

## A Conceptual Study on IMC as an Important Tool of Marketing

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**ABSTRACT** - Since the mid-1990's, the concept of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) has come to the fore and attracted considerable attention in the literature. The main purpose of this paper is twofold: (1) to explore IMC by delimitating its conceptual boundaries and identifying its main dimensions. To achieve this goal, this study analyzes the conceptual framework around IMC and its dimensions and it presents an extensive literature review. Moreover, a new definition is presented and the main dimensions of the concept are highlighted. A systematic literature review is carried out to identify IMC antecedents and consequences. Finally, the main academic and managerial implications are described. The present study will help academics and marketers to better understand the role that this new marketing paradigm plays within modern management, in identifying the key variables that promote or hinder IMC and the benefits derived from its implementation.

**Keywords :** Integrated Marketing Communication, Marketing, Advertising, Personal Selling.

### INTRODUCTION

Recently marketers have turned away from mass marketing and they have concentrated more on integrated marketing. Meanwhile, advances in communications technology and the rapid growth of direct marketing may influence on the nature of marketing communications. Marketers who attempt to build relationships with different sectors and various markets have considered variety of methods and tools to increase sales by promoting and encouraging the development of policies. As a result, consumers have been exposed to different marketing communications. Marketing is a set of activities to create value exchange between business and customers. It involves the exchange of information between producer and client, it identifies essential customers' needs. Customers cannot differentiate between the sources of the messages as marketers. In terms of consumer advertising, messages from various data channels are merged and the boundaries often disappear. Conflicting messages from various data sources are the causes of the different images that people have from the company and the different products will be distorted. In most cases, firms cannot merge or integrate different communication channels, thereby establishing heterogeneous communication with customers. Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) systems can integrate all messages and pictures of the product in customer' mind. It includes all routes that consignees read, see or even make sense of single message. In today's competitive era not only the means of the access to clients but also the ways that clients can refer to organization should be integrated. IMC means a cross-functional process for creating and nourishing profitable relationships with customers and other stakeholders by strategically controlling or impacting all messages sent to these groups and encouraging data-driven, purposeful dialogue with them. It also means emphasize that the integration of marketing communication should not be understood as a simple uniformity of the message transmitted across different channels. Companies must measure the means of communication from the perspective of performance-cost with customer's awareness and motivation to purchase. They must able to choose appropriate mix of communication tools and to avoid doing repetitive, unequal and inadequate work. Consumers' perception of a company includes different messages that they receive including media advertising, pricing, packaging design, direct marketing, public relations, sales promotion, store displays and even the place of purchase for a product or service. Companies need "a 360-degree view" of the customer to fully understand all different ways that communication may influence customer behavior in their daily lives. The automotive industry is one of the largest industries in the world, where more than a

hundred million people are employed in the industry. According to Drucker (1995), the automotive industry is mother of industries. Finding the relationship between the implementation of IMC and effectiveness in organizations of Iran Khodro is due to a large breadth of activities, having multiple products for different budgets, the huge number of customers, availability, importance of the industry and the relationship between other industries is the primary focus of this research. If the organization does not have a clear plan for communicating with their customers may face with confusion.

Thus, the main objective of this paper is to defining the key terms in Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) and also covers topical literature reviews and finally ends up with giving recommendations and conclusion.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Integration of communication is not a new concept and, in fact, the concept of communication integration emerged as early as the 1930s. During this period the sales representatives would collaborate with the advertising team while, by 1966, scholars had already recommended the combined use of promotional tools in order to ensure synergy. In 1970 and 1980 marketers felt increase in fusion activity of advertising industry. This idea influenced the advertising industry to provide one stop service to the customers. In late 1980 fusion of marketing came out and started dominating the marketing over public relation academics. In 1990 IMC had become one of the most contemporary marketing issue. Moreover IMC came out as a discipline in 1990s. The suggested names for this discipline was integrated communication (IC) and total communication (TC) but at last integrated marketing communication (IMC) has been finalized and came out as the most favored term. Despite ambiguity, the summery of IMC definition reveals it is the combined use of promotional tools in order to bring about consistency, clarity, and maximum communication impact. expresses the role of IMC messages in the development of communication strategies of firms and its strategic implementations. This concept explains that an organization should control (planned) and influence messages (unplanned, product, service) to create and encourage stakeholder relationships. In competition with the global market, marketers want to connect with customers in most efficient and effective way to communicate their product benefit and service quality to the potential customers. Consequently, marketing communications have become a fundamental aspect of marketing, a business vision and an essential factor in successful business management. Its importance have increased dramatically in recent decades, considering that the marketing and communication are inseparable, all organizations business areas using various forms of marketing communication to make their offer and to meet financial or non-profit targets. It can be said that IMC is highly complex content. For building sustaining competitive advantage current marketing era is helpful. IMC can build strong brand of the organization provided that marketing communication is stated more strongly to achieve its objectives. Social media the most popular and widely discussed tool in marketing communication plays the important role in the aggregate communication plan of a firm. Social media can be simply defined as the —media we use to be social. It emphasizes the importance of knowing the tactics and strategies of the tools that are available for the users to connect with each other rather than just understanding the definition. Though human beings have been interacting and using different marketing methods throughout the history, social media is more effective than the traditional methods because it offers a two-way communication. They propose that social media is a set of —highly interactive platforms created through the usage of mobile and web-based technologies in which individuals and communities are able to share, develop, discuss, and modify content created by other users. They discussed that the impact of consumer-to-consumer communications has been greatly magnified in the marketplace. Social media is a hybrid element of the promotion mix which enables companies to talk to their customers; on the other hand it enables customers to talk directly to one another. These unique features of social media make it as an important communication tool in modern day marketing by all means.

