

The Foundational Principles of Behavior Change

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- 1 Explain the potential of social media to transform traditional audiences into more participatory, globalized, and civically engaged users through information interaction and dissemination.
- 2 Distinguish assumptions about media users between linear mass communication models and social media transactional processes.
- 3 Understand the role of behavior change theory in the social marketing process.

Introduction

Generation Z, individuals born between 1997 and 2012, grew up with social media and constant Internet access, with the average getting a personal smartphone by the age of 12. While previous generations' use and interaction with digital technologies earned criticism for their lack of interest in reading print books, erosion of basic grammar skills, lack of memory recall ability, and a fascination with distributing mundane status updates through social networking sites (Bauerlein, 2009; Palfrey & Gasser, 2010), Generation Z is believed

as the most ethnically diverse generation with promising commitment to diversity and inclusion initiatives (Meola, 2022).

The initial purpose of this book, *Strategic social media: From marketing to social change*, was to explore the ways in which technology inspires behavior change, leading toward greater opportunities for businesses and positive social changes. Since the publication of the first edition of this book in 2016, much has changed about the digital world we live in. Today's media environment is more mobile, visual, and personalized. We saw digital tools such as enhanced visual communication, digital experience sharing, omnichannel marketing, Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence, mass personalization, and social e-commerce change how and why average social media users and marketing professionals use digital technologies. Despite advances in technology and the many emerging new social media platforms, the guiding communication theories and strategies that inspire behavior change in social media users remain timeless. Practitioners who enter the field with the foundational knowledge of behavior change theories can adapt media strategy to meet technological advancements throughout their career. Whether your behavior change messages are intended to inspire business decisions or positive societal changes, you will be able to inspire any generation using the behavioral change communication theories offered throughout this text. Thus, the second edition of this text includes many updated case studies and technological trends, while highlighting the large scope of applications of the core strategic social media theories in various fields.

Individuals today have more frequent interaction with information about a wider range of issues, making them more engaged with events happening around the world. Many express concerns about the potential negative influence social media have on our youngest generations. However, after over two decades of social media adoption, it is clear that social media technologies are not a fad. The commitment toward inclusion and diversity of future generations could inspire positive behavior change through social media use.

The definition of what new media includes is perpetually changing. To say that one generation's media use is better than another is ill-informed. Most often, individuals fear the unfamiliar and unknown when it comes to technology. Today, an average Internet user worldwide spends 147 minutes per day on social media platforms (Statista, 2022). It is only natural to question what type of influence media has on everyday lives. However, this reflection must consider the complicated process of igniting behavior change through media content.

Years of communication research have taught us that the cause-and-effect process is not as simple as previously thought. Media is often identified as the cause for negative behavior, whether it is making us more violent, obese, or over-sexualized members of society. However, the process of behavior change is far more complicated than what a direct media effects model suggests. It is easier to blankly assume that because person A consumed media B that they were led toward behavior C. These types of causal relationships seem justified, especially when the media message in question is something unfamiliar or scary. However, this type of assumption is sometimes referred to as "hypodermic-needle theory" (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007) and is an outdated notion of how media directly influences

behavior through a linear cause-and-effect process. A strong understanding of behavior change research outlined in this chapter will help illustrate this process.

Social media is defined as a group of Internet-based applications built on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social media platforms are used by one-in-three people in the world and more than two-thirds of all Internet users (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019). It is a primary tool for users to gain access to information, social connection, and entertainment. Thus, it is logical to turn to social media when attempting to inspire behavior change. The user-generated profile feature of social media is the closest connection many media producers will ever have to the individual personality of a consumer. Social media does not fundamentally change the ways in which media users make decisions about their everyday actions, but instead simply maximizes the opportunity for marketers to reach and interact with consumers. This book investigates how individuals turn to social media as a space to create and recreate personal and perceived identities, which in turn helps social media marketers understand how social media tools are used by their consumers to inspire behavior change through engaging content.

Many alternative social media references provide readers specific “how-to” guides about social media uses. For example, they share information about how TikTok videos are structurally different than Instagram stories. However, the authors of this book believe that it is more useful for marketers to have a strong understanding of how social media inspires human behavior change than it is to inform about platform-specific tools. Rather than constantly looking ahead at what is new or trendy in social media, it is more strategic and pragmatic to learn about how humans make decisions based on their own life experiences, including media content consumption. Marketers can then use this knowledge to develop social media strategies on any social media platform of their choice and adapt to the next trending platform.

