integrated marketing communication

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INTRODUCTION

Integrated marketing communication (IMC) emerged during the late twentieth century and its importance has been growing ever since (Grove, Carlson, and Dorsch, 2002; Cornelissen, 2001; Hartley and Pickton, 1999). Owing to the impact of information technology, changes came about in the domains of marketing and marketing communications which led to the emergence of IMC (Kitchen *et al.*, 2004a; Phelps and Johnson, 1996; Duncan and Everett, 1993). The multiplication of media, demassification of consumer markets, and the value of the Internet in today's society are just three of the areas in which technological innovation has impacted (Pilotta *et al.*, 2004; Peltier, Schibrowsky, and Schultz, 2003; Reid, 2003; Lawrence, Garber, and Dotson, 2002; Fill, 2001; Low, 2000; Hutton, 1996). This in turn left marketers in a challenging and competitive environment, trying to fulfil customers wants and needs while also developing long-term relationships with them. IMC can help in creating coordinated and consistent messages across various channels of communication. Furthermore, the concept is especially valuable in that it places great emphasis on the importance of all stakeholder groups and, in particular, on customer loyalty, which can only be created through strategic relationship building (Jin, 2003/2004; Cornelissen, 2000; Eagle and Kitchen, 2000; Pickton and Hartley, 1998; Miller and Rose, 1994).

To date, academic research on IMC has been limited. The majority of empirical research has been conducted with advertising and PR agencies or companies located in the United States with a clear tendency toward quantitative methodologies (Jin, 2003/2004; Peltier, Schibrowsky, and Schultz, 2003; Kitchen and Schultz, 1999; Beard, 1996; Miller and Rose, 1994). Very few studies have concentrated on the business "client" perspectives within Europe (Cornelissen and Thorpe, 2001; Low, 2000; Kitchen and Schultz, 1999).

The following sections discuss IMC in greater depth. Firstly, the relevance of IMC as a concept is discussed. Subsequently, an analysis of IMC implementation is carried out with reference to past research. Then, barriers to integration and criticisms of IMC are addressed. Finally, concluding comments are proffered.

THE IMPORTANCE OF IMC

This section focuses on the importance of IMC. First, the evolution of IMC and different IMC definitions are reviewed. A contemporary perspective on IMC is offered with a subsection flagging up the benefits of such an approach. Lastly, IMC's impact on promotional mix elements is presented.

The evolution of IMC. Integration, the attempt to present a consistent message across the available promotional mix elements has always been important to successful organizations even during the mid twentieth century. With the multiplication of media channels in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, the integration and coordination of different messages aiming to portray a single and unique image to all stakeholder groups has become both more important and more difficult to achieve.

However, some researchers believe that the concept of IMC can be traced back to the 1970s (Cornelissen and Lock, 2000; van Riel, 1995). The first study on IMC was conducted by Caywood, Schultz, and Wang (1991b) at the end of the 1980s, while the first "conceptual ideas" were published in the book "Integrated Marketing Communications" by Schultz, Tannenbaum, and Lauterborn (1993). IMC advocates believe that its emergence was down to the context of media upheaval of that time, for example, digital TV and mobile phones, market environments, that is, increasing global competition and rapid technological developments, such as the personal computer (Kliatchko, 2005; Reid, 2003; Eagle and Kitchen, 2000; Griffin and Pasadeos, 1998; Bruhn, 1997/1998; Hutton, 1996).

Technology can affect IMC from two sides, that is, from the marketing and consumer perspectives (Kitchen *et al*., 2004a; Schultz, 1993f). Today, integration is needed owing to globalization and the resulting interdependence between countries and marketplaces (Kitchen

et al., 2004a; Schultz, 1996b). Thus, corporate and brand managers need to coordinate the actions of their global and even national brand(s) with the aim of integrating elements of promotional mix.

A global marketplace which becomes more transitory through the Internet may lead to a customer-driven and focused marketing environment. In such an environment, technology can enhance marketing communication strategies, that is, both traditional advertising techniques and also new, unconventional marketing practices may be applied, such as database marketing, one-to-one communication, or marketing PR (McGrath, 2005a; Edelman, 2004; Gonring, 1994; Nowak and Phelps, 1994). The social networking website MySpace, for example, has more than 17 million visitors each month in the United States. Marketing communication innovators propose the exploitation of such networks as a means of establishing an ongoing dialogue with customers and prospects (Economist, 2006a). In conclusion, not only can technology help consumers to connect and communicate with each other but it can also act as a facilitator in establishing a relationship with individual consumers and companies.

Owing to disagreements about the emergence of IMC and the limited amount of research conducted with actual organizations, researchers have thus far been unable to agree upon a single definition of IMC. Kliatchko (2005), though, has examined the various definitions of IMC that have emerged over time and tried to explore their dimensions in the hope of unifying them. Table 1 is based on Kliatchko's (2005: 21) table of IMC definitions. So, his own definition and another recent definition by Schultz (2004b) have also been added.

As demonstrated in Table 1, during the early 1990s IMC was referred to as the *one sight, one sound* or *one voice* or the *seamless marketing communication* approach (Beard, 1997; Nowak and Phelps, 1994; Duncan and Everett, 1993). However, the increasing interest in the subject of IMC led researchers to reevaluate the concept and the "buzz words" were soon set aside (Grove, Carlson, and Dorsch, 2002; Lee, 2002; Fill, 2001; Hartley and Pickton, 1999; Phelps and Johnson, 1996). These words only hinted at the many applications of IMC

and, therefore, new concepts were added to the earlier definitions of IMC.

Contrary to the implication of many of these "buzz words," IMC does not mean that an organization should only work with one message or with a single unifying brand. Rather, an integrated approach encourages managers to work with multiple targets and enables them to achieve integration of different brands, communication messages, and functions within one company. Thus, IMC has the potential to fundamentally change the meaning of marketing communications and may even be the next step in the evolution of marketing (Dewhirst and Davis, 2005; Kliatchko, 2005; Grove, Carlson, and Dorsch, 2002; Lee, 2002; Phelps and Johnson, 1996).

As in an early definition by Caywood, Schultz, and Wang (1991b) (see below), for many practitioners and researchers, IMC is a concept which strengthens the effects of promotional mix elements at the tactical level, if these elements are united (Schultz, 2006a; Cook, 2004; Naik and Raman, 2003; Fill, 2001; Cornelissen and Lock, 2000).

> [IMC is 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 – general advertising, direct response, sales promotion, and public relations – and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency, and maximum communication impact (Caywood, Schultz, and Wang, 1991b: 2–3).

However, more recent definitions, such as the one presented by Schultz (2004a), add substantial value to old definitions and to the term IMC more generally. The concept is now viewed as a strategic instrument (Schultz, 2004b: 9).

> IMC is the concept and process of strategically managing audience-focused, channel-centerd, and result-driven brand communication programs over time (Kliatchko, 2005: 21).

