



INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION: CONSTRUCT, DIFFUSION AND ANTITHESES

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ABSTRACT

The construct of Integrated Marketing Communication predisposes, multi-facetted activities. The progression, however, is towards a common goal, predetermined by the commercial producer. There is the problem of ascertaining how that construct currently stands. Also, the need arises to draw out the militating antitheses of Integrated Marketing Communication despite the acclaim and ascendancy. This study, therefore, aims at examining how Integrated Marketing Communication stands as at today. It also attempts to identify key conceptual and systemic factors that work against it. This is a theoretical study, and the technique is essentially hinged on the discussion mode. It is a secondary research and data have been sourced from existing body of knowledge. The work found that the construct of Integrated Marketing Communication still embraces advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing, publicity and public relations as well as personal selling, to a large extent. These elements continue to drive the thrust of Integrated Marketing Communication activities. Antitheses such as cross-departmental conflicts and the size /nature of organizations impede optimum performance. Since Integrated Marketing Communication does not work in every organization, implementers must ascertain compatibility before commitment? Horizontal harmony across the co-operating departments is also strongly recommended.

Keywords: *Communication Performance, Integration, Mix Elements, Limitations, Diffusion.*

INTRODUCTION

Whereas traditional approaches tended to divide communication channels into distinct and mutually-exclusive entities, Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) prefers to see these message channels as mutually-inclusive, whilst recognizing individual features and capabilities. Instead of allowing communication options to work independently, Integrated Marketing Communication aims for synergy by 'pooling' them together in a semblance of organic unity. This way, they all accomplish the same omnibus goal though in different specialized ways.

McCarthy's "4ps" model which was greeted with plenty of enthusiasm at the time may be moribund in the face of IMC. He had attempted to simplify Borden's recipe of the marketing mix from twelve elements to just four, namely-product, price, place and promotion. Bhattacharya, (2002).

In the domain of IMC, the above assertion would appear to be overly simplified. One emerging development lends credence to this. At the time that McCarty developed his model, the business operative, manufacturer or commercial producer was driven to make sales. Under the dispensation of IMC, these players are compelled to build and sustain relationships with consumers as well as stakeholders over a long period of time.

Faced with the reality of changing dynamics in the market place, the commercial producer is forced to re-strategize effectively in order to remain in business. Integrated Marketing Communication presents a viable option where media advertising appears to be increasingly ineffective and, in certain cases, irrelevant. What follows is a fuller discussion of the emergence of IMC, the elements and components upon which is built, its growth as well as spread. Also covered are necessary theoretical and conceptual underpinnings, as well as methodology, findings, recommendation and conclusion.



Having come thus far, there is the need to know how Integrated Marketing Communication stands with regard to construct and diffusion. There is also the need to identify factors that constitute antitheses, and then proceed to warn implementers accordingly.

Literature Review

Theoretical Review

One communication theory that appropriately underpins this work is the Diffusion of Innovation Theory. The diffusion of innovation, theory is preferred because it spells out the categories involved in acceptance as well as adoption by organizations. This is one of the earlier social science theories developed by E.M. Rogers in 1962. The theory attempts to explain how and why certain products or ideas when introduced, systematically gain acceptance, momentum and then spread through a population or social system. In spreading, the innovation diffuses and becomes adopted as a part of the social system, often leading to behavioral change.

The Diffusion of Innovation Theory dwells much on “adoption”. When people adopt an innovation, according to this theory, it means that they have agreed to put aside what they used to do, and have embraced another. Adoption does not happen suddenly, this theory insists, but constitutes a process that sees some adopting early while others adopt much later on. Adopters belong, in the main, to five categories. The “Innovators” are usually the first to try the innovation, such people are adventurous and find excitement in trying new ideas. “Early adopters” represent the opinion leaders, they assume the role of bringing in more people into the new era. These individuals are very comfortable with the adoption of new ideas and need no information to convince them to change. The “Early majority” are not the first to adopt, neither are they opinion leaders or campaigners. They, however, adopt innovation before the average person.

Those who belong in the “Late majority” are people who are skeptical of change. These people will only adopt innovation after it has been adopted by the majority. Finally, we come to the category of “Laggards”. They are the most difficult group in a population to be convinced about change. They are very conservative, and are strongly bound by tradition. The laggards continue to reject change even when it is evident that such a stance is against their best interest. In the application of this theory, let us consider, the introduction of Integrated Marketing Communication, beginning from the 1980s by very few advertisers in Europe and the United States of America few companies moved away from near total dependence on media advertising to embrace IMC. These were the “Innovators”, according to Rogers. More organizations soon dropped their skepticism and adopted IMC; constituting the “Early adopters”.

By the turn of the century, many more firms had overcome the initial fear for change. They also decided to adopt the ideals of Integrated Marketing Communication; thereby representing the “Early majority”. Those companies that waited till about 2010 to join the IMC revolution can rightly be said to form the “late majority”, according to Rogers’ paradigm. Companies with IMC capabilities that are just beginning to consider the idea, as well as those that are yet to be convinced about the need for change are the “laggards”.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Mass media advertising, with its glamour and emblazonry, had captivated advertisers and, for a while, the audience. Although Public Relations, Publicity and other promotional and marketing communications tools were available, they were considered secondary and peripheral by the advertiser.

