IMC: Its Rhetorical and Philosophical Foundation and Impact

Allison Raemore Peiritsch

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IMC: ITS RHETORICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION AND IMPACT

A Dissertation
Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Allison Raemore Peiritsch

May 2016
IMC: ITS RHETORICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION AND IMPACT

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ABSTRACT

IMC: ITS RHETORICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION AND IMPACT

By

Allison Raemore Peiritsch

May 2016

Dissertation supervised by Ronald C. Arnett

A review of current integrated marketing communication (IMC) literature indicates that IMC has swept the globe. IMC has become the normative marketing practice for organizations to promote their goods and services, as well as an increasingly popular area of academic study. At the same time, literature shows inconsistency in IMC’s professional practice and academic instruction. An increasing number of IMC theorists suggest that “true” IMC involves reorienting an organization to become consumer-focused and responsive at every level. This broader vision for IMC points to the discipline’s communicative underpinnings. It is dialogic, other-oriented and interpretive in nature, yet most organizations and academics that claim to practice and teach IMC treat it as a “simple managerial task”—mere tactical coordination of marketing elements (Schultz and Patti 75). This dissertation supplements current
literature to establish IMC’s rhetorical and philosophical roots and provides a perspective about how organizations can achieve greater communicative understanding with their stakeholders by considering IMC from a humanities and constructive hermeneutic standpoint. By understanding the discipline as humanistic and situated in lived practices, rhetorical and philosophical acumen becomes the missing link between tactical implementation and IMC’s full potential. This praxis-oriented approach moves IMC beyond the limitations of the social sciences and into the philosophy of communication to offer better insight into how IMC is an interpretive encounter that demands attentiveness to and communicative engagement with the other.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Dr. Robert Millard Raemore, who supported me in every step of this doctoral program but didn’t live to see its completion. Dad, this work is the culmination of every lesson you ever taught me: to work hard; to know that success is in large part contingent on the ability to make it happen; to be intellectually curious; to recognize the inherent humanity in every person; to point out the good in others to help others discover the good in themselves; and to never stop moving. The last conversation we had was about eternal life. You continue to live on in everything that I do.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr. Ronald C. Arnett, this work would not have been possible had it not been for the gift of your wisdom during course work and the dissertation writing phase. Your words and lessons helped guide this project to life. Thank you for teaching me what it means to be a good scholar, teacher and person.

Drs. Janie Harden Fritz, Pat Arneson, Calvin Troup, Richard Thames, Garnet Butchart, Craig Maier and Erik Garrett, this work is a reflection of your teachings. I continue to carry with me the learnings I gleaned in coursework and in our discussions. Thank you for changing the way I see the world.

Rita McCaffrey, thank you for your ongoing support and kind words throughout course work, comprehensive exams and during dissertation writing.

Randy Jesick, I would not be in the communication field today had it not been for you. When I was a struggling undergraduate, you saw in me talent that I had no idea existed. Thank you for being a good professor, mentor and friend over these many years.

The Department of Communication faculty at Slippery Rock University, thank you for your encouragement. I’m so glad I am able to continue my work with you.

Mom, I know you have always wanted good things for me, and I have never given you enough credit for everything you have done for me. Thank you.

Brian, this work would not have been possible without your support and understanding. It wasn’t always easy. And sometimes, it was lonely for both of us. I’ll never be able to thank you enough for helping me—and us—get to a better life.

My dear son, Ian, you are the hardest worker I know and the greatest gift I’ll ever have. Your never-give-up attitude motivates me more than you’ll ever know.
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The goal of this project is to utilize the work of rhetoric and philosophy of communication to show how integrated marketing communication (IMC) is not just a social-scientific business practice but also a humanistic discipline rooted in a tradition born more than two millennia ago. The major notion that should come from this project is while the full potential of IMC is pointed to in its scholarship, that potential is not realized in the way that IMC is commonly practiced in the marketplace or in the way that it is taught in academic degree programs. This disparity between IMC theory and its practice and academic instruction can begin to be resolved when it is viewed through the lens of humanities and as a constructive hermeneutic born of the rhetorical and philosophical tradition.

This five-chapter project seeks to engage current challenges in the way IMC is practiced in the marketplace and presented in academia. Rhetorical and philosophical acumen and praxis, or theory-informed action, is offered as a way to more clearly elucidate IMC’s ultimate meaning and to advance IMC beyond its current practice and academic instruction. Within this introductory chapter, five sections are provided to situate the project. The first section, *Terms and Definitions*, provides definitions for commonly discussed IMC terms, as well as definitions for terms central to an understanding of IMC from a rhetorical and philosophical perspective. The second section, *IMC: Development and Diffusion*, provides a perspective on the forces that catalyzed IMC’s development and varying definitions of IMC as derived from extant literature. This section also orients the reader to IMC’s current popularity, its status as a global normative marketing practice, as well as IMC’s popularity as an area of academic
study. The third section, *Challenges: Disparity Between IMC’s Vision and Its Practice and Teaching*, will address the inconsistency between the scholarly vision for IMC and the way that it is currently practiced in the marketplace and presented in academia. The fourth section, *A Rhetorical and Philosophical Approach* will begin to situate IMC within the rhetorical and philosophical tradition to show how rhetorical and philosophical acumen can advance an understanding of IMC beyond its current narrow conception. This section also will provide familiarity with Gadamer’s work. The final section, *IMC as Hermeneutic Conversation*, will summarize the first chapter and provide snapshots of this project’s four proceeding chapters.

Though the work of communication and rhetorical studies is not typically mentioned within IMC literature, this work offers significance for the field. The overall project works to challenge current conventions of IMC as a social-scientific business model that often defaults to prescription, application and mere tactical coordination of various marketing disciplines. Instead, this project presents IMC as part of a long lineage of shifts in human communication. When an organization’s consumers are viewed as unique human individuals—and not objects for financial gain—IMC is better able to be seen for what it is—an other-oriented encounter that extends far beyond tactical alignment and reification through data collection. IMC becomes a framework for understanding and provides a place where meaning can be made between organization and consumer. When viewed through the lens of rhetoric and philosophy, the full potential of IMC can be realized in *respectful* alignment of an organization’s business objectives with the wants and needs of living, breathing humans. A rhetorical and
philosophical perspective works to move IMC’s practice out of technique and into the realm of praxis.

**Terms and Definitions**

This section begins to ground this project by describing several fundamental terms and ideas related to a humanities perspective of IMC born of the rhetorical and philosophical tradition. Consideration of these terms provides a starting point for understanding IMC from a rhetorical and philosophical standpoint and points to its roots in classical and contemporary understandings of communication. While multiple definitions and interpretation exist for each term, the following definitions serve as a map to investigate IMC. In addition, the varying definitions of IMC itself are not discussed in this section because they will be explored and defined throughout this project.

**Marketplace.** The earliest conception of the marketplace comes from the Greek term *agora* and refers to a place of assembly in ancient Greece where adult male community members met to discuss political and economic issues of the polis (Murray 56). Later, the agora evolved into a market square or a place of commerce where merchants sold goods and services (Murray 102). Today, the marketplace refers to both physical and virtual spaces in which goods and services are bought, sold or exchanged.

**Consumers.** The American Marketing Association’s marketing terms dictionary defines a consumer as “the ultimate user or consumer of goods, ideas, and services” (“Common Language in Marketing”). The AMA also notes that a consumer can be a “buyer or decision maker,” in addition to the person who ultimately uses a product or service. This suggests that consumers can be people who purchase products or services for others (e.g., a mother who purchases toys for her child). Further, consumers may take
the form of individuals, groups of individuals or organizations that purchase goods and services from other organizations (Schultz and Schultz, *Next Generation* 71). For purposes of this project, the terms *consumer* and *customer* are used interchangeably.

**Stakeholders.** A stakeholder refers to any individual, group or institution that has a vested interest in an organization and can affect or be affected by its actions. Guth and Marsh make a careful distinction to indicate that stakeholders are those people, groups or institutions that are actively identified by the organization as being critical to the organization’s success in contrast with groups that may show interest in an organization but are not deemed worthy of focus by the organization (88). According to Lusch, stakeholder theory attempts to identify which internal and external groups are worthy of an organization’s attention (266). Example stakeholder groups include an organization’s consumers, employees, investors or donors, news media, retail partners and vendors, community groups, and government and legislators.

**Consumer-centrism.** Pioneering IMC theorists Schultz and Schultz define a consumer-centric organization as “one that considers the ultimate purchaser or consumer of the product first, foremost and always” (*Next Generation* 50). They argue that consumers are the only group that can provide the needed resources that ultimately reward an organization’s varying stakeholders. Consumer-centric organizations are arranged so that all functional activities, processes and business units are focused on the consumer and on providing consumer benefits. Hence, the consumer is “integrated” into every level of the organization. The opposite of a consumer-centric organization is one that is siloed with little cross functional interaction. Business units and departments are
mechanized, focusing inwardly on doing what each does best and may not even consider consumers or stakeholders when making decisions.

**Praxis.** Praxis is central to a humanities education. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle defines praxis as theory-informed practice. Similarly, Arendt defines praxis as a form of critical thinking that involves the combination of reflection and action. A praxis orientation illustrates the limits and constraints of social-scientific IMC. This project will argue that IMC should be based on theory-informed practice derived from rhetorical and communication theory. As such, practitioners will better understand the underlying purpose of IMC and why they are employing a given technique so that they avoid defaulting to prescription. Praxis helps move the discipline of IMC away from unreflective “doing” and into the realm of enlightened practice, a hallmark of the rhetorical and philosophical tradition.

**Rhetoric.** Since antiquity, the study of rhetoric has concerned itself with human symbol use (or the use of language and images) to coordinate social action (Hauser, *Rhetorical Theory* 2). Although definitions of rhetoric vary, the term carries with it a focus on persuasion – a presupposition of IMC. In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle defines rhetoric as “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion” (24). Kenneth Burke defines rhetoric as "the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or induce actions in other human agents" (41). Similarly, Gerard Hauser defines rhetoric broadly as the “symbolic inducement of social cooperation as an inevitable consequence of language” (*Vernacular Voices* 14). These definitions provide a starting point for understanding IMC’s rhetorical underpinnings, as IMC involves the persuasive use of language directed to an audience as a means of stimulating action.
**Philosophy of communication.** Philosophy of communication is a relatively new area for inquiry that raises questions about how philosophy aids in a richer understanding of human communication. Philosophy of communication grapples with ideas about how human communication shapes the way that people think, act and create meaning through their lived experiences. Arneson defines philosophy of communication as an examination of questions related to the “nature and function of human communication” and that philosophy of communication as a study teaches people to think about “how we are communicatively situated in the world” (1/8). Arnett and Holba assert that philosophy of communication “moves us into the interplay of ideas, people and the historical situations that shape the dwelling of human meaning” (3). Butchart conceives of philosophy of communication as the study that raises questions to “unconceal” issues about “why our world appears to us as it does and how we can see it differently” (Hines). From the perspective of IMC, philosophy of communication teaches how to understand the many ways that organizations and people communicatively interact in a given moment. Those interactions dwell in the lived experience and result in shared meaning between organizations and their consumers.

**Constructive hermeneutics.** Part of the study of philosophy of communication involves an understanding of constructive hermeneutics. Hermeneutics refers to the study of interpretation. Philosophical—or constructive—hermeneutics refers to the “unification of three coordinates – the interpreter, the text and the philosophical moment—in dialogue” (Arnett and Holba 85). From the perspective of IMC, constructive hermeneutics can be viewed as the unification of an organization, its consumers and stakeholders, and the historical backdrop or context, which shapes
communicative engagement. Arnett and Holba suggest that constructive hermeneutics is centered on the idea of respect and the creation of a space for respectful dialogue albeit within “our own interpretive limits” (86). Constructive hermeneutics presumes that learning occurs in and through difference.

**Reification.** To reify means to make something abstract more concrete or real. Petrovic defines reification as the transformation of “human properties, relations and actions into properties, relations and actions of man-produced things which have become independent (and which are imagined as originally independent) of man and govern his life.” Further, Berger and Luckmann argue that reification occurs when “human creations are misconceived as ‘facts of nature, results of cosmic laws, or manifestations of divine will.’” Reification often occurs in organizations when people and their attitudes and behaviors are replaced by objective data as a starting point for decision making.

**Modernity.** Modernity suggests both a time period and social conditions, attitudes and practices that adhere to Enlightenment ideals. Modernity is often characterized by grand or master narratives that seek to represent all knowledge and explain everything in a few simple rules or precepts (Lyotard). Example master narratives include the myths of progress through science and technology. Modernity is often characterized by metaphors of efficiency, centralization, control, order, bureaucracy, authority, rationality, objectivity, the rejection of tradition and bias, homogeneity and unreflective thought.

**Postmodernity.** Postmodernity is a societal condition, inclusive of modernist elements, that raises doubt in the project of modernity. Postmodernity rejects grand or master narratives and in their place reside “petit narratives” based on local and contingent
truths (Lyotard). A postmodern perspective views the myth of progress through science and technology as a failed grand narrative (Irvine). Metaphors associated with postmodernity include pluralism, disunity, decentered selves, identity conflict, fragmentation, loss of control, disruption, demassified media, and polycentric power sources (Irvine). A postmodern perspective embraces diversity as a path to learning.

Terms associated with rhetoric and philosophy of communication serve as a starting point for understanding IMC from a rhetoric and philosophical perspective. These terms also help to enrich and inform an understanding of IMC as embedded in a tradition dating back more than 2,000 years. Scholarship on IMC, however, locates the development of IMC in the late 1980s. The next section will explore IMC’s emergence, its development, and its diffusion throughout the marketplace and academia.

**IMC: Development and Diffusion**

While the concept of integration has been noted in advertising and marketing literature for nearly a century, IMC evolved into a new discipline for academic study, teaching and practice nearly thirty years ago. IMC emerged in the late 1980s from Northwestern University’s Medill School of Journalism and was developed to address significant economic growth and developmental changes taking place in the marketplace at that time. Increasing marketplace pressures felt in the mid-1980s, which gave rise to the development of IMC, include the development and diffusion of new communication technologies across the entire business spectrum, globalization and organizations developing a multi-national presence, and an increased emphasis on branding as a means of competitive differentiation (Schultz and Schultz, *Next Generation* 9). These changes
had significant implications for the role and development of marketing and marketing communication within an organization.

**Development.** In its initial conceptions, IMC provided a prescriptive framework to guide organizations in reaching consumers with consistent, uniform and clear messages that were integrated across marketing disciplines. This approach was developed to respond to changes occurring in a late-capitalist market, characterized by increasing social and cultural pluralism, fragmentation, and interactive technologies that move power that had previously been in the hands of an organization to the consumer (Irvine). IMC’s earliest definitions were tactically oriented, espousing the virtues of coordinating marketing communication elements like advertising, public relations, direct sales, marketing, etc., to surround consumers with controlled and consistent messages in their preferred mediums. In *Integrated Marketing Communications: Putting It Together and Making It Work*, the seminal text on IMC, Schultz, Tannenbaum and Lauterborn define IMC as:

A marketing communication planning practice that integrates and coordinates an organization’s marketing, advertising, public relations, direct response, sales promotion and any other communication activities to provide clarity, consistency and maximum communication impact (54).

Similarly, Keegan et al. define IMC as the “strategic coordination of all messages and media used by an organization to influence its perceived brand value” (631). Duncan and Caywood define IMC as the “process of strategically controlling or influencing all messages and encouraging purposeful dialogue to create and nourish profitable relationships with customers and other stakeholders” (18). Finally, Kotler et al. define
IMC as “the concept under which a company carefully integrates and coordinates its many communications channels to deliver a clear, consistent and compelling message about the organization and its products” (542). Preliminary definitions of IMC are marked by an emphasis on outbound message centralization and control.

These early definitions present IMC as a narrowly focused, prescriptive and “simplistic” concept that works within a “toolbox” perspective to provide organizations a background against which to make marketing communication elements speak with “one voice” (Applegate; Schultz and Patti; Groom). In its early days, IMC was regarded as a “managerial task” that was “internally focused, reflecting what the marketer wanted to deliver or hoped to deliver to audiences whoever and wherever they might be” (Schultz and Patti 76). These views of IMC treat it as an “outbound system”—a system developed and controlled by an organization. Planning takes place internally and marketing communication elements are carefully crafted and coordinated before being pushed externally in hopes of cultivating an audience to purchase an organization’s products or services (Gould; Kitchen and Li; Grove, Carlson and Dorsch; Kerr). Following this approach, IMC is a monologic, one-way directive where organizations synchronize a message’s aesthetic and linguistic qualities to better control what they want consumers to see and hear.

Literature, however, shows that conceptions and views about the definition, purpose and value of IMC have evolved far beyond mere tactical coordination of marketing communication elements. Theorists have sought to expand the practice’s value to one that follows an “outside-in” approach. More recent scholarship frames IMC as a strategic business process that focuses on continuous dialogic engagement between
an organization and its consumers (Kliatchko “New Definition;” Kerr et al.; Schultz and Patti). These more recent dialogic views of IMC take an organization’s consumers as the starting point for business and financial decision making and move IMC away from its initial “toolbox” approach.

In their work, *IMC – The Next Generation*, pioneering IMC theorists Schultz and Schultz broaden the scope of IMC from an outbound marketing approach to a “full-fledged business strategy” that integrates “all the pieces of an organization around a single factor: the wants and needs of customers” (15). Duncan and Mulhern define IMC as “an on-going, interactive, cross-functional process of brand communication planning, execution, and evaluation that integrates all parties in the exchange process in order to maximize mutual satisfaction of each other's wants and needs” (9). Kliatchko defines IMC as an “audience-driven business process of strategically managing stakeholders, content, channels, and results of brand communications” (“Revised Definition” 140). Schultz and Patti suggest that while in the early days IMC was a “rather simple managerial task” focused on tactical coordination, IMC now has the potential to effect the way that an organization defines, approaches and deploys marketing, which subsequently serves as a starting point for the way that an organization is structured (75). Torp also notes that integration has evolved from a focus on communication tactics to the “internal integration of an organization’s culture and ‘soul’” (190). Luck and Moffatt argue that IMC is not just an organizational “activity;” rather, “it is a system of belief or engagement, embedded in an organization's culture” supported by technology and senior management (311). In other words, IMC begins to focus on shaping an organization’s approach to the marketplace by emphasizing social interaction, discourse and the
coordination of work processes. When this mode of thinking is embraced at the corporate level, IMC is elevated from a view as the coordination of communication tactics.

These broader conceptions of IMC suggest that the discipline is one that is deeply communicative calling for rhetorical and philosophical acumen if understanding is to be achieved. At a fundamental level, more recent “consumer-centric” conceptions of IMC are dialogic, other-oriented and involve the necessity to see the organization from the consumer’s perspective in order for an organization to achieve success. To adopt this “outside-in” perspective and practice, Fortini-Campbell suggests that organizations start by redefining marketing so that they are experiencing and analyzing a brand from a consumer’s standpoint and then learning how they make judgements about it. As such, things not typically called “communication” (such as a dirty restroom or a poorly laid out parking lot) are viewed for their power to communicate (61). Fortini-Campbell suggests that if an organization is truly consumer-centric, it understands that “meaning is in the mind of the consumer” and that the “consumer’s interpretation is the real brand,” while a company’s vision is just the “aspirational” brand (15). Consumers interpret a brand through the lens of their own lived experience and not through the intent of an organization.

Once an organization commits to viewing itself from the consumer’s perspective, it should commit itself to two-way, dialogic communication with consumers to understand their perspective. The result is what Torp characterizes as a shift in integration from being just a combination of marketing communications disciplines to becoming a “virtual philosophy” or “way of thinking” for an organization” (201). More
recent views on integration move the discipline away from outbound message control to an organizational philosophy that centers on consumers as “active and creative receivers” who actively try to make sense of a message by linking it to a context that is familiar and meaningful (Christensen et al., “New Tensions” 213). Consumers as active interpreters who construe meaning based on their own lived experiences speaks to the communicative, dialogic and interpretive importance of IMC.

**Diffusion.** Interest in IMC and its diffusion throughout academia and the marketplace has increased significantly since its emergence nearly three decades ago. Diffusion refers to the “acceptance and perception” by researchers, teachers and practitioners about IMC as a discipline and the subsequent process by which IMC concepts, curricula and practice are adopted (Kerr et al. 519). Today, IMC’s marked diffusion can be noted in the number of published journal articles on the subject, undergraduate and graduate IMC degree programs offered, and the number of organizations that profess to practice IMC.

**Scholarship.** An analysis of coverage in peer-reviewed academic journals shows a dramatic increase in the number of articles that focus on IMC or mention IMC during the last 25 years. Two different EBSCO keyword searches of the Communication and Mass Media Complete and Business Source Premier databases were conducted to draw conclusions about the rate of academic focus on IMC or its inclusion in articles in five-year increments. The first search sought to determine the number of articles in which IMC was the primary focus. This involved a title search of the terms “IMC” or “integrated marketing communication” to determine those articles that focused on the discipline. The keyword search of journal titles shows that from January 1, 1990 to
December 31, 1994 (roughly the first five years of IMC’s emergence), 13 articles focused on IMC. The same search of journal articles from January 1, 2010 to December 31, 2014 shows that 71 articles were focused on IMC, marking a 446 percent increase in articles focused on the discipline. To account for journal articles that may not have been exclusively focused on IMC but include references to the discipline, a keyword search using the terms “IMC” and “marketing” was conducted. This search shows that from January 1, 1990 through December 31, 1994, 33 journal articles referenced the practice. The same keyword search of journal articles from January 1, 2010 to December 31, 2014 shows that 398 articles include mentions of IMC, marking a 1,106 percent increase in articles that reference the discipline. The rate of academic interest in IMC—either as the focus of an article or as warranting reference in an article—has dramatically increased since its initial development.

Figure 1: IMC Coverage and Inclusion in Scholarly Journals

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>294</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*The rate of academic reference in IMC in the title and body of an article was reviewed in five-year increments beginning with IMC’s approximate inception in 1990. Each five-year increment begins on January 1 of the respective year and ends on December 31. The last five-year increment beginning on January 1, 2015, includes coverage through the submission date of this document.

IMC has two journals dedicated to the practice, which include the *International Journal of Integrated Marketing Communication* and the *Journal of Integrated Marketing*.
Communications. A review of IMC journal articles reveals that IMC is predominantly covered in traditional advertising and marketing journals such as the *International Journal of Advertising*, *Journal of Advertising Research*, *Journal of Marketing Communications*, *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Management*, *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing*, and *Journal of Interactive Marketing*. While *Corporate Communications: An International Journal* has included a number of articles on IMC over the last 15 years, IMC is covered less frequently in communication journals. Some journals that have included IMC-focused articles include *Public Relations Quarterly*, *Journal of Communication Management* and the *Review of Communication*.

IMC’s popularity has propelled the development of a number of dedicated conferences attended by both academics and practitioners. These dedicated conferences include IMC Capetown and IMC Durban (in South Africa), the University of North Carolina Wilmington’s biennial IMC conference, West Virginia University’s INTEGRATE Conference, the Integrated Marketing Summit and Road Tours, as well as a One-Day International Conference on Integrated Marketing Communication, which was hosted by the Hyderabad Business School’s Department of Marketing in Hyderabad, India. While not an exhaustive list, IMC is also discussed as part of separate tracks and panel discussions within various national and local conferences presented by the International Communication Association, National Communication Association, the International Association of Business Communicators, American Marketing Association, the Public Relations Society of America, Association of National Advertisers, and the American Association of Advertising Agencies.
**Undergraduate and graduate degree programs.** IMC is currently viewed around the world as the normative business marketing practice (Kitchen and Schultz 197). As a result, the number of university-level courses and degree programs have increased substantially to reflect growing interest in IMC as the generally accepted way to create brand communication campaigns by organizations around the world (Kerr et al. 512). To meet marketplace demand, universities have reoriented their public relations, advertising and promotion management courses to include IMC content, or universities are creating entirely new IMC majors. As a result, most university-level marketing programs offer an IMC or promotion management course (Kerr et al.). Undergraduate and graduate degree programs in IMC are offered in universities on six of seven continents.

**Marketplace practice.** Since its inception, IMC has gained widespread attention and interest and has become an “irreversible prevailing tendency” among marketplace practitioners (Kliatchko, “New Definition” 7). Holm suggests that IMC has influenced the thought and actions of all types of organizations that are contending with competitive realities of an open economy (26). Holm suggests that IMC has not only garnered interest from product and service marketers but also from other organizations facing competitive pressures, such as state-owned companies and political parties (26). Torp suggests that because the scope of IMC has been so broadened to encompass everything from tactical coordination of marketing elements to full-scale consumer integration, many organizations profess to practice IMC.

While not an exhaustive list, organizations and brands noted to practice some form of IMC include Adidas, Aetna, Amazon, Apple, Audi, ALS League of Belgium, ASDA Stores, BeatBullying, Benetton, Britvic Soft Drinks, Child Poverty Fund,

Apple and P&G are two organizations that treat IMC as a strategic and financial business practice and will be detailed in the next section of this chapter.

**Challenges: Disparity Between IMC’s Vision and Its Practice and Teaching**

Despite IMC’s popularity, its global acceptance as a normative business practice and its broad implications at an organizational level, IMC literature reveals a significant disparity between IMC theorists’ vision for the discipline and the way that IMC is predominantly practiced in the marketplace and taught in academia. The discipline is still very much in academic and professional development (Kitchen et al., “Emergence of IMC” 19). While scholarly work on IMC has evolved from a limited view of coordinated marketing tactics tools to a strategic business process with far reaching organizational implications, there are significant gaps between IMC theory, marketplace practice and classroom content.

Kerr argues that IMC research is not informing IMC practice (131). Luck and Moffatt contend that IMC is still “vastly misunderstood” and that the benefits it can provide are not being achieved due to poor implementation (312). Further, theorists
suggest that “despite the advances in IMC theory and development and the growing sophistication of its conceptualization, the understanding of some industry practitioners and academics has not advanced past the tactical level” (Eagle et al.; Kitchen et al., “Brand Integration;” Kerr). In Kimberly Maul’s PRWeek article about brand creativity and integrated marketing, Tom Collinger, then associate dean and department chair of the integrated marketing communications program at Medill at Northwestern explains, “When you say the words ‘integrated marketing communications,’ what it means to people and how they practice it is as different as the different interpretations of a Rorschach ink blot.” For some practitioners, IMC works at the level of tactical coordination and for others it suggests the way in which an organization manages its communication strategy across the organization. IMC, in essence, is in the eye of the beholder. The term can mean different things to different organizations. However, according to Maul, most practitioners define IMC as a way to “incorporate consistent messaging and branding across all communications channels.” This outbound approach to IMC is also the way that academic degree programs tend to approach the discipline.

Kerr et al. argue that what is being taught internationally in IMC is not what theorists would actually consider to be the heart of the concept (511). Their international review of 87 syllabuses found that what is being taught in IMC does not draw from IMC’s key constructs, and IMC’s key writers and disciplinary research are not included in course content. Instead, existing advertising or promotion management courses are slightly reconstructed and infused with IMC terminology and then presented as IMC thus ignoring the research and extensive writings that work to move IMC beyond tactical coordination of marketing communication elements. Further, Torp contends that in many
cases, textbook authors have kept up with “fashion,” merely by changing the title of their works and the terminology used. Subsequently, whatever content fell under the term “marketing communication” in previous editions is referred to as “integrated marketing communication” with no significant change in the content. What ultimately is presented to students and then moved into the marketplace (when those students become practitioners) is a diluted, tactical version of IMC that neglects an explanation of its full organizational potential.

To clarify the way that integration is commonly treated in the marketplace, Schultz and Schultz offer a frequently cited four-level framework to explain the way organizations define and achieve IMC (“Transitioning;” Kitchen and Schultz; Holm; Kliatchko, “Revised Definition”). This framework also suggests a shift in Schultz and Schultz’s initial view of IMC as an “outbound marketing” approach to an “inbound” approach that accounts for consumer feedback and behavior as the starting point for organizational decision making. Following Schultz and Schultz’s framework, subsequent studies confirm that the majority of organizations that proclaim to practice IMC are anchored in the first two stages (more so in the first stage), with some moving into stage three and very few practicing IMC advancing to stage four (Kitchen and Schultz; Holm). Schultz and Schultz’s integration model provides a perspective about IMC’s development in the marketplace and academic instruction. It also provides a starting point to understand and describe how rhetorical and philosophical acumen can help an organization advance their approaches to IMC beyond tactical integration.
Following Schultz and Schultz’s framework, the first level of integration focuses on the coordination of all marketing communication elements to achieve a unified and consistent message across all channels. At this stage, marketers focus on achieving “one sight, one sound” to best control how consumers might receive and interpret organizational, product or service messages. This approach’s ultimate objective is for consumers to receive and form in their minds a consistent and unified message, as directed by an organization, about its products and services (Kliatchko, “Revised Definition” 154). Christensen et al. argue that this type of integration is typical of “antidialogical” elements and is a way of controlling marketing communications and “centralizing power” within organizations (“Flexible Integration” 429). While this level represents a first step in the IMC process, it also represents an early 1990s definition of IMC – an “inside out” approach where marketers focus on the control of coordinated messages through centralized internal planning. At the same time, literature shows that most organizations that profess to practice IMC do so at this level.
At the second stage of integration, marketers begin to redefine the scope of marketing to move beyond traditional communication tactics as potential points of consumer contact. Echoing Fortini-Campbell’s call to define marketing beyond traditional communication tactics, this second stage of IMC involves viewing an organization from the consumer’s perspective so that an organization can assess how various consumer contact points might enhance or detract from a brand experience. Razeghi and Calder suggest that IMC’s “hallmark” is an understanding of how a brand concept—beyond regard for advertising and other communicative elements—is brought to life in specific consumer contact or “touchpoints” (54). These points of contact, which can influence the experience and interpretation of an organization and its products and services, might include anything from long wait times when calling a customer service line to the color of paint used in a store to a dirty restroom. Once the consumer’s perspective is integrated into an organization’s marketing practice, IMC itself becomes a much more imaginative endeavor. It is moved beyond what is traditionally considered “communication” to other elements of an organization that also carry with it a communicative impact.

Organizations that accomplish third-level integration use technology to create databases to store information about their consumers and prospects as the source for strategic and financial decision making. At this level, organizations engage in “data-driven marketing” to develop “economic and behavioral views” of their consumers (Next Generation 28-29). According to Han and Kamber, “data mining” is an unfortunate misnomer – its goal is not the simple extraction of data but rather understanding (5). Following Schultz and Schultz’s view consumer purchase, survey and longitudinal data
can be used to aid in demographic and psychographic studies to help an organization better understand and serve consumers. By collecting names, addresses and other demographic information through the use of loyalty cards, website accounts and surveys, organizations can track over time how often and when consumers buy certain products, as well as when they stop purchasing products. Further, with IMC premised on tracking consumer behavior over time and then using that data to guide decision making at the corporate level, Schultz and Schultz contend that data must focus on transactions or behavior rather than attitudes. This project, however, will argue that data should not be relied upon for consumer understanding. IMC must also acknowledge the centrality of dialogue and communication for insight into how consumers might perceive and experience an organization and its products and services.

At the fourth level of integration, a consumer-centric approach to business becomes infused throughout the entire organization. When full integration is achieved, Schultz and Schultz indicate that an organization will show competencies in all four levels (“Transitioning”). Management instills a “culture of marketing”—that marketing is everyone’s job” within everyone within the firm (Kliatchko, “Revised Definition” 144). Moreover, this culture of marketing becomes solidified in the way that an organization is structured and arranged to do business. In other words, “IMC is about moving marketing out of a department and into the fabric of an organization” (Laurie and Mortimer 1464). That is, the organization’s functional units are arranged around customer groups and integrated to deliver and satisfy consumer needs. At this level, “consumer centrism” is not empty jargon. Senior management views a deep understanding of its consumers, long-term relationships and the role of marketing
communication as an investment that can generate long-term business results. Organizational and financial objectives are focused on and begin with consumer behavior that serves as the basis for marketing programs accountable for business results.

