

## Integrated marketing communications: pathway for enhancing client – customer relationships

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**Abstract:** *The strategic coordination of marketing communication tools is vital and highly crucial for every result driven organization today. Companies must be able to deliver the right message to their target audience in order to elicit the right results. The objectives of this paper amongst others are to: (i) ascertain whether proper implementation of Integrated Marketing Communications can help reduce the cost of marketing communication or promotional budget. (ii) Establish whether the use of integrated marketing communications by firm through its advertising agencies can bring about profitable long-term client-customer relationships. The paper raises two hypotheses, which are stated in the null form. These are: The more an organization adopts Integrated Marketing communications, the more fund it will spend on promotional activities in the long run, and the less an organization adopts IMC principles, the more profitable Client-Customer relationship it will build. The paper uses survey method with structured questionnaire to obtain data that were later analyzed with correlation coefficient and analysis of variance test statistics. (ANOVA). Findings show that company will be able to save cost on marketing communication and promote lasting long-term client-customer relationships, if they properly adopt integrated marketing communication principles. The paper makes valuable recommendations which users of IMC will find useful in the ever dynamic and highly competitive world of marketing.*

**Keywords:** Integration; Marketing; Communications; Enhanced; Relationships

### Introduction

The strategic coordination of the marketing communication tools is highly vital and crucial for every result driven

organization today. Most companies strive to produce a clear, consistent and competitive message across to target audience. Effective marketing communication should be an integral part of every efficient and result oriented

organization with integrated market communications approach stressing consistency of messages. That is, communication efforts of a company through its different products must project a unified voice. Companies must be able to deliver the right message, in the right medium, across to target audience, in order to elicit the right results.

The simple argument for this clarification call for the use of Integrated Marketing Communication is that there are financial, competitive and strong laden customer relationships to be achieved as parts of the results of integration

Indeed, marketing is tending away from focus on individual transactions and now moves towards a focus on building value-laden relationship. Building strong company-customers relationship requires that all the company departments work together with the marketing unit as a team to serve the customers better. In other words, the entire company department must see and embrace marketing as an integrated management function.

#### **Statement of problem and research objectives.**

Modern Marketing is tending away from a focus on individual transactions and now moves towards a focus on building value-laden relationships marketing networks. Companies now seek better ways of delivering value-laden relationships to their esteemed customers. Relationship marketing requires that the entire company departments work together with the marketing units as a team to serve customers better. Integrated Marketing Communications is believed to be one of the methods of achieving these ideal client-customer relationships

through its clear, consistent and highly competitive messages across to target audiences. There has also been anxiety in the minds of many organizational executives as to whether the use of integrated marketing communications will result in reduction in cost of Marketing Communication. Many companies are not sure of the synergy effects, which the use of IMC will bring to the organization. This paper intends to fill that intellectual gap by proposing that the use of integrated marketing communications can help companies minimize the cost of marketing communications as well as promote client-customer relationships.

The need for companies to fully adopt integrated marketing communication ideals is borne out of the fact that there are financial, competitive and relational benefits to be achieved through the synergy afforded by the process of integration, Picton and Broderick (2005).

#### **The objectives of this paper, among others are to:**

- Ascertain whether proper implementation of Integrated Marketing Communication programmes by an organization can help reduce the promotional fund/budget of such an organization there by reducing the cost of marketing communication.
- Establish whether the use of integrated marketing communication by a firm through its advertising agencies can bring about profitable long-term client-customer relationship.
- Offer valuable recommendations which companies and advertising agencies will find highly valuable if faithfully implemented.

The paper raises two propositions, which are stated in the null form. These are:

- The more an organization adopts Integrated Marketing communications, the more fund it will spend on promotional activities in the long run, and
- The less an organization adopts IMC principles, the more profitable Client-Customer relationship it will build.

