

## Pitfalls On Integrated Marketing Communications Measurement

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### Abstract

*There have been many deliberations about the foundation and the measurement basis of IMC, which has been widely acclaimed as a key competitive advantage by a multitude of marketing communication practitioners. In this article, we endeavor to address the prominent setbacks of basic IMC conceptualization and associated measurement adversities, which prominent scholars are still seeking to master, as well as putting forward convenient and versatile opinions to overcome such aforementioned obstacles. Furthermore, this study aims to move the focus from IMC measurement to measurement of differences between IMC and traditional marketing communications outcomes.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Integrated Marketing Communications, Conceptualization, Measurement, Traditional Marketing Communications

### Bütünleşik Pazarlama İletişimi Ölçümündeki Zorluklar

#### Özet

*Bütünleşik pazarlama iletişiminin temel yapısı ve ölçülmesi üzerine birçok farklı görüş bulunması, çok sayıda pazarlama iletişimi*

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*uygulayıcısı tarafından ana bir rekabet üstünlüğü olarak görülmektedir. Bu makale ile amacımız, akademisyenler tarafından hala çözümlenmeye çalışılan bütünleşik pazarlama iletişiminin kavramsallaştırılmasını ve buna bağlı olarak ortaya çıkan ölçülme zorluklarını ele almanın yanı sıra sözkonusu engellerle ilgili çok yönlü fikirlerimizi ortaya koymaktır. Aynı zamanda, alışageldiğinin aksine bu çalışma bütünleşik pazarlama iletişiminin ölçülmesi yerine geleneksel pazarlama iletişimi ile bütünleşik pazarlama iletişiminin sonuçları arasındaki farklılıkların ölçülmesi üzerine odaklanmıştır.*

**Keywords:** Bütünleşik Pazarlama İletişimi, Kavramsallaştırma, Ölçme, Geleneksel Pazarlama İletişimi

### **Introduction**

Technology is creeping into every part of our daily lives, making our world faster, easier and more mobile than ever. In addition, technology enlarges the traditional area of personal and business life applications and opens new horizons for the practitioners. Such expansions in business life practice have two key results. First, competitive advantages historically enjoyed by companies have diminished. Products and technologies that were once unique can now be duplicated within months, while no more there is a single source of company's information for all; message inconsistencies are more easily discovered. Secondly if communications do not align with product or service offerings, a company's brand is jeopardized.

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) is considered as one of the most prominent benefits of technology in the marketing communications field since the early 1990s. While technology gives increased power to competitors and consumers, the same technology also enables the principles of IMC to operate on new levels. Mechanisms for two-way communication are more efficient and fluid than ever. By using technology to support IMC concepts, companies have ability to exceed customer expectations and outsmart the competition (Katrandjiev, 2000).

From the relationship management perspective, IMC is recognized as beneficial to the accomplishment of business objectives on one

hand, and the key competitive advantage on the other. Notwithstanding the wide common acknowledge on the concept, there still exist many crucial, unresolved problems, about conceptualization and measurement of IMC (Lee and Park, 2007), which could well be deemed an overwhelming hindrance to the efforts to pinpoint its impact on the current marketing communication practice (Phelps and Johnson, 1996)

Lee and Park (2007) conclude that different definitions and measurement techniques that were used in past studies (Caywood, Schultz, and Wang, 1991; Duncan and Everett, 1993; Eagle, Kitchen, Hyde, Fourier, and Padisetti, 1999; Kitchen and Schultz, 1997; Phelps, Plumley, and Johnson, 1994) caused the relevant discussions. The constitution of a thoroughly defined IMC discipline would probably enhance the likelihood of reaching today's varied customer segments more easily and the outcomes could be precisely evaluated and exploited.

Though the general concept of IMC seems to suffer from its lack of a sound definition and measurement of its consequences, in reality it is assumed to challenge the former dominant concepts of marketing communication, namely the Traditional Marketing Communications (TMC). In this respect, today's eminent scholars would pay much more regard to the issue, that is; whether IMC has a prospect of transforming back to TMC.

In this article, while we discuss several proposed measurement techniques for IMC, we indeed aim to see if there are differences in the outcomes between the largely debated issues, namely the TMC and IMC, accompanied by the endeavor to consider the need to measure where they make a difference. Managerial implications and conclusion parts would follow the above cited courses.

### **Definitions of IMC**

Starting with the appearance of the IMC concept in the late 80's, many definitions of the concept have been presented by various scholars. Table 1 demonstrates a list of IMC definitions from the literature and it may be taken as evidence of lack of consensus on the definition of IMC. The nonexistence of a generally accepted theory can be attributed to deficiency in conceptualization.

As can be seen from the table above, although most definitions are “process” oriented, they differ in terms of how the aim of IMC is proposed. Some of them put forth customer loyalty as the end mean, the others stress an increase in brand value as the main goal. Even if all of the mentioned goals may be desired results, it seems more reasonable to view the aim of IMC as affecting consumer behavior positively through a favorable communication.

