



SECTION III

IMC messages



In the first two sections of this book we have explored the general context of IMC, where it fits within corporate and brand strategy, and its various component parts. In this section we turn our attention to the message itself, the importance of understanding how it is processed and techniques needed to ensure that it happens. IMC is made up of advertising-like and promotion-like messages that may be delivered in a variety of ways, as we have seen. These messages are no more than a collection of words and pictures, without meaning for a brand, until successfully processed.

In Chapter 8 we shall discuss message processing, and learn how difficult it is to get a target audience to successfully process marketing communication. To begin with, it is the job of the media carrying the message to make it available to the target audience. Once exposed, it is up to the execution itself to attract and hold attention, and encourage learning the brand name and key benefit (at minimum); and for high involvement decisions, to accept the message as well. At each of these steps, emotion will be involved, informing how the message will be processed.

Maximizing the likelihood of message processing and satisfying a brand's communication objective is the job of creative executions in IMC. While it is creative instinct and genius that brings marketing communication to life, especially advertising, effective executions require much more than a great creative idea to be successful. A great creative idea could be entertaining, but may not satisfy the brand's communication objective. An idea that is not consistent with the executional requirements associated with a brand's communication objective and strategy cannot be successful. In Chapter 9 we shall be addressing some of these requirements, and looking at creative techniques that are known to help facilitate message processing, and specific creative tactics associated with brand awareness and brand attitude communication objectives.

There is a large and significant body of knowledge in psychology covering the ways in which words and pictures are used in the execution of a message that leads to successful processing. These fundamental creative techniques should be understood by everyone involved in the development, execution, and evaluation of IMC. They provide the foundation from which the creative mind must build its magic, insuring not only a memorable and unique execution, but one that is likely to satisfy the brand communication objectives and positively influence brand choice. A number of these techniques are also discussed in Chapter 9.

CHAPTER 8

Message processing

Processing is the general term that applies to the short-term attention paid to marketing communication, and what follows. It occurs with *each* exposure to a message execution, however delivered: via traditional advertising or promotion, the package, even the product itself, or just hearing the brand name. In fact, any reference to the brand. Processing reflects how the target audience deals with the message being delivered in an integrated marketing communication (IMC) campaign. It is obviously dependent upon exposure to the message, and if successfully processed will lead to the desired response.

This process follows what McGuire (1969) referred to as an *information processing paradigm*. William J. McGuire was one of the founding fathers of attitude change theory, and he described six processing steps that must occur for any message to be persuasive. He was referring to any type of persuasive communication, and this would include advertising. The six steps were: the message must be presented to the target audience, they must pay attention to the message, comprehend what is presented, yield to the argument, retain that agreement, and then act on it.

Perhaps the most important point to understand about McGuire's information processing paradigm is that it involves *compounding probabilities*. This is why persuasive communication is so difficult. What it means is that if one is 50% successful at each stage of the process, less than 2% of the target audience will actually act upon their positive intention formed as a result of processing the message: this is the nature of compounding probabilities. If 50% are presented the message and 50% pay attention, that is 25% of the target audience; another 50% comprehend what the message is saying, meaning 12½% of the total target audience; 50% yield, or 6¼% of the target; 50% form a positive intention, a bit over 3% of the target; and 50% act upon that intention, just 1½% of the target audience. This should dramatically underscore the difficult job IMC has in effectively communicating with its target audience.

■ Communication response sequence

In an IMC sense, these six steps of the information processing paradigm may be thought of as a communication response sequence where exposure leads to processing that brings about a communication effect leading to the desired target audience action:

Exposure→Processing→Communication Effect→Target Audience Action

It is the job of IMC to ensure that all of the various executions in a campaign are contributing to this process.

Good planning will ensure exposure. The manager is responsible for scheduling media in such a way that the target audience will have ample opportunity to see and hear the messages. An important consideration at this first stage in IMC planning is how many opportunities, at minimum, will be necessary to ensure that enough processing of the message

occurs to drive the desired communication effect. It may require several exposures before enough attention is paid to learn something about the brand's primary benefit; and even if a positive intention is formed, additional messages may need to be processed in order to keep that intention salient until an actual purchase is made. This can be true even with current users of a brand. If a brand is not routinely and frequently purchased, even users may need to be regularly reminded.

■ Message processing responses

The communication response sequence is triggered by exposure to any part of an IMC campaign, as well as to the brand itself during usage. In fact, as Rossiter and Bellman (2005) have pointed out, even exposure to the marketing communication of competitive brands could influence processing for a brand. For example if two competing brands are associated in memory, exposure to the competitor's marketing communication could trigger a sequence such as: 'Ah, this is the brand that claims to be better than my brand, but nothing can top my brand' for a brand loyal. Or for more casual users of the brand, perhaps: 'This is the brand that claims to be better than the one I'm using. I wonder if it is? Maybe I'll give it a try'.

The point is, processing of information about a brand can be initiated by exposure to a wide variety of sources. Thus exposure to anything related to a brand has the potential for initiating processing of information about it. One cannot control the advertising or other marketing communication of competitors, but it must be taken into account when developing one's own.

Processing itself is made up of four different responses that can follow from exposure: attention, learning, acceptance, and emotion (Figure 8.1). With the exception of emotion, which is involved with the other three, these responses reflect stages of McGuire's information processing paradigm (attention, comprehension, and yielding).

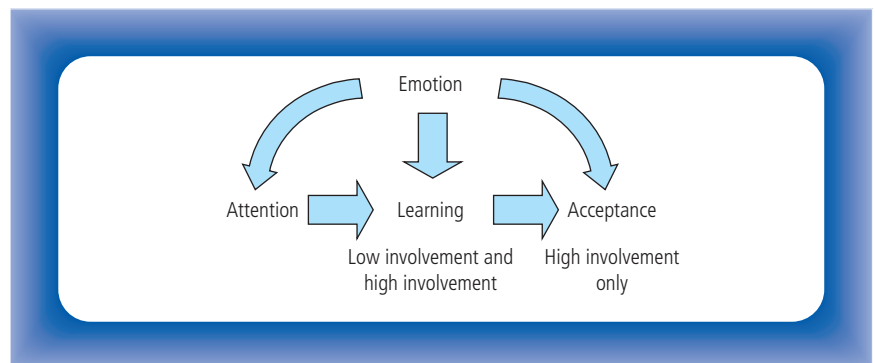


Figure 8.1
Processing responses

Attention is necessary before any of the other processing responses can occur. Without *conscious* attention being paid to the message (and again we

mean message to include any reference to the brand) it will be impossible to *fully* process the message. While some have tried to argue that low attention or even subconscious attention to marketing communication can be effective, with the exception of emotional responses, it is very unlikely; and with only unconscious attention, impossible (Percy, 2006). Full processing occurs in working memory (which we shall discuss later in this chapter) where the new information that has been attended to is consciously integrated with existing knowledge and assumptions about the brand. Certain very low level learning is possible with low attention or subconscious attention, but it will not have an effect upon attitudes or preferences; which is what *full* processing is all about. But more on this subject later.