The new definition seems more appropriate to the twenty-first century, as Schultz acknowledges IMC's importance as a business process and its value to both external and internal audiences. The definition provided by Schultz

Table 1 IMC definitions.

Author and Year	Concepts Introduced
Caywood, Schultz, and Wang (1991) and Caywood, Schultz, and Wang (1991b)	• Coordination and consistency of messages and communication channels (one sight, one sound) • Use of a variety of communication disciplines to work in synergy based on a comprehensive plan • IMC as a concept
Schultz (1991)	• Inclusion of consumers, prospects • Behavioral responses • Nurture relationship and customer loyalty • IMC as a process
Duncan and Everett (1993)	• Profitable relationships expanded audience scope from customers to other stakeholders
Nowak and Phelps (1994)	• Reinforced notions of consistency, coordination, and behavioral response
Schultz and Schultz (1998)	• Strategic business process • Expanded notion of brand communication • Measurability • Specified the multiple markets more explicitly, inclusive of external and internal audiences
Schultz (2004b) and American Marketing Association (2007)	• Strategic business process • Extensive brand communication • Evaluation and measurement • External and internal stakeholder groups • Long-term brand value focus
Kliatchko (2005)	• Process and concept • Audience-focused • Communication program • Result-driven

Source adapted from Kliatchko (2005: 21)

(2004b) has also been used by the American Marketing Association to define integrated brand communication (American Marketing Association, 2007). However, Kliatchko (2005) does not focus explicitly on individual stakeholder groups but rather refers to them as "audiences." In addition, his definition is not as explanatory in nature as Schultz's (2004b), as he underplays the results-driven characteristic of IMC and does not explicitly mention the importance of the long-term brand value and short-term financial returns. As noted by Kliatchko (2005); Schultz's (2004b) definition supplements other IMC definitions through its employment of the terms "business process," "evaluation," and "measurability".

Many researchers have noted that it may not be possible to agree upon a universal IMC definition, given the various interpretations of IMC and its different values in the academic and commercial spheres (Kliatchko, 2005; Phelps and Johnson, 1996; Stewart, 1996). A critical review of previous definitions of IMC and an assessment of current IMC literature reveals that researchers were able to reduce any IMC definition to five crucial attributes (Kitchen *et al.*, 2004a; Low, 2000):

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1. The communication effort should be directed at consumers in order to affect behavior.
2. An outside-in approach should be utilized, that is, start with the customer first when developing a communication strategy.
3. A well-established relationship between the company and the customer is necessary.
4. To deliver a message correctly all communication activities should be included with contact points integrated into the strategy.
5. To create a competitive brand, coordination between the communication disciplines is needed.

A contemporary perspective of IMC. Owing to the rising demand in various product categories after World War II, the focus of marketers shifted to the product itself, making potential relationships with customers something of a side issue (Johnson and Schultz, 2004; Kitchen, 1999; Evans and Berman, 1987). During the 1950s, most organizations arranged their plans in line with their products and not according to customer wants and needs (Johnson and Schultz, 2004). Fuelled by dramatic changes in the marketplace and communications, retailers and other intermediaries have since gained in importance (Rosenbloom, 2004; Low and Mohr, 1999; Schultz, 1996b).

With competition increasing and with supply outstripping demand in most developed countries, a shift in power towards retailers and intermediaries has occurred. For this reason, building a long-term relationship with customers should be important to any kind of business in today's marketplace. Indeed, owing to the direct contact that retailers have with the end-consumers of manufactured goods, they should also know them better. Indeed, a powerful relationship exists between retailers, intermediaries, and manufacturers. (Reid, 2003; Low and Mohr, 1999; Schultz, 1996b). In an ideal world, the relationship between retailer, intermediary, and manufacturer would be interdependent, if not to say integrated, so that all parties could create customer-orientated communication messages, and essentially so that the manufacturer could develop customer-specific products (Pickton and Broderick, 2005; Schultz and Schultz, 2003; Schultz, 1993c).

Communication between customer and manufacturer used to be linear or one-way, that is, from the marketer to the consumer (Schultz, 1993c). But the customer of today has knowledge about the marketplace and has no need to wait for messages and information from the organization. The customer of today makes informed decisions and will make demands and influence advertisements or any other information received. Marketers must respond to these changes. The marketer needs to develop communication plans with the consumer as the starting point, later working back toward the product or service in order to design effective communication strategies. During the planning process, information about the customers, their wants and needs, and other background knowledge must be obtained. In IMC taxonomy, this is known as an *outside-in* approach (Kitchen, 2005; Schultz and Schultz, 2003; Hartley and Pickton, 1999; Schultz, 1996b; Stewart, 1996; Schultz, 1993e, 1993c). An important outcome of an IMC approach is that all communication mix tools, at least on the company's side, are integrated and support each other, resulting in synergy effects.

Another major driving force behind IMC is the demassification of markets. Many mass markets of the twentieth century have separated into diverse and smaller markets splintering into more specific customer segments. As a result, individual consumers' lifestyles, income classes, education, gender, and consumer actions characterize these new markets. The rich information flow from the Internet, broadcast media, and the press make information available to the consumer as never before, but research has discovered that most customers make their purchase decisions based on information of perceived value and not based only on the information a company chooses to present to them. Therefore, the ability of a company to utilize an outside-in approach and to portray a consistent image to prospects and existing customer groups becomes a critical success factor in competitive and information-rich market places (Jin, 2003/2004; Fill, 2001; Gould, Lerman, and Grein, 1999; Pickton and Hartley, 1998; Herrington and Lollar, 1996; Stewart, 1996; Schultz, Tannenbaum, and Lauterborn, 1993).

Benefits of IMC. IMC enables marketers to combine all of their communications in order to plan and create a coherent and synergistic approach. An important benefit of IMC is that it appreciates the significance to marketing strategy and corporate branding of new communication tools, such as direct marketing, Internet marketing, or different types of sales promotions (McGrath, 2005b; Pickton and Hartley, 1998; Drobis, 1997/1998).

Central to the discussion of contact points and message integration is the idea of incorporating different communication disciplines into one marketing communication campaign with the aim of achieving outcomes desirable to the company, for example, persuading customers to buy. As most organizations need to communicate with more than one target audience or stakeholder group, any campaign should take the characteristics of both the product brand and the corporate brand into consideration (Gylling and Lindberg-Repo, 2006; Phelps and Johnson, 1996; Nowak and Phelps, 1994). It is also necessary to blend every promotional mix element together as they have greater influence within an IMC approach as combined forces. Therefore, IMC can promote synergism internally among departments and, in turn, outside-in planning can be achieved (Reid, Luxton, and Mavondo, 2005; Stammerjohan *et al.*, 2005; Eagle and Kitchen, 2000; Phelps and Johnson, 1996).

