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**GO FOR INTEGRATED MARKETING  
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# Go For Integrated Marketing Communication

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**Abstract – Integrated marketing communication (IMC) is being practiced worldwide at very large scale and it is one of the most controversial areas of research, the concept marking a constant progress from the simple coordinating of promotional tools to a complex strategic process. Further to the evolution of modern marketing, where IMC has become a major way of achievement the objectives of a company, there is a need to identify opportunities to increase its impact on consumer behaviour. 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. It 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, communication mix, customer oriented**

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## INTRODUCTION

Many companies still rely on only one or two communication tools. This practice persists in spite of the fragmenting of mass markets into a multitude of minimarkets, each requiring its own approach; the proliferation of new type of media; and the growing sophistication of consumers. The marketing of products and services and the ways in which communication takes place with customers and consumers in many industrial nations has changed tremendously over the last two decades. Technological revolutions and innovations such as the Internet and mobile phones now affect many millions of people, yet were almost unheard of twenty years ago. Control over information or power over information has apparently shifted from the hands of manufacturers to the hands or minds of consumers. Consequently marketers have had to change the ways they conduct their marketing communication activities toward a more holistic customer-oriented and potentially customer-controlled process. Often this process is termed '**Integrated Marketing Communications**'.

So IMC is a strategic communication process that uses multiple marketing communications tools to promote awareness of a company's product or service, informing consumers about features and benefits, while moving targeted customers to make a purchase decision or to utilize a service ("*Marketer's Toolkit*," 2006). The ultimate goal of marketing communications is to influence someone to make a purchase. The IMC

strategy seeks to help consumers through the purchase process. By understanding who your market is; what your specific objective is; and which points you want to communicate; you can aid consumers along in the purchase process.

IMC aids basic marketing communications because not only does it make a consumer make a decision, but an efficient IMC strategy helps identify the best times and places when marketing communications are most likely to reach the specific target groups. The IMC strategy is all about using multiple modes of communications to achieve the desired message to the targeted consumers. "The central tenet of the IMC approach, which distinguishes it from the conventional view, is that each medium enhances the contribution of all other media." (Niak & Raman 2003, p.385). 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.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

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. 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.

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".

T.Duncan(2008) defined it as: a concept that direct and coordinate the process of planning, implementing and supervising brand messages by which brand-customer relationship is build .To applying this concept, various tools are used that their major specifications and applications are shown in Table I.

**Table I: Main Specification and Applications of Mc Tools**

Marketing communication tool	Main specifications	Main application
Advertising	Non-personal. One-way. Paid.	Brand awareness. Brand image. Encourage a response.
Sales promotion	Short term. Encourage an immediate response.	Facilitate the buying decision.
Direct marketing	Direct and two-way. Data based. Using wide range of media.	Enabling dialogue with customer. Product and services customization.
Public relations	Create and control brand news. No media spending. The most credible MC.	Formal channel of communication with society specially in crisis management. Reinforcement and modify brand Image.
Personal selling	Face to face communication. The most effective and expensive marketing communication.	Dominant tool for B2B and special products in B2C. Brand message personalization.
Packaging	Containing product information. Free medium.	Brand identity reinforcement. Delivering the last brand message.
Events and sponsorship	Create, sponsor or participate in celebration, contests and trade fairs.	Active involvement of customers. Brand public announcement and Reinforcement.
Customer Service	Managing brand customer relationship. Company's attitude and behavior toward customer.	Customer retention. Customer satisfaction.

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.

As defined by the American Association of Advertising Agencies, Integrated Marketing Communications is a concept of marketing communications planning that recognizes the added value of a comprehensive plan. Such a plan evaluates the strategic roles of a variety of communications disciplines--for example, general advertising, direct response, sales promotion and public relations--and combines these disciplines to

provide clarity, consistency and maximum impact through the seamless integration of messages. IMC is the process of using promotional tools in a unified way so that a synergistic communications effect is created. (Marketing Management 13e, Kotler and Keller, 2009)

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## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As stated earlier, the marketing environment has changed dramatically in the last two decades. Media fragmentation and the need for more cost-effective and efficient marketing has apparently changed the way marketers approach the task of marketing and marketing communications For ease of references these changes are summarized in Table 1:

**Table 1: Changes in the Market Place – Drivers of Integrated Communications**

- Loss of faith in mass media advertising
- Media cost inflation
- Need for more impact
- Need for more cost-effectiveness and efficiency
- Media fragmentation
- Audience fragmentation
- Increased reliance on highly targeted communication methods
- Low levels of brand differentiation
- Increased need for greater levels of accountability
- Technological evolution and revolution
- Greater level of audience communications literacy
- Overlapping audiences
- More complex decision-making units
- Need to build more customer loyalty
- Move towards relationship marketing
- Globalization of marketing strategies

Source: De Pelsmacker et al., 2004

All these driving elements have – according to the literature – encouraged or even forced companies to change the ways they organise and conduct their marketing communication activities and seemingly led to more integrated approaches (Kotler & Keller, 2006; Shimp 2003; Kitchen & De Pelsmacker, 2004). This forms the rationale for considering integrated marketing communications (IMC) because companies are inevitably cast into the role of communicator in order to survive and grow.

## **PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY**

The primary aim of this study is to explore the emergence, relevance and utility of IMC. Then to know the major reasons for the growing importance of IMC and key challenges for IMC in India. This paper attempts to throw light on the conceptual issues associated with IMC. The present study is exploratory in nature to provide a clear guidance for empirical research. It is also descriptive where the focus is on fact finding investigation with adequate interpretation. For this purpose secondary data were collected. The secondary data were collected through newspapers, magazines, books, journals, conference proceedings, reports and websites.