### Literature review

Integrated Marketing Communication is the strategic coordination of all messages and the media used by an organization in order to collectively influence its perceived brand value (Duncan and Caywood, 1996). The American Association of Advertising Agencies (4As) sees Integrated Marketing Communication as "a concept of marketing communication planning that reorganizes the added value of a comprehensive plan that evaluates the strategies roles of a variety of communication disciplines – general advertising, direct response, sales promotion and public relations and combines these disciplines to provide clearly, consistency and maximum communication impact". Many definitions were reviewed in the course of the work. Most authors agreed that integration of the marketing communication mix elements would provide an organization with a clear, credible, consistent and better competitive message to target audiences/markets. The views of various scholars on Integrated marketing Communication emphasized the need for a synergistic marketing communication plan, that uses multiple tools of marketing communication apart from traditional advertising and capitalizes on the strengths of each, with the goal of achieving maximum communication impact. Most scholars portrayed integrated marketing communication mix

as the specific mix of Advertising, personal selling, sale promotion, public Relations and Direct Marketing that a company uses to pursue its advertising and marketing objectives. The above view is supported by David Dolak (2006), Belch and Belch (2004) Jobber and Fahy (2003) and wright (2000), among others.

A number of scholars summarized the Objectives of marketing communications under three main heading.. These are: To Inform; Persuade & Remind .The above view is supported by Jobber and Fahy (2003), Kallmeyer and Abbratt (2004), Cornelissen (2001) amongst others. The Chartered Institute of Marketing, London (2008) added a fourth objective. The institute uses an acronym "DRIP" to describe this as thus: To: Differentiate; Remind; Inform-; Persuade.

The illustrative and insightful dimension added to promotional mix elements by Belch and Belch, (2004) in what the joint authors referred to, as IMC planning model is worthy of mentioning. The joint authors traced the genesis of marketing communication from an organizations review of its marketing planning. The organization goes ahead to analyze it's promotional programme situation, analyze its promotional budget and the firm thereafter determines its integrated marketing communication programmes. The firm could further take a strategic step by identifying all its promotional mix elements and then integrates its marketing communication strategies.

The findings from literature reveal that the development of marketing communication programmes require an in-depth analysis of the market. This analysis might make extensive use of marketing research as an input, which in turn provides the basis for the development of marketing strategies with

regards to product, pricing, distribution and promotion decisions. The above analysis, if effectively done and implemented could serve as the road map to follow in achieving the set marketing goals. The above view is supported by Duncan, (2002); Eagle et al, (1999); Gould, 2003; amongst others. Literature also reveals that IMC must show five significant features. These features, according to Kitchen et al (2004), where the joint authors adapted and modified the works of Duncan (2002) are:(i) The primary goal of IMC is to affect behaviour through direct communication. (ii) The process should start with the customer or prospect and then work backward to the brand communicator.(iii)IMC should use all forms of communication and all sources of brand or company contracts as prospects message delivery channels.(iv) The need for synergy is paramount with coordination helping to achieve a strong brand image IMC requires that successful marketing communication needs to build a relationship between the brand and the customer. Their view above, is also supported by Kallmeyer and Abratt, (2001); Low, (2000) and Kliatchko, (2005) among others.

The authors added that it is important to consider the relative strengths and weaknesses of each of the promotional mix components when deciding how to properly utilize the marketing communication mix in order to meet the set marketing objectives.

The strategic place of the marketing communication mix in the lives of different products is emphasized in most literatures. Picton and Broderick (2005) gave a summary view of the different marketing communication tools to be used at each stage of a product's life such as at introduction; growth; maturity/saturation stage and decline. This view is presented below.

Choosing the right and appropriate marketing tool is very essential if a firm is to meet the set marketing objective. Picton and Broderick (2005) presented all the promotional tools and how each of the tools has an overlap on the other tools. In all, the authors gave incisive picture of how each of the tools affects the others. The choice of a firm's marketing communication tool(s) is largely influenced by a number of factors such as business mission, business objectives, marketing objectives, promotional objectives, resources availability, competitors' activities and competitors' reaction pattern, target audience and the type of product, amongst others.

### Relationship Marketing

The relevance of relationship marketing in achieving customer/client satisfaction and organizational marketing objectives is not in doubt especially in a developing economy, Such as Nigeria (Osugwu 2004). Satisfaction, according to a Kotler (2000) is a person's feeling of pleasure or disappointment resulting from comparing a company's product perceived performance (or outcome) in relation to his or her expectations. If performance matches expectations, the customer is satisfied. If the performance exceeds expectations, the customer is highly delighted or highly satisfied. However, if performance falls short or expectations, the customer is dissatisfied. In the words of Achumba (2000), Higher satisfaction creates delight and an emotional bond between the customer and the company and its products. If marketers raise expectations too high and they are unable to perform to same level, then customers or consumers are likely to be dissatisfied.

