

IMC: A STRATEGY, FOR NEW ERA EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT: Education institutions in India is facing severe competition as they offer same curriculum and present in same geographical area. Promotion is important aspect of marketing though not popular among educational institution. Geographical wide spread of our country and to encourage people to pursue higher education. Educational institutions need to reach to consumers or students sitting in every corner of the country and it is possible through well planned IMC tools. The paper is an attempt to investigate various IMC tools used by educational Institutions.

KEY WORDS - IMC, IMC tools, Educational Institution

INTRODUCTION

Integrated marketing communication (IMC) is the marketing strategy of combining all marketing communication efforts to deliver consistent message of the company's brands to stakeholders. IMC is aimed at maximising the communication effects. It involves integrating all method of brands promotion for product and service among target customers. Components of Integrated marketing communication includes; 1) Creating awareness about product and target market by understanding about the brand and target market. It is vital for the marketer to understand about the product its offerings, target market and end consumers. Marketer need to focus on need attitude and expectations of end users and monitor competitor's activities. 2) Product and services design, offerings and promotion should align with company's corporate vision. 3) Company need to establish corporate identity by focusing on brand /product identity. 4) Customer oriented approach focused on the performance and attributes of the product from customer prospective. 5) Advertisement, direct selling, promotion through social media are some of the communication tools adopted to create awareness about the brand. 6) Promotional tools are capable of pursuing customers to take immediate purchasing decisions, for example- trade promotions, personal selling. 7) Integration tools are capable to track different levels of customer interaction information like feedback, reviews. These tools help in serving customers better and maintain long term relationship. The tools used for integrated marketing communication are; advertising, sales promotion, Direct marketing, Publicity, Interactive / internet marketing, Personal selling. Advertisement is paid form of nonpersonal communication about an organization, product, service, idea or cause by an identified sponsor. Sales Promotion a method of marketing that provides extra value or incentives to the sales force distributors or other end consumers and is capable of accelerating independent sales. Direct Marketing is a process of marketing by which the organisation communicates directly with target customers to generate a response and/or a transaction. Publicity is non-paid non-personal communication regarding product, organisation/ brand process, service. Interactive/internet marketing is a method of marketing communication that facilitates two-way communication where user can participate seek clarification over the information at real time. Public relation is a method of creating good will about the product / brand /service process/ organisation. Personal selling is methods of person to person communication whereby seller assist and persuade perspective purchase the product and service. The basic advantages of integrated marketing communication create products /brands more consistent and recognisable by delivering same message through different channels making customers more familiar, gaining their trust and helps in competitive advantages in long run. Helps in reducing average marketing cost. IMC strategy helps in reaching to wider audience using different channel to different target market. Whether it is product or service, promotion is the key component of marketing mix and Integrated marketing communication is one of the effective means to achieve the promotional objectives. The service orientation of today's marketplace has given rise to the concept of relationship, calling specific attention to the dual importance of product as well as consumption experience for people (Ponsonby & Boyle, 2004). This situation is well reflected in the extremely competitive environment in case of Higher Educational Institutions (Dawes & Brown, 2002). The reason can be attributed to same geographical area or it can be offering similar curriculum and accredited to same bodies. Today's potential student customers are more informed as they have a wide exposure to information and curriculum choices, through various sources, including various regulatory bodies like UGC and other government and non-government sources.

The factor attributed to why marketing in higher education has evolved it is proliferation of college ranking systems. As the cost of college education escalated, students and parents were in dilemma to know whether money spent is worth. When organized higher education failed to provide a credible answer, *U.S. News & World Report* filled the vacuum. The researchers are focusing on IMC in the context of higher education mainly since the university provides and supports the environment of learning and the dissemination of knowledge among its stakeholders. (Mohd Ghazali Mohayidin et al., 2007). IMC is the marketing strategy that focuses on the satisfaction of consumers and other stakeholders by putting into concern of their personal values and choices. A satisfied student and employee is reflected on their performance towards studies, work assignments, achievements, personal development. Thus, developing quality graduates, who possess analytical and problem-solving skills and interpersonal understanding; have become the main concern of a university (Mohd Ghazali Mohayidin et al., 2007). Educational institutions need to plan and select IMC tools that can create positive impact about the educational institution.

Literature Review

The Pioneer in IMC studies was conducted in 1997 by the American Productivity & Quality Centre. The research resulted in several key findings and led to the development of the four stages of IMC framework (McGoon, 1998). A framework of four stages of IMC relevant to higher educational institution is given Schultz and Schultz (2004).