Most managers perceive IMC as a process which encourages message integration and consistency, thus facilitating the interpretation of information for customers. Faced with an IMC approach, the customer will understand the different information and will not be confused by the vast amount of it from all contact points (McGrath, 2005b; Stewart, 1996; Duncan and Everett, 1993). However, if companies disregard IMC and different messages are not delivered in unison, it may lead to an incoherent brand image, which can negatively influence consumer buying and recall behavior (McGrath, 2005b; Stammerjohan *et al.*, 2005; Stewart, 1996; Schultz, 1993e). The combined consideration of product contact points and the consumer increases the company's awareness, and creates a positive relationship between the customer or prospect and the company (Gylling and Lindberg-Repo, 2006; Schultz

and Kitchen, 2004; Bill, 1993). Thus, different brand-customer contact points need to be carefully maintained (McGrath, 2005b).

IMC's cost-effectiveness and its apparent ability to deliver higher return on investment (ROI) has been underlined repeatedly in the literature (Holm, 2006; Reid, 2005; Duncan and Mulhern, 2004; McGoon, 1998/1999). However, researchers have failed to explain how and why these financial benefits might be achieved.

Furthermore, other traditional marketing tools, such as the product life cycle, can be considered in the different planning stages of a product, but should not *always* be taken as a blueprint, because brands are harder to damage once customer loyalty has been achieved, for example, in the case of Apple or the smoothie brand Innocent (Kotler *et al.*, 2005). However, this is not universal, as recent product withdrawals and/or brand reputation damages have indicated. For example, the link between child labor in developing countries and global manufacturers, such as GAP, Nike, or even Coca-Cola have at least shaken consumer confidence, if not to say damaged their reputations (Thomas, 2007; Johnson and Colin, 2003). A long-term brand can only be realized if it delivers an excellent pricing, distribution, and value strategy – IMC helps in better realizing these goals (Pickton and Broderick, 2005; Cornelissen, 2001; Schultz, 1997b; Miller and Rose, 1994). IMC is valuable in that it can better inform, influence, motivate, and enlighten consumers about new and existing products because of its integrative nature and its strategic long-term focus on the actual brand (Keller, 2001).

Notably, management levels within various companies have often misinterpreted IMC, that is, as a reason to cut back on the number of company employees or to decrease the marketing budget (Low and Mohr, 1999; Schultz, 1995a). Moreover, decreasing marketing budgets, growing complexity in client-organizations, and the decreasing number of employees in organizations are conditions favorable to IMC (Pickton and Broderick, 2005; Low and Mohr, 1999). But, if a company invests in establishing an IMC approach and, for example, employs a "communication czar" as suggested by Schultz

(1991), the brands' reputation can be further strengthened and loyalty among stakeholder groups further increased. The IMC budget should be introduced as a variable cost to the finance team. Seeing it as an investment will help in understanding that if more funds are allocated to the IMC budget the outcome for the company will be greater (Reid, 2003; Low, 2000; Schultz, 1995a; Duncan and Everett, 1993).

IMC benefits can be summarized as follows (McGrath, 2005a; Reid, 2003; Pickton and Hartley, 1998):

- an IMC approach aligns short- and long-term marketing in order to avoid conflicts within an organization;
- it is a sound and clear approach;
- all target audiences are considered;
- individual and one-to-one communication is encouraged;
- synergy and recall increase;
- results in financial benefits.

Although research into IMC has discovered various benefits, their basis in reality, that is, how researchers have arrived at them, should be questioned. These benefits were either derived from quantitative studies (Eagle, Kitchen, and Bulmer, 2006; Kim, Han, and Schultz, 2004; Kallmeyer and Abratt, 2001) which left little room for an actual investigation of why these benefits have occurred, or they were the direct result of researchers credulousness when faced with marketers' positive perceptions of IMC. Most IMC research has concentrated on the opinions of advertising executives or clients. However, there has been little research directly focused on IMC benefits (Reid, 2005; Phelps and Johnson, 1996).

THE IMPACT OF PROMOTIONAL MIX ELEMENTS ON IMC

To develop customer-orientated messages, the manufacturing company should realize the importance of the information held by retailers and other intermediaries about customer wants and needs. One obstacle here is retailers' long-standing apprehension about ceding control to manufacturers, an attitude which has seen retailers guarding essential customer data

due to fears that the manufacturer may use the information to go directly to the customer – cutting retailers and other intermediaries out of the value chain (Markillie, 2006; Reid, 2003; Schultz, 1996a). To avoid such complications between different retailers, manufacturers, and distributors, Schultz (1996a) suggested the implementation of one database where input and output access is granted to all parties. An IMC approach implies that a database should not be seen as only a storage capacity for names and addresses of customers. The advantages of a customer database include (Nowak and Phelps, 1994):

- going beyond the demographics toward the psychographics of customers;
- understanding who the most loyal and profitable customers are;
- understanding consumer attitudes, buying habits, and behavior;
- gaining more loyalty from customers.

A database can help in detecting customer preferences in relation to media channels, usage, and times. A healthy brand relationship with customers can be achieved through the use of not one promotional tool but many – such as PR campaigns, TV commercials, and magazines – in order to transmit the message (McGrath, 2005b). Multiple communication tools are not important for brand relationships alone.

On the contrary, the greater utilization of marketing communication tools within an IMC approach can lead to a better overall outcome and may also deliver a more holistic picture (Smith, Gopalakrishna, and Chatterjee, 2006; Reid, 2003; Naik and Raman, 2003; Low, 2000; Phelps and Johnson, 1996; Schultz, 1996b). Consequently, advertising alone should not be made responsible for building the brand because the brand is an asset which belongs to the whole organization (Eagle, Kithen, and Bulmer, 2006; McGrath, 2005b; Edelman, 2004; Schultz, 2004a; Drobis, 1997/1998; Hutton, 1996; Gonring, 1994; Nowak and Phelps, 1994).

Nonetheless, it is important for the marketer within the company and advertising agency to recognize the need to involve more than one promotional tool to reach different consumer groups (Economist, 2007b; Keller, 2001;

Nowak and Phelps, 1994). Ultimately, the decision-making process is controlled by the senior management and, as such, their power and involvement are essential for the development of IMC throughout the company (Reid, 2005; Pickton and Hartley, 1998). It is vital that marketers and the senior management of a company realize that an advertising agency alone will not be able to implement an IMC program because of their limited perspective and possible lack of experience with regard to coordinating and integrating all communication disciplines. Thus, the involvement of the top management must be seen as a necessity.

Therefore, the marketers of the twenty-first century should utilize an IMC program which goes beyond the usual marketing concepts, such as the 4Ps, trying, in addition, to generate new ways of creating customer segments via a database (Johnson and Schultz, 2004; Schultz and Schultz, 2003; Hutton, 1996). The informed customer of the twenty-first century will have extensive knowledge about the product category, the product per se, or even the company in general. A firm can turn the customer's search for knowledge into a competitive advantage by engaging in an interactive dialogue with the customer, for example, through direct marketing or Internet chat forums. This may then flourish into a long-term relationship in which different promotional tools can be employed to reach individual consumer groups (Cook, 2004; Johnson and Schultz, 2004; Schultz, 1995b; Nowak and Phelps, 1994).

