

Review

A review and analysis of the role of integrated marketing communication message typology in the development of communication strategies

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This conceptual paper proposes that communication strategies should be aligned to the IMC message typology in its entirety. In order to shed light on the role of IMC in the development of communication strategies a literature review was conducted. The literature review revealed that IMC is a logical structure of developing communication strategies. An organisation should control (planned) or influence messages (unplanned, product, service) to ensure message consistency and maximum communication impact. In simple terms, an organisation should strive to match its brand promise made through planned messages with actual performance as reflected in its product, service, and unplanned messages. The paper provides a communication planning framework to organisations on how to use IMC message typology to ensure message consistency and maximum impact.

Key words: IMC message typology, marketing communication tools, product messages, planned messages, unplanned messages, service messages, communication strategy.

INTRODUCTION

There is a growing interest in integrated marketing communication (IMC) among marketing scholars and practitioners. Notably, the fragmentation of markets and the multiplicity of promotional tools are a compelling reason for organisations to adopt IMC in order to ensure consistent messages to all stakeholders (Gronstedt and Sircuse, 1998:23).

Traditionally, organisations have focused on mass marketing with the emphasis on selling goods and services regardless of the needs of the customers. However, with the increased competition in the marketplace,

organisations in all sectors are being forced to embrace IMC as a marketing approach. IMC represents a paradigm shift from the era of mass marketing to the era of consumer orientation. The new marketing approach, as embodied in IMC, emphasises issues such as relationship marketing, retention marketing and database marketing (Iacobucci and Calder, 2003:6).

In addition, Shimp (2003:6) claims that "a marketer who succeeds in the new environment will be the one who coordinates the communication mix so tightly that you can look from (advertising) medium to medium, from

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programme event to programme event and instantly see that the brand is speaking with one voice". Shimp's assertion endorses the view that IMC is important to ensure both message consistency and maximum communication impact. Moreover, as Gurău (2008:171) suggests, IMC "provides an opportunity for organisations to enhance the relationship of their brands with customers and other stakeholders".

In spite of the growing importance of IMC, there is paucity of research evidence on the role of IMC message typology in the development of communication strategies. However, scholars such as Badrinarayanan (2005) have looked at integrated marketing communication and brand identity as critical components of firms' brand equity strategy. In an article entitled "How integrated marketing communication works? A theoretical review and an analysis of its drivers and effects", Porcu et al. (2012) propose a conceptual framework around IMC. None of these studies focus on the role of IMC message typology in the development of communication strategies. It is against this background that the goal of the paper is to analyze the role of IMC message typology in the development of communication strategies. This paper is divided into four sections namely, literature review, research approach, discussion and implications for communicators.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical evolution of IMC

Communication integration is not a new concept and, in fact, the concept of communication integration emerged as early as the 1930s. During this period the sales representatives would collaborate with the advertising team while, by 1966, scholars had already recommended the combined use of promotional tools in order to ensure synergy (Thorson and Moore, 1996:13).

The late 1970s and the 1980s saw an increase in merger activity in the advertising industry. This trend came about as a result of an industry-wide effort to offer more than advertising and to provide a one-stop service to clients (Thorson & Moore, 1996:13). In the late 1980s, this new integration was labelled the "new advertising". However, this elicited an outcry from public relations academics, who saw the new concept as being, what they termed, a marketing imperialism and, to them; this new concept would mean a domination of marketing over public relations (Thorson and Moore, 1996:14).

The 1990s saw IMC becoming one of the most topical marketing issues (Percy, 1997:ix). Moreover, it was in the 1990s that IMC emerged as a discipline (Kerr et al., 2008:514; Holm, 2006:24). Possible names that were suggested for the new discipline included integrated communications (IC), total communication and IMC with the latter emerging as the most favoured term (Kerr et al., 2008: 514).

Juxtaposed to the view that IC was an alternative term for IMC, Rensburg and Cant (2009:3) are, nevertheless, of the opinion that IC differs from IMC. According to them, IMC deals with integration within "the realm of marketing", while IC goes beyond marketing to include communication fields such as corporate design, public relations and corporate communication (Rensburg and Cant, 2009:3).

Despite its popularity; there is still no consensus among scholars on the definition of IMC (Kerr et al., 2008:514; Grove et al., 2007:37; McGrath, 2005:192; Anantachart, 2005:102). In the next section, the definition of the concept will, despite the confusion and lack of clarity about its meaning, be examined.