After attention comes *learning*, where some information is picked up from the execution and is stored in memory. With effective processing of the message this will include at least the brand name and the key benefit. With low involving products, for potential buyer's learning is really all that might be necessary in order to stimulate a tentatively positive attitude toward the brand and an interest in trying it. With existing users, relearning of the brand and benefit from an IMC execution serves to reinforce brand awareness and positive brand attitude. When we say 'relearning' we do not mean users have necessarily forgotten the brand, only that as they process the message it is consistent with existing memory for the brand, and makes it salient.

With high-involvement products, the target audience must not only learn what the message is trying to communicate, they must also *accept* the message. In processing the message, they must take what they have learned and integrate it with all of their knowledge and assumptions about the product category and competing brands, and believe that what the message says fits with this. If it does, this will initiate the formation of a positive brand attitude for potential new users, and help reinforce or build brand attitude for users.

The fourth response in processing is *emotion*. At some level there is an emotional response to everything one encounters in life, so that necessarily includes marketing communication. It is important to understand that emotion will be involved in attention, learning, and acceptance; and in some cases, along with attention, may be all the processing that occurs. After attending to the message someone may have a negative emotional response and *never* learn anything, including the brand name. A person may simply hate the advert, package, etc. On the other hand, someone may only have a positive emotional response and connect it with the brand, which itself could be enough to drive preference if it is a low-involvement product (especially transformational). We shall be looking at emotion in some depth later in this chapter.

Processing of messages, once it moves beyond attention, has the potential to initiate, reinforce, or increase communication effects for a brand. For those unfamiliar with a brand, at the very least brand awareness will occur. Users of the brand will likely have their brand attitude and purchase intention reinforced; potential users familiar with the brand may have their attitudes toward the brand strengthened, and a purchase

intention initiated. At the same time, if marketing communication for a competitor brand is being processed, there is the potential for those communication effects to interfere with the communication effects for the first brand. This would be the case in the example above for the casual brand user whose interest in another brand was initiated by advertising. Their existing positive brand attitude for the brand they use, built and sustained by processing the brand's IMC, was interfered with by processing the other brand's advertising.

While a very simple example, this is what is going on all the time in the market. The target audience is processing messages from a wide variety of sources for a number of brands in a category, with resulting communication effects: they are aware of many brands, they have at least some tentative positive brand attitudes, and for some have formed purchase intentions. The stronger a brand's marketing communication, the greater chance it has of 'inoculating' the target audience against competitor messages. This is something McGuire (1969) talked about, how processing strong positive messages over time will build attitudes more resistant to the arguments of others.

In a sense, processing is where the target audience takes over from the marketing manager. It is the manager who provides the opportunity for exposure, but the target audience must then process the marketing communication before anything else will happen. True, the manager can help facilitate the likelihood of processing with effective creative executions, and we shall be looking at how this can be done in the next chapter. But in the rest of this chapter we want to look specifically at just how the target audience process messages. When managers understand how a message is processed, they are in a much better position to develop more effective strategic IMC plans.

Attention

Our primary concern is with the *initial* attention paid to marketing communication. Once initial attention is achieved, it is up to the execution itself (the advert, package, brochure) to hold attention and ensure further processing. While the notion of attention may seem obvious, there is nonetheless a great deal of debate in the fields of neuropsychology and neurology over just what constitutes 'attention'. In the last 50 years over a dozen different theories of attention have been proposed. Although no single theory has emerged, perhaps the work that has enjoyed the strongest influence on the meaning of attention is that of Broadbent (1958) and his filter theory. This theory basically posits that people have the ability to block or weaken the messages coming to the brain from their sense organs. It is not exactly clear how this is done, but there is ample evidence that it does occur. The result is that the content of consciousness in working memory after being filtered by attention is very limited.

Today, attention is no longer seen as a simple process that enhances perception, but rather a complex process that helps us better understand

what is going on around us, and provides strategies, as well as control of, how information is processed (Gregory, 2004). In terms of marketing communication, we do not need to be concerned over the neural arguments, but we do need to understand that there is a difference between conscious and unconscious attention, and that most unconscious attention will not lead to a full processing of a message.

Unconscious processing is automatic, and reflects something psychologists talk about as 'bottom-up' processing, which deals unconsciously with signals from our senses. This is in contrast to 'top-down' processing, which calls upon the associations already in explicit or declarative memory (conscious memory) to help interpret the signals coming from our senses. However, just because someone is not aware of something does not necessarily mean they do not consciously process it. As someone flips through a magazine or glances at a television commercial, they are probably not aware that they are paying attention to the content. Do you consciously think to yourself 'that is an advert and I am not interested'? Unlikely, but your behaviour can indicate that you did pay some attention because you keep turning the pages, or leave the room to get something to eat. Visual input into working memory (bottom-up processing) was recognized as an advert or commercial (top-down processing) and the decision was made to not further process the message.

But people do pay unconscious attention to much of what is going on around them; they just tend to ignore it. For example, research suggests that our visual system is filtering out some information even if neurologically it is being held at an unconscious level. This is especially likely if one's attention is focused somewhere else. The frontal-parietal network simply filters out some information. In a classic example of this, Simons and Chabris (1999) showed a group a film of people tossing a basketball back-and-forth, and asked the participants to count the number of passes. About a minute into the exercise someone dressed in a gorilla costume walked directly in front of the screen, yet incredibly 70% of those in the study did not notice the gorilla! When the exercise was repeated, and the participants were asked to look for the gorilla, they had no trouble seeing it.

With marketing communication, to be effective *conscious* attention is required, with one exception. Generally speaking, emotional responses are processed unconsciously. But as we shall see later in this chapter, they interact in working memory with conscious, declarative memory.