IMC IMPLEMENTATION AND APPLICATION

As most IMC research has been conducted with regard to advertising agencies, little is known about actual IMC application within client firms. However, it is believed that only a few organizations have reached "complete" integration (Kitchen and Li, 2005; Kitchen and Schultz, 2003; McGoon, 1998/1999). In order to draw benefits from an IMC approach, it is imperative that the whole organization, that is, across functions and subsidiaries, understands how IMC works and how IMC plans can be put into action. If this is not the case, the integration will undergo difficulties, which will in effect weaken both the corporate brand and the relationship between product brands (Reid, Luxton, and Mavondo, 2005; Davison, Bulmer, and Eagle, 2005; Duncan, 2005; Gould, Lerman, and Grein, 1999; Novelli, 1989/1990).

The next sections explore possible IMC implementation models (Pickton and Broderick, 2005; Fill, 2002; Schultz and Kitchen, 2000a). Their advantages and disadvantages are reviewed. Also reasons for embracing the Kitchen and Schultz (2001) model in this article are explained. The final section concentrates on consumer segmentation in relation to IMC, strategic planning aspects of IMC, and the kind of research that should be carried out in order for a company to act consumer-driven.

The establishment of IMC – Fill.   Fill (2002) views IMC as a change of mind-set which has to be first embraced by marketers. He also points out that certain barriers exist and hence steps have to be taken to overcome such barriers. As such, the first step in an IMC approach is to focus on the promotional activities – the marketer needs to ensure that consistency and a thematic harmonization takes place among the promotional tools employed by the company (see the first box in Figure 1).

Next, the functional coordination needs to be looked after. The different parts of the organization, such as human resources, finance, corporate communications, and so on, have to be introduced to the idea of "internal marketing relationships" in order to implement an IMC approach throughout the company (see the second box in Figure 1). Hence, an IMC approach requires a cultural shift of values and beliefs, which have to come from within the organization in order for all employees to act consumer-orientated and -driven (see the third box in Figure 1). Only then can an IMC approach be fully embraced (see fourth box in Figure 1).

This model is easy to understand and also resembles certain stages of the model. However, owing to its simplicity, it lacks significant detail and explanation. It seems difficult to overcome the problem of positioning companies at their individual stages in this particular model. Furthermore, this model did not originate from actual empirical research, but rather from the critical review of current IMC literature conducted by Fill (2002).
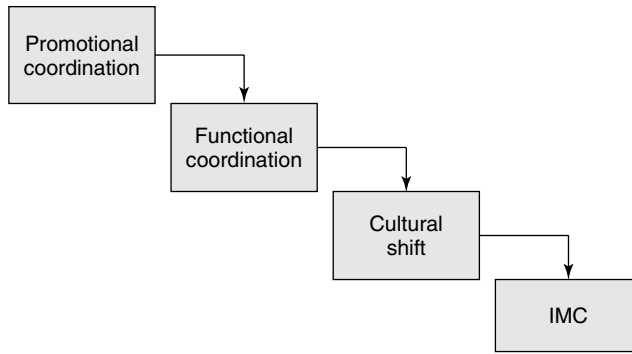
Figure 1 The establishment of IMC. (Source: Fill 2002: 469).

IMC rabostic model – Pickton and Broderick.   In comparison to Fill's model (2001); Pickton and Broderick's (2005) model (see Figure 2) resulted from both a critical review of current IMC literature and empirical research (Hartley and Pickton, 1999; Pickton and Hartley, 1998).

The first step to be taken, according to Pickton and Broderick's (2005) model, is to assess the company's current position in the market place. Thus, feedback from previous marketing communication campaigns and outcomes of marketing communication activities need to be evaluated in order to determine the companies' target audience(s). The next step involves the budget allocation and the review of available resources, followed by the setting of the company's objectives and strategic plan. After determining the company's aims, decisions at the operational level have to be made. Promotional tools need to be chosen as tactical instruments, which will assist in implementing the campaign. Lastly, the success of the new campaign needs to be monitored and evaluated
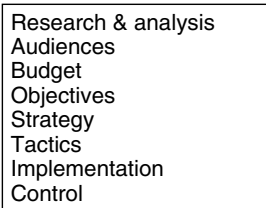

Figure 2 IMC RABOSTIC model. (Source: Pickton and Broderick 2005: 14).

in order to understand if certain changes with regard to the marketing communication plan need to be made (Pickton and Broderick, 2005).

Although, this model is much more detailed than that of Fill (2002), it lacks significant contribution in relation to the stages of IMC implementation. As such, the overarching aim of this model is to demonstrate how a marketing communication campaign should be implemented, and not how an IMC approach can be applied throughout an organization. In addition, not much is mentioned about the sequence of the individual stages and whether they are interchangeable. Owing to the fact that this model only concentrates on the implementation of marketing communication campaigns, it does not show how IMC could be used as an approach within an organization in the long term.

The four stages of IMC – Schultz and Kitchen.   Research conducted by Kitchen and Schultz (1999) focused on advertising agencies, while best practice IMC cases were explored by the American Productivity and Quality Center (APQC) (APQC 2007) led by Schultz (Webb *et al*., 2000; Hack *et al*., 1999; Schultz *et al*., 1999; Schultz and Schultz, 1998; Schultz, 1998). The findings of these studies enabled a four-stage model (see Figure 3) in order to understand the development process of an IMC approach within client organizations.

As demonstrated in Figure 3, and also by Fill (2002), the first step toward becoming integrated is to coordinate IMC at the tactical level. The aim is to generate harmony among the

various communication tools and the product. This is also known as the *one sight, one sound* approach. The primary focus is on the external communication of the brand. Most important, however, is that even in the first stage the IMC approach should be led by the company and not the agency. This is the "lowest amount" of integration a company should acquire, as it focuses on the tactical implementation of IMC. The difference between strategy and tactics is that the strategy shows which objectives the company wants to accomplish while tactics relate to how these objectives can be realized (Pickton and Broderick, 2005). If the communication between marketing communication functions, for example, sales, direct marketing, PR, and other departments (e.g., operation) fails, the customer might not understand the intended message from the company and may even perceive the company as a disappointment. However, at this level there is no mention of a customer-orientated approach.

The second level expands to a redefinition of communications, that is, all communication contact points that a customer or prospect can have with the company should be considered. Behavioral data should also be attained in order to understand customers, which is the first time that a customer-centric approach is being stressed (Kitchen and Schultz, 2001).

The third step is to utilize the increasing information flow about customer behavior, attitudes, and transactional data via a database, that is, customer data is turned into customer knowledge. Accordingly, the database should provide information about the customers, for example, how often they buy from the company or when they started buying. New technologies should also be used in order to increase the information flow between employees, distributors, and suppliers. These technologies may then help in executing messages at the right time and place (Kitchen and Schultz, 2001).

