

12.3: The Communication Process

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Describe the communication process.
- Identify and discuss each element of the communication process.

Communication Process Defined

At first glance, the communication process seems simple. However, a deeper look shows the complexity and issues involved with communicating. When choosing how to send a message to the consumer, it is important to understand how the communication process works. All forms of marketing promotion are methods of communication from the company to the consumer. No matter which method of promotion you use, the elements of the communication process are important to recognize and consider.

Understanding how communication flows helps the marketer to create better messaging, better media, and a response system that facilitates the communication objective. Sending and receiving a message are only two small parts of the complex system marketers work with when trying to send promotional messages to consumers.

Within the complex communication system are the variables of the sender, encoding, messaging, media, the receiver, decoding, and the feedback loop—all while contending with constant noise. Out of all the elements of the communication process, only the sender, the encoding, the message, and the media are in the marketer's control. All of the other elements are outside of what marketing can control. Marketers must understand all of the other aspects of the communication process to mitigate the unknown and meet the campaign objectives.

When we consider communication, we are simply transmitting information. On the granular level, the communication process is how the message gets created, sent, and received. The elements of the communication process are consistent no matter the message or how you choose to send it. However, the variations in messaging, medium, and receiver all affect the encoding process and the feedback loop (see Figure 12.6).

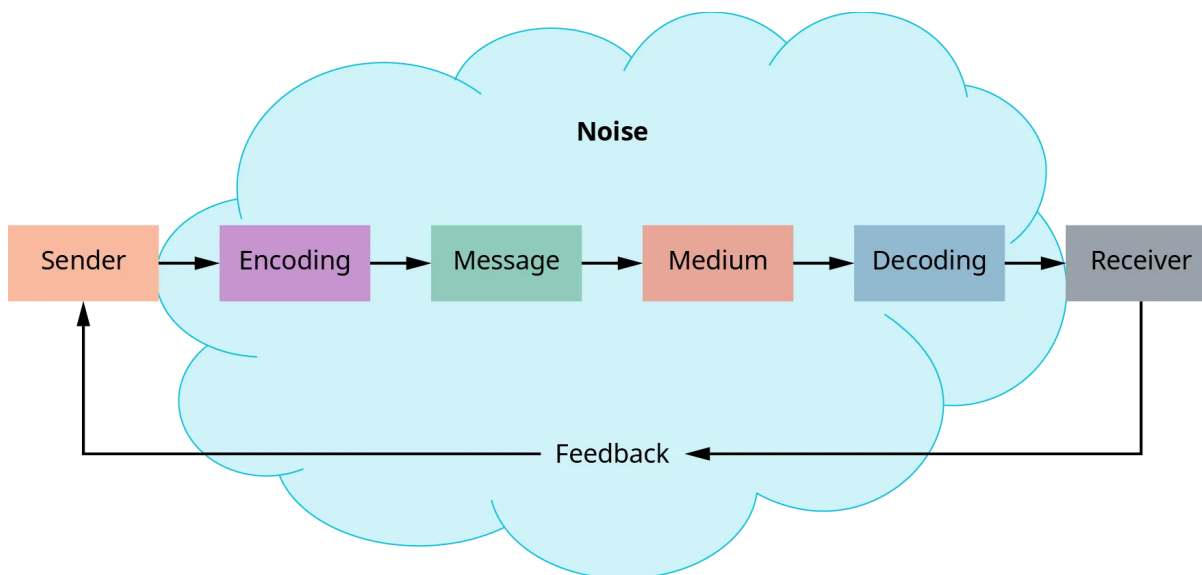


Figure 12.6 The Communication Process (CC BY 4.0; Rice University & OpenStax)

The Elements of the Communication Process

For communication to happen, it must go through a process. Both personal and professional communication are comprised of several elements that occur for the exchange of information. For communication to happen, there must be a sender and a receiver. Between the sender and the receiver is the message itself and the channel by which it is sent. All the variables in between include the elements that are uncontrollable and, if not managed well, can cause issues. These elements include the encoding and decoding of the message as well as the noise that gets in the way and the feedback that helps us gauge the success or failure of the message.

The Sender

The sender is the source of the message. This can be the company, the marketer, or the hired talent for a commercial. For example, when PepsiCo signed a multiyear contract with Beyoncé to be a brand ambassador, Pepsi made Beyoncé the sender of its messaging (Casserly, 2012).