Learning and acceptance

In processing marketing communication messages, after gaining attention, the target audience must 'learn' something. At the very least, the marketer must communicate the brand name and the primary benefit associated with that brand. With low involving product decisions, that is really all that is necessary. But as we shall see later, for high-involvement decisions, the simple learning of the brand and the benefit will not be enough. The target audience must also accept the message as true.

Within a neurological or psychological context, learning means the stimulating of pre-existing synapses in the brain. It is rare that learning will involve something totally new, and the creation of a new synapse. Learning involves the integration of new information with existing knowledge and assumptions. In processing marketing communication, if one pays attention and continues to process the message, they are 'learning' at least something. But what they are 'learning' may not be new information. They may simply be learning that they already know those things about the brand. For example, people familiar with a brand will recognize it and learn that the message is about that brand, and they will bring into working memory other associations they have with that brand, and integrate it with what they are processing from the message (top-down processing, as discussed earlier). If the benefit has not already been associated with the brand in memory, what they do associate with that benefit will be brought into working memory and integrated with what they know about the brand. Then either a new memory will be formed coupling the benefit with the brand, an association with the brand will be rejected, or the message will simply be 'forgotten'.

In a psychological sense, all of this is 'learning'. The reason it is important to understand this is because when developing marketing communication executions (packages, adverts, etc.) one must be aware that the images used and the benefits presented will be understood within the framework of already existing knowledge and assumptions about those images and textual content.

Learning and brand awareness

Learning in the sense that we are using the term refers to rote learning. Rote learning is basically a passive process, and occurs automatically whether we are aware of it or not (Langer et al., 1978). Because of the nature of rote learning, a certain amount of repetition is usually required before new memories for the learned response are retained. Part of that repetition comes from the consistency in message and execution that is part of IMC.

Those unfamiliar with a brand must obviously 'learn' the brand name, but this does very little good if they do not also associate the brand with the appropriate category need. The response that must be learned will depend upon whether recognition or recall brand awareness is required, as discussed in earlier chapters. What must be learned with brand recognition strategies is that the brand will be associated with the need in such a way that when the brand is seen at the point-of-purchase it is immediately linked with the need. With recognition brand awareness, seeing the package or hearing the brand name should always elicit in the target audiences' mind the question: 'Do I need any of that now?' On the other hand, brand recall learning requires the brand be the response to the need. When the need occurs, it should elicit from the target audience the brand as satisfying that need.

The key to learning the appropriate brand awareness association is something Tulving (1983) talked about as *encoding specificity*. As he

defined it, 'successful retrieval depends on achieving a match between the information encoded at the time of learning and the information that is available at the time of retrieval.' With marketing communication this means that the execution must present the brand in the same way that it is most likely to be presented when a brand choice is made. For brand recognition learning, the target audience must be able to recognize the brand at the point-of-purchase. As discussed above, this means the execution must show the package as it will be encountered, and within the context of the product category. For brand recall learning the need must be clearly shown with the brand as the solution, and in that order, so that the connection is learned in such a way that the brand name is retrieved from memory when the need occurs. We shall be dealing with creative tactics in more detail in the next chapter.

Learning and brand attitude

The key to learning for building positive brand attitude is to learn the brand's primary benefit, and link it in memory with the brand. Remember, that benefit, at least in some form, will already be associated with other things in memory. The job of a brand's marketing communication is to highlight the degree of the connection between the brand and the benefit; and the job of individual executions (things like the package, adverts, in-store collateral, etc.) is to tie in other positive associations with the benefit from memory in order to reinforce the positive nature of the benefit.

If the primary benefit for a brand of soluble (instant) coffee is 'great coffee taste', using images in executions that are likely to elicit this benefit will facilitate making that connection, and making it stronger as new memories are formed. For example, suppose the brand used a picture of an espresso machine in the background, with a steaming cup of coffee in the foreground alongside the package. The image of the steaming cup of coffee would be likely to elicit positive memories among the target audience of coffee's aroma, and this will be reinforced more positively by the association with coffee made by an espresso machine. Additionally, using a cup, not a mug, should activate more high quality association in memory. All of this is then linked to the brand, and a new memory formed. People know that soluble coffee really does not taste as good as fresh-brewed espresso. But because this is a low involving decision, all that is necessary is to create a positive feeling that it just might be good tasting coffee. When seen in the store, that positive feeling will be retrieved as they think to themselves: 'I wonder if it really does taste that good. I think I'll try it and see.'

For high-involvement decisions, however, this sort of simple rote learning will not be enough to drive positive brand attitude. To begin with, because of the risk involved, more than one benefit will usually need to be learned. Learning about the primary benefit is what will help hold the target audience's attention, and interest them in processing the rest of the advert. Assuming the primary benefit is important to them, they will then be looking for more information before beginning to form a positive brand attitude and possible brand purchase intention.

To facilitate learning when dealing with high-involvement decisions, it is important to understand the target audience's existing knowledge and assumptions about the brand and product category. In order to process and learn the brand's benefit they must be pitched in the execution at a high level, but not so high that it is dismissed as unbelievable. Knowing where this line is drawn is critical because the message should not undersell either. This idea reflects something that Sherif and Hovland (1961) long ago talked about in their assimilation-contrast theory. People hold definite beliefs about things, and if an advert for a high-involvement product makes a claim, that claim will either be accepted or not based upon these existing beliefs. If a new hybrid automobile makes the claim that it is more powerful than a BMW, the target audience is likely to dismiss it out-of-hand. Such a claim would fall into what Sherif and Hovland called their 'latitude of rejection'. How could a hybrid be more powerful than a BMW?

But what if this new hybrid really was more powerful? If that were the case, marketing communication would need to gradually build toward that claimed benefit, perhaps with a refutational strategy. This can be accomplished by pitching the claim in what Sherif and Hovland call the 'latitude of indifference', an area between what is clearly felt to be true and definitely not to be true. Perhaps the claim could be made that because of new technology this new hybrid has significantly more power. Unless the target audience believes a hybrid can never have much power, this claim could fall into their latitude of indifference: they don't necessarily agree, but they don't necessarily reject it either. They would be open to processing the message, especially if not having enough power was a significant concern among potential hybrid buyers. You can see from this example how important it is to know what the target audience's existing attitudes are when dealing with high involving decisions. If they are to successfully process the message, learning the desired benefit, it is critical to understand where their latitude of rejection lies in order not to overclaim.