Finally, the fourth stage is to deploy IMC at the strategic level. This involves marketing and finance working together for the business to become fully customer-centric as a means of generating measurable and behavioral ROI. A successful IMC approach needs to take into consideration the corporate goals instead of simply serving tactical product brand objectives (Fitzpatrick, 2005; Schultz and Schultz, 2003; Schultz, 1997a; Gonring, 1994).

Result from previous research studies with advertising agencies (Kallmeyer and Abratt, 2001; Kitchen and Schultz, 1999; Schultz, 1997d; Miller and Rose, 1994; Caywood,
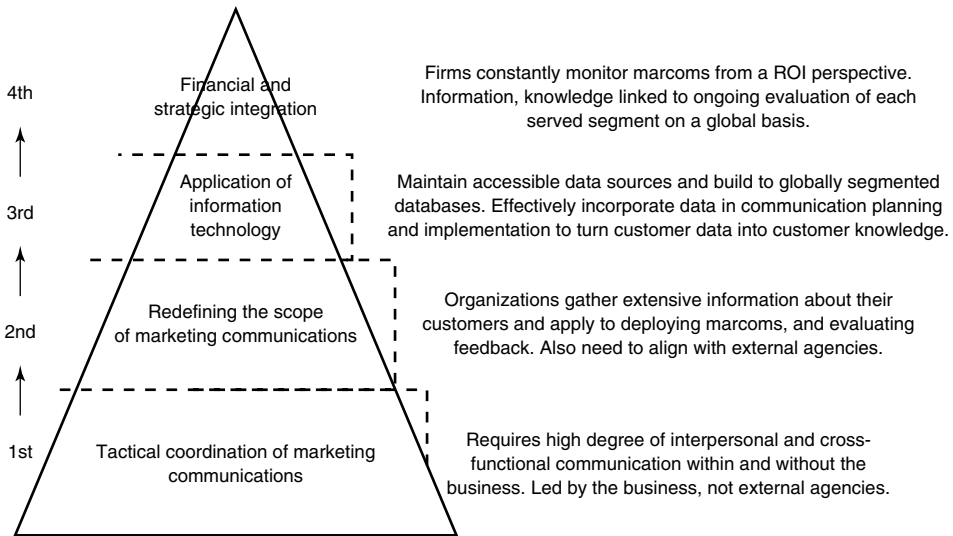

Figure 3 IMC – a four stage model. (Source: Kitchen and Schultz 2001: 108).

Schultz, and Wang, 1991b) shows that client companies may not always have the resources to implement an IMC approach at all four stages. This leads them to avoid delegating all control to a single agency, thus dividing power and responsibility among different promotional agencies. As such, during the late twentieth century, an emerging trend was reflected in the advertising agency environment with agencies forced to broaden their employees' skill sets to include a much greater variety of marketing communications skills. The aim here was to attract clients desirous of a ''one-stop shopping'' experience whereby agencies show a commitment to an IMC approach (Novelli, 1989/1990).

Most organizations in the early twenty-first century appear to be in stage one or two because they have yet to realize a change toward the kind of consumer-focused communication which requires close collaboration between, as a minimum, the marketing, research, and finance departments (stage four) (Kitchen *et al.*, 2004a; Schultz, 2004c). However, it should be questioned if integration among these departments is deemed to be desirable. As such, why have firms not realized this change? It may be that owing to the success of some companies, the senior management does not see it as a necessity to change current company practices.

Furthermore, it may also be possible that companies want to implement change but owing to certain reasons, for example, financial, structural or legal, the proposed change is impossible to implement. Hence, additional research is required to understand how and to what extent IMC approaches have been implemented by businesses and what kind of role agencies play as seen through the ''eyes'' of their clients.

In addition, financial investments for consumer research and new technologies are needed to advance through all four stages (Kitchen and Li, 2005; McGoon, 1998/1999). However, an underlying cause may also be that even though marketers and researchers have recognized the importance of IMC (Schultz, 2006b; Schultz, 2004c) and the need to focus on long-term relationship building with customers, this view has yet to be supported by the senior management. As long as IMC is perceived as a mere sales-boosting, tactical function, a company will most likely not progress through the four stages. If its strategic significance is realized, IMC can augment the corporate and product brand's image and improve relationship management between various stakeholder groups and the company (Gylling and Lindberg-Repo, 2006; Pickton and Broderick, 2005). It also helps to create a consistent marketing communication approach focusing on the long-term brand value of both corporate and product brand, which should lead to significant synergy effects. IMC, as a strategic business process, should therefore be implemented and applied throughout the organization. This view has been expressed repeatedly by these authors (Kitchen, 2005; Kitchen and Li, 2005; Kitchen *et al.*, 2004a; Schultz and Schultz, 2003; Kitchen and Schultz, 2001; 1999; Hack *et al.*, 1999; Schultz and Schultz, 1998).

After critically evaluating this model, certain points ought to be questioned. The first stage, the same as Fill's (2002) model, primarily focuses on the coordination of promotional tools in order to create a consistent marketing communication approach. However, at this stage why should the company not include customer research data in order to create tailored messages for specific target groups? Furthermore, the next three stages principally focus on the actions of the internal departments. In Kitchen and Schultz's (2001) model technologies, customer research evaluation and the coordination between agencies and the finance department are focused on, whereas in Fill's (2002) model the functional coordination and internal cultural shift are emphasized. At this point, there is no mention of the relationship the customer has with the company, be it short-term or long-term.

What is questionable about all three models is, why have the models never been adopted by any other researchers other than those who created them? Although the Kitchen and Schultz (2001) model originated from actual empirical research, it has never been tested or verified with different organizations through a wide range of industries. Thus, it is not known if this particular model is applicable to B2B and B2C industries. However, the possibility exists that because B2B companies very often have less customer numbers than B2C companies, these firms may use a much more

consumer-driven approach where databases are utilized on a day-to-day basis (Wilson, 2006; Laiderman, 2005). Hence, the model should be "tested" within actual companies in order to see, first of all, if it is applicable, and, if so, at which stage different companies find themselves to be in.

Despite such criticisms, the Kitchen and Schultz (2001) model, in comparison to the other two models, is the only model which resulted from empirical research and focuses solely on the implementation of IMCs, and not on mere marketing communications campaigns. Although Fill's (2002) model explains the different developmental stages, they appear similar to the one developed by Kitchen and Schultz (2001), only with less detail and explanation. Furthermore, Fill's model (2002) does not depict the importance of measurement in an IMC approach, which is seen as a vital component of such an approach (Alvarez, Raeside, and Jones, 2006; Reid, 2005; Kitchen *et al.*, 2004a; Eagle and Kitchen, 2000).