Figure 1: The product's life cycle and examples of the strategic use of integrated marketing communications

Introduction	Growth	Maturity/Saturation	Decline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasis on awareness building especially among innovators and early adopters (pull strategies)</li> <li>• Emphasis is on trade push strategies to obtain distribution acceptance</li> <li>• Emphasis on PR and activities to advertise awareness and image building and assist in positive attitude formation</li> <li>• Emphasis on sales promotions to induce trial and encouragement of inclusion in customers' repertoire sets</li> <li>• Strong sales force emphasis may be a feature for some products in, for example, industrial durable market</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasis continues on building awareness and adoption by new customer (early adopter, early majority)</li> <li>• Emphasis on trade push strategies to gain distribution penetration</li> <li>• Advertising and PR may be increased as increases in sales revenue permit larger expenditures</li> <li>• As product moves into mass market, wider audiences are included in target specification</li> <li>• Sales promotion may still be emphasized as new customers are encouraged but as demand increases, price offers may be used less</li> <li>• Promotions encouraging 'loyalty' may feature prominently</li> <li>• Effort to encourage positive word of mouth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More emphasis may be required on brand differentiation. If competitive environment requires it, re-positioning may be considered</li> <li>• Emphasis on keeping customer (loyalty promotion) and sales promotions to encourage brand switching from competing brands</li> <li>• Reminder advertising encouraging customers to keep brand within repertoire set</li> <li>• Sales promotions to encourage increased usage</li> <li>• Trade promotions used to maintain distribution penetration prominence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotional effort may be reduced to harvest brand profits</li> <li>• Before decline, consideration will be given to rejuvenating brand or reposition brand to new users or attract lapsed users</li> <li>• New, 'improved' version of the brand may appear and be promoted to extend the PLC</li> </ul>

Source: *Picton and Broderick (2005): Integrated Marketing Communications. Pearson Education limited, Edinburgh Gate, England P.438.*

In the words of Achumba (2000), Higher satisfaction creates delight and an emotional bond between the customer and the company and its products. If marketers raise expectations too high and they are unable to perform to same level, then customers or consumers are likely to be dissatisfied. However, where a company sets expectations too low, it will not attract many customers. (Although, it may likely satisfy those who buy).

Relationship Marketing is the process of creating, maintaining and enhancing strong value laden relationships with customers and other stakeholders. Kotler (2000) opines that the goal of relationship marketing is to deliver long term value to customers and the measure of success is long-term customer satisfaction. It must be noted that marketing is now moving away from a focus on individual transaction and now moves towards a focus on building value-laden relationship marketing networks. Relationship

marketing requires that the entire company department work together with the marketing unit as a team to serve the customer. The company must see marketing as an integrated management function.

A number of scholars on customer relationship building believe that there are different levels of relationship building in an organization. Scholars such as Kotler(2000) Belch and Belch (2004), Fill (2006), Copley (2004) among others asserted the Different levels of relationship building. These levels include: Basic marketing; Reactive marketing; Accountable marketing, proactive marketing and partnership marketing. It must be emphasized here that the least of relationship building from the point mentioned above is basic marketing while the highest level of relationship building is partnership marketing. A customer-oriented organization must not operate below the level of proactive marketing.

*Table 1: Summary of demographical data showing classification of participants*

Variable	Frequency	%
i. Consumers	520	47.7
ii. Marketing Communication Organizations	260	23.9
iii. Staff beverage Producing Companies	310	28.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>1090</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source: Field Survey, 2009*

### Methods

The work is empirical and exploratory. The study used stratified sampling technique. A set of well structured questionnaires were administered on three categories of respondents which are consumers of Nigerian

Beverage products, staff of Beverage producing companies and staff of Advertising agencies or marketing communication organization. Likert Scale structured questionnaire was used with options of five variables, which ranges from Strongly Agree (SA); Agree (A); Undecided (U); Disagree (D); and Strongly Disagree (SD).

