcomes at different stages of the consumer decision journey and the characteristics of different media types to recommend the best-aligned media and messaging options.
- The communication optimization model evaluates all proposed communication options for effectiveness and efficiency to ensure that maximal collective effects result.

FIGURE 3
IMC Conceptual Framework
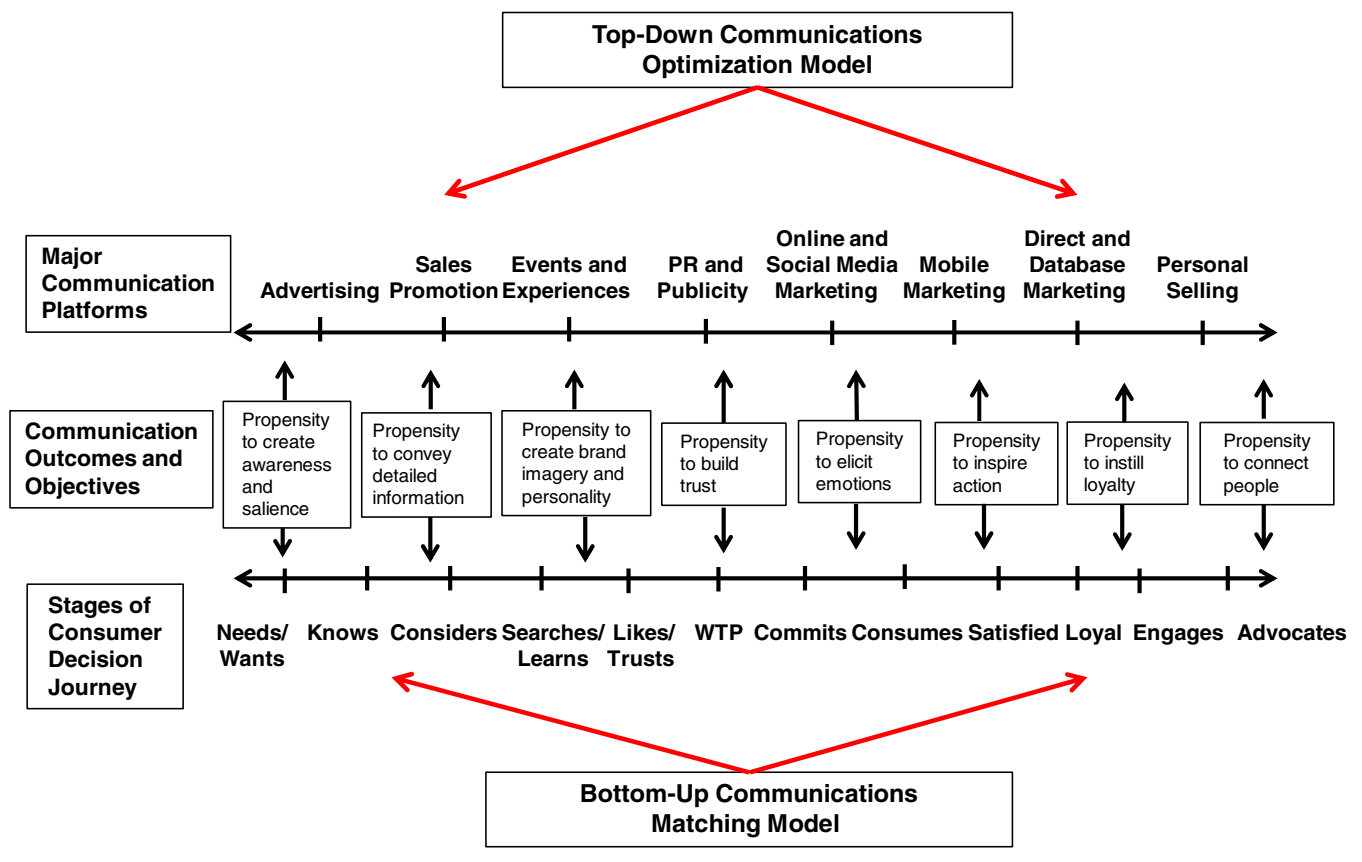
By considering communication matching and integration in detail, the two communications models offer a comprehensive top-to-bottom view of marketing communications, helping address some of MSI's research priorities in this IMC domain. By virtue of its broad nature and media neutrality, the framework we offer can help guide managerial thinking and academic research in several specific areas, such as in understanding online versus offline, marketer-controlled versus consumer-driven, and digital versus nondigital differences.

