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How Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) works? A theoretical review and an analysis of its main drivers and effects

¿Cómo funciona la Comunicación Integrada de Marketing (CIM)? Una revisión teórica y un análisis de sus antecedentes y efectos

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ABSTRACT: Since the mid-1990's, the concept of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) has come to the fore and attracted considerable attention in the literature. The main purpose of this paper is twofold: (1) to explore IMC by delimitating its conceptual boundaries and identifying its main dimensions and (2) to develop a whole theoretical model of its antecedents and consequences. To achieve this goal, this study analyzes the conceptual framework around IMC and its dimensions and it presents an extensive literature review. Moreover, a new definition is presented and the main dimensions of the concept are highlighted. A systematic literature review is carried out to identify IMC antecedents and consequences and the research hypotheses are formulated. Following the obtained results, a conceptual

RESUMEN: A partir de la mitad de los años noventa, el concepto de Comunicación Integrada de Marketing (CIM) comenzó a ocupar un lugar destacado y ha atraído una atención considerable por parte de la literatura. El objetivo de este trabajo es doble: (1) la delimitación conceptual de la CIM y la identificación de sus principales dimensiones, (2) el desarrollo de un modelo teórico global de antecedentes y efectos. Para la consecución de estos objetivos, el trabajo analiza, en primer lugar, el marco conceptual para aclarar el concepto. En segundo lugar, se propone una nueva definición de CIM y se destacan sus dimensiones más relevantes. En tercer lugar, se lleva a cabo una revisión de la literatura que permitió identificar una serie de antecedentes y consecuencias, formular una serie de hipótesis de investigación, para terminar

model has been developed and the most relevant findings are discussed. Finally, the main academic and managerial implications are described. This model will help academics and marketers to better understand the role that this new marketing paradigm plays within modern management, in identifying the key variables that promote or hinder IMC and the benefits derived from its implementation.

Keywords: Integrated Marketing Communication, Drivers, Effects, Modeling.

proponiendo un modelo teórico de funcionamiento de la CIM. Finalmente, se analizan los resultados del estudio y las principales implicaciones académicas y de gestión. El modelo propuesto puede ayudar a académicos y profesionales del marketing a comprender el papel que este paradigma juega en el management moderno y a identificar las variables clave que promueven u obstaculizan la CIM y los beneficios que pueden derivar de su implementación.

Palabras clave: Comunicación Integrada de Marketing, antecedentes, consecuentes, modelo teórico.

1. Introduction

Marketing and corporate communications are the main persuasive element the organization can use to connect with its markets by communicating ideas and seeking to impart particular perceptions of brands, products and services to customers, consumers and stakeholders. Nevertheless, the increasingly wider variety of communication and promotional tools together with the modern-day array of on- and off-line channels and media forms can widely disseminate messages.

Traditionally the literature distinguishes between two types of communication tools: *above* and *below-the-line*, the former related to mass or conventional media, while the latter involves communication tools in non-conventional media¹. Nowadays the 'line' mentioned above is fairly irrelevant. Yet these tools have been developed separately and in practice could lead to uncoordinated implementation, this may not directly lead to contradictory communications. Nevertheless a lack of strategic appreciation of communication is evident and this may be a key barrier in achieving desired synergies to leverage stakeholder relationships in terms of brand equity and financial performance.

¹ Cfr. BIGNÉ, Enrique, *Promoción Comercial. Un enfoque integrado*, ESIC Editorial, Madrid, 2003, pp. 34-35.

In this complex and dynamic context, the concept of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) has emerged and since the mid-1990's it has come to the fore and attracted considerable attention in the literature. To explain the need of analyzing and exploring this concept, we should commence by examining the development of the 'marketing' concept through its evolution from transactional and functional approaches to the current focus on relationship marketing.

In 1964 McCarthy's "4Ps model" simplified Borden's marketing mix by reducing the initial twelve elements to only four variables that represented the instructional guidelines for most marketing courses². Marketing has evolved from a logic focused on transactions and products to being focused upon the development of long-term relationships and the underlying improvement of resources and competencies in order to create and sustain customer value³.

Similarly, communication has been traditionally approached and managed from the functional perspective with the clear aim of persuasion. Persuasion tends to be one-way and is identified with the transactional marketing approach- to inform, persuade and remind. Yet, a relational approach to communication is a wider concept that goes beyond persuasion and aims to build dialogue with stakeholders in the attempt to achieve three main objectives: to inform, listen and respond. This dialogue, if pursued, will lead to increased organizational brand value.

