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Integrated Marketing Communication: A Developing Theory

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Abstract

Purpose- The objective of this paper is to provide the detailed knowledge based on the empirical studies on Integrated Marketing Communications. This paper aims firstly, to cover the evolution of IMC including the definitions of IMC. Secondly, to identify the barriers while implementing the IMC by the organizations and advertising agencies over the three decades.

Methodology - This paper is based on a review of literature, by taking the articles from different databases (EBSCO, Scopus,) over the last decades (1991-2020).

Findings- The study has found that over the three decades (1991-2020) It has been observed that the IMC has been defined differently by diverse authors in the past three decades wherein, Don.E Schultz; Seric and Gill & Lucia Porcu have contributed significantly while defining the definitions in three phases respectively. The study has categories barriers into four groups namely- conceptual issues, turf wars, organizational culture and stiff organizational structure.

Research limitations- This research is limited to secondary data and few papers. Future studies should review a greater number of studies to get represent able results.

Originality: This paper has a novel contribution by filling the existing gap. Firstly, this paper covers definitions evolved over the time 1991 to 2020, as existing studies have neglected the evolving definitions of IMC from 2008 onwards. Moreover, the study helps to identify the obstacles faced by the agencies and organization while IMC implementation.

Keywords- IMC, Integrated Marketing Communications, Marcom, IMC Measurement, Evolution, Developmental process.

INTRODUCTION

As global markets are expanding and technology is transforming the organizations way of communication. Hence, the importance of integrated communication is impossible to ignore. In a competitive environment in order to survive in a market, organization communicates to provide high quality product and services to the end users. Organizations need to understand the value of marketing communication. Competition, social concerns and environment uncertainties are the forces affecting the firms to be in business. Therefore, it is necessary for the survival of form should do something new to fulfill the requirements and demands of stakeholders (Duncan & Everett 1993).

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) is still subject to new terminology, known as integrated marketing, '360 branding' 'whole egg', relationship marketing' 'seamless communication', 'one-to-one marketing', 'interactive marketing'. (Duncan 2005).

As a new approach to reaching consumers and other stakeholders, the concept of IMC has been widely spread around the globe over the past decade and has 'influenced a whole generation of marketing communications managers. The most basic driving force of IMC comes from changes in the market environment in which business is conducted.

Thus, this article will explore the phenomenon of IMC from a theoretical perspective. This paper will consider the IMC developmental process and barriers of IMC implementation based on a review of literature, by taking the articles from different databases (EBSCO, Scopus,) over the last decades (1991-2020).

IMC DEVELOPING PROCESS

In 1991, the original research undertook in this field by faculty at the Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University, in the United States and led to the emergence of IMC discussions. (Caywood et al, 1991). After this, the literature focused on the explanation and working of IMC. Duncan & Everett, (1993) stated "IMC is both a concept and a process", faced difficulty in arriving at defining the IMC. Brown (1997), Beard (1997) both explained IMC as a process and discussed the two principles of IMC, i.e. consistency and synergy. Eagle et al (1998) stated IMC as- a change in perception of marketing communication in the minds of advertising agencies and clients. Yet, in spite of continuing confusion regarding the concept of IMC, Schultz,(1998) did the discovery of development of IMC. He perceived IMC as business process, covering present as well as future scope of IMC and identified four levels of IMC.

Tactical Coordination > Redefining the scope of marketing Communication >application of IT >financial and strategic integration. (Source: Schultz and Kitchen, 2000b)

Tactical coordination: In order to serve all the clients, as their demands and expectations are more, there must be one broad agency umbrella; for that organizations need to co-ordinate diverse communication activities across products divisions, regions and countries. They have to achieve synergy instead of managing individual communication efforts. For that cross functional training can be provided to individuals who make them fluent in application and strategies formulation.

Redefining the scope of marketing Communication: Marketing communication is not just a management of outbound activities but seeing all the possible points by which customer comes in the contact with the brand. The important aspect of IMC is to realign the communication that is to look the way the consumer sees it. The customer sees the total experience with the organization and makes their preferences accordingly. Changing the focus of transmitting messages from organization way to customer point of view will lead to formation of relevant brand messages.

Application of IT: Information technology is a Driving tool which change the marketing communication and finding solutions. IT deals with how and when the messages are to be delivered which helps in building insight to understand customer brand contacts. It doesn't mean using of Technology but pairing the technology with appropriate customer needs and requirements

Strategic and financial integration: how to measure the return on customer investment and uses of IMC to derive organization and strategy directions are focused. Customer receives a variety of messages and it is the only consumer who decide which contact are the most influential and that is the most critical element of measurement rather than individual communication efforts. In order to exist in 21st century organizations need to adapt cross-functional process, outside inside approach, training to compensation structures to achieve profitable brand relationships and to enhance brand value for the organization.

With the passage of time, different authors have diverse opinions about integrated marketing communication and gave their own definitions as given in Table 1

American Association of Advertising Agencies(4As) (1989); Duncan (1992); Kotler (2000);

Duncan & Moriarty (1998) had given their definitions from organizational perspective.

Schultz, Tannenbaum and lauterborn (1993); Kliatchko (2005) thought more of consumer and presented their views from consumer point of view.

Over the decades Schultz and Schultz (2000); Seric, Gill & Ozretic (2015); Porcu, del Barrio and Kitchen (2019) presented IMC as a cross functional process.

