

# THE PERCEPTION OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES (SMES) MARKETING MANAGERS ON IMC STRATEGY IN ZIMBABWE: A CASE OF MASVINGO URBAN

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## ABSTRACT

To date, there is little empirical research in Zimbabwe on Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) despite its appeal and accounts of its benefits. The author proposes that IMC is fundamentally a process in which marketing managers instil into Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) a sense of competitiveness in the organization. IMC has been recently postulated as a key determinant for a firm's competitiveness. Also, IMC has been found to encourage message integration and consistency, facilitating the interpretation of information for customers. The customer will not be confused by the vast amount of information from all contact points. Marketers can also combine all of their communications in order to plan and create a coherent and synergistic approach. One hundred marketing managers were interviewed at their offices in Masvingo urban and a series of regression analyses was done and standardised coefficients were used to establish their perception on IMC as a marketing strategy. Most of them expressed ignorance of the full knowledge of IMC and its employment as a marketing strategy. There is need for SMEs to embrace IMC as a new phenomenon that can catapult their businesses.

**Keywords:** perception, Small and Medium Enterprises, Integrated Marketing Communication strategy.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

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

Integrated marketing communication (IMC) emerged during the late twentieth century and its importance has been growing ever since (Grove, Carlson, and Dorsch, 2002; Cornelissen, 2001; Hartley and Pickton, 1999). Owing to the impact of information technology, changes came about in the domains of marketing and marketing communications which led to the Emergence of IMC (Kitchen et al., 2004a; Phelps and Johnson, 1996; Duncan and Everett, 1993). Businesses in the world are working towards embracing IMC and Zimbabwe is not an exception.

Integrated Marketing Communication is a step towards an integrated approach in achieving efficiency by synergy. By definition, It involves the merging of distinct communication functions in a way that allows an organization to speak with “one voice, one look” (Fitzer 2005). It is also considered as the planning and execution of all types of marketing communication needed for a product, brand, idea, company or place in order to satisfy a common set of objectives and support the positioning of promotion. The concept of integrated marketing communication has evolved over four fundamental stages, starting from tactical coordination of promotional elements, redefinition of the scope of marketing communication and application of information and communication technology to the financial and strategic integration (Panda 2009). The definitions suggest that any business including SMEs, may employ IMC.

## **BENEFITS:**

The multiplication of media, demassification of consumer markets, and the value of the Internet in today's society are just three of the areas in which technological innovation has impacted (Pilotta et al., 2004; Peltier, Schibrowsky, and Schultz, 2003; Reid, 2003; Lawrence, Garber, and Dotson, 2002; Fill, 2001; Low, 2000; Hutton, 1996). This in turn left marketers in a challenging and competitive environment, trying to fulfil customers' wants and needs while also developing long-term relationships with them. IMC can help in creating coordinated and consistent messages across various channels of communication. Furthermore, the concept is especially valuable in that it places great emphasis on the importance of all stakeholder groups and, in particular, on customer loyalty, which can only be created through strategic relationship building (Jin, 2003/2004; Cornelissen, 2000; Eagle and Kitchen, 2000; Pickton and Hartley, 1998; Miller and Rose, 1994). This obviously does not exclude SMEs for they are businesses.

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

IMC's cost-effectiveness and its apparent ability to deliver higher return on investment (ROI) have been underlined repeatedly in the literature (Holm, 2006; Reid, 2005; Duncan and Mulhern, 2004; McGoon, 1998/1999). However, researchers have failed to explain how and why these financial benefits might be achieved with reference to SMEs. Reid, 2005; Phelps and Johnson, (1996) concur that there has been little research directly focused on IMC benefits.

Most IMC research has concentrated on the opinions of advertising executives or clients. Although research into IMC has discovered various benefits, their basis in reality may be questioned. These benefits were either derived from quantitative studies (Eagle, Kitchen, and Bulmer, 2006; Kim, Han, and Schultz, 2004; Kallmeyer and Abratt, 2001) which left little room for an actual investigation of why these benefits have occurred, or they were the direct result of researchers with credulousness when faced with marketers' positive perceptions of IMC, the same authorities argue.

## WHY IMC IN ZIMBABWEAN SMES:

To date, academic research on IMC has been limited. The majority of empirical research has been conducted with advertising and public relations agencies or companies located in the United States with a clear tendency toward quantitative methodologies (Jin, 2003/2004; Peltier, Schibrowsky, and Schultz, 2003; Kitchen and Schultz, 1999; Beard, 1996; Miller and Rose, 1994). Very few studies have concentrated on the business “client” perspectives within Europe (Cornelissen and Thorpe, 2001; Low, 2000; Kitchen and Schultz, 1999). Little research on IMC among SMEs in Zimbabwe has been carried out yet there is a proliferation of SMEs which may stand to benefit from such research.

