

## **Integrated Marketing Communication: A Catalyst for the Growth of E-Business Management**

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**Abstract:** The need for an organization to properly coordinate its marketing communication strategies in order to deliver clear, consistent and competitive messages about itself and its products has become highly imperative today for every result driven organization. Integrated marketing communication can be defined as the strategic coordination of marketing communication mix elements and the channels of communication in order to afford an organization a clear, consistent, impactful and result driven communications about its brand and corporate image in the eyes of its esteemed customers and other stakeholders. The objectives of this study amongst others are to: appreciate the meaning of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) and its vital tools which an efficient marketer can use in order to strategically position its products very well in the ever dynamic and competitive market make a comprehensive analysis of the steps involved in developing an effective IMC programme. In this case, the immense benefits which E-business managers stand to gain through the use of IMC as well as examine the needs for firms to maintain the right database which could serve as catalyst to effective E-business management. The study uses a qualitative method draws up useful policy implications and what firms stand to gain through their adoption of IMC in their E-business management.

**Key words:** Integrated marketing, communications, growth, E-business, IMC programme, Nigeria

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The need for an organization to properly coordinate its marketing communication strategies in order to deliver a clear, consistent and competitive message about itself and its product has become a challenge today for every result oriented firm. Effective marketing communications must be an integral part of every efficient and result driven organization. How innovative and creative marketing communications practitioners are in appropriately combining, coordinating and efficiently using the marketing communication tools will have great impact on their companies' products/services and by extension, on such products' market share. This again could pose serious challenge to competing companies across markets and put these competitors on their toes.

The Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) approach believes that a company must leave no chance for error, no patience for miscommunication and no time should be left for confusion. The IMC approach is on the consistency of message that communications effort of a company through its different products must project a unified voice. Business (companies) must be able to deliver the right message in the right medium to elicit the right results. A simple argument for IMC is that there are financial, competitive and effective benefits to be achieved through the synergy afforded by the process of integration. In reading this study on Integrated Marketing

Communications (IMC) in E-business management, the objectives of the study amongst others are to make readers be able to:

- Appreciate the meaning of integrated marketing communications and its strategic place in E-business management
- Understand the vital tools of integrated marketing communications which an efficient firm can use in order to effectively position its products/services very well in the eyes of its esteemed customers
- Be familiar with a number of steps and stages involved in developing an effective integrated marketing communication programme
- To show-case the strategic place of direct marketing in E-business management as well as examine the unique needs for firms to maintain the right database which could serve as catalyst to effective E-business management
- Show the immense benefits which E-business managers stand to gain through integrated marketing communications usage such as cost savings, better return on investment, planned and sustained good client-customer relationships, amongst others

**Background:** Many changes in the world of business today have been driven primarily by advances in information technology and this has caused a major shift

from the mass marketing, product centered theories of marketing popularized in the 1950 and 1960's to the more Customer-centric, Database-driven interactive and measurable approaches of integrated communications (Peltier *et al.*, 2003). The development of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) can be traced to the early 1980's when many American advertising agencies started to feel threatened by their clients attempt to save money through direct media purchases and patronage and creative boutique operations. This development came to a climax towards the early part of 1990's when advertising agencies started to offer more than their traditional function of just producing and placing advertising in the media.

The advertising agencies then saw that their survival in the turbulent decade of the 1980's depended on providing integrated strategies.

The question one might ask here is were advertising agencies not adding value to their clients programmes before IMC. Of course, they were but not in an integrated sense. In this respect, Kliatchko (2005) opines that value added services need not start and end in only advertising messages and strategies. But now in an expanded view of advertising, advertising agencies must positively evolve specific promotional mix to provide clarity, consistency and maximum communication impact.

In a similar way, Picton and Broderick (2005) observes that coordination is a powerful element of an integrated communication strategy. And that many companies might find integration difficult to adopt due to tough battles on how to allocate resources and unwillingness to invest in the needed database. He also observed that different departments were responsible for different elements in the communication strategy (i.e., an advertising department, direct mail department and a trade show or an event management department). In many of these cases they are usually reluctant to give-up control over their, respective area and fight each other for a piece of the marketing budget.