**Apple.** Schultz and Schultz’s four-level integration framework raises the question: What organizations have achieved what pioneering IMC theorists would deem full integration? In the 2015 CMO (chief marketing officer) Survey of 288 marketing professionals from the Fortune 1000, Forbes 200, American Marketing Association, as well as academia, Apple Inc. was named as the company that sets the standard for marketing across all industries (“2015 CMO Survey”). In a *Forbes* interview with John Ellett, IMC pioneer Don Schultz cites Apple as an exemplar for its practice of IMC. Schultz suggests that Apple’s focus on the consumer starts in the store and then informs the organization’s strategy for resource allocation and investment at the corporate level. Schultz comments that when a consumer walks into an Apple store, the first thing asked is “What are you trying to do? What problem are you trying to solve? They start with the customer and then work from there.” Schultz explains that Apple reviews consumer feedback and data over long periods of time as a means to develop its business and marketing strategy. He criticizes organizations for failure to look at consumer behavior data longitudinally. Schultz indicates that most organizations are focused on recent activity (e.g., last quarter or last week) and that it is impossible to understand and interpret consumers’ behavior without looking at longitudinal data. In his estimation, data that extends five to ten years is better suited for determining behavior patterns and for developing strategic insights.
**Procter & Gamble.** In the same spirit, P&G, a multinational manufacturer of personal care, household cleaning, laundry detergents, prescription drugs and disposable diaper products, puts the consumer at the center of its business. This consumer-focused shift occurred in the early 2000s when A.G. Lafley became CEO. At that point, P&G’s mission was to “meaningfully improve the everyday lives of the customers served,” yet this mission proved meaningless and difficult to enact (Lafley). Lafley contends that the organization’s employees were not truly focused on any common strategic purpose. P&G expanded its mission to include the idea that “the consumer is boss” (Lafley). This mantra became the underpinning for P&G’s approach to devising business and financial objectives based on consumer behavior. “The consumer is boss” cascaded into all parts of P&G, and employees at every level of the organization were asked to incorporate and apply the mantra to their own work in the organization’s effort to make consumers’ lives easier.

“The consumer is boss” continues to be reflected in the development of products that are meaningful to P&G’s consumers even if it necessitates changing products to accommodate cultural differences. P&G’s consumer-centric approach also includes thought-provoking marketing, better in-store experiences, and developing new ways to build social connections and directly interact with consumers (Lafley). Lafley indicates that an important shift is viewing consumers as critical sources of information and organizational direction, and then putting structures in place to be able to accommodate consumer feedback and incorporate it into business planning. Lafley states:

If we can develop better ways of learning from them—by listening to them, observing them in their daily lives, and even living with them—then our mission
is more likely to succeed. ‘The consumer is boss’ became far more than a slogan to us. It was a clear, simple, and inclusive cultural priority for both our employees and our external stakeholders, such as suppliers and retail partners (Lafley).

While both Apple and P&G serve as exemplars for full-scale IMC, scholarship demonstrates that the majority of organizations still practice IMC at a tactical level (Schultz and Schultz “Transitioning;” Kitchen and Schultz; Kerr et al.; Torp; Kliatchko “Revised Definition”). This raises the question: what are the impediments to full integration?

A Rhetorical and Philosophical Approach to IMC

While concepts of IMC continue to evolve, theorists note that part of the disparity between IMC’s scholarship and its practice and teaching is attributed to a theory base lacking academic rigor. Schultz and Patti assert that most of the early research on integration and IMC is prescriptive, “primarily reporting the ‘how’ rather than the underlying ‘what’” and that in many cases, the over-focus on application research is still true (76). Critics suggest that much of the IMC literature “underprioritizes” or neglects “fundamental theoretical problems” and instead focuses on application and prescription (Cornelissen and Lock; Torp). Further, Kliatchko argues that most IMC texts are application oriented although they claim to be based on academic research (“New Definition”). Since the 1990s, literature on IMC has offered increasing evidence of the need for theoretical grounding, yet when conceived through a humanities perspective, IMC already partakes in a rich rhetorical and philosophical tradition that more clearly illuminates the discipline’s role in fostering understanding between organization and consumer.
Rhetorical and philosophical foundations. This project asserts that IMC’s lack of a theory base is due to the focus on IMC from a social-scientific standpoint, which neglects and ignores IMC’s rhetorical and philosophical roots. The ultimate goal of IMC is rhetorical: to create meaning and dialogue between an organization and its consumers. If the heart of IMC is persuasion in the marketplace, IMC is indebted to and a product of the rhetorical tradition—a tradition dating all the way back to ancient Greece. While a toolkit approach to IMC is focused on tactics and technique, a rhetorical and philosophical approach to IMC advances the discipline as one steeped in praxis or theory-informed action. Rhetoric and philosophy of communication moves IMC away from a simplistic, channels-based practice to an approach focused on communication and the creation of meaning.

Few scholars study IMC from a rhetorical or philosophical standpoint. Those that do indicate that when situated in the realm of rhetoric and philosophy—the relationship of “lived and shared human experiences”—communicative or rhetorical acumen is no longer a peripheral concern, especially for those organizations with a public presence (Groom 146). Rhetoric concerns itself with discursive ways of communicating with an audience with the hopes of achieving audience receptiveness. A philosophical and rhetorical approach to IMC is needed because it becomes the bridge over which teachers and practitioners can move from articulating and practicing IMC as the simple coordination of marketing elements to a broader business approach that is centered on the communication and dialogic understanding of consumers and other stakeholders. A philosophical and rhetorical approach to IMC places the discipline squarely in the realm of human communication.
A literature review on IMC reveals that since its initial development, there is a lack of research that deals with explicitly rhetorical or philosophical aspects of IMC, except for a few studies. Skerlep critiques an aspect of IMC—public relations—for a lack of theoretical interest in its discursive and rhetorical dimensions. He argues for the inclusion of discursive and rhetorical dimensions to shift the dominant paradigm of public relations theory from a social sciences and practical orientation. Similar to Skerlep, Roberts suggests that public relations practices can be viewed as “exercises in rhetorical form,” which necessitate broad knowledge of human persuasion stemming from the lived experience (1). Kliatchko argues that IMC’s ethical dimensions are under-explored and examines the ethical dimensions associated with the portrayal of consumers in marketing communications (“Primacy”). He contends that when planning and implementing IMC programs, organizations must view the consumer as a “human person” instead viewing them through reified data that possesses the human person in numbers and figures. Groom argues that IMC lacks a rhetorical dimension that focuses on its impact on “human communicative exchange” and that the humanities through rhetoric provide a foundation for the integration of rhetoric and communication into IMC’s study and practice (145). Likewise, Persuit engages epideictic rhetoric to examine social media and the role of “rhetorical decorum” in steering organizations to practice ethical and effective IMC.

Rhetoric and philosophy of communication does not disregard that the social sciences provide a way to understand IMC. They do, however, reveal its limitations. Humanistic approaches to IMC can co-exist with, redeem and strengthen social-scientific practices. A humanistic approach to IMC becomes a “necessary mode of engagement”
and provides an “enlarged understanding” and alternate means through which organizations can view their consumers—not just as “profit targets” but as living, breathing people (Groom). Kliatchko addresses the importance of viewing “consumers with respect, in keeping with their dignity as persons” (“New Definition” and “Primacy”). Accordingly, humanistic approaches to IMC begin to ground terms that may be perceived as empty business jargon, such as “consumer centrism” or “consumer engagement.” Deliberate training in communication and rhetorical studies places IMC squarely in the lived human experience and teaches rhetorical acumen, interpretive sensibilities, and an ethic grounded in respect for and understanding of the other. In a marketplace marked by complexity and difference, a humanities approach to IMC provides a way to understand and engage consumers and stakeholders that advance beyond the limitations of the social sciences.

When IMC is viewed through philosophical and rhetorical perspectives, the possibilities of truly integrated experiences are improved because “knowing from within” is privileged instead of “knowing from an abstract vantage point” (Groom 150). Rhetorical and philosophical approaches to IMC invite academics and practitioners to understand the discipline through communication, which espouses the importance of how to find meaningful common ground and points of intersection based on shared lived experiences. These approaches create a needed bridge from which organizations can move from simplistic coordination of marketing tactics to the many ways in which organizations can engage consumers through dialogue to understand the shared lived experience. Rhetoric and philosophy is often ignored because these approaches are deemed outside of the traditional purview of business, and subsequently IMC. Yet,
rhetorical and philosophical approaches provide opportunity for an enlarged mentality from which students and practitioners can learn to do IMC work in a way that balances the need to create a consistent and unified message with the importance of understanding and responding to a diversity of perspectives.

**IMC as a constructive hermeneutic.** One way to understand the rhetorical and philosophical grounding of IMC is by reconceptualizing it as a philosophical or constructive hermeneutic. A constructive hermeneutic approach is most fully advanced through the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer in *Truth and Method*, but it is implicit in the work of a number of scholars since antiquity including St. Augustine, Mikhail Bakhtin, Martin Buber, Kenneth Burke, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and Emmanuel Levinas. Gadamer’s work points to how IMC (as invested in understanding and shared meaning between organization and consumer) is located in lived human practices and thus necessitates rhetorical and philosophical acumen if understanding is to be achieved.

The corpus of Gadamer’s work focuses on the nature of human understanding and how humans come to interpret and understand an object or idea. Building on Heidegger’s work, Gadamer focuses on his concept of philosophical hermeneutics. Gadamer sees Platonic dialogue and Aristotelian phronesis (or practical wisdom) as fundamental to providing a proper account for how to achieve understanding. Central to Gadamer’s project is a rejection of modernity’s attempt to found understanding on method and rules that seek to capture, possess or explain the world with a few simple precepts. Method results in reification, which can “obfuscate the human nature of communication, supplanting people with objective data” (Persuit 18). Gadamer rejects the role of method and privileges understanding as a dialogic, practical and historically
situated activity. For Gadamer, the work of philosophical hermeneutics is ontological rather than methodological, and understanding is an “event over which the interpreting subject does not ultimately preside” (Linge xi). Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics seeks to reveal the fundamental conditions that create all forms of understanding.

Philosophical hermeneutics can be applied in situations where humans encounter things that are not immediately understandable but necessitate interpretive effort (Linge xii). For Gadamer, hermeneutics lives in the spaces between people. Cissna and Anderson explain that “the between” is a region of a relationship that is a “third entity” necessitating the self and other but is “more than the sum of them” (23). In Truth and Method, Gadamer explains:

To understand what a person says is to come to an understanding about the subject matter, not to get inside another person and relive his experiences. We emphasized that experience of meaning that takes place in understanding always includes application. Now we are to note that this whole process is verbal. It is not for nothing that the special problematic of understanding and the attempt to master it as an art—the concern of hermeneutics—belongs traditionally to the sphere of grammar and rhetoric. Language is the medium in which substantive understanding and agreement take place between two people (386).

Gadamer argues that humans exist in and through language. Accordingly, humans cannot understand themselves—or their interpretive limits—unless they understand that they are uniquely situated in a culture that is mediated by language which shapes a given worldview. Gadamer explains, “Where there is understanding, there is not translation but
speech” (386). Understanding begins with conversation because no two people will come to or experience a hermeneutic situation in exactly the same way.

Understanding is not achieved simply by being able to speak but rather involves knowing the proper way to achieve understanding in the first place. Gadamer believes that understanding involves the recognition of being embedded in a tradition and in a community. He describes this as “historically effected consciousness” (391). This means that in conversation, participants cannot start from a tradition or bias-free place. Further, contrary to Enlightenment ideals, tradition and bias are not undesirable because it is impossible to extract oneself and walk above the tradition that shaped a given worldview. In conversation, tradition and bias transmit societal attitudes and values from which we learn.

Yet even in a “hermeneutical conversation” involving an interpreter, the text (or written word) and the historical moment, a conversation takes place. Gadamer suggests in hermeneutical conversation—or a situation involving an interpreter and a text—a text’s meaning is not “fixed” and “immovable” (390). Understanding a text’s meaning should not require that the interpreter try to reenact or recreate the conditions under which the text came into being. Instead, the interpreter must try to understand what the text is saying on its own terms. In the process, the interpreter’s own thoughts go into “reawakening the text’s meaning,” which Gadamer calls a “fusion of horizons” (390). The “event of understanding is productive and is the formation of a comprehensive horizon in which the limited horizons of the text and interpreter are fused into a common view of the subject matter—the meaning—with which both are concerned” (Linge xix). A fusion of horizons suggests a dynamic interplay—a conversation—among the
interpreter, the text and the philosophical background which may offer unexpected growth opportunities.

Arnett and Holba offer that Gadamer’s philosophical—or constructive—hermeneutics refers to the “unification of three coordinates – the interpreter, the text and the philosophical moment—in dialogue” (85). Arnett and Holba explain that Gadamer’s theory is centered on the idea of respect. In hermeneutical conversation, the interpreter must respect and be aware of the prejudices and biases that shape a given interpretive identity. Interpreters must respect and understand the questions and standpoints that are developed in a given historical moment. Finally, interpreters must respect what the text is saying in its own right, as texts have their own life and cannot be made to say what is desired. In Arnett and Holba’s estimation, philosophical or constructive hermeneutics provides a philosophical picture of knowledge advanced through respect in communicative and interpretive engagement (85). Further, Arnett asserts that constructive hermeneutics assumes a basic hermeneutic presupposition – people learn from difference. Learning through alterity suggests paradigmatic questioning, paradigmatic shifts and innovation (Arnett, “Humanities” 178). Constructive hermeneutics points to a rhetorical and philosophical approach to IMC that recognizes the importance of listening fearlessly, an openness to the other, and organizational vulnerability.

This project asserts that Gadamer’s constructive hermeneutics can inform a deeper understanding of how IMC can be enriched through the humanities. An argument can be made that organizations (as comprised by humans) are constantly in “hermeneutical conversation” with their consumers whether in a face-to-face or a
mediated context. Organizations, particularly those that espouse a consumer-centric perspective, must learn to “read” their consumers to guide decision making at the corporate level. Yet many organizations enter a hermeneutical conversation and hear what they want to hear, presuppose that they “know better” than their consumers or rely on data as reified communication as a proxy for human communication. The following chapters explain IMC’s rhetorical and philosophical roots and how Gadamer’s theory of constructive hermeneutics can help practitioners and academics understand, articulate and ultimately advance the practice of IMC to one that is attentive to dialogue and communicative understanding.

**IMC as Hermeneutic Conversation**

Not all approaches to IMC need be rooted in the social sciences. In fact, a humanities-based, praxis-oriented approach to IMC grounded in communication and rhetoric can strengthen predominant approaches to IMC and provide needed perspective by situating the discipline in human communication (Groom). By defining key terms related to IMC and rhetoric and philosophy of communication, this chapter provided a vocabulary from which to base this project’s exploration of how IMC can be viewed from a rhetorical and philosophical standpoint. Terms related to IMC have roots in ancient and contemporary understandings of rhetoric and philosophy of communication and point to a philosophically grounded approach to IMC that is supported in past and present literature.

One basic finding in IMC literature is that IMC is the predominant approach to marketing by leading organizations (Kitchen and Schultz 197). As a result, academic institutions are quickly retooling current advertising, public relations and marketing programs to include IMC courses, or they are adding standalone IMC degrees. Despite
its popularity, however, most literature asserts that what is being practiced in the marketplace and taught in academia is a very elementary approach to IMC that involves the coordination of marketing elements. This represents an “inside-out” or outbound form of marketing not representative of two-way symmetrical communication. Moreover, this managerial approach to IMC does not reflect the vision for the discipline set forth by leading theorists.

Reviews of IMC practices and scholarship imply that integration is generally practiced by an organization at one of four levels and that there is a gap between tactical coordination of marketing elements and full integration at the strategic level. Scholars point to a lack of understanding about what IMC is and many argue that this disparity stems from an agreed upon definition of IMC and a theory base from which to draw its practices. This project instead argues that the inability to achieve the idea of full integration rests in the lack of scholarship that articulates and claims IMC’s rhetorical and theoretical roots. IMC is a discipline rooted in hermeneutics. The inability to achieve full integration is a communicative issue, which necessitates an attentiveness to dialogue and understanding. Although a social scientific approach provides a framework for conceptualizing IMC, the social sciences present serious limitations to the study, teaching and practice of the discipline. The success or failure of an organization’s IMC efforts seem to hinge on an understanding of IMC as human communication and as a constructive hermeneutic. While the study of IMC seems to tend toward the empirical and methodological, the examination and implications of understanding consumers demands a communicative approach. A rhetorical and communicative perspective on IMC focuses on how meaning is made between organization and consumer with IMC as a
dialogic manifestation necessary to address and adapt to today’s marketplace complexities.

This project asks why IMC has not advanced beyond tactical practices and if the discipline needs to be conceived differently. Gadamer offers a stronger theory for how organizations can better understand consumers and stakeholders as “creative receivers” (Christensen et al., “New Tensions” 213). Gadamer’s opposition to method suggests in part the limitations of a social scientific approach to IMC and that an over-reliance on method and data results not in communion but alienation. IMC literature shows that few organizations move past Schultz and Schultz’s second level of integration. Recalling that the third level of integration is driven by information technologies and reified data, Gadamer helps to establish that this level of integration exemplifies a significant “hermeneutic hurdle” that few organizations surpass. Gadamer reminds us that IMC is not an instrument—it is an ongoing and shared conversation between people.

The proceeding chapters will unfold as follows. Chapter two, *IMC: Rhetorical and Philosophical Roots and Emergence as a Discipline*, will situate IMC within the field of rhetoric and philosophy of communication by first reviewing precepts of persuasion through the work of Aristotle, Kenneth Burke and Gerard Hauser, as well as historical hermeneutic approaches, including those of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey and Martin Heidegger, which lead into a discussion about Gadamer’s constructive hermeneutics. Second, this chapter will review critical shifts that led to IMC’s development, including shifts in communication technologies explained through the work of Marshall McLuhan and Walter Ong, in addition to the evolution of the marketplace and marketing through major historical periods.
Chapter three, *Directions and Approaches*, will identify current practices in the marketplace and in academic instruction through Schultz and Schultz’s four-level IMC framework. IMC’s academic treatment will be discussed through the work of Gayle Kerr, a leading IMC education researcher, to further elucidate the reality and challenges presented in the way that IMC is taught to emergent practitioners. IMC’s rhetorical and philosophical treatment will be identified based on its predominant global practice.

Chapter four, *Critical Voices*, will identify principal critiques of IMC and arguments against the discipline. Among the critiques to be examined: IMC’s lack of an academically rigorous theory base; IMC’s lack of a universally agreed upon definition; Joep Cornelissen and Andrew Lock’s critique that IMC is not new, that IMC simply a rhetorical device used to gain consensus in an organization and that IMC is a management fad; public relations theorist and practitioner critiques that IMC must be broadened to account for all stakeholders; and Lars Thøger Christensen’s project, which critiques IMC for ignoring the message receiver. Christensen’s project also asserts that IMC is a “significant ideal” that must be reconceived to be more flexible so that organizations can more nimbly detect and respond to marketplace complexities (“Flexible Integration” 425). Christensen’s project will provide a springboard for the communicative and rhetorical approach to IMC addressed in chapter five.

Chapter five, *Toward a Rhetoric and Philosophy of IMC*, will bring together all of the metaphors discussed throughout this project to discuss a humanities approach to IMC through the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer—a theorist who is not typically cited in IMC literature but who informs a dialogic understanding of the discipline as rooted in human communication. Five praxis-oriented principles developed from this project will illustrate
a humanities-approach to IMC, which views the discipline as foremost a discovery and understanding, committed to an other-orientation, predicated on constructive interpretation, engaged in creative dialogue, and inclusive of all of an organization’s stakeholders. This final chapter will show how rhetoric and philosophy moves IMC beyond the limits of the social sciences to help practitioners and academics more clearly understand, articulate and achieve its full potential.
Chapter Two:

IMC: Rhetorical and Philosophical Roots and Emergence as a Discipline

IMC was developed in the late 1980s by Northwestern University’s Medill School of Journalism to address significant economic growth and developmental changes taking place in the marketplace at that time. Schultz and Schultz contend that the marketplace pressures in the mid-1980s that propelled IMC’s development include three shifts: the development and diffusion of new communication technologies that affected the entire business spectrum; an increased emphasis on branding as a means of competitive differentiation; and an increased focus on multinationalization and globalization, which began to make it difficult for organizations to establish a consistent and coherent image in the minds of their various stakeholders when crossing traditional geographic boundaries (Next Generation 9). As a result, organizations began to see it as beneficial to use an integrated approach to more effectively reach their consumers and accomplish business objectives. However, the forces that precipitated IMC began well before marketplace changes in the 1980s. Its theoretical and practical questions are the result of a long lineage of shifts in rhetorical and communicative thought that can be traced back to ancient times. To put IMC’s emergence, practice and contemporary issues into proper context, this chapter will provide a rhetorical and philosophical perspective explaining how IMC is a humanistic engagement meant to arrive at understanding against a multiplicity of interpretations of a given organization and its products and services.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section, Situating IMC in the Rhetorical and Philosophical Tradition, provides historical and theoretical thought that examines IMC through the alternate standpoint of rhetoric and philosophy. IMC is first
explored as a rhetorical experience through the work of three theorists Aristotle, Kenneth Burke and Gerard Hauser, whose thought enhances an understanding of IMC as rhetorical. IMC is next examined through philosophy of communication as a fundamentally interpretive engagement through the hermeneutic theory of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger and Hans Georg-Gadamer. This section suggests that the purpose of IMC is not to persuade but rather to foster understanding. The second section, *Shifts that Propelled the Emergence of IMC*, details the historical forces the prompted the development of and need for IMC. This section explores three shifts but with more theoretical and philosophical texture than is traditionally offered in IMC literature. First, it details the evolution of human communication technologies using the work of Marshall McLuhan as a starting point; second, it explains the importance of branding as a competitive differentiator and details changes in the way that goods are brought to market throughout history; and finally, it examines the advent of globalization and multinationalization and the implications for marketers. The final section, *The Communicative Significance of IMC*, brings together conclusions from each section to solidify IMC’s place within the rhetorical and philosophical tradition and explain why IMC was developed.

This significance of this chapter for the greater project is in the way that classical and contemporary rhetorical and communicative thought offers an alternate way to understand and strengthen the scholarship, practice and teaching of IMC. With organizations now playing the role of key societal figures, it is necessary to understand what it means to “be a good organization communicating well” and how effective communication occurs between an organization and its consumers and other stakeholders.
While a humanities-based approach to IMC is often disregarded because it is grounded on qualitative research lacking empirical data, Persuit maintains that a “humanistic, interpretive, rhetorical approach” to IMC is a much more robust way to view and advance the field (25). The humanities attend to IMC’s communicative impact and view the practice as “human beings in dialogue,” as situated in lived practices, and mindful of the historical moment (25-26). Further, with the “increasingly complex dynamics” of today’s marketplace, Groom contends a humanities-based approach to IMC is necessary if the discipline is to advance at all, and that the humanities—grounded in rhetoric and communication—should be IMC’s rightful “philosophical and physical academic home” (145). Finally, Lars Thøger Christensen’s project, in concert with Firat, Cornelissen and Torp suggest IMC’s scholarship and practice requires an understanding of the “creative receiver” instead of viewing the people who comprise an organization’s stakeholder groups as passive message recipients (“New Tensions” 213). In their view, an organization’s consumers and other stakeholders may hold a multiplicity of potentially conflicting interpretations about a given organization based on their own lived experiences, which points to necessity of dialogue in IMC. This criticism will be explored in the remaining chapters of this work. This chapter, however, builds on the work of theorists who are working to advance IMC through rhetorical and philosophical perspectives with the goal of providing needed theory and academic rigor from which to strengthen IMC scholarship, teaching and practice.
Situating IMC in the Rhetorical and Philosophical Tradition

This project views IMC as a deeply rhetorical and philosophical encounter and a discipline organized around questions of persuasion, perception and meaning that demand attentiveness to the other. Rhetoric and philosophy of communication offer a more sophisticated way to explore these questions. While rhetoric and philosophy of communication can be seen as two separate areas of inquiry, they also are related under the broader discipline of human communication. From antiquity to present, rhetoric has focused on the way that people engage others through the exchange of symbols, especially the symbol system of language, to accomplish a goal (Hauser, Rhetorical Theory 3). From the perspective of IMC, rhetoric offers a way to understand how language brings people together to accomplish a goal. Philosophy of communication (or a philosophical approach to human communication) is a relatively new horizon for inquiry, yet its questions are implicit in the work of philosophers dating back to antiquity. According to Butchart, philosophy of communication represents an effort to think philosophically about topics that are fundamental to the meaning of being human, including questions of language, media, consciousness, difference and ethics (Hines). From the perspective of IMC, philosophy of communication offers a way to view the discipline as an interpretive engagement meant to arrive at understanding. Taken together, rhetoric and philosophy of communication comprise a broad discipline that considers philosophical thought throughout human history regarding the way that humans communicate in and through difference to create, negotiate and interpret meaning with others.
Rhetoric. Rhetorical scholar Gerard Hauser asserts that from antiquity to present, rhetoric concerns itself with the use of “language and symbols to coordinate social action” (*Rhetorical Theory* 2). Organizations rely on planned, persuasive and audience-adapted communication to engage consumers and accomplish their business objectives. Viewed through a rhetorical lens, IMC represents the convergence of the organization (or rhetor), the organization’s messages to be conveyed (or text) and the organization’s stakeholders (or audience). An organization’s practitioners must understand how to communicate and craft messages and understand the meaning they engender. As such, IMC practitioners are rhetorical practitioners—they focus on stimulating cooperation between an organization and its publics through language. Without realizing it, IMC practitioners engage in rhetorical action every day, yet given a lack of rhetorical training, they often fail to characterize their endeavors as specifically rhetorical. Rhetoric, however, offers a way for teachers and practitioners to better understand the opportunities and limits of IMC as a shared and interpreted endeavor, and it provides a way for practitioners and teachers to more fully articulate and understand IMC as both persuasive and discursive.

Rhetoric is traditionally associated with persuasion in and through language because written and spoken words create a system of symbols that humans rely on to communicate, share and make meaning with others. While the roots of rhetoric can be traced back to political, legal and celebratory speech making in ancient Greece, what is now considered rhetoric can include any spoken or written form of literary and nonliterary discourse (Donaworth qtd in Herrick 5), including organizational discourse, such as IMC. Heath emphasizes the close connection between public relations and
classical rhetoric, given that organizations now play a significant role in society in contrast with individuals in ancient times (18). Rhetorical discourse is often identified by six distinguishing characteristics, which include messages that are planned, adapted to an audience, shaped by human motives, responsive to a situation, persuasion-seeking and concerned with contingent issues (Herrick 8). Not all rhetorical discourse will satisfy all criteria; however, the criteria do emphasize IMC as rhetorical given that the discipline often focuses on the intentional, persuasive and purposeful communication to understand attitudes and influence opinion in the marketing of an organization’s products and services.

While rhetoric is often viewed pejoratively for distortion and manipulation, the rhetorical legacy believes communicators and practitioners cannot be effective unless they are good listeners who consider and respect what others think and also want to understand why their audiences hold the beliefs that they do (Heath 19). In his essay, The Rhetorical Tradition: Wrangle in the Marketplace, public relations scholar Robert L. Heath suggests that communication in the rhetorical tradition does not mean that one person or organization is able to place messages and their intended meaning into the minds other people. Rather, meaning comprises the “constitutive and attributive” interpretations that one person makes of another person’s statements and actions (Heath 20). As such, Heath contends that public relations—and by extension IMC—practitioners are in the “message and meaning business” (20). This means that practitioners must be other oriented (19). For this reason, a rhetorical perspective is crucial for the advancement of IMC’s scholarship, teaching and practice.
Three theorists who enrich an understanding of IMC as inherently rhetorical include Aristotle, Kenneth Burke and Gerard Hauser. Aristotle’s treatise on rhetoric illustrates how organizational discourse helps people make decisions on questions of value or preference that demand immediate action in everyday life. Burke’s focus on rhetoric as symbolic action explains how organizations and people can work with language to create common ground, invite participation and shape a given worldview, all of which can foster social coordination. Finally, Hauser’s view of rhetoric as colloquial speech offers how ordinary people engage in vernacular discourse to form publics around issues important to them. Collectively, Aristotle, Burke and Hauser’s work underscore the ways that IMC is fundamentally rhetorical. That is, organizations use language and symbols to “induce social cooperation thereby constituting a given ‘social reality’” or to create shared meaning (Hauser 3). Within each theorist’s work are important considerations for how IMC (if it is to be successful) should be understood as humans in discursive communication versus what are often quantitative, social scientific approaches involving reified communication.

* Aristotelian: *Rhetoric as public discourse.* Aristotle provides a useful starting point for understanding rhetoric and offers a way to understand IMC’s rhetorical underpinnings. His rhetorical theory has influenced much of what is studied as rhetoric today. Aristotle defines rhetoric as the “faculty of discovering in any given case the available means of persuasion” (24). He focuses on the importance of public discourse, as he believed that discourse benefits the good of society. In Aristotle’s view, rhetoric is “strategically functional” because it provides the means through which people can solve problems with others who may hold differing opinions of a given subject (Heath 26).
Organizational rhetoric is fundamentally dialogic with different people advocating for different ideas, opinions and points of view. Aristotle viewed the public element of discourse as fundamental to determining the strongest, best and most ethical ideas because ideas—and what counts as knowledge or opinion—debated in public are subject to intense scrutiny where they must be defended.

In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle attempts to codify and put into systematic order how information shapes knowledge, as well as how people are persuaded to action. Aristotle believes that most of the things that we have to make decisions about—whether a policy, a political vote or even a product purchase—lack certainty and ask us to make a choice given a range of alternate possibilities (*Rhetoric* 25). Aristotle claims that rhetoric is useful for a number of reasons relevant to IMC: *good ideas need advocacy* by rhetorically skilled practitioners; practitioners need to know how to *adapt their ideas to an audience*; and practitioners need to *understand how to see the pros and cons of an issue* in making a decision involving uncertain outcomes (Herrick 81-82). For Aristotle, rhetoric is ethical (and not manipulative or deceitful), as it is inherently other-oriented, meant to uncover truths and contribute to the good of society. Moreover, Aristotle believes that rhetorical acumen is useful for everyone—not just the privileged few or professional communicators—because clear and persuasive communication is essential in shaping the kind of decisions made in everyday life in matters both large and small. This suggests that rhetorical competence is not only useful for IMC practitioners but for ordinary people.

Aristotle believes that human thought—and what we come to accept as knowledge (versus opinion)—follows three paths: scientific demonstration, dialectic and
rhetoric (Bizzell and Herzberg 144). For Aristotle, only scientific demonstration produces what he deems enduring truths or certain knowledge. However, Aristotle also recognizes that absolute certainty is not always possible or available, especially when decisions must be made on contingent or uncertain issues. This is where dialectic (or the establishment of probable knowledge through reasoned arguments) and the power of language are needed. From the perspective of IMC, rhetoric plays a dual role in gaining consensus in contingent matters (e.g., building trust or helping consumers make decisions). Practitioners employ rhetorical principles when they educate non-experts or everyday people who are uninformed about an issue (or consumers) to persuade them to make decisions that involve value or preference (Bizzell and Herzberg 145). Rhetoric also can convey the results of dialectic (the results of an already reasoned argument) to persuade those who are uninformed to aid in their decision making. Rhetoric is a useful mode of thought and questioning for both practitioner and consumer, particularly in matters where absolute certainty is not available.

Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* provides a taxonomic system for effective public discourse. Upon reviewing elements of Aristotle’s rhetorical theory, the close kinship between rhetoric and IMC is clear, as organizations work to gain understanding and consensus with their many audiences. His rhetorical system is organized around the enthymeme often called a rhetorical syllogism. Aristotle believes that anything that is rhetorical or persuasive operates around the enthymeme (Herrick 83). This three-part deductive argument, also a central element of the marketing mix, moves an audience from a general premise or idea, through a minor premise (particulars that support that idea) to a given conclusion. In the case of the enthymeme, however, one of the premises is unstated and
implied, which underscores the imperative of audience adaptation and understanding. Aristotle indicates that when we try to influence others, parts of a premise are often unstated because they are generally understood as accepted knowledge by both speaker and audience or, in this case, organization and stakeholder (*Rhetoric* 28). Underscoring the way that rhetoric creates shared meaning, we see that rhetoric suggests that an organization must understand its audiences if they are to be persuaded. Like language, enthymemes are effective only when the message recipient knows and understands what is unstated and implied.

A contemporary example of an enthymeme involving IMC can be seen in the tagline for Wheaties cereal—“Wheaties: Breakfast of Champions.” The Wheaties brand focuses on the idea that stellar athletes eat Wheaties for breakfast. Accordingly, the major premise is that champion athletes eat Wheaties for breakfast; the minor premise suggests that everyone wants to be a champion in some aspect of their life; and the conclusion is that by eating Wheaties for breakfast, people can be champions. The minor premise is suppressed and seems to place the onus on the audience to arrive at the desired conclusion, which in this case is positive perception and product purchase. With IMC as rhetorical, and the enthymeme as the heart of rhetoric, how can arguments involving omitted premises be effective? Organizations must know and understand their audiences’ points of view and why they hold those points of view. An enthymeme underscores the shared and communal nature of rhetoric and that “enthymemes are arguments that obligate the rhetor to consider the beliefs, values and experiences of an audience” when trying to persuade (Herrick 84). Much like fully integrated IMC is organized around the
consumer, the enthymeme emphasizes that consumers’ attitudes, values and beliefs are central to and cannot be ignored if a rhetorical engagement—or IMC—is to be effective.

