

INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION AND CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP: AN ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Governments of countries, provinces or states propagate information about their various development programmes and activities through variety of media outlets. The effectiveness of communication is critical as it determines the success of such government programmes. This also plays a vital role in building a strong and lasting government-citizen relationship. Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) involves an optimum utilisation of activities such as advertising, public relations, sponsorship of events and exhibitions in a synergistic manner to build a durable customer relationship. In Nigeria, both central and state governments operate programmes for the development of urban and rural areas. This research aims at investigating the nature and extent to which IMC is utilised for (i) promoting rural development programmes in the country and (ii) fostering government-citizen relationship. The perception of customers (citizens) was captured through a survey. Analysis revealed that governments employ multiple media to inform and communicate government programmes and employment opportunities to the people. The researchers recommended that the integration of customers (citizens) in the communication process and strategies may remove inconsistencies in the messages of governments to the people.

Keywords: Integrated Marketing Communication, Customer and Customer relationship

Introduction

In today's ever changing “Nanosecond Culture” of social networks, empowered customers and hyper competition, we need to be prepared to immediately implement holistic thinking for our marketing and communications strategy. With an increase in global competition, technological advances, and fast informed customers, it is important for businesses to make a powerful impact on target audiences and markets.

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is one of the most important communications trends adopted all over. It is one such step toward an integrated approach to achieving efficiency by synergy. The emergence of this concept has become one of the most significant examples of development in the marketing discipline. It has influenced thinking and acting among companies but also authorities, state owned companies and political parties, all facing the realities of competition in an open economy.

Integrated Marketing Communications is a simple concept. It ensures that all forms of communications and messages are carefully linked together. At its most basic level, Integrated Marketing Communications, or IMC, as we'll call it, means integrating all the promotional tools, so that they work together in harmony. As we are already aware of the fact that in the present scenario the Marketing communications play an important role of voice of the brand and are a means by which it can establish a dialogue and build relationships with consumers. They allow marketers to inform, persuade, incentivize, and remind consumers directly or indirectly. The applied tool applied repeatedly is the 'integrated marketing'. Integrated Marketing Communications is a term basically used to describe a holistic approach to marketing communication. It aims to ensure consistency of message and the complementary use of media. The concept includes online and offline marketing channels.

Integrated marketing communication is integration of all marketing tools, approaches, and resources within a company which maximizes impact on consumer mind and which results into maximum profit at minimum cost. This approach was mostly used in developed countries to increase its global market value but now from last few years Indian market is also being attracted towards this concept.

It not only informs, but is also used to differentiate the seller's products or services may also be effective in affecting the price elasticity of demand. Prerequisite of Marketing Communication is that the marketing communications strategy of a firm must be coordinated and linked with concepts such as target segments, positioning, differentiation, and image. India is the most diverse country in the world. It has many cultures and traditions with their own moral values and perceptions which vary from region to region. Therefore it becomes difficult to satisfy the needs of every individual in the most profitable way but India's huge population and growing middle class presents promising potential for many US and European multinational companies focusing on the Indian markets. With more companies viewing India as an emerging market, competition in markets is growing and integration would become inevitable for communications in the developing world.

The economic liberalization and reform movement, started in India in 1991, has been

one of the major contributors to the increase in its trade interactions globally. The open flow of communication with the rest of the world and the country's ability to adapt to these changes has made it a very lucrative and promising land for many multinational companies. The growing purchasing power of India's huge middle class makes it easier for companies to do business in India. However, as stated above, the customer base in India is extremely fragmented. The huge geographic expanse of the country has resulted in an inconsistent distribution system that is radically different from that present in most other countries. Added to this is the cultural diversity of its inhabitants, differences in their tastes, habits, and requirements that make it very difficult for companies to market their goods in a streamlined and consistent manner. Therefore, the concept of focused and massive marketing, i.e., integrated marketing, is very helpful in this diverse economy.

The objectives of any marketing communication process are to create strong awareness about issues or programmes (development programmes of the government), deliver information, educate the market (citizens), and advance a positive image of the development programmes. This will help show the citizens how important it is to adopt these development strategies. In simpler terms, IMC refers to speaking with one voice in order to elicit response from the citizens.