The result will be that the communication strategy will be fragmented rather than integrated. What happens when interactions with customers are fragmented. Belch and Belch opined that if customers are fragmented then they would get annoyed because different parts of the company do not know what others are saying. Consumers might feel that they are talking to many different companies instead of one. Truly that is actually not the way to build good relationship.

In the opinion of Fill (2006), he raises the fact that marketing has moved from customer acquisition (winning new customers) through customer relations (keeping customers for life) towards customers deselection

(dumping unprofitable customer while selectively seeking and keeping the profitable ones). He listed other form of marketing communications which are media proliferation, audience fragmentation, advancement of information technology and the internet, consumer empowerment, increased advertising, clutter, shift in channel power and the desire for more accountability. All these underpin the driving forces leading toward integrated marketing communications.

In their research on marketing communications, Duncan and Everett asserted that IMC is both a concept and a process. The IMC perspective can be interpreted as meaningful integrative of Holistic thinking, i.e., looking at marketing communication in a way by which various marketing communication tools are strategically employed in a complementary fashion after a careful analysis of customer needs and review of market situation. Schultz and Kitchen (2000) equally viewed integrated marketing communication measurable persuasive brand communication programmes over time with consumers, prospects and other targeted relevant external and internal audience.

According to Duncan (2002), he believes that the above definition of IMC by Schultz and Kitchen (2000), forecasts the trend of the development of IMC in the future. He therefore, noted that this new definition indicates that IMC has moved from (or has the potential to move from) a marketing planning process to a strategic business process. Based on the above definitions, one can simply summarize some basic tenets of integrated marketing communications as:

- Aims to affect behaviour
- Starts with customers or prospects
- Uses any and all forms of contents
- Achieves synergy
- Builds relationships

Low (2000) opines that integrated marketing is simply a step further from IMC or the highest stage of IMC by focusing on conveying unified messages to customers via the correct blending of the promotional mix.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**The growing importance of IMC:** The move towards integrated marketing communications according to Belch is one of the most important marketing developments that occurred in the 1990's and this approach is growing daily as this new millennium continues to advance. Belch believed that the IMC approach to marketing communication planning and strategy is being adopted by

both large and small companies and has become popular among firms marketing consumer products and services as well as business to business marketers. Some of the reasons why marketers are adopting the IMC approach according to Marketing Communication Scholars (MCS) are:

- The understanding that the strategic integration of the various communication functions rather than having them operate autonomously would bring many added benefits both to clients and consumers. By coordinating their marketing communication efforts, companies can avoid duplications take advantage of synergy among promotional tools and develop more efficient and effective marketing communications
- Advocates of IMC approach are of the opinion that it is one of the easiest ways for a company to maximize the return on its investment in marketing and promotion
- The move towards integrated marketing communications also reflects an adaptation by marketers to a changing environment, particularly with respect to consumers, technology and media. More changes are occurring daily among consumers with respect to demographics, lifestyle, media use, buying and shopping patterns
- Today, many companies are turning to lower-cost target communication tools such as event marketing and sponsorships, direct marketing, sales promotion and the internet as they develop their marketing communication strategies. There is indeed a revolution in the world of marketing communication today
- The rapid growth and development of database marketing. Many companies are building database containing customers' name, geographic, demographic and psychographic profiles; purchase patterns; media preferences, etc. Advocates of this approach believed that database marketing is critical to the development of effective use of IMC

### **Promotional mix**

**The tools for IMC:** Marketing promotion has been defined by Belch and as the coordination of all seller initiated efforts to set-up channels of information and persuasion in order to sell goods and services or promote an idea. Kallmeyer and Abratt (2001) viewed it as marketing communication mix which the joint researchers called the specific mix of advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, public relations and direct marketing that a firm

uses in order to pursue its advertising and marketing objectives. While, implicit communication occurs through the various elements of the marketing mix, most of an organization's communication effort with the market place takes place as part of a carefully planned and controlled promotional programme.

In the words of Davies, he sees marketing communication mix as the specific mix of advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, public relations and direct marketing that a company uses to pursue its advertising and marketing communication objectives. Fill (2006) goes further when he says, marketing communication is a management process through which an organization engages with its various audiences.

By understanding an audience's communication environment organizations seek to develop and present messages for its identified stakeholder groups before evaluating and acting upon the responses. By conveying messages that are of significance value, audiences are encouraged to offer attitudinal and behavioural responses.