Duncan and Moriarty observed that many marketing roles, especially in the service sector, essentially consist of positions in which communication represents the central element of marketing activities⁴. According to their perspective, communication is not only generated by marketing activities, but is a key element located at the very core of all company functions (under the slogan "you cannot not communicate"⁵).

Schultz and Schultz consider that the planning, development and implementation of marketing programs should be approached in a different and new

² Cfr. BORDEN, Neil H., "The Concept of the Marketing Mix", *Journal of Advertising Research*, vol. 4, June, 1964, pp. 2-7; MCCARTHY, Jerome, *Basic Marketing*, Richard E. Irvin, Homewood, IL, 1964.

³ Cfr. GRÖNROOS, Christian, "The relationship marketing process: communication, interaction, dialogue, value", *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing*, vol. 19, n° 2, 2004, pp. 99-113.

⁴ Cfr. DUNCAN, Thomas, MORIARTY, Sandra E., "A Communication-Based Marketing Model for Managing Relationships", *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 62, n° 2, April 1998, pp. 1-13.

⁵ Cfr. DUNCAN, Thomas, MORIARTY, Sandra E., "A Communication-Based Marketing Model...", *op. cit.*, p. 2.; WATZLAWICK, Paul, BEAVIN-BAVELAS and Janet H., JACKSON, Don D., *Pragmatics of Human Communication*, W.W. Norton, New York, 1967, p. 51.

way⁶. According to these authors, such an approach concerns the integration of a wide range of activities and functions that influence and impact upon dynamic information flows between an organization and its stakeholders. Nowadays, most marketing professionals are changing their approaches due to dramatic alterations that are currently affecting markets, consumers/clients, technologies, media and the ability to collect, manipulate and store data. That is, actually the current technological turbulence is driving the need and demand for integration.

Furthermore, Don Schultz, in his work titled “*The Inevitability of Integrated Communications*”, considered that “*the question of integration or not is moot*”⁷ because in reality consumers integrate all messages received from an organization. Thus, even if the organization has transmitted uncoordinated messages to the same consumer, that consumer will aggregate and integrate those messages according to some pattern. Unfortunately, in some cases, the criteria chosen by the consumer to make such integration can harm the organization and associated brand value. Hence the company must be able to manage the process according to its own interests and strategic purposes.

In this saturated market environment, characterized by an increasingly high competition, a new synergistic approach is needed and IMC represents an alternative approach that can replace traditional marketing approaches focused on transactions as it is based on a consumer-oriented perspective and it is focused on a relationship marketing approach based on communication⁸.

MC was created and adopted by academics as a response to professional developments in marketing and advertising. As Clarke Caywood affirmed, “IMC emerged out of an academic department that, for several decades, had been recognized as the number one advertising program [...]”⁹. In the last few years, authors have developed the theory of IMC in order to direct, describe and explain the new practices¹⁰.

⁶ Cfr. SCHULTZ, Don E., SCHULTZ, Heidi F., “Transitioning marketing communication into the twenty-first century”, *Journal of Marketing Communications*, vol. 4, n° 1998, pp. 9-26.

⁷ SCHULTZ, Don E., “The Inevitability of Integrated Communications”, *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 37, n° 3, 1996, p. 139.

⁸ Cfr. STEPHENS, Debra Lynn, HILL, Ronald Paul and BERGMAN, Karyn, “Enhancing the Consumer-Product Relationship: Lessons from the QVC Home Shopping Channel”, *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 37, n° 3, 1996, pp. 196-200.

⁹ CAYWOOD, Clarke, *The Handbook of Strategic Public Relations and Integrated Marketing Communications*, McGraw-Hill, Chicago, IL, 2012.

¹⁰ Cfr. SCHULTZ, Don E., KITCHEN, Philip J., *Communicating Globally. An Integrated Marketing Approach*, NTC Business Books, Lincolnwood, IL, 2000, pp. 35-67; NOWAK, Glen,

Academics and practitioners have debated for over two decades about this concept without reaching agreement about what it is and what benefits it offers to marketers, thus the IMC paradigm is still unclear in terms of definition and limits of application, since it is relatively new. Kliatchko¹¹ affirmed that “*research work on definitional issues on IMC is still called for at this time*” and that “*working towards a consensus on the fundamental tenets of IMC is a step towards consolidating a common framework in the understanding and practice of the concept*”. This need is highlighted by Schultz, Patti and Kitchen¹², who called for an accepted definition and for further research on specific areas: measurement and the relationship between brand and IMC.

