As a discipline, Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) attempts to unify all pieces of marketing communications, including advertising, public relations, direct marketing, social media, and sales promotion. In a fast-paced industry, with highly saturated marketing channels, forward-thinking and staying on trend is the only way to make an impact on your target audience.

The “2020 Watchlist for Marketing Communicators,” presented by West Virginia University’s IMC and DMC Graduate Programs, provides insight into the future of marketing based on the rising trends and tactics today, backed by insights from our extensive network of alumni, industry leaders and professional faculty, as well as case studies and tactic examples to help inspire your next-level marketing communications plan.

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INFLUENCER MARKETING is the practice of leveraging an individual’s following for the purpose of promoting, endorsing or supporting brands. What started as typically using celebrities to pose with cans of cola and talk about how they use certain makeup each morning has evolved into a highly specialized industry. As social media continues to rise, the ability for any individual to become an “influencer” in their space of interest is increasingly more attainable.

Today, brands are utilizing those of all levels of social following to put a face to their products, give consumers someone to relate to and spread their company name across the individual’s network.

**What to Watch For:**

**An Increase in Nano- and Micro-Influencers Partnerships:** These influencers have followings that total less than 25K on social media. They are generally seen as being more “credible” than macro-influencers as their content typically focuses on a niche topic. They create communities using their platform and are more likely to engage directly with their following, creating increased feelings of trust and a sense of a real relationship with their audience.

**Authenticity Will Triumph:** As more posts with “#ad” and “#sponsored” appear, it may be time for brands to focus on building an elite team of influencers to champion their brand for a life-time, rather than focusing on having a high-volume of partnerships. Increasingly, more brands realize that the true metric to measure is engagement, which is more often more readily available with smaller influencers. Smaller audiences usually mean more authentic connections, which are what lead to action and relationship.
marketing tactics rooted in making fans and employees their influencer team. Instead of paying celebrities and beauty gurus with high followings to promote their products to fans, Glossier sent 500 fans who had previously purchased products free samples to test and share with their network.

These typical consumers and micro-influencers who received the products have high-influence as they are closely connected with their followers, knowing most of them personally offline, but low reach. However, it appears these nano- and micro-influencers connections are doing more to help the brand than a celebrity, endorsement ever could. The brands rely on fans authenticity in posts to back reviews and drive sales.

In just five years, the brand has grown to achieve 2.3 million followers on Instagram, seeing 600% growth between 2015 and 2016. Glossier’s branding and promotion strategy also allowed them to raise more than $300 million in funding and brought them to be named “Most Innovative Brand” by Fast Company and acclaimed as a top beauty brand by famed publications like Allure and Teen Vogue.

“The marketing landscape is solidly in the era of taste-making, culture shaping, impact wielding social media influencers. The modern power play for marketers is leveraging these independent voices in a way that showcases the brand while preserving as much autonomy and independence for the influencer. Personal fame has become a commodity, but smart brands will recognize that it’s more than just spotlighting people, products, ideas or opportunities. The true power of a social influencer comes in their ability to motivate action, and increasingly this means getting out of their way as they create content. The influence of social-media connected individuals has never been more critical for brand success. No other source of recommendation is as trusted by the growing number of digitally connected consumers.”

**Glossier**

*Glossier, a Manhattan-based beauty brand, launched its online store in 2014 and soared in popularity nearly overnight due to its unique business-to-consumer tactic of making fans and employees their influencer team. Instead of paying celebrities and beauty gurus with high followings to promote their products to fans, Glossier sent 500 fans who had previously purchased products free samples to test and share with their network.*

64% of consumers choose, switch, avoid or boycott a brand based on its stand on societal issues.

*Edelman’s 2018 Earned Brand Study*
In an activist consumer climate, brands are increasingly becoming open to the idea of taking a stance on tough topics to align with the causes that are important to their consumers. While engaging with controversial issues was once taboo in the media world, but it is now a leading way to earn press coverage and start conversations about your brand.