In all, 1200 questionnaires were administered on three categories of respondents described above. Out of these total of questionnaire administered, 1126 questionnaires were returned while 36 of these

questionnaires were rejected because they were not properly filled. In all, the research made use of 1090 returned questionnaires. Below is the summary of demographical data showing classification of participants.

**Table 2: The level of perceived effective use of IMC as it affects funds/ marketing communication or promotional budget in the long run**

Variables	No	Consumers 520		Marketing Communication Organization 260		Staff of Beverage Producing Company 310	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
		Proper implementation of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) programmes by a beverage producing organization on its products will reduce the overall promotional budget on such a product in the long run.	1090	3.89	1.02	4.28	0.62
The use of marketing communications tools can help reduce the company's overall promotional budget thereby increasing the company's profit in the long run.	1090	3.46	0.21	4.24	0.24	4.00	0.84
The use of different communications tools such as Advertising, sales promotion PR etc by a beverage producing company can help reduce the amount of money the company spends on marketing communication budget.	1090	3.42	0.42	4.18	0.65	4.06	0.57
The use of Integrated Marketing Communications by a beverage-producing firm will be an efficient way through which overall cost of marketing communications can be reduced.	1090	3.64	0.21	4.28	0.21	4.24	1.02
The use of IMC by beverage firms will help reduce wastage in the amount of money use for marketing promotions by the company and this will thereafter increase the company's profit	1090	3.82	0.62	4.44	0.62	4.44	1.24

Source: Field Survey, 2009

Table 2 reveals summary descriptive Statistics of effective use of IMC on funds/promotional budget in the long run. One observes that the means of staff, customers and marketers perceptions on the effectiveness of Integrated Marketing

Communication in promoting customers' patronage differ slightly, however, they all indicated that effective use of IMC has the potential of reducing the amount a company spends on its promotional budget or cost of marketing communications.

### Hypotheses Testing

Two hypotheses were raised in this study. They were tested at 0.05 significant levels.

**Hypothesis ONE:** The less an organisation adopts IMC, the more fund it will spend on promotional activities in the long run.

**Table 3: Correlation Coefficient Matrix of Adoption of Integrated Marketing Communication and fund spent marketing communication activities in the long run**

Variations	CPAIMC	MPIMC	SBOCPIMC	CPFSP	MPFSP	SBOCPFSP
CPAIMC	1	0.57*	0.82*	-0.52*	-0.61*	-0.68*
MPIMC		1	0.72*	-0.66*	-0.55*	-0.58*
SBOCPIMC			1	-0.73*	-0.60*	-0.68*
CPFSP				1	-0.65*	-0.66*
MPFSP					1	-0.74*
SBOCPFSP						1
Mean	16	18	16	8	12	10
Standard Deviation	0.46	0.44	0.42	0.40	0.32	0.24

*CPAIMC-Consumers' Perceived Adoption of integrated marketing Communication*

*MPIMC-Marketers' Perceived Adoption of integrated marketing Communication*

*SBOCPIMC-Staff of Beverage Producing Company Perceived Adoption of Integrated Marketing Communication*

*CPFSP-Consumers' Perceived fund Spend on Promotion*

*MPFSP-Marketers' Perceived fund Spend on Promotion*

*SBOCPFSP-Staff of Beverage Producing Company Perceived fund Spend on Promotion*

**Table 4: Summary of Analysis of Variance on perceptions of staff, customers and marketing**

Source	SS	Df	M S	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1644	2	822	1.875**	.322
Within Groups	474.570.6	1081	438.2		
Total	476214.6	1083			

