

Integrated Marketing Communication: A Review Paper

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Abstract

Integrated marketing communication (IMC) is being practiced worldwide at very large scale. The purpose of this review paper is to enhance the understanding of what is IMC, its impact and the difference between IMC and traditional marketing communication. Integrated marketing communication is consumer oriented approach rather than organizational oriented that focuses on organizational needs. IMC is performed in a manner of synergy rather than in isolation. IMC is associated with some positive results like brand awareness, customer satisfaction, brand loyalty, positive brand image, unique brand association, greater profitability, increased sales and cost savings. IMC has major impact on organizational performance and brand equity. There are some barriers to successful implementation of IMC program.

Keywords: Integrated Marketing Communication

Introduction:

Communication is the process of conveying thoughts and sharing the meanings among individuals or organizations. Communication which can be described as the paste that keeps combined a channel of distribution. The function of communication within channel of marketing is an important issue from both a theoretical and managerial point of view. Communication in marketing channel can function as the process by which influential information is transmitted (Frazier and Summers, 1984). Though the Marketing literature admits that communication plays a vigorous role in channel functioning (Grabner and Rosenberg, 1969; Stern and El-Ansary, 1988), it provides no integrated theory for channel communication. Communication has been connected conceptually to both behavioral issues (e.g. power and climate) and structural issues (e.g. the pattern of exchange relationship) in the channel, yet empirical research on channel communication is scanty. Communication is a need which is being used to create network, spread ideas and promote the products or services. Effective communication is done through well-known channel that transmits simply and exactly.

Marketing communications represent the accumulation of all components in a brand's marketing mix that promote exchanges by building shared meanings with the stakeholders of brand. Businesses use different tools to promote their company, product or services. Tools can be

brochures, telemarketing, websites etc. Objectives of the marketing communication are to provide information to target audience and to boost the sales.

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is a term that emerged in the late 20th century regarding application of consistent brand messaging across myriad marketing channels. IMC was developed mainly to address the need for businesses to offer clients more than just standard advertising. The concept of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) makes definite sense – so much so that trainee in the field may get amaze what all the confusion is about. IMC recommends that marketers focus at the customer first – his or her preferences, buying patterns, media exposure, and other factors – and then customer is exposed to the products that fits its need through mix of communication methods which the customer find more attractive and credible. According to Jones (2008) it is revolutionary step because of a whole culture of agencies, in-house departments, and consultants had grown up around the notion of separation for advertising, direct marketing, sales promotion, and public relations efforts, rather than the harmonious, customer-centered planning process that IMC requires. Integration has become an essential concept in marketing because technological advances have changed how business stakeholders interact. Marketing theory that was established during the discipline's formative years has been overtaken by the complexities of real-time, multimodal, multi directional communication.

What is Integrated Marketing Communications?

Schultz (1993) defined IMC as concept of marketing communication planning that combine and evaluate strategic role of different communication discipline to get the clarity, consistency and greater impact. According to Percy et al. (2001) planning and execution of all marketing communications are required in a same way to meet the objective. Process of producing and applying the different communication programs and the probability to have impact in future over time, overall IMC process starts with the customer and work to determine and define the methods and forms to develop the influential communications programs (Schultz, 1993). IMC is also considered as a strategic business process which is used to plan, develop, execute and evaluate the coordinated and assessable influential marketing communication programs relevant to external and internal audience over time (researchandmarkets.com). Raman and Naik (2005) defined the IMC in following words, “an IMC program plans and executes various marketing activities with consistency so that its total impact exceeds the sum of each activity”. It is a strategy in which different communication tools like advertising, public relations, sales promotion, direct marketing and personal selling work together to maximize the communication impact on target consumers (en.wikipedia.org). IMC is also defined as a management concept which is designed to make unified force of different aspects of marketing communication such as sales promotion, public relations, advertising and direct marketing rather than to work in isolation (marketing.about.com).