**Table 1: IMC Definitions from The Marketing Literature**

Author	Date	Definition
American Association of Advertising Agencies	1989	A concept of marketing communications planning that recognizes the added value in a program that integrates a variety of strategic disciplines – e.g. general advertising, direct response, sales promotion and public relations – and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency and maximum communication impact.
Schultz	1991	The process of managing all sources of information about a product/service to which a customer or prospect is exposed, which behaviorally moves the customer towards a sale and maintains customer loyalty.
Keegan et al.	1992	The strategic coordination of messages and media used by an organization to collectively influence its perceived brand value.
Schultz	1993	IMC is the process of developing and implementing various forms of persuasive communications programs with customers and prospects over time. The goal of IMC is to influence or directly affect the behavior of the selected communications audience. IMC considers all sources of brand or company contacts which a customer or prospect has with the product or service as potential delivery channels for future messages. In sum, the IMC process starts with the customer or prospect and then works back to determine and define the forms and methods through which persuasive communications programs should be developed. (Schultz, 1993a ). In this quotation, IMC is no longer inside-out, but outside-in- that is driven by the buyers or potential buyers of goods and services (p. 22)
Schultz et. al.	1993	IMC is used;
		1. to offset unfavorable or undesirable communication about a product or service
		2. to enhance favorable communication.

Betts et al.	1995	IMC is the strategic choice of elements of marketing communications which will effectively and economically influence transactions between an organization and its existing and potential customers, clients and consumers.
Kotler and Armstrong	2010	IMC is the concept under which a company carefully integrates and coordinates its many communications channels to deliver a clear, consistent and compelling message about the organization and its products.
Kitchen and Schultz	1999	Kitchen and Schultz (1999) sought to redefine IMC as a hierarchical process with four developmental stages: first, communication coordination; second, redefining marketing communication through consumer research and feedback; third, building globally segmented databases to refine customer communication and behavior measurement; and the fourth and most sophisticated stage, financial and strategic integration, which involves monitoring return-on-investment performance for each audience segment (American Productivity & Quality Center, 1998; Kitchen and Schultz, 1999).
Shimp	2000	5 features of IMC:
		1. The primary goal- to affect behavior through directed communication.
		2. The process should start with the customer or prospect and then work backward to the brand communicator.
		3. All forms of communication & sources of brand or company contacts are prospective message delivery channels.
		4. Synergy & coordination - to achieve a strong brand image.
		5. It needs to build a relationship between the brand and the customer.
Duncan	2002	A cross-functional process for creating and nourishing profitable relationships with customers and other stakeholders by strategically controlling or influencing all messages sent to these groups and encouraging data-driven purposeful dialogue with them.
Schultz & Schultz	2004	IMC is a strategic business process used to plan, develop, execute and evaluate coordinated, measurable, persuasive brand communication programs over time with consumers, customers, prospects, and other targeted, external & internal audiences.
Kliatchko	2005	IMC is the concept and process of strategically managing audience-focused, channel-centered and results-driven brand communication programs over time.
Pickton & Broderick	2005	IMC can be defined as the management process of integrating all marketing communications activities across relevant audience points to achieve greater brand coherence.

Traditional marketing communications and IMC share the same objectives, so if a difference in definition is sought, success in accomplishment of the aim rather than the aim itself should be examined. For this article, Kotler's definition of IMC will be taken into account because of its clear and concise approach which can be summarized as "one message for everyone".

### **Development of IMC**

A snapshot of the existing body of literature on marketing communications would make it clear that the concept of IMC is quite new as it was unrecognized in the academic world as well as the professional world in the 1980s. In 1989, the American Association of Advertising Agencies defined IMC as '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. general advertising, direct response, sales promotion, and public relations) and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency, and maximum communication impact.'

Following this definition, in one of the first books published on IMC, Schultz et al. (1993) defined and examined IMC concept through a broader perspective. They argue that when compared to parts of the marketing mix (i.e. advertising, public relations, and sales promotions), IMC appeared as a new way of perceiving the whole marketing communication as one. Similarly, rather than traditional programs in advertising, the curriculum of some universities (such as Northwestern University's Medill School in the USA) started to change in order to focus on this new idea of IMC.

While such a move towards IMC was observed in the academic world, there was a resistance among the marketers. For many years the traditional marketing communications was used by academicians and practitioners as an umbrella term to cover and manage various communications functions used by marketing. When IMC first emerged it was also regarded as the manager's integrating task for aligning and coordinating messages delivered through communication channels. The marketers argued that, as offered by IMC, an agency which provides a variety of alternatives on differ-

ent communication channels would be inefficient to perform at highest level in all required areas.