Through a solid understanding of foundational communication theories, one will be able to apply the tools of behavior change to any past, present, or future social media platform. It is better to understand the link between media and behavior change than it is to know the technological differences between platform interfaces. By the end of this book, it should be clear that regardless of your goal as a social media strategist, whether it is for social media marketing, personal social media use, or creating large-scale social change campaigns, the process through which media users are inspired toward permanent behavior change is the same.

Thus, the authors believe that the most effective marketers blend traditional communication theories and social media strategies to help individuals meet their goals via technologies. This chapter aims to discuss how social media has been able to push individuals toward more participatory, globalized, and civically engaged users by changing the ways in which users gather and disseminate information (Jenkins, 2006; Levine, 2007; Scheufele, 2002). While this chapter provides a substantial overview of communication theories, future chapters will help guide readers toward developing specific social media strategies, and thus illustrating the promising opportunities brought by social media.

Bridging Communication Theories and Social Media Practices

This chapter provides a basic communication theoretical framework for individuals looking to advance their career through the effective creation and dissemination of social media messages. One basic definition states that communication is “who says what to whom and with what effect” (Lasswell, 1948). This definition of communication intrinsically links the construct to persuasion. Whether it be the source of the message (who), the content of the message (what), or consumer characteristics (whom), the process of communication is all about behavior change (Griffin, 2011). Understanding human behavior is one of the most crucial things that social media specialists need to learn before developing successful social media marketing campaigns.

Because this book is vested in constructing effective social media messages, it will mostly examine the communication process through the mass communication paradigm. Traditional models of mass communication were long thought of as a “*one-to-many*” model, where one message was crafted to appeal to as many people as possible and broadcast through a mass medium to reach a large audience. Here, mass media audiences were seen as homogeneous, individually anonymous, and geographically dispersed. With a simple click of a button, an advertisement could be distributed to the masses in print, over the radio, or on television. Mass media disseminates a single message multiple times in a more efficient manner than any other type of communication (Dominick, 2008). However, just like the other types of communication, scholars and communication specialists have learned that this top-down linear model that posits one individual as a sender of a communication message and another as a receiver was not an accurate portrayal of the user experience.

Media users are not made up of a single homogeneous mass. They include many individuals that come to the media experiences with unique personalities, motivations, experiences, and goals. Users are most engaged with media that account for these unique qualities of their life experiences. It is important for communication strategists to take a more nuanced perspective to the role that media users play in the mass communication reception process.

Persuasive communication models integrate the interaction between senders and receivers of messages. These range from linear models of communication, where information is transferred from the sender to the receiver in a step-by-step process, to a more transactional process where the information exchange is fluid and takes participation from both sides. It is important to understand the differences between these models in order to most effectively persuade people toward desired behavior change outcomes via social media messages.

Linear Communication Models to Transactional Processes

Theoretically, our understanding of communication models has gone through great transformations over the past 100 years. This chapter suggests that these transformations and trends are a guide for emerging communication contexts, specifically those in the digital and

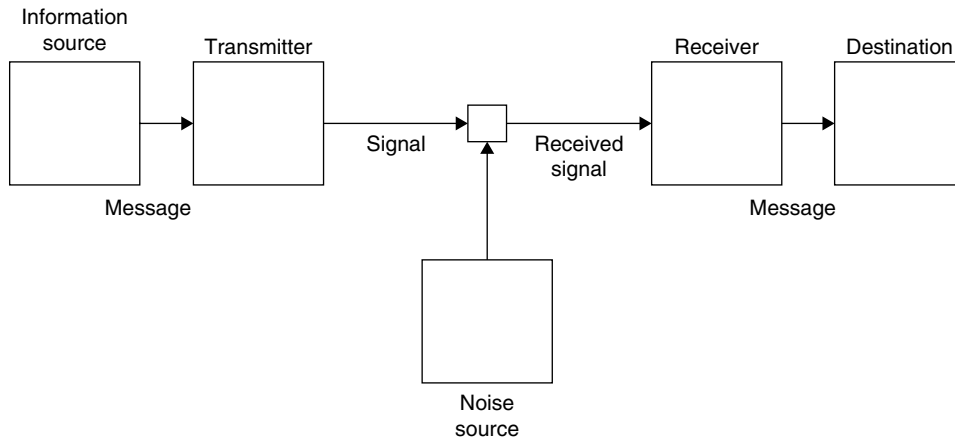


Figure 1.1 Shannon–Weaver model of communication. Source: Shannon (1948). Reproduced with permission of *The Bell System Technical Journal*.

social age. The 1947 *Shannon–Weaver model of communication* (Figure 1.1) is used as the foundation for much of our knowledge of communication today. It highlights many important takeaways for effective communication. The model identifies eight key elements for information transfer: source, encoder, message, channel, decoder, receiver, noise, and feedback.