Cause marketing is becoming more than just donating a portion of profits. Cause Marketing is evolving into brands making a bold advertising statement, investing time to make a substantial contribution to a cause, and creating products that allow consumers to showcase their views as well. As consumers begin using political beliefs and social justice passions to showcase their individuality, creativity in cause marketing campaigns is becoming increasingly important to stand out to these broad audiences and offer ways for their target audience to share the message of socially and politically active brands and organizations.

33% of consumers are now choosing to buy from brands that they believe are doing social or environmental good.

Unilever Consumer Study

73% of people agree a company can increase local profits and improve the economic and social conditions in its area.

Edelman 2019 Barometer
To get into the hearts and minds of consumers, brands need to stand for more than just a product. They need to stand on the right side of important societal and environmental issues. More brands are talking about issues in the world because for people to love and trust a company or agency, you have to do right in the world and work off the belief that doing so will attract great clients and consumers. Creativity is the currency we work in this industry, and utilizing creative solutions makes people love your product more. Yes, it’s easier to just donate profits, but that doesn’t resonate. Creative solutions create an emotional response; people see something that’s missing in the world and are moved by a company’s action to do something about it.”

WILL MONTGOMERY
Associate Creative Director at McCann New York
Creative Demand. In an oversaturated marketing world, strategists are being tasked with developing with the most abstract concepts to capture media and consumer attention, all while adhering to brand identity. More and more consumers are being immersed in the world of a brand during extravagant temporary events called “pop-ups.” They showcase creative risks, generate social media buzz with limited availability, and give new audiences a chance to experience the brand firsthand.

What to Watch For:

Valuing Experience Over Sales: Pop-up shops will continue to be about the experience they provide consumers, instead of strictly to sell products. Marketers will focus on creating events that give the consumer entertainment and content to share on social media with their network, rather than push them to walk away with a purchase from the brand.

Digital Pop-Up Shops: Brands are beginning to partner with online retailers to sell limited-run merchandise co-branded between the two companies. These partnerships will continue to increase between brands in different industries, not just retail, as well. For example, Cheeto’s snack food brand launched a limited-run line in partnership with clothing retailer Forever 21 earlier this year.

Developments in Customer Service Design: Pop-up shops will continue to experiment with innovative methods of customer service. These methods include the use of contactless shopping, being able to purchase without going to a cashier or waiting in a line, and the ability to send promotions to a consumer’s phone who is currently in the store.
Cheetos, the popular snack brand, took on the fine-dining world in 2017 with the launch of a pop-up restaurant in New York City named The Spotted Cheetah. The restaurant included a three-course menu developed by celebrity chef Anne Burrell that included Cheetos meatballs, tacos and cheesecake.

Inspiration for the restaurant came from online trends of consumers sharing recipes that utilized Cheetos as a key ingredient. The company identified Anne Burrell as the perfect influencer to head the campaign and bring together snack food and fine dining due to her creative personality and notable reputation for quality recipes. Burrell released a recipe early on and a save-the-date as the first hints of a restaurant to come. In early August, the brand officially announced the restaurant would take place in the next few weeks and would be a limited-run.

The Spotted Cheetah was open from August 15 through August 17 and completely sold out of reservations within six hours of being available. They held private dining times for media and “foodies” influencers to drive content creation and social media buzz. The company created a digital cookbook for those who couldn’t attend to have The Spotted Cheetah experience at home, and the e-book was downloaded nearly 13,000 times in its first week of being available. Overall, the campaign generated more than 3,400 media placements and 157,000 campaign website visits during its run.

Additional Examples:

“The Bell Hotel” by Taco Bell
“The Neighborhood of Good” by State Farm
“Ultra Rollerama” by Revlon

95% of marketers think events give the opportunity to form in-person connections

65% of brands say that events and experiential programs are directly related to sales

84% of brand marketers say events and experiences are a key part of integrated
Changes in TV Consumption. With many consumers “cutting the cord” on traditional TV service and opting for streaming platforms, brands need a new way to reach these highly fragmented audiences and get the most out of their budget. Addressable TV advertising utilizes data collected by cross-referencing the programs consumers watch, the cable provider they use and other factors like websites they visit. This data creates profiles of potential target consumers to be delivered specific ads that speak to their interests. Brands and companies provide a target consumer to a cable provider to ensure their ads are only going to households whose compiled target would make them prospective customers.