Beyond understanding the centrality of the enthymeme to rhetorical discourse, Aristotle delineates three contexts in which discourse takes place: deliberative, epideictic and forensic situations. Each context is directly relevant to IMC. For any discursive act to be persuasive, Aristotle believed that the setting—and the kind of issues handled in that setting—must be considered and understood. An understanding of the rhetorical context is necessary for persuasion to take place. First, deliberative or legislative rhetoric is forward-looking and focuses on the best or most advantageous approach to be taken when deciding a policy or what should be done in a given situation (Corbett xiv). IMC persuades consumers to make a decision about a future purchase or investment, given the range of product and service choices available. Aristotle views eudaimonia, or human well-being, as central to questions of deliberate speech, which focuses on actions that contribute to the good of society. Second, epideictic rhetoric praises a person being honored or blames someone for bad actions and is organized around virtue and vice (Corbett xiv). Epideictic rhetoric is frequently used in advertising and marketing to reinforce important values or to encourage people to uphold important virtues. IMC aids in the celebration, reinforcement or maintenance of consumers’ beliefs. Finally, forensic rhetoric looks to the past and is concerned with justice rather than forward-looking policy (Corbett xiii). IMC practitioners might engage in judicial rhetoric as a means to judge or blame the competition as a way to influence opinion, again to purchase products and services. The primary concern of judicial rhetoric is to build a case for a decision that could be considered either warranted or unjustifiable.
Beyond understanding the rhetorical context, Aristotle suggests that speakers must turn three kinds of proof (or sources of persuasion) when engaging in deliberative, epideictic or judicial rhetoric. This “tripartite division” of rhetorical appeals, consisting of ethos, pathos and logos, likely represents Aristotle’s most enduring and influential contribution to rhetoric because these sources of persuasion have been discussed by “virtually all subsequent rhetoricians” (Corbett xvi). These sources of persuasive possibilities are also relevant to IMC today, as they provide practitioners resources for motivating consumers and other stakeholders in various rhetoric contexts.

First, ethos, refers to character, credibility or believability, which develops from what rhetors convey in rhetorical engagement and is comprised of phronesis or practical wisdom, eunoia or goodwill, and arête or virtue (Aristotle, Rhetoric 91). Appeals to ethos include an organization’s use of corporate social responsibility programming, community relations programming, working with an expert or celebrity spokesperson, and consumer testimonials to bring added credibility to an organization, its products or its services. Second, pathos refers to human emotion, and although Aristotle criticizes the manipulation of emotion, he recognizes the importance of putting the audience in the “right frame of mind” (Rhetoric 89). For Aristotle, the “right frame of mind” reflects a “moral concern” on rhetor’s part to help the audience arrive at a correct judgement (Herrick 88). Appeals to pathos involve an organization stirring emotion to persuade consumer behavior. Emotional appeals can be positive (by playing on happiness, love, desire or affection) or negative (by playing on sadness, worry, jealously or hatred). Finally, logos refers to the words, arguments or logic of a rhetorical act and reflects the reasoning about facts used in practical decision making. Logic and reason can be
conveyed through the use of statistics, scientific evidence, historical data and the use of studies and survey results. Taken together, Aristotle indicates that rhetors must understand the elements of good character, human emotion and logical arguments when engaging an audience’s values on questions of public significance.

Aristotle offers a view of rhetoric as discursive, he elucidates how organizations can be more effective rhetors when communicating, and he explains how organizations can better understand and evaluate persuasive communication involving their audiences. As organizations work to advance their reputations, policies, products and services to their consumers, they engage in the process of public advocacy, which points to the ideal of dialogic, two-way symmetrical communication fundamental to public relations – and by extension IMC. In building relationships and exchanging ideas with audiences, communicative exchange allows each side to contest and debate ideas, attitudes and beliefs that can foster more collaborative decision making, which should result in decision making in the public interest. Aristotle offers a view and system of rhetoric that is fundamentally discursive and other-oriented, which suggests that if organizations are to be successful and act in the public interest, they should want to know and understand the perceptions, attitudes and beliefs of their various audiences. Aristotle, however, is not the only theorist who informs an understanding of IMC as rhetorical. Kenneth Burke also helps us understand rhetoric in a social context.

**Burke: Rhetoric as identification and invitation.** Burke’s rhetorical theory offers a way to understand IMC as rhetorical through the metaphors of what Heath identifies as “identification” and “invitation” (37). For Burke, language is a symbol system—
comprised of both explicit and inconspicuous acts—that has the capacity to bring people together or push them apart. As such, Burke examines the way that language and discourse might influence the way that humans view their world and the subsequent way in which they act—or choose not to act—together. Burke recognizes the importance of Aristotle’s concept of rhetoric as persuasion but advances an understanding of rhetoric beyond acts which are overtly suasive, planned and purposeful. Burke’s rhetorical theory accounts for the way that routine and unobtrusive acts might cause humans to find common ground and invite them to act together. Leon Mayhew argues that for Burke, rhetoric provides a way for people to find “meaning and value in social activity … and integrates culture and eloquence by providing life-enhancing vocabularies for social participation” (35). Rhetoric provides the linguistic, symbolic means for people to participate and engage in public life together.

In A Rhetoric of Motives, Burke defines rhetoric as “the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents” (41). Burke views humans as “symbol-using animals” and examines the ways language provides a given vocabulary, creates meaning and influences a given worldview (Symbolic Action 3). He offers an understanding of rhetoric that is not “artistic” but rather focuses on how humans exist in and work with “symbol systems” to “build up their ideas, concepts, and images of identity and community” (Counterstatement 219 and Symbolic Action 2). Burke’s view of rhetoric is “bound up in communities, communal ideas, social relations, religion, magic and psychological effects” (Bizzell and Herzberg 991). Burke accounts for the way that language is used in everyday social contexts by examining how discourse impacts the shaping of a given reality and the subsequent way in which humans choose to
engage in the world. His theories are directly relevant to IMC, as IMC practitioners work to help people make sense of an organization by finding common ground or to induce cooperation between an organization and its publics.

Burke offers a way for IMC practitioners to understand the invitational nature of rhetoric as the starting point for the development of campaigns, as well as routine engagement with consumers. In his article, “Implications of the Practice and Study of Kenneth Burke’s Idea of a Public Relations Counsel with a Heart,” Peter Smudde details the ways that Burke’s work connects to public relations practice—and by extension IMC. He contends that Burke’s humanist theories bridge public relations’ rhetorical dimensions and “social consciousness,” which avails practitioners of a perspective that seems to be lacking in PR (430). Much like an IMC practitioner, Smudde contends that the work of a public relations professional involves the production of symbols meant to invite and inspire action among its publics (431). “They [communication professionals], much more than others in the organization, tell various publics ‘what the organization is.’ They share identity, manage issues and powerfully locate the organization in the world of public discourse” (Cheney & Dionisopolous 139 qtd in Smudde 431). Words and their definitions have the power to inspire and influence a different view of the world—a view that can invite or deny participation and social cooperation.

As such, two concepts are essential to Burke’s invitational understanding of rhetoric: “identification” and “terministic screens.” Burke contends that “identification” or identifying with other people is fundamental to being human and to human communication (Rhetoric 19). For Burke, the human need to identify with other people begins with “division” (22). This means that because we are born as biologically
separate beings, we need to identify, through communication, to overcome our separateness (22). To overcome this separateness or division, we look for ways that our interests, attitudes, values, experiences, perceptions, and material properties align with others, or appear to have the potential to be aligned (Quigley). Burke stresses the role and influence of language and words in creating identification and inviting social coordination. As a concept, identification has three elements, which include the process of naming something according to specific properties to make the object familiar; the process of associating with and disassociating from others—suggesting that persons (and ideas or things) share (or do not share) important qualities in common; and the end result of identifying is being consubstantial with others (Quigley). Consubstantiality then leads to invitation and “social cohesion” (*Rhetoric* 44). Consubstantiality occurs when individuals convince others or themselves that they share important qualities and they choose to act together.

Burke’s view of rhetoric as identification is significant for IMC. Given that an organization and its various stakeholders begin with division, organizations work to establish common ground through communication when marketing products and services. Points of intersection—whether attitudes, values, experiences or product and service benefits—must be identified by an organization to more clearly and compellingly establish common ground with potential consumers. Consubstantiality, the end result of Burkeian identification, is achieved when consumers are sufficiently convinced that a product or service has enough important qualities to merit purchase. Bizzell and Herzberg indicate that for Burke, language “used to create identification works to include members of a group in a common ideology, while at the same time excluding alternate
terms, other groups, and competing ideologies” (990). IMC creates identification through publicity, advertising and other forms of organizational discourse that aid in informing consumers so they can evaluate, choose and pursue a given option. Burke’s concept of terministic screens deepens an understanding of the invitational nature of rhetoric and how the language used in creating identification can bring people together or push them apart.

Rhetoric depends on shared meaning and shared views of reality, which centers on definitions of meaning. Burke develops the idea of “terministic screens” to describe the way that language and words “reflect,” “select” and “deflect” reality (Symbolic Action 45). The language we use and the language organizations use represent a given reality, world, culture, and belief—even without intention. As such, words are terministic screens, which suggest that people draw from their own world in choosing words or a given vocabulary when they communicate with others. Terministic screens represent the perspective through which a given person views the world based on the terms that person uses or encounters. That is, individuals interpret messages through a view or screen of their own vocabulary that represents their perspective of world. Their observations are implied in the terms used, and this helps to explain why people interpret the same message differently. In Burke’s view, every person enters a communicative engagement with a different terministic screen based on their own experience.

Rhetoric and IMC work to “create, change, abandon and enact various perspectives and the shared terministic screens” that enable cooperation and dissent and influence choice (Heath 40). According to Burke, “We must use terministic screens, since we can’t say anything without the use of terms; whatever terms we use, they
necessarily constitute a corresponding kind of screen; and any such screen necessarily directs the attention to one field rather than another” (Symbolic Action 50). Taken from the perspective of IMC, Burke’s concept of terministic screens, however, helps marketers more fully understand why identification occurs in some cases but not in others. While a group of consumers might be comprised of enough people that share similar characteristics, the reality is that consumers approach the world through different terministic screens—or perspectives. Before reaching the point of developing tactical marketing campaigns, organizations must invest time into understanding the varying backgrounds, attitudes, values and beliefs of their consumers. When organizations understand enough about consumers’ terministic screens, they are able to devise marketing campaigns that create identification. Moreover, Burke’s concept of the terministic screen also suggests that organizations work through their own terministic screens that reflect, select and deflect a given reality. Marketing campaigns create terministic screens meant to reflect a given reality, help consumers select a given product or service, while also deflecting competitive efforts.

In summary, Burke’s rhetorical theory offers critical insights into the invitational character of IMC. Through his concept of identification, we gain a theoretical way to view practical action—that organizations communicatively strive to invite and inspire social cooperation with their many stakeholders. Burke’s concept of terministic screens adds depth and texture to the way that language reflects, selects and deflects a given worldview – both on the part of an organization and its audiences. Taken together, both concepts illustrate that if IMC is to benefit an organization, practitioners must allow for dialogue that invites their stakeholders to share their varying—and changing—attitudes.
and beliefs. A commitment to dialogue and communication can help organizations more fully understand who their many stakeholders are and how they interact to shape and contest each other’s views. Hauser’s rhetorical theory helps to more fully explain this phenomenon.

**Hauser: Rhetoric as reticulate and vernacular.** Hauser examines rhetoric’s role in shaping publics, public spheres, and public opinions, as well as how everyday people interact to influence “a discursive expression of civic judgement that reflects a common understanding among members of a public” (Vernacular Voices 61). He defines rhetoric broadly as the symbolic inducement of social cooperation as an inevitable consequence of language (Rhetorical Theory 14). Similar to Burke, for Hauser, rhetoric is not just “suasive” speech. It is a mode of thinking about—or a philosophy of—communication, especially in its “heuristic concerns for invention” (Vernacular Voices 33). This suggests that rhetoric and discourse can be a trial-and-error approach that allows us to learn for ourselves in discussion with others. Hauser indicates that we cannot truly understand ourselves, our collective self or others unless we understand the extent to which we are shaped by communicative exchange with others (36). Rhetoric can provide clues and paint a portrait that allows us to learn something for ourselves and about ourselves. Like Aristotle, Hauser views rhetoric as discursive with discourse as rhetoric’s defining characteristic.

Two concepts are central to Hauser’s view of rhetoric: discourse is reticulate and vernacular. In Vernacular Voices: The Rhetoric of Publics and Public Spheres, Hauser explores how publics form and communicate their ideas. Hauser defines a public as a cluster of interconnected individuals who may have different opinions about a common
problem and seek to solve or influence its outcome through discourse (32). Hauser rejects the idea that people can be viewed as one discrete, identifiable group with attitudes and beliefs that endure over time. Instead, he encourages a view of society as comprised of many different publics that form the “reticulate” or networks where participants engage and intersect in “webs of meaning and commitment that arise through discourse” (*Vernacular Voices* xi). According to this view, the broad public represents a space comprised of “multiple spheres” populated by individuals who engage in conversation to “discover their interests, where they converge or differ, and how their differences might be accommodated” (56). In his view, in a “pluralistic” society, people may be part of multiple or many “discursive arenas” where they engage in conversations that may intersect with each other and begin new dialogues (67). As such, rhetoric is not confined to institutions or formal occasions. Hauser believes that rhetoric includes “everyday interactions, cultural artifacts, local events, demonstrations,” among other acts that provide information and evidence about what everyday people think and why they might hold those views (*Rhetorical Theory* 95). Hauser offers that people often focus on what is important based on their lived experience, that their points of view on a given subject will vary and that not all points of view are critical.

For Hauser, discourse in the reticulate public sphere is “vernacular” because people often address each other not through formal, institutional discourse or institutional forums but through everyday dialogue and interaction that reflects the language and style of a given community. This vernacular dialogue then influences how public opinion is formed. Vernacular rhetoric also suggests that the “rhetorical acts” that occur in a given environment reflect a given reality, ideas and attitudes (*Vernacular Voices* 81).
Understanding how vernacular language can open up “inventional spaces” is imperative for organizations, as they rely on and must work with various stakeholders (33). As such, “rhetorical competence” is a necessity when questioning or contesting another’s ideas or opinions (33). When people engage in dialogue, they must actively question each other to better understand a view and perspective that might not be their own. Rhetoric’s inventional character leads not only to a better understanding of the other, but to a better understanding of the self and the choices that made at a political, cultural and social level.

Hauser’s work is primarily focused on political discourse. However, his work directly informs a rhetorical understanding of IMC because organizations can benefit from the idea that while discourse can persuade points of view, it is also critical to understand the language of a given discourse in the first place. People have different worldviews, and those worldviews are often constituted in and through vernacular rhetoric. Organizations must take the time to understand not only the world in which their stakeholders live, but also the language they use to communicate. Hauser asserts that, “We belong to a community insofar as we are able to participate in its conversations. We must acquire its vernacular language in order to share rhetorically salient meanings” (67). Learning and appropriately using vernacular language may help an organization achieve a clearer understanding of a given public.

At the same time, understanding that the public sphere is reticulate—that is comprised of many nested publics which intersect and converge around various issues—is especially timely in an age where people often communicate through social technologies to influence an organization’s policies, products or services. Hauser offers the important notion that for organizations to effectively engage in the reticulate public
sphere, they must have rhetorical competence, including “interpretation, understanding and flexibility” (Persuit 89). In a time where social networking technologies are a pathway for various stakeholders to communicate with organizations in a given parlance, Hauser’s view of rhetoric as reticulate and vernacular advances yields a more sophisticated understanding of IMC at both theoretical and practical levels.

Taken together, Aristotle’s emphasis on rhetoric to achieve discursive understanding; Burke’s view of rhetoric as fostering identification and invitation; and Hauser’s view of rhetoric as vernacular, resulting in the creation of multiple spheres of influence, underscore the fundamental necessity of dialogue between an organization and its stakeholders to foster understanding and mutually beneficial relationships. Organizations and their IMC practitioners must move away from a philosophy that seeks to control the perception that stakeholders have of an organization and presume that people are passive message recipients. Instead the rhetorical heritage, through the work of theorists like Aristotle, Burke and Hauser, calls organizations to be sensitive to the attitudes, values and beliefs of their many audiences and to understand how these audiences came to those beliefs into the first place. In other words, dialogue is a fundamental necessity if communicative understanding is to be achieved. Organizations must communicate to understand the views of their stakeholders, and they must understand those stakeholders if they are to effectively communicate. The necessity of dialogue in IMC, however, raises a fundamental philosophical question: how do humans come to understand? The following section explores the interpretive dimensions of IMC through a discussion of the philosophy of communication and constructive hermeneutics.
**Philosophy of communication.** As an area of inquiry, philosophy of communication considers the field of communication more broadly than rhetoric. Philosophy of communication represents mode of communication centered on understanding how humans negotiate and create meaning, and it is organized around the presupposition that we learn through difference (Arnett, “Philosophy” 57). As such, philosophy of communication asks us to recognize our own interpretive limits—the bias, prejudice or set of assumptions that we bring to a communicative and interpretive engagement (Arnett, “Philosophy”). We then must think about the specific element and context surrounding a given communicative moment—the “particulars contingent on a particular situation, a particular moment, and a particular contribution to public opinion,” as well as the fluidity of meaning (58). From the perspective of IMC, philosophy of communication helps scholars, teachers and practitioners move from viewing IMC as an authoritarian model founded on a rhetoric of telling and a philosophy that seeks to control the way stakeholders view an organization. Philosophy of communication rejects “authorial intent” and respects that meaning is subjective and temporal based on the individual lived experience (61). Further, philosophy of communication agrees with Christensen et al.’s call for IMC to focus on the “creative receiver” who construes meaning around particulars (to be discussed in chapter four), and that the attempt to manage a message recipient’s interpretations is “doomed to fail” (Christensen et al., “New Tensions” 214). Philosophy of communication suggests that IMC is a discipline that should not engage in rhetorical practices of telling stakeholders what to think or attempting to control their interpretation of a given organizational object. Instead the discipline should be primarily concerned with uncovering understanding.
Taken a step further, hermeneutics, or the study of interpretation, is an area within philosophy of communication that raises questions about interpretation or how we come to understand the “texts” or messages—whether the written or spoken word, objects and situations – that we encounter in the world. As nested in the discipline of philosophy of communication, hermeneutics provides a framework through which organizations can more clearly determine the particular questions that underlie a given historical moment or situation, understand the extent of their own interpretive identities, and respect what consumers and stakeholders are saying on their own. From the perspective of IMC, hermeneutics raises significant questions about how organizations can attend to a multiplicity of stakeholder attitudes and values as the starting point for organizational decision making. Christensen et al. note that hermeneutics offers a way to understand how message reception is a “self-referential process” through which the recipient makes sense of the communication in the context of what is relevant and familiar (“New Tensions” 213). In other words, message reception and interpretation is a process where people construe meaning based on their own lived experience. Hermeneutics offers a way to understand IMC as a creative and dynamic process that cannot be controlled by an organization. Four theorists who contributed to the development of hermeneutics include Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, and Hans-Georg Gadamer. Within each theorist’s thought is an approach to interpretation that can be witnessed in the marketplace today.

Schleiermacher’s theory of interpretation. Schleiermacher is known as the father of modern hermeneutics (Palmer 97). His project moved hermeneutics out of the realm of Biblical interpretation and into the realm of understanding everyday conversation.
Schleiermacher viewed texts not just as the written word but also everyday conversation, the arts and other human creations. His project sought to develop a general approach to interpretation that would lead to “objectively valid knowledge” in the human sciences—or those activities, experiences and objects associated with and created by humans (Palmer 94). He viewed the task of hermeneutics as finding laws and principles that could lead to objective understanding in various aspects of human behavior. For Schleiermacher, any text or message represents a confluence of the inner thoughts of the author and the outer expression of those thoughts in language. Schleiermacher thought the proper and objective way to understand a text was to recover “authorial intent” or what the author meant to convey (Hermeneutics and Criticism). He believed that authorial intent could be recovered through both grammatical and psychological analysis because it was not always practical to query a message’s author because author and recipient were separated by time and space.

Schleiermacher’s approach to interpretation presents limitations because it asks the interpreter to play a dual role of message recipient and author. First, the interpreter of a message must play the role of message recipient by analyzing its words and language. This involves focusing on the relationship of a message’s words relative to its sentences, sentences relative to the paragraphs, and beyond, until an understanding of the message can be accurately reached. Schleiermacher believed that interpretation and understanding occurs within a “hermeneutical circle” (Palmer 87). In other words, a message cannot be understood in its entirety unless the interpreter also understands the message’s individual sentences and words. At the same time, an interpreter cannot understand the individual parts of a message without some comprehension of the whole (Stiver 89). This grasp of
part-to-whole and whole-to-part largely hinges on an understanding of a text’s grammar and language.

After playing the role of message recipient, Schleiermacher asks the message recipient to step into the role of message author to arrive at an objectively valid interpretation. Schleiermacher asks the interpreter to enter into the mind of a message’s author to better understand what the author meant to communicate or “authorial intent” (Stiver 88). For Schleiermacher, correct message interpretation involves understanding the both the author’s message goal and its intended meaning. To reconstruct the author’s mental experience that gave rise to the message, the interpreter must become familiar with the author’s life and historical moment. Paired together, in Schleiermacher’s estimation, grammatical and psychological analysis could lead to the recovery of authorial intent and ultimately, objectively valid knowledge. The notion of authorial intent, however, finds its limitations when a message’s intended meaning and its received meaning contradict one another.

*Dilthey’s theory of interpretation.* Dilthey continued Schleiermacher’s quest for objective understanding but rejected the notion of “authorial intent.” He did not believe in the value of reconstructing the inner world of a message’s author. Instead, Dilthey focused his hermeneutics on understanding the external world that gives rise to the inner experience of a person and the subsequent outer expression. Dilthey argued that “concrete, historical, lived experience” is the proper way to understand human expression, whether those expressions be gestures, historical actions, law, art or literature (Palmer 98-99). His hermeneutical approach investigated the systematic relation between
experience, expression and understanding (Palmer 106). Dilthey, however, emphasized the importance of the historical moment in objectively understanding human expression.

By focusing interpretation on objects that have persistent and lasting status, Dilthey thought objective understanding was possible because objects of human creation themselves are relatively permanent (Palmer 121). In Dilthey’s view, a message could be objectively understood by grasping the historical and temporal aspects that prompted their development in the first place (122). He contended that by developing historical acumen, it is possible to shed biases and prejudices come to objective understanding.

However, both Dilthey and Schleiermacher’s approaches to hermeneutics were criticized for their limitations because they presume that it is possible to step outside of one’s biases and historical situation and occupy a point above or outside of history from which “atemporal” laws could be developed (95). The inability to step outside of our lived experience serves as a starting point for the hermeneutic thought of both Heidegger and Gadamer.

Heidegger’s understanding as Being. Heidegger rejects Schleiermacher and Dilthey’s contention that the task of hermeneutics is objective knowledge, and in Being and Time, he completely reconceives the task of hermeneutics as leading to a fuller understanding our own possibilities for human existence. Heidegger moves hermeneutics from epistemology (or the philosophical study of how we come to knowledge) to ontology (or the philosophical of the nature of our being or existence). Heidegger steps back to view understanding as something that we are versus something we do (Ramberg and Gjesdal). For Heidegger, hermeneutics is not about understanding language rather it is about the world revealed through language. Persuit articulates that for Heidegger,
“communication is the human expression of Being” (57). As such, understanding is a mode of unconcealment and discovery. Heidegger sees hermeneutics as rooted in the human situation and leading to a more authentic way of Being in the world in the rather than an instrumental way of knowing. For Heidegger, the primary act of interpretation first brings a thing from concealment (Palmer 129). His hermeneutic approach means letting things become manifest as what they are without forcing preconceived ideas on them, which is a reversal of direction from what we are used to (133). As such, it is not we who point to things, but rather, it is the things that show themselves to us. True understanding for Heidegger is being led by the power of the object unto itself and the possibilities thus revealed (133). Heidegger’s theory of interpretation emphasizes understanding as an event that reveals new and authentic possibilities for existence.

Gadamer’s constructive hermeneutic. Heidegger’s account of understanding as a mode of human Being and discovery provides a place for his student Gadamer to focus on how humans understand and construe meaning from the objects—or in the case of IMC, messages—they encounter in the world. Similar to Heidegger, Gadamer views hermeneutics as ontological and intrinsic to being human. He not interested in the recovery of authorial intent or developing laws for objective interpretation and understanding. In Truth and Method, Gadamer contends that human existence and understanding are far too complex to be modeled on the scientific method and rejects what he sees as the unachievable goal of Enlightenment objectivity (277). Instead, Gadamer believes that people and the messages encountered in the world exist in their own respective “historically effected” horizons (337). His project focuses on how
understanding occurs when humans, embedded in their own biases and traditions, encounter objects in the world, which are a product of other human biases and traditions.

Gadamer first foregrounds the importance of language to interpretation and understanding because language itself is the “medium of hermeneutic experience” (385). We exist in and through language and learn about the world around us through intersubjective linguistic exchange. Language provides the common ground through which a message and interpreter can meet and through which we can subsequently learn through difference. For Gadamer, significant understanding between two people cannot take place apart from language (386). Gadamer notes that genuine conversation—or dialogue—is essential to understanding and that dialogue cannot be instrumental and attempt to steer a communicative participant to a given conclusion. Instead, for Gadamer, genuine conversation has a life of its own with unanticipated meaning and can be one that we never intended to have (385). Subsequently, genuine conversations are not “conducted” but rather happen and cannot happen in the absence of language.

When participating in conversation and interpretation, Gadamer contends that we must first understand that we are situated in a linguistically mediated, historical culture (Ramberg and Gjesdal). Gadamer emphasizes the role of tradition in human thought and how we construe meaning. Understanding a message or a text means that we have to recognize that we are embedded in a tradition and in a community, which affects the way that we interpret messages that we encounter in the world. Gadamer describes this as our “historically effected consciousness,” which means that in conversation or interpretation, participants cannot start from a tradition or bias-free place (391). Contrary to Enlightenment ideals, it is impossible to extract oneself from the lived experience and
objectively look down upon the world. Tradition and bias run in the background of all that we do and shape our knowledge and worldview. In conversation with others or engagement with a message, it is helpful for us to understand our own “interpretive limits,” as we unavoidably carry a bias (Arnett and Holba 86). For this reason, tradition and bias are not negative for Gadamer: biases are unavoidable, they are part of being situated within a community, and they transmit societal attitudes and values from which we learn.

Moreover, for Gadamer, texts—be it a written work, artistic object, expression or other object encountered in the world—are part of and a product of traditions. Texts are not neutral objects. Returning to Gadamer’s ideal of a genuine conversation, he contends that we should not address—or project our own ideas onto—a text but rather allow the text to speak to us, which is similar to Heidegger’s view (Ramberg and Gjesdal). Gadamer contends that texts have the ability to question us if we let them, and we are able to enter into a dialogic relationship with them. Understanding a text’s meaning should not follow the traditional German approaches to interpretation found in Schleiermacher that ask the interpreter try to reenact or recreate the conditions under which the text came into being. Instead, the interpreter must try to understand what the text is saying on its own terms. In the process, the interpreter’s own thoughts go into “reawakening the text’s meaning,” (390). Gadamer calls this a “fusion of horizons” (390). This “event of understanding is productive and is the formation of a comprehensive horizon in which the limited horizons of the text and interpreter and fused into a common view of the subject matter—the meaning—with which both are
concerned” (Linge xix). Achieving a fusion of horizons, however, requires that we approach a text in a constructive manner.

Constructive hermeneutics—advanced significantly through Gadamer’s work—assumes the basic hermeneutic presupposition that we learn from difference or Buber’s “unity of contraries” (qtd in Arnett and Holba 85). As an approach to interpretation and understanding, constructive hermeneutics is centered on the idea of respect and how we make meaning out of difference so that we can discover a new understanding of the world around us. According to Arnett and Holba, constructive hermeneutics asks that we respect and recognize the prejudices and biases that characterize our own interpretive identity; we respect and understand the questions and standpoints that are developed in a given historical moment; and we respect what a text is on its own terms (85). A text is an entity unto itself, and we cannot force it to say or mean what we want. Gadamer’s constructive hermeneutics provides a philosophical view of knowledge advanced through respectful attentiveness to ideas and difference in communicative and interpretive engagement.

This project rejects traditional German approaches to interpretation that ask the interpreter to recover authorial intent or to recreate the historical moment that gave rise to a communicative expression, as it is not possible to step outside of oneself and objectively view the world. Heidegger’s contention that interpretation is concerned with uncovering truths, and Gadamer’s constructive hermeneutics, provide more helpful ways to reconceive IMC. In Gadamer, we gain the strongest approach to communication with fruitful application to IMC. Constructive hermeneutics, as the interplay of the organization, its consumers and the historical moment, tells us that IMC is fundamentally
communicative, message centered and interpretive. Gadamer provides a linguistic, dialogic approach to understanding that shows how organizations can not only learn more about their own consumers, but how they can learn more about themselves through dialogic engagement and an constructive hermeneutic approach to interpretation.

Gadamer’s work advances IMC beyond a rhetoric of telling and a philosophy that seeks to control a message recipient’s interpretation to an approach centered on dialogic understanding that can occur between an organization and its consumers in conversation. Gadamer also emphasizes the need for organizations to be flexible and recognize stakeholders as “creative receivers” (Christensen et al., “New Tensions”) who construe meaning based on their own lived experiences. Gadamer suggests that we learn in and through language with respectful attentiveness to our own interpretive limits, what others are saying in their own right and the historical moment that gives rise to the engagement in the first place. As such, this project contends that IMC is not an instrument, tool or a process. Instead, the work of philosophy of communication helps us view IMC as a mode of engagement where organizations and stakeholders meet to create unanticipated meaning together.

In summary, this section examined rhetorical and philosophical thought to provide an alternate vantage through which to view a discipline typically considered a social-scientific business practice. A humanities-based, praxis-oriented approach to IMC rooted in human communication and rhetoric can strengthen and provide needed theoretical grounding to develop IMC scholarship, teaching and practice. Aristotle, Burke and Hauser all underscore IMC’s rhetorical orientation and offer the ways in which IMC is fundamentally discursive, persuasive, invitational, reticulate and vernacular.
Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer illuminate various approaches to interpretive understanding with Heidegger and Gadamer offering a perspective about how IMC can be viewed as an engagement meant to arrive at new and unanticipated understanding. Gadamer underscores the ways that IMC demands attentiveness to the other and constructive engagement and interpretation is necessary for success. While scholarship criticizes IMC for its lack of theoretical grounding (Schultz and Patti; Cornelissen and Lock; Torp), when moved into the field of rhetoric and philosophy of communication, it is evident that IMC has an extensive theory base on which to draw that help to advance IMC beyond monologic practices that seek to control interpretation.

Having situated IMC within the rhetorical and communicative tradition, this project will now turn to a theoretical examination of the shifts that catalyzed IMC’s emergence.

**Shifts that Catalyzed the Emergence of IMC**

The previous section situated IMC within the field of rhetoric and philosophy of communication by examining aspects of rhetoric and philosophy’s historical lineage that contribute to an understanding of IMC as a fundamentally communicative engagement, necessitating dialogue and attentiveness to the other. The following section will turn to explore what IMC theorists believe are three principle shifts that prompted the development of IMC in the late 1980s. Schultz and Schultz contend these shifts include the development and diffusion of communication technologies that impact the entire business spectrum; an increasing emphasis on brands and branding as a competitive differentiator; and an increasing focus on multinationalization and globalization as organizations work to establish a consistent and coherent image when transcending traditional geographic boundaries (*Next Generation* 9). The forces that precipitated
IMC, however, began well before marketplace changes in the 1980s and are a result of a long lineage of theoretical and practical questions that date back to antiquity. To put IMC’s emergence into proper context, this section will rely on the work of a number of theorists often studied in the communication discipline, including Plato, Marshall McLuhan, Walter Ong and Eric Havelock. Viewed through the lens of rhetoric and communication, IMC’s development is imbued with scholarly texture that gives the discipline academic rigor and solidifies its theoretical grounding.