Orientation	Indicators
Stage 1	<p><i>Tactical coordination of marketing communication</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate interpersonal and cross-functional communication within the organization and with external partners
Stage 2	<p><i>Commitment to market research in support of IMC</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize primary and secondary market research sources as well as actual behavioral customer data • Maintain a multitude of feedback channels to gather information about customers and effectively act upon customer feedback throughout the organization
Stage 3	<p><i>Application of information technology in support of IMC</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverage technologies to facilitate internal and external communications • Adopt technologies for market research and data management purposes • Employ technologies to determine individuals who have the potential to deliver the highest value (financial or service contributions) to the institution
Stage 4	<p><i>Strategic integration of IMC</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active support of institutional leadership • Marketing communication staff empowered by senior leadership to lead the integration of external communication with internal communication directed to students, staff, alumni and other constituents • Measure effectiveness of marketing communication and incorporate findings into strategic planning

Figure 1, Provides an overview of the indicators of the four stages of IMC

One of the common tools used by Higher educational institutions are Web sites, they receive an enormous interest. (Castro et al., 2004) or (Hennicker, & Koch, 2000) Universities need to improve their content on the website. The matter of improving the quality of websites and searching for suitable methods for assessment is dealt by (Vaughan, Farrow & Tims, 2006). (Panopoulou, Tambouris & Tarabanis, 2008) focus on defining framework for a website evaluation. (Hackett, & Parmanto, 2005) investigate accessibility of university websites to disadvantaged students. These authors conclude that the higher complexity of websites decreases their accessibility to disadvantaged students. In the Czech Republic, (Svetík, 2009) deals with university marketing problems stressing the necessity of until communication mix elements into a single process with unified management as an integrated approach to marketing communication enhances its efficiency delivering synergy.

At Brno University of Technology, Czech Republic marketing communications towards prospective students are studied by Eva Kneblová. In 2009, the findings are summarized.

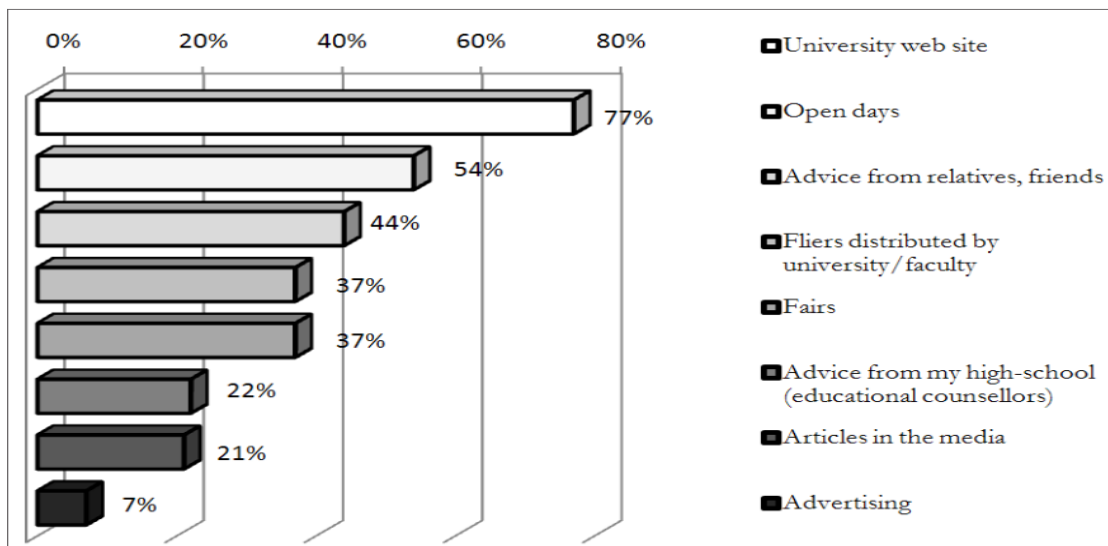


Figure 2, Result of internet research conducted at Brno University of Technology
(Taken from Kneblová, E2009, p. 14)

According to Schüller David, Rašticová Martina, (2011) IMC tools for educational institutions in Czech Republic includes social networks in the first place such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube and other web applications. Second is 3D virtual world offering much promotional opportunities? Direct contact with students through fairs to get information on study opportunities at selected universities. Recommendations by friends and relatives are very important for potential students. The overall faculty, the students 'and graduate's personal experience and, importantly, the quality of the education offered no doubt testify to the quality of each university and faculty and a good piece of advice from a close friend may influence the choice of a university.