In the early 1990s, most of the marketing managers seemed to be in consensus about the importance and necessity of IMC, yet the required organizational structure that should be established for IMC implementation was not created. Besides the burden of such a structural change, it was also found difficult to measure the IMC effect or more specifically the real IMC impact when compared to traditional marketing communications. A recent study on IMC showed that 'little has changed from traditional mass marketing practices in the areas of measurement and agency compensation for IMC services' (Swain, 2004:55).

Considering all these deficiencies both in conceptual terms and measurement, IMC has been criticized harshly. In fact, the early critics of integration argued that IMC was not a new concept but rather a naming process for a best practice of communication coordination. On the other hand, IMC had strong advocates and supporters in the academic world. One of the early writers in this area, Schultz (1991, 1993a, 1993b, 1999, 2002, 2005, 2006 and Schultz and Patti 2009) has mentioned the growing recognition and importance of IMC in his studies. The early definitions of IMC emphasized the '*planning*' or '*strategic integration*' terms as attached to the existing communications coordination. However, the recent studies view IMC in terms of 'customer relationships'. While it is accepted that the primary objective of all marketing communication efforts or, as it is called today, IMCs', is to build strong relationships with customers, it should not be forgotten that effective planning still remains at the center of the IMC definition for successful implementation.

In a recent study, Schultz and Patti (2009:78) defines the development of IMC within seven steps; '...traces the evolution of thinking and research in IMC, from the environmental monitoring (Step 1) to the observations and initial concepts (Steps 2 and 3) resulting from the environmental monitoring (articulated in the Schultz et al. 1993 book), to attempts to define IMC (Step 4). Much of the early IMC research focused on specifying the processes within IMC management and identifying obstacles to IMC implementation (Step 5).



Over time, the call for measuring IMC outcomes (Step 6) was seen as the key to more widespread adoption and adaptation of the IMC framework. Today, we see several organizational issues (Step 7) that we believe will frame the next steps in the development of IMC.' They point out these issues as well as a revisiting of selective initial concepts and definitions as the major path for further theory development. According to Schultz and Patti (2009:77) through its evolution IMC is experiencing a maturity pattern similar to that of other marketing management frameworks. The development of IMC as a discipline is summarized further in Table 2.

It is apparent that IMC has attracted much of the academic interest when compared to its recent history. Today, IMC is the subject of professional books and textbooks; trade and academic conferences; higher education curricula; academic journals and industry magazines, despite the lack of consensus in definition, the deficiency of measurement techniques and the existence of critics stating that IMC is not a new discipline.

**Table 2: The development of IMC as a discipline**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Development</b>
1991	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Caywood and Ewing (1991) underlines the idea of integration</li> <li>• Schultz examines the status of IMC dispute in US.</li> <li>• Tortorici argues that IMC is one of the easiest ways an organization can maximize its return on investment.</li> </ul>
1993	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schultz, Tannenbaum, and Lauterborn with their book 'Integrated marketing communication: Pulling it together and making it work' tried to define and examine the IMC concept through a broad perspective.</li> <li>• Schultz (1993b) recognized that IMC had become 'one of the hottest topics in the whole marketing arena'</li> <li>• Miller and Everett review the evolving concept of IMC and determine attitudes toward, and usage of, IMC by client organizations.</li> </ul>
1994	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Miller and Rose identified evolving paradigm of IMC was the undoubted stimuli for unification of all communication activities under a single concept.</li> </ul>



1996	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Duncan and Caywood argue that strategy is what separates IMC-marketing communications in past not strategically coordinated</li> <li>• Schultz in his study, among Indian advertisers, concluded that successful implementation of IMC would heavily rely on allocated budgets, staff, skills and structure.</li> <li>• In another study by Schultz in the USA, it is found out that 95% of respondents stated an integrated program would increase the impact of their marketing communications.</li> </ul>
1997	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In a study on diffusion of IMC, Kitchen and Schultz identified how senior advertising agency executives, within a judgment sample in UK and US, perceived and implemented IMC. Results indicated the agency view that IMC would improve client return.</li> </ul>
1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A multinational and cross-cultural study by Kitchen and Schultz, showed that the percentage of client budgets devoted to IMC differs in different countries and majority of resources devoted to IMC is related to agency size.</li> </ul>
2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shimp suggests five key features that are significant in IMC.</li> </ul>
2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In an IMC process model by Duncan, IMC is viewed as circular process rather than a linear one.</li> </ul>
2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IMC can use financial value and behavioral measures to evaluate performance (Zahay et al. 2004)</li> <li>• Swain conducted a survey to examine leadership preferences and perceptions of methods of measurement and agency compensation in planning and implementing IMC.</li> </ul>
2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eagle et. al. provided a two-country qualitative comparison concerning IMC.</li> <li>• Lee and Park present a four-dimensional conceptualization of IMC and empirically develop its measurement instrument.</li> <li>• Kerr et. al. with an international analysis examined the implied educators' perceptions of IMC.</li> </ul>
2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kitchen et. al. provide a review of the best IMC practices in US, Korea and UK while pointing out cultural divergence in adoption and practice besides revealing weaknesses regarding IMC practice.</li> </ul>

### **TMC Versus IMC**

The scope of communication is very broad since every contact a possible customer has with a product or service can be viewed as communication. It is much more than a plain marketing tool as it concerns the organization as a whole. For an organization, it is impossible not to communicate and therefore it is important to manage the organization's identity. Communication is described as an activity that creates a culture, helping an organization to interact with society by Schultz (1993).