In this model, shared meaning is imperative for effective communication. Most importantly, it provides an explanation for miscommunication. The receiver of a message could walk away without the intended message, not only due to external noise but also due to the encoding and decoding process. This applies to social media conversations as well.

For example, your friend may comment on your Instagram post. She knows that Instagram is a public space where others can also see the message. She then uses personal jokes and acronyms in her message, rather than being more forthcoming, because she wishes to be discreet about the meaning of her message. The message is so secretive that even you, the intended receiver, do not understand the meaning of the message or why it was sent. In this example, there was no external noise to cause the miscommunication; the technology worked appropriately and there was no language barrier between the sender and receiver. However, the encoding and decoding process did not align, thus resulting in miscommunication. This is one of the first models of communication that included an explanation for why miscommunication occurs even without external noise.

Regardless of the foundational importance of the Shannon–Weaver model of communication, researchers came to realize that the process of communication is much more transactional in nature than what the Shannon–Weaver model illustrates. Rather than communicating through a linear process, which posits one individual as a sender of a communication message and another as a receiver, a *transactional model of communication* (Figure 1.2) accounts for all participants as senders/receivers in a simultaneous and fluid exchange.

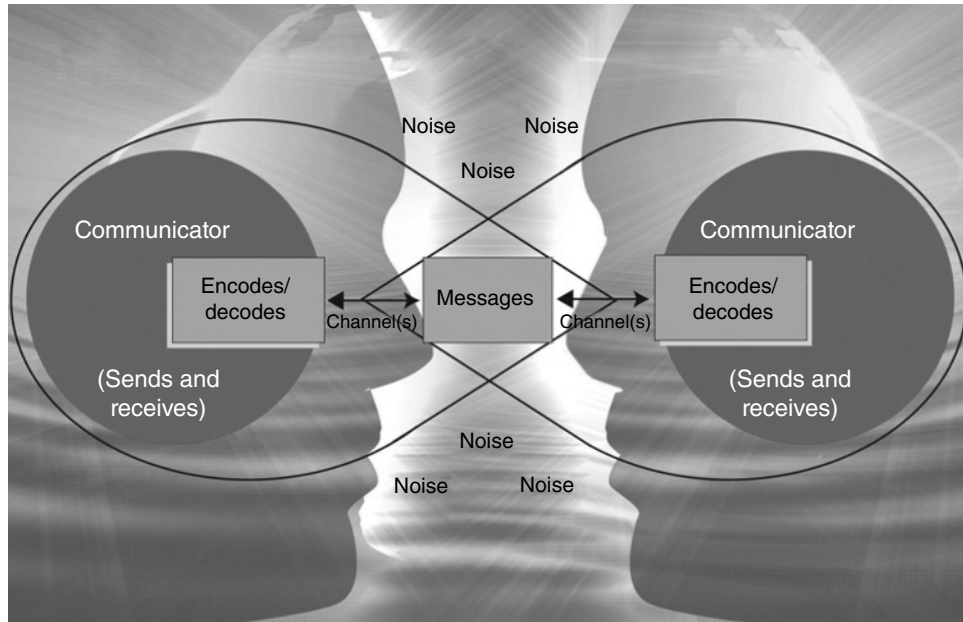


Figure 1.2 Transactional model of communication. Source: Adapted from <https://www.natcom.org/about-nca/what-communication>.

The quality of this exchange depends on the ability and willingness of communicators to gather necessary information and disseminate in an appropriate manner for the target user. While one individual is speaking, the other communicator is providing simultaneous feedback through nonverbal cues, relational history, and the setting of the conversation. People constantly shape their communication patterns based on real-time events in the communication environment.

While the linear model of communication gives limited power to the receiver of the message, the transactional model equalizes their role, as communication can only take place when the two meet on an agreed-upon meaning. In the earlier example, the subtle Instagram message causes miscommunication between the sender and receiver of the message. However, you don't just examine one Instagram post as a singular communication process. You consider the relational history with the person who constructs the message, the time of day that the message was posted, and the technology through which the message was constructed. Maybe you see that the message was posted through your friend's new iPhone and assume that the autocorrect spelling function of the new technology made the message unreadable. Each of these pieces of information influences how you interpret the message and is just as vital to the communication process as your friend's intended meaning.