Thus, the purpose of this paper is twofold: (1) to explore IMC by delimitating its conceptual boundaries and identifying its main dimensions and (2) to develop a whole theoretical model of its antecedents and consequences. These goals are interrelated, since it is not possible to model IMC process without a preliminary examination and definition of IMC. To achieve its objectives, firstly this study analyzes the conceptual framework around IMC by presenting an extensive literature review. Moreover, the authors identify the main dimensions of the concept and a new definition is presented. Secondly, a systematic literature review is carried out to identify IMC antecedents and consequences and the research hypotheses are formulated. Finally, the main managerial and academic implications are discussed.

This model is the first attempt to model IMC process from a holistic perspective by carrying out a theoretical clarification of IMC, which is paramount to understand how IMC can be implemented. Actually, the literature calls for further contributions to enhance and reinforce its theoretical basis. The proposed model may help academics and marketers to understand the role this new marketing paradigm plays within modern management, in identifying the key variables that promote or hinder IMC and the benefits derived from its implementation.

PHELPS, Joseph E., “The Integrated Marketing Communications Phenomenon: An examination of its impact on Advertising practices and its Implications for Advertising Research”, *Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising*, vol. 16, n° 1, 1994, pp. 49-66; KITCHEN, Philip J. (ed.), *Integrated Brand Marketing and Measuring Returns*, Palgrave-Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2010, pp. 1-144.

¹¹ KLIATCHKO, Jerry, “Revisiting the IMC construct: A revised definition and four pillars”, *International Journal of Advertising*, vol. 27, n° 1, 2008, pp. 113-160.

¹² Cfr. SCHULTZ, Don E., PATTI, Charles and KITCHEN, Philip J. (eds.), *The Evolution of Integrated Marketing Communications: The Customer driven Marketplace*, Routledge, London, 2011.

2. Conceptual framework

In 1993, Schultz, Tannenbaum and Lauterborn introduced the concept of IMC and suggested that it is time to abandon the McCarthy's 4Ps and to replace them with the 4Cs model: consumer, cost, convenience, communication. This model adopts a consumer-oriented perspective, since it suggests:

Forget product. Study consumer's wants and needs. You can no longer sell whatever you can make. You can only sell what someone specifically wants to buy [...]. **Forget price.** Understand the consumer's cost to satisfy that want or need [...], dollars are only one part of cost [...]. **Forget place.** Think convenience to buy. People don't have to go anyplace any more, in this era of catalogs, credit cards [...]. Finally **forget promotion.** The word in the 90s is communication. The motto of the age of the manufacturer- 'caveat emptor', let the buyer beware- is replaced by 'cave emptorum', beware of the buyer¹³.

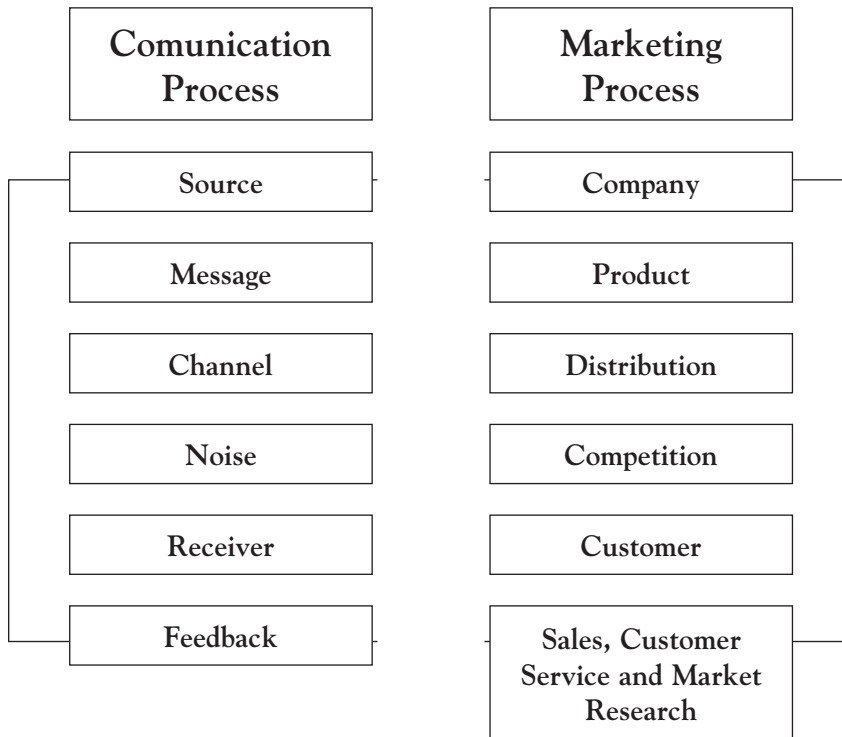
Following this perspective, Duncan and Moriarty proposed a 'Communication-Based Relationship Marketing' model in which communication, rather than persuasion, is the foundation of the customer-focused marketing efforts. The authors analyzed the evolution of communication and marketing theories by tracing their parallel shifts and showing the intersections between communication and marketing (see Figure 1). Although communication always has been a critical element in marketing, the authors show how the increasingly high level of interactivity makes communication an even more valuable element of marketing¹⁴.