Duncan and Moriarty (1997) describe three kinds of messages an organization delivers; planned messages, product or service messages, and unplanned messages. These messages are sent from the organization both intentionally and unintentionally, and it is important that they are coherent.

As IMC is recognized as a further development on top of the existing traditional marketing communications, outlining some of the main differences would be helpful for a better judgment. Duncan and Moriarty (1997) emphasize three main differences between IMC and traditional marketing communications;

- A shift of focus from acquiring new customers to maintaining and developing them;
- using a two-way communication instead of only one-way; communicating with customers, rather than just to them, and;
- making marketing communications less of a function of the company and more like a philosophy of conducting business.

As discussed, the planning process in IMC starts from the customer and work backwards to the company itself (Schultz, Tannenbaum, and Lauterborn, 1993). However, it is possible to argue that customer orientation is possible through TMC as well and that it is not an exclusive and specific attribute of IMC. From that perspective such an approach does not provide a distinctive evaluation of IMC activities.

A company communicates through everything it says, does, and what others say about it. It is argued by the advocates of IMC concept that the traditional marketing communication theory has

often looked at the messages in isolation, separated from the actual product or service. Prior to the launch of a specific communication program, consumers' knowledge and awareness are tested. Following that, a post measure is taken shortly after and the affect is then analyzed. The whole communication process, including the measurement, is thus following a linear path. On the other hand, as IMC considers the harmony in terms of overall message (involving the product or services) a company sends to customers and stakeholders, a broad view of communication is required when measuring its effect.

TMC also adopts a more static approach. Schultz, Tannenbaum, and Lauterborn (1993) base the concept of IMC on the fact that customers store information about a product or service from various sources. Information is retrieved from different media channels, but also from relatives and friends who have experienced the product or service. This information is collected over time.

As the real value of IMC is argued to emerge over time and the real effect could not be measured at a single point in time shortly after the communication program is delivered. As communication programs are often continuous, several evaluations are needed.

The message that is sent from an organization today must fit with the message stored in the customer's mind from earlier experiences. This is why, according to Schultz, Tannenbaum, and Lauterborn (1993), an integrated marketing communication approach is critical to apply. Similarly, Smith et al. (1997) stress that it is important with a strong cohesion within an organization; or contradictory messages will follow.

This also necessitates that internal and external communications must be consistent. While TMC concentrates on external messages; IMC, as Smith and Razzouk, (1993) states, argues that internal communication is as important as external communication, the former dealing with flow of information and decision making within the organization and the latter is focused on creating and maintaining an efficient communication with stakeholders and customers.

The traditional view of communication focuses on one message through a single mode whereas IMC deals with multiple messages

at the same time through various media or modes. This in turn requires a multidimensional measurement, including a separation between consumers' behavior and what is communicated. Consumer behavior include transactions made, relationships that provide feedback, and attitudes. The measurement is therefore circular, not linear as in traditional marketing communications. Attitudes are certainly affecting the behavior of a customer, but the experience is also affecting the attitudes.

The measurement needs to be planned for in advance and be built into the communication process. The response from the customer is used to adapt coming communications. Both complaints and inquiries are important to understand in order to further develop IMC. In short, it is necessary to identify and understand all types of contacts made with customers as these contacts communicate a message. IMC emerged as a mean to develop and manage a more holistic view of communication messages (Grönroos, 2000).

### **Past Research on IMC Measurement**

The measurement necessity essentially arises from the human-beings to grasp the consequences of their acts of the amount of their ownerships. In the current business world, in which harsh rivalry wars predominate, the involvement in measurement has become the key element to assess the outcomes of certain strategies implemented. Though marketing communications are acknowledged as a foremost tool to enhance communication with the targeted-market consumers, there has always been a gap between the realized and the actually-measured.

In line with the above discussion, Lee and Park (2007) emphasized that the inability of IMC to build up practical and reliable measurement scales has resulted in a bottleneck for the progress in the IMC area. For that reason, various marketing scholars endeavored to create reliable and adequate measures so as to determine the impact of consistent communications messages, targeting mainly consumers. As to realize a precise measurement of a process, a well agreed general definition and the necessary organizational structure for implementation of such a process should be in place.