Regardless of the communication process, whether it be communication between two friends, a public address in front of hundreds, or a 280-character tweet, the better message

can account for this gathering and dissemination process, the more effective the message becomes. Through this transactional lens, a more inclusive view of mass communication studies emerges. This leads us to our first action plan for social media strategists. Each chapter will include a similar action plan to help you apply concepts to real-life marketing strategies.

Transactional Communication Action Plan

There are three steps toward maximizing communication between the sender and receiver of social media messages.

- 1 Be certain that you are not just creating social media messages based on your own goals and objectives.
- 2 Determine who your target users are, the technologies that they utilize, and their own needs and gratifications.
- 3 Identify any barriers to an effective communication process, such as competence, access, or complicated relational history.

Your friend's decision to write a subtle message on your Instagram was based on her own predetermined objectives. Despite her Instagram account being a more public forum, she still chose the medium to disseminate a private message. Rather than considering the message target, technology options, and the audience decoding process, your friend only considered ways in which the message could be altered for her own purposes. Instead, she should have chosen a more appropriate medium where the message could have been more forthcoming and easier to interpret, such as a private mobile messaging application, like Snapchat or even Instagram Direct Messaging.

Now that you understand the differences between linear and transactional models of communication, we must take a deeper look at the ways in which the human decision-making processes influence marketing. Social media technologies have made it more important than ever to understand how individuals make sense of media messages. This information exchange navigates the items we purchase, the groups we join, and the recommendations we share with friends. Human behavior change is an essential area of study for anyone who is interested in marketing.

Marketing and Behavior Change Theory

The American Marketing Association (2023) defines *marketing* as the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large. The definition is intrinsically

linked with marketing research, which helps connect customers to the market through monitoring and evaluation efforts. Ultimately, marketing practitioners are responsible for designing and implementing a strategic plan to reach specific objectives. Marketing, advertising, public relations, and branding all fall under the broader umbrella of strategic communication. In today's ever-changing digital landscape, strategic communication vision is a critical component to any organization's success (Tariq, 2021).

Behavior change communication is an evidence- and research-based process of using communication to promote certain predetermined behaviors through an appropriate mix of interpersonal, group, and mass media channels (Manoff Group, 2012). Traditionally, behavior change theories have been utilized to develop public health interventions. The hope is that through strategic mass media dissemination, pro-social messages prompt human behavior change so that individuals may engage in more positive and healthier lifestyles. These messages are important to the safety and well-being of mass media users. Mass media provides the most efficient and cost-effective means for message dissemination. However, the approach does not always prove the most persuasive. Often, these mass media messages compete against hundreds of years of cultural rituals and practices that prove antagonistic to their health goals. While inciting this type of permanent behavior change in lifestyle can prove very difficult to achieve, this area of research has made great strides in our understanding of how to best influence human behavior change through mass media messages.

It was not until the early 1970s that marketers began using human behavior change theories to explore how to influence consumer behavior through mass media messages. Before this time, the focus was on the product and brand itself. Very little research went into the preference and lifestyle of target consumers. *Social marketing* emerged as a systematic way to design, implement, and control programs that are calculated to influence the acceptability of social ideas, including product planning, pricing, communication, distribution, and marketing (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971). Here, marketers began to see that it was much more effective to sell an idea and lifestyle, rather than a product.

Since the inception of social marketing, several alternative frameworks have been offered. Researchers have explored the possibilities for persuasion through target consumers, a change in mind-set process, and a more planning-centered approach (Thackeray & Neiger, 2000). Each of these approaches offers unique challenges and benefits for using mass media to influence human purchasing behavior. However, they all consider the transactional role that media users play in the communication process. Rather than focusing solely on the product or the media message, marketers have begun to realize the potential of considering consumer lifestyle and preferences as a central ingredient to behavior change.

Social marketing and behavior change theory are complementary approaches for understanding how consumers make purchasing decisions (Thackeray & Neiger, 2000). The best approach to marketing is a hybrid process. Strong media messages can influence human behavior, but only if they speak to the goals and experiences of their users. Consumers have their own preferences and life experiences, and the more that they identify with media

messages, the stronger that the message will speak to them. Though mass media can reach a large number of consumers, people do not like being seen as a member of a mass homogeneous crowd. The efficient and cost-effective nature of disseminating messages through mass media was making the content less individualized, thus proving less persuasive. Social media has made it easier than ever for marketers to integrate the mass and individuality of these two approaches.