**Development and diffusion of communication technologies.** One way to understand how the development and diffusion of communication technologies affect the way that organizations engage their consumers (and the way that consumers engage organizations) is through the perspective of media ecology, which is an area of communication studies that examines communication technologies and their impact on a given environment. Neil Postman defines media ecology as studying how communication technologies “affect human perception, understanding, feeling, and value; and how our interaction with media facilitates or impedes our chances of survival” (161). By tracing the evolution of communication technologies from the spoken word to digital mediums, we can gain clearer insight into how new media environments—that is, the environments created by communication technologies—propelled the need for IMC. These shifts, however, begin thousands of years ago.

Media theorist Marshall McLuhan is a principal theorist within the field of media ecology. While IMC was developed after his death, he has much to say about how the discipline emerged as part of a long history of changes in the way that humans communicate with each other. The *Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*
is McLuhan’s pioneering work that sheds light on how human communication evolved over four distinct epochs—oral culture, manuscript culture, print culture and electric culture. In *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, McLuhan examines media’s influence on individuals and society. His aphorism “the medium is the message” points to the importance of analyzing the introduction and usage of new mediums—or in this case communication technologies—because in McLuhan’s estimation, mediums have the power to shape and control the “scale and form of human association and action” (*Understanding Media* 9). In other words, communication technologies have the power to affect how individuals think, how they think about themselves and their communities, how they perceive the world, and how they choose to act with each other. McLuhan contends that mediums introduce both structural and perceptual changes in societies and alter the pattern of human interdependence (9). Taken together, McLuhan illuminates critical shifts in communication technologies and the changes catalyzed by those shifts at the level of individual human consciousness and also at the level of society.

To put in proper context the various shifts in communication technology and their consequences, this section relies on McLuhan’s framework of the four communicative epochs—oral, manuscript, print and electronic eras—to provide a trajectory through which we can better understand how changes in communication technologies created the need for IMC. Other relevant theorists will texture an understanding of the changes prompted by the introduction of new communication forms, including writing, moveable type and digital mediums. This section will also lay the groundwork for the subsequent discussions on the use of branding as a competitive differentiator, along with the impact of multinationalization and globalization on organizations. Technology plays a
significant role both in the fragmentation of the individual mind and society, as well as the way that organizations advance global trade and organizational operation across geographic borders. While this section traces the progression of communication technologies in linear sequence from oral to digital cultures according to Western development, this project recognizes that oral and manuscript cultures still exist in some parts of the world.

*Oral culture.* For McLuhan, the first communicative era begins with the tribal age, also referred to as oral cultures, in which humans communicate by wholly oral means (Norden). Walter Ong, a scholar who studied the transition from orality to literacy (and whose dissertation was supervised by McLuhan) notes that oral cultures were completely untouched by writing and symbols, and as a result, humans solely relied on the spoken word for communication, societal organization, and tradition preservation for future generations (Ong 31). Communication in an oral culture is driven by the spoken word with sound as the carrier of meaning and ideas. As a result, once knowledge was acquired in an oral culture, it had to be constantly repeated to be committed to memory since there was no way to write down thoughts, much less look up ideas (31). Consequently, those living in oral cultures relied on spoken repetition, proverbs, aphorisms and maxims to make thoughts memorable as information, ideas and stories were shared (Ong 34; McLuhan *Gutenberg Galaxy* 25). Words, choice of words, organization of words, and repetition became essential for retaining ideas that were shared.

In addition to their reliance on the spoken word to communicate, oral cultures also are noted for their communal orientation. All members of an oral culture lived in
harmony given that no one knew dramatically more or less than anyone else because the
distance and pace at which ideas could travel was slow (Norden). Communal,
interdependent oral cultures do not comprehend the concept of the individual or of the
separate and independent citizen. This is due in part to the “balance” and “simultaneity”
typified in oral cultures whereby “inner verbalization is effective social action”
(McLuhan, *Gutenberg Galaxy* 20). Oral cultures lack distantiation, interiorization,
analysis and reflection. For this reason, McLuhan asserts that thought and ideas are
always communally oriented and not personal, thus rendering nonexistent the idea of the
individual self (22). Accordingly, oral cultures lack the hallmarks of modern man:
“individualism, competition and specialization” (Norden). Self-analysis, the ability to
extrapolate and isolate the individual consciousness from the broader lived world, or the
ability to see one’s self at the center of experienced situations, is not characteristic of
tribal cultures (Ong 54). Accordingly, members of an oral culture define themselves as
part of a web of relationships comprising society as a whole rather as unique individuals
(as in a literate society).

*Manuscript culture.* Whether as early pictographs or as later alphabetic forms,
writing and writing systems (not the reproduced and printed word) brought about major
communication revolutions and drove significant psychological and intellectual changes
at both the individual and societal level. In *Understanding Media: The Extensions of
Man,* McLuhan argues that the mediums we use to communicate are simply extension of
ourselves, thus allowing for the ability to extend our thoughts beyond ourselves and to
the “whole of human society” (4). For McLuhan, mediums have the power to affect and
change the pattern of interdependence among people and introduce structural and
perceptual changes in societies (6). Much like roads are extensions of man so too is the written word, and the written word catalyzed significant changes in human thought and societal organization. McLuhan’s aphorism “the medium is the message” suggests that rather than the message carried by a medium, the medium itself should be analyzed (9). While new communication mediums may help facilitate and make communication with others easier, McLuhan’s phrase “the medium is the message” also points to the unintended consequences of new communication technologies.

The unintended consequences of new communication technologies—in this case writing and the Greek alphabet—can be witnessed in ancient Greece. Early Greek culture at the time of Socrates and Plato, represented a significant shift from a predominantly oral mode of transmitting knowledge to a slowly emerging literate one. In *The Muse Learns to Write*, Eric Havelock argues that in ancient Greece, monumental, yet slow and gradual, changes in thinking transpired with the development of alphabetic literacy in the fourth century BC (5). In Havelock’s estimation, the hallmarks of the Greek oral culture—singing, recitation and memorization—began to collide with the reading and writing of manuscript culture (21). This prompted criticism of the effects that writing would have on a person’s ability to commit information to memory and thus to exhibit “true” knowledge and understanding of a given subject.

Plato was an early critic of communication technologies. In *The Phaedrus*, Plato warns against the impact of writing on the human mind, as his Socrates decries the influence of writing on memory. In *The Phaedrus*, we encounter a conversation between the god Theuth (who invented letters and other technical inventions) and King Thamus who ultimately condemns Theuth’s invention of writing because he believes the written
word is unable to convey knowledge. A proponent of writing, Theuth argues that the written word will improve memory by providing a way to store and share information more broadly while Thamus warns of the dangers of writing. He argues that writing will result in forgetfulness in those who use it through a lack of “practice” in using their memory (62). Rather than truly learning information, humans instead will be able to store thoughts in writing for access when needed. Thamus asserts that when people begin to rely on writing instead of their memory, “they are reminded from outside by alien marks, not from within, themselves by themselves” (62). As people grew accustomed to writing down their thoughts and reading the thoughts of others, they became less dependent on the contents of their own memory because writing acts as a storage container for knowledge, which can be retrieved as needed.

Further, while the Greek alphabet began the democratization of literacy and created a common reader, other noted effects of the introduction of writing include emergence of the concept of the self or the separation of the “knower from the known” (Havelock, Preface). McLuhan indicates that the phonetic alphabet was the most influential technology in uprooting the constructs of a tribal/oral culture (Norden). Similarly, Ong asserts that “more than any other single invention, writing has transformed human consciousness” (77). The phonetic alphabet fosters an intense dependence on visual life and begins to shift humans from an environment organized by the ear to one organized by the eye (Norden). McLuhan argues that writing fosters abstraction—or the shift from direct experience to the realm of ideas, introspection and theory—which results in detachment. Writing, even a small amount of it, creates an environment that was “strongly fragmented, individualistic, explicit, logical, specialized
“and detached” (Norden). While the introduction of writing aided in the dissemination and preservation of knowledge and ideas, it wrested humans from their communal orientation bringing about the concept of the self, individualism and fragmentation. The shift from writing to the printed word only served to intensify these phenomena.

*Print culture.* Print culture was catalyzed by the Gutenberg printing press in the middle of the fifteenth century, lasting until the late 1800s, and moves a manuscript culture to one of mass production. For McLuhan, every aspect of Western culture has been shaped by the development of the Gutenberg printing press (Norden). He contends that the invention of movable type greatly accelerated, intensified, and ultimately enabled cultural and cognitive changes that had already been taking place since the invention and implementation of the alphabet (*Gutenberg Galaxy* 158). Typography or the mass distribution of print through the printing press created the means by which humans could extend themselves and their thoughts, views and ideas through mass-produced literature. People were now able to appropriate a singular viewpoint to a mass audience or to engage in what Ong refers to as “autonomous” vs. communal discourse (77). As a result, the concepts of “author” and “public” emerge on both small and national scales, as people (or authors) could write down their ideas and typographically reproduce and distribute them to larger audiences (McLuhan, *Gutenberg Galaxy* 132). For McLuhan, manuscript cultures could have neither authors nor publics because these concepts are a product of typography (*Gutenberg Galaxy* 130). With a lack of technology and no means of broad, fast distribution, a manuscript culture could not allow for the creation of an author or a public.
The printing press, allowing for the reproduction and distribution of printed words, also fostered uniformity, the homogenization of ideals and values, as well as dissent (McLuhan, *Gutenberg Galaxy* 235). McLuhan argues that typography plays a pivotal role in developing and advancing societies. He says that societies cannot move ahead, coordinate or organize themselves in the absence of technologies that allow humans to process experiences homogeneously (165). The reproduction and distribution of printed words allows for uniformity and the homogenization of beliefs that become cultural norms. For McLuhan, “the psychic and social consequences of print included an extension of its fissile and uniform character to the gradual homogenization of diverse regions with the resulting amplification of power, energy and aggression that we associate with new nationalism” (*Understanding Media* 175). The mass distribution of uniform knowledge through print helps to create the uniform and centralizing forces that lead to the creation of distinct groups, countries and even a sense of nationalism.

At the same time, the printed word also intensified dissent, fragmentation and individualism that had been taking place since the shift into manuscript culture. In *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, Elizabeth Eisenstein analyzes the effects of printing on the literate elite of post-Gutenberg Western Europe. Eisenstein believes that the printing press created a “reading” public that was more “dispersed,” “atomistic” and “individualistic” than a “hearing” public (which relied on reading aloud of written works typical of manuscript cultures) (132). A primary reason is that reading printed messages requires temporary isolation and reflection. Subsequently, the concept of society as comprised of a “bundle of discrete units” or that the “individual is prior to the social group” is typical of a reading versus hearing public (132). This idea of the isolated self—
as fostered by the printed word—leads to the individualism and fragmentation characteristic of today’s marketplace.

For McLuhan, “print is the technology of individualism” (Gutenberg Galaxy 158). The printed word becomes “a new natural resource that shows us how to tap all other kinds of resources, including ourselves” (164). Not only does typography allow for the “private point of view” as means of “self-expression,” it also helped “break the individual out of the traditional group while providing a model of how to add individual to individual in massive agglomeration of power” (McLuhan, Understanding Media 172). McLuhan asserts that print with its uniformity and repeatability allows for the development of self at a discrete, individual level. At the same time, the mass distribution of printed works based on varying points of view and written in different vernacular voices union creates a marketplace characterized by fragmentation. Nowhere is this fragmentation more evident than in today’s electronic culture, which brought about the need for IMC.

Electronic culture. Electronic media (the telegraph, radio, television, telephone and now digital technologies) create a world of “all at oneness” enabling global connectivity and hastening the speed at which we can communicate with each other (Gutenberg Galaxy 63). In addition to the “medium is the message,” McLuhan is perhaps most famous for coining the term “global village” or the idea that with advances in communication technologies, we now live in a world where we can participate in simultaneous experiences (31). However, while electric media’s instantaneous nature can bring us back together, McLuhan cautions that it does not mean that man exists in one large homogeneous, harmonious village or tribe. Quite the opposite. McLuhan’s “global
village” allows for a place where ideas can be amplified on a world scale, but humans now live in a “state of multitudinous tribal existences,” which creates a crisis of identity, a vacuum of the self, which generates tremendous violence—violence that is simply an identity quest, private or corporate, social or commercial” (Norden). These identity quests are witnessed in the way that humans at the individual, social and commercial level can reorganize themselves into new “tribes” and communities as a result of electric technologies. Electronic technologies are decentralizing leading to an increasingly connected yet fragmented world.

This affect intensified in the late 1980s and early 1990s when electronic and digital technologies rapidly and significantly expanded the number of media channels through which people could obtain their news, information and entertainment. People no longer had a finite number of mediums through which to consume news and information because digital technologies began to provide an endless number of content options that catering to individual preferences. Much as they do today, people began to have the ability to tune into media that interested them and to ignore those mediums whose content did not reflect their preferences. At the same time, digital technologies began to allow organizations to gather short and long-term purchase data on their consumers that gave more consumer insight than what was previously available (Schultz and Schultz, “Transitioning” 13). The expansion of digital technologies significantly increased the number of mediums through which organizations could reach their consumers and organizations moved from a mass to personalized media approach. Organizations saw—and continue to see—it advantageous to create messages customized to consumers’ attitudes, values and beliefs and to reach them in highly personalized formats, such as
In addition to significant fragmentation, the advent of digital and interactive communication technologies also shifted the balance of power between organizations and their consumers (Schultz and Schultz, “Transitioning” 15). For the first time, consumers had the ability through interactive and participatory media to voice their issues and concerns about an organization on a broad and public stage. Prahalad and Ramaswamy assert that the Internet has given consumers the power to influence the “value creation” and perception of products and services at every level of an organization (“Co-Creation Connection”). The marketplace began to be driven by “what consumers wanted, when they wanted it and under want conditions and through want means of distribution they desired” (Schultz and Schultz, “Transitioning” 15). For this reason, digital technologies have played a significant role in driving the need for IMC. At the time of IMC’s development and even moreso today, organizations need to know who their consumers are, what they want, how they want to receive goods and services and their media consumption habits. Today’s marketplace is marked by fragmentation, information overload and a seemingly endless range of purchase choices. One of the ways that organizations work to generate consumer attention, or what Kenneth Burke might call identification, is through the second driver of IMC—an emphasis on brands and branding as a point of competitive difference.
Emphasis on brands and branding. McLuhan notes that with electronic technologies leading to a highly individualistic and fragmented society, we often engage in “identity quests” (Norden). Organizations are now on their own identity quests through the creation of brands. Few would argue the importance of having a brand as a point of differentiation. Brand meaning and identity is a set of associations about a product or service that a brand marketer aspires to create or maintain, and these associations imply a promise to consumers from a marketer (Aaker and Joachimsthaler 43). While brands existed in competitive marketplaces, Schultz and Schultz contend that brands can provide a “competitive sustainable advantage” (Next Generation 375). As a result, organizations now see the importance in creating strong brands and supporting those brands through IMC.

In the time leading up to IMC’s emergence, the marketplace began to change through globalization (to be discussed in the next section). In the 1970s and 1980s, competitors to U.S. industry began to adopt the same product development and marketing methods which had driven domestic business but instead used them to develop and improve on their goods and services (Schultz and Schultz, “Transitioning” 11). At that time, international competitors began to build better products at more reasonable prices, thus providing consumers an array of more affordable options from which to choose, creating a surplus (11). As a result, domestic organizations resorted to sales promotions, cost-cutting measures and downsizing measures to maintain profitability in the 1980s (11). Organizations also explored other ways to maintain profitability and turned to branding, which was seen as a way for organizations to differentiate their products and
services amid a mass of similar products and services that provided the same functional benefits.

A strong brand identity—or the way that the product is positioned, the narrative created around the product and its benefits—was seen as better a way to capture consumer attention in a technologically fragmented marketplace marked by competition. Branding represents the creation of a value offering that provides functional, emotional, social or self-expressive benefits (Aaker 23). A brand can help consumers develop a stronger idea about what a product signifies when compared to similar products. Brands provide a competitive point of difference through a differentiated narrative, value offering name, logo, packaging, aesthetics and image, all of which are brought to bear through marketing, advertising and public relations activities. Simply having a brand, however, does not guarantee that an organization will remain competitive. For a brand to be successful, an organization must be attentive to the way that consumers perceive and experience a given brand, which necessitates dialogue at every level of a product or service’s lifecycle.

The level of consumer involvement in the development and maintenance of a given brand has evolved throughout history, particularly in light of previously mentioned shifts in communication technologies, bringing us to the present need for IMC and consumer attentiveness. Prahalad and Ramaswamy, however, assert that a century ago, a marketer-centric, one-way view of brand identity creation dominated marketing thought and practice (5). Under this view marketers, assumed that because they’ve spent money and effort in creating their brand, they owned and controlled it. This one-way approach, similar to Schultz and Schultz’s first level of integration, treats brand marketing as a
monologic directive where the marketer essentially becomes brand author with no consideration given to the consumers’ perception of the brand (“Transitioning” 9). Marketers often mistakenly believe that brand meaning is built unilaterally by an organization and is a construct of authorial intent.

Li and Bernhoff argue that any organization with a brand is under threat (12). Consumers often have their own ideas about what a brand stands for, which they are able to redefine for themselves and broadcast via social technologies. Li and Bernhoff’s contention underscores that while organizations may spend millions of dollars “building” a brand, brand meaning and interpretation is up to the consumer. Given the advent of the Internet and social technologies, the balance of power has shifted to consumers who now have the capacity to influence the perception of a brand based on their actual experience with a product. For this reason, organizations see it as imperative to involve consumers in every aspect of the marketing process.

In “Marketing Evolution: Defining Our Future,” Lusch traces the shift in marketing and branding and helps us understand why it is critical for organizations to involve consumers in the marketing and brand development process. His article reviews the marketplace from one that perceives consumers as passive recipients of marketing messages to one that views consumers as co-brand managers. He argues that marketing has evolved in three stages: “to-market,” “marketing-to” and “marketing-with” (261). First, the “to-market” approach prevailed from antiquity to the industrial revolution and focuses on bringing a scarcity of goods to consumers and often in a context where buyer and seller are far removed in space and time. Early marketing thought and practice focused on how to make things for and bring things to people who needed them. This
approach gave way to the “marketing-to” approach, which emerged as industrial and distribution sectors became more developed as part of the industrial revolution. What resulted was not a scarcity of goods, but an overabundance. As a result, the “marketing-to” approach focused on creating a demand for the goods created in an effort to connect a scarcity of buyers with an abundance of goods (263). Marketing is treated as a managerial activity, which emphasizes the segmentation of populations and the development of advertising and marketing to reach potential buyers. Focus was placed on transactions. Lusch asserts that the “to-market” and “marketing-to” approaches have given way to the “marketing-with” philosophy that treats the consumer as “endogenous” and as a “partner in the co-creation of value” (265). The “marketing-with” approach reflects dialogic IMC practices and helps elucidate why companies focus on branding and why they involve consumers in the brand development process.

Lusch’s “marketing with” approach stresses working collaboratively with consumers to understand and consider their perception, interpretation and experience of a brand at every point of a product’s lifecycle. Other recent perspectives on brand identity development reflect Lusch’s “marketing-with” approach and the idea that consumers should be “endogenous” in the brand creation process (Gronstedt; Iacobucci and Calder; Batey; Li and Bernhoff; Iglesias and Bonet). Prahalad and Ramaswamy note that consumers have become more “connected, informed, empowered, and active” given the rise of social technologies (“Co-Creation Connection”). With new tools, consumers have the power to interact with organizations and broadcast their dissatisfaction with a marketer’s goods and services in a much more broad and pronounced way. At the same time, organizations are now able to more easily connect with, engage and more clearly
understand how their consumers experience and interpret their brands. As a result, organizations now see it advantageous to develop brands as a point of competitive difference, to involve consumers in the development of brands, and to be mindful of consumers’ actual experience of a brand.

Brand identity is not static or self-authored but rather is a product of the ebb and flow of an organization and individuals interacting with each other—and evolving—over time. Given a highly connected and fractured marketplace, brands—and the narrative and meaning constructed around them—serve as a point of differentiation, particularly in a global marketplace. As more and more organizations sell their products and services outside of their home countries, maintaining a consistent and coherent brand image becomes increasingly difficult. As a result, globalization and multinationalization is the final trend that prompted IMC’s development.

**Increasing focus on multinationalization and globalization.** The final shift that prompted the development of IMC was the increasing focus on multinationalization and the globalization of the marketplace. Globalization can be defined as the “growing economic interdependence of the world’s people as a result of technological advances and increasing world trade” or the “crystallization of the world as a single place” (Guth and Marsh 540; Robertson 35). Returning to the idea of McLuhan’s “global village,” together mass media and digital technologies have created a tightly connected “global culture of consumption, much like a global mall” (Walker 42; *Gutenberg Galaxy* 31). An altered global marketplace where organizations can sell their products beyond home borders has forced organizations to rethink how to market products and services,
especially since marketing products in another culture presents challenges in maintaining a consistent and coherent corporate and brand image.

Companies are now able to operate in real time, seven days a week, around the globe (Schultz and Schultz, Next Generation 12). Globalization and technological connectivity deterritorializes the marketplace by eliminating geographical distance and the time needed to traverse that geographical distance. Scholars refer to this shift as “time-space compression” (Harvey ix). This means that with technological advances, the distances between places (in terms of time or cost to get there) shrink. Organizations are now finding themselves headquartered in a given country with regional operations around the world. While this phenomenon presents opportunities for multinational organizations, it also presents challenges.

Kraft Foods faced challenges with multinationalization and globalization when it launched the American version of the Oreo in China in 1996. In an article titled “Rethinking the Oreo for Chinese Consumers,” National Public Radio’s Robert Smith explained the challenges the Oreo faced in the Chinese marketplace. The article indicates that the Oreo was almost a failure, and Kraft almost removed it from the Chinese marketplace. The company had not done the market research that would have shown that Chinese consumers found the American Oreo’s cream too sweet and the cookie too bitter. This forced the Chinese team at Kraft team rethink the Oreo’s shape and flavor to match Chinese preferences. Kraft asked a “philosophical” question: “If an Oreo isn’t round and black and white and crazy sweet, is it still an Oreo? What is the essence of Oreoness” (Smith). In other words, Kraft had to determine how far it was willing to adapt the brand to reflect local tastes and customs without eroding the Oreo brand image.
Kraft determined that an Oreo is an “experience” (Smith). Oreos are meant to be pried apart, the filling scraped out with one’s teeth and then dunked into a glass of milk, which in Oreo’s brand parlance is called “Twist, Lick, Dunk” (Smith). Although Oreos were ultimately reintroduced into China in a rectangle shape (the length of an index finger) and in orange, mangoes and green tea flavors, this reintroduction was supported by advertising in China featuring children who taught their parents to pull Oreos apart, scrape out the filling with their teeth and then dunk the Oreo in a glass of milk. Kraft’s lesson learned in crossing into the Chinese marketplace is that understanding the consumer at a “really detailed level” will determine the success of failure of an effort. Ultimately, what Kraft and other multinational organizations have to ask is how far they are willing to adapt their products and brands while still maintaining a coherent image in the minds of consumers.

With the globalization of the marketplace taking place in the late 1980s, organizations needed to be attentive to how they could reach and engage consumers when entering new marketplaces. With a fractured marketplace and branding as a competitive differentiator, organizations struggled—and continue to struggle—with how to create a consistent brand and corporate image while remaining attentive and responsive to the “unique needs to individual markets and cultures” (Schultz and Schultz, Next Generation 12). As a result, organizations in the late 1980s had to rethink how they marketed goods and services at a global level, which involved striking the right balance between knowing what a given brand stands for and how far an organization would adapt it to meet the needs of local regions without the brand losing its meaning. These deeper brand
questions, as well as how to reach consumers in an increasingly digital global marketplace, necessitated a new approach for marketing.

Taken together, technological advances, branding as a competitive differentiator, and globalization all propelled the need for a marketing approach that would move beyond the traditional confines of the organization-driven “four Ps.” That is, organizations needed to find a better way to connect consumers with products, as the marketplace had outgrown traditional concerns for the product, its price, its placement and promotion. Given the shifts taking place in the late 1980s—shifts with a deep historical lineage—organizations needed an approach to marketing that would help them better identify, get to know and understand their consumers, as well as form and maintain a consistent and coherent brand message and image in their minds. Organizations also became increasingly attentive to the role of power of the consumer to positively or negative affect an organization at the business level.

IMC provided an answer. IMC was founded around the “four Cs” or the consumer’s wants and needs, the right cost to satisfy those wants and needs, convenience (or ease of purchase) and communication and dialogue (Lauterborn “Marketing Litany”). The new marketplace of the 1990s propelled organizations to advance beyond the limitations of push marketing and into the opportunities presented by two-way communication, as fostered by digital technology. Individually and collectively, IMC’s drivers underscore the importance of understanding the consumer at a much more sophisticated and detailed level than had been required in previous years.

The transition, however, to viewing IMC as fundamentally and necessarily communicative has proven to be a gradual and persistent shift. Today, scholars, teachers
and practitioners are still quick to emphasize IMC as marketing, at the expense of what is an intrinsically communicative discipline, which calls for a dialogic approach to understanding consumers as the basis of organizational decision marketing. When paired with rhetorical theory that underscores the fundamental necessity of dialogue and audience adaptation, and philosophy of communication that espouses a constructive hermeneutic approach to understanding, IMC’s communicative significance is better understood. Rhetoric and philosophy of communication do not advocate for marketplace practices that seek to tell and to control. Instead rhetoric and philosophy of communication advocate for dialogue and understanding. The spirit of the marketplace, inclusive of technological shifts, branding and globalization, all point to the need for more dialogic understanding between organization and consumer. Yet IMC continues to be practiced and taught as a monologic approach predicated on the idea of control. The following section, however, begins to lay the groundwork for the next chapter’s review of IMC’s predominant practice and academic instruction by explaining IMC’s communicative import.

The Communicative Significance of IMC

Rhetoric and philosophy of communication help to establish IMC as a humanistic discipline organized around how organizations and their consumers engage each other to arrive at understanding. This chapter reviewed the rhetorical contributions of Aristotle, Burke and Hauser; the philosophical contributions of Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer; as well as the technological, marketing and globalization forces which continue to affect and propel the development of IMC. Collectively, rhetorical and philosophical theories and marketplace trends point to the necessity for organizations not
only to work with their consumers to address opportunities, challenges and issues but also to understand them. Dialogue provides a conceptual key.

The work of rhetoric establishes IMC as a discipline that invites people into discourse, as a way to create identification and inspire social coordination. Cooperation could take the form of more mundane product and service transactions or more significant dialogue around consumer needs and marketplace challenges. The work of rhetoric also points to the way that consumers and stakeholder groups are comprised of everyday people who connect with each other through vernacular dialogue in the “reticulate public sphere” to influence organizational decision making (Hauser, “Vernacular”). Understanding how groups form, merge and disassociate around an organization and the language they use to communicate is critical for organizational understanding. Collectively, rhetorical theory emphasizes the need for organizations to be other oriented and actively engage their consumers to understand why they might hold a given point of view to solve contingent issues.

Philosophy of communication advances the work of rhetoric into the realm of interpretation and illustrates how consumers understand organizational messages based on their everyday lived experience. Gadamer’s constructive hermeneutics is critical for IMC, as he argues humans do not approach interpretive engagement by seeking authorial intent or an objective point of view. Moreover, it is impossible for consumers to arrive at objective interpretation because they bring their past experiences, pre-judgements and biases into interpretive engagement. If rhetoric points to IMC’s dialogic and audience-focused necessity, philosophy of communication, through constructive hermeneutics, offers an approach for organizations that suggests that organizations should want to
engage and understand their consumers in a way that is mutually beneficial. With constructive meaning that arises between organization and consumer, philosophy of communication also posits dialogue as imperative for IMC.

Rhetoric and philosophy of communication together point to IMC practices that avoid “telling” consumers what to think or seeking to control how they interpret a message. Instead, IMC should be viewed as a mode of unconcealment and discovery. Much like Persuit contends that for Heidegger and Gadamer, rhetoric has “everything to do with uncovering truth,” rhetoric and philosophy of communication reveal IMC as the discipline that should be concerned with uncovering understanding (89). Rhetoric and communication opens IMC to a rich history and corpus of ancient and contemporary theory organized around questions of persuasion, perception and the way in which meaning is cultivated—all of which are essential if the field of IMC is to progress beyond rudimentary tactical implementation of marketing elements.

While rhetoric and philosophy point to communication and dialogue as an imperative for IMC, literature continues to show that IMC is the predominant approach to marketing by leading organizations and generally practiced as outbound marketing (Schultz and Schultz “Transitioning;” Kitchen and Schultz; Kerr et al.; Torp; Kliatchko “Revised Definition”). Despite its popularity, most literature asserts that what is being practiced in the marketplace and taught in academia represents an “inside-out” or outbound form of marketing not characteristic of two-way, dialogic communication. This outbound, managerial approach to IMC is unable to access and achieve dialogic vision for the discipline set forth by leading theorists because it lacks necessary rhetorical and communicative resources.
Moreover, while IMC as marketing seems to promise order and stability, Christensen et al. note that attempts to manage interpretations among consumers are “doomed to fail,” as the field has not yet embraced the notion that consumers are “active, productive and creative receivers” of messages who interpret information based on their own lived experience (“New Tensions” 213). Thus, what organizations might label as a consistent and coherent message only provides a partial view of reality. A marketing approach to IMC presumes that organizations can control and manage the “organizational reality” to which consumers are exposed. A communicative approach to IMC accepts that a message provides a limited view of reality because consumers attach meaning to organizational messages based on their own lived experiences.

A humanities-based, communicative approach also becomes critical in a postmodern historical moment characterized by difference, conflict, multiplicity, embeddedness and limits (see Gadamer, Derrida, Lyotard, Eco and Arnett). Dominant, universal and totalizing grand narratives are now surrendered to what Lyotard calls “petit narratives,” which embrace a multiplicity of theoretical standpoints that focus on specific, local contexts that are more reflective of the diversity of human experience. If IMC is to be effectively practiced in a complex landscape characterized by petit narratives, organizations must develop rhetorical and communicative acumen. Arnett suggests that one of the tasks of rhetoric and communication is to engage the marketplace, conceived of as an assembly of multiple voices, which “functions as audience and actor—consuming ideas, learning and persuading” (“Humanities” 177). A rhetorical and philosophical approach to IMC respects that organizations and their consumers are embedded in the terrain of petit narratives where they are unable to occupy a “privileged
perspective” from which they can view their own communication in its entirety (Christensen et al., “New Tensions” 211). Built on communicative and dialogic ground, a humanities-based approach to IMC offers a praxis orientation through which scholars and practitioners can gain a textured perspective and learn to interpret through difference.

While IMC as marketing offers the promise of continuity, consistency and control, IMC as communication espouses and embraces difference, dialogue and even disagreement. Arnett contends that a view of rhetoric and communication steeped in “particulars” recognizes that we live in a historical moment characterized by “multiplicity, embeddedness and limits,” all of which demand that an organization attend to the interplay of communicative content, agents and the historical situation that shape a given setting (“Humanities” 182). When viewed as a constructive hermeneutic, as advanced through the work of Gadamer, IMC has the opportunity to meet its scholarly vision.

