Concept of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC)

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Abstract

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is being practiced worldwide at very large scale. Integrated Marketing Communication is consumer oriented approach rather than organizational oriented that focuses organizational needs. IMC is performed in a manner of synergy rather than in isolation. IMC 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. The contribution of this review paper is to enhance the understanding of what is IMC, its concept and the barriers. The findings of this work establish that there are some barriers to successful implementation of IMC program. Moreover, IMC has major impact on organizational performance and Brand Equity.

1. Introduction

Integrated marketing communications (IMC) emphasize the advantages of harnessing synergy within different media to make brand equity of the products and services that are offered by the organizations. The American Association of Advertising Agencies (Schultz, 1993) Cited in (Dennis A. Pitta et al., 2006) defines IMC as follows, "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”. This definition describes that the importance of the IMC, which was developed by the impact of different activities of the promotional mix (Dennis A. Pitta et al., 2006).

"A more functional and a company-specific definition of IMC is as a strategic approach to the planned management of an organisation's communications"(K. Prakash Vel, Ricky Sharma, 2010).

According to Lynne Eagle et al., (2007), IMC has been grabbing great attention in the different research and debates over many years. Many different researches argued instead for IMC to be considered more as a philosophy, which is more flexible according to the market condition and easy to adjust in the market changes. This idea of IMC "as a philosophical" is a reflection of the development of marketing. IMC is the latest and the effective and efficient development. On the other hand many researchers, practitioners, and educators are facing implications in the sense of development, growth and meaning.

Dennis A. Pitta et al., (2006), mentioned that IMC is playing a vital role to target the audiences with clear messages effectively and efficiently. There is no harm to say that it has become a useful tool for the organization. With the help of IMC marketers are able to identify the perfect combination of promotion mix elements to compete effectively. Marketers can select best tools or a combination to grab the attention of the audience like, advertising, direct selling, personal selling, word of mouth, sales promotion or any other tool can be selected by them.

It can also help organization to create an image and develop awareness about the organization and the products. Whereas, there are different variations of the promotional mix to support the refine the effort of the promotional offers. IMC has a strength that it is very flexible with can easily fit in the market and reachable to the audience. In this context, this work examines Integrated marketing communications (IMC) and its impacts on organizational needs. Rest of this work has been organized as follows. In section 2, literature review is presented. In section 3, an analysis of barriers in implementation of IMC is detailed.
whilst conclusion and future work is covered in section 4.

2. Literature Review

According to K. Prakash Vel, Ricky Sharma (2010), integrated marketing communication (IMC) has been playing a vital role for both clients and communication agencies. There are three main elements of IMC:

• Tools
• Media
• Message

Many organizations are using IMC to coordinate their different strategies, resources and messages to deliver the clear and meaningful message to the targeted audiences. The main idea is to develop a significant relationship with audiences.

Furthermore, research paper mentioned an example of brand consultancy firm vested with the responsibility of launching a world music festival in Abu Dhabi, UAE, adopted integrated marketing communication and get successful. There were a shortage of time and money for the whole campaign but the overall strategic communication objectives has achieved successfully after launching the campaign.

The essence of IMC providing different tools and devices for communication, like: "publicity, advertising, sales promotion, and many more" into a one platform. There is diversity in IMC and research identified three applications of IMC "coordinated marketing communication campaign", "one voice communication" and "IMC" (integrated marketing communication). We develop an idea to target multiple audiences with a single message through marketing communication. And creates a brand image as well by "brand advertising, consumer sales promotions, public relations and direct responses". (Stephen J. Grove, et al., 2002)

There is a big relation between best integrated marketing communications with the best practice insight programmes. Delivering effective IMC programmes involving different communication channels which is a big confront. This challenge arises from both the difficulty in getting insights that align multiple channels, whereas responding to this insight programmes in a timely way. Research showed that it is crucial for insight programmes if the brands getting success through communications, and in the
integrating their outbound and inbound communications to grab the customer attention. On the other hand, insight is essential to recognize the relative of directly controlled communication "such as TV, press and online advertising" and also brand related communications which are operated by the organizations. If we recognize customer behavioural responses it can help them to design useful and clear communications to convince and influence them (Don Schultz, et al., 2012)

3. An Analysis of Barriers to IMC Implementation

Now days, marketer seem to be sluggish in the way of dealing with the different requiring investment and the alteration in the approach of marketing communications. It has been in a debate by many researchers for a long time that what the expectation of the marketing communications is, along with the growing recognition that advertising, in existing markets, Firstly, to protect the existing market share or to grabbing share from the competitors. In this situation, Clients and agencies are facing serious challenges in developing and implementing effective communication programmes.