Duncan and Everett (1993) set out to utilize an objective index to gauge the extent to which major marketing communications func-

tions are integrated in the company – the chief concept in their definition of IMC. They asked the respondents whether five functions of marketing communications were assigned to the same outside agency or whether they were assigned to the same internal job position. This question is still being held either by the majority of enterprises of today's business world as well as by the reputed scholars of the marketing globe.

Low (2000), with respect to Duncan and Everett's (1993) definition of IMC, developed a three-item scale to measure three aspects of IMC: the extent to which marketing communication tools are planned by the same person (integration); the extent to which the elements of the marketing communications program are strategically consistent (strategic consistency); and the extent to which the marketing communications tools focus on a common message (message consistency). Lee and Park (2007) concluded on this study as "This study, despite its lack of rigor in conceptualizing these aspects, is important because of its attempt to measure multiple dimensions of IMC. However, one item for each dimension is hardly sufficient to measure the complex nature of the construct in each dimension. In addition, a single item used to measure each dimension does not allow us to assess the reliability of the scale. Finally, the phrase "strategically consistent" in the question (used to measure the strategic consistency) is ambiguous, creating room for the respondent's subjective interpretation."

On the other hand, Cornelissen and Lock (2000) doubted IMC's theoretical robustness as well as its actual significance for marketing and advertising thought and practice and noted that there is no recognized measurement system to gauge the influence of various IMC concepts.

Schultz and Kitchen (2000a) argued that mankind could not measure IMC and it would take some time before it would accomplish this unique goal. In addition, Semenik (2002) suggested that the measurement of the complex interaction of all the promotional mix elements is extremely sophisticated and may be beyond the methodological tools available at this time.

More recently, Kitchen et al., (2004) centered the lack of measurement to the effectiveness of IMC programs and emphasized that

more attention should be paid on measuring “outcomes” rather than “outputs” of marketing communication activities. As expected, Kitchen et al. (2004) also complained that the theoretical approach has distinctly lagged behind.

In addition to these, Swain (2004) presumed that the findings of IMC are still not yet a cohesive and effective paradigm, theory of practice. He assumed that for IMC to attain those levels of recognition and adoption; conceptual questions of definition, leadership, best practices, measurement, service compensation and the relationships between them must be addressed, resulting in a workable system to meet modern marketing communication challenges.

To conclude, IMC itself is a new tool and is considered as a new paradigm in marketing which encompasses non-traditional methods in communication (Schultz and Kitchen, 2000b). To measure the effectiveness of those new methods, new measures and new measurements are needed (Swain, 2004).

Measurement methods have also been focused on measuring the activities rather than the outcome (Spake, D’Souza, Crutchfield, and Morgan, 1999). Media commissions are a good example of measurement and compensation on the basis of activities.

There are several critics regarding the IMC measurement which are summarized in the Table 3.

One of the recent research areas in marketing, neuromarketing, can be also used to further examine the impact of IMC. It is argued that the brain develops preferences on the basis of the intuitional relation with the product’s brand rather than the advertising message. Studies on neuroscience (Ambler and Burne 1999; Ambler 2000; Ambler, Ioannides, and Rose 2000) could be used to interpret that the brain cannot make the distinction between the messages of the marketing department and the rest of the messages. So, other than those, in Web 2.0 world, IMC needs to focus on other brand interactions as well, like virtual worlds, computer games, viral networks and internet. Besides, for measuring the creative integrity and synergy of integrated marketing communication, it is mandatory to expand the knowledge in the role of neural components in decoding and integrating various communications. Since

the customers are the ones who integrate communication- not the brand managers-, it is necessary to have a quantitative methodology to measure the integrity of the various messages in the minds of the customers.

### **Beware of The Pitfalls!**

In order to determine the borders and accomplish the precise measurement of this newly emerged marketing discipline, namely IMC; we ought to take these views in to consideration thoroughly since it would facilitate the IMC practitioners to better assess the scope and depth of IMC implemented in their marketing communications program and to measure the impact of IMC on the marketing communications performance more accurately.

In consideration with the above literature, we would like to further expand the discussion on limitations and inconveniences of IMC measurement as categorized into several topics below:

### **Measuring Absolute IMC Effect**

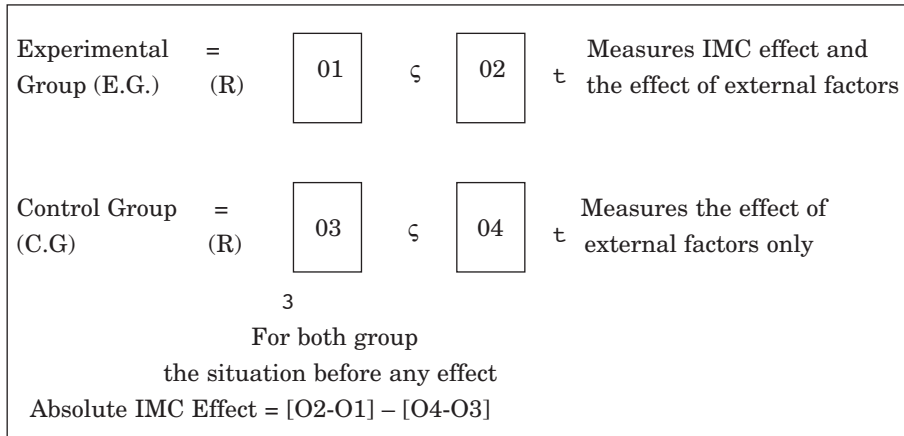
There is a limitation on the measurement of IMC due to the nature of the marketing environment open to various stimuli and competing effects from the outer world. One may well conclude that it would be safer to measure an effect through a sophisticated experimental design.