In summary, the previous sections have paid close attention to three different models (Pickton and Broderick, 2005; Fill, 2001; Kitchen and Schultz, 2001). A significant problem is that none of these models have been tested or validated in any form. In addition, none of these models have fostered an understanding of how IMC could be applied within companies. Albeit only partially, at least, the proposed model by Kitchen and Schultz (2001) tries to give some detail on how to implement IMC within companies. The other two models are lacking in explanations and detail, and appear at this point of time, too simplistic to be adopted as models for the empirical investigation of this thesis. Part of this thesis' empirical phase will be allocated to both reviewing the model proposed by Kitchen and Schultz (2001) and by analyzing feedback from respondents and also locating specific companies within the model.

Strategic IMC Planning

Johnson and Schulz (2004) have given some advice on how to overcome the aforementioned problems faced by organizations and agencies, and how to become a successful twenty-first century company through the application of an IMC approach. Their findings correspond with the stages outlined by Kitchen and Schultz (2001):

- conduct market research with the aim to better understand the customers;
- understand the perspectives, motivations, and behavior of each individual customer;
- focus on the customer and not product lines;
- require responsibility from the chief customer officer/chief executive officer to maximize customer value.

The four stage model (see Figure 3) reveals that an IMC plan should derive from the contact points each company has with its customers. Typically, tracking studies are used to measure all the contacts a customer has on a daily basis, for example, different media channels with a particular firm. This should give the company a general overview of who sees what kind of advertisements in the course of a given day. The marketer should then be able to divide the "mass" into segments. These segments of consumers can then be presented with targeted messages. This can be achieved with the help of sales representatives' knowledge as well as through the utilization of a fully functional database.

Recently, however, the climate of changing demographics and sociographics and rapidly expanding media choices have meant that traditional forms of segmentation, which have usually been based on consumer demographics, have been called into question. As a result, IMC researchers have identified the need for more sophisticated, behavior-orientated segmentation guidelines (Reid, 2005; Rogerson, 2005; Duncan and Mulhern, 2004; Yarbrough, 1996).

After grouping the customers into segments, promotional activities should be integrated such that they work according to the overall strategic IMC plan in order to accomplish the set marketing communication objectives. It must not be overlooked that communication between customers and organization should be a two-way process, that is, a dialogue or an exchange of information (Schultz, 2007; Smith, Gopalakrishna, and Chatterjee, 2006; Schultz, Tannenbaum, and Lauterborn, 1993). Each communication constituent may have specific aims but the end result should be

an integrated approach to the company's marketing communication activities (Pickton and Broderick, 2005).

After the objectives have (or have not) been realized, tests should be carried out in order to understand what has occurred in terms of the awareness, attitude, and behavior of customers. From such tests, areas for improvement can be identified. However, if the customers' behavior or attitude did not positively change toward the brand despite the implementation of an IMC approach, the organization should review its communication activities, such as its promotional tools, and examine its existing consumer groups. Thus, market research can again help in discovering and correcting errors (Duncan and Mulhern, 2004; Johnson and Schultz, 2004; Caywood, Schultz, and Wang, 1991b).

Nowak and Phelps (1994) developed a model (see Figure 4) which provides guidance for the correct employment of IMC at the strategic and tactical level. The authors have divided the aims of IMC into image and behavior orientation, whereas the center of the communication setting is represented by an accurate and up-to-date database which involves the market, message, and media strategy at the strategic and tactical level.

The model depicts changes in image perception and consumer behavior following a company's adoption of the IMC concept. Although advertising researchers have long recognized the merits and shortcomings of individual promotional tools, researchers (Nowak and Phelps, 1994) propose that when different promotional activities are used in an integrated manner, IMC can take place at the communication campaign (strategic level) and advertising (tactical) level. IMC, as shown in Figure 4, also encourages the employment of multiple messages within one campaign or advertisement in order to reach various target audiences (Schultz, 2007; Calder and Malthouse, 2005; Schultz, Tannenbaum, and Lauterborn, 1993) – this is also known in the early IMC literature as the *one voice approach* (Nowak and Phelps, 1994).

The significance of this model (Figure 4) in the IMC literature is apparent in its durability, having been adopted by researchers more than a decade after its emergence. For example, Grove, Carlson, and Dorsch (2007) have used it to measure IMC in advertisements at the tactical level over a 20-year time period.

Figure 4 thus demonstrates how companies can become more consumer-driven and provides examples of what activities can be used to create an integrated communication mix at the tactical advertising and strategic communication campaign level. Figure 4 aims to facilitate the implementation of an IMC approach in which individual steps show the reach of IMC implementation within a company. However, as shown in the previous sections, very little is known about IMC implementation or the strategic and tactical utilization of multiple communication tools.

In addition, although the literature on global, local, or "glocal" advertising strategies is vast, consensus with regard to the ideal option of an advertising campaign has never been reached (Wells, Burnett, and Moriarty, 2003; Kitchen and Eagle, 2002; Gould, Lerman, and Grein, 1999; Sriram and Gopalakrishna, 1991; Levitt, 1983). Thus, it is not known if an IMC approach should be adopted at a global level or if respective countries can still implement and apply their own IMC approach. As such, this research addresses the above discussed issues in the empirical phase. The next section aims to provide an overview of IMC research by reviewing some of the most profound studies in the field.

BARRIERS TO IMC

Following up on past IMC studies, researchers were able to identify perceived barriers to IMC implementation and application. The following points represent a summary of the most important barriers to integration. These barriers are discussed in the subsequent paragraphs (highlighted in italic) (Ratnatunga and Ewing, 2005; Kitchen *et al.*, 2004a; Swain, 2004; Eagle and Kitchen, 2000; Hartley and Pickton, 1999; Pickton and Hartley, 1998; Bruhn, 1997/1998; Gonring, 1994; Duncan and Everett, 1993; Schultz, Tannenbaum, and Lauterborn, 1993):

- power, coordination, and control issues;
- client skills, centralization, and cultural issues;
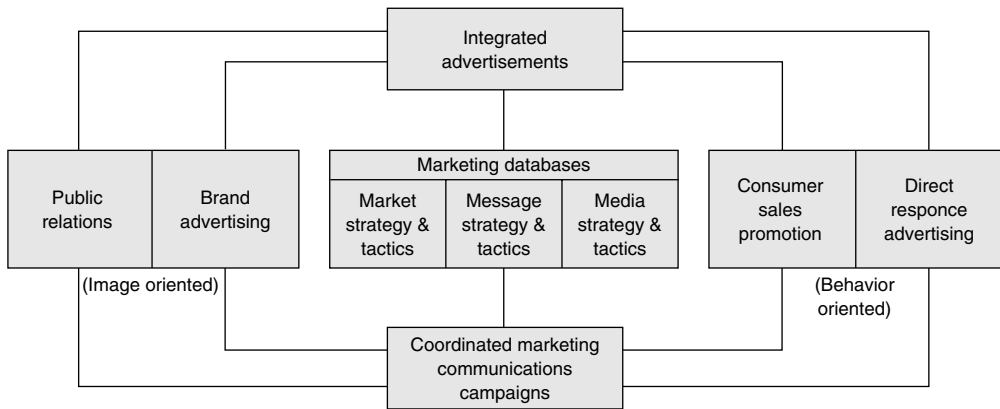- agency skills and general time/resource issues;

Figure 4 The integrated communications setting. (Source: Nowak and Phelps 1994: 57).