The new marketing generation is better explained and understood by considering communication as a crucial element in building relationships with customers and stakeholders. Thus, we consider that it is impossible to create and foster relationships without considering communication as a strategic element.

¹³ SCHULTZ, Don E., TANNENBAUM, Stanley I. and LAUTERBORN, Robert F., "The new Marketing Paradigm", *Integrated Marketing Communication*, NTC Business Books, Chicago, IL, 1993, pp. 12-13.

¹⁴ Cfr. DUNCAN, Thomas, MORIARTY, Sandra, "A Communication-Based Marketing...", *op. cit.*, pp. 1-13.

Figure 1. Parallel Communication and Marketing Processes¹⁵



Over these years, IMC has been defined from different perspectives, as a “management philosophy”¹⁶, as an “educational movement”¹⁷ or even as a unifying management practice¹⁸. Evidently further discussion is needed of the most relevant definitions of IMC with the aim of conceptual clarification. In the attempt to better clarify the conceptual background, we propose a new classification of the definitions of IMC developed and proposed by different

¹⁵ Cfr. DUNCAN, Thomas, MORIARTY, Sandra, *op cit.*, p. 3.

¹⁶ STEWART, David W., “The Market-Back Approach to the Design of Integrated Marketing Communications Programs: A Change in Paradigm and a Focus on Determinants of Success”, *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 37, 1996, pp. 159-172.

¹⁷ HUTTON, James G., “Integrated Marketing Communications and Evolution of Marketing Thought”, *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 37, n° 3, 1996, pp. 139-146.

¹⁸ Cfr. MORIARTY, Sandra E., “The circle of synergy: theoretical perspectives and an evolving IMC research agenda”, in THORSON, E., MOORE, J. (eds.), *Integrated Communication: Synergy of Persuasive Voices*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, NJ, 1993, pp. 333-354.

authors during the last two decades. More specifically, definitions have been classified in the following three categories:

- 1) The Inside-out approach.
- 2) The Outside-in approach.
- 3) The Cross-functional strategic approach.

2.1. *The inside-out approach*

The first category of IMC conceptualization shows a poor customer-orientation, in which IMC represents a relatively easy task consisting of joining and integrating the elements of marketing communication to make them speak with “one voice”¹⁹. One of the first definitions of IMC, proposed by *Northwestern University*, is representative of this approach; it is one of the most cited in the literature and was received by the *American Association of Advertising Agencies* in 1989:

A concept of marketing communications planning that recognizes the added value of a comprehensive plan that evaluated the strategic role of a variety of communications disciplines, e.g. general advertising, direct response, sales promotion and public relations- and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency and maximum communications impact²⁰.

The weakness of this definition lies in considering IMC as a mere tool for making communication elements speak with “one voice”, but it lacks a strategic view of the overall company. Similarly, Duncan and Everett proposed a definition of IMC as the “strategic coordination of all messages and media used by an organization to influence its perceived brand value”²¹. This does include the adjective “strategic”, but does not represent a different perspective, as communication has to change tactical tool to strategic weapon of a company.