In summary then, as with brand awareness, all that is required for low-involvement persuasion is rote learning of the brand benefit in order to initiate positive brand attitude. The brand name has already been learned (brand awareness learning), and it is only necessary to associate that brand in memory with its benefit. The actual response learned will be that the brand has the benefit. Because it is a low-involvement decision, the benefit is only temporarily held in memory until the product is actually purchased. But with high-involvement decisions, persuasion requires acceptance, not just learning, of the brand's benefit. The target audience must *personally agree* with the benefit claims being made for the brand.

This thinking follows directly from low- versus high-involvement models of decision-making. In psychology, low-involvement decisions follow a cognitive-conative-affect model and high-involvement decision a cognitive-affect-conative model (where cognitive reflects learning, affect attitude formation, and conative behaviour). This has been translated in the marketing and communication literature to various low-involvement choice models and the traditional hierarchy-of-effect model.

In low-involvement models, such as Ehrenberg’s Awareness-Trial-Reinforcement model (Ehrenberg, 1974), one first becomes aware of the brand, then on the basis of a tentatively formed favourable attitude (‘I think I might like that’) the brand is tried. *After* trial, more permanent attitudes are formed. Trial of the brand will either reinforce the initial positive attitude or bring about a rejection of it. One does not necessarily need to accept that the message is really true because there is little, if any, risk involved. If the person does not like the product after trial, they simply do not buy it again. On the other hand, when dealing with high-involvement decisions, a hierarchy-of-effects model holds. One becomes aware of the brand, but because of the risk associated with making a bad choice, a *definite* positive attitude must be formed prior to trial. The buyer must be convinced they will like the brand before buying. These basic models are illustrated in Figure 8.2.

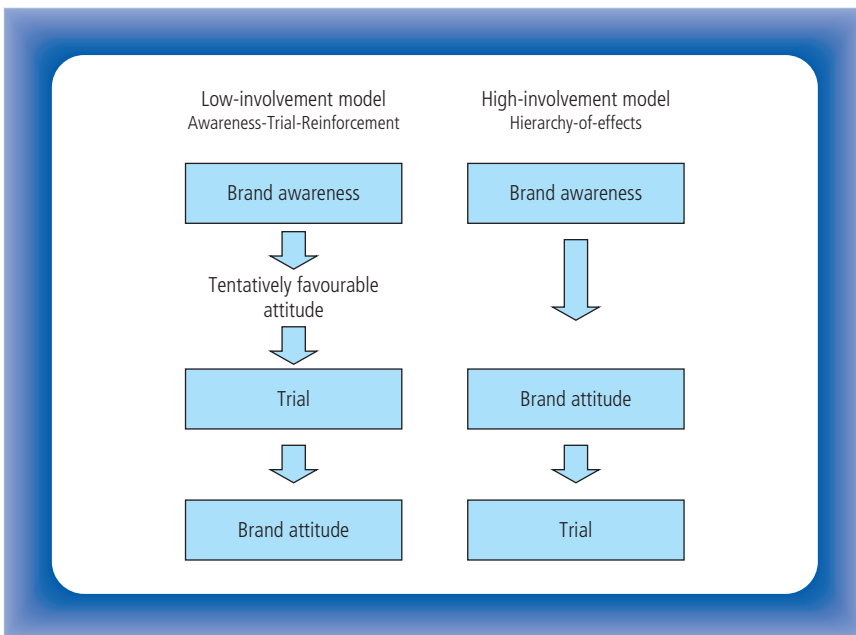


Figure 8.2
Basic consumer decision models

An experience of *Wine Enthusiast* magazine in the USA offers an excellent example of the need to consider every aspect of marketing communication in terms of how the message is likely to be processed (Strum, 2004). Wine retailers often use ratings and reviews at the point-of-purchase for wines on offer. The value of these ratings comes from the consumer’s perception of the credibility of the reviewer or publication offering the rating. Thousands of wine retailers used the ratings from the *Wine Enthusiast* taste panel on ‘shelf-talkers’ (those small notices fixed to a store shelf with an announcement or promotion).

But, there was a problem. Retailers brought to the magazine’s attention that its logo was presenting a problem. The logo used the word ‘Wine’

in large letters, stacked over the smaller 'Enthusiast' (Figure 8.3a). When the logo was used with a rating on a shelf-talker, the word 'Wine' was clearly visible, but the key word 'Enthusiast' that identified the magazine, and the source of the rating, was so small as to be barely perceptible. Consumer seeing the shelf-talker would process only the word wine and the rating.



Figure 8.3
 (a) Original Wine Enthusiast shelf-talker. (b) Revised Wine Enthusiast shelf-talker using new logo

This was obviously not what the retailer wanted to convey; and the magazine was receiving no exposure. The retailers wanted consumers to understand that the *Wine Enthusiast* had rated the wine highly, and in effect was recommending it. All the consumer was processing, however, was that the wine was rated highly by 'someone'. This may have been sufficient if the purchase was low involvement, but most wine purchases are likely to be high involvement. The buyer wants to be sure the wine will be good; especially for special occasions. In response to this problem, the *Wine Enthusiast* redesigned their logo (Figure 8.3b). With the new logo, ratings can be quickly and easily processed and linked to *Wine Enthusiast*; and with the new logo, the magazine had a new face, as we see in Figure 8.4.

Emotion

We have seen that processing marketing communication requires attention, learning, and for high-involvement decisions acceptance as well. But processing also involves emotion. In fact, emotion is a critical component of all message processing, and it is essential for managers to understand the role it plays. Emotion operates in two fundamental ways as it influences how marketing communication is processed. Firstly, there