Defining IMC

Despite confusion and ambiguity, several scholars have, nevertheless, proposed definitions of the concept of IMC. Table 1 presents various definitions as offered by some of the authoritative voices on the concept: Table 1.

It may be deduced from the abovementioned definitions that IMC is about the combined use of promotional tools in order to bring about "clarity, consistency, and maximum communication impact" (Schultz and Schultz, 2003:93). However, it would not seem as if any agreement about the definition of IMC is in sight. Moreover, understandably, the lack of a clear definition and a solid theoretical base has resulted in IMC being a poorly defined discipline (Kerr et al., 2008:516; Fitzpatrick, 2005:93; McGrath, 2005:192). The definition that has been adopted in this paper is that of Duncan (2002) because it takes the role of IMC messages in the development of communication strategies. The definition suggests that an organisation should control (planned) and influence messages (unplanned, product, service) messages to create and nourish stakeholder relationships. Thus, it can be argued that the IMC message typology in its entirety provides a framework whereby an organisation should communicate with its stakeholders. Furthermore, there are messages that an organisation can control (planned) and there are those that the organisation can only influence.

In addition, there is vociferous scholarly debate about whether IMC is a new concept, with three opposing groups of scholars taking part.

The first group regards IMC as a new discipline while the second group sees IMC as an old discipline. In other words, the second group sees IMC as an old idea under the guise of a new label with this group arguing that, as early as the 1950s, advertising agencies such as Leo Burnett were practising IMC (Thorson & Moore, 1996:14). The third group claims that IMC is irrelevant (Kerr et al., 2008: 517).

IMC message typology

The IMC message typology presents a good framework

Table 1. Definitions of IMC.

Author	Date	Definition
American Association of Advertising Agencies	1989	"A concept of marketing communications planning that recognises added value in a programme that integrates a variety of strategic disciplines – e.g. general advertising, direct response, sales promotion, and public relations – and combines these disciplines in order to provide clarity, consistency and maximum communication impact"
Schultz	1991	"The process of managing all sources of information about a product/service to which a customer or prospect is exposed and which, behaviourally, moves the customer toward a sale and maintains customer loyalty"
Keegan	1992	"The strategic coordination of all messages and media by an organisation in order to influence its perceived brand value collectively"
Kotler	1999	"IMC is the concept under which a company carefully integrates and coordinates its many communication channels to deliver a clear, consistent and compelling message about the organisation and its message"
Duncan	2002	"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"
Schultz and Schultz	2004	"IMC is a strategic process used to plan, develop, execute and evaluate coordinated, measurable, persuasive brand communication programmes over time with consumers, customers, prospects and other targeted, relevant internal and external audiences"
Kliatchko	2005	"IMC is the concept and process of strategically managing audience-focused, channel-centred and results-driven brand communication programmes over time"

Source: Kerr et al. (2008:515).

for communication planning purposes. This view is consistent with Moriarty's statement (1994:39) that IMC message typology (planned, unplanned, product and service messages) "is a logical structure of developing stakeholder communication strategies" because an organisation should meet or surpass the customer expectations created through planned messages with actual performance as reflected in its unplanned, product and service messages. In the same vein, Hawkins et al. (2011:230) state that IMC has "emerged as a strategy for gaining competitive advantage". Thus, organisations such should use IMC as a strategy to survive in the highly competitive environment. In order to make a brand promise, an organisation should send planned messages to its customers and prospects. Planned messages, according to Duncan and Moriarty (1997:78) and Dahlén et al. (2010:34), are messages that are sent via the traditional elements of the marketing communication mix, namely, advertising, personal selling, public relations, sales promotion and sponsorships.

However, there are also various unplanned communication activities which are major determinants of the attitudes and behaviours of consumers. These activities include word-of-mouth or interpersonal communication, intrapersonal communication and intermediary communication (Dahlén et al., 2010:34; Melewar and Karaosmanoglu, 2006: 852). The impact of word-of-mouth communication is particularly significant as an

individual who has had personal experience of a service provider may be regarded as an objective source of information. References and testimonials represent an active way in which an organisation such as a museum may use positive word-of-mouth communication in its marketing strategies (Hackey, 2010: 136; Melewar and Karaosmanoglu, 2006:852). In addition, positive or negative news disseminated by the mass media, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), employees and others may also influence consumers' perceptions of organisations (Melewar and Karaosmanoglu, 2006:852).