This project will continue to argue that the success or failure of an organization’s IMC efforts hinge on understanding how a humanities-based approach to IMC can complement and account for the limitations of social sciences. Organizations and their consumers are fundamentally communicative beings who construe meaning based on their own lived experience and based on understanding that emerges from dialogue. IMC is often quick to be characterized as a marketing approach instead of being viewed as dynamic communicative work. The following chapter will bring this contention to life by identifying how IMC is utilized in the marketplace and taught in academia through Schultz and Schultz’s four-level IMC framework. Communicative shortcomings will be
addressed and a constructive hermeneutic approach will be offered as the bridge over which the discipline can advance.
Chapter Three:

IMC: Current Directions and Approaches

Despite its status as a normative marketing practice and its dialogic potential (Schultz, Tannenbaum and Lauterborn 13), IMC literature reveals a significant disparity between IMC theorists’ vision for the discipline and the way that IMC is practiced in the marketplace and taught in academia. While scholarship attends to the need for IMC to evolve beyond tactical coordination and a channels-based approach, IMC still remains “inexorably anchored” in the first stages of its development (Kitchen and Schultz 199). In their article, “IMC: New Horizon/False Dawn for a Marketplace in Turmoil?,” pioneering IMC theorists Philip J. Kitchen and Don E. Schultz assert the need to “review and recast” IMC in light of considerable global economic and technological changes that have transpired since the concept’s origin (199). Kitchen and Schultz theorize that because technology has put power in the hands of the consumer to drive the marketplace, IMC must advance beyond what began as an outbound marketing technique to a more comprehensive, customer-centric organizational strategy to address our “interactive, push-pull marketplace” (198). Groom further articulates this need but instead positions it as “a rhetorical one that attends to IMC’s impact on the human communicative exchange, especially people’s ability to engage one another and story their experiences” (145). Taken together, it is clear that IMC must advance beyond tactical approaches to focus on the communicative and dialogic achievement of understanding between an organization and its multiplicity of consumers in what is now a fragmented, postmodern marketplace.
This chapter will describe IMC’s current practice in the marketplace and how IMC is presented in academia and is divided into three sections. The first section, *IMC: Current Approaches in Practice*, will examine IMC’s marketplace practice using Schultz and Schultz’s four-level framework for IMC integration (“Transitioning” and *Next Generation*). This section will describe how IMC is practiced based on four developmental stages: tactical integration of marketing elements; the identification, inclusion and improvement of non-traditional communication elements as part of an overall marketing program; the application of information technology; and the alignment of an organization’s business and financial objectives around consumer behaviors. The second section, *IMC: Current Academic Approaches*, will detail an emergent area of IMC scholarship—how IMC is positioned and presented in academia. This section will rely on the work of Gayle Kerr, an IMC education researcher, to show that IMC course content around the world does not adequately account for IMC scholarship and continues to reflect early 1990s conceptions of IMC. The final section, *IMC: Its Rhetorical and Communicative Exigence*, will bring together conclusions from each section and argue that the work of rhetoric and communication offers a needed foundation on which the discipline can achieve its scholarly vision and advance to reflect today’s marketplace challenges.

In this postmodern, consumer-driven marketplace, the next step in IMC’s development is communicative: one that attends to the need for rhetorical and communicative acumen as the means to better understand and navigate the multiplicity of interpretations of a given organization. While IMC scholarship, including that of its pioneering voices (see Kitchen and Schultz; Schultz and Schultz), articulates a need for
the discipline’s evolution beyond mere managerial and tactical approaches, this overarching need is rarely characterized as communicative (outside of Groom, Persuit, and Roberts, along with integrated communication theorists, such as Christensen). Instead, the discipline’s advancement is often predicated on other factors, which might include a better understanding of the following: how branding works in an interactive marketplace; IMC measurement; successfully working in an environment of media proliferation and fragmentation; proper adjustment of marketing theory in light of new marketplace paradigms; differences in how emerging markets operate; the intersection of marketplace culture and IMC; and effective academic instruction given marketplace shifts (Schultz and Patti 82-83). While certainly important considerations in IMC’s development, they only serve to cloud the underlying need for rhetorical and communicative sophistication in this postmodern, interactive marketplace. IMC must first utilize the work of rhetoric and philosophy of communication (sensitive to narrative ground and historical context) for its growth and advancement. Once a communicative approach to IMC is adopted, other factors for IMC’s improvement will be more easily resolved. However, to suggest how IMC can and should evolve, we must first describe its current practice and teaching. The following sections explain IMC’s current marketplace practice and academic instruction.

**IMC: Current Approaches in Practice**

IMC was initially developed in response to marketplace and technological shifts that occurred in the United States in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Kitchen and Schultz 197). In their groundbreaking article, “Transitioning Marketing Communication into the Twenty-First Century,” which later was developed into their seminal work *IMC – The
Next Generation, Schultz and Schultz articulate the current need to evolve IMC given prominent shifts in the marketplace and in technology that have occurred since IMC’s initial conceptualization. Kerr affirms this need and find that IMC research is not enlightening IMC’s practice, as “the industry neither cares nor finds value in what academics are teaching” (131). While the marketplace has since dramatically changed, the way that IMC is practiced continues to cling to approaches represented in traditional and historical marketplaces.

To briefly recap, as referenced in chapter two, the marketplace of the 1950s and 60s relied on McCarthy’s formative 4Ps model of marketing (i.e., product, price, place and promotion), which provided a framework for the development, production and distribution of goods and services at that time. In this “produce-and-sell” market, organizations depended on consumer research, mass distribution systems, and mass media approaches to attract and retain much of the consumer and industrial market for their goods and service categories (Schultz and Schultz, “Transitioning” 14). First-to-market status and funding generally were markers of future success. If an organization had an adequate understanding of its consumers’ needs, and had enough funding (to develop products to match those needs, own distribution channels and command a large presence through mass media), consumers were easy to attract (14). The marketplace of the 1970s, however, began to shift given the dynamics of globalization. Competitors to U.S. industry adopted the same marketing methods which had driven domestic business but used them to develop and improve on their goods and services (14). International competitors built better products at more reasonable prices, thus providing an array of more affordable options from which to choose, creating a surplus. As a result,
organizations resorted to sales promotions, cost-cutting measures and downsizing measures to maintain profitability in the 1980s.

By the late 1980s, organizations needed a way to maintain consumers and profitability in a highly competitive late-capitalist marketplace. Spurred, in part, by the advent of interactive information technology platforms, the entire marketplace of the late 1980s and early 1990s shifted. IMC in its promise of order, centralization, stability and efficiency provided an answer. Digital tools gave organizations new ways to reach consumers, whether through individualized direct mail, email marketing, cable television or the Internet. At the same time, digital technology for the first time allowed marketers to determine who their high potential consumers were. Marketers could now more easily and quickly gather and store information on their consumers’ short and long-term purchasing patterns, which afforded insight into which consumers were repeat purchasers, when purchases were made and under what conditions. These findings could then be used to create relevant and customized offerings delivered through specialized and personalized media. The challenge was that while the rapidly changing marketplace gave organizations new opportunities to understand and reach their consumers, organizations still adhered to the “concepts, methods and organizational structures of the 1950s and 1960s” (Schultz and Schultz, “Transitioning” 13). Technology continues to transform the marketplace and presents both opportunities and challenges.

While technology now allows for a greater degree of consumer insight and creates more channels through which an organization can reach consumers, it also moves power that had previously been in the hands of an organization to the consumer. In the current “radically changing business environment,” interactive technologies reverse a power
differential that had been in place for centuries (Schultz and Schultz, *Next Generation* 17). Instead of organizations dominating and directing the channels through which to market products and services to consumers (as in a mass-mediated marketplace), consumers can now filter the organizations that reach them, as well as influence the trajectory of an organization’s activity on a broad and public stage. Kliatckho explains this critical change forecasted by Schultz and Schultz, but fully realized after publication of their initial article. He contends that the advent of “participatory” media (such as blogs, podcasts, YouTube, among others) and the subsequent user-generated content render audiences not just receivers—but also active creators—of content, which “pushes the consumer centricity viewpoint of the IMC concept even further” (“Revised Definition” 148). Consumers are no longer—if they were ever—passive receivers of mass communication. Interactive technologies now allow consumers to “identify, evaluate and build relationships” with the organizations that they believe to be most relevant and beneficial to their needs (Schultz and Patti 76). Technology allows consumers to “tune in” to the organizations they prefer and “tune out” the organizations they reject. The current marketplace is one of fragmentation, media-for-me and unpredictability.

Moreover, interactive and multi-media technologies now give consumers the power to adopt “marketing” practices to influence and shape an organization’s activity, thus making IMC’s early reliance on monologic mass-market advertising and public relations practices irrelevant today (Kitchen and Schultz 199). Organizations can no longer create products and services and deploy them to a marketplace of waiting and willing consumers. Instead as active “communication generators” (Schultz and Patti 76),
consumers can widely broadcast their criticisms of an organization, the goods and services it markets, its treatment of employees, its impact on the environment, operational practices, along with any other dynamic that might affect others’ perceptions of the organization in an effort to influence change. As such, Schultz and Schultz argue that in today’s marketplace, IMC is an organization’s “most critical and most sophisticated tool” (“Transitioning” 17). This new interactive reality helps to facilitate more dialogic possibilities between an organization and consumer, all of which can benefit from the work of rhetoric and communication. While IMC began as a way to align outbound communication, it now provides a way to “integrate all company-customer interactions, both outbound—and inbound” (Schultz and Schultz, Next Generation 15). Yet regardless of tectonic shifts that have taken place in the market, IMC is most frequently practiced following the same concept that was developed for a marketplace that no longer exists.

For this reason, scholars contend that early concepts of IMC must evolve to meet a new marketplace characterized by multiplicity, fragmentation and hyper reality (see Schultz and Schultz; Kitchen and Schultz; Proctor and Kitchen; Kliatchko; Finne and Gronroos). As detailed in chapter one, early conceptions of IMC present it as “a marketing communication planning practice that integrates and coordinates an organization’s marketing, advertising, public relations, direct response, sales promotion and any other communication activities to provide clarity, consistency and maximum communication impact” (Schultz, Tannenbaum and Lauterborn 54). At the time of IMC’s development, organizations and their agencies began to see it beneficial to plan and coordinate all communication so it had a unified look and feel, and delivered a consistent message, from the standpoint of the consumer. Scholars now assert that this
conception—while perhaps relevant in an early 1990s marketplace—does not go far enough in today’s marketplace.

New definitions of IMC present it as a “full-fledged business strategy” (Schultz and Schultz, *New Generation* 15). Duncan and Mulhern define IMC as “an on-going, interactive, cross-functional process of brand communication planning, execution, and evaluation that integrates all parties in the exchange process in order to maximize mutual satisfaction of each other's wants and needs” (9). Kliatchko defines IMC as an “audience-driven business process of strategically managing stakeholders, content, channels, and results of brand communications” (“Revised Definition” 140). Schultz and Kitchen define IMC as a “strategic business process used to plan, develop, execute and evaluate coordinated, measurable, persuasive brand communication programs over time with consumers, customers, prospects and other targeted, relevant internal and external audiences” (“Communicating Globally”). Luck and Moffatt describe IMC as “more than a process or activity within an organization: it is a system of belief or engagement, embedded in an organization's culture, underpinned by communication and driven by technology and senior management” (311). These definitions suggest that IMC must advance from a focus on control, channels and efficiency to that of understanding consumer perceptions and behavior as the starting point for strategic and financial decision making at the corporate level.

Based on their observations of numerous organizations in North America, Europe, Latin America and Asia Pacific, Schultz and Schultz observe general patterns in IMC’s development and implementation. In their estimation, organizations progress through four stages of IMC development, starting with tactics and technique, and as organizations
achieve success at one level, they progress—ultimately to an orientation driven by their consumers’ behaviors as the basis for organizational decision making (Schultz and Schultz, *Next Generation* 21). Schultz and Schultz contend that to be “truly integrated as an organization,” the organization must demonstrate proficiency in all four levels (“Transitioning” 19). In their observation, what is considered IMC falls generally into one of four levels of development, making their model a helpful roadmap for understanding IMC’s current marketplace practice and its ideal practice in the views of IMC theorists.

**Tactical coordination.** The first stage of IMC development reflects early definitions of IMC and is also often the first step an organization takes with IMC. For many organizations, this involves coordinating the “manageable pieces and parts” of an organization’s broad marketing activities into a “coherent and cohesive whole” (Schultz and Schultz, “Transitioning” 20). As such, organizations synchronize advertising, marketing and public relations functions to send a uniform message via their respected channels to achieve “clarity, consistency and maximum communication impact” among consumers (Schultz, Tannenbaum and Lauterborn 54). Kliatckho asserts that the ultimate goal is for the target consumer to “receive and form in their minds a unified and integrated message” (“Revised Definition” 154). While the importance of the consumer is implied, consumers are the focus to the extent that organizations determine their preferred mediums and develop campaigns that reach them through those mediums. In some cases, the desire to coordinate marketing efforts leads to the centralization of an organization’s marketing communication functions (e.g., advertising, public relations, direct sales, among others), as well as the development of corporate style guides to unify
overall content and aesthetics (Schultz and Schultz, “Transitioning” 19). At this level of practice, the organization focuses on integrating the marketing communication campaign development process, as well as the subsequent tactics so they have similar content and aesthetics.

Outbound marketing presupposes an active sender (the organization) and a passive receiver (the consumer) as part of the overall marketing effort (Percy and Elliott). Implicit in this integration mode is that the company integrates tactics and thus a message in an effort to steer how a consumer might perceive and interpret the organization, product or service (Finne and Gronroos 180). What this approach overlooks or ignores, however, is that consumers themselves are active message recipients who interpret messages based on their own lived experience. Consumers, as message recipients, also perform the task of message integration in their own right (Finne and Gronroos 181).

While consumers interpret meaning based on their own understanding and perception of a given brand, the discipline remains mostly understood as the integration of advertising and promotional activities (Luck and Moffatt 311). Most organizations in the current marketplace understand and practice IMC at a first stage of development.

Marketplace applications. Simplistic and tactical use of IMC is evident in every industry. A review of company press releases describing different IMC efforts illustrate that three prominent organizations employ basic and prescriptive IMC practices and include Toyota’s Corolla brand, Taco Bell and the United States’ National Football League’s Jacksonville Jaguars franchise,. Each organization’s press release describes an IMC campaign organized around a central idea and then brought to life through the
synergistic coordination of marketing tactics. No IMC activities beyond the level of tactics and tactical integration were mentioned.

According to a September 5, 2013 press release titled, “Integrated Marketing Campaign Elevates 2014 Toyota Corolla to New Heights,” global automobile manufacturer Toyota devised an IMC campaign to reach the Millennial generation with messages about the new model’s “upgraded technology” and “elevated styling,” while still trying to maintain appeal among its long-time Baby Boomer audience (“Toyota”). Toyota devised the campaign around the insight that Millennials want to advance their careers, and a first “real” car purchase is a step in that direction (“Toyota”). The Corolla, with its upgrades and features, is positioned as fulfilling this need. The corresponding IMC campaign as described illustrates tactical coordination. Toyota’s press release describes channels by which the company reached Millennials and Baby Boomers with Corolla’s messages, such as a mix of ads running on television, in movie theaters, in print and digital medium, and on billboards and outside signs, as well as mobile games, Vine and Instagram videos, social-media hashtags, Toyota-sponsored events and test-drive experiences to generate Millennial interest in the Corolla.

In the same vein as Toyota, global quick-serve restaurant chain Taco Bell also practices tactical IMC. In an October 27, 2015, press release titled “First Player to Steal a Base During the World Series Will Earn America a Free Breakfast From Taco Bell,” the organization announced that it partnered with Major League Baseball during the 2015 World Series to give “America” a free A.M. Crunchwrap if bases were stolen during specific series games. Taco Bell Corp.’s chief brand engagement officer explains, “This year, in partnership with Major League Baseball, we are encouraging the whole country
to root for a stolen base in the Series—from either team—because the player who steals that first base will have thereby ‘stolen’ a free breakfast, our A.M. Crunchwrap breakfast sandwich, for all of America” (“Taco Bell”). Much like Toyota’s campaign, Taco Bell’s effort is described as tactical coordination, which included television and online advertising, a social media promotion with the #StealABreakfast hashtag and public relations support.

Similar to Toyota and Taco Bell, the NFL’s Jacksonville Jaguars also practice IMC as outbound marketing. A June 22, 2015, press release from the Jaguars franchise details an IMC campaign to instill a sense of pride for the team among fans in the North/Central Florida and South Georgia region. The press release titled “Jacksonville Jaguars Launch ‘#MOREJAX’ 2015 Marketing Campaign,” explains that “#MOREJAX was devised to signify the Jaguars’ passion, focus, attitude, aggressiveness, desire and commitment under the leadership of Jaguars Owner Shad Khan.” Similar to Toyota and Taco Bell, the Jacksonville Jaguars describe the effort as a “fully-integrated marketing and promotional campaign,” which includes a Jaguars emoji keyboard and mobile app, contests and sweepstakes, along with out-of-home, grassroots, radio, television and print advertising; digital elements; and corporate partnerships—all designed to reach fans with pro-Jaguars messages throughout the course of the program.

Together Toyota, Taco Bell and the Jacksonville Jaguars work with IMC in a way that reflects the majority of the global marketplace. Each case study explains how a given organization is attempting to advance or “push” its agenda onto various stakeholders through a coordinated marketing effort and multiple channels. Whether these campaigns are built on higher-level insights into consumer behavior is unclear.
There is no mention of how consumer behavior influences the direction of the organization or how these campaigns operate at the corporate level. What is clear is the way IMC is positioned in each announcement remains consistent with early views of IMC, thus reinforcing its prevalent perspective as a tool for coordinating campaign tactics. However, when organizations begin to consider information-bearing consumer touchpoints as marketing elements in their own right, they enter the next phase of IMC development.

**Redefining the scope of marketing communication.** When organizations advance to the second level of IMC development, they start to view the organization from the perspective of the consumer in an effort to redefine what is considered marketing communication. At this stage, organizations start to account for all the possible ways that a consumer might experience and come into contact with a brand in their marketing efforts rather than merely viewing marketing communication as a series of “outbound marketing efforts” (Schultz and Schultz, *Next Generation* 27). Kliatchko indicates that inherent in this stage is a reevaluation of channels through which an organization can reach consumers, thus expanding an organization’s marketing efforts to account for the many ways that consumers encounter and experience a brand (“Revised Definition” 154). This view suggests that consumers come into contact with brands in exponentially different ways. When contact points are considered from a consumer vantage, organizations can gain better insight into why consumers hold certain views of an organization and how they might have arrived at those perspectives. Such points of contact – whether product packaging and its functionality, employee presentation and
behavior, user friendly websites, clean facilities, among others—have the ability to enhance or detract from a consumer’s experience and perception of a brand.

Understanding how consumers experience a brand is critical to its success. Razeghi and Calder note that the “hallmark of an integrated approach to marketing is the translation of a brand concept” through all consumer “touchpoints” (39). As previously noted, theorists argue that in the end, consumers perform the task of message integration on their own. They do not distinguish where an organization’s message originates—whether the customer service department, sales force, marketing department, facilities and beyond (Schultz and Schultz, “Transitioning” 20; Finne and Gronroos 181). Rather consumers integrate organizational messages based on their own unique lived experience. This is why it is critical for organizations to understand that artifacts and encounters, beyond those deemed “marketing communication,” have the power to communicate and influence perception.

*Marketplace applications.* Razeghi and Calder suggest that organizations can more clearly visualize how consumers experience a given brand and their subsequent interpretations through “interaction mapping” (39). Their Florida Hospital System case study shows how interaction mapping helped to ensure that a patient’s experience at Celebration Health, a modern health care facility in the town of Celebration, Florida, matched (instead of detracted from) its mission and vision. Instead of relying on advertising and promotion, Celebration Health used interaction mapping to understand how “operational changes, from new technology to new programs to new staffing models” had to be instituted, as these elements also have the power to influence the overall brand experience (45). Celebration Health determined that a patient’s experience
at check-in, questionnaire length, wait time, ability to be with a family member during a procedure, among other factors, are all points for potential brand interpretation and carry a communicative impact (45). If Celebration Health wanted to engender a favorable reputation among stakeholders, it first had to understand various consumer touchpoints and how patients experienced and perceived those touchpoints.

Employees are another critical consumer touchpoint; although, employees are often the last to know about marketing programs (Schultz and Schultz, Next Generation 162). Many organizations presume that once a marketing campaign begins, employees will somehow be able to determine and communicate a campaign’s messages thus enhancing the effort. The reality is that unless specific internal communication programs are designed to bring employees into a campaign effort or corporate initiative, their ability to serve as positive consumer touchpoints will be compromised. Further, without strong internal communication programs, employees may become disgruntled and disillusioned with the organization overall.

In their article, “Positioning Southwest Airlines through Employee Branding,” Miles and Mangold articulate the importance of viewing an organization’s employees as essential to consumer recruitment and retention. They offer “employee branding” as a process that can give organizations a “competitive advantage” if employees are viewed as a crucial marketing tool (“Southwest” 535). Miles and Mangold define employee branding as “the process by which employees internalize the desired brand image and are motivated to project the image to customers and other organizational constituents” (Miles and Mangold, “Conceptualization” 68). Their case study on Southwest Airlines shows how the organization views its employees as a central contact point for its consumers that
can enhance or detract from a consumer’s experience and perception of the brand (“Southwest” 535). Further, Southwest has an employees-first (instead of customers-first) orientation, suggesting that a strong employee focus will be positively realized in the way they treat customers (“Southwest” 538). This article offers the perspective that employees are a critical element of the IMC mix as they have the power to positively bring an organization’s mission and vision to life when engaging consumers.

As organizations achieve success by redefining what counts as a marketing or communication point of contact, they advance to a level of IMC development that involves the collection and analysis of consumer behavior data as the basis for organizational decision making. Most organizations, however, practice IMC at a first or second level of development because they are unable to practice the kind of consumer-focused communication that also necessitates collaboration between “at a minimum, the marketing, research, and finance departments” (Kitchen and Burgmann; Kitchen et al., “Theoretical Perspective;” Schultz, “Marginalized Brand”). As will be discussed later, this level presents serious communicative and interpretive challenges for IMC broad implementation.

*Application of information technology.* At this stage, IMC begins to evolve from a campaign technique to a broader corporate concept. Organizations that accomplish third-level integration use technology to create databases to store information about their consumers and prospects as the source for strategic and financial decision making. Simply having a database or using data to engage in unsophisticated database or email marketing, however, does not constitute the application of information technology. Instead, third-level integration is achieved through when an organization engages in
“data-driven marketing” to develop “economic and behavioral views” of their consumers (Next Generation 28-29). Kliatchko asserts that when information technology is used effectively, an organization can create “more targeted messages (content), using preferred contact points (channels),” in addition to understanding which consumer groups are most profitable, at risk for migration, along with those groups of consumers that present growth potential (“Revised Definition” 155). In other words, third-level integration is achieved when data helps to develop a picture of consumer knowledge, which then provides a baseline for the development of corporate objectives.

For Schultz and Schultz, four steps qualify the application and use of information technology in IMC: capturing empirical customer data, working with behavioral data versus attitudinal data, using valuation tools and techniques to evaluate a consumer’s potential contribution to an organization, and differentiating customers on economic criteria (“Transitioning” 22). First, with IMC’s focus on individual consumers (rather than broad consumer groups indicative of mass marketing), organizations use databases to store longitudinal purchase data. By collecting names, addresses and other demographic information through the use of loyalty cards, website accounts and surveys, organizations can track over time how often and when consumers buy certain products, as well as when they stop purchasing products. Second, with IMC premised on tracking consumer behavior over time and then using that data to guide decision making at the corporate level, data must focus on transactions or behavior rather than attitudes. For Schultz and Schultz, success cannot be measured by intent, perception, attitudes, brand recall, or other “outputs.” Instead programming and decision making must be measured
by transactions or actual outcomes (22). Past behavior—not attitude and intent—
provides the only reliable guide (at least from this perspective) to decision making.

Third, analytical tools allow an organization to determine values of consumers
and consumer groups. This allows an organization to more clearly understand which
consumers are frequent purchasers and those that might become more frequent
purchasers with more targeted messages. As such, organizations can “benchmark, with a
high degree of precision, the costs to acquire, retain or migrate customers”
(“Transitioning” 23). This also serves as an early warning system for consumers that
might be at risk for migration to other brands. Finally, the fourth marker for IT
integration suggests that organizations cannot take a mass perspective of their consumers.
Past marketing practices suggest that organizations focused on an “average” consumer
based on demographic data (e.g., men ages 21-45 who play sports and live in an urban
area) (21). Instead, IT used for IMC allows an organization to connect with high
potential consumers on a one-to-one or a “one-to-selected-few” basis based on attitudes,
values and media consumption preferences (21). Organizations should focus their efforts
and resources on the “top 20 or 30 percent or so, who provide the majority (70-90
percent) of revenue or profits” (21). In doing so, programming can focus on those
consumers who most frequently purchase goods and services from an organization, and
programs can be created specifically to cultivate potential purchasers or retain those who
are at-risk.

Marketplace applications. While far fewer organizations practice IMC at a third
level of development, global product marketer P&G does. In her ComputerWeekly
article, “Procter & Gamble Uses Teradata Cloud Analytics for Global Marketing,”
Lindsay Clark describes how P&G uses data to develop global IMC campaigns to support its more than 60 global brands (including Crest, CoverGirl, Febreze, Gillette and Pampers), sold primarily through retailers in approximately 80 countries. Clark suggests that P&G was challenged with trying to better reach and understand its consumers in a technology-driven marketplace. While the company once relied on television advertising as the primary channel to reach its consumers, interactive technologies forced the company to rethink its approach (Clark). The company has since created more than 15,000 consumer-facing websites to support its products, which also serve as a rich source of consumer information (Clark). P&G was challenged to determine the best way to use data yielded from its various websites in way that would benefit both consumer and brand.

Clark notes that in a reversal for the company, P&G began by placing the consumer at the center of the brand experience (rather than the brand at the center of the consumer experience) and listed all potential brand touchpoints (whether online, in-store or on television), as suggested in Schultz and Schultz’s second-level of IMC development. Each consumer touchpoint was then built into an overall interaction model that gave the company insight into the many ways that a consumer could potentially interact with a brand. Through its consumer websites, P&G gave consumers the option to create an account to sign up for coupons, product samples and other promotional information. As an example, Clark describes an initiative of P&G’s Pampers diapers brand, which involved the creation of “PampersVillage,” a website that provides product and baby care information, as well as parenting advice. Consumers can sign up to receive product samples and customized coupons (which are ultimately trackable) to
either the baby’s age or a stage of a woman’s pregnancy in exchange for consumers providing personal details to log on to the site. Data gleaned from “PampersVillage” and P&G’s other websites was then migrated into a single dashboard repository providing clearer insight into consumer behavior (Clark). This repository lists profiles detailing consumers’ preferred brands, as well as the ways they prefer to receive brand information.

Consumer participation in online marketing and loyalty programs provides transactional information, allowing P&G to understand which consumers are most loyal and how to cultivate other loyal consumers. In this article, P&G’s Dennis Devine explained that this central data clearinghouse allows the company to codify consumer behavior – which consumers participate in marketing programs, what online tools they might use and what inspires them to participate (Clark). Devine further indicated that data capture and analysis also allows P&G to gauge the effectiveness of a given campaign and how to design more effective campaigns in the future (Clark).

Further, P&G’s large-scale application of digital technology allows the organization to cultivate relationships with its consumers on a global scale. Through interactive technology, the organization contends that “it’s now possible to have a one-on-one relationship with every consumer in the world” (Chui and Fleming). P&G uses digital technology to track consumer feedback and comments in real-time. The company’s “consumer pulse” dashboard “uses Bayesian analysis to scan the universe of comments, categorize them by individual brand, and then put them on the screen of the relevant individual” (Chui and Fleming). This tool also enables instant reaction to marketplace developments, allowing the organization to respond to negative
developments and social media commentary and to improve upon products and initiatives that are working well.

Taken together, P&G’s use of information technology to be more customer-centric reflects the tenets of Schultz’s and Schultz’s third level of IMC development. Organizations must have processes in place to track and store purchase behavior over time, focus on actual transactions rather than intent or attitude, use technology to evaluate consumers based on trial and repeat purchase over time, and finally segment customers based on their overall contribution to an organization. Interactive technologies also enhance an organization’s potential to foster and cultivate relationships with key consumers. P&G’s Devine explains how customer data is used at the organizational level by suggesting that the consumer intelligence afforded by data is “very important information to help steer the business” (Clark). P&G’s use of data in driving business decisions points to how organizations work with IMC as guiding corporate principle. The following section will explain how organizations employ IMC at the corporate versus tactical level.

**Strategic and financial integration.** At the fourth level, IMC is elevated to a consumer-centric organizational philosophy driven by senior management and cascaded throughout the entire organization. IMC as a strategic and financial practice represents its “next frontier,” extending far beyond IMC’s original tactical conceptualization (“Transitioning” 24). When treated as a strategic business process, organizations follow an “outside in orientation” with centralized planning that begins with third-level consumer data (Laurie and Mortimer 1466). An organization’s goals are then aligned to match consumer behavior and needs (e.g., providing the best products, services and
experiences for a consumer) and supported by appropriate marketing and communication programs (Schultz and Schultz, *Next Generation* 51/57). When IMC is adopted at the corporate level, consumers are treated as financial assets who require nurturing for both short and long-term investment. In essence, the focus moves away from the impact of individual marketing efforts to a broad corporate emphasis on the creation, communication and delivery of value (8). Following this view, the benefits of IMC will not be realized until an organization knows who its customers are, how they experience a brand, how they prefer to be contacted, and their short and long-term behavior. Moreover, the benefits of IMC cannot be realized until an organization is functionally arranged to be consumer-centric.

As an overarching business practice, theorists suggest IMC provides two key benefits to a company’s senior management—it provides a basis from which management can determine how to allocate financial resources (e.g., building a new plant, creating a new line extension or developing additional marketing programs), and IMC also guides organizational alignment (e.g., how to structure the organization to be truly consumer centric) (Schultz and Schultz, *Next Generation*). Yet, Schultz and Schultz indicate that most organizations attempting to integrate at the business level are “hampered” by “ineffective organizational designs and obsolete organizational structures,” thus affecting an organization’s ability to be truly consumer-centric (*Next Generation* 350). They indicate that an organization’s structure usually impedes “integration alignment, and the efficient use of people and resources to achieve maximum returns from organizational investments” (350). Further, an ineffective organizational structure precludes horizontal communication systems and the ability to align internal
and external initiatives. As suggested, to achieve full integration, a cultural shift must take place within an organization—all departments, functions and business units must be aligned and understand IMC as a consumer-centric engagement and how it works (Kitchen and Burgmann 7). Ultimately, IMC offers a considerably different organizational approach to marketing than was initially conceived in the early 1990s.

*Marketplace applications.* While literature suggests that a paucity of organizations practice IMC in this more advanced stage of development, P&G remains a salient example of a global company that practices IMC as a strategic business practice. As referenced in chapter one, P&G undertook a change in the early 2000s to become a consumer-centric organization at every level of the business. Under the direction of then-CEO A.G. Lafley, P&G underwent a transformation with all of the organization’s employees brought together around the actionable mission “the consumer is boss” (Lafley). Employees were then empowered to enact the mission within the scope of their own work, underscoring how IMC was made relevant throughout every level of the organization. This consumer-centric mantra became the underpinning for the organization’s strategic and financial planning.

Reflective of “outside-in” planning, Lafley contends that an important shift took place by viewing consumers as critical sources of information and thus organizational direction. As such, P&G has instituted internal changes to better serve its consumers. In a June 5, 2013 press release titled “Procter & Gamble Announces Organization Changes,” the company explained a shift in its organizational design to “help us get closer to consumers and become more agile with customers.” It also fostered a culture of listening and learning with practices put in place to integrate data and consumer feedback.
to serve as the basis for business planning. While the organization focuses on compelling marketing, better in-store experiences, and developing new ways to foster relationships with consumers, it also seems to understand the benefits IMC can bring when understood and championed at the corporate level (Lafley). For P&G, “the consumer is boss” proved more than empty jargon – this mission shows how P&G treats its consumers as assets.

While P&G provides a clear-cut example of IMC conceived as a business strategy (accounting for each of Schultz and Schultz’s four levels of IMC development), literature indicates that the company is among a small number to achieve IMC’s full benefits, as practiced from a social-sciences perspective. Kitchen and Burgmann provide an excellent summary of significant barriers to integration, which include power, coordination and control issues; client skills and cultural issues; agency skills and general time/resource issues; IMC measurement difficulties; lack of strategic vision and business culture; unclear positioning at the corporate level; subcultures within different communication departments; need for cross disciplinary managerial skills; fear of change; hierarchical organizational structure; turf battles and functional silos; media fragmentation and specialization mindsets (12-13). More importantly, a praxis orientation hinging on broad-based knowledge of human persuasion can bridge the gap between a tactical and organizational uses of IMC, propelling the discipline beyond the limits of the social sciences. Before offering how the work of rhetoric and philosophy of communication provides needed ground on which to advance the discipline, another crucial barrier must be added to the mix: how IMC is perceived and taught in academic instruction.