Statement of the Problem

There are several government campaigns that are targeted at developing the people in both rural and urban areas. Some of these campaigns are the roll back malaria campaigns, reduction of child labour campaigns, healthy environment campaigns, back to agriculture (Ikola Nkwu by Governor Rochas Okorocha) campaigns, exclusive breastfeeding campaigns, girl child education campaigns, safe delivery and antenatal care campaigns. Considering the fact that infant mortality and maternal death seem to be one of the problems bedevilling child bearing, more emphasis has been placed on safe child delivery. To ensure that this is achieved, the need for antenatal care is being emphasised in several campaigns all over the country. Some of these campaigns are: Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (MNCH) Respectful Maternity Care and Maternal mortality and morbidity campaigns. Maternal mortality and morbidity campaigns are an awareness and sensitisation campaigns centred among rural women on the importance of going for regular antenatal care in the hospitals (Lemuel, 2013). Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (MNCH) Respectful Maternity Care campaign is a campaign floated by the Wellbeing Foundation Africa (WBFA), working in conjunction with the White Ribbon Alliance Nigeria (WRAN). The campaigns focused on improving the interpersonal rapport between health workers and their clients, while highlighting the relationship between the quality of maternity care and the effects it has on mother and child from conception to delivery and beyond (Wellbeing Foundation Africa, 2015).

These campaigns are expected to bring about increased knowledge on the part of the audience and in turn induce change in their attitude and behaviour such as, going for antenatal care and keeping to the advice of the medical care givers. Since, antenatal care (ANC) among pregnant women is one of the important factors in reducing maternal morbidity and mortality. Unfortunately, many women in developing countries do not receive such care. This is because most women in rural areas seen not to attend to antenatal care as a result of low level of awareness among the rural people (Laishram, Thounaojam, Panmei, Mukhia & Devi, 2013). **The same is applicable to other health related campaigns and agricultural development programmes. People in rural areas and urban centers seem not to be well informed in these developmental issues.**

One is forced to ask; is it that it is the attitude of the people to forget the messages in a campaign after the campaign must have died down or that the media messages are not properly tailored to create the needed awareness in order to enhance the knowledge, attitude and practice of the people towards developmental issues?

Purpose of Study

The major purpose of this study is to ascertain the extent to which IMC is utilised in ensuring development in both rural and urban areas. Other specific objectives of this study include:

1. To ascertain the extent to which IMC is utilised for promoting rural development programmes in the country.
2. To find out the extent to which IMC is utilised in fostering government-citizen relationship.

Research Questions

Based on the above objectives, the following questions guided the study.

1. To what extent is IMC utilised for promoting rural development programmes in the country?
2. To what extent is IMC utilised in fostering government-citizen relationship?

Literature Review

The Concept of IMC

As a concept IMC has become well known on an international scale during the 1990s. Thus IMC is a term whose widespread use is comparatively recent, a fact, which might explain why there not yet is a common understanding of its real meaning and the lack of a generally accepted definition. Some 20 years ago academics and professionals discussed theory and practice of business communication but without considering the idea of integration as a realistic approach to reach a competitive strategic position for the company. Some early

attempts in the beginning of the 1980s initiated academic interest and articles appeared in the academic literature (Dyer, 1982; Coulson-Thomas, 1983). From the beginning of the 1990s IMC became a real hot topic in the field of marketing (Caywood et al., 1991; Miller and Rose, 1994; Kitchen and Schultz, 1999).

Few years back , major portion of marketing budgets went to advertising ,but now the scene has changed, it is allocated into various activities such as trade promotions, consumer promotions, branding , PR and advertising. The allocation of communication budgets away from mass media and traditional advertising has obviously promoted IMC in recognition and importance for effective marketing. The emergence of IT has fundamentally affected the media practices, contributed to an extensive deregulation of markets and individualized patterns of consumption and increased the segmentation of consumer tastes/preferences. The key has been 'value' and several combinations of methods are used, all aiming to raise benefits and reduce costs. Smith et al. (1999) have defined IMC as “the strategic analysis, choice, implementation and control of all elements of marketing communications which efficiently (best use of resources), economically (minimum costs) and effectively (maximum results) influence transactions between an organization and its existing and potential customers and clients”.