About three decades ago, when it became known that the emphasis on mass media advertising was beginning to become unproductive, firms sought a more strategic integration of their

marketing and promotional tools, Fawcett (1993). Advertising agencies were briefed to incorporate other promotional tools; in some cases, the advertiser took on the initiative. The result of all this is what we now know as Integrated Marketing Communication. A good number of advertising agencies reacted quickly to this development. Some expanded their operations to encompass the entire spectrum of IMC, while others created subsidiary outfits to handle different aspects of IMC. To give it a much needed conceptual foundation, the American Association of Advertising Agencies set up a task force and charged it to, amongst other things, develop an acceptable and credible definition. The task force did its job and the AAAA had an operational definition of IMC thus:

“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 – for example, general advertising direct response, sales promotion and public relations-and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency and maximum communications, impact”. Belch, G. and Belch, M. (2001)

Given these necessary operational and conceptual frameworks, Integrated Marketing Communication had come to stay

Advertising continues to play a prominent role even within the IMC configuration, and the reasons are not obscure. It remains a cost-effective means of communication with large audiences. For example, during the 1999-2000 television seasons in the United States of America, 10 million households were reached by the average 30 second spot. Cost per one thousand households came to just 14 USD. Belch & Belch, (2001). The pervasiveness of advertising cannot be overlooked. It has proved to be an important promotional tool. This is especially so with advertisers in the large fast – moving consumer goods category. Additionally, advertising has been effective in creating and reinforcing brand images and symbolic appeals. Brand names, colours, attributes and offerings are effectively portrayed by advertising in intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions. Using a case study of Absolut Vodka, Richard Lewis avails a lot of insight on how advertising helps to effectively position a brand over a long period of time. His findings show that while other spirits decline in sales, Absolut grew market share and held to the position of market leader for over two decades. Through advertising effort, the target, the product and the offering was powerfully communicated, (Lewis (1999).

Though Direct Marketing, as a promotional tool, is grossly underutilized in Nigeria, it has remained an effective and reliable option in Europe and North America. Direct marketing goes beyond direct mail and mail order activities. It includes the Internet, direct selling, tele-marketing, direct response marketing and database marketing.

Direct response marketing simply promotes a product or service through a material that solicits the audience's response. It can be useful in gauging acceptance, whilst encouraging customers to deal directly with the manufacturer, with huge economic benefits. The Internet is proving to be a preferred direct marketing vehicle in Nigeria, with advertisers like Konga and Jumia showing plenty of enterprise.

Another element in the promotional mix of Integrated Marketing Communication is sales promotion. Essentially, it offers an added incentive to entice patronage. If sales promotion is presented as consumer-oriented, it seeks to reach the final consumer. When it reaches the end-user, it promises extra value as a means of making immediate sale. Sales promotion usually accomplishes this through such techniques as sweepstakes, coupons, contents, sampling, point-of-sale 'goodies', as well as premiums and rebates.

When the activity is targeted at the sales and distribution chain,, it aims at reaching retailers, wholesalers, dealers and distributors. This variant of sales promotion is trade-oriented, rewarding extra effort on the part of the intermediary through merchandising allowances, trade shows, price deals and Belch & Belch (2001). Sales promotion is are used by the advertiser to shore-up brand loyalty by drawing consumers' attention to the brand in a powerful and, sometimes, irresistible way. It also recognizes and rewards the distributors, assuring them that they are in the right trade. Publicity and public relations constitute yet another set of elements in our discussion of Integrated Marketing Communication. The publicity element offers the commercial producer an opportunity to use feature articles, photographs, press conferences, films, news releases and videos to effect favourable awareness. This non-personal form of communication is not directly paid for by the advertiser. Owing to the fact that it emanates from an "unbiased" source, the consumer accepts it with much less scepticism than advertising. It is, therefore, seen as credible. A firm is said to engage in public relations when it aims to emanate and control image and adverse publicity through systematic planning and execution of initiatives intended to generate the aforesaid results. The objectives of public relations are broader, and its activity period longer than obtains with publicity. The tools of public relations include the use of different public affairs opportunities, fund raising, special publications, souvenirs, community activities, special events, sponsorships, exhibitions and even advertising. All this is aimed at maintaining a positive image with stakeholders and publics at all times. Interactive Internet Marketing presents the most recent element within the IMC mix of ingredients. Revolutionary advances in ICT have made the internet one of the most dynamic communications channels at the disposal of IMC. Being interactive, this medium enables unhindered two-way-flow of information between an organization and its audiences – real and potential. Through the use of websites, e-mails, blogs, banners and viral steaming, to mention a few, this option allows companies and organizations to customize their communication. More importantly, it helps the advertiser to keep in touch with the audience, and it offers the opportunity to respond quickly, to forestall terrible consequences. The element of personal selling has its role to play within the IMC configuration. This is a person-to-person type of communication whereby a 'seller' sets out to present a product to a prospect. In doing this the 'seller' attempts to persuade the prospect by explaining certain features and benefits of the product in a very friendly way. The aim is to persuade him or her to purchase the said product or to act upon a certain idea. While advertising remains non-personal, this communication type is true to its name – personal. A key attribute is that it enables direct contact between buyer and seller. The interface makes it possible to see and hear the prospects' and packaging. With personal selling, feedback is precise and immediate. Other miscellaneous options can be incorporated under public relations or within the trade

