

The Theoretical Understanding of Integrated Marketing Communication Strategy: An Approach

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Abstract

Accessing to a larger group of customers and targeted audience has always been a challenge for any business effort. Many previous business approaches have highlighted the significance of different methods reaching to a larger number of audiences to advertise or inform about a product impactfully. Integrated marketing communication plays an integral role in communicating business messages to a larger audience. IMC effectually helps in integrating all essential components of marketing efforts to communicate a unified message to prospective, potential and existing consumers. Integrated marketing communication proves to be highly useful in terms of creating brand awareness among customers at the least costing. IMC proves to be highly relevant and rather essential for business-to-business marketing including providing a potential platform for direct informing and interaction with customers and consumers. In the present paper, the theoretical understanding of integrated marketing communication strategy is showcased so that the readers find useful implications of IMC into different business communication approaches. One of the distinct advantages of IMC is its relevance and essential role in business-to-business (B2B) marketing. It provides a potent platform for direct communication and interaction with both customers and consumers. This direct engagement fosters a deeper understanding of customer needs and preferences, facilitating a more tailored and effective marketing approach.

Keywords: Media, advertising, promotion, customer, information, marketing

INTRODUCTION

In the past, traditional mass media advertising was the dominating feature in most companies' promotional mix, a fact that caused marketers to rely heavily on their advertising agencies in their marketing communications. The reliance on mass media advertising has been attributed to the past success of mass production of goods. Being the production of the similar products in mass quantities and in fact everything produced was also tried to be sold, as a result the marketers assumed that the group of the consumers was harmonic and would be best accessed with mass media advertising [4]. At

the same time other marketing communications components such as sales promotion and direct marketing were considered merely as auxiliary services that were implemented by an outside operator on ad hoc basis [1]. In the same way, company's public image and its publicity affairs were used to be outsourced from a public relations agency and in no case were viewed as cardinal and integral components in the marketing communications processes [6]. In addition, many marketing organizations kept their marketing communications functions strictly separate with different budgets, different objectives, and different views on markets and so on [2].

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Almost all the business houses across the world do harbor to these five effective marketing communication strategies. The overall aim, objective and approach of all marketing communication strategies evolve over presenting the company's products to the targeted consumers and customers including informing them about the products benefit. Companies select out one or more of the combinations of many effective marketing communication components to decide and determine the outflow of messages anticipating the estimated effects. If rightly approached, the effective marketing communication strategy surely pushes to insert the product's benefits into the minds of targeted customers along with assuring the positive reception of the messages and multiple product related information [3].

Past few decades, marketing communication has experienced drastic changes. The wide range of marketing communication and its tools stand evidential in modern times to result either in brand building exercises or for targeting sales through developing relations with customers or consumers. Now, the modern marketers also have abundant options of using latest media like cable, television networks, satellite TV, magazines and newspapers to educate, inform, persuade and repeatedly remind customers about their products and services [5].

Need for Changing the Strategy

In fact, the outsourced service did not understand and implement the suitable strategy to promote the company or its product. However, because of it, the company and product image marketed by such organizations was hardly a consistent approach and most of the time even failed to communicate effectively to the target audiences. Such an approach came to its end during the 1980s as many companies realized the need for a more strategic, cohesive, and objective approach in their communications process and approach. The new approach had coordinated, collaborated, and integrated approach towards the advertising efforts including a variety of other communication techniques like sales promotion, publicity, direct marketing, public relations and event sponsorships. Inclusion of such coordinated and integrated efforts can be considered as using any communications tools necessary to percolate messages across to the target public or desired audience [7]. Integration was further by the realization that advertising and other forms of promotion are most effective when they are coordinated with other elements of the marketing communications mix [8]. This type of realization started the growth era for the concept commonly known as integrated marketing communications (IMC), which since then became one of the dominant marketing concepts of the 1990s. (depending on the source), like any other emerging idea, concept, or technology, has been given many names, mainly by advertising industry: integrated communications, seamless communication, total communication, orchestration, new advertising, cross-selling, 360° branding, total branding and even, whole egg. Despite the fact that a general consensus on the title has not been reached IMC has become the term used within the industry about this particular process. In fact, Integrated Marketing Communication is very critical to structure and manage brand relationship programs, certainly because it gives the skills and new thought process that are significant if organizations aspire or plan to create and successfully manage interaction with customers and other associated prominent stakeholders.