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**IMC: Current Academic Approaches**

IMC course content in colleges and universities also echoes the marketplace’s narrow view of IMC as a tactical practice rather than a consumer-centric business strategy. Despite literature that advances IMC to an organizational philosophy, IMC course content around the world does not generally account for the broader, cutting edge perspectives of the discipline. Luck and Moffatt contend that IMC is still “vastly misunderstood” both in practice and teaching and that the benefits it can provide are not being achieved due to poor implementation (312). Similar to its marketplace practice, some theorists suggest that despite development in IMC theory, academics still understand and teach IMC at an overly simplistic level (Eagle et al.; Kitchen et al. “Brand Integration;” Kerr). Further, Kitchen et al. assert that instead of IMC theory informing its practice, IMC practice is leading theory and there is an urgent need for client organizations to avail themselves of IMC research (531). Given the popularity of IMC in the marketplace coupled with the disparities in its practice, Schultz and Patti articulate that an emerging research area is how IMC is being taught around the world, along with the instructional resources and content used to support those courses (79). Several studies led by Gayle Kerr, an IMC education researcher, provide insight into global academic perceptions of IMC.

In her article, “Apples, Oranges and Fruit Salad: A Delphi Study of the IMC Educational Mix,” Kerr finds that regardless of its global diffusion and increasing scholarly sophistication, IMC courses remain consistent with early conceptions (121). Her Delphi study comprised of a global panel of leading IMC educators found that most IMC courses are developed from existing courses in advertising and promotion.
management. Similarly, her study “An Inside-Out Approach to Integrated Marketing Communication: An International Analysis” analyzed 87 IMC syllabuses from six countries, including Australia, Korea, New Zealand, Taiwan, United Kingdom and the United States, and found that most syllabuses do not draw on IMC’s key constructs, key writers or published research (511). What ultimately is presented to students and then moved into the marketplace (when those students become practitioners) is a weakened version of IMC that does not account for its full organizational potential. As a result, students (as future practitioners) are taught to engage in mere technique and are missing out on a praxis-oriented education that provides necessary theoretical sophistication to help them discern underlying questions and dynamics that encourage a given approach.

With the proliferation of IMC as a marketplace practice, academic institutions are adding IMC courses and degree programs to prepare future practitioners. Faculty, however, are an obstacle and “adapt to rather than embrace” this dynamic (129). Much like the marketplace clings to antiquated versions of IMC, Kerr et al. found that what is generally being taught in academia are former versions of promotions strategy, advertising management or marketing theory courses infused with IMC terminology (511). As a result, what is taught in IMC is not what theorists would actually consider the heart of the concept (511). Often faculty lack the knowledge of what IMC is or are unwilling to move out of their area of expertise to teach IMC based on its latest research. Mirroring IMC’s predominant marketplace practice, IMC faculty also are prone to take an “inside out” approach to teaching and misguidedly view it from the narrow perspective of advertising or promotion rather than embracing IMC at a broad and strategic level (511). This pattern explains in part why IMC’s marketplace practice
remains entrenched in early practices. The educators charged with teaching the next generation of practitioners either are unaware of or refuse to avail themselves of the latest IMC research and advance it into the classroom.

Kerr found that there is little to no consensus as to where and how IMC should be positioned in a university environment (128). IMC lacks a disciplinary home but is most frequently housed in a business school. Moreover, given IMC’s interdisciplinary practice, its teaching is witness to disputes and turf battles among departments at any given university. Kerr et al. find that:

For most IMC courses and programs, IMC is taught almost exclusively in business schools in Australia, New Zealand and the UK. It is housed in communication schools in Korea and split between business and liberal arts (commonly journalism) in Taiwan. In the U.S., IMC’s disciplinary home is divided among business (58 percent), communications (29 percent) and liberal arts (generally schools of journalism) (13 percent) (530).

Given this insight, it appears as though IMC has a dual heritage in business and communication but is most commonly taught from a prescriptive, social-scientific business perspective. With a lack of an established disciplinary home, which varies by university, most faculty who teach IMC are unable to grasp conceptual locus and instead default to a modified version of their own area of expertise.

Kerr suggests academia’s “culture of specialization” is a significant impediment to its teaching and marketplace implementation (135). IMC’s generalist, interdisciplinary approach can be hard for students and faculty to comprehend because in contrast with the education and skill set afforded by a PR or advertising degree, students find it hard to
tidily understand what kind of skills their IMC education provides (135). Kerr asserts that this “generalist approach is hard to grasp because it is cross disciplinary and not specific” (135). Coupled with an educator’s lack of understanding about IMC, it’s not surprising that students, too, misunderstand or find the concept hard to comprehend. Kerr further asks how a generalist degree like IMC can possibly survive in a “university imperative to specialize?” (135). This specialist mindset entrenched in academia results in two dynamics. First, at the academic institutional level, it fosters interdepartmental turf battles and hinders cross disciplinary collaboration. Second, at the marketplace level, it only serves to indoctrinate a specialist, tactical mindset in emergent practitioners when a cross-disciplinary, interdepartmental, strategic mindset is what is needed most.

Literature by IMC theorists working to elevate the discipline from technique to praxis shows that most organizations that profess to practice IMC and most faculty who claim to teach IMC are relying on an anachronistic construct no longer reflective of or relevant to today’s marketplace. Whether practitioners are driving IMC’s academic instruction or IMC instruction is driving its practice is not easily answerable. But these are important questions to ask, as practitioners and academics play a role in its understanding, perception and growth.

What is evident is that with the marketplace and academia clinging to early practices, a change in perspective is necessary if IMC is to evolve. The integration of rhetoric and communication into both IMC practice and its teaching can provide an alternate understanding while instilling needed theoretical sophistication and marketplace competence. The following section will bring together marketplace and academic insights to show how IMC is facing an exigence evincing a need for rhetorical and
communicative education. When conceived from the standpoint of rhetoric and philosophy of communication attentive to narrative ground and questions informing the historical moment, IMC has the opportunity to advance in its practice and its teaching in a way that is more reflective of today’s marketplace.

**IMC: Its Rhetorical and Communicative Exigence**

To this point, this chapter has described IMC’s marketplace practice and academic course content by relying on Schultz and Schultz’s four-stage model of IMC development. Literature shows that despite significant advances in IMC’s theory, its practice and teaching are firmly entrenched in the early stages of its development (Kitchen and Schultz; Kitchen and Burgmann, Luck and Moffatt). IMC is treated in the marketplace and academia as dated instrumental marketing that coordinates a company, product or services’ various marketing tactics and consumer touchpoints to speak with one consistent, cohesive voice to in an effort to best manage consumers’ interpretations’ of a given initiative. Considerably fewer organizations practice IMC at its later stages of more sophisticated development, which first involves data capture to understand consumers and then uses that data as the basis for organizational design, resource allocation and overall decision making.

IMC theorists suggest barriers to the achievement of full implementation (see Kitchen and Schultz; Ratnatunga and Ewing; and Swain), and as previously noted, Kitchen and Burgmann provide a summary list of obstacles ranging from power, control and coordination issues; measurement difficulties; need for cross-disciplinary management skills; turf battles and functional silos; and media fragmentation (13). Many of these barriers are indicative of social-scientific practices. While this project accepts
that a social-scientific approach is a fact of current practice and academic course content, it also acknowledges that a social-sciences orientation presents considerable limitations to the achievement of IMC’s full potential, as the ground for dialogic engagement between an organization and its stakeholders. IMC’s most significant barrier is the lack of texture and insight afforded by the work of rhetoric and philosophy of communication. Groom echoes this assertion and contends that IMC’s next necessary integration is within the field of communication (145). If the discipline is to advance and provide any benefit, it will be through a humanities-based approach to IMC that focuses on the achievement of communicative understanding in a multi-vocal marketplace.

In his article, “Walking the Humanities into the Marketplace: A Communicative Call,” Arnett contends that engagement between the humanities and the marketplace is an essential rhetorical and communicative task of the twenty-first century (177). According to Arnett, when the two realms remain separate “by default, the market increasingly narrows questions and issues” to overlook complexities that would advance an understanding of today’s marketplace (177). Instead, when the humanities and the marketplace engage each other, an alternate standpoint is offered through which learning through difference can occur. Arnett further contends that in contrast with the marketplace’s social scientific implementation strategies (that contribute to visions of modernist, marketplace efficiency), the humanities offer “historical, literary and philosophical content that enriches and embeds market decisions within ideas that deepen decision making beyond supply and demand of material exchange” (176). Learning through the simple and familiar underscores precision, which opens doors for thoughtless application and implementation (178). Learning from the “unexamined ideas of the
Other, while additionally, discerning and clarifying our own presuppositions” invites “paradigmatic questions, paradigmatic shifts and innovation” (178). IMC, if it avails itself of the work of the humanities, has the opportunity to advance in new and unanticipated ways better reflective of the contemporary marketplace.

This chapter’s review of IMC’s treatment in the marketplace and academia underscores marketplace practices that carry both rhetorical and philosophical implications. As predominantly practiced, IMC illustrates a rhetoric or prescription—a rhetoric of telling—evident at both the organizational and consumer level. At an organizational level, IMC literature—inclusive of Schultz and Schultz’s four-level integration scheme—offers “prescriptive ‘turnkey’ solutions” around the desire to integrate (Cornelissen and Lock 10). In other words, IMC literature tells organizations in an often step-by-step fashion how they can achieve integration whether that means the orchestration of a unified marketing communication campaign or integrating an organization around consumer behavior. While IMC’s prescriptive rhetoric is often decried by critics for being overly simplistic and unable provide long-term solutions and account for organizational complexities (Cornelissen and Lock), the idea of integration proves attractive to organizations in its promise of consistency, control, order and efficiency.

IMC’s rhetoric of telling is also evident at the level of the consumer. As such, IMC is still focused on visions of consistency, control, order and efficiency through outbound “marketing that tells.” Viewed in this light, IMC is more focused on efficient channels and message control than two-way communication that actively works and wants to understand how consumers might arrive at a given interpretation. As previously
discussed in this chapter, Toyota, Taco Bell and the Jacksonville Jaguars all work with IMC in a way that attempts to push a story or set of messages onto their various stakeholders without regard to how those people might interpret a campaign effort given the parameters of their own lived experience. While Schultz, Tannenbaum and Lauterborn posit that IMC is “dialogue-seeking” and “not formula-driven,” its current rhetoric seems to illustrate the opposite (13). Even at higher levels of integration, a dialogic, interpretive side of IMC is not mentioned. Instead, IMC in its predominant practice points to the idea that with the right organizational structures and practices in place, the ground will be paved for an organization to advance or broadcast a given narrative to a set of consumers.

Further, from a philosophical standpoint, an IMC framework points to practices organized around a philosophy of centralization and control. Today’s marketplace is characterized by “fragmented, partial knowledge” and “information overload” (Irvine), as well as an increasing suspicion of contemporary businesses among an organization’s many stakeholders – all stemming from the last decade’s economic recession and corporate scandals (Christensen et al., “New Tensions” 209). This call for “corporate credibility” from critical and sophisticated stakeholders—including consumers—has deepened the need for organizational transparency (209). Given these dynamics, IMC in its promise of centralization and closer control is appealing to organizations in what often appears to be an unstable marketplace.

Much like, IMC’s prescriptive rhetoric operates on a two-fold level, accounting for integration that takes place on the part of the consumer and integration that must occur within an organization, so too does its philosophy of centralization and control.
Schultz and Schultz’s integration model shows that not only should an organization’s marketing and communication departments be integrated in one central location but that various functional structures of the organization (such as finance, accounting, operations, etc.) engage in horizontal communication, all in an effort to be tightly centralized around the wants and needs of the consumer (evidenced through their transactional behavior). Moreover at the consumer level, an orientation to message coordination, conformity and control are commonly illustrated in IMC practice. At its most fundamental, IMC is predicated on centralization in developing a marketing communication program in an effort to best influence and control the messages to which a consumer is exposed. In addition to Toyota, Taco Bell and the Jacksonville Jaguars’ outbound integration programs, both Celebration Health and Southwest Airlines account for and work to control the various touchpoints through which a consumer might interpret a given brand.

While IMC espouses prescriptive rhetoric and a philosophy of control, what ultimately is lacking is a focus on IMC as discursive and other oriented. While the idea of consumer-centrism is said to be the core of IMC, dialogue between and organization and its consumers, as well as understanding on the receiver end of communication, are overlooked in IMC literature. Kliatchko urges us to remember that consumers must be viewed with respect, seen in their totality as human beings and afforded basic human dignities (“Revised Definition” 146). This reminder points to the shortcomings of IMC’s reliance on Big Data in organizational decision making.

Persuit’s humanist perspective on IMC provides a clear example of the detriments of data as reified communication. In quoting Neil Postman, she describes reification as “converting an abstract idea (mostly a word) into a thing” (18). Much like IMC relies on
data as the locus of an organization’s decision making, she contends “reification abounds” in the marketplace (18). Persuit asserts that reification requires measurement, which can “obfuscate the human nature of communication, supplanting people with data” (18). Data detailing measurable consumer behavior and transactions, as the basis for organizational decision making, provides a salient example of reification. An over reliance on data as the starting point for organizational decision making presents serious limitations in terms of understanding how an organization’s many stakeholders come to hold their current and often contradictory views. Context, particularity and nuance are lost to a quick snapshot provided by a dataset. The use of data as the sole means to human understanding points to a considerable hurdle in achieving IMC at the organizational level. It also hints at the limitations of IMC as currently conceived.

A humanist perspective to IMC urges practitioners to get behind the data and to attend to nuance. Gadamer’s examination of the way that humans perceive and make sense of the world offers a way to reconceive the work of IMC as humans in conversation, providing constructive ground for its development. His focus on human understanding moves this project’s focus away from method, control, centralization and solutions. Rather than a prescriptive focus on how to advance through various phases of IMC development, Gadamer encourages us to sidestep any method and model and ask “what are we trying to do in the first place and how do we do it?”

Importantly, Gadamer’s approach to understanding is not instrumental or focused on control – that is, it is not influencing the trajectory of a conversation to get what one wants. Constructive hermeneutics centers on understanding—not what’s useful, convenient or superficial—but rather what’s complicated, nuanced and ultimately,
meaningful. With consumer centrism at the center of IMC, constructive hermeneutics can lead to this vision and transform IMC, moving the discipline from channels-based marketing to a mode of communicative and organizational understanding. If organizations are truly consumer centric they must want to actively engage their consumers and marketplace stakeholders and do so in a way that is respectful of difference, opening up unexpected possibilities for organizational growth.

This chapter illustrated IMC’s marketplace practice and academic instruction using Schultz and Schultz’s four-level framework for IMC development. Examples of IMC’s practice were provided for each of the four levels, and examples of IMC’s academic instruction were provided based on the work of Gayle Kerr. Despite extensive developments in the marketplace since IMC’s inception in the early 1990s, IMC’s practice and teaching remains entrenched in its early technique and channel-driven conceptions. This proves particularly troubling given that IMC was initially devised for a marketplace that no longer exists due to technological changes that place power in the hands of the consumer. Further, with so few organizations achieving the “ideal” of IMC as currently articulated, we are led to question its feasibility.

While this project accepts that a social-scientific approach to IMC is a current practice, it also acknowledges that a social-sciences orientation is limiting. IMC in its current practice is prescriptive, offering a rhetoric of telling, as well as an organizational philosophy, underscoring centralization and control. While both practices offer an organization the perception of stability and order, they overlook the way that humans construe meaning based on their lived experiences. The humanities, as rooted in rhetoric and communication—attentive to nuance, particularity and locality—offer new ground
and an alternate vantage through which the discipline can grow. Gadamer’s constructive hermeneutics and his examination of how humans perceive and make sense of the world offer a way to reconceive the work of IMC as hermeneutic conversation. He calls the discipline, its practitioners and teachers to engage and learn not through what’s comfortable and readily available but rather through what requires one to step out of familiar and into “radical alterity” to meet the challenges of today’s marketplace (Levinas 192 qtd in Arnett, “Humanities” 183). The next chapter, Critical Voices, will identify and describe principal critiques and arguments against the discipline that cast IMC as prescriptive and grounded in control.
Chapter Four:
Critical Voices

To understand IMC’s challenges and how a rhetorical and communicative approach can advance the discipline, one must be familiar with IMC’s critical voices. One of the major notions of this project is that IMC’s benefits can be achieved when organizations willingly and openly in hermeneutic conversation with their various stakeholders. IMC should be viewed as a fundamentally other-oriented encounter necessitating accountability and respect for difference if understanding and growth is to occur. Engaging what is different and unfamiliar assumes a fundamental hermeneutic presupposition—that learning occurs in and through difference, inviting “paradigmatic questioning, paradigmatic shifts and innovation” (Arnett, “Humanities” 177/178).

Although IMC scholarship espouses consumer-centrism (see Schultz and Schultz, Next Generation), it is most frequently practiced as instructive, prescriptive rhetoric predicated on a philosophy of centralization and control. IMC as a constructive hermeneutic seeks out and welcomes divergent voices, as a means through which understanding and learning through alterity—through sometimes alien and clashing views—can occur. As such, a humanities-based approach to IMC seeks to reframe and look to criticisms as opportunities for IMC’s development by calling into question the discipline’s current conception and practices.

IMC’s varying criticisms tend to fall—albeit not neatly—under two interrelated themes: theoretical criticisms, along with criticisms concerning IMC’s limitations when implemented. This chapter is divided into three primary sections. The first section, Theory Construction and Credibility Issues, includes criticisms of IMC’s theoretical
foundation and lack of a universal definition; questions about IMC’s novelty and originality; as well as assertions that IMC is a management fad and legitimation tool.

The second section, *Implementation Limitations*, explores concerns about the centralization of marketing communication functions; critiques that integration ignores the epistemological notion of an agent’s embeddedness and perspective; criticisms that IMC overlooks how meaning is construed by message recipients; and finally questions about IMC’s broader ability to account for marketplace complexities and shifts. The final section, *IMC as Creative Dialogue*, will bring together themes from each section, laying the groundwork for this project’s final chapter, *Toward a Rhetoric and Philosophy of IMC*.

The significance of this chapter for the greater project is rooted in examples of IMC’s critiques—its divergent voices—as potential platforms for the discipline’s scholarly and practical growth. With IMC as a significant “ideal” (Christensen et al., “Flexible Integration” 425), criticisms of IMC should not be dismissed wholesale because they offer insight and perspective to advance the discipline in its practice and teaching. When considered modes of advancement, IMC’s critical voices offer necessary perspective and serve as a springboard for the remainder of this project. In particular, Christensen’s project (in concert with Firat, Torp and Cornelissen) while representing IMC skeptics and detractors, discusses legitimate and significant issues that must be taken seriously. They assert that the project of integration must be reconceived to account more fully for the “creative receiver” (see Christensen et al., “New Tensions”) to allow organizations to more nimbly recognize and address marketplace complexities (see
Christensen et al., “Flexible Integration” ). Together with Gadamer’s constructive hermeneutics, Christensen’s project offers needed perspective for IMC’s development.

**Theory Construction and Credibility Issues**

While most marketing practitioners favor the integration of marketing and communication efforts because it is deemed “common sense,” IMC is not without skeptics and detractors (Kitchen and Burgmann 15). Simon Torp provides a useful survey of IMC’s advocates and detractors by plotting the field into a quadrant (196). His upper-left quadrant includes non-academic, non-theoretical skeptics and detractors, including David Drobis, chairman emeritus of Ketchum, a top-ten global public relations firm and Ralf Grauel, a business journalist and consultant. The lower-left quadrant includes academic, theory-based skeptics and detractors, such as public relations theorists James and Larissa Grunig, and corporate communication theorists Lars Thøger Christensen, Joep Cornelissen, Simon Torp and A. Fuat Firat. The upper right quadrant represents non-theoretical supporters and advocates, which encompasses consultancy writers and practitioners, along with varying contributors to non-theoretical, popular press publications. Finally, the lower right quadrant represents theory-based, academic advocates, such as Don. E. Schultz, Tom Duncan and other mainstream academic theorists and textbook writers.

Critics tend to approach IMC from a social sciences or a sociological perspective. Their criticisms will be put into conversation with a humanities-based approach to IMC at the end of this chapter and in chapter five. Most, but not all, of this chapter centers on conversation between academic, theory-based detractors and IMC advocates who raise their own well-founded concerns of the field. Critiques about IMC’s theory construction
and credibility include IMC’s lack of theoretical grounding, which then gives rise to concerns about IMC’s lack of definitional precision; IMC as new language for an old concept; and IMC as management fashion—a prescriptive solution providing instrumental rhetoric that serves to legitimize a desired action or plan.

**Lack of theoretical grounding.** In their article, “Theoretical Concept or Management Fashion?: Examining the Significance of IMC,” Cornelissen and Lock suggest that IMC is “theoretically ill-founded,” leading to difficulties in promoting its theoretical and practical significance only to result in eventual dissatisfaction among academics and practitioners (11/13). They argue that while IMC has been broadly accepted and endorsed by academicians and practitioners, the field lacks “theoretical robustness” and empirical evidence of its actual value (13). For Cornelissen and Lock, any theoretical concept of IMC must be proved over time through empirical observation in marketing communication practice (8). They also argue that any IMC principle or model must then be made “explicit” into clearly “defined” constructs that can be measured and tested (8). Cornelissen in his own right argues that for IMC to have any validity as a theory of marketing communication, it must be able to offer empirical description, not prescription, of marketplace practice (485). In his view, IMC has been insufficiently advanced to the status of a theory based on marketing and advertising managers’ perceptions of change or their verbal endorsements of IMC (486). Kitchen and Schultz, IMC proponents, acknowledge that while there is no widespread consensus on how to measure the return on investment of an IMC program, this issue is not isolated to IMC because it is an ongoing challenge for traditional marketing, marketing communication and public relations (199). Regardless, Cornelissen and Lock suggest
that until IMC can be conclusively measured and tested, offering empirical evidence of its actual marketplace practice and success, IMC will continue to rest on a shaky theoretical foundation.

In a similar vein, Torp contends that IMC literature “underprioritizes, or in certain cases, completely neglects” central theoretical problems, instead defaulting to “prescriptive and application-oriented writing” (195). Kliatchko, while an academic, IMC proponent, also indicates that a significant amount of theoretical research must be conducted before IMC can be solidified into a theory (“New Definition” 13). In his estimation, the majority of IMC research is based on and promotes unsophisticated but favorable views of IMC with a marked focus on “elements, tactics, tools, procedures and applications” rather than attending to the more fundamental task of developing a “theoretical understanding” of what IMC really is and does (13). Cornelissen and Lock argue that given this lack of academic rigor, IMC offers little more than “simplistic and turnkey solutions” (10). As such, IMC is perceived as a “panacea” with prescriptive checklists offering quick, simple steps for organizational success that in practice are unable to deliver on long-term results because of the practice’s inability to account for and respond to marketplace complexities (10). Kliatchko, however, contends that once a theoretical concept of IMC is clearly delineated, research on IMC’s “development, application, implementation and evaluation” will be more effective (“New Definition” 13). IMC research tends to focus on practical implementation or case studies instead of linking to the corpus of communication and rhetorical theory that offer IMC a praxis orientation.
On the teaching side, Kerr et al., while also academic IMC proponents, argue that the current understanding of the field is largely contingent on “practitioner perceptions and practices,” and thus ignores the important stakeholder group of IMC theorists who are actively working to define the discipline and who also are responsible for teaching future practitioners and academics (512). While IMC theorists have worked to develop research to advance the field, much of that research is being ignored in university level teaching. Instead, IMC course content tends to reflect a microscopic, simplistic view of the discipline or is based on advertising promotion content that masquerades as IMC. As a result, many criticisms of the field’s lack of academic and theoretical rigor, lead to critiques of IMC’s lack of a universal and agreed-upon definition.

**Lack of definitional precision.** With definitions of IMC ranging from the coordination of tactics to a more sophisticated business strategy, practitioners and academics are inclined to adopt whatever perspective of IMC suits their agenda. IMC’s divergent marketplace practice and academic instruction is often ascribed to its lack of a broadly agreed-upon and enacted definition—a persistent concern shared by both IMC detractors and proponents in the social sciences. A humanities-based approach to IMC, however, suggests that a lack of a definition becomes a place for the discipline’s growth, allowing multiple interpretations of a given phenomenon, to be discussed later in this chapter.

IMC detractors Cornelissen and Lock suggest this lack of a definition has serious implications that negate IMC’s status as a theory. In their view, IMC’s theoretical status “hangs closely” with a universal definition (10). Torp further notes that even today, the field is marked by “extreme conceptual and semantic ambiguity” and that IMC’s lack of
definitional precision may result in the concept becoming so diluted and vague that it will be “rendered meaningless” like so many other business concepts (193/194). Grauel, a business journalist and consultant, suggests that IMC is among a number of misused terms and irritating business jargon that people would be happy to never hear again (qtd. in Torp 193). IMC critics indicate that a lack of definitional clarity prevents IMC from being taken seriously on both theoretical and practical levels.

IMC pioneers and proponents also share concerns about what a lack of a definition could mean for the advancement of the discipline in theory, practice and teaching. Kitchen and Schultz agree that there is no broad agreement on “what IMC is, how it works and/or what it does” and worry that as IMC expands into emerging markets, there will be more IMC interpretations than ever with every “advocate and detractor” having their own idea of what IMC is—often based on their own relativistic, parochial views (199). In similar spirit, Schultz and Patti contend that “until we can define what we mean by IMC, both academically and professionally, it is difficult to develop theory or even theoretical underpinnings” (81). More recently, however, Kliatchko and Schultz suggest that perhaps IMC’s lack of definitional precision is “irrelevant” and that the concept’s real value rests in marketing efforts that are “relevant, authentic and useful” to consumers (388). Regardless, it is clear that with no well-established and accepted definition, IMC’s practice is far ranging and subject to interpretation. Given the absence of more sophisticated and academically rigorous views of IMC, practitioners and instructors resort to an understanding of IMC as simplistic and tactical.

From the perspective of academic course content, Kerr et al. also assert that since IMC’s emergence in the early 1990s, the concept has been defined in “many ways by
many people with no clear consensus evident” (515). This lack of clarity and consensus creates a “deserved concern” among academics and hinders its emergence as a new discipline, along with the development of a “relevant theory base” (515). Kerr et al. trace an evolution in IMC definitions, noting the emergence of the idea of “communication as dialogue” as a part of a “continual redefinition” that reflects more than decade of IMC’s practice and research (516). Ultimately, they conclude that definitional ambiguity does not help the progress of a “sound educational and learning platform” and that before IMC can be effectively taught, agreement is needed on what it is (518). In their view, owing in part to a lack of a definition, IMC’s instruction is generally devoid of any scholarly IMC content.

Despite the perceived shortcomings of IMC’s lack of definitional clarity on the part of both detractors and proponents, Schultz and Kitchen assert that IMC’s validity cannot be exclusively contingent on a universally-accepted definition (“Response” 18). Instead they defend IMC’s legitimacy, and argue that it in a pre-paradigm stage with its advancement as both a concept and theory following scientific theory (see Kuhn). Schultz and Kitchen argue for IMC’s significance and value based on broad interest from marketing communication writers, practitioner interest at the conference level, tracks on the topic in academic marketing conferences, and inclusion of the concept in peer-reviewed academic journal articles that support IMC as a developing discipline on both the academic and practitioner level (“Response” 18). Kitchen and Burgmann also offer that although IMC is still an emergent discipline, it is impossible to point to how much research is needed before a specific concept can be anointed to theory (15). They further maintain that it is impossible to know whether IMC will ever become fully formed theory
as currently conceived or it is a concept that needs to be linked to other communication concepts to emerge through a different theory (15). In this spirit, Christensen’s broad project ultimately recasts integration through a new set of parameters, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

**An old concept revived.** Cornelissen and Lock argue that to establish the ultimate significance of any theory, its beginnings must be traced, which proves difficult in the case of IMC because in their view, integration as a concept “represents substantially nothing new” (7; Cornelissen, “Marketing Development” 486). Torp suggests that a call for integration was foreseen in 1962 in Theodore Levitt’s essay on centripetal marketing (39). Levitt’s definition of centripetal marketing, espouses the importance of an organization being “systematically self-conscious” about all commercial messages emanating from a firm, as they must be “carefully coordinated to achieve one overwhelming, self-reinforcing, simple and persuasive story” (qtd. in Torp 39). Cornelissen and Lock claim that the impetus for IMC extends back to the early 1970s with the concept gaining prominence in the early 1980s given economic and marketplace pressures (7). In critics’ views, as market forces led to increased media fragmentation, increased domestic and international competition and an overall marketplace trending to individualism, organizations more urgently saw the significance of integration even though IMC’s vernacular repackaged an old concept.

In his review of IMC development, Torp mentions several companies that structured and implemented their marketing communication in ways that might be viewed as IMC today. In citing Marchand, Torp offers AT&T as an organization that practiced IMC in the early 1900s not just at the level of coordinated tactics and channels
but also at the strategic and operational level (192). In citing Syrett, Torp also offers Disney as a company that engaged in IMC practices long before the advent of IMC (193). Torp indicates that Walt Disney followed a principle he called “synergy” in the 1950s and 1960s that called for the coordination of all elements of Disney’s marketing mix so that they complemented each other (193). For these reasons, Cornelissen and Lock question the theoretical status and significance of IMC in practice, suggesting it will have a small and passing influence because it does represent substantial change from traditional thought and practice (9). As a result, research indicating that IMC is an old concept cloaked in new vernacular leads some critics to regard IMC as a trendy marketing approach.

**IMC as a management fad.** In light of IMC’s paucity of academic and theoretical grounding and an agreed-upon definition, Cornelissen and Lock dismiss IMC as fad and “management fashion” (10). They acknowledge, however, that IMC can still have an influence on practice even if it is a business trend. They argue that IMC is “management fashion” based on five points: IMC’s lack of academic content and rigor (previously discussed); its tendency to oversimplify and prescribe (also previously discussed); its adoption for the norm of rationality; IMC’s use of “rhetorics” (used here in the pejorative) to persuade; and its overall transient pattern of influence (10-11). Cornelissen and Lock suggest that IMC’s vocabulary and language can serve as a persuasive device. They assert that under contingent conditions, organizations often seek comfort in techniques that are fashionable and used by influential individuals or organizations (11). In their estimation, organizations adopt IMC techniques not for any real technological or economic reason, but rather because of “social or psychological
pressures” felt by a practitioner (11). In effect, adopting IMC techniques gives the appearance of “keeping up with the Joneses,” offering what Cornelissen and Lock call the “norm of rationality” (11). In other words, in contingent and complex situations, IMC is appealing because it is a de rigueur technique that offers what is perceived to a logical solution based on a promise of stability, control and predictability.

As management fashion, Cornelissen and Lock further argue that IMC relies on the use of “rhetorics” (11). In their view, given IMC’s popularity, its vernacular provides little more than a convenient linguistic device used to justify the implementation of a given technique or idea (11). IMC as management fashion allows managers to advocate for its use because it offers a popular and appealing technique, thus helping to justify a given set of recommended actions. Moreover, and returning to critiques of IMC as lacking empirical evidence of its practice and success, Cornelissen also asserts that IMC, ultimately puts forth a “rhetoric of teleology and progress” rather than any real descriptive theory of contemporary marketing practices (483). In reading Cornelissen, Persuit offers that IMC is “really just a good way for IMC to promote itself as the progressive answer” to contemporary marketing communication issues (33). In essence, IMC’s vernacular provides the means by which to advocate for efficient, reasoned and progress-oriented changes in an organization’s marketing communication program.

Cornelissen and Lock also suggest that IMC is a management fashion given its “transient pattern of influence” predicated on its “ahistorical bias” and tendency to focus only on “recently developed” ideas (11). As a result, they contend that IMC will be of short-term, misguided interest given its roots in simplistic and overly prescriptive solutions that are bound to fail and eventually result in disappointment. As such, they
foresee IMC’s ultimate failure in being unable to live up to its promises and leaving practitioners and academics disappointed and disillusioned (13). Christensen et al. also agree and suggest that prescriptive models are unable to address complex behavior, which ultimately prevents organizations from adequately addressing and adapting their environment (“Postmodernity” 156). They contend that the dichotomy between simplistic approaches and complex behavior is problematic, with IMC bound to fail, estranging an organization in the marketplace (156). In critics’ views IMC will ultimately be remembered for the frustration and disappointment engendered among organizations that subscribed to its principles based on IMC’s promise of stability and control.

In summary, IMC’s theoretical critiques reveal significant concerns that question IMC’s credibility in theory and practice despite the work of IMC theorists who are actively working to shape and advance the discipline. Detractors, in particular Cornelissen and Lock, view IMC as lacking the academic rigor and formal theory development necessary to advance beyond a mere marketing concept. With current research tending to the practical and prescriptive, they assert that this due in part to IMC’s lack of a universal and agreed-upon definition, which ultimately erodes the concept’s academic and practical credibility. At the same time, IMC theorists, including Schultz, Kitchen, Kliatchko and Kerr, acknowledge the challenges associated the concept’s lack of definitional clarity and agree that a definition will bring more formal theory, precepts and principles. Importantly, however, proponents also maintain that IMC’s overall significance and practical contributions should not be diminished because the field lacks a definition. Detractors, like Cornelissen, Lock and Torp, also question
whether integration is a new concept by suggesting that it was practiced in historical marketplaces. In Cornelissen and Lock’s view, IMC simply provides new language for an old concept, ultimately serving as a tool of legitimation in today’s marketplace. They contend that IMC is a fad that will ultimately have a passing influence.

