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Role of Integrated Marketing Communication in Modern Indian Business

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Abstract: *The present paper torches upon the emergence of integrated marketing communications (IMC) that has significantly influenced thinking and acting among all types of companies and organizations facing the realities of competition in the present open economy. It has been proved as an efficient promotional tool to communicate more universally, clear, and effectively. The paper put lights on various facets of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) especially in Indian Business Scenario. The challenges and scopes of IMC with the context of strategies, implementation, and audit have also been discussed.*

Keywords: *Integrated Marketing, Social networking, Indian Business.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's ever changing "Nanosecond Culture" of social networks, empowered customers and hyper competition, we need to be prepared to immediately implement holistic thinking for our marketing and communications strategy. With an increase in global competition, technological advances, and fast informed customers, it is important for businesses to make a powerful impact on target audiences and markets. Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is one of the most important communications trends adopted all over. It is one such step toward an integrated approach to achieving efficiency by synergy. The emergence of this concept has become one of the most significant examples of development in the marketing discipline. It has influenced thinking and acting among companies but also authorities, state owned companies and political parties, all facing the realities of competition in an open economy.

The concept of IMC

As a concept IMC has become well known on an international scale during the 1990s. Thus IMC is a term whose widespread use is comparatively recent, a fact, which might explain why there not yet is a common understanding of its real meaning and the lack of a generally accepted definition. Some 20 years ago academics and professionals discussed theory and practice of business communication without considering the idea of integration as a realistic approach to reach a competitive strategic position for the company. Some early attempts in the beginning of the 1980s initiated academic interest and articles appeared in the academic literature (Dyer, 1982; Coulson-Thomas, 1983). From the beginning of the 1990s IMC became a real hot topic in the field of marketing (Caywood *et al.*, 1991; Miller and Rose, 1994; Kitchen and Schultz, 1999). Few years back, major portion of marketing budgets went to advertising, but now the scene has changed, it is allocated into various activities such as trade promotions, consumer promotions, branding, PR and advertising. The allocation of communication budgets away from mass media and traditional advertising has obviously promoted IMC in recognition and importance for effective marketing. The emergence of IT has fundamentally affected the media practices, contributed to an extensive deregulation of markets and individualized patterns of consumption and increased the segmentation of consumer tastes/preferences. The key has been 'value' and several combinations of methods are used, all aiming to raise benefits and reduce costs.

Smith *et al.* (1999) have defined IMC as “the strategic analysis, choice, implementation and control of all elements of marketing communications which efficiently (best use of resources), economically (minimum costs) and effectively (maximum results) influence transactions between an organization and its existing and potential customers and clients”. The American Association of Advertising Agencies defines IMC as “a concept that recognizes the added value of a comprehensive plan that evaluates the strategic roles of a variety of communication disciplines, and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency and maximum communication impact”.

Integrated marketing communication is integration of all marketing tools, approaches, and resources within a company which maximizes impact on consumer mind and which results into maximum profit at minimum cost. Generally marketing starts from “Marketing Mix” and also includes internet marketing, sponsorship marketing, direct marketing, database marketing and public relations. And integration of all these promotional tools along with other components of marketing mix to gain edge over competitor by knowing the right touch-points using to reach highest level of consumer satisfaction is referred as Integrated Marketing Communication. Using outside-in thinking, it is a data-driven approach that focuses on identifying consumer insights and developing a strategy with the right (online and offline combination) channels to forge a stronger brand-consumer relationship. The objectives of any marketing communication process are to create brand awareness, deliver information, educate the market, and advance a positive image of the product brand. In simpler terms, “IMC refers to speaking with one voice, eliciting a response”. Therefore, “IMC is a return to building brand loyalty by building brands that deserve loyalty”.

II. INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION IN INDIAN BUSINESS CONTEXT

India is one of the most favorite markets on the globe. The growing purchasing power of India’s huge middle class makes it attractive. However, the customer base in India is extremely fragmented. The huge geographic expanse of the country has resulted in an inconsistent distribution system that is radically different from other countries. Also the cultural diversity of consumer, differences in their tastes, habits, and requirements that make it more complex task to market their goods in a streamlined and consistent manner. The concept of IMC with focused and massive marketing is fairly new to the Indian companies who have traditionally experienced a mixed economy and trade restrictions back home. In a protected economy, the companies had faced restricted competition and consequently did not realize the importance of targeted and more focused marketing. In the absence of well-developed departments for individual elements of marketing communications, a quasi-integrated approach was in practice among various departments in Indian companies.

