

Invited article

## Brand Equity Management in a Multichannel, Multimedia Retail Environment

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### Abstract

Today's multichannel, multimedia retail marketing environment presents a number of brand management challenges. From a micro perspective, marketers must manage each individual channel and communication option to maximize their direct sales and brand equity effects, as well as any indirect brand equity effects from being associated with a particular channel or communication option. From a macro perspective, marketers must design and implement channel and communication options such that sales and brand equity effects are synergistic. Concepts, frameworks, and future research directions are put forth to address these different challenges.

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### Introduction

Modern marketing is all about choices. The recent decade has seen an explosion of different means to communicate about and sell products to consumers.<sup>1</sup> Fig. 1 displays some of the more prevalent means of marketing communications and distribution for brands. These communication and channel options vary on a number of different dimensions and offer various pros and cons. The challenge for marketers is to choose among these options to devise coordinated communication and channel strategies that maximize “push” and “pull” in today's complex multichannel, multimedia retail environment.

In terms of channels of distribution, options can be broadly classified into direct and interactive channels and indirect channels. *Direct and interactive channels* involve selling through personal contacts from the company to prospective customers by mail, phone, Internet, mobile, in-person visits, and so forth. *Indirect channels* involve selling to customers through

third-party intermediaries such as agents or broker representatives, wholesalers or distributors, and retailers or dealers.

In terms of marketing communications, they can be broadly classified into personal communications and mass communications. *Personal communications* involve 1-to-1 communications between a marketing person or representative and an individual consumer through personal selling, direct marketing, online marketing, word-of-mouth, etc. *Mass communications* involve communications to a group(s) of consumers through advertising, sales promotions, events and experiences, etc.

In a digital world, the lines are getting increasingly blurred between channels and communications as marketers often blend persuasion and selling in much of what they do (Winer 2009). These options are now increasingly becoming available to customers as a result of the burgeoning role of interactive technologies in the retail environment (Varadarajan et al. 2010). For example, many marketers who sell online combine direct channels and personal communications in their interactive marketing programs.

Our focus, however, is on both channels and communications and on how to manage brands in a multichannel, multimedia retail environment. These days, marketers are employing a vast range of distribution options. Increasingly, winning channel strategies will likely be those that offer customers integrated shopping experiences that skillfully “mix and match” direct and indirect

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<sup>1</sup> For expositional ease, we use the terms, consumer and customer, interchangeably throughout the paper.

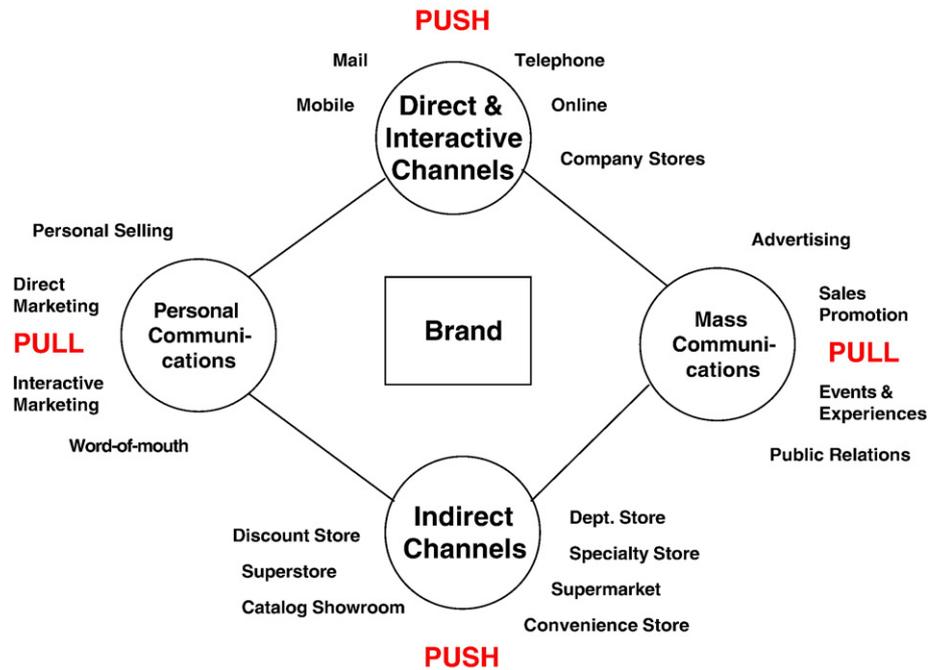


Fig. 1. Marketing integration.

channels via physical stores, Internet, telephone, catalogs, and so forth. For example, consider the wide variety of channels through which Nike sells its shoes, apparel, and equipment:

- *Branded Nike Town stores*: Nike Town stores, located in prime shopping avenues in metropolitan centers around the globe, offer a complete range of Nike products and serve as showcases for their latest products.
- *Niketown.com*: Nike’s e-commerce site allows consumers to place online orders for a wide range of products.
- *Catalog retailers*: Nike’s products appear in numerous shoes, sporting goods, and clothing catalogs.
- *Online stores*: Nike products are sold by online retailers such as Amazon and eBay.
- *Outlet stores*: Outlet stores feature discounted Nike merchandise.
- *Other bricks-and-mortar retailers and their websites*: Nike products are sold by other bricks-and-mortar retailers such as shoe stores, sporting goods stores, department stores, and clothing stores, as well as on many of these retailers’ web sites.
- *Specialty stores*: Nike product lines such as Nike Golf and Nike ACG are often sold through specialty stores such as golf pro shops and outdoor gear suppliers.

Similarly, Table 1 displays the wide variety of communications that firms can use. Consider how Nike chose to launch one of their new brands of shoes:

When Nike introduced the latest version of its successful line of sneakers endorsed by basketball star LeBron James,

it was supported by supported by a wide range of traditional and non-traditional communications: The first episode of “SportsCenter” on ESPN to be sponsored by a single advertiser; the distribution of 400,000 copies of DVDs about the making of the shoe and the ad campaign; saturation advertising on espn.com, mtv.com, and some other sites; a “pop-up retail store” in Manhattan; video clips appearing as short programs on the MTV2 cable network; a retro-chic neon billboard near Madison Square Garden that

Table 1  
Major Communication Types.

1. *Advertising* — any paid form of nonpersonal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods, or services by an identified sponsor.
2. *Sales promotion* — a variety of short-term incentives to encourage trial or purchase of a product or service.
3. *Events and experiences* — company-sponsored activities and programs designed to create daily or special brand-related interactions.
4. *Public relations and publicity* — a variety of programs designed to promote or protect a company’s image or its individual products.
5. *Direct marketing* — use of mail, telephone, fax, email, or Internet to communicate directly with or solicit response or dialogue from specific customers and prospects.
6. *Interactive marketing* — online activities and programs designed to engage customers or prospects and directly or indirectly raise awareness, improve image or elicit sales of products and services.
7. *Word-of-mouth marketing* — people-to-people oral, written, or electronic communications which relate to the merits or experiences of purchasing or using products or services.
8. *Personal selling* — face-to-face interaction with one or more prospective purchasers for the purpose of making presentations, answering questions, and procuring orders.

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