Encoding

How the message gets developed is the creative process marketers go through to put meaning behind the information they want to share with their customer. The process of creating the message is known as encoding. The process of putting the thoughts and ideas into words or symbols is encoding. Encoding could be writing a press release, developing a tag line, writing ad copy, creating a jingle, or designing a brand symbol. How a marketer chooses to encode the message should depend on the audience's characteristics.

The Message

From the encoding process, a message is developed. For marketers, the goal is to have the message reflect the value the product provides to the consumer. When Nike tells its customers to “Just Do It,” it has created a message. Dove’s “Real Beauty” campaign created a message that beauty comes in many different forms.

The Medium

Once the marketer has the message developed, they need to send it. The medium is how the message is delivered. The message could be sent through the television in the form of an advertisement or a news story. The message could travel to the customer through an email directly in the customer’s inbox. The message could also be a salesperson describing why the new Ford Broncos are safe and dependable.

The Receiver

In marketing, the customer is generally the receiver. However, messaging can also be delivered to groups and organizations. When Comcast develops its annual report and sends it to its group of investors, the investors are the receivers of the message. If Chick-fil-A creates a billboard saying to “Eat More Chicken,” the travelers passing the billboard are the receivers.

Decoding

Decoding is the process of unpacking the message and giving it meaning. It is the receiver’s understanding of the message that has been sent. Many things affect the process of decoding, some of which include the receiver’s knowledge and experience. To create the most effective messages and delivery, the marketer must extensively research and understand the receiver. When the consumer hears the message “Red Bull gives you wings,” the company (sender) wants to convey that the product will give the customer (receiver) the energy to do whatever they want to do. If the receiver believes that they can actually fly after drinking Red Bull, there was an error in the decoding process.

Feedback

The feedback loop tells the sender if the receiver understood the message as they intended when they encoded it. Feedback is the checkpoint on a specific call to action. It can be a return email, a click to a website, or a purchase using a coupon. When the feedback loop is complete, the marketer has data regarding the communication process.

Personal selling has the richest method of feedback. If the salesperson is in front of the receiver and can hear their voice when they respond and can see their body language, they have a complete understanding of whether the encoding was effective when the decoding takes place. If the marketer sends a coupon to a consumer via a mobile app and the consumer redeems the coupon at the point of purchase, the redemption is the feedback loop for the sales promotion.

Noise

In the communication process, many elements are outside of the marketer’s control. The biggest factor that can be a point of conflict for the marketer is the noise that interferes with the receiver’s ability to get the message, decode it, and provide feedback. All the elements that get in the way of the receiver getting the message are noise. Noise can be the distractions that happen while the ad plays during an episode of *Seal Team*—things such as getting a snack, talking to a family member or friend, or surfing channels just as the ad is playing. Noise can be the other thousands of messages targeting the same receiver and vying for their attention.

The marketer's job is to understand the various sources of noise and work to create encoding and mediums that will help to reduce the interference. It is typically believed that because of all the noise, the receiver must be exposed to the message on average 7–10 times before they take action toward the message.

Knowledge Check

It's time to check your knowledge on the concepts presented in this section. Refer to the Answer Key at the end of the book for feedback.

1.

When a message is created, and the company chooses to have a celebrity as the spokesperson, what does the celebrity represent in the communication process?

- a. Sender
- b. Feedback loop
- c. Medium
- d. Noise

2.

Which of the following is considered noise in the communication process?

- a. The sender sings a jingle.
- b. A special news bulletin interrupts a paid ad.
- c. The consumer calls the 800 telephone number displayed in the advertisement.
- d. The consumer clips the coupon from a mailer.

3.

A popular form of communicating is through television advertisements. Which element of the communication process is the television advertisement?

- a. Noise
- b. Sender
- c. Medium
- d. Feedback loop

4.

Putting thoughts, ideas, or information together in symbolic form is called _____.

- a. encoding
- b. noise
- c. decoding
- d. sender

5.

The Tennessee Department of Tourist Development purchased an ad for *Southern Living*. The ad encouraged people to choose the state of Tennessee for summer vacations. Along with beautiful, scenic photos of Tennessee, the ad includes the tagline "Tennessee sounds good to me." In this print ad, the source of the advertising message is _____.

- a. the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development
- b. *Southern Living* magazine
- c. the people in the scenic pictures
- d. readers of the magazine

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