

Communication is “The transmission of information, ideas, attitudes, or emotion from one person or group to another (or others) primarily through symbols” (**Theodorson and Theodorson, 1969**). Communication can take place in a number of forms, including verbal communication, written communication and non-verbal communication. In virtually all types of communication, and certainly marketing communications, the following elements are present:

The Sender (source, transmitter)

All communication requires that there be a sender from which the communication stems. This could be, for example, a broadcasting authority, the editor of a newspaper or an employer or marketer.

The Receiver (audience)

The second key element in the communication process is the party or person with which we wish to communicate. Unless and until the intended audience receives the message, there is no possibility of effective communication. In many cases the target audience for marketing communications is the customer or at least the potential customer. However, much marketing communication is also aimed at persons or parties other than the customer. For example, communications may be aimed at others who influence the purchasing process. Similarly, communications may be aimed at ‘publics’ important to the company, such as shareholders, local communities, and even politicians and governments.

The Channel (media or medium)

A channel is something through which we communicate. There are many types of channel of communication and these various types are very important to the marketer in planning marketing communications.

Encoding

In order to transmit and share messages and information, the sender must translate the message or information by means of a variety of signs and symbols appropriate for both

the channel and the receiver. This process is known as encoding. It is important that the sender should use signs and symbols the receiver can interpret and understand. For example, the marketing communicator must not use words or symbols that make no sense or perhaps, even worse, can be misinterpreted by the receiver. So, for example, if the marketer was promoting a new product such as a waterproofing agent to households, it might not be a good idea to use the technical terms for the chemicals in the product, as most consumers would probably not understand them. Similarly, the marketer should use signs and symbols the customer can relate to: advertising messages for teenagers, for instance, might be very difficult to those we would use for the more mature end of the market.

Decoding

Obviously, if there is an encoding process in communication, there must be a decoding process at the receiver's end of the process. Many of the comments with regard to the appropriate signs and language to use made about encoding apply here. In the decoding process, the target audience tries to interpret and make sense of the messages that are being conveyed. Very often in the decoding process, the intended message can become changed or distorted. The receivers will have their own perceptions and beliefs, which can cause changes and distortions.

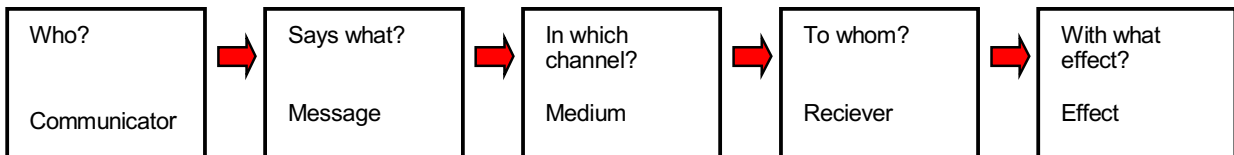
Feedback

The final element of a communication system is what is known as feedback - information from the receiver this time, as a result of the communication sent. Such feedback may be intended or unintended, voluntary or involuntary, personal/direct or impersonal/indirect. Such feedback serves a number of useful purposes in a communication system. But in particular feedback enables the sender, e.g. the marketer, to ascertain the extent to which the intended message has been received and interpreted correctly. As importantly, it will also help to indicate the extent to which it has achieved the desired result. Perhaps the most obvious form of feedback in marketing communications is where the message is intended to create a sale, whether or not the customer has actually purchased.

The communication process can be presented in diagrammatic form, which are called 'models'. A model gives a general picture of a range of different particular circumstances.

They also help in explaining, by providing in a simplified way information which would otherwise be complicated or ambiguous. A model may make it possible to predict outcomes or the course of events.

The Lasswell Formula (1948)



The Lasswell Formula (Lasswell 1948) is a convenient and comprehensive way of introducing people to the study of the communication process. This model is a simplified representation of the process and it more or less takes for granted that the communicator has some intention of influencing the receiver and, hence, that communication should be treated mainly as a persuasive process. It assumes that messages always have effects. The model also omits the element of feedback.

Marketing communications, are an important tool of marketing for a variety of reasons. It is impossible to sell your products and services if nobody knows of their existence. Similarly, it can be difficult to market a product if customers have little information about your company. Even if the customers are familiar with both product and company, they may still require 'a little persuading' in order to be convinced that they actually need the product. All these are situations where, without effective marketing communication, making a sale is difficult. The process here are those of creating awareness, generating interest, heightening desire, and ultimately creating action in the form of a sale. Each in their own way, the various tools of promotion are aimed at fulfilling one or more of these functions. The 'AIDA' mode represents these various stages a customer passes through in the purchasing process.

The 'AIDA' Model

Attention → **Interest** → **Desire** → **Action**

The communication process is seldom perfect and problems often arise. An important element to include in the description of the communication process is that of 'Noise', where the message received after transmission and decoding is not the same as that intended, or where the receiver has difficulty even receiving the message, we say there is 'noise' in the communication system.

Noise, such as distractions or the interference that occurs as the communication is being encoded, transmitted and decoded, can obstruct the transmission of the message. There are many different types of noise that can render the message inaccurate, unclear or even mean that it is not received at all.

Technical noise

This can occur while the message is being transmitted, for example, when a poor telephone connection means the caller's voice cannot be heard .

Physical noise

This can occur while the message is being transmitted, for example, people talking.

Social noise

Social noise creates interference in the transmission and decoding of messages. It is caused when people are prejudiced against others because they are of a different age, gender or social class.

Psychological noise

A person's emotional state or attitude could interfere with message transmission. A person's anger or hostile attitude can create psychological noise.