Despite these theoretical concerns, IMC’s popularity both in practice and as an area of university study persists. While skeptics and detractors continue to challenge the discipline at a theoretical level, they also delve into questions of IMC’s capabilities and limitations in meeting the challenges of the contemporary marketplace. In doing so, they uncover and grapple with more fundamental, epistemological questions of whether IMC is actually able to deliver the benefits it proposes in light of organizational, marketplace and human communication complexities. The following section explores these concerns.

**Implementation Limitations**

When viewed from the perspective of its implementation, critics raise doubts about IMC’s ability to address what is known about the contemporary marketplace and human communication. The following section explores critiques about IMC’s limitations in practice. In addition to concerns about IMC implementation from public relations theorists and practitioners, much of the following discussion centers on Lars Thøger Christensen’s project whose work explores idea of integration beyond technical and practical developments. His work takes a step back to pose more fundamental questions about the nature of the discipline. Christensen questions whether integration as predominantly conceived and practiced is at odds with the current marketplace and with the way that humans construe meaning based on their own lived experience.
This section heavily relies on three of Christensen’s studies, which include:

“Integrated Marketing Communication and Postmodernity: An Odd Couple?”
(Christensen, Torp and Firat); “The Organisation of Integrated Communications: Toward Flexible Integration” (Christensen, Firat and Torp); and “New Tensions and Challenges in Integrated Communications” (Christensen, Firat and Cornelissen). Taken together, Christensen and colleagues raise fundamental questions about integration, which include whether centralizing an organization’s communication eliminates diverse perspectives and ideas and is ultimately “antidialogical” in nature (Torp 195); whether integration is built on the pretense that an organization can occupy a privileged perspective and accurately view itself in its totality; whether integration is able to fully account for the perspective of the message recipient who construes meaning in a “self-referential” way (“New Tensions” 213); and finally, whether IMC in its predominant conception and practice is too rigid to detect and adapt to marketplace complexities and shifts.

Before addressing Christensen et al.’s critiques of IMC, it is important to explain his project’s view of integration and how he approaches integration from a postmodern perspective. First, Christensen and his colleagues believe that integration’s focus should extend beyond consumers to all of an organization’s stakeholders. In essence, his project removes the “M” from IMC, along its strict consumer focus, and foregrounds the fundamental imperative of communication to the overall project of integration. In doing so, we gain an approach to integration that is sensitive not only to the need for an organization to attend to its consumers but also to its many stakeholders and to their interpretations of a given message. Christensen and colleagues therefore refer to the idea as “integration” or “integrated communication” (IC), which also emphasizes the
importance of communication, meaning and understanding to the overall project. IC will be discussed later in this chapter.

Second, Christensen and colleagues approach integration from a postmodern perspective. Postmodernity is a cultural condition introduced by Lyotard that raises doubt in master narratives, such as history, science, culture and identity, that seek to represent and totalize all knowledge (see also Jameson, Baudrillard and Benjamin). Suspicious of master narratives, postmodernity rejects modernity’s assumptions of a linear, bureaucratic, efficient and progress-oriented outlook and instead embraces petit and local narratives, social and cultural pluralism, a sense of fragmentation, acceptance of multiple and conflicting identities, loss of centralized control and contingency (Irvine). Christensen et al. view IMC as a “clearly modern approach,” and while they recognize that contemporary society still includes modern dynamics, they believe it is a “serious mistake” to apply a modernist construct on postmodern consumer behavior or what they call “postmodern consumption phenomena” (“Postmodernity” 164). In their view, the prevalent view and practice of IMC is antithetical to the realities of the marketplace. Christensen’s project questions if and how IMC – and more broadly integration – is nimble enough to address the complexities, contradictions and nuance evidenced in not only today’s consumer but also in all stakeholders who comprise the broader marketplace.

Christensen et al. contend that postmodernity is marked by a “loss of control, consistency and predictability,” which also results in the tendency for production and consumption to become reversed (“Postmodernity” 158). Consumers themselves become active message producers who move beyond technology to seek out ways to assert their
own identity. They often do this by purchasing and assimilating products and messages that represent their given identity in a given moment (158). Postmodernity, however, is marked by fluidity of identity and consumers may assume a different identity in a different context, which challenges organizations to gain a sophisticated understanding of their consumers and stakeholders.

Moreover, while consumers might use and combine products and messages to signify an identity, the way that products and messages are appropriated might differ from their original purpose. As a result, products and messages may be incorporated and modified by a consumer in both welcome and unwelcome ways by an organization. For this reason, Christensen et al. suggest that in postmodernity, an organization’s products and messages can “have a life of their own” based on how consumers weave them into their own identities and lives (“Postmodernity” 159). Consequently, the signifier (the message) risks becoming detached from its referent (the good or service), and in some cases, the message becomes even more “real than the reality it allegedly represents” (158). Christensen raises the concern that integration in its prescriptive rhetoric and philosophy of control does not equip practitioners with the ability to detect and respond to distortion and difference.

When practiced as outbound marketing, integration lacks the dialogic grounding needed to facilitate meaning between organization and consumer. Although IMC is presented as “dialogue-seeking” and “responsive” (Schultz, Tannenbaum and Lauterborn 13), IMC in its predominant practice focuses more on clearing a path for an organization to “tell” or deliver messages to consumers and less on how those messages might actually be construed or interpreted. Moreover, while IMC theorists present integration as steeped
in a philosophy of consumer-centrism (Schultz and Schultz, Next Generation 57), IMC in its current practice is grounded in a philosophy of centralization and control—on bringing order and coherence to an otherwise fragmented and cluttered marketplace to surround consumers in their preferred mediums. Christensen’s broad project addresses both of these issues directly, offering important considerations for how to evolve integration to meet the needs of a dynamic marketplace. Before addressing these critiques, however, this project first turns to concerns about the integration of an organization’s marketing communications functions, which serves as a springboard for the remainder of this discussion.

**Limitations of marketing communication centralization.** While most advertising and marketing practitioners are in favor of IMC, many of its detractors include public relations theorists and practitioners who decry IMC as marketing encroachment (Kitchen and Burgmann 16). Because public relations and marketing activities are traditionally organized into different departments, detractors view IMC as an “imperialist” attempt to swallow public relations under the purview of marketing (Kitchen and Burgmann 16; Rose and Miller 52; Grunig and Grunig 141). In their “Excellence” study, conducted in conjunction with the International Association of Business Communicators, James and Larissa Grunig explore the types of conditions and environments that contribute to the successful practice of public relations.

Grunig and Grunig argue against centralizing an organization’s marketing communications activities and contend that organizations are best served when their marketing and public relations functions remain separate entities. Public relations is the organizational function meant to establish trust, believability and credibility between a
company and its many stakeholders. When the public relations department is merged with an organization’s marketing functions, the credibility derived from a separate public relations department is compromised. Further, Grunig and Grunig suggest that as separate entities, an organization benefits from the inherent diversity of fresh and different perspectives provided by public relations and marketing functions uninfluenced by each other (141). They note a century-long debate about the role of public relations and whether it is to support marketing or if public relations is meant to play a broader political and social role (141). Grunig and Grunig claim that as a management function, public relations practice has survived largely because of its strategic value in communicating with and understanding a broad array of stakeholders – not just consumers. For this reason, how and whether to integrate an organization’s advertising, marketing and public relations functions has been the subject of ongoing argument.

While Grunig and Grunig believe that organizations are best served when public relations and marketing departments remain separate entities, they also suggest that in an integrated capacity, the public relations department could function as the lead integrator because public relations practitioners are charged with broad environmental scanning, issues detection and mitigation, along with relationship development with many stakeholders (148). In other words, given the public relations function’s strategic value in serving as an organization’s eyes, ears and conscience, all communications functions should be integrated into or coordinated by the public relations department (148). Following this scenario to preserve and protect the value of public relations, marketing communication would report to or at least be coordinated by a corporate-level public
relations department. This notion of integration moves IMC to integrated communication given the extended focus on an organization’s many stakeholders.

Grunig and Grunig believe that public relations remains most effective when four criteria are satisfied: the department has easy access to key decision makers in an organization and can contribute to strategic management decisions; all communication programs are coordinated by the public relations department; public relations is not subordinated to other departments (e.g., marketing, finance and human resources); and public relations departments are structured horizontally to communicate with specific publics and so that it is possible to reassign people as needed (Wightman 19). When all communication departments are centralized into a single function, critics argue that the trust and credibility established by the public relations department—and thus the overall organization—is eroded.

Practitioner critic David Drobis supports this criticism, as he approaches IMC from the standpoint of a public relations practitioner focused on many stakeholders – not just consumers. However, Drobis first questions the overall value of IMC in its early 1990s conception, which he views as vague and thus obsolete (6). He suggests that IMC is not clear enough in referring to any specific marketing activity and goes so far as to pronounce IMC “dead” in its early 1990s conception because in his view, IMC stood for “many things, but nothing in particular” (6). Drobis, however, does not completely dismiss IMC and attempts to clarify and expand the concept as integrated communications.

In looking to recast IMC, Drobis also favors the role of public relations in managing an organization’s marketing communication function because unlike other
communications functions, he maintains that public relations is charged with listening and responding to many stakeholders (9). Integration has to account for other stakeholders beyond consumers, as other stakeholders also have an impact on an organization’s overall performance and reputation. He maintains that if “integrated communications is to stand for anything in its new life, then it must go beyond marketing” and include the many functions covered under public relations, including employee and labor relations, investor relations, government relations, crisis management, community affairs, customer service and “any other management function where effective communication is critical” (7). Still, this centralized notion of an organization’s communications function has caused some detractors to criticize integration as overly rigid and monologic.

In its current practice, Christensen et al. suggest that integration is just a new method to control marketing communication and centralize power in an organization (see “Postmodernity;” “Flexible Integration;” Torp). They maintain that the question of how to organize the integration process becomes one of structure and ultimately a question of who or what department is in charge (“Flexible Integration” 428). Christensen et al. suggest that integration’s tendency to centralize and control marketing communications results in an organization imposing a “monological and hegemonic identity on markets and organizations” (“Postmodernity” 156). Torp characterizes this tendency as “antidialogical” (195). While IMC proponents like Kitchen and Schultz favor consolidating control and responsibility for marketing communication in one place by instituting a “communication czar” or “corporate communication director;” Christensen et al. raise concerns that this “compliance-oriented approach” is ultimately too
regimented and unable to provide for the nimbleness and flexibility needed to respond to unanticipated events or marketplace changes (“Flexible Integration” 431). Still, Christensen et al. do not dismiss integration outright. They instead advocate for a more flexible approach that considers integration as a worthy ideal, but they also recognize that marketplace changes and unexpected events necessitate flexibility, which will be discussed later in this section (“Flexible Integration 423). Christensen’s project does, however, point to integration in its vision of control, coherence and totality as built on a false promise.

**Unattainable comprehensive perspective.** Christensen et al. deem IMC as predominantly conceived an “illusion” (“New Tensions” 211). They contend that integration operates under the presupposition that it is entirely possible for an organization to step outside and stand above itself and take a “broad and all-inclusive view” of itself and its many messages (211). Similar to Gadamer’s philosophy that understanding begins with the recognition of one’s interpretive limits and that humans are inextricably embedded in a community or bias, Christensen et al. argue that it is impossible for an organization to view itself and the totality of its communication from a “privileged perspective,” thus making IMC’s validity a question of epistemology (211). As such, a contemporary view of IMC becomes fundamentally flawed because any vision of “wholeness, coherence and unity” is inevitably incomplete (212). Rather, any interpretation of an organization is “local and partial” based on the perspective and lived experience of the interpreter—whether internal or external to an organization (212). As such, questions of integration begin to move to one of interpretation, as propelled by the experience, history and bias of the message receiver.
Christensen et al.’s view of integration as providing a “partial conception” of an organization, in their view, has several implications (212). They first suggest the project of integration becomes “not so much a project of consistency but one of power” because partial and biased views of an organization are often presented “in the name of wholeness, coherence and integration” (212). IMC as treated as outbound message delivery often presents these partial conceptions as totalizing or the preferred view of an organization. Further, this desired organizational perspective originates from senior managers who carefully craft a preferred view that they want consumers to hold. For this reason, Christensen et al. advise that integration’s “power”—a partial conception presented as a totalizing reality—must be used carefully because a given narrative can alienate an organization’s different organizational stakeholder groups or individuals within the same group because people may interpret a message differently based on their own lived experience.

Following this view, integration creates what Burke, referenced in chapter two, would call a “terministic screen” or a collection of words, images, signs and symbols through which an organization views itself and wants others to view it (Symbolic Action 45). Whatever image an organization presents of itself is a partial perspective meant to “reflect, select and deflect” a given reality but ultimately depends on the interpretation of the message recipient (45). Consumers and stakeholders view an organization through their own terministic screens underscoring the importance of understanding the intricacies of the message receiver. Christensen et al. caution that integration is a “complex and expansive process involving many different audiences, messages and media” where no one—whether internal or external to an organization—should be
viewed as a “passive message recipient” (“New Tensions” 212). For this reason, they emphasize the importance of understanding how meaning is construed communicative process because interpretations of a given organization can be multiple and conflicting.

**Consumers as active and interpretive receivers.** Christensen et al. also contend that IMC in popular practice represents an unattainable ideal because humans are dynamic, interpretive beings who are not passive containers waiting for a message (“New Tensions” 207). Christensen et al. assert that while IMC is generally preoccupied with visions of unity, any project of integration needs to consider that “consistency is always in the eye of the beholder” (213). They challenge Schultz’s assertion that any difficulties in achieving a coherent message on the part of a receiver is simply the result of poor planning (209). Message integration occurs on the part of the receiver whether messages sent are coordinated by an organization or not. Message recipients interpret a given message by coordinating it with other aspects of their experience to arrive a given interpretation or conclusion.

Christensen et al. urge a view of consumers—or any message recipient—as “active and creative receivers” who actively try to make sense of a message by linking it to a context that is familiar and meaningful (“New Tensions” 213). They remind that the reception of IMC messages is not one of authorial intent (213). Consumers do not attempt to figure out what an organization meant to convey, and instead, reception is a “self-referential” process that cannot be coordinated and controlled by an organization (213). Groom, while an IMC proponent, explains that as part of message interpretation, consumers “graft” meaning on a message based on their own lives heightening the importance of moving IMC into “the realm of human communicative exchange.”
Consumers as creative and dynamic message recipients accentuate a gap in IMC practice and the need to move it from a prescriptive and instrumental approach and instead urge a view of integration as mode of engendering communicative understanding to address marketplace challenges.

Finne and Gronroos, IMC proponents, advocate for the primacy of the message recipient and recommend that instead of only studying outbound messages, IMC must also focus on consumer activity. In their view, the way consumers perform message integration elevates the significance of meaning. Adding to the complexity of message integration, Finne and Gronroos suggest that messages are interpreted around four dimensions of the lived experience: historical, future, internal and external dynamics, which emphasizes that humans can interpret and create meaning around the same concept differently. They advance a relationship communication construct to enhance IMC. Moriarty, also an academic IMC proponent, acknowledges that people integrate messages naturally, but gets around this concern by arguing that it is ultimately up to an organization to present a clear corporate or brand image to best position itself in the marketplace. Taken together, both critics and proponents suggest that more recognition and understanding of the multi-dimensional message receiver is essential for the advancement and achievement of integration’s full benefits.

When organizations engage in dialogue with their stakeholders, integration can also serve as a mode of discovery. Christensen et al. highlight the importance of recognizing that communication goes far beyond a mere mode of message transmission; communication is also a process of discovery whereby an organization and its consumers can come to understand not only each other but themselves (“Postmodernity” 164).
question how IMC as currently conceived limits a heightened understanding of an organization’s stakeholders. For this reason, Christensen et al. advocate for an approach to integration sensitive to nuance and complexity (“New Tensions”). “Flexible integration” ultimately provides flexibility while recognizing the ideal of integration—even if it cannot always be followed in practice.

*A call for “flexible integration.”* Christensen et al. argue that contemporary IMC is not “sophisticated” enough to allow organizations to “register, manage and adapt” to ongoing changes in the marketplace (“Flexible Integration” 425). In their view, IMC is a rigid, inflexible process that when followed does not enable an organization to be able to detect, address or quickly adapt to marketplace changes. They contend that IMC provides a system or a process meant to bring stability and control to an organization, but when the system is altered to address a marketplace change, it either takes far too long to adjust the process to be successful or the system falls apart. Christensen et al. contend that in a postmodern world, an organization cannot possibly strictly follow or “adhere tightly” to the idea of integration (“Postmodernity” 164). While IMC provides an ideal solution for organizations, marketplace dynamics (consumer and stakeholder feedback or changes enacted by stakeholders and other groups) are far too complex, intertwined, diverse and fluid to respond well to what is deemed a rigid, modernist framework.

In citing organizational theorist Karl Weick, Christensen et al. introduce the term “equivocality,” or the possibility that multiple interpretations of an organization, its products and services can and do exist (“Postmodernity” 162). They contend that for organizations to be able to account for nuance and complex, multi-layered environments, organizations must first embrace divergent voices internally. As such, Christensen et al.
refer to Conant and Ashby’s law of requisite variety to illustrate how IMC is too rigid and controlling inside of an organization to allow an organization to be able to adequately understand and respond the environment outside of an organization (162). Recalling Cornelissen and Lock’s critique of IMC as supplying a prescriptive and panaceatic solution, Christensen et al. explain that:

The continuous application of simplistic models on complex behavior, thus, prevents organizations from knowing their environment and learning new adaptive capabilities. If organizations are unable and unwilling to tolerate equivocal inputs, they produce failure and isolation from reality (162).

This suggests IMC is too inflexible to be able to adapt and respond to the multiplicity of valid, divergent and conflicting dynamics faced by an organization. Further, it points to integration in a postmodern marketplace as ultimately risking disillusionment and failure, reverberating Cornelissen and Lock’s warning.

More importantly, however, Christensen et al. do not dismiss integration altogether. They fully recognize while IMC presents a “significant” ideal, its principles cannot always be closely followed in practice (“Flexible Integration” 425). They point to a need to evolve and conceive of integration differently and advocate for a “flexible” approach that is more consistent with the contemporary landscape (423). In their view, IMC and flexible integration are both focused on the consumer, but each approach is rooted in a different organizational philosophy. Contemporary IMC (or social-sciences IMC) centers on the element of control as the means to clear a straightforward path for message delivery. Flexible integration, however, accepts and navigates the twists and turns of a rocky path and walks it with stakeholders as the means to textured
understanding. Flexible integration recognizes the value of control but conceives of it differently.

Put into practice, and drawing on organizational theory, Christensen et al.’s flexible integration balances control provided by integration with flexibility to understand and adapt to marketplace dynamics through a framework that integrates three features: loose with tight couplings, internal and external control, and common starting and end points (“Flexible Integration” 425). First, in a tightly coupled system, organizations focus on creating a coherent and unified image across stakeholders and mediums. As such, the organization is described and structured around adherence to its corporate message (425). In a tightly coupled system, one movement will be felt by the rest of the system, similar to cogs in a wheel. If one cog were removed, the system would be disrupted. This system, much like Christensen’s view of IMC, remains rigid with very limited flexibility. A loosely coupled system, on the other hand, is capable of concurrently handling “flexibility and stability but in different parts of the system” (425). Organizations can be comprised of tightly and loosely coupled systems simultaneously (425). Christensen et al. prefer an organizational structure with loose couplings because it contains structural and functional elements allowing for stability while permitting flexibility. This kind of structure organizations enables organizations to maintain grounding and control, yet still adapt to marketplace developments—acknowledging the ideal of integration but the reality of flexibility.

Second, loosely coupled systems also offer “endogenous and exogenous” control given the need for stability and the necessary flexibility to adapt to change (“Flexible Integration” 425). To achieve this balance, organizations must empower their employees
to become “sophisticated observers” who are able to recognize, work with and enact changes around nuance and variation (436). Instead of unreflectively subscribing to, organizing a company around, and attempting to enact a coordinated message, Christensen et al. encourage the practice of boundary spanning to “continuously confront” and challenge the status quo with “alternative ideas and understandings” (436). Flexible integration presupposes that an organization accepts vulnerability and is open to a diversity of employee and consumer feedback, which necessitates varied types of inputs from both employees and consumers. From an organizational structural standpoint, this requires necessitates horizontal and vertical internal and external exchanges (436).

Following this view, totalizing centralization is replaced by organizational units that are “integrated internally through intense communication” and at the same time can operate autonomously yet be mindful of their counterparts (437). This loose but recognized structure allows for a diversity and depth of perspectives that push integration beyond the philosophy of centralization and control predominantly practiced in the marketplace.

Finally, in adopting an approach that is both integrative and adaptive, Christensen et al. discuss the importance of common starting and common end points (“Flexible Integration” 438). In order to balance stability and flexibility, employees must understand and internalize common starting points or values, which serve as the basis for decision making at both the individual and organizational level. Instead of having to gain permission for decisions that carry a communicative impact, an organization’s employees are empowered to make decisions based on how they align with an organization’s values. Further, employees must also understand common end points or goals, which allow employees to make decisions and work toward a common goal (438). As a framework,
common starting and end points serve as filters or the ground for decision making in an organization attentive to and capable of responding to diverse inputs and ideas. Put into practice, if organizational structures are in place that allow for flexibility, enable both horizontal and vertical communication, and common starting and end points are known, organizations can quickly respond and address change and diverse perspectives while also maintaining stability. If a suggested action or marketplace opportunity reflects a given value and will support a given goal, a decision can be more easily and nimbly made than in an organization with tight centralization.

Christensen et al.’s flexible integration approach is one that moves far beyond the confines of IMC’s centralization. Instead, it permits an organization’s functional groups to “voluntarily, consciously and consistently coordinate their communication efforts without constant overview and impositions from the center” (“Flexible Integration” 441). This approach recognizes the benefits of coordination and integration across an organization, but rejects “tight centralization” giving an organization the strength to respond to the marketplace in a timely way (425). Hence, flexible integration is at once integrative and adaptive, necessitating communicative sophistication and interpretive sensitivity.

In summary, this section has raised important questions about IMC’s viability when implemented. Public relations critics challenge centralizing an organization’s marketing and communication functions. They argue that because the public relations function offers broader benefits in communicating with an organization’s many stakeholders, public relations cannot be subsumed into marketing. By doing so, an
organization, in addition to the public relations profession itself, risks losing the trust and credibility it is meant to foster.

Christensen’s project echoes this concern but in a slightly different way. Although skeptical of IMC’s ability to address the varying interpretations humans may draw around a similar object, Christensen and colleagues do not indiscriminately reject the practice. Instead they raise fundamental questions that interrogate the validity and limitations in conventional approaches to IMC while also acknowledging integration as a “significant ideal.” Their critique of IMC hinges on the argument that conventional IMC is a modernist construct that does not allow its adherents to adequately detect and respond to the diversity and a multiplicity of interpretations of a given organization in the postmodern marketplace. Christensen and colleagues challenge IMC for its prescriptive rhetoric and philosophy of centralization and contend that it is ill-fitted for the postmodern marketplace, as well as how humans construe meaning around a given object. Instead, they advocate for an approach to the integration that both welcomes difference and diversity while also recognizing the ideal of integration in bringing clarity and consistency to organizational expression. Christensen and colleagues view the project of integration from a sociological standpoint, and their work provides multiple points of intersection and agreement with a humanities-based approach to IMC to be discussed in the next section.

**IMC as Creative Dialogue**

The goal of this project is to advance the practice and instruction of IMC beyond simplistic coordination of marketing tactics through the work of rhetoric and philosophy of communication. This project takes as a starting point the idea that engaging what is
different and unfamiliar can be a catalyst for learning and innovation (Arnett, “Humanities”). This chapter will now identify underlying themes that arise from IMC’s criticisms and begin to extract communicative value as a means for the discipline’s growth and development.

The first significant theme identified in IMC’s criticisms is that IMC lacks theoretically strong grounding because it is not supported by an academically rigorous theory base and because the discipline lacks an agreed-upon definition. As a result, both critics and proponents suggest that in the absence of more theoretically sophisticated descriptions, practitioners and instructors default to practicing and teaching IMC as prescriptive and tactical. This project agrees that given a lack of theory that positions IMC otherwise, the discipline will continue to be viewed as a simplistic process rather than a significantly more inventive and constructive philosophy or mode of thinking.

Rhetoric and philosophy of communication through the work of Aristotle, Burke, Hauser and Gadamer asks scholars, students and practitioners to reconceive the discipline as humans in conversation instead of viewing it as an abstract, methodological business process to be applied for financial gain. As organizations have replaced individuals as key societal figures (Cutlip; Heath 18), organizations should be viewed as what they really are – collections of humans working toward a common goal. IMC must move from outbound marketing and an attempt to control interpretation to a way of thinking about the nature of organizations and the role of communication within them. Classical and contemporary rhetorical and communication theory—through the work of theorists like Aristotle, Burke, Hauser, Heidegger and Gadamer—point to the discipline as one that should be other-oriented, founded on discourse and dialogue, attentive to niche
audiences and their common vernacular, and attuned to discovery and understanding. This project will continue to argue that when viewed from a humanities standpoint, IMC can avail itself the rich history of rhetorical and philosophical writings that serve to more rigorously ground IMC in a much-needed praxis-oriented approach.

Tied closely to IMC’s lack of a theory base is IMC’s lack of an agreed-upon definition. While IMC critics and proponents suggest that the discipline’s lack of definitional clarity is problematic, a humanities-based approach to IMC instead suggests that a lack of an agreed-upon definition is an opportunity. A humanities-based approach to IMC welcomes a dialectic of “fuzzy clarity” (Arnett and Arneson, *Dialogic Civility* 316). Following this view, a precise definition only serves to constrain IMC’s possibilities rather than enable the exploration of multiple possibilities of a given phenomenon (Arnett, *Dialogic Confession* 17). This definitional gap provides an entrance for the work of philosophy of communication to unearth fundamental questions about IMC, its possibilities, its limitations, and if necessary, how it might be viewed differently (Hines). Philosophy of communication asks scholars, practitioners and teachers to take a step back and engage the philosophical “why.” By doing so, we ask why certain communicative choices are made while considering the history of ideas that illustrate why and how humans communicate as they do.

The second theme emerging from IMC’s criticisms is the need for the discipline to reconceive itself as dialogic instead of taking a monologic, outbound approach to communication. “Dialogue suggests a ground or position from which one encounters and listens to the Other while permitting undiscovered answers to emerge between persons in conversation (Arnett, “Dialogic Confession” 17). A strong sense of two-way
communication between an organization and its stakeholders is essential if an organization is to be truly other oriented. While competing, conflicting and critical voices may be viewed as an organizational threat, engaging those voices suggests an opportunity for organizational growth and transformation. Pearson explains:

The important question becomes, not what action or policy is more right than another (a question that is usually posed as a monologue), but what kind of communication system maximizes the chances competing interests can discover some shared ground and be transformed or transcended” (qtd in Meisenbach and Feldner 253).

In other words, dialogue provides a way for organizations and their stakeholders to learn about themselves together. Instead of viewing dialogue as a means to an end, the participatory nature of dialogue allows organization and stakeholder to co-create the kind of meaning reflective of Gadamer’s fusion of horizons.

The third theme that arises from IMC’s criticisms is the need for the discipline to recognize that it is a fundamentally interpretive engagement. Dialogue is a first step in understanding the Other while constructive interpretation is the second step. Dialogue and constructive interpretation work together—one element cannot work without the other. Rather than a business process predicated on monologue and control, IMC scholars and practitioners should be more concerned with how humans construe meaning around a given message and why they might hold a given interpretation. While IMC espouses the virtues of being consumer-centric and organizing a company around consumer wants and needs, scholarship does not focus enough on the creative and interpretive process involved in being human. Being consumer-centric and other oriented
are two different things. Consumer-centrism is a means to an end, an Other-orientation is opens up the possibility for understanding.

IMC scholars and practitioners must acknowledge the complexity and nuance involved in the marketplace and in the human condition. Learning how to be hermeneutically sensitive and sophisticated is imperative for those who practice and teach IMC. Stakeholders and the people who comprise a given organization are embedded in a multiplicity of perspectives, traditions and biases that shape their worldviews. Dialogue and constructive interpretation can help people find common ground when sharing and contesting ideas. A constructive hermeneutic approach provides a space in which new meaning and possibilities can be charted between organization and stakeholder. Gadamer’s framework illustrates how the confluence of the interpreter, the text (stakeholder) and historical moment might converge in dialogue to create new and unexpected meaning and thus opportunities for learning and innovation. By developing interpretive sensibilities, practitioners are better able to detect, address and adapt to marketplace shifts and changes.

The fourth and final theme that emerges from IMC’s criticisms is the fundamental importance of viewing IMC as communication instead of marketing. While not described as such, Christensen’s project does the work of philosophy of communication by raising primordial and epistemological questions about the validity and limitations in conventional approaches to IMC. Christensen and colleagues point to how communicative acumen and sophistication is a requirement for the discipline. His project underscores the fundamentally communicative nature of integration in representing the confluence of the broad communication discipline.
Christensen’s project recognizes the value of integration beyond a strict consumer focus. He and his colleagues reconceive the task of integration to extend beyond consumers to help an organization’s employees better detect, address and adapt to marketplace nuance and complexities. The ability to address marketplace complexity and nuance is predicated on integration’s ability to help an organization’s employees better understand and work with an organization’s many stakeholders through dialogic engagement and constructive interpretation. As such, Christensen’s project drops the “M” from IMC to re-envision integration as “integrated communication.” In doing so, communication is foregrounded and tied to integration’s success.

At the same time, Christensen recognizes that integration is not always possible in a postmodern marketplace marked by multiplicity, nuance, difference and fluidity. His project postulates that while integration is an important ideal, it cannot always be adhered to in practice. As such, he proposes the notion of “flexible” integration which balances the ideals of integration with the flexibility to quickly detect, accept, address and adapt to diversity and developments in the marketplace. By moving integration to a flexible construct, Christensen and colleagues underscore the communicative necessity of integration. If integration is to be successful, scholars and practitioners must understand much more than marketing communication and public relations—two components of the broad communication discipline. By bringing in constructs from organizational theory, Christensen exemplifies how IMC’s next integrative move is that of the communication discipline.

If integration is to be successful, IMC scholarship and practice must be attentive to the role of interpersonal, organizational, corporate and marketing communication,
along with public relations (all grounded in rhetoric and philosophy of communication) within the discipline. While not described by Christensen as such, integration becomes much more than marketing communication. The success of integration and a sophisticated understanding of the various aspects of the communication discipline work hand in hand. Taken together, Christensen’s project underscores how the work of rhetoric and philosophy of communication is integral to IMC’s advancement in its scholarship, practice and teaching.

The primary message of this chapter is that IMC’s development is predicated on understanding and taking seriously the discipline’s various criticisms. When reframed as opportunities for development, each criticism offers the possibility for growth and transformation at the level of scholarship, teaching and practice. When reviewed as a whole, several important themes that align with a rhetorical and philosophical approach to IMC emerge from IMC’s critical voices. Those themes include IMC’s theoretical, dialogic, interpretive and communicative necessity. This project asks scholars, teachers and practitioners to recognize the importance of a constructive approach to interpretation and discovery. This work leads by example in enacting a constructive hermeneutic approach to IMC’s development. The following chapter draws from the terms and themes presented in this project to construct a humanities-based approach to IMC through the work of rhetoric and philosophy of communication.
Chapter Five:

Toward a Rhetoric and Philosophy of IMC

To advance a humanities-based approach to IMC, this project has enacted the kind of work it is asking of IMC scholars, teachers and practitioners—to listen to diverse and divergent voices as a path to growth and understanding. The previous chapters have dissected aspects of IMC to: describe its confluence with rhetorical and philosophical constructs; describe its current practice and instruction; and uncover fundamental issues that call the discipline into question. This project has examined IMC to establish its potential as significantly more than the controlled integration of advertising, marketing and public relations tactics, as commonly practiced in the social sciences. When researched, taught and practiced as such, IMC is simply an agglomeration of communications (with an “s”) instruments and methods to be applied to a given issue to attempt to reach people with a given message (Jackson; van Riel; Luck and Moffatt). Instead, this project advocates a more humanistic approach to IMC, founded on the work of rhetoric and communication, and views the practice as organizations and stakeholders who are humans in communicative and interpretive engagement working to address and resolve issues of mutual implication.