Managerial Implications

There are several important managerial guidelines that follow from this research that can help marketers better integrate their marketing communications.

1. There must be as complete an understanding as possible of the consumer paths to purchase and decision funnels for the specific product categories and consumer segments of most interest to the brand being managed. There is no single path to purchase shared by all consumers. However, there can be a general sense of the kinds of decision journeys taken by different sets of consumers and their likely attitudes and behaviors at different stages along the way. In formulating these paths to purchase, it is important to adopt a model that reflects and can account for the more complex and nonlinear decision journeys that characterize many of today's consumers.

2. For every communication option under consideration or currently being used, it is critical that marketers assess:

   a. What is the direct ("main" or independent) effect of the communication on consumers? In what ways does it change consumer knowledge or behaviors? What does it make consumers think, feel, and do? Does it reinforce the messages conveyed by other communications in any way?

   b. What does the communication uniquely contribute that complements other communications? What is the unique role played by the communication that makes it indispensable?

   c. In what ways, if at all, does the communication interact with other communications and enhance their effects? How does the communication improve the ability of other communications to influence consumer knowledge and behaviors? Consequently, what is the best role for that communication in the necessary sequence of multiple messages?

3. More broadly, marketers must routinely conduct a communications audit of any proposed communications program to evaluate how well it is integrated and the extent to which the whole exceeds the sum of its parts. The seven criteria from the communication integration model—coverage, cost, contribution, commonality, complementarity, cross-effects, and conformability—can provide a useful foundation to assist in such a critique. Marketers must also conduct in-depth communication reviews for ongoing or already executed communications programs. Such a review should attempt to empirically assess both the direct and indirect contributions to brand equity and sales of each marketing communication. Applying the proper measurement models is critical here.

Future Research Directions

Given what we have learned about the state of IMCs, what pending issues still require additional academic research? We summarize some of the remaining key methodological and substantive questions in Appendix D. As we discuss in more detail next, we organize these questions into three main areas concerning (1) our conceptual framework, (2) how to model communication effects, and (3) other key priorities.

Our conceptual framework. Certainly one important future research area is to validate the usefulness and logic of the general approach suggested by the proposed communications framework. Given that there are several issues in operationalizing the two communication models, it is crucially important to further develop and refine each model and empirically test the resulting formulations.

In particular, the depicted linkages in Tables 1, 2, and 3, which support the foundation of the communications matching model, are all research propositions that require careful further investigation and testing. As part of the validation of Table 1, several specific links should be explored. For example, are brand websites necessarily poor in building trust and eliciting emotions, or can such outcomes be obtained with careful use of certain types of endorsers/sources and audio/video material? If so, which specific types? To test the propositions in Table 2, research should explore all possible communication needs for consumers at different stages of the decision journey, as well as all possible outcomes created by communications with consumers, to ensure that a comprehensive inventory of all meaningful communication effects exists.

Many of the posited linkages in Table 3 also call for additional research. What, for example, are the types of communications content and formats that increase a consumer's willingness to pay or lead a consumer to purchase action? For both Tables 1 and 3, researchers may find it easier to focus their study on individual columns to assess the full range of processing effects and communication outcomes associated with particular communication platforms.

In terms of the communications optimization model, the seven IMC criteria should be investigated in greater depth. Are they sufficiently exhaustive and mutually exclusive? What kinds of specific checklists and quantifiable metrics can be applied to help both the design of IMC programs a priori and the assessment of their effects after the fact?

How to model communication effects. In motivating the logic behind our conceptual framework, we noted the need in researching IMC to (1) incorporate multiple dependent variables, (2) move beyond contemporaneous effects into lagged and sequencing effects, and (3) measure effects conditional on the stage of the consumer decision journey. We elaborate on these three suggestions next.