It is the role of marketers to ensure that consumer behavior is positively reinforced at every point of engagement. As the marketplace grows with new products, brands, and services, it is essential to the survival of businesses to have a steady core of loyal customers. In fact, the industry named this cognitive procedure *shaping*, where the product is seen as a positive or negative reinforcer to the consumer purchasing behavior (Rothschild & Gaidis, 1981). It is the goal of marketing to ensure that purchasing is positively reinforced at every stage, including in retail stores, as well as its consumption at home.

Shaping procedures are used so that consumer purchasing trials become more than a random process. Rather than ensuring that customers choose your product or service when faced with endless options available in a global marketplace, marketers hope to shape consumers so that there is no question as to which product they purchase in the future. This helps marketers rely on a sale before consumers even walk into a store. Consumption is much more than a one-time transaction. Shaping leads to long-term patterns of consumer behavior.

For many years, it was difficult to track longitudinal patterns of consumer behaviors and consumption. Traditional marketing research, such as surveys and focus groups, was unable to capture user data over time. However, advances in technologies, such as customer loyalty reward cards, credit card history and scanner data, have made long-term tracking easier. While these technologies provide effective ways to understand the history of products customers purchased, this book argues that social media technology is the most effective tool for marketers to use when interested in shaping consumer behavior.

The use of social media for transactional communication with consumers is critical to any marketing practitioner. Today, 71% of online users turn to social media when making purchasing decisions (Barysevich, 2020). Research has found that social media increases brand recognition and customer loyalty, generates greater exposure for business, increases user traffic, improves search ratings, reduces marketing expenses, results in new business partnerships, and yields a higher conversation rate (DeMers, 2014; Stelzner, 2011). Rather than secretly tracking purchasing behavior with technology, social media allows marketers to engage directly with consumers through an open transactional process. This is especially useful as customer concerns for privacy and data security increase.

Companies are now able to utilize numerous platforms to engage customers, including company websites, blogs, discussion forums, emails, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, mobile messages, and affiliated pins on Pinterest. While it is important for marketers to reach out to their customers offline, it is equally important for sales and customers to be able to communicate with one another via social media

(Mangold & Faulds, 2009). This develops a strong community among members, a concept discussed in detail in Chapter 3. Social media provides an ideal way to communicate with customers without disrupting their everyday rituals.

Once transactional communication is in progress, and consumers are shaped by positive social media reinforcement, they are more likely to return for repeat business. The positive reinforcement no longer just comes in the form of purchasing or product experience. Social media allows marketers the ability to check-in, monitor, and listen to customers at every step of the consumption process, including the period of time before they even make a purchase and long after they bring the product home. Social media can prompt consumers to think about a product or brand when they otherwise would not.

For example, as a consumer, you may put great thoughts into purchasing a new pair of athletic shoes. There are a lot of competing brands to choose from. You may examine consumer blogs or reviews to determine which pair best suits your particular lifestyle. Maybe you will use the shoes primarily for walking daily. Social media helps guide your decision based on your unique preferences and price point, and personalize the consumption process to suit your individual needs.

Once the purchase is made and you wear the shoes a few times, you are likely not to think about them very often. This is what consumers want in a product. If the shoes are meeting the purchase goals, they become a part of your daily routine and habit. The only time you are likely to consider the shoe purchase again is if something goes wrong and the experience is negatively reinforced, such as the sole wearing thin and the shoe hurting your foot.

This is an unfortunate challenge faced by marketers in the consumption process. How can repeat brand loyalty be encouraged when customers only buy new products because their previous purchase no longer meets their needs? Social media allows the opportunity for marketers to build a relationship with consumers during this critical period when the product is working well. Marketing practitioners can ask customers to share pictures of their purchase, provide information about local hiking trails, or offer exclusive promotions for being such a good customer. Each of these positive interactions helps reinforce or shape the way consumers feel about their purchase. In fact, it makes it easier for transactional dialogue at every point along the consumption process: before, during, and after the sale. This way, consumers are thinking about your brand when their experiences are positive.