Gulf States Toyota, a private Toyota parts and vehicle distributor with over 150 dealerships, was seeking a data-driven way to drive more foot traffic to their locations. To eliminate budget waste, the company created an Addressable TV strategy to reach the in-market buyer audience that has expressed an interest in making a car purchase.

Gulf States Toyota utilized AT&T AdWorks addressable platform to execute the campaign. This platform allowed for the ads to reach in-market households that had DIRECTV service to run a month-long campaign. An external insights company was brought in to track success and uncover additional insights about the consumers who were impacted.

The company reveals that foot traffic in stores where the campaign was running saw an average increase of 19%.

Spending on addressable TV ads is expected to hit $3.3 billion by 2020.

Video Advertising Bureau

Steps to An Addressable TV Advertising Campaign Simplified:

1. Create a custom target segment utilizing consumer behavior and demographic profiles
2. Match consumers with what they watch and what they buy
3. Scoreholds based on how likely they are to act on a prospective campaign
4. Activate campaign in high scoring households with addressable advertising technology
Diverse Audiences Demand Diverse Messaging. Brands are continuously putting a greater emphasis on diversity and inclusion in their marketing campaigns not only because America is the most diverse it has ever been, but because of the visibility of that diversity. Consumers are demanding for brands to pay attention to representation and authentically showcase the population for what it is: a brand spectrum of culture and individuality.

With the rise of social media, everyone has a platform for opinion and to voice their individuality. Increasing, people of color are utilizing this opportunity to speak out about their culture, drive trends and become powerful influencers. Brands need to continue to make authentic efforts to include Multicultural Americans in to marketing images and diverse cultures into messaging. If efforts are not authentic, and these people are not recognized, brands put themselves at risk of boycott and backlash on social media, again with those growing platforms for individuals to become influencers of their culture.

Brands to Watch For:

Nike: In 2018, after a number of overturns in leadership, the brand admitted to its failure to promote women and people of color. The company has since turned around to mend internal and external issues with efforts like raising salaries by 10% to close pay gaps and putting out campaigns like the “Pro Hijab” sportswear ads to address the needs of Muslim women athletes.

Procter & Gamble: This brand has been making efforts to promote diversity and inclusion since 2007 with the formation of the “My Black is Beautiful” campaign. This campaign created a group of 2.6 million members to drive conversation around black beauty and the stigmas associated with self-image. The company Chief Brand Officer, Marc Pritchard, was also named co-chair of the ANA’s #SeeHer movement in early 2019. This movement was founded to eliminate gender bias in advertising and media.
Neilsen Research conducted a study in 2018 about the influence of African American consumers on creating mainstream trends. This group currently has the highest smartphone ownership and usage and are leveraging digital platforms and technology to develop individual platforms to champion cultural expression and entrepreneurship.

Subgroups are on the rise like “Black Twitter” and other cultural platforms as well, giving this community a unique place to network and further spread their influence. Bands are beginning to notice the power of this community and invest in the needs, interests and concerns of these consumers. African American buying power is expected to rise to $1.54 trillion by 2022.

“People of color have always found their way to the front of the lines as it relates to pop culture and trends. That’s also the observation of one of the nation’s top marketing professionals Neil Gordon, former Chief Marketing Officer for McDonald’s USA, who said ‘the ethnic consumer tends to set trends. So they help set the tone for how we enter the marketplace.’ So it’s no wonder that when we analyze the integration of culture on society’s marketing influence, my mind immediately permeates to how successful Black influencers have navigated not only the nuances of America’s food but also some of today’s most talked-about social movements as well as lifestyle must-haves.”

JESSICA GARRETT MODKINS, President of Hip Rock Star

“80% of marketers agree that using diverse representation in ads helps a brand’s reputation.”

“Millennials and Generation Z consumers alike prefer media with diverse representation and encourage brands to take social stances.”