Traditionally, Wright (2000) believes that the promotional mix has included four elements: advertising, sales promotion, public relations and publicity; personal selling. However, most modern scholars agreed on the inclusion of the 5th element which is direct and interactive (internet) marketing. A company's total marketing communication mix-called its promotional mix therefore, consists of the specific blend of:

- Advertising
- Personal selling
- Publicity and public relations
- Sales promotion
- Direct and interactive marketing tools that a firm uses to pursue its advertising and marketing objectives

Briefly, we can identify these promotional mix elements.

**Advertising:** Any paid form of non-personal communication and promotion of ideas, goods or services by an identifiable sponsor.

**Personal selling:** Oral presentation in a conversation form with one or more prospective purchasers for the purpose of making sales and building customer relationships.

**Sales promotion:** The use of short-term incentives in order to encourage the purchase or sale of a product or service.

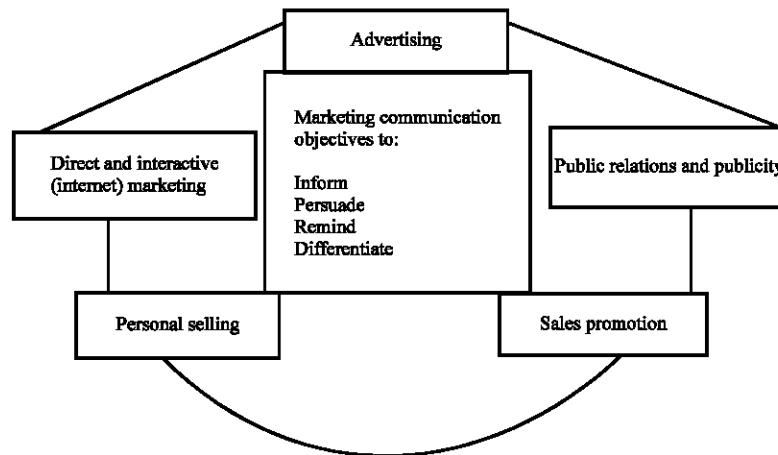


Fig. 1: Marketing communications mix

**Public relations:** Building good relations with the company's various publics by obtaining favourable publicity, building up a good corporate image and heading-off unfavourable rumours, stories and events about the firm.

**Direct and internet marketing:** Direct marketing communication is a process of communication directly with target customers to encourage responses by telephone, mail, electronic means or personal visit. Popular methods of direct marketing communication include direct mail, telemarketing, online computer shopping services, cable television shopping network, internet marketing, etc. All types of marketers including retailers, wholesalers, manufacturers and service providers use direct marketing communications. The ultimate goal of marketing communication is to reach some audience to affect their behaviour. In Fig. 1, marketing communication mix elements with the objectives of marketing communication are shown.

**Informative promotion:**

- To inform the market about the arrival of a new product
- To increase the awareness of a new product, brand or product attribute
- To explain how the product works
- To suggest new uses for a product
- To build a company image

**Persuasive promotion:**

- To encourage brand switching
- To change customers' perceptions of product attributes
- To influence customers to buy now
- To persuade customers to call back

**Reminder promotion**

- To remind consumers that the product may be needed in the near future
- To remind consumers where to buy the product
- To maintain consumer awareness

**Differentiation promotion:** The Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM), London in 2007-2008, Lecture manual added a fourth objective to the marketing communication objectives. CIM London in 2008, calls these marketing communication objectives with the acronym, Drip to, i.e.:

- Differentiate a seller's products from other competing products (D)
- Remind customers on the company products/offers (R)
- Inform potential customers on the products' availability (I)
- Persuade customers to buy (P)

**Choosing the correct marketing communication tools:**

It is believed that choosing the correct marketing communications tools for a particular promotional task is not an easy one. Indeed, the process is still very much an art though it is becoming more scientific because of the access to consumer and media database. Computer can carry out matching consumer characteristics with media database very rapidly and promotional budgets can be evaluated for a variety of different mixes. In the final analysis however, the client's wishes and the expertise of the promotion planner are decisive. In this regards, it is good to provide some guideline for choosing the correct promotion tools.