- flexibility/modification issues;
- IMC measurement difficulties;
- lack of strategic vision and business culture;
- unclear positioning at corporate level;
- subcultures within different communication departments;
- need for cross-disciplinary managerial skills;
- fear of change;
- hierarchical organization structure;
- turf battles and functional silos;
  - need to protect status;
  - need for single budgeting process and shared performance;
  - need for equal consideration across all functional areas;
  - cross-functional training;
  - inside-out communication planning;
  - short-term planning;
  - lack of database development;
- media fragmentation;
  - IMC must continually demonstrate how their mix on nontraditional media creates more impact at less cost;
- mind-set – specialization, history, tradition, experience.

IMC involves the whole company, starting with the CEO and cascading through the organization. Ideally, the corporate objectives should support the marketing objectives and vice versa. If *commitment is only given at the tactical level*, which mainly involves the marketing functions, the corporate level, such as the senior managers or the CEO itself, will probably fail to be as dedicated to the program as they should be because they will not be directly involved with the IMC implementation and may not recognize the benefits of applying an IMC approach as a strategic process (Holm, 2006; Reid, 2005; Bruhn, 1997/1998). However, even though IMC should start at the senior level, research has indicated that this occurs only very rarely (Swain, 2004). Senior managers ought to be highly engaged in the application of IMC procedures throughout the organization, and this research further explores this idea.

IMC utilizes traditional promotional elements but it is also forced to go beyond them due to the fragmentation of media and rise of new technologies. This leads to a recognition of the import of nontraditional forms of marketing communication activities, including the interactive media (such as short message services) and the Internet (e.g., through employing consumer chat rooms) (Economist, 2007b; Gonring, 1994). In particular, marketing practitioners may interpret the concept of IMC not as prerequisite of company development but rather as a one-dimensional rationalization for another agency to make an easy profit (Stammerjohan *et al.*, 2005; Wolter, 1993). Thus, owing to increasing pressure from clients and *decreasing marketing budgets*, advertising agencies may exploit the concept of IMC to include more promotional mix elements in their functions, possibly resulting in greater profits for the agency. Therefore, practitioners need to

recognize that IMC can work in favor of the organization and not just the agency. Indeed, the agency should not be seen as the final solution to the company's problems, but rather as a mixture of consultant and communication expert, working toward the company's and the agency's aims and objectives (Beard, 1997; Bill, 1993).

Another barrier is represented by the *trend toward specialization in the twenty-first century*, for example, a client-organization could employ a direct marketing agency, an advertising agency, and packaging agency at the same time. It is noticeable that many specific agencies have been developed, such as advertising, PR, and promotion agencies, but what clients really need is integration. This requires a much broader vision where aims and purposes are refocused (Naik and Raman, 2003; Schultz, 1993b). Furthermore, such specialization may also exist within the client organization, that is, the different marketing communication functions are separated from each other. Moreover, the individual tasks within one department are again divided into small fragments, which may limit the success of an IMC program (Hartley and Pickton, 1999). Therefore, division of departments may not only present a physical barrier but may also fragment the tasks of employees such that an IMC approach is thwarted. The problem is how to successfully link the different functions and departments with each other in order to start communicating and become integrated.

It is likely that most organizations' structures do not suit IMC programs. Integration necessitates not only vertical communication but also horizontal communication, a state of affairs which often causes conflicts among the employees and their functions and tasks (Gould, Lerman, and Grein, 1999; Grein and Gould, 1996; Schultz, 1993a). Communication across strategic business units (SBUs), brands and departments, as well as from brand managers to senior managers and vice versa, needs to be secured, which requires an open-minded business culture (Kim, Han, and Schultz, 2004). IMC may lead employees to a *sacrifice of power*, which could cause disputes among them because of fears arising over loss of control and authority (Eagle and Kitchen, 2000; Gonring, 1994). However, implementation and application

outcomes of "full integration" have yet to be addressed in the IMC literature (Pickton and Hartley, 1998; Schultz, 1993b).

Thus, employees may fear that their status will be reduced or, worse still, their positions lost. The coordination and combination of various tasks, duties, and arrangements often represents the stiffest challenge to the implementation of an IMC program (Cornelissen and Harris, 2004; Schultz, 1993b). *Conflicts among employees* and *fragmentation of tasks* can be caused by *poor database development*, *short-term planning*, or *"inside-out" communication* – developing the communication strategy based on the product and then working toward the customer (Reid, 2005; Reid, Luxton, and Mavondo, 2005; Kitchen *et al.*, 2004b; Gonring, 1994).

The *history or background of an organization*, as well as its *traditions and experience*, can lead to difficulties when implementing an IMC program. Firstly, its structure may often be considered satisfactory, leading to a feeling that there is no real need for a change (Schultz, 1993b). However, if this situation persists and change is not being welcomed, it may result in a loss of the company's market position. Schultz (1993d) pointed out that openness to reorganization or adaptation to new organizational structures can be the key to greater integration or an obstacle to the successful implementation of IMC, depending on the company's culture.

It has been suggested (Cornelissen, 2000; Nowak and Phelps, 1994) that to overcome barriers, cross-functional tasks, such as regular meetings or introductory training, should be developed in order to leave behind authority conflicts and create team spirit among employees. Schultz (1991) came up with the post of a communication czar who is responsible for the complete implementation and application of an IMC program within the company. McArthur and Griffin (1997) also noted that it was common practice within consumer organizations to have a single person coordinating all major communication activities. But no direct reference to Schultz's (1991) concept of a communication czar was made. In addition, Schultz (1993e) also suggested that in drastic circumstances, it may be worth restructuring the whole organization with new departments

in order to reach effective outcomes and achieve appropriate changes (Schultz, 1993e).

More than a decade has passed since the first conceptual papers on IMC have emerged, but still very little is known about how IMC can help to overcome communication barriers and how IMC is implemented in firms.

CRITICISMS OF IMC

After the discussion of past research papers and barriers to IMC, it may be necessary to draw attention to the criticisms surrounding IMC. Firstly, Cornelissen and Lock (2000) argue that practitioners are only acknowledging and perceiving the concept of IMC as important owing to its rhetorical appeal and that there is little evidence of how an IMC approach can be implemented or how the concept is being used within organizations. There is also widespread acceptance that IMC advocates have tended to overemphasize on the language being used to describe IMC, rather than grounding IMC on the basis of empirical data (Cornelissen, 2003; Cornelissen and Lock, 2000; Schultz and Kitchen, 2000b). Indeed, the idea of integration and its nature should be viewed as "common sense" by any marketing practitioner, because marketing practitioners would almost certainly tend to be pro-integration rather than against it.