Humans have always exhibited markedly habitual behavior regarding their purchasing decisions. We tend to buy the same brand of products, eat similar types of food, and go to the same stores when shopping. This proves even more true in today's digital world, where shopping applications keep track of previous purchases and save our bank account information. Consumers even spend a similar amount of time and money in stores each visit. Knowledge of these patterns of human behavior can prove very lucrative for marketers. This information is missed when marketers only focus on media messages and products. Social media provides new opportunities to get to know your consumers on a much more intimate level.

Generally, *consumer habits* are a form of automaticity that is guided by past experiences (Wood & Neal, 2009). This is why shaping is so essential to repeat business. Repetition is

central to all facets of human life, including our daily media consumption. Humans tend to have a limited *media repertoire*, or the entirety of media channels that a person regularly uses (Hasebrink & Domeyer, 2012). Though a larger supply of media content from multiple media sources exists, your consumers tend to only use a very limited number of media sources in their everyday lives. The notion that digital users have the totality of information in the world at their fingertips is true. However, they tend to only visit their favorite websites on a routine basis. This helps to organize all the information, but also drastically decreases the amount and type of content received.

Repetition is also an important facet of consumer purchasing. It helps ease the uncertainty of such a saturated marketplace. In fact, the more bogged down individuals feel by time pressures, distraction, and self-control depletion, the more heavily they rely on routines (Hasebrink & Domeyer, 2012). Often, these are the very same negative moods and attitudes that guide media-seeking behavior. If you are feeling stressed out or bogged down at work, you may be more likely to come home and watch hours of television to relax. Repetition and routine help ease stress in our everyday lives.

As such, breaking consumer habits is difficult. Creating new routines requires a more mindful decision by the user, especially when it requires a new digital search or the effort of entering your bank account information again to create a new account. Why bother when you already have the information stored somewhere else? Communication theory tells us that it can be very difficult to change the daily routines of individuals. The theory of *cognitive dissonance* helps explain the discomfort that individuals experience when they are confronted by new information that is contradictory to their current beliefs, attitudes, and ideas (Festinger, 1962). Humans do not like their daily repertoires disrupted.

When met with media messages that are not consistent with current practices, people use communication to make things more consistent and reduce dissonance. Humans strive for internal consistency. Dissonance reduction is achieved in one of four ways: (1) change the behavior or cognition; (2) justify the behavior by changing the conflicting cognition; (3) justify the behavior or cognition by adding new cognitions; or (4) deny any information that conflicts with existing beliefs.

Let's assume that you read a media message that states how a new brand of athletic shoes recently introduced to the market is better than the one that you just purchased. You have already invested substantial time researching social media prior to your purchase to determine which brand would be best for your lifestyle. However, this new information is not consistent with your purchasing decision.

There are many ways that you may try to reduce the dissonance brought by this new media message. You may decide that you will no longer purchase the brand of shoes that you just bought, justify all the money that you saved by buying a pair of lesser quality shoes, or decide that the new shoes are probably not better at all, and simply a new fad that will go away. All these are ways that you would make things more consistent with your previous behavior.

The cognitive dissonance process often leads individuals avoiding or ignoring situations and information that are likely to increase dissonance. This helps explain why consumers

ignore so much of traditional media marketing. In addition, because of a limited media repertoire, it is likely that consumers never actually receive these media messages unless they are shared on the platforms that have already been visited as part of their daily routine. This is especially true now that media users can fast-forward or skip commercials/advertisements altogether.

Social media provides a space where marketers and consumers coexist. It allows marketers to focus their attention on customers who are already interested in their brand and would be more impacted by media messages that are consistent with their current cognitions.

Based on this understanding of human behavior, marketers need to consider behavior change theory when developing a social media marketing strategy. This book will help practitioners understand how to best research media users to craft social media messages, choose an appropriate social media platform, and monitor the resulting information exchange. Moreover, it encourages the social media strategy to fit within a larger marketing campaign to reach product goals. These social media strategies will help transform customers into lifelong brand advocates.

While most of the book focuses on crafting social media messages for marketing purposes, Part IV explains why it is a smart idea to use social media to market for social good. This is consistent with the roots of behavior change theories. A more socially conscious brand strategy can prove mutually beneficial for businesses, consumers, and the globalized world alike. Given the more civically minded nature of Gen Z, these positive social efforts should be important to all organizations looking to thrive in future media landscapes. Now that we understand the benefits of using behavior change theory in marketing strategies, let's examine a case study that promotes transactional communication and creates a culture of belonging.

