

4.2: From Talking to Consumers to Talking with Consumers

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this section, students should be able to do the following:

1. *Describe* the traditional linear communications model.
2. *Describe* the new interactive, nonlinear, multivocal communications model.

The Traditional Linear Communications Model

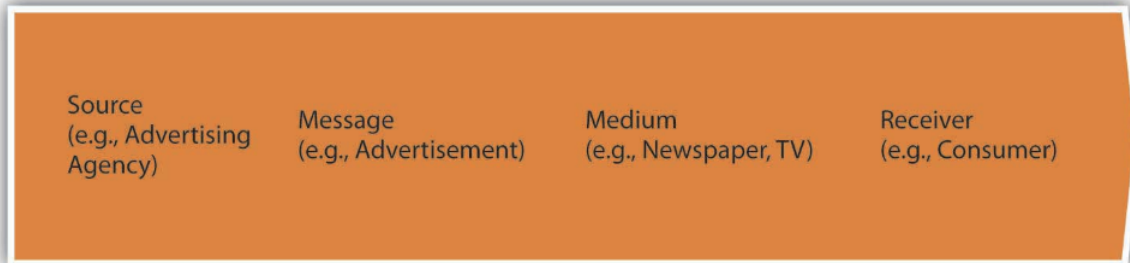


Figure 4.2 The Traditional Communications Model

For most of history, advertisers talked *to* consumers—the **traditional communications model** was a one-way street. It was pretty simple, really: The *source* (such as an advertising agency) created a *message* (the advertisement) and selected the *medium* (newspaper, TV, outdoor, etc.) that carried it to the *receiver* (the consumer). The consumer may have given feedback to the source about the message (typically only indirectly, namely by buying the advertised product or service or not)—and of course she may have ignored it, just as people often do today—but the line of communication was clearly drawn. The producer called the shots and the message was *univocal* (one voice).

A New Interactive, Nonlinear, Multivocal Communications Model

Flash forward to a more dynamic—and chaotic—picture. Today, advertising messages come from many sources simultaneously through different media that target different receivers (consumers, business partners, stockholders, even government officials). At the same time, receivers talk with one another and they may initiate their own communication with the sender, whether that organization wants to hear it or not.

The **updated communications model** is interactive, nonlinear, and *multivocal* (many voices). In addition, consumers now may choose to opt out of listening to a particular message—they often get to decide which messages they see or hear, and when. In the old days, opting out meant getting up to make a sandwich when a TV commercial came on, but today many of us have a lot more control to determine what messages will appear for us to consider in the first place. For marketers, this **permission marketing** strategy makes sense (even though some may be indignant that they're losing control over the situation). The rationale is very simple: A message is more likely to persuade consumers who have agreed to listen to it in the first place.

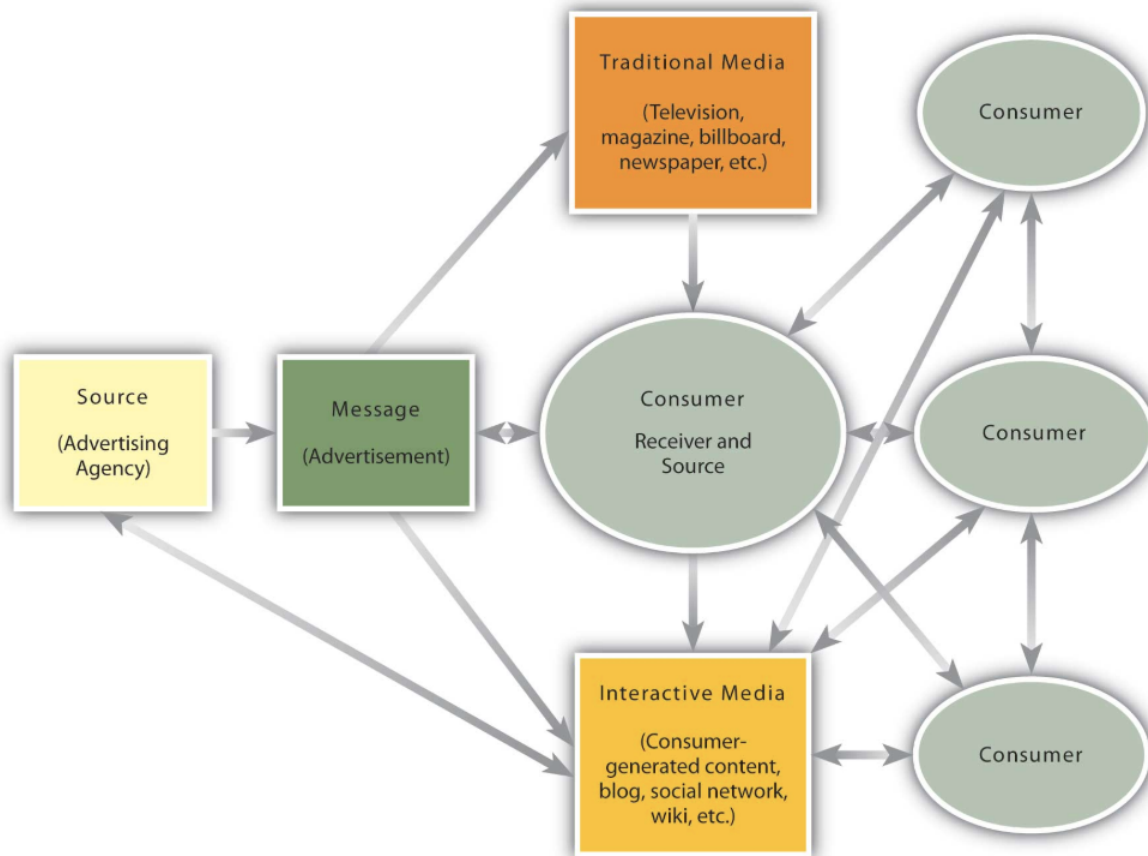


Figure 4.3 A New Interactive, Nonlinear, Multivocal Communications Model

Seth Godin, founder of direct interactive marketing agency Yoyodyne (which Yahoo! later acquired) explains the importance of permission marketing: “We’re getting good at avoiding spam: e-mail spam, newspaper spam, TV spam, calling-me-at-home-over-dinner spam. The point of advertising shouldn’t be to interrupt more people who don’t want to talk to us.” To be heard above the noise, advertisers should seek permission from people to tell their story and begin a private, personal conversation that revolves around mutual interest and respect.

Understand Communication to Create Effective Advertising

If we understand the communications model, we appreciate how messages affect people, how people make purchase decisions, and what influences these choices. These issues can help advertisers understand why people accept some messages while they ignore others. After all, it’s frustrating to be ignored—but in the world of advertising it’s also expensive.

Key Takaway

We are used to thinking about communication as a one-way process that moves from a source who chooses what to say, how to say it, and where to say it to a receiver who either absorbs the message or not. That basic assumption is no longer valid in many cases, as consumers today become more proactive in the communications process. This creates many more interesting advertising possibilities, but it’s also harder to control the process once the inmates run the asylum.

EXERCISES

1. Describe the traditional communications model. How does it differ from the updated communications model?
2. Explain why permission marketing is so important to today’s marketer and advertiser.

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