In order to ensure message consistency, an organisation should influence product messages. Product messages emanate from the attributes of a product, for example, pricing, durability, distribution networks, form, features, performance, conformance, quality, reliability, reparability and style (Venter and Rensburg, 2009:260; Aaker, 1995:204; Kotler and Keller, 2009:363; Little and Marandi, 2003:120). According to Van der et al. (1996:172), a product is the first component of a marketing mix and, hence, it should form the basis of communication decisions.

In an effort to maximise communication impact, an organisation should ensure that customer expectations are consistent with its service messages. According to Duncan and Moriarty (1997:84), service messages "originate from interactions with the organisation's employees". Clearly, in order to meet the expectations of

customers it is essential that museum employees be competent, reliable and responsive. This view is in line with Yucelt (2000:4)'s suggestion that the quality of a service is determined by the quality of the relevant employees.

Stages of IMC

According to Thorson and Moore (1996:24), the IMC integration process comprises the following stages, namely, awareness, image integration, functional integration, coordinated integration, consumer-based integration, stakeholder integration and relationship management integration.

Awareness: The business environment is dynamic. In other words, economic, social, technological and cultural factors all have an impact on the existence of an organisation and are a compelling reason for a move to new, integrated marketing systems (Thorson and Moore, 1996:24).

Image integration: It is essential that an organisation present "a consistent message, look and feel". In other words, the messages to all stakeholders and their physical presentation should be consistent, as consistency of image and message eliminates both internal contradictions and a fragmented image (Thorson and Moore, 1996:24).

Functional integration: Prior to functional integration, the strengths and weaknesses of all the marketing communication tools should be analysed. These tools include public relations, advertising, sales promotions and direct marketing. Of special interest is the fact that these tools all complement each other (Thorson and Moore, 1996:26). As Thorson and Moore (1996:26) suggest, "public relations permits an organisation to use third-party credibility with careful targeting and placement of newsworthy stories in media while advertising allows a message to be repeated" Accordingly, the right mix of tools should be selected in order to ensure both message consistency and maximum communication impact with written policies, manuals and guidelines being used to achieve the desired results. In addition, cross-functional communication is important in order to ensure successful integration (Thorson and Moore, 1996:26).

Coordinated integration: The communication integration may be driven by either an organisation or a communication agency. In the case of an organisation, each of the communication disciplines may lead the integration, depending on the marketing goals and objectives of the organisation. The glue that binds the communication disciplines within an organisation "is shared budgets, shared performance measures, and outcomes". In the case of an agency driving the communication integration,

it is recommended that an integrated agency, as opposed to a traditional agency, be used (Thorson and Moore, 1996:27).

Consumer-based integration: During this stage, an organisation gathers information about both customers and prospects with a view to improving its communication efforts with the profiles of customers and prospects being an important consideration when determining a communication mix. To this end, it is advised that databases be established as these databases will enable the organisation to match its market offering with the needs of its customers. This, in turn, will enable the organisation both to increase its customer retention rates and to attract prospective customers (Thorson and Moore, 1996:30).

Stakeholder integration: Customers are the main reason why an organisation exists. However, noncustomer stakeholders also constitute an important part of the stakeholder community of an organisation with these noncustomer stakeholders including employees, the community, government, press, vendors and suppliers (Thorson and Moore, 1996:30). Employees are at the heart of the implementation of IMC because they are the embodiment of the brand. Accordingly, it is essential that employees "live the brand". The growing importance of employees reinforces the view that internal communication is an important tool in re-orientating employees in line with the IMC culture, together with the concomitant change in values and beliefs (Fill, 2001:414).

Relationship management integration: This stage involves measuring the effectiveness of both the marketing communication efforts and the role that the communication professionals are playing in the strategic direction of the organisation. IMC elevates communication professionals to a strategic level where they are able to make a meaningful contribution to the strategic direction of an organisation. For example, they may assist in the implementation of programmes such as total quality management. Significantly, they may also make a contribution when an organisation enters into strategic alliances with other organisations (Thorson and Moore, 1996:33).