Variety into IMC

“Organizations now have to communicate with these groups using a wide variety of media. Consequently, there are more kinds of messages than ever before, and inconsistency can become a company-wide problem. That is why IMC is also needed to coordinate communication consistency because the mass media now have considerably less importance than they have had in the past; dialogue is becoming increasingly critical in this marketplace. That means that companies can no longer rely only on one-way communication targeted to large groups of customers. To be successful now, organizations must not only be able to target messages to individual customers, but also to listen and respond to all their stakeholders” [9].

IMC Impact

Integrated marketing communications is a recent concept and is an effective process for managing customer relationships that contributes a great deal to the brand value brought through communication

efforts. Such efforts often include cross-functional processes that create and nourish profitable relationships with customers and other stakeholders by strategically controlling or influencing all messages sent to these groups and encouraging data-driven, purposeful dialog with them. IMC includes the coordination and integration of all marketing communication tools, avenues, and sources within a company into a seamless program in order to maximize the impact on end users at a minimal cost. This integration affects all firms' business-to-business, marketing channel, customer-focused, and internally directed communications.

The integrated approach towards marketing communication may be a more complex approach since the concept is parallel function on various communication components. The major benefits of integrated marketing communication are the cost effectiveness. The combined approach towards advertising or informing the targeted audience naturally becomes more cost effective.

The process of marketing communication strategy develops a kind of atmosphere where all the departments of marketing come closer in order to get unified for the increased communication to attain the set marketing communication objectives. It has also the ability to satisfy customers resulting in increased sales of products and services.

Highlighted Efforts of IMC

Integrated Marketing Communication has emerged into an environment where marketing communication practices were drastically altering. The most major changes were 1. Decreasing belief in mass media advertising because of media clutter, rising costs, and negative consumer reaction towards it. 2. Meticulous fragmentation and divide of target consumer groups. 3. Increased and sophisticated perception and changing interest of consumers. 4. Increased faith on technically targeted communication methods. 5. Forces imposed on marketing communications supplier groups. 6. Decentralization of powers from manufacturers to retailers. 7. Tools and technological up gradation. 8. Increased globalization of markets. 9. Focus on return on investment on communication efforts.

Future Implications

Anyhow, certain changes have dictated marketing communicators to look for more innovative and more feasible, efficient and effective mechanisms of communication to access, persuade, inform and remind consumers and prospective customers of their products and services.

The objective of integrated marketing communications is to differentiate and elevate a brand or service above its competitors to achieve brand equity [10]. As a concept level IMC has been defined and out of those definitions the one given by the American Association of Advertising Agencies ("the 4As") has been most adopted "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 — e.g. direct response, sales promotion, general advertising, and public relations — and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency, and maximum communication impact [2]. The essence of the definition lies in the very first line: "...a concept of marketing communications planning..." IMC is actually about integrated and collaborative planning of marketing communications options [11,12]. It can be assumed that IMC focuses solely on message integration which means that all communication tools should deliver the same message, but beyond that IMC expands in the sense that it also helps in determining the selection of communication tools including the use and the timing helping to understand the coordination of marketing communication to optimize the communication strategy [13]. Mitchell Kozikowski remarked on the collaborative approach towards effective implementation of IMC, he states "IMC requires collaboration by the key disciplines on strategy and use of the best combination of communications disciplines to build relationships with customers."

CONCLUSION

IMC also offers the potential substance for greater communications impact because creative ideas can cross the boundaries from one communication discipline to the other. The nature of IMC has also

been explained with a statement that IMC is both a concept and a process, but not a function Caywood commented that this process is significant because it synergizes with an assumption that the whole is greater than the fragments of the same; He further added that “When all brand and corporate messages are strategically coordinated, the effect is greater than when advertising, sales promotion, marketing PR, packaging, etc., are planned and executed independently, with each area competing for budgets and power and, in some cases, sending out conflicting messages

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