The idea of IMC still manifests itself in a variety of local and situational ways for marketers. It is necessary to examine the cultural and social factors with demographic influences, keeping in perspective a pertinent analogy of ‘GO GLOBAL’ with the concept of IMC.

IMC is a major strategic concept that is as evolutionary and discursive in Indian context. A strong need is compulsory here to explore the concept and phenomena of IMC directly in the real world of communication. With the change in communication practices and technologies, integration in marketing techniques is inevitable for Indian companies to survive in this multi-national and multi-cultural world emerging globally. Flow of communication is easy and open and our ability to adapt to these changes has made it a very enthralling and promising place for the global market.

The purpose of integrated marketing communications strategy is to work toward the common goal of customer focused marketing. The Indian marketplace consists of an increasingly complex arena of competitors within a rapidly changing environment. Businesses are now getting Internet-based operations, portraying a charming picture of sophisticated and cluttered market. It is attempting to speak with clear voices about the natures of their operations and the benefits associated with the brands and products. Numbers and variety of media is bombarding potential customers with messages, it is vital to have clear and consistent communication in the clutter. Response to this apparently amorphous marketing environment has led many Indian organizations to desirable integration of their communications efforts under the umbrella of this strategic marketing

communications function. Effective marketing departments and advertising agencies are developing pipelines of new, talented innovations, media buyers, promotions managers, database web masters, and others in order to succeed in the long term. Employee performance attitudes reflect morale within the marketing department and also relations with other departments and groups. The effect of IMC plans are building bridges with other internal departments and making everyone aware of the thrust and theme of the program.

III. MAJOR REASON FOR THE GROWING IMPORTANCE OF IMC IN INDIA

Several reasons have caused IMC to develop into a primary strategy for marketers in India; few of them are given below-

1. Market is now having a rural-urban mix shape
2. Occupational diversity (Agriculture to other skills)
3. Awareness is spreading fast
4. Indian consumer is being more smart
5. Heterogeneous Demographic Traits
6. Diversity in economic conditions
7. Media advertising is shifting to multiple forms of communication focusing at target centered niche media. Market is shaping from a manufacturer-dominated market to a retailer-dominated, consumer- controlled market.
8. Technology is getting updated rapidly
9. Huge opportunities are available to develop with market
10. Manpower is getting performance-based compensation from traditional compensation, sales and profit margins are increasing.

IV. KEY CHALLENGES OF IMC IN INDIA

However, significant challenges to achieve optimal IMC performance are still in existence and acting as key barriers in way of effective IMC function in the country. Following are the few of them-

- Lack of strategic consistency
- Lack of needed skill sets among marketing staff
- Scarcity of creativity and innovation
- Insufficient marketing budget
- Lack of a standard measurement process
- Lack of technology advancement support.
- Ambiguity on the issue
- Complex cultural and social values

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The emergence of integrated marketing communications (IMC) has become a significant example of development in Indian marketing discipline. It has influenced thinking and acting among all types of companies and organizations facing the realities of competition in the present open economy. It is the judicious and efficient use of the product promotional tools so that a universal, clear, and effective promotional message is communicated amongst the target audience. Integrated Marketing

Communication (IMC) is more than the coordination of a company's outgoing message between different media and the consistency of the message throughout. This also facilitates in ascertaining the effectiveness of the overall marketing effort to evaluation of brand messages. It is an aggressive marketing plan that captures and uses an extensive amount of customer information in setting and tracking marketing strategy. As the IMC strategies should be based on situation analysis and SWOT analysis, a periodical implementation would be significant. The need of the audit of the IMC process should be well understood and measurement and evaluation of the effectiveness should be taken care of. The primary goal of affecting the perception of value and behavior through IMC has to be checked up carefully. Indian consumption pattern are changing rapidly, technical advancements are fast, development and diffusion of IMC program should closely be associated with these changes. Objectives and strategies must be elastic enough to mould accordingly. In order to reach a better result, the marketer needs to develop marketing integration as occurring different levels and degree of various functions. The most important and fundamental level should be of vertical integration of objectives and activities. Within their own organizations, marketers should recognize the importance of creating important position with clear responsibility at different level on performance and productivity basis.

At last but not the least the key is 'Value' and all efforts must be in level-headed way to deliver in order to reduce the cost and increase the benefits. Integrated Marketing Communication can perform and lead to way to reap the benefits if exercise as a unit in order to attain the common objective of delivering the value to customer.

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