The choice should be exercised within the flowing top-down hierarchy of objectives. According to CIM London in 2008, the choice of the marketing promotional tool is largely influenced by a number of factors such as:

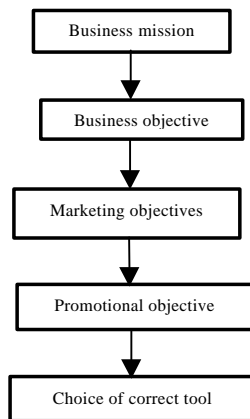


Fig. 2: Marketing matrix

- Business mission
- Business objectives
- Marketing objectives
- Promotional objectives
- Resources availability
- Competitors activities and competitors' reaction pattern
- The target audience
- The type of product, amongst others

The link between choice of correct promotional tools, company mission and objectives (Fig. 2).

**Implementation:** Implementation of promotional strategies is very vital and this calls for a firm's advertising agency to display a sense of creativity, professionalism and commitment to the client's promotional objectives. Belch added that it is vital for advertising agencies to work closely with their clients as they have to develop the adverts and select media because it is the advertiser (client) that ultimately approves (and pay for) the creative work and media plan. The joint research added that a similar, process takes place for the other elements of the IMC programme as objectives are set, an overall strategy is developed, message and media strategies are determined and steps are taken by the firm to implement them.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Monitoring, evaluation and control:** This is the last step in the IMC planning process. It is vital for firms to determine how well the promotional programme is meeting the communications objectives. Chisnall adds that the marketing promotions planners want to know how and why the promotion programme is performing. He wants to

know if there are deviations from the plans or whether there is need for modification, Belch added that this last step is designed to provide managers with continued feedback concerning the effectiveness of the promotional programme which in turn can be used as input into the planning process. The integrated marketing communication model (Fig. 3) portrays the development of a marketing program which requires an in-depth analysis of the market. This analysis may make extensive use of marketing research as an input which in turn provides the basis for the development of marketing strategies with regard to product pricing, distribution and promotion decisions. Each of the steps requires a detailed analysis since, this plan serves as the road map to follow in achieving marketing goals.

Once the detailed market analysis has been completed and marketing objectives have been established, each of the marketing mixes must contribute to a comprehensive integrated marketing program. The above joint researchers added that the promotional program element which is the focus of the model must be combined with all other program elements in such a way as to achieve maximum impact. This view is also supported by Peltier *et al.* (2003) and Cornelissen and Lock (2000) amongst others. Kitchen *et al.* (2004) looked at IMC process model from the strategic point of view. The researchers believed that firms need to do a SWOT analysis of their operation as well as those of their competitors.

The firm is also to analyze its database and information technology network. The firm who intends to have sound integrated marketing communications need to review its brand relationships which leads to customer acquisition, retention and growth. Moreover, Kitchen *et al.* (2004) believed that IMC must show 5 significant features. These according to them are:

- The primary goal of IMC is to affect behaviour through direct communication
- The process should start with the customer or prospect and then work backward to the brand communicator
- IMC should use all forms of communication and all sources of brand or company contacts as prospects message delivery channels
- The need for synergy is paramount with coordination helping to achieve a strong brand image
- IMC requires that successful marketing communication needs to build a relationship between the brand and the customer

When deciding how to properly utilize the marketing communications mix to meet the marketing objectives, it is

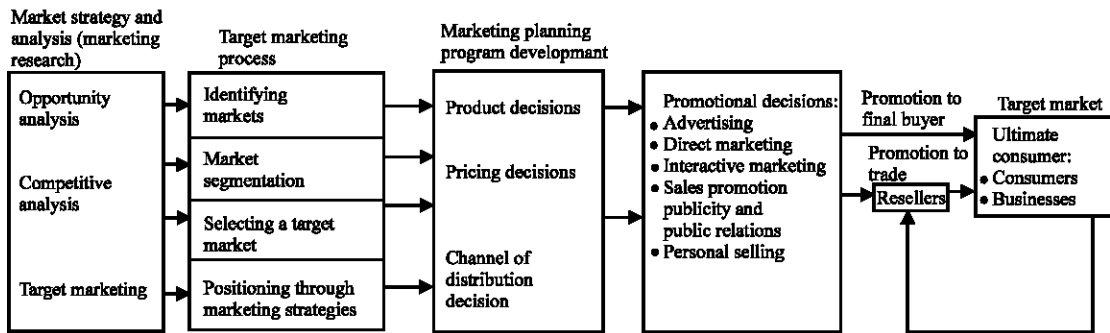


Fig. 3: Marketing and promotions process model

important to consider the relative strengths and weaknesses of each component of the marketing communication mix. Further, one must always define his/her total budget first (generally defined in the marketing and/or business plan) and then decide upon the best way to leverage the different elements of the mix to maximize the return on one's investment. One has to balance the various mixes to create an integrated approach to one's marketing communications effort and also devote enough resources for each component to be successful.