The American Association of Advertising Agencies defines IMC as “a concept that recognizes the added value of a comprehensive plan that evaluates the strategic roles of a variety of communication disciplines, and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency and maximum communication impact”. Integrated marketing communication is integration of all marketing tools, approaches, and resources within a company which maximizes impact on consumer mind and which results into maximum profit at minimum cost. Generally marketing starts from “Marketing Mix” and also includes internet marketing, sponsorship marketing, direct marketing, database marketing and public relations. And integration of all these promotional tools along with other components of marketing mix to gain edge over competitor by knowing the right touch-points using to reach highest level of consumer satisfaction is referred as Integrated Marketing Communication. Using outside-in thinking, it is a data-driven approach that focuses on identifying consumer insights and developing a strategy with the right (online and offline combination) channels to forge a stronger brand-consumer relationship.

History of Integrated Marketing Communication

The History of Marketing in the 20th century and earlier is a complex and still not fully explored subject, mixed up as it is with a history of trade and economics. The concept of integrated marketing is focused on the creation of value, arguing that the organization needs to be united in the creation of distinctive or differentiated value in

order to achieve productive synergy. Similarly, Peter Drucker argued that, “Every organization, whether business or not, has a theory of the business. Indeed, a valid theory that is clear, consistent and focused is extraordinarily powerful.”

According to Drucker, the Theory of the Business consists of assumptions about the environment of the organization, the specific mission of the organization and assumptions about the core competencies needed to accomplish the organization's mission. The concept of integration also arises as a result of recognition of disintegration, especially in the field of communication. Integrated marketing communications (IMC) developed during the 1990s as an Endeavour to achieve consistency across marketing communications disciplines and media that had become fragmented over time through the cultivation of individual disciplines, competition and the development of independent communication objectives. By 2000, it was recognized that there was a logical and practical need in what was called stage for IMC for this to be extrapolated across all organizational contact with customers and therefore across the entire organizational business processes.

Benefits of using IMC to brand corporations

In recent years the concept of applying marketing techniques to the corporation has become more widespread with related notions of stakeholder relationship. The Indian corporation increasingly has to manage itself – for all its stakeholders - as a brand. Promoting the corporate brand to attract workers is seen as particularly important by managers, with the well-reported shortage of skilled workers. In Australia, the proportion of those aged 65 and over increased in recent years. And it is projected that it will double by 2050. Projected population data of India shows that the next decade will experience a shrinking of the working population and if the low unemployment rate stays at its current, there will certainly be a lack in supply of a suitable workforce.

The need for companies to differentiate themselves in the employer marketplace is becoming critical. While mainstream marketers have long championed the IMC cause, a perhaps more “offbeat” approach to integration has arisen in recent times, which acknowledges the need for the handling of difference and variety within the context of an integrated communications project. It should be noted that beyond a general call for horizontal co-ordination, the nature of such processes is rarely specified in the literature. Indeed it has been argued that in the post-modern world, IMC may be. Given the apparent lack of Literature, and different cultures prevailing, this looks specifically as barriers faced by organizations on the road to IMC. The attachments to different professions and challenges of working across departments have also been researched in the area of culture and health care.

A recent multi-perspective study of healthcare professionals by Morgan and

Ogbonna (2008) noted that respective loyalties of professional subcultures may be stronger than loyalty to the organization and may impede lay managers' authority to influence practices. Their study looked at two large healthcare organizations in the UK and examined the differing views of doctors, nurses and “nonclinical” managers.

They found that, in the context of professional organizations, complex, multiple cultural values are frequently hierarchical and are commonly interpreted differently, with differentiated, fragmented and collective meanings. They even found that within sub-cultures there was fragmentation. And pointing out that a company does not consist of one unified culture with variations arising in groups, professions, functions and countries. With a similar theme, in the disciplines of communications and marketing, the concept of integrated communication has been proposed as a way of avoiding contradictory messages and improving an organization's “corporate story”.