Figure 3, Marketing Communications Mix of Universities- Communication with Students in an Increasing Competitive University Environment, Schüller David, Rašticová Martina, 2011

Academic marketing has become more pronounced in recent years (Hanover Research, 2014). The impact that an integrated marketing communication campaign using online tools because "in the virtual environment there are no international boundaries" (Stoica, Orzan, 2011), is a lot higher than the sum of the efforts of some individual communication campaigns, as the coherence and consistency of transmitted messages may be affected (Percy, 2008). "In addition, the Internet offers the possibility to analyse the results much lower costs, no shipping cost, no cost needed for the implementation of the focus group". (Stoica, 2011) The concept of synergy in marketing communication was rather less studied, so future research may consider how to form synergies because of the simultaneous use of various communication channels, which can even be applicable in the higher education institutions. For IMC to be most effective, marketing and communications staff should adopt both informal and formal outreach efforts. Campus 'influencers' should be enlisted to support both the planning and promoting of IMC initiatives. In addition, it is critical that metrics are established to evaluate the outcomes, not simply the outputs, of marketing communication.

(Dawn Edmiston, 2008). Integrated Marketing Communications, Social Networks and implementation of MC tools from the private sector is a future way for universities to improve their communications with stakeholders (David Schüller, Vladimír Chalupský, 2012). IMC Strategy adopted by Winston Salem State University are ;to strengthen reputation through integrated communication, Implement consistent brand advertising, support strategic recruitment efforts, Ignite internal and external brand champions The integrated marketing communication strategy should combine traditional media advertising, online advertising, place advertising, and public relations and publicity as communication channels and include content about education and content about country of origin to influence students IMC must contain information about both the quality of academic offer and staff and help in career preparation. (Xinxin Li, 2016) According to Kerin and Peterson (2010), when developing the integrated

communication mix, several factors need to be considered. 1) The information requirements of potential consumers: providing the suitable and required information timely with effective communication mix approaches. 2) The nature of the offering. 3) The nature of the target markets. 4) The capacity of the organization. As for the information requirements of potential consumers, it has already been studied and analyzed through the interviews in the Empirical and Analysis part. Developments of information and Communication era provide many opportunities to build two-way relationship with customer. Utilizing IT tools (e.g. data mining in search engine's data warehouses). Digital applications has influenced MC considerably and opened new channels to communicate to target consumers. These evolutions also facilitate CRM strategies. Because of online communication cost effectiveness, many organizations have replaced the traditional communication methods to digital communication methods. (Amir Ekhlassi ,et.al,2012)

Result and discussion

The prime objective of Integrated Marketing Communication is to increase the overall visibility of the educational institution and to enhance its reputation among internal and external audiences. Internal audience includes, present students, staff, faculty. While external comprises of Alumni and others outside the organization. Marketing strategy planning for higher-education institutions and universities need to apply integrated marketing communications. Educational institutions should create its marketing mix components that will be communicated to prospects. To create marketing mix components targets groups need to be identified and analyzed in detail to understand its needs, wishes, and expectations. Defining target group is essential step before deciding IMC tools.

The study from previous research results indicates that social networks like Face book, Twitter and other applications (such as YouTube) promise a huge potential of the communication between the universities and its potential students that has yet to be used to the full capacity. Direct communication with prospective students, need to be strengthened. New creative forms of marketing communications like knowledge contest include paper presentation, project exhibition; talks by experts etc and coverage of events by press helps in positioning of educational institutions among the prospects. Representatives from a educational institutions to visit secondary schools trying to provide them with information about the courses offered and probable benefits by pursuing the same. Advertisement using fliers and bill board, Advertisement in transit showing the university logo, offering courses, etc helps in communicating about the courses offered. The concept of Open Day can be introduced by educational institutions where prospective students may visit the faculty ,premises where they would like to study to meet their future teachers, see the lecture rooms, labs, and learn about other factors influencing the quality of study at a given higher-education institution.

The present study is an inspiration and perhaps a guideline for practical improvement of the IMC strategies for educational institution, to contribute in growing globalization and the spreading multiculturalism of this country. The next phase of research should be aimed at detailed analysis from the prospective of urban, rural and international students to conclude and provide an implementation framework of IMC tools.

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