**Table 3: The critics and relevant approaches on IMC measurement**

Year	Critique
2000	Eagle and Kitchen note that the major area against which IMC can be critiqued does not concern what it is, or how it works, but how to measure its effectiveness.
2000	Schultz and Kitchen (2000a) proposed an IGMC Communication Planning. Current inflows from customers and prospects will be measured for the short term, which will be turned into marginal returns and incremental revenue; whereas the return of investment on brand building will be measured based on the brand equity among customers and prospects.
2001	In their study on IMC curriculum, Farrelly et al. state that measuring communication ranked highest in the preferred topic list.
2002	Semenik offered basic approaches to measuring the effectiveness of an overall IMC program: 1. To take on the measurement of each of the promotional tools used in a campaign. 2. To use single-source tracking measures 3. To measure media exposures, product (brand) impressions, and personal contacts. (p. 29
2004	Kitchen et al. argued that financial returns can only be collected if communication resources are invested and measured against actual customer behavior.
2008	Kitchen, Kim and Schultz examined the international differences in terms of IMC measurement by an empirical study.
2009	Ewing proposed 5 areas of integrated marketing communication measurement which require further research.

In Figure 1, we suggest an experimental design with two groups before and after measurement. This design or any other appropriate experimental design could serve much better to claim that IMC has better outcomes than TMC, if any.



**Figure 1: Experimental Group Design to Test Effect of IMC**

### IMC Measurement Over Time

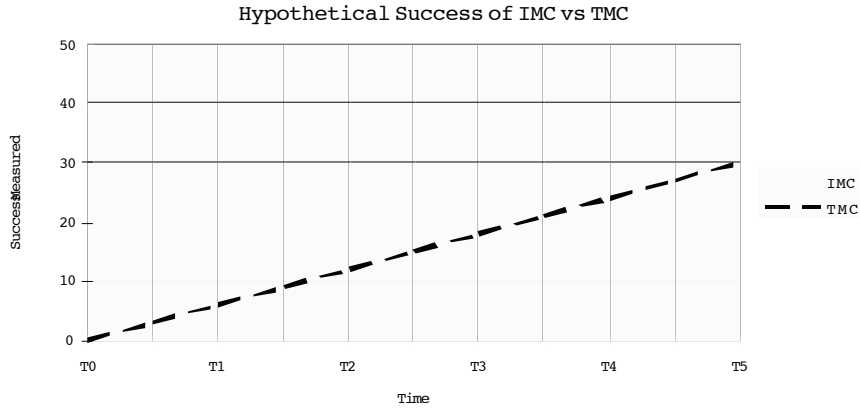
Marketing communication is a circular, not a linear process. There is no doubt that attitudes influence behavior, but it is also true that behavior influences attitudes. If a consumer has a good experience with a brand, this experience either reinforces the positive network that existed before it or causes the consumer to change the previous network and attitude. The major difference between IMC measurement and traditional one-way, linear mass communication program, is that the behavior of the prospect is a vital factor in developing the next wave of IMC programs. The concept of IMC means a long-term synchronization of messages and campaigns. (Katrandjiev, 2000)

The main difference between the IMC and the traditional, functionally oriented activities (particularly those of mass media advertising) is that IMC must, in some way, impact the behavior of the target audience. It does not mean that functional activities such as advertising, sales promotions, direct marketing, and public relations do not influence behavior. In fact they do, especially direct

marketing and sales promotion. The major difference is that IMC is planned, developed, executed, and evaluated with affecting one specific consumer behavior in mind, the process of making purchases now or in the future. (Katrandjiev, 2000)

Traditionally, marketing people measure effect of communication only at a single point in time with cross-sectional studies - when the message is delivered or shortly thereafter. In the context of IMC programs, there is a need to understand how the communication program impacts the consumer's behavior at several points in a period of time. In other words the marketer must know the communication history of the customer in addition to the delivered message.