Based on the themes and issues described in this work, this chapter now identifies five praxis principles central to a humanities-based approach to IMC that have emerged out of this project. Each principal relies on and brings to life rhetorical and philosophical concepts discussed in this project that recast IMC as foremost a mode of communicative understanding between an organization and its stakeholders. In addition, each concept
describes a practical approach and explains how it either intersects with or diverges from a social-scientific approach to IMC.

The significance of this chapter for the greater project is in the way that philosophical perspectives are now linked to practical applications. This chapter will explain communicative themes from the previous chapters in a way that shows the inherent relationships between philosophically-oriented work and practical applications to show how a humanities orientation to IMC can cultivate and enhance communicative meaning between an organization and the humans who may come into contact with it. Rhetoric and philosophy of communication can inform, complement and extend the practice of IMC by accounting for the limitations of its predominant social-scientific orientation in practice and academic instruction. In order to take the work of rhetoric and philosophy seriously, and thus take seriously a humanities-based approach to IMC, one must show how abstract theory can be utilized to address real human circumstances that operate at an interpersonal and organizational level. If IMC is to avoid a legacy of “disillusionment” (see Cornelissen and Lock), scholars, practitioners and teachers must understand how practical, creative dialogue informed by rhetorical and philosophical precepts can augment and advance a social-sciences construct.

A Humanistic Approach to IMC: Five Praxis Principles in Action

This project takes its starting point from Gadamer’s constructive hermeneutics as the ground for IMC’s development and growth. A constructive hermeneutic approach sees human understanding as: an ongoing and evolving process (not as a “fixed entity”); dialogue-dependent; respectful and welcoming of a diversity of perspectives and viewpoints; and attentive to context and the historical moment (Paton 187). Further, a
constructive hermeneutic underscores that “additive change, not just substitutional change, can make a difference in human life together (Arnett, “Humanities” 180). In other words, a constructivist approach urges organizations and the humans organized around them to join together and to plot and create their own shared story that supports a common good.

The point of this section is to illustrate how IMC can be practically and instructionally developed to reflect a perspective that understands organizations and stakeholder groups as real humans—instead of abstract entities—who must understand each other and engage in hermeneutic dialogue if the kind of change that contributes to a common good is to be affected. A humanistic approach to IMC, founded on rhetorical and philosophical theories, is made visible through the five following principles organized around the metaphors of discovery and understanding, an other-orientation, constructive interpretation, creative dialogue, and a commitment to engaging all of an organization’s stakeholders. These principles, developed through this project, work together to broadly reconceptualize the discipline as a mode of discovery and understanding instead of an instrumental method for selling goods and services. As such, a humanities-based approach to IMC illustrates the common commitment of engaging the other, which lays the foundation for a constructive relationship that welcomes and respects alterity and the vast diversity of human attitudes, values, beliefs and experiences as the path for organizational and an individual’s learning and growth together.

**Principle One: IMC is a mode of discovery and understanding.** The first principle of a humanities-based approach to IMC is to view the discipline foremost as a mode of discovery and understanding rather than a method of selling goods and services.
While most definitions of IMC foreground the importance of “nourishing profitable relationships with customers and other stakeholders” or “influencing perceived brand value” (Duncan and Caywood 18; Keegan et al. 631), the discipline must take a step back and ask what must first be accomplished if an organization is to be successful in achieving its business objectives. IMC scholars, practitioners and teachers must ask the question, “What is IMC fundamentally meant to accomplish?” If IMC, in the estimation of many of its social-sciences proponents, is meant to develop long-term relationships between organization and consumer, the discipline must be reconceived to foreground what this project asserts is the non-negotiable importance of discovering and understanding *in the first place* basic truths about the people an organization is meant to serve.

This principle makes evident the key distinction between a humanities and social-sciences approach to IMC. While a social-sciences approach to IMC views the marketplace as a place for the exchange of material goods, a humanities-based approach to IMC sees the marketplace as a place where organization and stakeholder can come together to chart a shared vision and story reflective of a common good. The marketplace is not just a space for capitalism; rather, it is a place for “competing visions of the good life, visions that affect people in a given historical situation” (Arnett, “Humanities” 184). Organizations must consider IMC as invention and invitational rhetoric. The marketplace is primarily a place where an organization and the people affected by it can engage in dialogue and work together to discuss, understand and address human concerns and build a mutually beneficial world. In order to do this, organizations must first
discover and understand what is fundamentally important to their stakeholders as *humans* and not as *objects* for financial gain or for the influence they may assert over others.

The humanities seek to discover what first is deeply meaningful and important to humans and to generate wisdom (“Humanities and Social Sciences” 3). Thus, a humanities-based approach to IMC begins by *questioning* what is intrinsically vital, meaningful and important for the humans who comprise an organization’s stakeholder groups and addresses those needs through the development of a workplace, policies, and goods and services, as well as through campaigns that support those efforts. The social sciences, on the other hand, seek to “analyze, explain and possibly predict” human behavior in an effort to generate new knowledge or factual information (3). A social-sciences approach to IMC begins with an argument (or perhaps an object—an untested product or service idea) and then attempts to cultivate consumer or stakeholder interest through campaigns that are positioned to address assumed needs. Both approaches seek to understand an organization’s stakeholders; however, each relies on different mode of discovery, which yields different interpretations.

With rhetoric and philosophy of communication centered on *heuresis* (invention or discovery), the first task of a humanities-based approach to IMC is to uncover central meaning and core truths. Reflective of Heidegger’s view of understanding as leading to more authentic possibilities for Being, IMC from the humanities perspective takes its starting point from what’s *meaningful*—not from what’s *useful*. As mentioned in chapter one, Gadamer reminds us that IMC from a humanities standpoint is not an instrument. It is not a tool or a thing to be foisted onto people for instrumental or strategic gain. Rather, Gadamer leads us to view IMC as an ongoing and shared conversation between people.
leading to mutual discovery. Persuit points out that “rhetoric [and by extension philosophy of communication] as Aristotle, Hauser, Gadamer, and Heidegger see it has nothing to do with “spin” [or selling] and has everything to do with uncovering truth” (89). When reconceived not as a device or technique, but rather as a mode of thinking and thus conducting business, a humanistic approach to IMC imparts organizations with the freedom to explore and uncover basic truths about human beings. The attitudes, values, beliefs and experiences of a stakeholder are laid bare—they are understood as they are, without being subject to an organization’s interpretation—and become a pathway to organizational and other-oriented decision making. In this light, when viewed from the perspective of the humanities, IMC now provides a space where organization and stakeholder can work together to understand how they might be able to create a world where more authentic Being can occur.

While the fundamental necessity of discovery of meaning and human truths may seem implicit and presupposed in popular approaches to IMC, it is not. Schultz and Schultz’s first level of IMC, explained in chapter three, involves the tactical coordination of marketing elements, which also reflects the predominant practice and instruction of IMC. The discipline reflects an instrumental rhetoric of telling rather than a rhetoric of learning and discovery. Following this social-scientific approach, practitioners devise an idea, product or service; dimensionalize the concept through the elements of IMC; and “push” their idea onto consumers to attempt to manage and direct the interpretation of a given message. This approach’s ultimate objective is for consumers to receive and form in their minds a consistent and unified message, as devised by an organization, about its products and services (Kliatchko, “Revised Definition” 154). While this project agrees
that providing coordinated and consistent messages makes rational sense in a competitive marketplace, this project also believes that an organization’s IMC efforts will only be successful if the discipline is first viewed as a mode of open discovery. Organizations must begin by asking their consumers much more primordial questions of value, purpose and meaning, which will then inform the kind culture an organization fosters among its employees, the type of policies an organization adopts, the type of products and services that should be developed and marketed, along with the kinds of campaigns that will support all of an organization’s efforts.

This project acknowledges that at more advanced levels of integration, a social-sciences approach to IMC does conceptually point to a desire for consumer understanding. Schultz and Schultz’s second level of IMC involves viewing the organization from the perspective of the consumer, and their third level involves the application of consumer behavior data as a means to strategic and financial decision making. At the same time, the insights to be yielded by these approaches in practice are limited, as they often begin with or hinge on already solidified ideas instead of fundamental questions. These attempts at discovery and understanding can be limited and misleading. They take a cart-before-the-horse approach, and ultimately provide a partial, biased and limited view of understanding, which will be discussed in Principle Three.

Further, and pointing to its purported roots in a consumer understanding, Schultz and Schultz argue that when fully implemented, IMC operates in a closed-loop cycle with learnings from each level informing the next in circular fashion, starting over and over again. Following this view, a closed-loop cycle would allow organizations to incorporate
learnings gleaned from levels two and three into their future tactical marketing campaigns. However, in the absence of a foundation of true discovery and understanding, a social-sciences approach to IMC that, while claiming to take an “outside-in” approach, actually further results in closed-loop, insular thinking. This could prove problematic given that companies follow a closed system that is ill-equipped to address more significant and new human insights and needs transpiring outside of an organization.

A humanities-based approach to IMC sees organizations and their stakeholder groups as humans in communicative engagement who are working to discover the intersection of real human needs and how those needs might be addressed through an organization’s offerings, an approach that reflects Burke’s concept of identification (see *Rhetoric of Motives*). With IMC as a heuristic and committed to discovery, an organization and its stakeholders must work to actively engage, question and understand each other’s virtues and values. As a result, organizations and their stakeholders are better able to address and create a shared vision for a good, rather than basing decisions on unexamined assumptions. IMC from a rhetorical and philosophical perspective points to the discipline foremost as a mode understanding and discovery.

**Principle Two: An other-orientation balances consumer-centrism.** The second principle of a humanities-based approach to IMC involves taking an other-oriented approach in the marketplace to supplement the limitations of IMC’s consumer-centric focus. Although, an other-orientation and consumer-centrism may seem conceptually similar, they are not, which again underscores the difference between a humanities and social-sciences approach to IMC.
A humanities approach to IMC adopts a rhetoric that is responsive to—rather than imposes on—the other. As such, an other-orientation encourages mindful consideration of how organizations broadly interact with and consider basic human dignities and core issues of the human experience as the starting point for organizational decision making. Following this thought, an organization would be open and considerate of concerns and ideas stemming from those who may not directly fall into an organization’s stakeholder groups or defined target audiences. In other words, an organization would be respectful and open to inputs from those for whom it might not stand to profit because they represent learning opportunities.

A social-sciences approach to IMC adopts a rhetoric of imposition and of telling—particularly to those for whom an organization has delineated as “core consumers.” Consumer-centrism is instrumental and much more narrowly focused on identifying, segmenting and cultivating relationships with those for whom an organization views as “target markets.” In other words, consumer-centrism focuses on what is already known. Proponents of consumer-centrism assert that the practice takes an “outside-in” approach where organizations place the consumer at the center of the organization as the locus for all decision making. Consumer-centrism, however, ultimately takes a much more microscopic look at what is already known or stands to be learned about an already defined set of consumers, while a humanistic IMC takes a telescopic look outward to possibilities.

A humanities approach to IMC adopts a rhetoric of invitation, which highlights communicative practice that encourage feedback from the other as a necessity for growth. Further, an other-orientation is a necessity in a global marketplace which calls for the
ability to welcome and assume the place of the other (Groom 152). An other-orientation suggests an openness, willingness and ability to detect, adapt to and address difference and unanticipated human inputs in the marketplace. Marketplace “shifts” and “inputs” are not abstract phenomena. Rather, shifts and inputs are changes in the marketplace that stem from human desires and behaviors. According to Groom, examples might “include, but are not limited to, matters of corporate citizenship, identity and brand development, employee relations, community involvement, environmental stewardship, and general social responsibility (148). In a postmodern marketplace marked by difference, disunity, social and cultural pluralism, fragmentation and hyper-reality, organizations must be prepared to adapt to a landscape of ever-changing petit narratives. Organizations must invite the other as a way to understand the human desires that catalyze a given narrative and to the humans who shape them. Yet the idea of engaging and assuming the place of the other “presupposes theoretical commitments … not readily found in business education but always found in the liberal arts” informed by the work of rhetoric and philosophy (152). Rhetoric and philosophy is focused on developing an other-orientation and welcomes and accepts the divergent voices that create the complex, multi-layered environments that organizations must navigate.

For this reason, this project agrees with Christensen et al.’s construct of “flexible integration” (“Flexible Integration” 423). Although they view integration from a social-sciences standpoint, a humanities-based approach to IMC finds points of intersection with Christensen’s project. Christensen’s call for flexibility in adapting to marketplace shifts and inputs balanced by the consistency and control afforded by integration is not an “either-or” approach, asking organizations to choose one approach over the other. This
project acknowledges the reality and rational benefits of a social-sciences approach to IMC but understands its limits. By taking a “both/and” approach, a humanities-based approach to IMC can balance and temper consumer-centrism with an other-orientation, founded on core questions of humanity, which is so often overlooked and dismissed in the marketplace.

This project urges the recognition and attunement to marketplace diversity, but it also agrees with Christensen et al. that integration (and thus consumer-centrism) is an ideal that can be followed provided it is compatible with the environment in which it is situated. As Christensen et al. suggest, the predominant practice of IMC represents a modernist, regimented, efficiency oriented construct meant to bring control to an organization (“Postmodernity” 157). Conceptually, it makes a tremendous amount of sense to focus and arrange an organization around specified and delineated consumer segments, provided a consumer-centric philosophy does not inhibit diverse inputs that lead to discovery and learning. IMC in the popular sense—and thus in its consumer-centric orientation—become less problematic, provided IMC is treated as a mode of understanding, as suggested in Principle One. As a mode of discovery, an organization shows an ongoing commitment to understanding the ebbs and flows of human behavior, even after humans are demarcated and segmented into discrete and identifiable segments for marketing and promotion. IMC from a social-sciences perspective suggests consistency and control; humanistic IMC compensates for its limitations, keeping the overall project humane and responsive to human concerns.

**Principle Three: Humans creatively and actively integrate messages.** The third principle of a humanities approach to IMC views humans as “creative message receivers”
who integrate and make meaning of messages in the context of their own lived experience (Christensen et al., “New Tensions” 213). This project agrees with and borrows Christensen et al.’s characterization of humans as “creative receivers” because people creatively interpret messages against a backdrop of what is familiar, engrained and tacitly meaningful to them (213). Further, humans will interpret messages whether an organization coordinates its communication or not (213). This points to the why organizations must communicatively engage their stakeholders to understand how the same message might have been interpreted differently and the circumstances that yield richer understanding into why people derived a given interpretation. Principle Three underscores several critical points about humans as “creative receivers:” humans interpret messages based on their own experience, and humans appropriate messages in ways that are meaningful to them, which are often unanticipated and cannot be controlled by an organization. Both of these points underscore the necessity of communicative engagement as a path to understanding versus an over-reliance on data as the starting point for organizational decision making, which will be discussed in the following section.

Humans interpret messages based on their own experience. Understanding humans as creative message recipients, and the importance of learning to interpret otherwise, situates an organization within a constructive hermeneutic and highlights the importance of cultivating practical rhetorical and communicative sensibilities in practitioners and students. Understanding the other requires active communicative engagement and participation, but engagement and participation on their own are not enough. People—whether everyday individuals, those organized into stakeholder groups
or employees who comprise an organization—do not naturally engage in hermeneutic, other-oriented dialogue. Rather, we are often prone to assuming that everyone is “like us,” we simply talk “at” the other, or we hear only what we want to hear. We engage with the intention of interpreting a message based on our own experience, we adhere to our own strongly held premises, or we argue without opening ourselves to the possibilities that we might learn from the other. Organizations operate in much the same way, particularly when they treat IMC as outbound marketing. As a result, practitioners presume that with the right set of messages and mix of channels, it will be able to impose its ideal interpretation of itself onto others. Constructive understanding, however, reminds us that our interpretations about things in the world are determined by our perceptions and experience that we carry with us into an interpretive engagement, and that we must step into the shoes of the other if learning is to occur.

Gadamer strongly reminds us that each person brings a set of preconceptions, presuppositions and prejudices, which comprises an engrained worldview, into a communicative engagement. We are always already biased our own experience—experience that shapes who we are and how we think. Yet, we are often unaware of and unfamiliar with our own interpretive limits. One of the tasks of a humanities-based approach to IMC is to help practitioners and students uncover, understand and make clear how a given set of thoughts, beliefs and behaviors might stem from a set of assumptions of which humans are often unacquainted. Humanities IMC asks us first to understand—if not confront—our own biases as practitioners. Further, when part of a humanities education, students (as future practitioners and stakeholders) are taught to understand a given bias that they carry into a conversation. We are then asked to dig below the surface
to gain a greater appreciation about how a set of unstated biases influences practitioners and stakeholders in the way that they unthinkingly live their lives. A task of humanities IMC is to examine how those unconscious biases might affect thought on a given topic.

All of an organization’s audiences, including the organization itself enters a communicative engagement with a necessarily “local and partial” view (Christensen et al., “New Tensions” 211). Constructive hermeneutics calls all parties in communication to be mindful of their identities and subsequently, the limits placed on their ways of knowing. This does not mean that an organization must surrender its own values to the will of its audiences. Rather a constructive hermeneutic approach to understanding respects that an organization can indeed maintain its point of view and values, but at the same time, it is asked to fearlessly listen alongside the other—whether individuals or groups of people—with an open mind, respecting what is being said in its own right. In this space, a “unity of contraries” (Buber 110) or “identification” (Burke, Rhetoric 19) emerges with creative, constructive and often unanticipated learnings develop through dialogue (to be discussed in Principle Five). This represents Gadamer’s fusion of horizons. Each participant in communicative engagement is transformed by the other, resulting in mutual implication. With consumers as creative message recipients who actively construe meaning based on their own lives, a humanities-based approach to IMC views it necessary that organizations and their stakeholders commit, to not only engage each other, but also to learn from each other, thereby creating a shared sense of meaning, learnings and a shared narrative.

*Humans appropriate brand messages creatively.* One of the reasons why constructive interpretation is so important is because people construe meaning...
subjectively and often appropriate goods, services and messages to reflect a desired identity. When people purchase goods and services, what they purchase often is a result of who they are and how they unconsciously understand themselves (Groom 152). As a result, people also become active message producers who may combine goods, services and messages in a given moment to reflect a given identity—an identity which might change given the situation (Christensen et al., “Postmodernity” 158). One of the fundamental tasks of marketing and marketing communication involves identifying points of intersection between an organization’s goods and services and how humans view themselves in a way that positions the company in the most positive light. However, people often appropriate and combine products, services, advertisements and images in ways that may be unwelcome by an organization. Creative and unintended uses of a given brand also have the power to communicate and provoke meaning, further underscoring the need for organizations to discover and understand motivations and consumer truths.

Christensen et al. cite the Tommy Hilfiger as an example of a brand that was appropriated in an unanticipated way that ultimately provided new meaning, opportunity and growth (“Postmodernity” 215). The brand was originally focused on the “preppy” consumer but later found success when it was adopted by rap artists who in turn influenced the brand’s adoption among urban teens. In this case, Tommy Hilfiger was open to this new, unanticipated audience. The brand did not dismiss or avoid acknowledgement of interest among the urban teen and did not “insist on a pre-planned image strategy” (215). Instead, the company got to know its new audience, how it perceived the brand and successfully adapted to demand.
Hauser’s view of the reticulate public sphere and vernacular rhetoric explains this phenomenon. Hauser accentuates how groups of everyday people may develop, converge and diverge with each other around an organization given an issue, interest, idea, good or service. In the same way that Tommy Hilfiger’s unanticipated urban-teen audience came to see the brand as emblematic of an urban lifestyle, new audiences who integrate a given message, product or service based on their own desires and experience can develop outside of and often unbeknownst to an organization in the reticulate public sphere. Rather than ignore or avoid unanticipated brand or message integration, organizations can constructively engage the vernacular voices that appropriate a given brand or message with the goal of fostering mutual understanding.

*Data provides limited understanding.* Constructive interpretation is also important given the social sciences’ proclivity to rely on predictive data as the starting point for consumer understanding. Schultz and Schultz’s third level of IMC involves the collection and analysis of large sets of consumer behavior data as the foundation for organizational decision making. In their view, success cannot be measured by intent, perception, attitudes, brand recall, or other “outputs.” Instead, in their view, organizational decision making, resource allocation and programming, must be measured by transactions or actual outcomes (“Transitioning” 22). If consumers are indeed creative message receivers, as this project argues, Big Data points to a serious limitation in uncovering why people think and act as they do.

While Big Data is able to quantify human behavior, it cannot explain human motivation or intention. Data can show that a product was purchased, but it cannot explain the intrinsic motivation behind the purchase. Data can explain that a person spent
15 minutes on a given webpage, but it cannot explain why the person chose to read the content. Data can explain that a phenomenon happened and when it might have occurred, but it ultimately is a poor proxy for understanding, which is lost to reification. In reification, human behavior is converted into an object and estranges an organization from gaining any real significant insight into the fundamental human truths suggestive of the human attitudes, values and beliefs that provoke a given behavior. Relied upon as the exclusive means for organizational decision making, data empties an organization of meaningful insight into those it is meant to serve.

Persuit maintains that “reification” abounds in the marketplace and can “obfuscate the human nature of communication, supplanting people with objective data” (18). A reliance on data as the starting point for organizational decision making suggests significant shortcomings in a social-sciences approach to IMC. It also illustrates how the humanities can develop and tangibly address the disparity in the current practice of IMC through meaningful and creative dialogue that engenders learning, understanding, and a shared narrative between organization and stakeholder. While this project takes data as a marketplace reality that can indeed provide quantifiable, objective information, it also argues that data must be put into conversation with humans who are able to creatively and constructively add depth and texture in explaining their lived experience and how it might converge or diverge with a given organization.

**Principle Four: IMC is creative dialogue.** The fourth principle of a humanities orientation to IMC views the discipline as one invested in dialogue. By reconceiving IMC as foremost a mode of understanding and discovery, the success of the discipline—
and the organizations that subscribe to its ideals—is predicated on practicing IMC as creative dialogue involving humans in conversation. Gadamer defines dialogue, as opposed to rigid statements, as spoken language that “in the process of giving and taking, talking at cross purposes and seeing each other’s point—performs the communication of meaning that … is the task of hermeneutics” (361). If dialogue leads to understanding, and if the first task of IMC is discovery and understanding, then IMC must be grounded in dialogic engagement. A humanities approach to IMC views the fusion of two parties in dialogue as fundamental to the creation of new knowledge, new learnings and new possibilities for growth.

For Gadamer, the bias we carry into a conversation “is what makes knowledge possible, what makes change happen, and what makes the uniqueness of life’s events understandable” (Arnett and Arneson 43). Dialogue was another begins with narrative ground that has bias … that both “sharpens and limits our insight” (Arnett, “Communication Ethics” 57). Pointing to Gadamer’s constructive hermeneutic, dialogue requires one to understand the ground upon which one stands and then to learn to understand the ground of another. Emergent insight comes from the between of ground or narrative bias (57). Gadamer helps us understand that when we are in dialogue with another person, we are not actually in dialogue with the person – rather we are in dialogue with that person’s bias or the ground one which that person stands (65). As such, the only way to uncover and understand one’s ground is to engage in dialogue.

Because we live in a historical moment marked by difference, as well as narrative and virtue contention, organizations must engage in dialogue with the various stakeholders who come into contact with and can be affect by an organization to explore
together alternate conceptions or varied textures for understanding life together (Arnett, “Humanities” 179). In the twenty-first century, organizations now are called to a much more “pragmatic and humble task”—they must open themselves constant learning and discernment (179). In doing so, organizations can work together with the humans who comprise their various stakeholder groups and inventively work toward public agreement and a vision for a common good.

Further, Gadamer’s constructive hermeneutic points to an organization, product or service’s identity and brand meaning as co-created. Co-creation asserts that brand meaning does not rest with an organization or the consumer, but rather is the product of what occurs between and in the “midst of” two parties in dialogue. Brand meaning is set of associations about a product or service that an organization aspires to create or maintain, and these associations imply a promise to consumers from the company (Aaker and Joachimsthaler 43). Brand meaning and identity can help organizations and their stakeholders form a relationship through the creation of a value offering that provides functional, emotional or self-expressive benefits.

As suggested in chapter two, a century ago, a marketer-centric, one-way view of identity creation dominated marketing thought and practice (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 5). Under this view organizations assume that because they’ve spent money and effort on their products and services, they own and control them. This one-way approach treats brand marketing as a monologic directive—similar to the tactical coordination of IMC elements—where the organization essentially becomes brand author with no consideration given to the consumers’ perceptions of the brand. Organizations often mistakenly believe that brand meaning is built unilaterally by an organization and is a
construct of authorial intent. However, as explained in chapter two, this view of marketing has given way a philosophy that treats the consumer as “endogenous” and as a “partner in the co-creation of value” (265). This approach stresses working with consumers and stakeholders in dialogue to understand their perception, interpretation and experience of a company, its products and services in order to create value that leads to a common good.

Following a view of meaning as co-created, dialogue is at once participatory, creative and inventive. Dialogue, following a constructive hermeneutic approach, in the most literal sense has the ability to create understanding and meaning, mutually beneficial value, and new and unexpected opportunities that can only occur with two parties in conversation. As such, the project is grounded in the view that IMC is not abstract theory. The success of the discipline hinges on the understanding and practice of IMC as real people who actively participate in dialogue to create understanding that leads to growth.

**Principle Five: IMC must account for all of an organization’s stakeholders – not just consumers.** While IMC has traditionally focused exclusively on consumers, this project argues that IMC must broaden itself to account for other stakeholder groups that either come into contact with an organization or that have the potential to influence an organization’s success. The project of integrated communications (IC), as favored by Christensen’s project, helps to conceptually broaden IMC to include all stakeholder groups, and this project agrees with that ideal. However, this project argues that IMC itself must evolve beyond an exclusive consumer focus. This project takes as a starting point the idea that marketing refers to communication between an organization and its
various audiences around corporate or commercial activities, concerns and issues.

Whether an organization is engaging a legislator, a reporter, a business partner or a consumer, it is in the business of marketing—the “marketing” of ideas—stemming from commercial activity that ultimately transpires in the marketplace.

Humans—exclusive of the role that they play for an organization—come into contact with an organization’s messages that are directed to consumers. Organizations deliver messages with everything they say or do (Gronstedt qtd in Christensen, Firat and Torp 425). Stakeholder groups are not abstract entities – they too are comprised of humans who as a consequence of human nature are active and creative interpreters of messages themselves and have the ability to influence organizational behavior and decision making. Example stakeholder groups include an organization’s employees, legislators and government agencies, the news media, influencers and opinion makers, other organizations that serve as business partners or suppliers, local community groups, activists and other group that may arise with a vested interest in the organization. A stakeholder group can also represent a group that might arise around a given issue and is identified by the organization as one that can influence the success or failure of the company in a given situation. As such, the discipline must broaden itself to recognize that all stakeholders have the potential to come into contact with organizational messages whether those messages were directed at them or not.

Further, and congruent with the ideal of IC, it makes rationale sense for an organization to coordinate all messages that are disseminated in the broad marketplace—whether they are to reach consumers, legislators, investors, donors and beyond. Recognizing Moriarty’s suggestion that it is ultimately up to the organization to create a
consistent and clear brand image, the discipline must recognize that organizational messages received by a community group, have the ability to clash and contradict the messages received by a legislator if those two parties find themselves in conversation (40). As such, organizations must broaden the focus of IMC to account for the many groups with whom it communicates and who may engage each other in conversation outside of the organization.

At the same time, this chapter previously noted agreement with Christensen et al.’s flexible integration approach that balances the ideal of message integration with the ability to flexibly detect, address and adapt to various inputs in the marketplace. Christensen’s project supports the concept of integrated communication, as marketplace inputs do not solely arise from consumers alone. Inputs that have the potential to positively and negatively affect an organization arise from all stakeholder groups. As such, IMC from a humanistic perspective recognizes that the marketplace is fundamentally comprised of humans categorized and located within various stakeholder groups. If IMC is to evolve and advance beyond the limitations of a social sciences standpoint, it must be able to flexibly account for and dialogically engage various stakeholders regardless of the role they play as designated by an organization. IMC, as traditionally practiced, overlooks the necessity of coordinated and consistent communicative engagement with an organization’s own employees, among myriad other stakeholder groups with whom an organization must engage, to understand and chart a shared vision against a common good.

The crux of a humanities-based approach to IMC is a focus on understanding the human persons an organization is meant to serve. The necessity of understanding what
people think and why they act as they do is a theme that runs throughout rhetorical and philosophical studies. While this project accepts a social sciences approach to IMC, it also recognizes its limitations. In order to account for those limitations, scholars, practitioners and academic instructors must avail themselves of an alternate perspective not typically welcomed or seen as credible in business practice or studies. As previously stated, IMC is not abstract theory. The practice of IMC fundamentally involves human beings in conversation who have a vested interest in a common good. When committed to the practice of IMC as discovery and understanding, an other-orientation, constructive interpretation, creative dialogue, and a commitment to all of an organization’s stakeholders, IMC has the possibility to evolve and advance to meet the needs of a complex, twenty-first century marketplace.

**Summary and Conclusions**

This project has performed the work suggested by Gadamer’s constructive hermeneutic by placing into conversation IMC’s predominant and social-scientific practice with a lesser-studied approach reliant on the work of the humanities, born of the rhetorical and philosophical tradition. Much like dialogue asks parties in communicative engagement to see each other’s point of view, this project agrees that merits exist within social-scientific IMC, as well as humanistic IMC. What develops in the midst of this conversation is an approach to IMC that accepts as fact the practice of social scientific IMC, but relies on the work of the humanities to account for its limitations. Taken together, the two approaches can extend the scholarship, practice and teaching of IMC in a way that meets the dialogic and communicative vision for the discipline implied in scholarship but rarely realized in the marketplace or taught in academia. In the
“between” of this conversation emerges a view of IMC that is both integrated and flexible and invested in understanding the lived experience of the humans who serve as an organization’s employees and the humans an organization is meant to serve.

Because IMC is predominantly treated as prescriptive, predictive and practiced as outbound marketing, scholars, teachers and practitioners are urged to avail themselves of the work of the humanities as the ground for the discipline’s advancement and growth. Gadamer’s constructive hermeneutic provides a philosophical and theoretical base for this project while the work of other scholars (Heidegger, Burke, Hauser and Aristotle) support a view of IMC as invested in rhetorical and communicative practices. While both proponents and critics assert that IMC lacks the necessary academic rigor and theoretical grounding, rhetoric and philosophy yields a rich history and corpus of ancient and contemporary thought organized around questions of persuasion, perception and meaning—all of which move the discipline out of the realm of technique and into the realm of praxis.

Humanistic IMC moves the discipline away from being viewed as marketing and channels and instead advances a view of the discipline as fully invested in humans in communication and understanding. The project contends that meaning is created not within the confines of an organization’s four walls, but instead, it emerges in the midst of dialogic engagement between organization and stakeholder. As such, the marketplace isn’t just a place for capitalism and the exchange of goods and services. The marketplace becomes a space for the exchange of ideas (Arnett, “Humanities” 176). It is a place where organization and the humans who are—or who have the potential to be—affected by it can engage in dialogue to determine the kind of life they can and want to live
together. When committed to the practice of IMC as discovery and understanding, an other-orientation, constructive interpretation, creative dialogue, and a commitment to all of an organization’s stakeholders, an organization will find itself in meaningful conversation that can address real and urgent human concerns.

IMC from a humanities perspective calls scholars, teachers and practitioners to view the discipline’s success as built on the communicative integration of individual and organizational voices working together toward a common good. The marketplace typically ignores, overlooks or dismisses the work of rhetoric and philosophy by contending that it is abstract theory. However, rhetoric and philosophy of communication provides a framework and a way of knowing that helps us see value in difference as a path to growth, helps us question why things in the world appear to us as they do, and helps us engage in dialogue to understand how we might be able to address fundamental human issues. IMC must reconceive itself as the discipline *par excellence* that leads organizations and their stakeholders to uncover and constructively grapple with principal questions that lead to a life well spent together. The humanities, through the work of rhetoric and philosophy of communication, serves as a missing link between IMC’s predominant practice and teaching as tactical coordination and its dialogic vision. IMC’s growth and advancement is predicated on viewing the discipline as real people in hermeneutic conversation. The humanities equips us with the rhetorical and communicative sophistication to join, participate in and evolve this vibrant and vital conversation.
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