Case Study: Starbucks #whatsyourname Campaign

The Starbucks mission statement is to “inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup and one neighborhood at a time,” which is consistent with the commitment to diversity and inclusion initiatives of Generation Z by creating a culture of belonging where everyone is welcome (Starbucks, 2020). While this mission statement does not directly speak to the sale of coffee that the brand is best known for, it does speak to the “third place” experience that consumers often experience in store. Coffee shops are often cited as a third-place destination, as they exist outside an individual's home and workspace, and host regular, voluntary, informal gathering of people who enjoy one another's company (Rosenbaum *et al.*, 2007). Drinking coffee from the same place, during the same time each week can create a ritualistic consumption experience referenced above. Undoubtedly, Starbucks marketers understand the value of focusing on creating a warm and inclusive space for this routine.

One ritual of the Starbucks third space experience is the process of placing an order. Starbucks personalizes this experience by utilizing unique jargon from other American baristas. Patrons specify whether they would like a tall, grande, or venti size, rather than small, medium, and large (Owens, 2023). Consumers are also encouraged to select unique ingredients to make up their drink order, including the type of milk, syrup, topping, and level of caffeine. Once an order is placed, the Starbucks barista asks the customer's name, writes it on the cup, and calls it out when the drink is ready. This personalized experience not only ensures that the correct drink order ends up in the hands of the appropriate recipient but also personalizes the experience between the barista and the customer. Over time, baristas often get to know a customer's drink based on the routine customer experience of always going to the same place, with the same order, at the same time.

In 2020, this routine customer third place experience was the focus of a social media campaign. Starbucks UK launched a #whatsyourname campaign to help raise awareness and support gender-diverse youths (Figure 1.3). The campaign included traditional television commercial, as well as content on Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube to promote dialogue. The social videos included portrayals of people who offered their new name in a public space for the first time during the

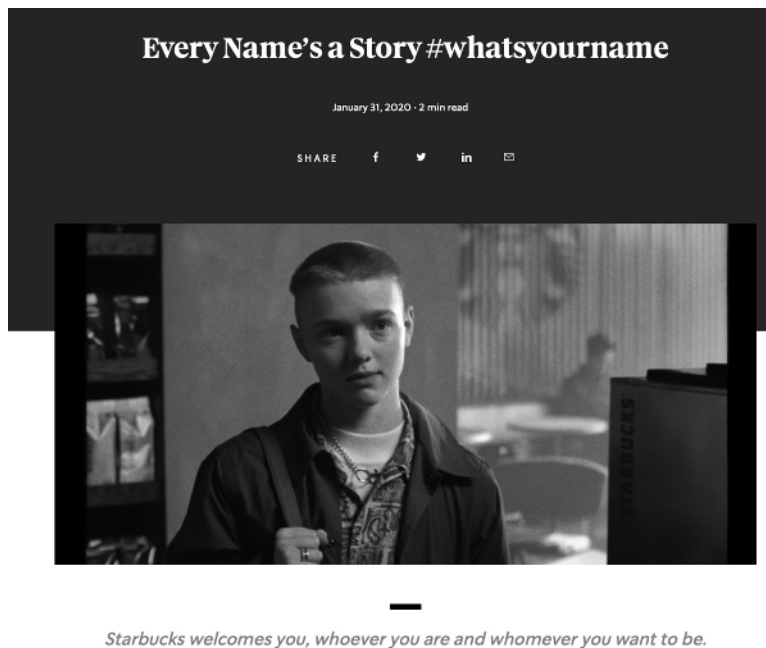


Figure 1.3 Starbucks Campaign Website. Source: Starbucks Corporation/<https://stories.starbucks.com/emea/stories/2020/whatsyourname/last> accessed 26 September, 2023.

Starbucks ordering process. They found Starbucks to be a safe and accepting environment for a significant moment of their transitioning process, as they are recognized for who they want to be (Starbucks, 2020). The social media campaign received Channel 4's Diversity in Advertising Award for addressing the transgender community's lack of representation in UK advertising.

The Starbucks UK #whatsyourname campaign successfully utilized social media to communicate with customers about the unique and personalized experience they can expect when they engage the brand. The campaign communicated with customers on an individual level in a way that was consistent with their brand mission, reduced dissonance, and captured loyalty of a key demographic. Here, you see how mass television broadcast, in-person consumer purchases, and social media can all work positively together.