Integrated Marketing Communication Integrated Marketing Communication is defined as the coordination and integration of all marketing communication tool, avenues and sources within a company into seamless program that maximize the impact on customer and other end users at a minimal cost. This integration affects all firms business-to-business, marketing channel, customer-focused, and internally directed communications. Integrated Marketing Communications is a management concept that is designed to make all aspects of marketing communication such as advertising, sales promotion, public relations, personal selling and direct marketing work together as a unified force, rather than permitting each of them to work in isolation. Besides, it acts as an aggressive marketing plan because it sets and tracks marketing strategy that captures and uses extensive amount of customer information. It also ensures that all forms of communications and messages are carefully linked together to achieve the specific objective of IMC.

**The important tools of Integrated Marketing Communications are:****Advertising**

Advertising is the most old and popular tool of IMC. It has four characteristics- it is nonpersonal; it is persuasive in nature; it is paid for by an identified sponsor; and it is disseminated through mass channels of communication. Message of advertisement may encourage adoption of goods and services by potential buyers. It is much cheaper way than personal selling to reach customers. Advertising peruses non personal nature and it can lack the ability to adapt the sales message to the potential buyers and in actual sales. Advertising actually works best in increasing awareness, changing attitudes and influence sales. The contribution of advertising to sales is difficult to separate because many factors actually influence sales. Contribution of advertising to sales works best in the long run. But it has exception in terms of internet arena. The use of banner ads and some pop ups views promote sales in internet base advertisements. New technology can count how many persons clicked the banner and ultimately made a purchase. Brand management and maintaining brand equity are strategically equipped with advertising. Recently the cost of advertising in Television increased five times in last 20 years worldwide. Because of its large number of audiences national advertising is very popular to spread the message of the firm. The credibility and clutter are other disadvantages in advertising because of its frequent and paid presence. Massive advertising from network television, to daily newspapers, to roadside billboards, to golf course signs, to stickers on fruit in grocery stores consumers are more likely to ignore advertising messages. Modern technologies including DVRs (digital video recorders) allow audiences to record television programs and gives power to skip commercials. The disadvantages make advertising more vulnerable and complex to integrate in wide marketing communication plan.

**Public Relations (PR)**

Public relations is managing and building positive relations with the firm's various publics by obtaining favorable publicity, building up a good corporate image, handling and heading off unfavorable and negative rumors, stories, and events . Though public relations are used to promote product, people, ideas, and activities yet nonprofit firms are highly engage for its promotion than any other organizations. Public relations, which is often consider as management function which identifies, establishes, and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the different publics upon which its success or failure involves. Publicity, the main tool used by public relations practitioners, mostly works on third party endorsement. For that reason it is often considered as most credible messaging tool in marketing communication. Publicity capitalizes on the news value of a product, service, idea, person or event so that the information can be disseminated through the news media. Publicity articles are perceived as being more objective than advertisements, and their messages are more likely to be believed, absorbed and accepted. Though it is a free of cost vehicle officially it is a very hard working and vastly complex platform for bringing effective out bound publicity messages to be noticed and picked up by credible media sources. Public relations' role in the promotional mix is becoming more important because of what Philip Kotler describes as an —over communicated society. Consumers develop —communication- avoidance routines where they are likely to tune out commercial messages.