Kotler also proposed a definition that follows the inside-out approach, defining IMC as: “the concept under which a company carefully integrates and coordinates its many communications channels to deliver a clear, consistent,

¹⁹ NOWAK, Glen, F., PHELPS, Joseph E., *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51.

²⁰ CAYWOOD, Clarke, SCHULTZ, Don E. and WANG, Paul, *Integrated Marketing Communications: a survey of National Goods Advertisers*, unpublished report, Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University, 1991.

²¹ DUNCAN, Thomas, EVERETT, Stephen E., “Client Perceptions of Integrated Marketing Communications”, *Journal of Advertising Research*, vol. 32, n° 3, 1993, p. 33-39.

and compelling message about the organization and its products”²². Likewise, Percy, Rossiter and Elliot argued that IMC is “the planning and execution of all types of marketing communication needed for a brand, service, or company to satisfy a common set of communication objectives”²³.

In the Spanish context, Bigné defined IMC as “integrated promotion”²⁴ emphasizing that it was a tactical tool that coordinates the promotional variables. Most recently, Rodríguez conceptualized IMC as:

an approach that involves a new way of conceiving and carrying out communication with the market, which requires effective coordination of the different marketing communication tools [...] with the rest of activities in the company that also influence the image that customers perceive about the organizational product or brand²⁵.

This author highlights the distinction among elements of the communication mix (typical of the traditional approach), although she recognizes the importance of coordinating the different promotional tools with the aim of maximizing the marketing communication effect.

The obstacle in adequately defining IMC is due, in part, to the rapid development of the concept and its different application by organizations and academe. At the beginning, definitions were focused on operational and issue communication tactics and gradually authors realized the need of a more exhaustive and holistic approach to augment customer relationships.

2.2. *The outside-in approach*

The second category includes definitions that illustrate an active attempt to understand what customer and clients want to see or listen to, when and where, and through what means.

This category represents an *outside-in* marketing approach and constitutes an important improvement from the first approach. According to Kitchen

²² KOTLER, Philip, *Marketing Management*, Prentice-Hall, London, 2000, p. 542.

²³ PERCY, Larry, ROSSITER, John and ELLIOT, Richard, *Strategic Advertising Management*, 2001, p. 270.

²⁴ BIGNÉ, Enrique, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

²⁵ RODRÍGUEZ, Inmaculada, “La Comunicación de Marketing Integrada”, in RODRÍGUEZ, Inmaculada (ed.), *Estrategias y técnicas de comunicación. Una visión integrada en el Marketing*, UOC, Barcelona, 2006, pp. 28-29.

and Schultz, only 25% of organizations sampled focus communication activities based on a deep understanding of the dynamics of their served markets²⁶. Schultz recognized the necessity of overcoming the *inside-out* phase, affirming that:

Integrated Marketing Communications is the process of developing and implementing various forms of persuasive communication programs with customers and prospects over time. The goal of IMC is to influence or directly affect the behavior of the selected communications audience. 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 developed²⁷.

In this sense, Schultz and Schultz propose a definition to capture the current and future scope of IMC as “a strategic business process used to plan, develop, execute and evaluate coordinated, measurable, persuasive brand communication programmes over time with consumers, customers, prospects and other targeted, relevant external and internal audiences”²⁸. The most important characteristic of this definition is that appears (maybe for the first time) an approach to IMC as a “business process”, encouraging the creation of chain-systems through which all activities can be planned, implemented and evaluated.

Pickton and Broderick proposed that IMC is:

a process which involves the management and organization of all ‘agents’ in the analysis, planning, implementation and control of all marketing communications contacts, media, messages and promotional tools focused at selected target audiences in such way as to derive the greatest economy, efficiency, effectiveness, enhancement and coherence of marketing communications effort in achieving predetermined product and corporate marketing communications objectives²⁹.

²⁶ Cfr. SCHULTZ, Don. E., KITCHEN, P. J., *Communicating globally...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-67.

²⁷ SCHULTZ, Don E., “Integrated Marketing Communications. Maybe definition is in the point of view”, *Marketing News*, January 18, vol. 27, n° 2, 1993, p. 17.

²⁸ SCHULTZ, Don E., SCHULTZ, Heidi, “Transitioning Marketing...”, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

²⁹ PICKTON, David, BRODERICK, Amanda, *Integrated Marketing Communications*, Prentice-Hall, Hemel Hempstead, 2001, pp. 17-18.