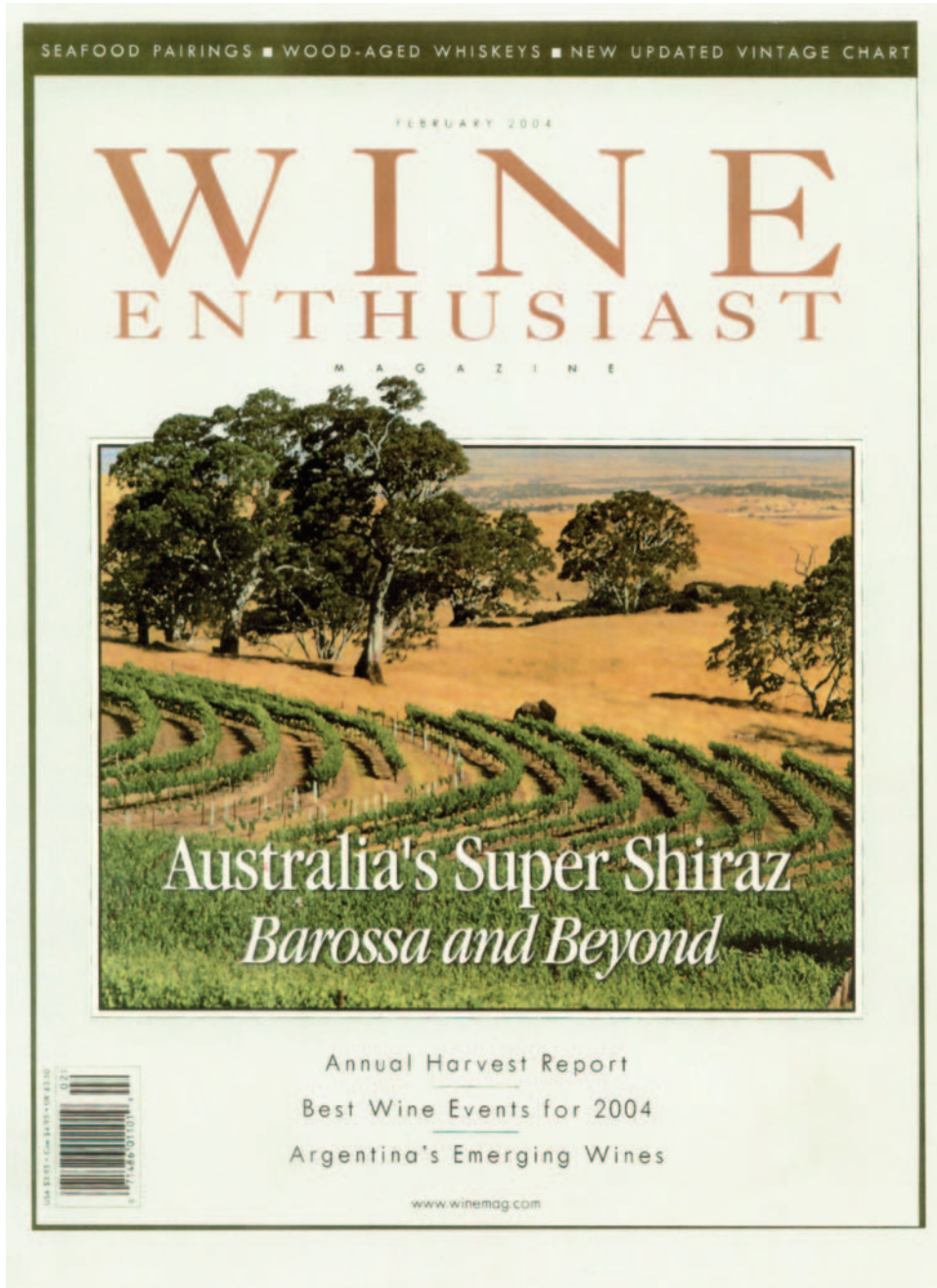


Figure 8.4

An example of how changing the masthead enabled wine ratings from the *Wine Enthusiast* magazine to make more of an impact at retail. *Courtesy: Wine Enthusiast*

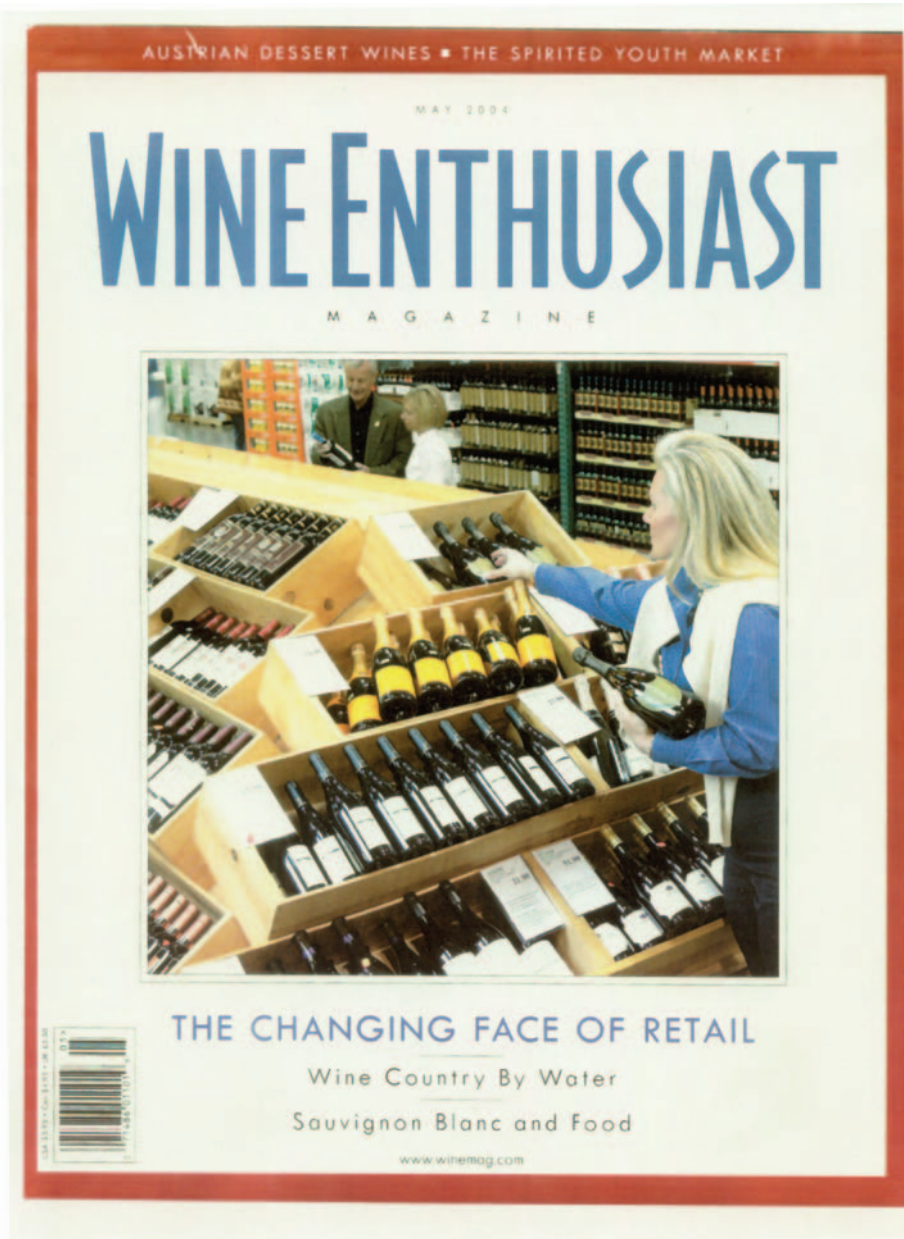


Figure 8.4 (Contd.)

are emotional associations in memory linked to just about every object and experience in a person's life, and these emotional associations will be activated by the text and, especially, the images used in an execution. Secondly, when there are people shown in an execution, the emotion expressed by those people will stimulate a corresponding emotion in anyone paying attention to it (something known as embodiment).