**Steps in developing effective marketing communication programme:** In order to achieve better results from use of IMC, the marketing communicator must take the following steps into consideration when designing the message. We now examine the steps involved in developing an effective integrated marketing communication programme.

**Identify the target audience:** The marketing communicator must have a clear target audience in mind. The audience may be potential buyers or current users; those who make buying decisions or those who influence it.

**Determine the communication objectives:** This is what the marketer wants to achieve. To do this, he needs to know where the target audience now stands and what stage/or state it needs to be moved to. The purpose of marketing communication is to move the customer along these stages and ultimately to achieve final purchase (Fig. 4).

**Design the message:** Having designed the communication objectives, the marketing communicator turns to develop an effective message. Ideally, the message should get attention; hold interest; arouse desire and obtain action (A framework known as AIDA model). In practice, few messages take the consumer all the way from awareness to purchase but the AIDA frame work suggests the desirable qualities of a good

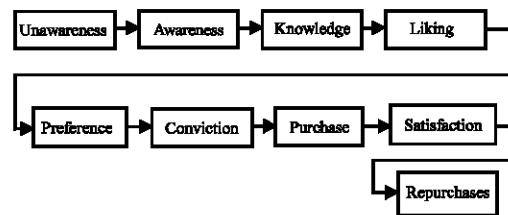


Fig. 4: Process of customer decision

message. In putting the message together the marketing communicator must decide what to say (message content) and how to say it (message structure and format).

**Message content:** Here, the marketing communicator has to figure out an appeal or theme that will produce the desired response. There are 3 types of appeal.

**Rational appeal:** Message appeals that relate to the audience's self interest and show that the product will produce the claimed benefits, i.e., appeals of product quality, economy, value or performance.

**Emotional appeal:** Message appeals that attempt to stir up negative or positive emotions that will motivate purchase. Examples are fear, guilt, shame, love, humour, pride and joy appeal.

**Moral appeal:** Message appeals that are directed to the audience's sense of what is right and proper.

**Message structure:** Here, the communicator decides how to say the message. There are three issues that are involved here:

- The first is whether to draw conclusion or to leave it to the audience. Present researches show that the advertiser is better-off asking questions to stimulate involvement and motivate customers to think about the brand and then let them come to their own conclusions

- The second message structure is whether to present a one sided issue, i.e., whether to mention only the product's strengths or whether to admit few shortcomings of the product. When dealing with highly sophisticated and enlightened customers, you have to present the two sides
- Whether to present strong arguments first or last. Presenting strong arguments first leads to strong attention but may lead to anti-climate ending

**Message format:** This has to do with the content of the message such as in print adverts the communicator has to decide on the headline, copy, illustration, colour, etc.

**Selecting the message source:** Message source refers to the company, the brand name, the salesperson, the actor in the advert who endorses the product, i.e., today many firms are using celebrities and other drama artists to endorse their adverts the message source, i.e., in Nigeria many companies are using footballers such as Kanu, Okocha or other world footballers such as Becham, Ronaldo, Ronaldiinho, etc.

**Choosing the media:** The communicator must now select channels of communication. There are broad two communication channels. These are personal and non-personal communication channels.

**Personal communication channel:** In personal communication channel, two or more people communicate directly with one another. They may communicate face-to-face or over the telephone or through mail, fax machine, internet, etc. Personal communication system is very effective as it gives room for quick feedback.

**Non-personal communication:** These are media that carry messages without personal contact such as radio, television, newspapers, billboard, posters, etc.

**Collecting feedback:** After sending the message, the communicator must research its effects on the target audience. This involves asking the target audience whether they remember the message; how many times they saw the message. What points they recall, how they felt about the message and their past and present attitude towards the product and the company. The communicator would also like to measure behaviour resulting from the message. How many people bought the product. How many people visited their stores or shops after the adverts, etc.