Source: Field Survey, 2009

Key: \*\*Non-significant two tailed test

a. Independent variables --staff, customers, and market organizations' perceptions

b. Dependent Variable: fund spend on promotional activities

The results of the ANOVA are presented in an ANOVA table 4. This table contains columns labeled "Source", "SS or Sum of Squares", "df - for degrees of freedom", "MS - for mean square", "F or F-ratio", and "p,

prop, probability, sig., or sig. of F". The only columns that are critical for interpretation are the first and the last. The others are used mainly for intermediate computational purposes. The row labeled "Between Groups",

having a probability value associated with it, is the only one of any great importance at this time. The other rows are used mainly for computational purposes. The first column that researcher most probably first look at, is the value “.322” located under the “Sig.” column. If the number (or numbers) found in this column is (are) less than the critical value ( ) set for the study, then the effect is said to be significant. Since this value set for this study is .05, any value less than this will result in significant effects, while any value greater than this value will result in non significant effects. If the perceptions are found to be insignificant using the above procedure, it implies that the means are not differ. In terms of the above finding, it would mean that the perceptions of staff, customers and marketers are not significantly differ about the organisation adoption of IMC, and

the fund expended on promotional activities in the long run. This table does not tell the researcher anything about what the views were, just that there was no difference because non-significant difference was found, then the differences between the means are not great enough to allow the researcher to say that they are different. In that case, no further interpretation is attempted.

Therefore, the second null hypothesis that stated that “the less an organisation adopts IMC, the more fund it will spend on promotional activities in the long run” is upheld at  $f(2, 1083) = 1.875$ , 0.05 significant level.

**Hypothesis TWO:** The less an organisation adopts IMC principles the more profitable longterm client-customer relationship it will build.

*Table 5: Correlation Coefficient Matrix of Adoption of Integrated Marketing Communication and client-customer relationship*

column is (are) less than the critical value ( $\alpha$ ) set for the study, then the effect is said to be significant. Since this value set for this study is .05, any value less than this will result in significant effects, while any value greater than this value will result in non significant effects. If the perceptions are found to be insignificant using the above procedure, it implies that the means

Source: Field Survey, 2009

Key:

- CPAIMC-Consumers' Perceived Adoption of Integrated Marketing Communication
- MPIMC-Marketers' Perceived Adoption of Integrated Marketing Communication
- SBOCPIMC-Staff of Beverage Producing Company Perceived Adoption of Integrated Marketing Communication
- CPCCR-Consumers' Perceived client-customer relationship
- MPCCR-Marketers' Perceived client-customer relationship
- SBOCPCCR-Staff of Beverage Producing Company Perceived client-customer relationship

**Table 6: Summary of Analysis of Variance on perceptions of staff, customers and marketing organization on the effectiveness of Integrated Marketing Communication to promote customers' patronage in beverage producing companies**

Source	SS	Df	M S	F	Sig.
Between Groups	13698	2	6849	57.554**	0.05
Within Groups	128639	1081	119		
Total	142337	1083			

Source: Field Survey, 2009

Key: \*\*Non-significant two-tailed test

a Independent variables staff, customers market organizations' perceptions

b Dependent Variable: Customers' patronage

In terms of the above finding, it would mean that the perceptions of staff, customers and marketers differ significantly about the organisation adoption of IMC and profitable longterm client-customer relationship it will build.. Therefore the second null hypothesis that stated, "The less an organisation adopts IMC, the more profitable longterm client-customer relationship it will build" is rejected at  $f(2, 1083) = 57.554, 0.05$  significant level.

### Conclusion

Successful marketing communication relies on the strategic coordination of options called the promotional mix. These options include advertising, sales promotion, public relation direct marketing, and personal selling. The Internet has also become a powerful tool for reaching certain important audiences. The role each element takes in a marketing communication programmes relies in part on whether a company employs a push strategy or a pull strategy. A pull strategy relies more on consumer demand than personal selling for the product to travel from the manufacturer to the end user. The demand generated by advertising, public relations, and sales

promotion "pull" the good or service through the channel of distribution. A push strategy, on the other hand, emphasizes personal selling to push the product through the marketing channels. (The Channels of distribution). These two channels have been considered in this study and factors that promote the two channels were investigated the summary of the findings presented below.

- The more an organization adopts Integrated Marketing Communication the more fund it will spend on promotional activities in the long run

- The more an organization adopts Integrated Marketing Communication the more client customer relationship it will build

- The more an organisation adopts Integrated Marketing Communication at difference stages of a product life cycle, the more market share it will build.