The way these two emotional responses mediate the processing of marketing communication will be discussed below, but first it would make sense to look at just what is meant by an 'emotion'. To begin with, it is important to understand that emotions and feelings are *not* the same thing. An emotion is the unconscious underlying process that embodies all of the components that go into making up an emotion, while a feeling is only the 'conscious' expression of that emotion. Damasio (1999) has described this difference well: 'The full human impact of emotions is only realized when they are sensed, when they become feelings, and when those feelings are felt. That is when they become known, with the assistance of consciousness.'

Most people who study emotion described it in terms of three different components referred to as the 'reaction triad': physiological arousal, motor expression, and subjective feeling. To illustrate this, suppose you came across a coiled snake on a path as you were walking through the woods. Before you are even conscious of the snake, your limbic system is at work signalling the body to release adrenaline and the heart to beat faster (physiological arousal), you 'freeze' (motor expression), and only then do you become aware of the sense of danger and fear (subjective feeling). All of these responses are part of emotion. While the first two have little practical value for marketing communication, subjective feeling certainly does. It is these 'feelings' with which we are concerned.

Our conscious response to an emotion, our feelings, become a part of the cognitive process that leads to logical thinking. It helps increase attention and learning when consistent with the relevant underlying motivation driving behaviour and choice in the brand's product category. Damasio (2003) has stated that reasoning is influenced not only by conscious signals, but also by unconscious signals from the neural networks associated with emotions. This means that along with a person's knowledge and experience with a brand, the emotional associations with these memories will influence brand choice.

Recent studies in neuropsychology using neuroimaging with positron emission tomography (PET) scans and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) that measure brain activity when information is being processed have confirmed the role emotion plays in brand choice decisions. In one study (McClure et al., 2004) brain activity was measured with fMRI as people made a choice between two colas. When they did not know what they were drinking, the only areas of the brain that were active were those associated with taste perception. But for those whose favourite brand was Coke, when they were asked to choose between Coke and Pepsi, knowing what they were tasting, those areas of the brain associated with emotional memory were active when they stated their preference.

Clearly, if managers can measure and understand the emotional associations with brands and with their marketing communication executions they will have a powerful tool for developing more effective messages; messages more likely to be positively and fully processed. Gaining this understanding is not as difficult as one might think. Measuring emotional associations is done by simply asking about the *feelings* associated with something. According to Bradley and Lang (2000), people become conscious of their emotions when asked, and are quite capable of describing their feelings when asked to think about it.

Emotional associations in memory

Few, if any objects or experiences are emotionally neutral. Everything one experiences and forms long-term memory traces of will have an emotional component. Adverts, packages, and other marketing communication for a brand will activate not only cognitive, conscious associations from memory (declarative, or explicit memory as we shall see later in the chapter when we talk about memory), but also unconscious emotional associations (nondeclarative emotional memories) with the brand. These memories are stored in the amygdala, part of the limbic system, and located in the paleomammalian region of the brain.

As one begins to process marketing communication, the emotional memories associated with the imagery used in the execution, as well as the brand itself, will proceed into conscious working memory, and it will arrive *ahead* of whatever conscious memories are activated. These emotional memories help 'frame' the knowledge and assumptions activated in conscious memory (largely from the hippocampus), and inform how the message will be initially processed. One of the most important jobs in IMC, which we shall be underscoring in the next chapter, is insuring a consistent look and feel among all of the various executions in different media. This helps ensure that the same emotional memories are activated in the processing of the messages.

This means that when an advert or other marketing communication for a brand cues either positive emotional associations with the brand or with the imagery in an execution, those unconscious emotional memories will mix with conscious memory and enable a person to become aware of the fact that they are emotionally aroused. For example, they may experience a good feeling, or even a happy feeling. Out of the processing that occurs, new associations in memory are possible and likely. Any emotional learning, if linked to the brand, as well as learning associated with the benefit in the message, will be in play and ready to be activated when exposed to new advertising for the brand, when the brand is seen at the point-of-purchase, even when just 'thinking' about the brand. Effective marketing communication, utilizing common executional elements within an IMC campaign, will ensure this happens.

Still, it must be remembered that while positive emotional associations in memory will provide an initial positive context within working memory for processing the message, it does not have the strength to override

negative conscious elements in the processing (e.g. noticing that the price of the brand has increased significantly). But in all other cases these positive emotional associations will facilitate positive processing of the message and the formation of new positive memories: in other words, learning.

Interpersonal emotion

The second area of emotion important to understand in the processing of marketing communication is interpersonal emotion and the notion of *embodiment*. Other people's emotions influence our own by virtue of the information they convey. This is thought by some social and evolutionary psychologists to be part of our natural response to our environment in order to survive. Sensing fear or anger in someone conveys potential threat or danger; happiness, safety or comfort. When people are shown in adverts, on packages, storefronts, or in other marketing communication, and they convey particular emotions, those perceived emotions will tend to influence parallel emotional responses in the target audience.