The #whatsyourname campaign encourages transactional communication by consistently communicating with, and responding to, customer comments on their social media platforms. They regularly prompt customers to participate with user-generated content by inviting consumers to share their personal story on Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube. This communication with individuals that consumers already know and trust builds brand loyalty. Rather than just creating media messages based on the goals and objectives of selling coffee, the company has directed attention toward the challenges and initiatives that are consistent with the values of their consumer demographic. Direct communication creates meaningful and personalized transactional communication that leads to brand loyalty (Shandrow, 2013). The socially conscious nature of the #whatsyourname campaign makes people feel good about changing their purchasing habits.

Here you see how social media provides an opportunity for businesses to reach out to potential and current customers through multiple channels to promote engaging transactional dialogue. Social media is used to prompt users to share their positive experiences with others, not simply as a place to complain or share negative experiences with a brand. Not only does this become a part of their new schemata of interpretation, but it also allows new customers to hear about the product through an already trusted source, rather than through a business's self-promotion. This is just one example of how social media can be used to build a positive consumer and community experience. Each chapter of this book will explore additional case studies where social media helped in reaching these goals.

Discussion questions

- 1 What personalized elements of the #whatsyourname social media campaign help target individual customers, rather than a homogenous mass audience? What challenges would Starbucks have faced through a similar campaign in a more traditional media environment?

- 2 Think about a social media campaign you like. Has the campaign spoke to the “third place” experience? How did the campaign create a culture of belonging where you feel you’re welcome?
- 3 If you oversaw your company/organization/club’s social media efforts, how would you use social media to promote transactional communication with your consumers?

Summary

There is much to learn about how we utilize new media to make decisions in our daily lives. Throughout this chapter, we have discussed the complexities of this process and identified the role that media users play. Most importantly, we have learned how mass communication is no longer viewed as a vehicle for “one-to-many” messages. Selective targeted messages are most effective in establishing behavior change no matter which type of communication specialty you are interested in engaging. This shift from viewing a mass audience to targeting individuals is essential to successful social media marketing.

Because of social media, media users now see themselves as content generators, rather than passive receivers of media texts. Businesses need to personalize content and allow room for participation. People are no longer shocked when a website addresses them by their first name, and it will not be long, if we have not reached the point already, where this level of individuality and customization is expected. Social media makes it easier than ever to encourage this type of transactional communication. It is an efficient and cost-effective way to reach your business objectives, as well as the goals of your customers.

Social media has brought forth new opportunities for information gathering, dissemination, and socialization. However, these new technologies have not completely altered our purposes for doing so. The tools for behavior change are the same, and once you understand the theoretical underpinnings, you will be better equipped to create and disseminate efficient and effective messages for your social media campaigns. This chapter has presented the first rule of an effective social media marketing strategy: stop thinking about communication in a linear fashion. Ask questions about the interests of target consumers, rather than wondering how to get media messages to reach the largest number of people possible.

This book is interested in guiding strategy for producers of social media messages that inspire behavior change in people. A strong practitioner is the one who can apply technological competence and critical thinking skills to a long-term strategic plan. Using behavior change theory, marketers can create media messages that meet the goals and experiences of their consumers. Through a mindful strategy, consumer behavior can be positively reinforced at every point of engagement. This will reduce dissonance in the behavior change process and result in more loyal and long-term brand advocates. These customers will then influence their own social network to continue increasing your return on investment.

This chapter has laid the foundation for how communication theories approached behavior change. Hopefully, a stronger understanding of the complexities of the relationship between media content and subsequent behavior change has been gained. The following chapters will examine historical shifts in behavior change literature and the opportunities and challenges of information diffusion, community building, and mobilization. These three constructs will become the core of your social media strategy and will set you apart from other social media experts in the field.

Key Takeaways

- 1 Communication theories help teach social media specialists how to gather necessary information, package it for specific target consumers, and disseminate it through an appropriate medium.
- 2 Our understanding of the communication process has shifted from a linear model toward a more transactional process that accounts for all participants as senders/receivers in a simultaneous and fluid exchange. Determine who the target consumers of the message are, the technology that they utilize, and their specific needs and gratifications.
- 3 Marketers are turning toward behavior change theory to better understand the lifestyle and experiences of consumers. This focus on consumer behavior helps transform customers into lifetime brand advocates.
- 4 Social media should be used to engage in dialogue to help build relationships with customers. This positive reinforcement will keep them coming back.
- 5 Humans markedly exhibit habitual behaviors. A strong understanding of these routines will help practitioners better construct social media marketing messages that appeal to consumer lifestyle.

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