From this definition the main characteristics of an integrated communication strategy may be deduced, such as identifying marketing communication and other organizational objectives; planning all tools in a coherent and synergic way; effectively managing and integrating all promotional activities; managing all communication tools and considering all media to send brand messages.

Fill reaffirmed the idea of a coherent communication and strategic development when he considered IMC as “a management process that strengthen brand proposals”³⁰. According to this author, IMC is not only related to communication, but also to business and brand management.

2.3. *The cross-functional strategic approach*

This perspective goes beyond the juxtaposition of promotional elements and the implementation of market research. It is based on significant resources invested in the creation of segmented databases and the restructuring of the organization in order to attempt a deep customer orientation. In this context, IMC represents a real change and an important investment. Only if those communication resources are invested, measured and related to actual customer behavior will be possible to estimate the benefits achieved in financial terms.

Duncan developed a model which differs from other customer-based IMC process models and whose foundation is communication. This author offers a new definition of IMC as “the process for managing the customer relationships that drive brand value [...] a cross-functional process for creating and nourishing profitable relationships with customers and stakeholders by strategically controlling or influencing all messages sent to these groups and encouraging data-driven, purposeful dialogue with them”³¹.

This is not a linear process, but a circular one that represents the core of all relationships and creates brand value in terms of sales and profitability to attract, retain and increase the number of clients. The concept “cross-functional process” implies that all departments and external agencies must work together in the planning and management of all phases of brand relationships. It is important to highlight the idea of “profitability” in the

³⁰ FILL, *Marketing Communications: Contexts, Strategies and Applications*, Prentice Hall, London, 2002, p. 15.

³¹ DUNCAN, Thomas, *IMC. Using Advertising and Promotion to Build Brands (International Edition)*, Mc. Graw Hill, New York, 2002, p. 8.

customer relationships, since not all relationships have the same value for the company.

Duncan and Mulhern suggest that IMC should be more strategic than executive and it must go beyond the promotional selling and advertising messages. It has to include two-way communication and should be managed according to results. All this information lead to a redefinition of IMC as “an on-going, interactive, cross-functional process of brand communication planning, execution, and evaluation that integrates all parties in the exchange process in order to maximize mutual satisfaction of each other’s wants and needs”³², that reflects a changed view, in which the marketing communication management represents a series of processes that cross traditional departmental boundaries.

In spite of the considerable attention that IMC has attracted in the literature during the last decade, the debate about IMC as a set of rigid specifications and rules is still alive. However, some authors suggest that IMC should be considered as a philosophy whose implementation is situationally specific. Thus, managers have the flexibility needed to implement IMC relative to market changes. Gould considered IMC as a controversial theoretical concept in terms of generalization of what it was and what it does. However, if IMC is analyzed from the theory of “post-structuralism”, then IMC could be seen as “a set of contingently framed practices and discourses where localized, particular practitioner interpretations are just as important as general theoretic ones”³³.

More recently, Christensen, Firat and Torp only talk about Integrated Communication (IC). According to them IC can be defined as “the notion and the practice of aligning symbols, messages, procedures and behaviors in order for an organization to communicate with clarity, consistency and continuity within and across formal organizational boundaries”³⁴. If companies do not align their symbols and messages, they reduce their potential impact and sub-optimize their communication budgets³⁵. IC, as defined by these

³² DUNCAN, Thomas, MULHERN, Francis, *A White Paper on the status, scope and future of IMC*, McGraw Hill, New York, 2004, p. 9.

³³ GOULD, Stephen J., “IMC as Theory and as a Poststructural Set of Practices and Discourses: A Continuously Evolving Paradigm Shift”, *Journal of Advertising Research*, vol. 44, March, 2004, pp. 66-67.

³⁴ CHRISTENSEN, Lars Thøger, FIRAT, A. Fuat, TORP, Simon, “The organisation of Integrated Communications: toward flexible integration”, *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 42, n° 3-4, 2008, p. 424.

³⁵ Cfr. SMITH, Paul, “Benefits and Barriers to Integrated Marketing Communications”, *Admap*, February, 1996, pp. 19-22.

authors, is claimed to be a wider concept since IMC tends to assume that the integration should take place within the area of marketing.

While the first conceptualizations were focused on the coordination of a limited set of communication parameters in order to obtain coherent and clear messages, IC imply a whole and global involvement of the organization through the participation of stakeholders. Considering that current companies communicate with all they do (or do not), IC has been developed from being a specialized activity to being an issue that concerns the whole company.