First, there clearly is a need for more research using a broader set of dependent variables more closely linked to expanded funnel metrics (as in Appendix B and Table 2). Ideally, this research should be conducted in field settings (as was done by, e.g., Ataman et al. 2010; Naik and Peters 2009; Smith, Gopalakrishna and Chatterjee 2006; Smith, Gopalakrishna and Smith 2004; Wiesel et al. 2011). Such research would be more likely to provide insights that tie more closely with how managers use them to make decisions.

Second, there is a definite need for the development of dynamic models that recognize the longitudinal, time-delayed

effects of marketing communications (i.e., capture sequential effects instead of just simultaneous effects, as was done by, e.g., Smith, Gopalakrishna, and Chatterjee 2006; see also Assael 2011 and Raman et al. 2012). As part of this research thrust, there is a need to study optimal sequence issues (differential carryover and decay rates, lags and delays, etc.). Although these inquiries may often involve analytical models and empirical research of large databases, there is also a need for individual-level analyses to explore changes in knowledge and behavior in more detail.

Finally, there is a need to recognize that consumers' brand-related needs vary as they move through various stages in their decision journey. Consequently, their response elasticities should also be expected to vary by stage. To accurately reflect this heterogeneity in consumer response, the stage of the consumer decision journey should therefore be used as a moderator variable in analyses. Incorporating these three changes in future IMC research modeling and analyses should produce richer, more valid insights into how exactly consumers are affected by different communication options, either singularly or in combination.

Other key priorities. Our review also identified several specific areas that we also believe deserve significant research attention in this domain. First, there seems to be a paucity of scholarly research on the changing nature of how consumers seek, acquire, and integrate brand-relevant information in today's dramatically new media environment. Court et al. (2009) claim that the purchase funnel model no longer applies and that their model of the consumer decision journey "loop" should replace it. Academic research is needed to test this very consequential assertion. We find it quite surprising that behaviorally oriented academic research has not attempted to study how consumers gather and integrate their brand-related information in ways that are potentially very different from how they did so more than 30 years ago, when behavioral research last pursued this question (e.g., Punj and Staelin 1983). Some more recent research has suggested propositions but does has not conducted empirical tests (e.g., Peterson and Merino 2003).

Second, individual-level IMC research must recognize that communications coordinated in some fashion may produce differences in the levels of awareness, beliefs, and attitudes, as well as qualitative differences in the actual knowledge created, compared with uncoordinated messaging. Thus, a well-designed and executed IMC program may form new associations about the scope and meaning of the brand, as well as the nature of its communications program as a whole. Behaviorally oriented researchers also need to conduct individual-level "mediators and moderators" analyses to explore the full range of possible changes in consumer thoughts, feelings, and actions about the brand resulting from IMC programs versus single-medium or uncoordinated media programs. A deeper understanding of all these different possible consumer behavior changes would help both agencies develop better IMC programs and marketers better track their effects.

A third priority area concerns organizational issues and the internal processes that will improve communication integration. Several related topics, such as training and

alignment of sales and marketing, were identified as part of the MSI research priority setting. In this area, progress may be made by collaborating with academics from communication and journalism schools, which, as we have noted, have generally placed greater emphasis on organizational issues with IMC. Blending their thinking with some of the aforementioned marketing tools and insights may spark new ideas as to how to strategically and tactically develop well-integrated communication programs within organizations.

Finally, the MSI research priorities pose several questions that our article does not address, which require more thorough examination to identify what we know and do not know from academic research. These include improved integration of marketing and sales and more holistic development of messages and creative across communication options. One clearly emerging area of tremendous importance is mobile marketing. Given its recent emergence due to the explosion of smartphones, academics are just now beginning to develop concerted research on the topic (e.g., Andrews et al. 2016; Fang, Luo, and Keith 2014; Gupta 2013). Like any new communication medium, although some general communication principles will certainly apply, there will undoubtedly be a number of uniquely original considerations that firms will have to factor in (Bell 2014; Ericson, Herring, and Ungerman 2014; Ghose 2015; Hwang, McInerney, and Shin 2015).