All elements of mixed marketing communication industry facing confusion with media division, reducing audiences, and also the tools and techniques which measure the audience. The introduction of new form of media like digital/interactive television and the internet. All these elements are forcing marketers to re-think the combination of marketing communication tools in the relation of traditional mass media which cannot meet the requirements of different consumer market. "There are a number of strategic issues of concern in the wider debate regarding the evolution of IMC and its long-term contribution to marketing theory and practice". There is a strong confusion between the different marketing communication sectors and control of communication strategies and developments. There is a very little evidence that the differential customer value being determined by any sector of marketing communication. (Lynne Eagle et al., 2007)

According to Calin Gurau (2008), there are many barriers for the
organizations to implement integrated marketing communication process. There is no doubt that IMC process is depending on the organizational structure and difficult to adopt. "There are many barriers but the most significant organisation barriers for the implementation of the IMC concept are:

- Lack of horizontal communication
- Functional specialisation
- Decentralisation
- Lack of IMC planning and expertise
- Lack of budget
- Lack of database technology
- Corporate culture"

Every organization has different structure and different way of marketing communication. Successful organization should sort out these barriers and implement the IMC process according to its organizational structure. It is very difficult to accept that all organizations can follow the same IMC process. The researchers are still trying to find the best way for the integrated marketing communication.

3.1. Role of Media Mix

There is no harm to say that the traditional promotional tools have replaced by the IMC. Which has become more effective way of communication? Introduction and the growth of digital media has become a challenge for the global market with many new opportunities. Currently media is in use by the marketer by broadcast by TV, radio, outdoor, print, digital, in store and many others like exhibitions, product placement, and cinemas. There is another media which has been becoming a significant and the fastest growing communication, is the social marketing medium. Social media networking is used for the communication campaigns of products, services and events. It is the effective tools for the marketer to analyze the market situation. Social media platforms are Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn and Twitter. They are considered as revolutionary tools for the fastest transmission of information. Marketers are using these platforms very effectively and efficiently as springboards for the introduction of new products, viral marketing, getting feedback and other marketing objectives. (K. Prakash Vel, Ricky Sharma, 2010)

According to Dennis A. Pitta et al., (2006), the result showed that the marketers can target niches market...
with the help of 200 to 300 cable TV channels which are available in many locations. These channels are providing narrowcasting opportunities that can help marketer to reach the specific targeted audiences which are interested in specific information. Different audiences are not only interested in sports, but specific sports, like cricket, hockey, football and many more. Marketer found the ways to get the attention of the consumers through IMC, which allows managers to deliver a range of application with the help of selective use of IMC elements.

This is a big problem for the organization that they are not customer focus but IMC giving them great strength and a platform to deliver communication message to the audience. Interactivity in marketing venue define as "immediately iterative process by which customer needs and desires are uncovered, met, modified, and satisfied by the providing firm". In this approach, the data of the customer acquired by "person to person or person to technology". It is helping organization to deliver a clear and a specific message on the individual basis. (John A. Schibrowsky, et al., 2003)

3.2. Electronic Media, IMC and Interactivity

There is no doubt that media has a great importance now a days. The expectations are very high for the different organizations and their publicity. Organizations are using effectively media which is helping them to increase profit. "Many organisations that would normally advocate using sound customer centric research practices in their traditional marketing efforts abandoned this logic in the interactive portion of their communication programmes".