**Sales Promotions (SP)**

Sales promotion is one level or type of marketing aimed either at the consumer or at the distribution channel (in the form of sales-incentives). It is used to introduce new product, clear out inventories, attract traffic, and to lift sales temporarily. Sales promotions are short term and can be designed targeting final consumers or the trade. Consumer promotions such as coupons, sampling, premiums, sweepstakes, price packs, low-cost financing deals, and rebates are purchase incentives in that they induce product trial and encourage repurchase. Sales promotion targeting traders are allowances for featuring the brand in retail advertising, display and merchandising allowances, buying allowances such as volume discounts and other volume-oriented incentives, bill back allowances such as pay-for performance incentives, incentives to salespeople, and other benefits to encourage wholesaler and retailers to carry the item and to push the brand. Researchers have found two main perspectives regarding sales promotion in firms' total marketing plan. First on is about the view of sales promotion as supplemental to advertising in that it connects the role of advertising with personal selling. This view regards sales promotion as a minor player in the marketing communication program. The next observation on sales promotion and advertising is, it is a distinct function with specific objectives and strategies very different from each other. Sales promotion in this logic is equal to or even more imperative than advertising. For that view, many of the companies allocate as much as 75 percent of their advertising or promotion budget to sales promotion and just 25 percent to advertising. Finding the

right balance is often a difficult task. There is no doubt that sales promotion providing incentives that gives quick increase in sales volume and in long run it helps to boost brand identity and brand image.

### **Personal Selling (PS)**

In general term, Personal selling is where businesses use people (the "sales force") to sell the product after meeting face-to-face with the customer. The sellers promote the product through their attitude, appearance and specialist product knowledge. They aim to inform and encourage the customer to buy, or at least trial the product. Personal selling actually means dealing with all person-to-person contacts with existing and potential customers with the aim of introducing the product to them, convincing him or her of the product's value, and closing the sale. The responsibility of personal selling varies from organization to organization, depending on the nature of product, size of the company, type of the industry, and the products or services it is marketing. Many of the firms emphasized on personal selling this much that they regularly train and develop sales and other representatives improve their interpersonal skills with clients, customers, and prospects. They are regularly offering employee reward programs for their effective role in sales management. Personal selling is the most useful way to make a sale because of the interpersonal communication between the prospect and the salesperson. Messages can be customized to specific situations; immediate feedback can be received and processed according to need. But personal selling is comparatively most expensive tool in a marketing promotion.

### **Direct Marketing (DM)**

Direct marketing, the oldest and effective form of marketing communication, is the process of communicating directly with target customers to persuade response by telephone, mail, and electronic means. The main users of direct marketing include but not limited to retailers, wholesalers, manufacturers, and service providers, and they use a variety of methods including direct mail, telemarketing, online shopping services, cable shopping networks, direct-response advertising and infomercials. Because of its wide accessing nature consumer firms to nonprofit organization all are investing good amount of money in direct marketing.

Direct marketing become more popular because of some socio-cultural change which include women's role changing in society, reduced the amount of time for shopping, cards for payment of goods and services, faster to purchase executions, technological advances in telecommunications and computers allow consumers to make purchases from mobile places via telephone, television, or computer, mobile or any other electrical portable devices. So companies are preparing to target more precisely a segment of customers and prospects with message tailored to their specific needs and characteristics. Unlike advertising and public relations, this often not directly attached with ensured sales, direct marketing offers accountability by providing tangible outcome.

Direct marketing can reach individual consumers and develop a long term sustainable relationship with each of them which not only strength the annual sales but also a strong loyalty for further business opportunities. Analyzing of previous reports of brands it is observed that brands with strong brand equity are more successful in direct marketing efforts than less popular brands. Direct marketing works best when other marketing communication, includes traditional media advertising, supports the direct marketing effort largely. Direct marketing has weakness as well, it is often said as being less sales oriented and more relationship oriented. Consumers are bombarded with mail, infomercials, and telemarketing pitches daily which can result negatively if not monitored with targeted strategies. Drawback includes privacy issues of customers, creating mistrust, expensive and more complex use of database management.

### **Sponsorships (Event Marketing)**

Sponsorships (event marketing), merge advertising and sales promotions with public relations and publicity strategies. Sponsorships increase simultaneously awareness of a company or product or services, build loyalty with a target audience, facilitate differentiate a product and service from its competitors, demonstrate commitment to a community or ethnic group, endow with merchandising opportunities. Most of the sponsorships strategies are initiated to build long-term associations. Though the value of sponsorships can be very difficult to measure, yet its presence in a firms integrated marketing communication plan is very essential. Recent statistics shows sports sponsorships make up about two-thirds of all sponsorships. Social Media Marketing The idea of social media marketing basically describes the process of promoting business through social media channels. It becomes the powerful marketing means that is defining the way people are

communicating, engaging and expressing their everyday life. It is lowcost, large traffic, interactive and more linkages for further understanding promotional methods for most of the businesses. Social media currently become very effective tool; with its help companies can get their required information, product description and other promotional issues in this net working world. Because of its wide acceptance organizations are allocating good amount of budget for online marketing and presence, where majority of investment and engagement are on social media. Facebook, Instagram, Myspace, Google Plus, Twitter are so popular that almost who ever use internet has one account and spending significant amount of time surfing in it.