Appendix A: Some Definitions of IMC[3]

American Academy of Advertising Agencies

"Integrated Marketing Communications recognizes the value of a comprehensive plan that evaluates the strategic roles of a variety of communication disciplines—advertising, public relations, personal selling, and sales promotion—and combines them to provide clarity, consistency, and maximum communication impact."

American Marketing Association

"A planning process designed to assure that all brand contacts received by a customer or prospect for a product, service, or organization are relevant to that person and consistent over time."

Journal of Integrated Marketing Communications

"IMC is a strategic marketing process specifically designed to ensure that all messaging and communications strategies are unified across all channels and are centered around the customer. The IMC process emphasizes identifying and assessing customer prospects, tailoring messaging to customers and prospects that are both serviceable and profitable, and evaluating the success of these efforts to minimize waste and transform marketing from an expense into a profit-center."

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[3]Summarized at https://thedma.org/membership/member-groups-communities/integrated-marketing-community/integrated-marketing-definitions/.

Appendix B: Potential Stages in an Expanded Consumer Decision Journey

1. Feels a need or want for it (at a category level)
2. Knows about it (sufficient brand awareness in terms of recall and recognition)
3. Actively considers it (examines attributes and benefits)
4. Searches for more information, learns more about it, and begins to critically evaluate it (builds brand knowledge)
5. Likes it and has trust/confidence in it (has functional and nonfunctional brand associations that are strong, favorable, and unique)
6. Is willing to pay (more) for it (high perceived brand value based on functional, emotional, social, and symbolic benefits)
7. Chooses to try it soon and knows where, when, and how to get it (high desire to act)
8. Consumes it (timing, frequency, and amount of consumption)
9. Is satisfied with it (has positive thoughts, feelings, and experiences)
10. Is loyal repeat buyer of it (both attitudinal and behavioral loyalty)
11. Is engaged and interacts with it (participates in both online and offline brand-related activities)
12. Is an active advocate for it (both offline and online with social media)

Appendix C: Five Major Themes Reflected in Prior IMC and Related Research

1. The current consumer decision journey is significantly different from what it was in the past, in that it requires much more carefully designed and implemented IMC programs to ensure maximal results, with the deployment of stage-appropriate media and messages in optimal sequence.
2. Different communication options have different strengths and weaknesses and generate different types of effects on consumer knowledge and behavior along consumers' decision journeys. New media options greatly increase the marketer's ability to target specific outcomes with greater precision.
3. Much interaction and synergy exists across communications. Different types of information in different communications interact and combine to change consumer knowledge and behavior in meaningful ways. These interactions often vary depending on the sequence in which the different communications are processed.
4. By recognizing the direct and indirect changes in knowledge and behavior engendered by different communications, marketers can choose those communication options that are most likely to collectively achieve brand objectives.
5. Digital communication options, in particular, offer robust effects that influence consumers directly as well as indirectly by how they interact with many other digital or nondigital communication options.

Appendix D: Future Research Imperatives in IMC and Recommendations to Marketers

1. To better validate the communications matching model, gain a deeper understanding of both the full range of possible outcomes created by different types of communications as well as the specific communication needs for consumers at different stages of the decision journey.
2. To improve the insights and recommendations from the communications optimization model, at the macro level, consider the scope and relevance of the seven IMC criteria and, at the micro level, develop more specific and quantifiable considerations for each of the seven criteria.
3. To better reflect the full range of outcomes that may arise from consumer exposure to communications along different stages of their decision journeys, employ multiple dependent variables.
4. To capture the dynamic nature of marketing communication effects, incorporate differential carryover and decay rates, lags and delays, and the effects of sequencing in theoretical models and empirical tests.
5. To better reflect the complexity of consumer paths to purchase, use the message recipient's current stage in the decision journey as a moderator variable in assessing the heterogeneous effectiveness of different marketing media effects (main and interaction effects).
6. To provide stronger grounding to the proposed conceptual framework, gain a richer, deeper understanding of the consumer decision journey and how consumers choose to seek, acquire, and integrate brand-relevant information in today's new communications environment.
7. To improve the impact of the proposed conceptual framework, examine the optimal organizational structures and processes in employing the proposed models and concepts to craft a well-integrated marketing communications plan.

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