Findings from this research show that the development of Integrated Marketing Communication requires an in-depth analysis of the market. This analysis might make use of marketing research as input, which in turn will provide basis for the development of market strategies. Finding also show that

there is need for companies to properly integrate itself with its Advertising Agency (Client-Agency integration) so that a better communication can be produced which will be sent across to target audience.

### Recommendations

The views of respondents on factors that can promote the usage of Integrated Marketing Communications are summarized and they form part of the recommendations of this work. These recommendations comprise of those given by marketing producing companies as contained in the open-ended questionnaire:

- There should be increase in the display of professionalism on the part of marketing communications organizations. As professionals in marketing communication, they stand in vantage positions in advising their clients on the best way to combine the various promotional tools in order to achieve clarity, consistency and competitive messages.

- There should be better coordination of the marketing communication budget. This, they asserted would lead to reduction in the overall promotional budget and thus have the multiplier effect of increasing the profitability level of such companies.

- It needs be pointed out that most respondents from marketing communication organizations stressed the fact that marketing and promotional objectives must be realistic, measurable, achievable, specific and time bound. This will make firms to know whether or not the objectives are being achieved

- The place of adequate resources to achieve set objectives cannot be over-emphasized. Firms need to back the set marketing

objective with enough or adequate financial muscle. This will not allow competitors to take undue advantage. This is because competitors will certainly respond to the firm's promotional drive..

- Companies will be able to achieve set promotional objectives if they produce quality products. Respondents emphasize the production of quality products that can meet people's taste. Respondents believed that firms would be able to beat their competitors with their marketing promotions if such promotions are used on better/quality products produced. Certainly, you cannot continue to deceive the consumers at all times.

- Better, effective, and reasonable pricing policies must be given consideration. Respondents believe that firms should not over-price themselves out of the market. Respondents believe that marketing communications will be more impactful if such products are priced effectively and at a degree of reasonability.

- Many respondents re-emphasized the use of children and youth in promoting beverage products. Most beverage producing companies are already employing this strategy of "catch them young". Today one easily sees beverage logos and photographs been displayed conspicuously on walls of many nursery/primary schools, signboards of secondary schools, etc. All these have the effect of registering the products well in the minds of these youths right from primary/secondary schools.

- Sponsorship of events such as schools' inter-house competitions will help promote promotional messages. Firms must seek when most popular schools are embarking on their inter-house competition. In fact, it will be a cheap way of selling the company's

promotional messages in the minds of these youths. During schools inter-house competitions, free products could be given to children and companies can also sell at reduced prices. This will certainly register the company's sales efforts/messages in the minds of the youths. Moreover, there is need for Nigerian beverage producers to take sponsoring of some major event in the sports arena. Such events according to respondents include NUGA games, African Cup of Nations. All these events usually draw the attentions of Nigerian youths together. These, respondents believe, will help promote the use of Integrated Marketing Communications.

- There is need for companies to start exploring the use of Internet in selling their products to distributors. Placing such "distributors wanted" on the net can also help in promoting a company's selling effort.

- Belch and Belch (2004) stressed that the greatest benefit derived from integration of marketing communication is synergy. Synergy can be described as the addition  $3+3=7$  phenomenon. By bringing together the various facets of marketing communications in a mutually supportive and enhancing way, then the resulting "whole" is more than the simple sum of its parts. Each elements of the marketing communication enhances and supports the other in a consistent fashion when integrated marketing communications approach is used.

- Marketing communication messages must stress the products benefits and strengths. This, respondents believe would help to strengthen the belief and faith of consumers on the products being promoted.

- Companies need to properly integrate their marketing communications agencies, Advertising Agencies & Public Relations firms with one another in order to ensure clarity of messages, consistency, credibility and a highly competitive message across to target audience..

- There is need for an organization to be consistent and not conflicting about its marketing communication because consistency in message creates better awareness, reinforces the message and helps in building a solid brand while conflicting messages confuses and could even scare away customers.

- Needs for organizations to institute regular cross-functional meetings e.g. meetings involving all departmental heads that are involved in the IMC programmes. Again, firms should also foster inter-departmental communications to ensure that each group is living up to expectations where necessary, to identify unexpected problem or challenges.

- Proper training must be accorded to employees (staff) of both client companies and those from marketing communication agencies. This will yield better marketing communication results.

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