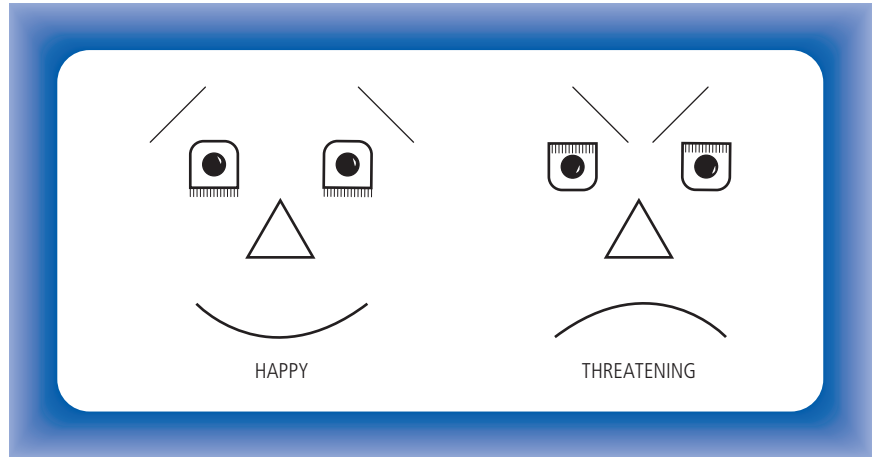
This is known as embodiment. In other words, people will embody, that is take on or initiate, the emotional behaviours of others as perceived in their facial expression, body posture, or prosody (tone of voice). As Niedenthal et al. (2005) have defined it, embodiment means 'the bodily states that arise (e.g. posture, facial expression, and use of the voice) during the perception at an emotional stimulus, and the later use of emotional information (in the absence of the emotional stimulus)'. In effect, the emotions exhibited by people in, for example, an advert, will be 'felt' by those attending to it, and that emotion will become part of the processing in working memory of that message. This will be available for later use when processing other messages about the brand.

The most important component in assessing someone else's emotional state is their facial expression, and this has been studied more than any other aspect of emotional expression (deGelder, 2005). It seems that people have a very efficient system for recognizing and processing the emotional content of facial expressions. And, as with emotional memories, the amygdala is at the heart of how emotional expressions are processed (Wright et al., 2002).

When looking at someone's facial expression, it is the eyebrows, mouth, and eyes that convey emotion. Based upon a study of schematic faces representing happy vs. threatening faces (as illustrated in Figure 8.5), Lundqvist and Öhman (2005) found that V-shaped eyebrows conveyed a threatening emotion while Λ -shaped eyebrows were seen as friendly. They also found that a U-shaped mouth conveys a happy feeling while a Ω -shaped mouth was seen as unhappy. Using eye tracking, they also determined that the most important facial cue communicating threat or anger was the eyebrows, and for communicating a happy feeling, the mouth. Subsequent work using image analysis of real faces supported these findings.

This of course has direct implications for executions in marketing communication. To communicate a positive, happy emotion requires attention

Figure 8.5
Happy versus
threatening
schematic faces.
Source: Adapted
from Lundqvist and
Little (2004)



to a true 'smile'. Rossiter and Percy (1997) pointed out the need for depicting an authentic emotion, critical for transformational strategies. But, this is not easy to effect. Even experienced actors have difficulty realistically projecting an emotion that is not truly felt, and this is especially true of smiles. This is because of the evolutionary importance of smiles. The facial muscles that control smiles are affected by two distinct neural systems. The evolutionarily older one originates in the striatum and exerts an involuntary control over facial muscles, reflecting truly felt emotions (Fridland, 1994). The second, in terms of evolution, is newer and involves voluntarily controlled muscles (Gazzaniga and Smylie, 1990). As a result, the use of the intentionally controlled muscles for a smile that an actor may use in smiling might not reflect a true positive emotion.

These voluntary smiles need only involve the mouth, and are consciously seen and interpreted as a smile, as the work by Lundqvist and Öhman (2005) has shown. The truly felt positive emotions such as happiness will also involve the muscles around the eye, and this will initiate an embodiment of the emotion. Such smiles are known as 'Duchenne Smiles' after the 19th century French anatomist Duchenne de Boulogne. A true Duchenne Smile is an unintentional emotional signal that occurs spontaneously upon the experiencing of the positive emotion of joy or happiness, reflecting a true emotional state. This is what one is looking for when using people in marketing communication and one wishes to elicit a positive emotional response (essential for transformational brand attitude strategies).

■ The role of memory

One must be concerned with memory in any consideration of IMC because of the very nature of IMC. With multiple messages, delivered through different media, how these messages are processed and stored in

memory will be critical to the overall effectiveness at the campaign. It is essential that as different messages are processed they become part of a unified memory for the brand. Even though various messages, and various aspects of individual messages, may be processed differently, they must be associated in memory with the brand, and available for subsequent processing when the brand is being considered.

In this chapter we have referred a number of times to 'conscious' and 'unconscious' processing, and will deal with this in more detail below. In many ways what we are really talking about here when talking about processing and its result is *memory*. Conscious processing involves the use of what psychologists call declarative or 'explicit' memory. Unconscious processing involves what is known as nondeclarative or 'implicit' memory, and generally reflects what we have talked about as 'bottom-up' processing. It is important to understand that even if there happens to be unconscious processing of marketing communication leading to implicit memory (unlikely in any case), those memories cannot inform brand attitudes or choice. The only exception here are nondeclarative emotional memories (Percy, 2006).

Declarative and nondeclarative memories recruit different brain systems and use different strategies for storing memory (Heilman, 2002). One's declarative memory is for facts, assumptions, and events, the sorts of things that one can bring consciously to mind as either a verbal proposition ('that is an expensive, luxury product') or a visual image (in our mind's eye we 'see' the product). Nondeclarative memories also come from experiences, but they are expressed in terms of unconscious changes in behaviour, not as conscious recollections. With the exception of emotion, nondeclarative memories are generally inaccessible to the conscious mind. Such memories tend to involve knowledge that is *reflexive* rather than *reflective* in nature (Heilman, 2002). Importantly in terms of IMC and brand learning, once something is stored in nondeclarative memory, that unconscious memory *never* becomes conscious.

Unconscious processing

There is a great deal that people process, but are unaware of it. It is impossible to consciously attend to everything in our environment; and much of our behaviour is unconscious. This is what enables a driver to stop at a red light, a person to type, or to play the piano. One does not consciously think: 'That light just turned red, what should I do?' One simply applies the brake. In typing or playing the piano, one does not consciously recall where the letter 'g' is located on the keyboard or where the note b-flat is on their instrument. They automatically type the letter or play the note. This is called procedural memory, a key part of nondeclarative or implicit memory, and behaviour associated with it is unconscious.