### **Direct and internet marketing**

**A vital tool for E-business:** Today while most companies continue to rely primarily on the other promotional mix elements (such as advertising, sales promotion, personal

selling and public relations) to move their products and services through intermediaries, an increasing number are going directly to the consumer. These new companies believed that the traditional promotional mix such as mentioned above are effective in brand image, conveying information and or creating awareness going direct with the same tool can generate an immediate behavioural response. Direct marketing is a vital tool in the integrated marketing communication programme.

By definition, direct marketing is a system of marketing by which an organization communicates directly with target customers to generate a response or transaction. This is done through mails, telephone, internet, fax messages and the development of web sites. The response might take the form of an enquiry a purchase or even a note.

### **Developing the database for effective E-marketing**

**programme:** A marketing database is a collection of records that can be related to one another in multiple ways and from which customer related information can be obtained in a variety of ways. We must recall that market segmentation and targeting are critical components of any promotional programme of any organization. Hence, direct marketing programme employs these principles even more than others since, the success of a direct-marketing programme is in large part due to the ability to do one-to-one marketing. To segment and target their markets, direct marketers use a database. A database is a list of customers and or potential customers. This list helps the marketer to segment the customers into different units either on the bases of income; geographical location, etc.

This database is a tool for database marketing. Again, database marketing can be defined as the use of specific information about individual customers and/or prospects to implement more effective and efficient marketing communication.

**Uses of database:** Database is used to perform the following functions:

- It helps in improving the selection of market segments
- It helps in needed information which will facilitate repeat purchases
- Helps to get information so as to stimulate repeat purchases
- Helps the company to cross-sell some of its other variety of products to the same customers, i.e., the company already has the data/information on the customer to some of other products of the company
- Database provides a means of monitoring changes in customer behaviour, identify new target markets and cross-selling of products and services

- It also helps in Customer Relationship Management (CRM). It takes on the process of turning a prospect →customer→repeat purchase customer→member→advocate→partner. So, customer database helps the organization to identify which customer the company strives to turn to advocate and to partner

#### **Sources of database information in Nigeria**

**Federal office of statistics:** In Nigeria, the Federal office of statistics serves as a good source of data on companies and many other organizations.

**Census board/bureau:** Census data provide information on almost every household in any developed economy such as USA, UK, etc. We hope that Nigeria will grow or develop to such a state.

**Yellow pages and directories:** There are many providers of yellow pages, lists and directories. However, the accuracy and timeliness of these directories vary.

**Marketing research bureau:** There are few reliable and strong marketing research outfits from which we could gather information on companies and prospective customers.

**Direct marketing association:** In many developed countries, we now have direct marketing association which helps in providing statistical information on direct marketing use.

**Merits of the use of E-marketing:** The E-marketing offers many useful advantages to users amongst which are:

**Target marketing:** The major advantage which the internet offers users is the ability to target very specific groups of individuals with minimum waste coverage.

**Message tailoring:** E-marketing enables companies to target the message to precise audience. Messages are designed and tailored to meet the needs and wants of target audience.

**Interactive capabilities:** Because the internet is interactive, it provides strong potential for increasing customer involvement and satisfaction and it also gives almost immediate feedback for both the seller and the buyers.

**Information access:** Another great advantage of the internet is its availability as an information source. People

visit sites to gather necessary information regarding products, specifications, cost, purchase information, etc.

**Sales potential:** The Internet helps to generate great sales potentials for a firm.

**Creativity:** A well creatively designed sites can enhance a company's image which could lead to repeat visits which will help to positively position the company in the mind of the companies/buyer.

**Exposure:** For companies with limited budget or financial resources, the world wide web enables them to gain exposure to potential customers that would have been earlier difficult to reach or impossible to reach.

**Speed:** The internet serves as the quickest means of acquiring information regarding other companies, its products/services.

**Shortcomings of E-marketing:** The use of E-marketing has a few pitfalls among which are:

**Measurement problem:** One of the greatest disadvantages of the internet is the lack of reliability of the research numbers generated.