Whereas, Electronic media is playing important role to exchange communication between buyers and sellers. As we now that new electronic media is different from traditional media, and the differences that are important to developing IMC program. There are four important elements of interactive media "(1) the two way nature of the communication system, (2) the level of response control each party has in the communication process, (3) the personalisation of the communication relationship, and (4) the use and involvement of database technology". The research
showed that the role of databases is critical in the process of moving from traditional IMC to interactive IMC. It is true that the interactive personalised relationship cannot be made without ongoing database management practices. The data of the customer are collected through traditional, website or email surveys, through online and store based purchase history. (John A. Schibrowsky, et al., 2003)

This is true for the effective interactive IMC; organizations have to develop internal structure according to the nature of the business and the needs of the customers. To become smart company organizations must have an ability to introduce ‘smart’ marketing campaigns and ‘smart’ IMC programs. Organization has to collect data on the individual level and use that data with the customer management strategies and then use the electronic media to develop interactions. Many advertising researchers, managers and academics are agreed that the electronic media lies in its interactivity. (John A. Schibrowsky, et al., 2003)

3.3. The Impact of the Technology on Marketing Communication

According to Calin Gurau (2008), internet technology has been rapidly growing and changing the communication process." because of three specific and co-existent characteristics that differentiate it from any other communication channel":

Interactivity: "The internet offers multiple possibilities of interactive communication, acting not only as an interface, but also as a communication agent (allowing a direct interaction between individuals and software Applications)".

Transparency: The information available on the internet is transparent and easily accessible for all internet users.

Memory: The web is not only helping people to deliver information but also keeping the information and easily available until it will be removed by the network.

Calin Gurau (2008) mentioned that all these option are playing role for the transformation of profile and the behaviour of online audiences. There is a point for the practioners that they have to find the new ways
that how audiences get and use information. There is no doubt that audiences are linked with the organizations. "The traditional communication channel was unidirectional - the institutions communicated and the audiences consumed the information. Even when communication was considered a two-way process, the institutions had the resources to send information to audiences through a very wide pipeline, while the audiences had only a minuscule pipeline for communicating back to the institutions".

There is a change in the marketing world that now, the communication is no more pipeline is has become a network which removed the distance between organization and audience. All the members of an organization sending message which is faster we can say on a single click. On the other hand it is true that the easiness of sending message increased the number of messages but organizations are using resources to deal with them (Calin Gurau 2008).

Furthermore, now a day’s audience is connected with each other by using the network. Audiences are in touch with organizations on a single click so these networks providing them a facility to connect to the other member on a single click. Audiences are discussing and debating about the organization through the network. In this technological world every one is a communicator even if they don’t know anything about organization (Calin Gurau 2008).

In the past audiences were not able to access the information but now a day’s with the help of technology audiences are able to access to the information anywhere any time and communicator can comment on the information. Audiences are also able to access multiple sources of information (Calin Gurau 2008).

Audiences pull information as well through the network by the help of the growth of networked world. Now a day’s we can get message through different channels like, email, voice mail, faxes, pagers, cell phones, interoffice memos, television, radio etc. The media is offering different type of communication channels. Whereas the audiences have a facility to ignore the message that was pushed. They can filter the message easily with the help of technology. On the other hand audiences can pull the message according to the needs and wants.
Internet users have more control on the message. They can search and find the required message (Calin Gurau 2008).

4. Conclusion and Future Work
It is concluded that many researcher and practitioners argue, this is the most challenging time in the field of advertising. There is no doubt that the IMC along with electronic media has dramatically changed the nature and the way of marketing. IMC providing different tools and devices for communication into a one platform and target multiple audiences with a single message within less time and also helping marketers to identify the perfect combination of promotion mix elements to compete effectively. Marketer should use the correct and suitable form of IMC to develop their current communication plans.

This is the fact that integrated marketing communication plan should not be considered as a final goal but this has to be considering as the starting point in the process of developing and implementing of a marketing programme. This strategy helps people to differentiate the way of traditional advertising and the integrated marketing communication.

Furthermore, integrated marketing communications develop the way of thinking regarding change. Marketers are focusing to target individual customers instead of a very broad segmented market. Organizations are now able to gather information about customers, these information can be collected through stores, telephone, website, e-mails and advertising and with the help of information it is easier to target individual customers.

Finally, there are some barriers in the process of implementation of IMC, but it is depend on the organizations to identify those barriers. Organizations have to select the successful integrated marketing communication plan according to the structure, size, and nature of the business that organization has. Because it is very difficult to accept that all organizations can follow the same integrated marketing communication process.

The future research will look into the possibility of extension of this by investigating other factors which might cause an obstacle in the successfully implementation of IMC across different organizations.

References