But Cornelissen and Lock (2000) are not alone in critiquing IMC. Other scholars have characterized IMC as too ambiguous, partially owing to its lack of a universally agreed-upon definition and the resulting divergence of operational IMC measures (McGrath, 2005a; Cornelissen and Lock, 2000; Stewart, 1996; Phelps and Johnson, 1996; Nowak and Phelps, 1994). To overcome this validity problem, Schultz (2004b) proposed a new and revised version of IMC, adopted by the American Marketing Association (2007). In addition, it seems that most researchers have recognized the strategic importance of IMC even if evidence in relation to the realization of the strategic employment of IMC within companies is scarce.

Furthermore, Cornelissen and Lock (2000) reproached IMC as nothing more than a managerial fad. Indeed, current IMC studies, as for example Schultz and Kitchen (2000b), have noted that IMC is still in its pre-paradigm stage and cannot, therefore, be called a theory. Despite this, in the past two decades many marketing communication investigations on IMC have proven that IMC is widely accepted among marketing and PR practitioners (Kitchen and Eagle, 2002; Reid *et al.*, 2001; Kitchen and Schultz, 1999; Kitchen and Schultz, 1998; Schultz and Kitchen, 1997; Miller and Rose, 1994; Duncan and Everett, 1993).

In addition, PR-oriented literature in the early 1990s argued against integration of marketing and PR. In an article by Miller and Rose (1994), the two authors reported on the debate at the conference for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication in 1993. Other papers and reports were also reviewed, such as that by Ehling, White, and Frunig (1992) who claimed that "the public relations function of excellent organizations exists separately from the marketing function . . . " (Miller and Rose, 1994: 13). These researchers view PR as a subject on its own, serving various stakeholder groups in a different manner than marketing does. Thus, in the eyes of these practitioners and researchers, PR should not be seen as a mere function of marketing. However, IMC was and still is perceived as reality and an important subject area to both marketing and PR practitioners, albeit for sometimes different reasons (Miller and Rose, 1994; Nakra, 1991; Niederquell, 1991).

To date, more than 100 articles and papers have been published about IMC, and although it is an emerging discipline, the fundamentals of IMC are becoming established (Patti, 2005). Schultz and Kitchen (2000b) note that the validity of a concept or theory does not only consist solely in a universally accepted definition. Although one cannot come up with a definite figure for the number of investigations needed before a specific concept can be called a theory, different concepts and frameworks are needed and ought to be interrelated and linked before an actual theory emerges (Carroll and Swatman, 2000; Walsham, 1995). As such, it is not yet known if IMC will ever emerge as a theory or if it is a concept which needs to be linked to other communication concepts to produce a different theory.

Hypothesis testing in relation to the tactical integration of marketing communication tools has begun to emerge (McGrath, 2005b;

Stammerjohan *et al*., 2005; Jin, 2003/2004). On the other hand, different theoretical constructs and concepts are still needed to lift IMC to the theoretical level. With the apparent research focus on advertising agencies, too little research has been carried out on client organizations for there to be a demonstrable link between theoretical constructs and the experience of actual firms. As such, IMC theory building as seen from the point of view of a strategic business process has only recently begun to emerge.

In the past, researchers have argued (Cornelissen and Lock, 2000; Pickton and Hartley, 1998; Hutton, 1996; van Riel, 1995) that the historical framework and the origins of IMC can be traced back to the 1970s and 1980s, with the term *IMC* simply becoming more popular during the last decade. Caywood and Ewing (1991) also acknowledged that some ambitious practitioners of the 1950s tried to implement integrated programs and failed only because of their lack of knowledge and technology. However, it is undeniable that the nature of communication has changed dramatically during the last 20 years. Today, marketing communication practitioners must utilize these new kinds of communication, for example, the Internet, networks, value chains, direct marketing campaigns, and databases, all of which have had a significant impact on companies.

In fact, the concept of IMC has grown out of such changes (Economist, 2007b; Grove, Carlson, and Dorsch, 2007; Schultz and Kitchen, 2000b). Although practitioners may have attempted to coordinate and integrate marketing communication mix elements at the tactical level even before the earliest IMC papers were published, IMC as a strategic business process focusing on long-term brand value and customer relationship management is a product of the late twentieth century. With the aforementioned changes occurring in an increasingly global context of commercial competition, the adoption of an IMC approach throughout the company appears to be valuable, if not necessary, to sustained success.

IMC is often seen as a technique that belongs to marketing practitioners rather than to the organization, whereas PR practitioners may view it as a limiting approach given that marketing does not incorporate all functions of PR (Wightman, 1999; Miller and Rose, 1994; Wolter, 1993). Most advertising or marketing practitioners are in favor of IMC, whereas public relations practitioners are often against it. This may be due to the fact that IMC tends to be seen by PR practitioners as an attempt to bring PR under the umbrella of marketing (Miller and Rose, 1994). Wightman (1999) also suggests that many advertising agencies use IMC to incorporate PR due to decreasing client budgets. The central argument put forward by Miller and Rose (1994) is that marketing is often viewed primarily as a function which serves the customer as a stakeholder, while PR directs messages to different stakeholders.

Furthermore, Cornelissen and Harris (2004), in exploring the working relationship between marketing and PR, discovered that the majority of firms have not integrated these functions and that they rarely work in unison. Ideally, these two communication functions should be combined. Thus, the difficulties that practitioners face in assimilating these two functions may be seen as a barrier and also as a flaw insofar as PR practitioners may oppose IMC in order to prevent themselves from being subsumed by the "marketing" banner, thus denying themselves access to IMC's strategic value. Then again, neither marketing nor PR practitioners should make final conclusions because despite a vast amount of theorizing, little detailed empirical work on IMC within organizations exists to support the conceptual perspectives already advanced.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

There is little doubt that IMC is increasingly important in the twenty-first century. Technology makes integration possible and IMC programs have already been adopted by various organizations, such as FedEx and Dell. One of IMC's aims is to create synergy among the different marketing elements in order to achieve short- and long-term returns (Madhavaram, Badrinarayana, and McDonald, 2005; Naik and Raman, 2003; Stewart, 1996). Other benefits of an IMC approach are greater consistency among the various communication messages and functions, cost savings, easier working relations between different department,s and a

better utilization of media and promotional mix elements (Pickton and Broderick, 2005).

This article has focused on the concept of IMC, past research studies on IMC, barriers to its implementation, and critiques of the concept. The investigation into past research studies has proven that although practitioners have indicated that IMC is demanded from firms, little research has been carried out in relation to client firms themselves, especially in the non-English-speaking world. Thus, the progress of IMC is not yet over. In fact, it has just begun.

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