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Digital Media and Marketing Interactivity

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Do you receive marketing communications using digital technology such as a smart phone, a tablet, a computer? Then you are a consumer of digital media. Digital media is an example of a *disruptive technology* (Bower & Christensen, 1995). A disruptive technology transforms the way that business is conducted within a sector, and digital media have transformed communication industries such as television broadcasting, film, journalism, publishing and music. For example, the digitisation of music has reduced the demand for records, cassettes and CDs, and has resulted in music sales taking place online rather than through physical stores. One of the most urgent questions that organisations are asking themselves today is: “How do we make sure that we are using digital media to the best effect within our marketing communications?” What follows is an overview of the core knowledge areas that will help you navigate this exciting new communications landscape.

Defining digital media

Digital media can be audio, video, written or image-based material that has been digitally compressed (encoded), transmitted and then decoded (activated) upon a digital device. Analogue or ‘traditional’ media such as print and broadcast media differs from digital media in terms the ease and the degree to which it can be accessed, shared, modified and stored. Analogue media is ‘push media’, where communications are broadcast to a passive audience of viewers, readers or listeners (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2012). Digital media is ‘pull media’, or a form of ‘inbound marketing’, where the individual actively seeks information and interacts with brands (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2012). Push media” places

an advertising message within a marketplace; in contrast pull-media facilitates and stimulates interactions (Mollen & Wilson, 2010).

A key factor determining the choice of digital channel within integrated campaigns is the degree of interactivity.

Interactivity

An interaction occurs when an object has an intended effect upon the other, for example during the process of communication. The addition of “ivity” signifies that *interactivity* refers to the quality and process of interaction taking place. Consumers like interactivity and this leads to a positive attitude towards the digital communication (Kirk et al., 2015). According to Liu and Shrum (2002) there are three dimensions of interactivity: active control, two-way communication and synchronicity (Table 9.1).

Table 9.1: Three dimensions of interactivity. Adapted from Liu and Shrum, 2002

Dimension of interactivity	Definition	Digital communications example
Active control	Voluntary and instrumental action that directly influences the controller’s experience	Banner advertisements that allow you to click through.
Two-way communication	Implicit or explicit reciprocal communication	Changing the digital ads that you see based on previous search tracking (implicit) Online chat with a organisation representative (explicit)
Synchronicity	The delay between sending a message and receiving a reply. Digital media provide an almost instant response.	Entering a search term and getting an immediate response. Customisation of page content

A communications strategy of maximum interactivity would be challenging and expensive. Consumers differ in terms of how much interactivity they want, and some do not value interactivity as highly as others, which means that an increase of interactivity might result in a reduction of message effectiveness (Kim et al., 2011). For example, *digital immigrants* (consumers born before 1980) do not value two-way communication as much as *digital natives* (consumers born after 1980) (Prensky, 2001; Kirk et al., 2015). This means that managers should critically evaluate the degree of each dimension of interactivity for the characteristics of their target audience.

Exercise

Select three digital marketing communications that you saw today, one from e-mail, one from social media and one from a webpage. For each digital marketing communication identify the extent to which you had active control, two-way communication and the degree of synchronicity. Assess whether an increase in interactivity would have increased or reduced the effectiveness of the advertisement for you.

Evolution of communication models

In response to digital disruption, marketing communication models have evolved to account for one-to-many to a many-to-many interactivity (Table 9.1). The one-to-many model represents a one-way communication process where a message is formulated, sent, received and decoded. This does not account for the interactivity that characterises digital media. The one-to-one model reflects developments in digital communications that enable consumers to engage not only in communication with a brand but also with each other in a dialogue. A many-to-many model is where customers can interact with other customers and with the brand (Hoffman & Novak, 1996). This is called a “trialogue” (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2012).

Table 9.2: Differences between communications models

Communication model	Description	Example
One-to-many model	One source contacts many receivers with one message, the medium does not allow the customers to respond to the brand	Television advert
One-to-one model	One source contacts each recipient with a different personalised message and the customers can each respond to the source through the same medium	E-mail advertisement
Many-to-many model	One source sends a different message to each participant, customers can each send a message to each other, response to each sender-receiver can be made through the same medium	Social media post