Growth and Spread of IMC

There are reasons why Integrated Marketing Communication has been accepted and adopted by companies, especially the large concerns. These are directly connected to its perceived and actual effectiveness in the marketing communications function. It is considered a unique mechanism in the presentation of a coherent message/image about an organization and its product. The aggregate power of integration means that advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, direct marketing and public relations function more effectively in synergy than where they stood alone, (Lewis, 1999).

Integrated Marketing Communication has been found to produce benefits in the co-ordination of marketing communications, as well as implementation, Beard (1996). In other words, additional benefits were registered in respect of marketing communications expectations upon the onset of integration. With IMC consumers are given the benefits to being exposed to messages from an array of sources, all saying the same things, each carrying the uniqueness of the source with it.



Increased competition means that the consumer has a wider choice. The local manufacturer directly competes with the foreign manufacturer located thousands of miles away. In markets such as this, IMC has helped firms to increase promotional aggression by looking beyond advertising. Studies have shown that IMC encourages co-operation within organisational departments. Since these departments come together and work together, they save additional cost relating to organizational facilities. Unnecessary duplication is avoided, leading to improvement in operational efficiency, Duncan & Moriarty (2004). Integrated Marketing Communications has been found to have consequences a beyond the communication process. IMC has been proved to positive effects on brand management, Kitchen (2000).

Furthermore, IMC leads to competitive advantage in the market; this is accomplished by encouraging a greater preference and purchase intention, better brand reputation and knowledge, as well as improvement of attitudes towards a brand, Swain (2004).

Also, recent changes in channels of power, through advances such as the Internet and information technology, have meant looking beyond advertising. A development like this also moves power away from the producer to the consumer. Integrated Marketing Communication has the capacity to reach the “mass” as well as the “personal”

Brand parity is a reality in many markets. Many products are virtually the same in formulation and performance. Attempts to persuade consumers through the use of distinct individual media have not proved very effective. Marketers need an array of voices to differentiate their products and generate purchase intention. The ‘integrated’ advantage of IMC energizes the communication effort and reaches prospects where compartmentalized media deployed cannot break through.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes secondary data garnered from existing works. It is descriptive; at the same time it observes a discussion format. Books and journals have been consulted for knowledge and insight. Such data have been fashioned into a line of thought congruent with the philosophy and thrust of this work.

The procedure has enabled a study of Integrated Marketing Communication with an emphasis on its construct, diffusion and antitheses. The work remains theoretical and non-numerical.

FINDINGS

The antitheses of Integrated Marketing Communication are those factors or variables that spring directly from the concept and practice of IMC to militate against its success. Cross-departmental conflicts have a negative influence on IMC. Whereas, inter-departmental co-operation has been cited as one of the factors that have helped to put IMC on the ascendancy, mistrust and malice could result across departments. When some departments feel that others are getting more out of the integration, they may fail to give genuine and full co-operation, Kim (2004).

In the 21st century, marketing has moved away from a focus on transaction to long – term relationships. Under this dispensation, products with brand orientation tend to fare better, and this is an area where Integrated Marketing Communication functions effectively. Consequently, IMC may not yield its full potential when applied to services rather than tangible products with brand orientation.

The size of an organization can either drive or hinder the implementation of IMC. Certain endogenous antecedents such as a well-structured, and diversified management works in favour of IMC. Only large business organizations with these features can drive IMC and generate results. Einwiller & Boenigk (2011).



RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Caution holds primacy here. It is apparent from the foregoing that Integrated Marketing Communication is not for every firm, manufacturer, company, marketer, advertiser or commercial producer. Service organizations in banking, insurance, finance, consulting, law, audit/accounting, medical and advertising, to mention a few, ought not to dabble into the adoption of IMC in its fullness. In such organizations outstanding and affordable professional service will suffice. A well thought-out Public Relations programme may be all that is required.

We have also seen that some of the factors that gave rise to the ascendancy of IMC are actually capable of frustrating its effectiveness. Top management must ensure horizontal harmony across the co-operating departments. Finally, size is a major determinant. Only large organizations with requisite structures and resources can effectively deploy IMC; this is especially so if their products have the potential of becoming a part of the life-style of their target audiences. Smaller organizations with paucity of resources should decide on one or two of the elements of IMC, since full adoption would be unnecessary and unwise.



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