## **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.

## **MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

Integrated Marketing Communication is the boost for promotional mix elements, whether it is advertising; direct marketing, interactive/internet marketing, sales promotion, publicity/public relations or personal selling, combining these disciplines to provide consistently and clearly a maximum communication impact. Promotion has been defined as the coordination of all seller-initiated efforts to set up channels of information and persuasion to sell goods and services or promote an

idea. Promotion is the systematic attempt to move forward step by step prospects from a state of unawareness to awareness then to knowledge and liking, then to preference and conviction and finally to action (purchase) or a positive behavioral response. The communication accomplishes its objectives in a series of mental stages as the receiver or audience moves from unawareness to actual deal. The purpose of integrated marketing communication should be to maximize customer delivered value. Integrated marketing communication plays a very important role in the ability and capacity of firm to innovate and success fully delivers competitive response through value added offerings to their customers. The various steps commonly followed in an integrated marketing communication process are:

- Identify the audience to be targeted.
- Determine objectives of your communication.
- Design the message of communication.
- Select your media channel.
- Decide the budget.
- Decide the marketing communication mix.
- Measuring your results.
- Managing and coordinating IMC.

So a centralized strategic planning is the very heart of integrated marketing communication. The use of various options should be centrally planned and coordinated utilizing a systematic strategic planning. Strategy lays down the broad principles by which a company hopes to secure an advantage over the competitors, exhibit attractiveness to buyers and lead to efficient utilization of resources and promote company image. Moreover a successful Integrated Marketing Communication program must have the right combination of promotional tools and techniques that must help companies to identify appropriate and efficient methods for communicating and building relationship with customers as well as other stakeholders, such as employees, suppliers, investors, interest groups and the general public.

Accordingly in this way 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 is 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.

### 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.

### EXAMPLES OF COMPANIES THAT GO FOR IMC

Coca Cola uses Integrated Marketing Communications in order to communicate with its target. It is a pioneer company in 360° communications as they rapidly understood they had to get in touch with consumers to create links and to look for them wherever they are.

The communication plan is adapted regarding the market, the society, the potential, the product positioning etc. Coca Cola is willing to be close to its consumers, to be part of their daily life, to become a kind of ritual attached to specific moments; for that, they use social media and social marketing through social responsibility for example, creating emotions and feeling of affiliation toward its customers. For example, they raise funds for social causes like earthquake or hurricane.

Nike Inc. is one example of a multinational company that makes use of the concept of integrated marketing communication in its organization. It utilizes a wide array of marketing strategies which the company readily adapts, based on the needs and wants of the target market. As a result, the concerned company remains to be one of the top organizations that are wanted and needed by different types of people from all over the globe. Nike's strengths and weaknesses with regard to its integrated marketing communications have been elaborated in this composition. As for its strengths, the vital objectives and goals of Nike have been effectively determined by the company and these serve as guide for all of Nike's endeavours. Moreover, the long-established marketing strategies employed by Nike—from promotions that cost billions, to its simple tagline—have been modified as the years pass, to cater to the increasing demands and needs of its countless consumers. Also, the company's employees, key officials, and, most importantly, leader possess the



necessary behaviours which are required from people who have to live up to an esteemed company's positive international image.

### **MAJOR REASONS FOR THE GROWING IMPORTANCE OF IMC IN INDIA**

Several reasons have caused IMC to develop into a primary strategy for marketers in India; few of them are given below-

- Market is now having a rural-urban mix shape
- Occupational diversity (Agriculture to other skills)
- Awareness is spreading fast
- Indian consumer is being smarter.
- Heterogeneous Demographic Traits
- Diversity in economic conditions
- Media advertising is shifting to multiple forms of communication focusing at target centered niche media.
- Market is shaping from a manufacturer-dominated market to a retailer-dominated, consumer controlled market.
- Technology is getting updated rapidly
- Huge opportunities are available to develop with market
- Manpower is getting performance-based compensation from traditional compensation, sales and profit margins are increasing.

### **KEY CHALLENGES FOR IMC IN INDIA:**

However, significant challenges to achieve optimal IMC performance are still in existence and acting as key barriers in way of effective IMC function in the country. Following are the few of them-

- Lack of strategic consistency
- Lack of needed skill sets among marketing staff
- Scarcity of creativity and innovation
- Insufficient marketing budget
- Lack of a standard measurement process

- Lack of technology advancement support.
- Ambiguity on the issue
- Complex cultural and social values

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The emergence of integrated marketing communications (IMC) has become a significant example of development in Indian marketing discipline. It has influenced thinking and acting among all types of companies and organizations facing the realities of competition in the present open economy. It is the judicious and efficient use of the product promotional tools so that a universal, clear, and effective promotional message is communicated amongst the target audience. Success comes when one learns to control and coordinate. So integrated marketing communication plan should not be considered an end goal but rather a continuous approach. This is the most exciting, most challenging time in history of communication research. The diffusion of integrated marketing communication program should closely be associated with changes in consumption pattern, technical advancement and competition. Integrated marketing communication study provides practice based and grounded insights as well as concrete suggestions for organizing communication campaigns. Integrated marketing communication must not be just communication with present and prospect customers, but also with employees, vendors, related industries and external environment either directly or indirectly involved within. Moreover in marketing effective communication is absolutely necessary even though one is having a superb product best package and offer a fair price, people will not come to buy it unless they might have hear of it or are aware of it. So without integrated marketing communication promotion of a brand or product or generally your business is impossible and without promotion nothing can be sold in this competitive global market.

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