Table 1: MAIN DEFINITIONS OF IMC

Year	Author name	Definitions of IMC
1989	American Association of Advertising Agencies(4As)	A concept of marketing communications planning that recognizes the added value of a comprehensive plan that evaluates the strategic roles of a variety of communication disciplines – general advertising, direct response, sales promotion, and public relations – and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency, and maximum communication impact.
1992	Tom Duncan	The strategic coordination of all messages and media used by an organization to collectively influence its perceived brand value.
1993	Schultz, Tannenbaum and lauterborn	A concept of marketing communications planning that recognizes the added value of a comprehensive plan that evaluates the strategic roles of a variety of communications disciplines (general advertising, direct response, sales promotion, and public relations) and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency, and maximum communications impact.
1997	Duncan & Moriarty	IMC is the process of strategically controlling or influencing all messages, and encouraging purposeful dialogue to create and nourish profitable relationships with customers and other stakeholders.
1998	Schultz and Schultz	IMC is 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 external and internal audiences.
2000	Kotler	A concept under which a company carefully integrates and coordinates their multiple communication channels to provide a clear, coherent and compelling message about the organization and its products.

2002	Duncan	A cross-functional process for creating and nourishing profitable relationships with customers and other stakeholders, by strategically controlling or influencing all messages sent to these groups and encouraging data-driven, purposeful dialogue with them.
2005	Kliatchko	IMC is the concept and process of strategically managing audience-focused, channel centered, and results-driven brand communication over time". He recognized the three pillars i.e. consumer focused, channel centered and results driven.
2005	Pickton and Broderick	It is a process that involves the direction and organization of all the agents in the analysis, planning, implementation and control of all contacts, media, messages and promotional tools of marketing communications focused on public goals selected, so that they result in greater economy, efficiency, effectiveness, improvement and coherence of efforts of communication from the company for the achievement of the objectives of certain products and corporate marketing communication.
2008	Kliatchko	IMC is an audience-driven business process of strategically managing stakeholders, content, channels, and results of brand communication programs.
2015	Seric and Gill	Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is a tactical and strategic consumer-centric business process, boosted by advances in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) which, on the basis of information obtained from customers' databases, delivers a clear and consistent message through the coordination and synergies of different communications tools and channels, in order to nourish long-lasting profitable relationships with customers and other stakeholders and create and maintain brand equity.
2019	Porcu, del Barrio and Kitchen	the stakeholder-centered interactive process of cross-functional planning and alignment of organizational, analytical and communication processes that allows for the possibility of continuous dialogue by conveying consistent and transparent

		messages via all media in order to foster long-term profitable relationships that create value.
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Source- complied by the author

BARRIERS TO THE IMC IMPLEMENTATION

Duncan and Everett (1993) found that egos and turf battles were primary hurdles to integration. Eagle and Kitchen (2000) identified coordination and time issues in its study of the New Zealand advertising and marketing industry. Similarly, Ebre (2005) found imbalanced organizational structures and culture perceived as a main barriers to IMC implementation. In addition to this kitchen and Tao 2005, marcom budget, govt control & media control acted as a blockage to the IMC implementation.

In summarizing, the following studies examined the barriers to the IMC and are grouped in four categories:

1. Conceptual issues- From the last three decades, the papers showed that IMC is an evolving concept. There is an absence of common IMC concept across academics and practitioners, (Ebre et al. 2004; Kitchen, Schultz, et al. 2004; Kitchen and Tao 2005; Holm 2006; Gurău 2008; Kerr et al. 2008; Laurie and Mortimer 2011). Hence, there is a need to conceptualise the concept of IMC.
2. 'Turf wars' – Turf wars between participating advertising agencies and their clients represented the main barriers in the implementation of IMC. Studies of Eagle and Kitchen 2000; Ebre et al. 2004; Kim, Han, and Schultz 2004; Kitchen, Schultz, et al. 2004; Eagle, Kitchen, and Bulmer 2007 have indicated turf wars as a main obstacles in IMC implementation. In addition, these papers also suggested that advertising agencies and clients should have independent control over IMC.
3. Organizational culture- Gurau (2008) found the absence of technology application and database management in the organization. Without database management, organization have weakened the relationships between the organization and customer. Eagle and Kitchen 2000; Ebre et al. 2004; also discussed the importance of market and customer orientation in the corporate culture. Managers should informed about the organization objectives, mission and vision. Moreover, cross functional integration of communication tools and techniques between different departments found to be important inhibitors of IMC success.
4. Stiff organizational structure- Absence of cross-functional communication between different departments, improper exchange and coordination of information between the departments were the barriers to IMC (Eagle and Kitchen 2000; Ebre et al. 2004; Holm 2006). For a successful IMC implementation, managers should take care of such obstacles and should overcome such issues by making strong internal communication systems and with proper coordination. Proper training related to marketing activities should be imparted to staff, managers and all the actors of communication process (Eagle and Kitchen 2000; Kallmeyer and Abratt 2001; Kitchen and Tao 2005).

CONCLUSION

This novel study has found that over the three decades (1991-2020), no common definition has been defined by the authors. It has been found that authors have defined concept of the IMC differently in the past three decades wherein, Don.E Schultz; Seric and Gill & Lucia Porcu have contributed significantly while defining the definitions in three phases respectively based on organisational, consumer and cross functional perspective respectively. In addition, this study has categories barriers into four groups namely- conceptual issues, turf wars, organizational culture and stiff organizational structure.

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