Importance of IMC:

Each strategy has its own importance which can be assessed from the results and impact of that strategy. IMC is supposed as a key competitive advantage in many organizations (Kitchen and Schultz, 2001; Weilbacher, 2001; Smith, 2002) because sales and profit can be increased while saving the time, money and stress by applying IMC (Smith, 2002). This fact is also recognized by agency executives (Kitchen and Schultz, 1997). IMC has positive impact on communications, creativity and cause consistency in communications. Real contribution of integrated promotional mix can make a strategic tool for business. IMC provides new dynamic model that facilitate the business to make marketing communication as consumer oriented

(Kitchen, Brignell, Li and Jones, 2004). It makes easy availability and access of goods and services and makes message more efficient and reduces product related risks in the mind of consumers.

Objectives of IMC:

There are always some specific objectives behind every strategy and these objectives are the end results of that strategy. IMC strategy of communication is also focused to achieve specific objectives. Katrandjiev (2000) described two conflicting objectives of IMC as (1) to achieve considerable sales and (2) to build a strong brand image. Schultz (1993) said that objective of IMC is to influence the behavior of target audience. The ultimate goal of IMC is to setup customer oriented sensibilities, help in resource allocation, achieve competitive advantage and develop business process in all direction of organization and its operations that add value for its customer (researchandmarkets.com). Despite these major objectives, there are some common objectives like create brand awareness, favorable customer attitude and to drive business & revenue (ehow.com).

Components of IMC:

When going to develop any strategy, there are always different elements which support to develop that strategy. These components can be said as pillars of that strategy. Each pillar has its importance and all pillars are essential for the successful implementations of strategy. In the same way, IMC strategy is consisted of three main elements: the consumer, the channels and the evaluation of results. These components are discussed below (wiki.answers.com):

1- Consumers:

In this element it is interrogated how consumers get information as well as how the delivery of that exchange of information affects the message's form and contents.

2- Communication channels:

This element interrogates several channels and how much effective each channels is in IMC strategy.

3- Results:

It considers how the level of intricacy in IMC strategies leads marketers to measure result by designing new ways.

According to Linton, there are different elements of IMC; these elements are media, message consistency, design consistency, reinforcement and sales alignment. Media is used to perform specific role and is used to create awareness about the product to the prospects. In advertising campaign of product only main features are highlighted and more deeply details are provided through direct mailing, websites, telemarketing, brochures etc. Message should be consistent i.e. same message should be delivered through different media. Design consistency refers to consistency in color, photographs and other visual elements and proper linkage among these elements. Design consistency reduces cost and increases impact on the audience. Reinforcement is about the result evaluation. It evaluates how much the strategy successful and whether the required message is delivered. In business-to-business marketing, purchase is the lengthy and complex process where there are different decision makers and influencers. IMC provide the information at every stage, buying team establishes its requirements, prepares a specification and short list of potential suppliers, evaluates proposals, and makes a final assessment of the most suitable suppliers. An integrated campaign aligns the communication program with the purchasing process at each stage to ensure success.

Developmental Process of IMC:

When we are going to develop the strategy, we have to follow different steps or stages. Mostly these steps are followed in sequence. Kitchen and Schultz (2000) described the stages in the developmental process of IMC. These stages are

1. Tactical co-ordination (content)
2. Redefining the scope of marketing communications (channels)
3. Application of information technology (stakeholders)
4. Strategic and financial integration (results)

First stage requires the cross-functional and interpersonal communications within and outside the business in order to achieve synergy and consistency which creates “one sight, one sound”. In second stage, organizations collect the extensive information about the customer and apply to arrange marketing communications and to evaluate feedback and then the most favorable channel in the mind of prospect is selected. Third stage declares the accessible data sources and globally segmented databases are built to get understand and identify the relevant and profitable customers. In fourth stage firms constantly control the marketing communications performance from ROI perspective.

According to Akers, there are different steps which are involved in developing IMC plan. These steps are analysis, identity, goals and budget. First step is the analysis of prospects to whom the message will be communicated. It is about to know the demographic characteristics of target audience. Second step is concerned with creating brand or company unique identity. This stage matches the identity of brand to the characteristics of prospects and differentiates the brand from those of competitors. In third step the specific objectives related to brand identity and purpose of brand are determined. Fourth step is the allocation of money for IMC plan. This step ensures that budget is carefully allocated that increases revenue.