Therefore, it is proposed that measurement of IMC must be performed through a longitudinal study. Some of the effects expected from an IMC campaign involve a change in consumer responses and this may apparently take time to happen. Time is an important factor to consider in a study aimed at measuring IMC success. Such a study may reveal the real difference between the IMC and TMC policies applied. This is shown in Figure 2:



**Figure 2: Hypothetical Longitudinal Study IMC vs TMC**

Measuring the effectiveness of IMC means to compare the situations in which IMC is applied and not applied. This rationale is required to exercise TMC first and then IMC (or vice versa) for the same campaign and to check the existence of any differences in the results so that anyone can mention the effect of IMC. However IMC is not a onetime action for companies. Generally if companies adopt an IMC approach they execute it consistently. They do not practice IMC and TMC consecutively in the same campaign. If the real measurement issue is to measure whether the integration in marketing communications contributes to the success of any campaign, it cannot be measured by the studies which examine the results of IMC practice without comparing the results of TMC for the same case.

The same problem still exists even if a longitudinal study is aimed at measuring the effect of IMC in a specific campaign because there is no comparison of the situations with and without the integration. A further problem, most longitudinal studies that try to measure IMC effect, actually measure the success of a specific campaign instead of the effect of integration for that campaign. The rationale behind longitudinal studies is to use applied research (research to solve the problem of any company). However measuring IMC must be done through basic research (the one that contributes to the theory). Measurement of IMC has nothing to do with a specific campaign. What must be examined is what the result would be if marketing campaign was not integrated.

### ***IMC in Encoding or Decoding?***

Kotler (2003) defines integrated marketing communication as a way of looking at the whole marketing process from the viewpoint of the customer. Integrated marketing communication is a strategic business process aiming to provide a single, coordinated message; in which a message is first encoded by the sender, one or more communication channels are used to deliver the message and the receiver decodes the message upon receipt. There is a commonality in both propositions above. As we look at the whole marketing process from the customer's viewpoint in IMC, we should focus more on the integrity of the message at decoding phase, instead of its integrity at encoding phase. Two reasons for this follow:

Firstly, according to the communication process, the sender decodes the message, based on frame of reference and experience; knowledge, beliefs, feelings and interest of the receiver. In order to analyze whether there has been a single, coordinated message to be delivered, it is necessary to see how the message has been received and decoded by the consumer. Secondly, there has always been a “Noise” component in communication concept, which could cause decoded and encoded messages to differ from each other. This point becomes more important as technology empowers consumers and this causes a shift in communication power. (Ewing, 2009) In today’s world, brand meaning is not controlled by brand managers but they are co-created by brand users through continuous interaction. (Cova and Cova, 1997) Blackston (2000) further argues that consumers are like equity partners in the brand. Ewing (2009) proposes an agenda for further research in consumer empowerment which include: Mobile technologies, viral marketing, and consumer generated content, virtual worlds and co-created brand meaning. All of these above clearly show that it is not enough to measure the integrity of the message when it is encoded. Its integrity needs to be verified and validated when it is decoded considering the noise included during the transmission, consumer’s co-creation and subjectivity in decoding of the message.

In summary, whether messages are perceived as integrated at decoding phase, is more important than whether the company integrated messages at coding phase. Success of IMC messages may well depend on the success measured at decoding stage. Measurement at decoding stage can be considered as a more “customer centric” method focusing on the end customer.

### ***Could TMC Also Do What IMC Does?***

Behavioral consumer responses such as changes in attitude and loyalty or real life business results such as sales and profits are widely suggested as measures of IMC success (Swain, 2004). However, those responses may well be obtained through TMC. Even if IMC is successfully performed it is possible that desired consumers responses may not be attained. The possibilities are shown in figure 3. IMC measurement shall consider the difference created by IMC compared to TMC rather than the subjective interpretations of results of marketing communication.

	<b>Message</b>	<b>Implementation</b>	<b>Business Result</b>
<b>IMC</b>	Effective	Good	Positive
	Ineffective		Negative
<b>TMC</b>	Effective		Positive
	Ineffective		Negative

**Figure 3: Illustration of Business Results That are Possible Both Under TMC and IMC**

### ***Brand Loyalty or Message Loyalty***

Yet, measuring consumer responses such as loyalty as success criterion for IMC may not be suitable for another reason. It is a matter of argument that whether consumer response towards the brand or towards the message is desired. It is probable that an IMC campaign may well attain the desired loyalty to an IMC message while not creating brand loyalty.