There are other forms of nondeclarative, or unconscious, memory, and some have tried to argue that it in fact can have a positive effect

in processing advertising and other marketing communication. They suggest that messages are processed unconsciously, and this is an additional 'power' of advertising, having a subtle, unconscious effect upon brand attitude and behaviour. As already pointed out, this is impossible neurologically. The neural systems involved are separate from those involved in conscious processing and behaviour, and implicitly processed information does not recognize the use of higher-order, conscious manipulation.

Often these proponents of unconscious processing point to the work of Zajonc and his colleagues, and his notion of 'mere exposure'. Indeed, there are such things as priming effects (Zajonc, 1968; Murphy and Zajonc, 1993). For example, having seen or heard words or pictures briefly, even subconsciously, it can increase the likelihood of using them later (Kalat, 2004). But priming effects are largely a response to familiarity among a set of otherwise unfamiliar alternatives. As we have pointed out elsewhere (Percy, 2006), even if there is unconscious processing of advertising, there is simply no reason to expect a priming effect because of the other brands, as well as attitudes toward the 'primed' brand, will be recalled from *conscious* memory during brand choice.

Before leaving this subject, however, we must be careful to point out that we are *not* suggesting that something that is not fully attended to will not be consciously processed. People frequently process things consciously without paying attention to it or necessarily knowing it at the time. What we have been talking about here is processing that is *neurally* unconscious.

Conscious processing

People respond 'consciously' to everything they are exposed to and to which they actively attend neurologically. Psychologists like to talk about this in terms of *cognitive response*, which is nothing more than a conscious activity that goes on when actively processing information. Even though someone may not consciously be aware of everything that is being processed, they are associating in working memory the new information (e.g. exposure to an advert or seeing a brand on the shelf) with all the relevant knowledge and assumptions already stored in declarative memory. This is top-down processing, and involves declarative, explicit memory; our conscious memory.

People bring to brands and their marketing communication attitudes and beliefs, associated with their expectations, and experiences; and this will all inform how they think about that brand and process information about it. This follows from the two fundamental types of conscious memory: semantic memory and episodic memory (Tulving, 2002a,b). Semantic memory may be thought of as 'fact-based', and will include a general knowledge and understanding of brands and products. Episodic memory is 'event-based', and will include a person's experience with brands and products. This would not only include using the brand,

but memories of an event that was sponsored by the brand. Together both semantic and episodic memory combine to form declarative, conscious memory, and are integrated with new information as it is processed in working memory to form and build new memories linked to the brand.

In terms of cognitive response theory, it is assumed that people will try to make sense out of what they are experiencing: looking at a product display in a store, reading an advert in a magazine or watching a commercial on television, or attending an event sponsored by a company. How they make sense of what they are experiencing is by accessing the appropriate declarative memories from both semantic and episodic memory. It is the job of IMC to be sure a consistent base of knowledge and experience is available for making judgments about a brand (brand attitude) and making choices (brand purchase intention).

Summary

In this chapter we have discussed what is involved in processing marketing communications. It is important for managers to understand this because every aspect of IMC must be conceived to maximize the likelihood that a message will be positively processed, leading to the appropriate target audience action. Information is processed hierarchically, following the six steps of McGuire's Information Processing Paradigm. The message must be presented to the target audience; they must attend to it, understand what is presented and yield to the argument; they must retain that agreement and then act upon it.

The important point here is that the process is hierarchical, involving *compounding probabilities*. This means each step in processing information is dependent upon the successful completion of the previous step, and the percentage of the target audience positively responding at each step is multiplied over the six steps. So if 60% of the target audience is exposed to a message and 45% pay attention, that means only 27% of the target audience is even available to learn something; and so on through the last step, acting on the message.

For IMC planning, McGuire's Information Processing Paradigm has been reconfigured into the Communication Response Sequence, where *exposure* is followed by *processing* in order to achieve the desired *communication effect*, which should lead to *target audience action*. Obviously, the target audience must have the opportunity to see or hear an execution (exposure), and this is the job of media planning, the final step in the strategic planning process for IMC. Once exposed, the message must be processed, and successful processing involves: attention, learning, acceptance, and emotion.

Conscious attention is required in order to fully process the message. One may not necessarily be aware of the message at first, but neurologically it must activate conscious processing in working memory, which will then lead to active, conscious learning. At minimum for successful processing, the target audience must learn the brand name and primary benefit. With high-involvement decisions, because of the risk involved in making a bad choice, the target audience must accept the message as true. With low-involvement decisions acceptance is not necessary because there is no real risk involved. The target audience need only think the message might be true in order to be motivated to try the brand.

Mediating attention, learning, and acceptance is emotion. People have emotional responses to everything with which they come in contact, and this includes marketing communication. These emotional responses, along with already existing nondeclarative emotional memories linked to the brand and to elements within an execution, will all be at work to attract and hold attention, and facilitate learning and acceptance. New memories are then formed based upon what has been processed, mediated by those emotions. These new memories are then available, with the emotional associations, when brand purchase decisions are made.

This last point is important. By its nature IMC will most often involve multiple messages being delivered through various media. The need for a consistent look and feel over all IMC executions will be discussed in the next chapter. But additionally, it is critical that the processing of each message leads to a unified memory for the brand. Even though each message is processed individually, they must be associated with the brand consistently in memory. These memories become part of the knowledge and assumptions about the brand, stored in declarative, explicit memory. This is our conscious memory, and is required for attitude formation and purchase behaviour.

Although some have tried to argue for unconscious processing of marketing communication, while some messages or parts of messages may be processed unconsciously and enter nondeclarative, implicit memory, those memories cannot inform attitudes or brand behaviour. It is impossible because different brain systems are involved. Emotion is the only component of nondeclarative memory that has any effect upon IMC message processing.

■ Review questions

- 1 What must happen for a message to be successfully processed?
- 2 Why is it so difficult for marketing communication to result in a brand purchase?
- 3 How can processing advertising for a competitor help a brand?
- 4 Can unconscious processing of marketing communication be effective for a brand?
- 5 Discuss attention and its role in message processing.
- 6 What is the role of learning in building brand awareness?
- 7 How does learning differ for high versus low involving product decisions?
- 8 What is the role of emotion in message processing?
- 9 Discuss the two ways in which emotion can effect the way in which marketing communication is processed.
- 10 Look at some adverts and record your 'feelings' as you look at them. Where do they come from? What is it about the executions that elicit those emotions?
- 11 Why is it important for managers to understand the role of memory in processing marketing communication?
- 12 What is the difference between semantic and episodic memory? Find examples of advertising that are likely to involve each.

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