The breakdown in communication can be caused by the sender not translating his message into appropriate language, with the result that the wrong message is sent or it is not understood by the recipient. The most common reasons for the meaning being lost in the 'handling' of the message are as follows:

- Using the wrong words
- Using jargon or technical words that are not understood
- Using a foreign language or an accent that is not understood
- Using words or pictures that have more than one meaning

Other barriers of communication include:

Perceptual bias

This occurs where the recipient of a message makes assumptions and selects what they want to hear. This can result in the wrong message being received.

Information overload

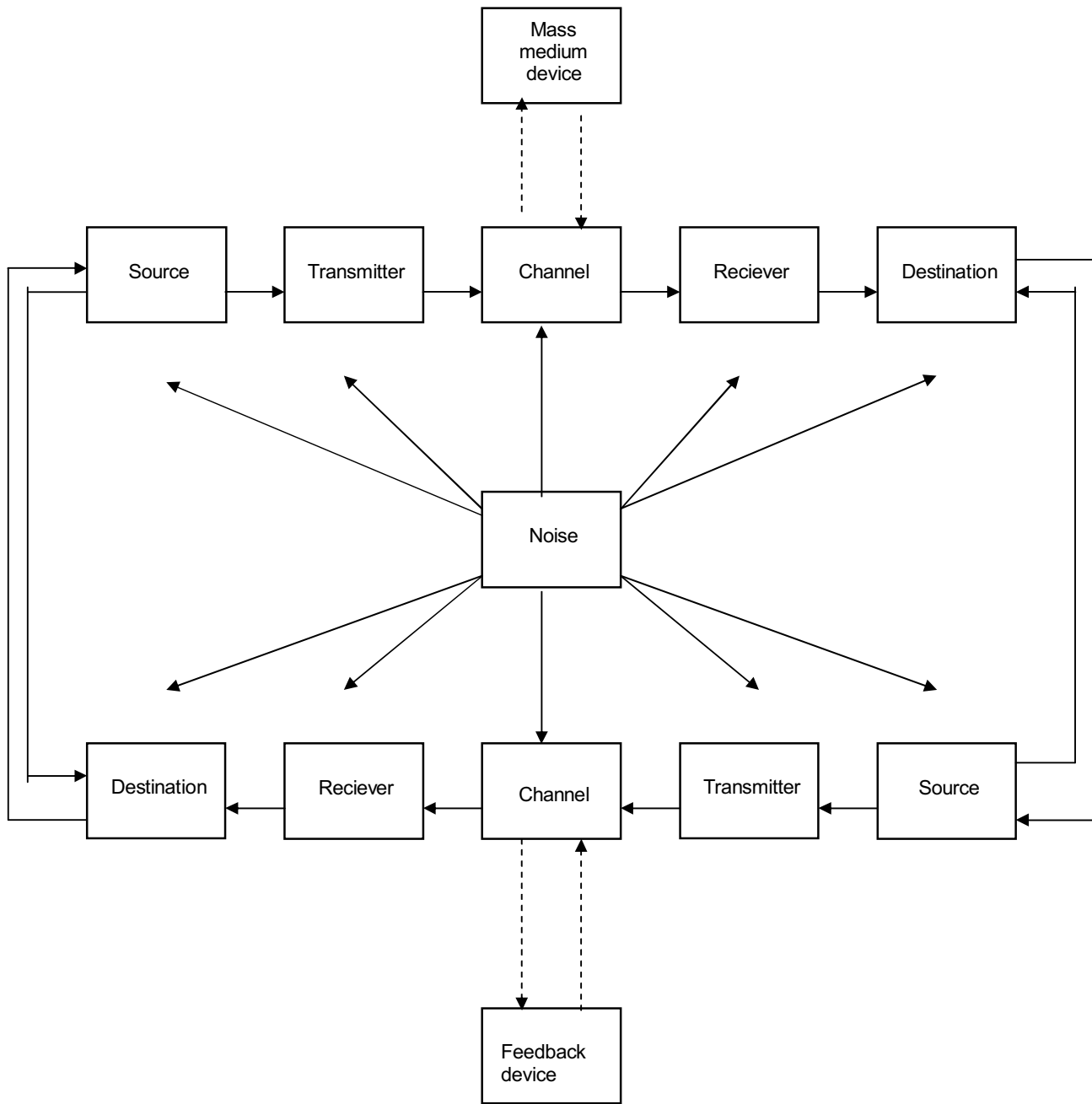
This can occur if the recipient of the message receives too much information or information that is too technical. The result is that the key messages are not conveyed or understood.

Contradictory non-verbal messages

This can occur if the person encoding a message says one thing but their body language says something else.

Problems in the communication process, can be represented in model form.

DeFleur's model (1970)



DeFleur's model (1970) was developed around an earlier model devised by Shannon and Weaver (1949). DeFleur notes that in the communication process, 'meaning' is transformed into 'message' and describes how the transmitter transforms 'message' into 'information', which then passes through a channel (for example, a mass medium). The

receiver decodes the 'information' as a 'message', which in its turn is transformed at the destination into 'meaning'. If there is correspondence between the two 'meanings' the result is communication. But, as DeFleur said, this correspondence is seldom perfect. The model shows how the source gets its feedback, which gives the source a possibility of adapting more effectively its way of communicating to the destination. The model also shows that noise can occur during any part of the communication process.

Effective marketing communications, where a message is received and understood in the way they intended it to be involves careful planning. Successful business communications have the ability to transfer and receive information using the most appropriate channel. They eliminate barriers to communication and proceed without prejudice, bias and unsuitable language in line with the needs of the recipient.

'Shared meaning' is more than the successful transmission of words from one party to another, but requires sound mutual understanding of each other, and the active participation of both sender and receiver.

An organisation must understand what its market wants, and a market must understand what an organisation is offering and how that will fulfil their needs and wants.