When the 'process' is recognized as the center of IMC definition, effect of integration or the effect of the message itself appears to be the real subject of measurement. For example, a campaign may have a negative message which will cause a decrease in sales but IMC may still be successful since its basic aim, by its definition, is to give the same message to everyone. As shown in Figure 4, It is possible to claim that the variables used to measure IMC in previous studies are meaningless:

<b>A positive message resulting an increase in sales</b>			
<b>Communication</b>	<b>Sales</b>	<b>The net effect of IMC</b>	<b>Status of success</b>
<b>TMC</b>	300 units of increase	200 units	IMC is successful
<b>IMC</b>	500 units of increase		

<b>A negative message resulting decrease in sales</b>			
<b>Communication</b>	<b>Sales</b>	<b>The net effect of IMC</b>	<b>Status of success</b>
<b>TMC</b>	300 units of decrease	200 units	IMC is still successful
<b>IMC</b>	500 units of decrease		

**Figure 4: Illustration of Message Loyalty**

If the aim is to increase sales at the end of the day, TMC (Traditional Marketing Communication) can also provide it. There is no empirical support to the claim that integration in marketing communication provides more customer loyalty than executing TMC. Assuming a campaign executed with an IMC approach delivers the same message to all consumers but the right message may not be chosen. In that case, because every channel gives the same message, the situation would be disaster. Ironically, the same negative message could be delivered successfully to everyone and none of the channels would have the chance to compensate for the negative effect of the message resulting in a totally negative effect rather than that expected. Whereas, if the message chosen has a negative effect and the company is executing TMC, salespeople can compensate for failings of the advertising or vice versa thus the campaign is not wasted. From that perspective practicing IMC could be argued to be more costly than TMC.

### ***Message to different ends***

Business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) marketing are similar but they are different. Some companies operate both in B2B and B2C, the obvious question here is whether the



message needs to be integrated. Moreover, the question becomes more difficult, if the same group (consumer segment, business segment.) is targeted via more than one channel and if the communication flows via intermediaries. For a market segment, to which the communication flows through more than one channel in which some of the channels are direct and some of them indirect, then decoding process is actualized in different points (e.g. end user by advertising, distributors by salespeople). As the number of decoding points (intermediaries) increase, ensuring the integrity of the message becomes more complex. In such a case, TMC might be more reasonable. The rationale behind this claim is that for some sectors it must deliver a different message or the same message in different ways to the end user and the distribution channel. The main point is to know where the message will be decoded.

### ***Controllable and Uncontrollable Communications***

A basic characteristic of IMC planning is the expansion of the concept of communications. In fact every contact a consumer has with the brand is a form of communication. It includes the design of the packaging, the way the product is displayed in the supermarket, the product placement, etc. However not all forms of communication are under the control of the marketer. Controllable communications are the following: marketer's advertising, marketer's sales promotion, marketer's public relation, marketer's direct marketing, packaging, sales force presentations, events, "hot" telephone numbers, and company customer service.

But many other communication elements exist, and the marketer has little or no control over these elements. The uncontrollable communications are: competitor's advertising, competitor's sales promotion, competitor's public relations, competitor's direct marketing, retailer's signage, retailer's display, media reports, consumer comments, users' experiences, and retailer customer service. The key to a successful integrated marketing communications program is to know which communication elements can be controlled and which cannot. So, the basic rule of IMC measurement is that a very broad view of communications must be taken. The marketer must assess which communications are unfavorable and which are favorable (Katrandjiev, 2000).

### Conclusion

IMC has become one of the most controversial areas in marketing during the past decade. When the existing body of literature is considered, IMC can be perceived as being in its pre-paradigm stage. The disagreement in terms of conceptualization as well as the lack of scientific evidence and robust empirical support both in implementation and measurement caused IMC to be considered as a managerial fad.

Although, the concept became widely popular and is considered as a necessity without questioning thoroughly in business circles, there are still unresolved issues regarding the implementation, the required organizational structure and agency compensation issues. Besides, educational manifestation of IMC among scholars that shapes the future of a profession and further theory development is seemed to be just a similar reflection of the previously existing course, the traditional marketing communications. In order to establish the maturity of IMC as a respectable discipline, these obstacles that prevent development of IMC should be removed.

The dominant perspective on IMC is still very company oriented, where an inside-out view, from the company to the consumer is adopted. The authors believe that a consumer-centric perspective on marketing communications, a more outside-in approach should be aimed at.

Concept of IMC automatically infers a long-term orientation. Given the circular nature of the marketing communication, measurement of IMC must be performed through a longitudinal study to capture over the long run effects. IMC deals with multiple messages at the same time through various media or modes. This in turn necessitates a multidimensional measurement.

There is a plethora of unanswered questions considering under what conditions IMC is superior to TMC. Also, considerations about risks of IMC are not identified through empirical research. It may be risky to centralize the communication and amplify it through IMC. In some cases that may cause an unrecoverable, catastrophic damage in marketing communication. This would specially hold if an inconsistent or unwelcome message is magnified through a well run communication program.

Until now, a large part of the past studies are addressed on a generally acceptable definition of IMC, while many others are focused on developing practical and acceptable measures to evaluate the success of IMC. Much to our surprise that no study has been carried out to analyze the differential effect between TMC and IMC. We believe that it is fundamental to measure the differential effect between IMC and TMC before starting to dig into measuring success of IMC.

It is worth to study and find evidence whether and under what conditions a significant effect in the long term between TMC and IMC exists. In this regard, this article proposed to initiate a series of discussions, as to provide an opening critique for further development and research in this area.

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