### **Internet Marketing**

Internet is one of the most incredible inventions for modern technology, playing a very unique role in almost every sector of our daily life. Marketing is also involve and using it quite fruitfully. Internet marketing often called as i-marketing, web-marketing, onlinemarketing or e-Marketing, is the marketing of products, services, idea, person and place over the Internet. Marketers are reaching global audience through integrating internet in its marketing plan. The interactive nature of internet marketing in terms of providing instant responses made it most popular among young generation. Marketing via e-mail and wireless media are also some time considered broadly in internet marketing. I-Marketing or internet marketing also refers to the placement of media along several multiple stages of the customer engagement through search engine marketing (SEM), search engine optimization (SEO), Web 2.0 strategies, banner ads on specific websites, email marketing and other internet strategies.

### **Mobile Marketing**

The growth of mobile use by mass population, make it as one important vehicle in a firms' marketing mix. Basically mobile marketing means communicating with the consumer via mobile devices. It can be done through sending a simple marketing message, to introduce them to a new audience participation-based campaign or to allow them to visit a mobile website. It is cheaper than traditional means for both the consumer and the marketer, easy enough for almost any age group to understand and engage and response, which enables emarketing strategies implemented more effectively in most cases.

### **Social media and its importance**

The integration of social media in integrated marketing communications is no more an auxiliary thought. This is done with the purpose to create the theoretical framework of this thesis work. The following figure shows the importance and the supplementary as well as power to act separately in enterprises marketing communication strategies.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

This research with previous studies clearly shows the importance of integration of marketing communication by organization to maintain synergy. Studies have gone through the consumer's perception and presence in communicative media to reach them in time with less costly ways and of course in a more convenient ways.

Following are the important indications of research recommendations to get the better and effective means of communication, use of effective tools in communication by organizations.

- a) The previous thought of using media as only a one way communicative style has changed, modern days communication become more interactive and interesting. So business firms as well as other organization should use those media where consumer feels themselves engaged and interested.
- b) The new approach of using marketing communication media become more strategic rather than only tactical, so the top management should get engaged with the organization's main vision and goal should be included in the firm's marketing plan.
- c) Consumers becoming more concern about what product they use, where it manufactured, what it contains and everything relating product benefit and purchasing methods. As TV advertisement, radio and billboard have limited space and costly it's nearly impossible for all organization to describe detail in those media. Whereas social media is convenient and easy accessed, no or less costly it is recommended the more frequent presence with detail information is needed there.

d) Social media as it is consumer dominated media, is widely trusted and viral among most people so firms should continuously updated and monitor social media and use it as a strategic tool in IMC plan. At the same time consumer do love to get information from sales person so the synergy and integration in sales pitch should be carefully monitored.

e) Many firms do not fully comprehend to employ and learn the different services available from social media. Discussed seven building blocks - identity, conversations, presence, relationships, reputation, sharing, and groups should be considered when designing strategic mapping of a firms marketing communication.

f) People are more spending time in social media in interesting contents and unique ideas, so it is recommended that firms should make sure more presence in social Medias and continue with regular involvements uniquely.

## CONCLUSION

The use of communication media is always regarded as vital decision for very organization. The main objectives of communication includes providing information, peruse, remind or retain the customer can only be successful when all the communicative tools create and execute similar message and bring synergy among them. Integrated marketing communication plays this important role to bring this harmony and ensure effective communications. Whereas social media, the new tool of marketing communication, is the fastest growing and widely use media by mass population is not only cheap to access but also more effective to carry more detail information as the same time has the power to target individuals and can promote personalized marketing campaign. The use of facebook, twitter, youtube and instagram are becoming the most populated place these days. In small to big industry, consumer goods to person marketing everything are gaining popularity and effective result in investing social media. This rapidly changing technological environment also signals that marketers should also be aware of the change and be consumer oriented in term of communication message and its vehicles to reach target audience. A unique and meaningful presence in social media which is incorporated with the aggregate IMC plan can only help a organization for long-term sustainable objectives and goals achievements.

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