At many instances, downloading of vital information from the net takes a long time. When there are a number of users the time increases and some sites may be inaccessible due to too many visitors to the sites

**Information overload:** As the number of adverts proliferates, the likelihood of one advert being noticed drops accordingly. The result is that some adverts may not be noticed and some consumers may become irritated by the clutter. For example, studies have shown that banner adverts are already losing effectiveness for this reason as many banners cluster around the major busy street.

**Potential for deception:** It has been found that some people can use the internet to deceive others. Many case of advance fraud (419) today are organized via the net.

**Power problems in the developing nations:** Many developing nations of African do not have constant electricity supply. To run generators with diesel costs a lot of money. This irregular supply of power could pose serious challenge to e-marketing activities.

**Lacks control of data:** Today many people visit certain sites; collect data for useful purposes without the permission of the owners of that information.



**Privacy:** The Internet marketers must be careful not to impinge upon the privacy of their customers or prospective buyers.

**Benefits of the use of IMC in E-business:** On benefits of integrated marketing communication, Picton and Broderick (2005) presented an highlight of what the joint researchers considered as part of the benefits of the use of integrated marketing communication by firms. These, according to the researchers include:

- Create integrity
- Consistent message
- Unbiased marketing commendations
- Better use of media
- Greater marketing precision
- Operational efficiencies
- Cost control
- High calibre consistent service
- Easier working relations
- Greater agency accountability

Belch stressed further that the greatest benefit derived from the integration of marketing communications is synergy. Synergy can be described as the addition of  $3+3 = 7$  phenomenon. By bringing together the various facets of marketing communications in a mutually supportive and enhancing way then the resulting whole is more than the simple sum of its parts. For example, Smith and Taylor (2002) illustrated this by adding that images and messages used in television advertising are carried through poster and magazine advertisements and are also presented at point-of-sale display on packaging, sales promotion and merchandizing and in other promotional activities. Each element enhances and supports the other in a consistent fashion. Integration is not just easy to achieve, however when it is achieved, the 4Es and 4Cs of IMC will definitely create the synergistic benefits of integration. Picton and Broderick (2005) listed these 4Es of IMC as:

**Enhancing:** Improve, augment, intensity.

**Economical:** Least cost in the use of financial and other resources not wasteful.

**Efficient:** Doing the right thing; competent not wasteful.

**Effective:** Doing the right thing; producing the outcome required and wasteful.

The joint authors also enumerated the 4Cs of integrated marketing communications which is also supported by CIM London in 2007-2008, lecture manual. These include:

**Coherence:** Logically connected firmly stuck together.

**Consistency:** Not self contradictory in agreement, harmony and accord.

**Continuity:** Connected and connected and consistent overtime.

**Complementary communication:** Producing a balanced, whole and supportive communication.

## CONCLUSION

It is worthy to note that many companies still rely on one or two marketing communication tools in their attempt at achieving their marketing communication objectives. This practice persists despite growing sophistication of consumers, dynamic nature of the market, growing competition in most industrial sectors and the need for efficient allocation of marketing communication budgets. Yet, the wide range of marketing communication tools, messages and audiences make it imperative for companies to move towards the IMC approach in an effort to ensure clarity of messages, consistency, credible and a competitive message cross to target audience.

One strategic benefit of IMC is that it helps produce stronger messages, consistent and consequently greater sales impact. IMC helps in improving the company's ability to reach the right customers with the right message at the right time in the right place and eliciting the right response. It has been stressed that the use of IMC reduces media waste (reduction in cost of promotion) and helps in promoting and improving the company's competitive edge.

### Policy implications:

- There is need for organizations to first conduct research in effectively identifying the need for marketing communications where and to what extent
- Companies need to properly integrate their marketing communications agencies, the company and with one another in order to ensure clarity of messages, consistency, credibility and a highly competitive message across to target audience. However if a firm cannot do this, then it is advisable such a firm should use one single agency for its marketing communication messages

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

Again, firms should also foster interdepartmental communications to ensure that each group is living up to expectations where necessary to identify unexpected problem or challenges:

- Proper training must be accorded to employees (staff) of both client companies and those from marketing communication agencies. This will yield better marketing communication results
- The monitoring mechanism must be adequate. There is need to monitor the results of marketing communications across all media
- There should be close relational integration between the agency and client and improved IMC should involve proactively seeking to be collaborative in communications jointly adopting and applying information technology, sharing research and developing trust and communications

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