According to Vargas (2005) an effective IMC process is concerned with the identifications of target audience, determination of the communication objectives, designing of the message content, selecting the means for communication, defining the media mix, budget & priorities and measuring the effectiveness of effort.

IMC vs Traditional Market Communication:

IMC differs from traditional marketing communication in number of ways. IMC is associated with some positive differences as compared to traditional marketing communication. These differences are considered as competitive advantage of IMC over the traditional marketing communication. Some of the differences of these two approaches are highlighted are given below:

Integrated Marketing Communication	Traditional Marketing Communication
Synergy function: Integrated into one	Isolated function: Partitioning
Customer-Oriented: start with the customer needs and wants	Organization-Oriented: start with the goals and product
Coherent communication programs	Breaking communication programs
Brand/Relationship building objective	Short-term sales objective
Targeted to stakeholder segment	Widespread audience

Source: Integrated Marketing Communication (<http://www.v5.books.elsevier.com/bookscat/samples/9780750663618/9780750663618.PDF>)

Factors influencing the IMC:

Every strategy is influenced by different factors which influence in different ways depends upon the nature of the goal behind strategy. There are different factors that influence the IMC. According to Schultz (1996) IMC just not relyonlyon integration of promotional mix, it also heavily depends on infrastructure, staffing, marketing budget and skills. It is assuring that only combination of promotional mix is not the IMCbut infrastructure of business should support. Despite of good staff and skills, marketing budget is most important, due to lack of budget whole effort become useless.Similar factors described by Kitchen et al. (2004) that nature of business, marketing development and required investment by business have great influence on IMC. According to Vargas (2005) nature of the product, nature of the market, stage in product-life-cycle, price and funds available for the promotion have major influence. It is also important to notice that product is suffering which stage in product-life-cycle, at each stage strategy differs. If stage is perceived wrongly then strategy becomes useless and result may differ from the required result. Reid (2005) considered attributes of the organization including type and size, as well as position in the market as influencing factors.

IMC and Organizational Performance:

IMC play important role to build the close relationship with customers. It provides the right points to know what the customers want and what their needs are. So the organization can provide life time value to customers. According to Vantamay (2011), there is positive impact of IMC on the organizational performance. Organizational performance can be checked through different dimensions; these dimensions are

- 1- Organizational infrastructure,
- 2- Interactivity,
- 3- Mission marketing,
- 4- Strategic consistency and
- 5- Planning & evaluation

Sales, brand advantage and customer satisfaction performance appears to be related to all these dimensions. Development of IMC in organization should address these dimensions. For organization infrastructure, reinforce the cross-functional relationship in the organization. Interactivity should be increased by encouraging the process that connects the customer with the company and its brand. In mission marketing, mission statement should direct the value creation with the help of brand and product and transfer of value to all stakeholders. For strategic consistency, co-ordination of all messages and elements of market mix should be increased in the promotion of brands. For planning & evaluation strategic consideration should be emphasized in brand promotion to all key target audience.

IMC and Brand Equity:

Brand equity can be defined as the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer's reaction to the brand marketing, it occurs when the consumer is close with the brand and contains some favorable positive strong and unique brand associations in the memory. Kitchen et al. (2004) identified that IMC is not only a communication process, but also a process connected with management and brands. Schultz, Tannenbaum and Lauterborn (1993) explained the impact of IMC on brand equity in terms of "contacts", a contact is any information-bearing endure that a customer has with the brand, including experience of using the product and the words of mouth. According to Schultz (2004) IMC has been suggested as a strategic business process that could cause to establishing brand value. It is widely accepted that influential communication is important in enabling the creation of brand awareness and brand image, that is, brand equity. According to Chang and Thorson (2004) IMC, with synergy among the several communications vehicles as its essential concept, could potentially generate the greatest persuasion impact in consumers' encounters with brand contacts. According to Kotler (2006) "IMC can contribute to the brand equity by crafting brand image and embedding the brand in the consumer's memory".