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

Communication between customer and manufacturer used to be linear or one-way, that is, from the marketer to the consumer (Schultz, 1993c). On the other hand, the customer of today has knowledge about the marketplace and has no need to wait for messages and information from the organization. The customer of today makes informed decisions and will make demands and influence advertisements or any other information received. Marketers must respond to these changes. The marketer needs to develop communication plans with the consumer as the starting point, later working back toward the product or service in order to design effective communication strategies (Shultz 1993).

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

## METHODOLOGY:

The target population of the research was all marketing managers in Masvingo urban. Due to the geographical spacing of SMEs in Zimbabwe and the large numbers of such businesses, it was not possible to interview all marketing managers in Zimbabwe. A sample was collected from Masvingo town. Stratified sampling was then applied taking period in management as a stratum. A series of linear regression were then performed.

## DISCUSSION:

### YEARS AS MARKETING MANAGER AND THE KNOWLEDGE ON INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS:

The researcher sought to establish the relationship between number of years as a marketing manager and the knowledge gained about IMC. Below is a table to explain the relationship.

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.611	.369		4.365	.000
	Years as manager	.396	.084	.432	4.738	.000
a. Dependent Variable: IMC knowledge						

According to the table above, a one unit increase in the period of being a marketing manager increases the IMC knowledge by 0.432 units. Also, the influence of years as marketing manager is significant as measured by the

t-ratio of its coefficient, 4.738, which is more than 1.96. The hypothesis that the more a person works as a marketing manager at an SME, the more knowledge one gains about IMC, is accepted.

#### KNOWLEDGE OF IMC AND THE EMPLOYMENT OF IMC BY SMES MARKETING MANAGERS:

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.301	.283		8.138	.000
	Knowledge	.235	.082	.278	2.870	.005
a. Dependent Variable: SMEs employment						

Accordingly, one unit increase in IMC knowledge increases the IMC employment by 0.278 units. Moreover, the influence of IMC knowledge is significant as measured by the t-ratio of its coefficient, 2.870 which is more than 1.96. The hypothesis is therefore accepted because as knowledge in and exposure to IMC increases, marketing managers stand to employ it.

#### PERIOD SERVING AS A MARKETING MANAGER AND EMPLOYMENT OF ONE PROMOTION ELEMENT:

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.115	.302		10.309	.000
	Years as manager	-.031	.068	-.046	-.460	.646
a. Dependent Variable: One element only						

The table above explains the fact that a one unit increase in the number of years as a marketing manager decreases the use of one promotional element by 0.046 units. Again the influence of period as marketing manager is not significant as measured by the t-ratio of its coefficient -0.460 which is not close to 1.96. The hypothesis is therefore rejected because not all marketing managers in SMEs employ one promotional element.

#### MARKETING MANAGERS AND THEIR PERCEPTION IN EMBRACING THE IMC STRATEGY:

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.056	.277		7.424	.000
	Managers	.199	.063	.305	3.172	.002
a. Dependent Variable: Perception to embrace IMC						

The regressed information in the table above shows that one unit increase in marketing managers increases the perception to embrace IMC by 0.305 units. Also, the influence of marketing managers is very significant as measured by the t-ratio of its coefficient 3.172 which is far above 1.96. It becomes apparent that marketing managers are prepared to embrace and try IMC strategy in order to leverage their performance. Therefore SMEs should take advantage of such marketing managers.

# PERCEPTION OF MARKETING MANAGERS OF IMC ON BIG FIRMS ONLY:

Model		Coefficients <sup>a</sup>			t	Sig.
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.304	.324		10.197	.000
	Managers	-.034	.073	-.046	-.457	.649
a. Dependent Variable: Big firms to employ only						

The table clearly spells out that one increase in marketing managers decreases the idea that IMC should be employed in big firms only by 0.046. The increase in the number of marketing managers is not significant as measured by the t-ratio of its coefficient -0.457 which is not close to 1.96. The hypothesis is rejected because many marketing managers do not support that IMC is for big firms only.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

Although marketing managers have an idea of IMC, its employment is still limited in Zimbabwean SMEs. They should embrace this phenomenon and try it. The traditional ways of communicating with prospects and customers have to be improved in this era of the demassification of markets. In addition, workshops should be mounted by senior management to make every one aware of IMC as a new trend in marketing communication. However, more researches may be carried out to bring more light to IMC strategy and SMEs at national level in Zimbabwe.

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