Barriers to Integrated Marketing Communications

The following are the possible barriers to IMC:

- a) No support from senior management: It is vital for an organisation that implements IMC to have the commitment from all levels of employees, including senior management could lead to IMC being deprived of resources which prevents the full potential IMC can deliver for the organisation to benefit from. Higher levels of the business need to coincide with the efforts of staff in the strategic planning to grasp that IMC's programmed is valuable (Valos et al, 2016).
- b) Clients are confused about the concept: Some companies such as advertising agencies could possibly take advantage of the IMC model, due to the stress they receive from clients and budgets being reduced. The introduction of new technology broadens the boundaries for advertising elements to endeavour with such avenues like the internet. Their focus may stray from the core principles of IMC which is to integrate the elements together, as they are less effective individually. Also their clients may not grasp the IMC concept as an essential attribute therefore they perceive IMC as saving money due to the strategic position.
- c) Conflict within Organisation: Trying to implement IMC into strong hierarchy structures organisations may cause staff resistance due to the nature of horizontal communication causing disagreements amongst staff. Staff may not perform their tasks and functions which jeopardises the work environment. For IMC to be successful, the culture of the organisation needs to accommodate an open perspective where communication amongst the varying departments are tactically managed. A corporate structure may not

necessarily invite IMC due to their culture being incompatible for the integration (Vladmir et al, 2012).

Methodology

The study was anchored on survey research design. Survey research method is considered appropriate in this study, because it provided a platform for the researchers to solicit for audience responses. The population of the study is the entire Imo State of Nigeria which is subdivided into three senatorial districts. The total population for the study is 3,381,729 based on the statistics obtained from the National Population Commission (NPC, 2006). The researcher adopted the Australian National Statistical Service (NSS) online sampling Calculator, which is widely used by both social science and physical science researchers in Europe and parts of Asia. From the Australian calculation, it is given that the basic sample size of the study is 385.

Questionnaire specifically designed for the study were used to source research data. The validity of the questionnaire was done using face validity technique. The instrument was given to scholars who are senior lecturers in the Departments of Mass Communication, Imo State University, Owerri. In checking for the reliability of the questionnaire, a pre-test was conducted in Orlu metropolis using pilot study. A total of 20 respondents were drawn for this purpose.

Data Presentation and Analysis

In this section, quantitative data generated through questionnaire were presented. The data collected through questionnaire were presented in tables using percentages. This was done in line with the research questions raised in the study. The researcher sampled a total of 385 respondents, out of which 35 copies of the questionnaire were lost in the field which amounted to 9.1%. Three hundred and fifty (350) copies of the questionnaire were

Research Question 1: To what extent is IMC utilised for promoting rural development programmes in Imo State?

Table 1: Extent to which IMC is utilised in Development programmes in Imo State.

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Large Extent	279	79.7%
Moderate	61	17%
Low Extent	3	0.9%
Indifferent	7	2%
Total	350	100%

Field survey, 2016

From table 1 above, it was revealed that 3 (0.9%) respondents said advertising and public relations programmes targeting development in the state were low, 61 (17%) respondents said campaigns on development and public relations programmes moderate, 279 (79.7%) respondents said, to a large extent, government utilise IMC in the pursuit of development in the state, while 7 (2%) respondents are indifferent.

This means that 79.7% of the respondents said, to a large extent, government utilise IMC in the pursuit of development in the state.

Research Question 2: To what extent is IMC utilised in fostering government-citizen relationship.

Table 2: Extent to which IMC is utilised in fostering government citizen relationship

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
High extent	2	0.6%
High	59	16.9%
Low extent	282	80.6%
Indifferent	7	2%
Total	350	100%

Field survey, 2016

Analysis from table 2 revealed that 2 (0.6%) respondents said they have very high knowledge of high decibel sounds media campaigns, 59 (16.9%) respondents said they have high knowledge of high decibel sounds media campaigns, 282 (80.6%)

respondents said they have low knowledge of the dangers of high decibel sounds from media campaigns, while 7 (2%) respondents are indifferent to high decibel sounds media campaigns.

This means that 80.6% respondents said they have low knowledge of the dangers of high decibel sounds from media campaigns.

Conclusion

The growing importance of IMC can be attributed to various factors. This include increasing competition, decline in effectiveness of mass advertising, more information sources for consumers and technological advances. Implementing the IMC process in an organization is not an easy task and it cannot be done at one go. The implementation of IMC in a company requires proper planning.



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