Barriers to IMC:

It is not easy to develop and implement a strategy. When going to develop and implement strategy, organization faces many barriers. As IMC has more benefits for the Agency and Company, but it faces many obstacles in developmental process. According to Moriarty (1994) cross-disciplinary managerial skills are considerable obstacles to IMC. Duncan and Everett (1993) described the egos (consider superior "I" myself to others) and turf battles (competition to achieve a segment) as primary barrier to integration. Eagle and Kitchen (2000) recognized four groups of possible obstacles to IMC success; these groups contain control issues, resources issues, cultural issues and flexibility issues. Schultz (2001) considered the concept of campaign as

a problem in IMC, because IMC focus on long-term relationship building while campaign is executed for the short-term. Tsikirayi, Muchenje and Katsidzira (2012) found budgetary restrictions and poor quality product as barrier in planning and implementing the IMC. Due to budget restriction, promotion can be of poor quality and undermine the sale of good quality product, while poor quality product can neglect the impact of good promotion due to boycott of product by the users.

Measuring the Effectiveness of IMC:

When a strategy is applied then first priority is to check and evaluate the result that how far strategy is successful. After the implementation every strategy gives the result whether in the form of success or failure. All strategies are developed by focusing the success. IMC is also considered as successive strategy. Providing information, creating awareness, changing attitude, enforcing brand loyalty and building company image are the effective results of IMC (Potluri, 2008). "Brand equity can be enhanced by pursuing a strategy that integrates the various marketing communications tools" (Vargas, 2005). Vantamay (2011) indicated the five factors to measure the effectiveness of IMC program; these factors are

- 1- Customer responses,
- 2- Market performance,
- 3- Brand exposures,
- 4- Communication effect and
- 5- Channel support.

Customer response is mixture of 5 indicators; these indicators are brand loyalty, customer satisfaction, brand extension, brand referrals and brand preference. Marketing performance is composed of 5 indicators; these indicators are sales growth, market share growth, ability to command premium price, profitability and sales income. Brand Exposure is composed of 3 indicators; these indicators are personal contacts, mass media exposure and contact points exposure. Communication effects are composed of 4 indicators; brand knowledge, brand attitude, brand awareness, and purchase intention. Channel Support is composed of 1 indicator: level of channel cooperation. Higher the level of all indicators shows the IMC is more effective.

Discussion:

Integrated marketing communication is being considered as business strategy which is used to get maximum positive impact on the business. Usually it is the combination of different promotion mix which is used in same way to produce seamless message to make maximum impact on the customer. This review paper examines importance and goals of IMC, how to IMC is developed, IMC impact on organizational performance and brand equity and also some barriers which influence the IMC process. Media, message consistency, design consistency, reinforcement and sales alignment are the components of IMC. Sales and profit can be increased while reduce the time and money. There are some goals behind the IMC, these goals can be, boost the sales, build strong brand image and achieve competitive advantage. To generate the brand equity is first priority of the company. IMC is being used to create a good image of brand in customer memory that customer share positive words of mouth to others. IMC focuses on customer that how greater values can be transferred to customer by organization which is supported by IMC, it helps organization to make close relationship with customer by attacking the dimensions of organizational performance. Our main objective of this review paper is to differentiate the IMC with traditional marketing approach, which can be seen that how IMC differ

the traditional approach. Cross-disciplinary managerial skills, egos, turf battles, concept of campaign, budgetary restrictions and poor quality product are major barriers to IMC. To make IMC impact more efficient, barriers removal is most important.

Conclusion:

This is the review paper in which we tried to explore IMC from different aspects that what IMC is and what is its impact on business. IMC is being practiced at very large scale worldwide. IMC gives positive impact with successful promotional integration if it is implemented with proper process. It gives positive impact as brand equity, brand awareness, profitability and changing attitude of consumer. But all the factors which are influencing the IMC should be managed properly. IMC strategy should be made considering different aspects which might leave negative impact. Expanding the concept of IMC tells us about its impact, factors influencing it and what are barriers. To get the effective impact barriers should be removed by managing the influencing factors.

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