Principles of IMC

According to Schultz and Schultz (2003:50), there are eight guiding principles in the implementation of IMC. These principles include the following: become a customer-centric organisation, use outside-in planning, focus on the total customer experience, align consumer goals with corporate goals, set customer behavioural objectives, treat customers as assets, streamline functional activities and converge marketing communication activities. Each of these eight principles will now be briefly described:

Become a customer-centric organisation: It is essential that an organisation's activities revolve around the final consumer as it is the customers who are the lifeblood of an organisation. Failure to meet the ever-changing needs of consumers may signal the demise of an organisation. "Unless a firm is financially successful, it cannot reward shareholders, management and society." Accordingly, it may be stated categorically that an organisation should spare no effort in meeting the needs of its target market (Schultz and Schultz, 2003:50–51).

Use outside-in planning: If an organisation is to become a customer-centric organisation then the organisation should implement an outside-in planning system. In terms of such a system the organisation is informed by the needs of its customers and determines both its objectives as well as the way in which these objectives will translate into reality. Of special significance is the fact that such a system links the financial goals of an organisation to the marketing spending levels. Accordingly, if an organisation wants a high return on investment, then the organisation should spend more on marketing communication (Schultz and Schultz, 2003:53).

Focus on the total customer experience: A customer's total marketing experience is not limited to the marketing communication activities of an organisation but includes, inter alia, the customer's interaction with intermediaries. As a result, an organisation's partners are critical in ensuring communication integration (Schultz and Schultz, 2003:56).

Align consumer goals with corporate goals: The needs of consumers are ever-changing and, thus, in order to keep their customers satisfied, it is essential that organisations align their corporate goals to the needs of their customers. In other words, the strategic direction of an organisation should be determined by the needs of customers and not vice versa (Schultz and Schultz, 2003:57).

Set customer behavioural objectives: An organisation should set the following customer behavioural objectives in an effort both to attract and retain customers – acquire new customers, retain and maintain present customers, retain and grow sales and migrate existing customers through the firm's product or service portfolio (Schultz and Schultz, 2003:60).

Treat customers as assets: It is essential that an organisation such as a museum be consumer orientated as an organisation that does not satisfy its customers' needs is doomed to fail in the marketplace. It must be remembered that customers are the source of income of an organisation while the other activities within an organisation are mainly cost centres. Accordingly, an organisation should invest in its customers as an asset (Schultz and Schultz, 2003:63).

Streamline functional activities: An organisation should disseminate messages and provide incentives to both customers and prospects. These messages may be sent out via marketing communication tools such as advertising and public relations while incentives in the form of sales promotional activities may attract customers and prospects alike (Schultz and Schultz, 2003:63).

Converge marketing communication activities: Marketing communication activities should be converged in order to effect integration. As indicated earlier, integration results in message consistency and maximises communication impact (Schultz and Schultz, 2003:63). In this section, relevant literature on IMC was reviewed. The following section will focus on the research approach that was adopted in this paper.

RESEARCH APPROACH

This is a conceptual paper on the role of IMC message typology in the development of communication strategies. In order to shed light on the role of IMC message typology in the development of communication strategies a literature review was conducted. In reviewing the literature on IMC, journal articles, textbooks, the internet (Google scholar) and online databases were used. Some of the databases that were used include Emerald, ProQuest, Nexus, and Academic Search Premier. The review was conducted around the following questions:

1. What is integrated marketing communication?
2. What are the IMC messages?
3. What is the role of IMC message in the development of communication strategies?

DISCUSSION

As indicated in the literature review, IMC involves disseminating clear and consistent messages to an organisation's stakeholders. As advised by Moriarty (1994), organisations should use the four messages to structure their communication efforts. In order to achieve full integration of communication, the communication activities of the museums should not be aligned to planned messages only. While there is consensus that IMC is about the harmonisation of the four messages. In practice IMC means the integration of promotional tools or marketing communication tools. However, contrary to this practice, an IMC message typology orientated communication strategy should encompass all the messages. While there is consensus that IMC is about the harmonisation of the four messages in practice IMC means the integration of promotional tools or marketing communication tools. However, contrary to this suggestion, the IMC orientated communication strategy should encompass the other messages. While organisations do

Table 2. IMC objectives.

Planned message objectives:	to increase the number of visitors by 10% this year; to increase the level of awareness of the museums' market offering; to increase profit by 5% during this financial year; to increase donations by 3%
Unplanned message objectives	to counteract negative publicity within three hours of its occurrence; to generate free media coverage worth R1 million; to reduce the amount of negative publicity
Product message objectives:	to improve existing exhibitions; to provide a more diversified product offering
Service message objectives:	to reduce the number of visitors' complaints by 20% during this financial year; to provide prompt, courteous and knowledgeable responses to all visitor enquiries; to create a conducive service environment; to increase the level of visitor satisfaction; to increase the number of repeat visitors by 5%

Table 3. IMC programme.

Action required	Deadlines	Budget	Status
PLANNED MESSAGE ACTIVITIES			
Establish marketing and communication partnerships with role players in the tourism industry	Ongoing	R 1 million	Not yet done
Develop and implement an advertising (magazine, radio, television) campaign	01/11/2015	R2 million	Not yet done
Design, print and distribute posters and leaflets	01/11/2015	R500 000	Not yet done
Arrange media conferences	01/11/2015	Not applicable	Not yet done
Compile and send out media releases	01/11/2015	Not applicable	Not yet done
Write and send out media invitations	01/11/2015	Not applicable	Not yet done
Write and place opinion pieces	01/11/2015	Not applicable	Not yet done
Design and print branding material	01/11/2015	R200 000	Not yet done
Arrange media interviews	Ongoing	Not applicable	Not yet done
Organise events	01/11/2015	R 1 million	Not yet done
Arrange stakeholder meetings	01/11/2015	R300 000	Not yet done
Inform visitors of upcoming events and exhibitions through social media	01/11/2015	Not applicable	Not yet done
Solicit funds from potential donors	Ongoing	Not applicable	Not yet done
UNPLANNED MESSAGE ACTIVITIES			
Monitor media stories and write daily reports	Ongoing	R200 000	Not yet done
Respond rapidly to negative media stories	Ongoing	Not applicable	Not yet done
Handle all media enquiries within three hours of receipt	Ongoing		Not yet done
Appoint artists, business executives and soccer personalities as ambassadors	01/11/2015	R 500 000	Not yet done
PRODUCT MESSAGE ACTIVITIES			
Acquire additional cultural history collections	01/11/2015	R3 million	Not yet done
Diversify into natural history collections	01/11/2015	R 1 million	Not yet done
Improve existing exhibitions	01/11/2015	R 2 million	Not yet done
Develop three new travelling exhibitions	01/11/2015	R 5 million	Not yet done
SERVICE MESSAGE ACTIVITIES			
Train all staff members in customer service	01/11/2015	R 500 000	Not yet done
Arrange refresher courses for all staff members	01/11/2015	R 1 million	Not yet done
Establish a visitors' complaints desk	01/11/2015	Not applicable	Not yet done
Establish a suggestion box	01/11/2015	Not applicable	Not yet done
Renovate old buildings	01/11/2015	R 10 million	Not yet done
Improve the parking facilities	01/11/2015	R 200 000	Not yet done
Draw up a database of visitors	01/11/2015	Not applicable	Not yet done

not have control over unplanned, product and service messages, they should influence them.

In other words, they should try to match customers' expectations which were created through planned messages with the actual experience as manifested in the form of product, service and planned messages as a match between customer expectations and actual experience (product and service messages) will result in positive unplanned messages, that is, maximum communication impact and message consistency. This section presents the observations that were made during the literature review. The following section looks at the implications of the findings for communication practitioners.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNICATION PRACTITIONERS

This paper proposes a break away from the tradition of limiting communication integration to the harmonisation of planned messages (marketing communication tools). The paper suggests that the IMC message typology is a logical structure of developing communication strategies. Contrary to the traditional view, the communication objectives should not be linked to planned messages (marketing communication tools) only but, instead, the objectives of the organisation should also be aligned to the unplanned, product and service messages. It is against this background that the organisation's communication objectives should be termed IMC objectives and not mere communication objectives as this will highlight the fact that the objectives have been aligned to the IMC message typology in its entirety. Accordingly, the organisations should formulate planned message objectives, unplanned message objectives, product message objectives and service message objectives. In addition, the objectives should be SMART; that is, they should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-specific. In line with the IMC message typology, the IMC orientated communication programme formulated by an organisation should be divided into four sections, namely, planned, unplanned, product and service message activities. The following are examples of IMC orientated objectives and activities for a museum: Table 2 and 3.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to propose that communication strategies should be aligned to the IMC message typology in its entirety. The paper dispels the notion that IMC is limited to the integration of marketing communication tools (planned messages). It suggests that an organization should make a brand promise through planned messages and influence its product, service and

unplanned messages to ensure message consistency and maximum impact. The organization should set IMC objectives and develop a programme featuring planned message activities, product message activities, service message activities and unplanned messages activities.

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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