The lack of a universally accepted definition is a major barrier to develop significant tools to measure outcomes³⁶. This cannot be measured without specifying what it truly represents within a company and what dimensions form it. Its main supporters perceive IMC as a phenomenon that has the potential to lead to global restructuring of the marketing and communication roles, through the elimination of boundaries between the main areas of marketing communication and between the business units³⁷. The importance of a formal definition of IMC has been argued in many academic papers³⁸, however, little has been done to decrease the uncertainty so far³⁹.

A definition of IMC is proposed to shed light on where this is and to better understand the role it must play in modern corporations in a wide perspective and not only as a tool for marketing communication managers. Thus, IMC can be defined as

³⁶ See for example KITCHEN, Philip J. (ed.), *Integrated Brand Marketing...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-144; SCHULTZ, Don E., PATTI, Charles and KITCHEN, Philip J. (eds.), *op. cit.*

³⁷ Cfr. RAPP, Stan, COLLINS, Tom, *Maximarketing. The new direction in Advertising, Promotion and Marketing Strategy*, NAL Penguin Books, New York, 1988; RAPP, Stan, COLLINS, Tom, *The great Marketing Turnaround: The age of the individual and how to profit from it*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliff, NJ, 1990; DUNCAN, Thomas, MORIARTY, Sandra, "A Communication-Based Marketing...", *op. cit.*, pp. 1-13; KITCHEN, Philip J., SCHULTZ, Don E., *Communicating globally...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-67.

³⁸ Several authors have highlighted the importance of a formal definition and conceptualization. For more insight see: DUNCAN, Thomas, *Principles of Advertising & IMC*, McGraw-Hill, Boston, MA 2005; DUNCAN, Thomas, *IMC, Using Advertising and Promotion to Build Brands*, Mc Graw-Hill New York, 2002; FILL, *op. cit.*, p. 14-20; KITCHEN, Philip J., SCHULTZ, Don E., "A multi-country comparison of the drive for IMC", *Journal of Advertising Research*, vol. 39, n° 1, pp. 21-38; SCHULTZ, Don E., TANNENBAUM, Stanley and LAUTERBORN, Robert, *op. cit.*

³⁹ Cfr. KITCHEN, Philip J., SCHULTZ, Don E., "A response to 'Theoretical Concept or Management Fashion'", *Journal of Advertising Research*, vol. 40, n. 5, 2000, pp. 17-21; KITCHEN, Philip J., SCHULTZ, Don E., "Integrated marketing communications in U.S. advertising agencies: an exploratory study", *Journal of Advertising Research*, vol. 37, n° 5, 1997, pp. 7-18.

the *interactive* and systemic process of *cross-functional planning* and optimization of messages to stakeholders with the aim of communicating with *coherence and transparency* to achieve synergies and encourage *profitable relationships* in the short, medium and long-term.

This definition embraces the multidimensional character of the concept, distinguishing four principal dimensions: (1) “one voice”, (2) interactivity, (3) cross-functional planning; (4) profitable long-term relationships (see Figure 2).

“One voice” represents the core of integration as it implies the clear delivery of coherent messages through all marketing communication tools⁴⁰. For this reason, a common strategy must unify the activity of marketing public relations, advertising, sales promotions, direct and interactive marketing whether on- or off-line.

Interactivity “is the hallmark of the paradigm shift”⁴¹ because IMC pretends to set a constant dialogue between the organization and its constituencies, including not just customers but stakeholders. Relationship Marketing has not been able to enclose the true value of communication in building relationships with clients and other stakeholders. It has been focused on variables, such as commitment and trust, which in reality are consequences or effects of communication. Such interactive communication can represent the missing ‘piece’ in relationship marketing theory in building authentic and strong relationships with stakeholders throughout an ongoing dialogue.

“Cross-functional planning”: if in traditional marketing communications the basis is the marketing mix, according to this new paradigm the point of reference is the organization as a whole. Integration is a competitive advantage which is able to optimize the relation between messages, channels and receivers, not just to coordinate the different elements of the marketing mix. The implications are very relevant due to the fact that messages may come from all departments and not only from the marketing department. Furthermore, all the organization’s partners have to gain and apply this orientation to communication: IMC should encourage a cross-functional planning and promote the company *in toto*.

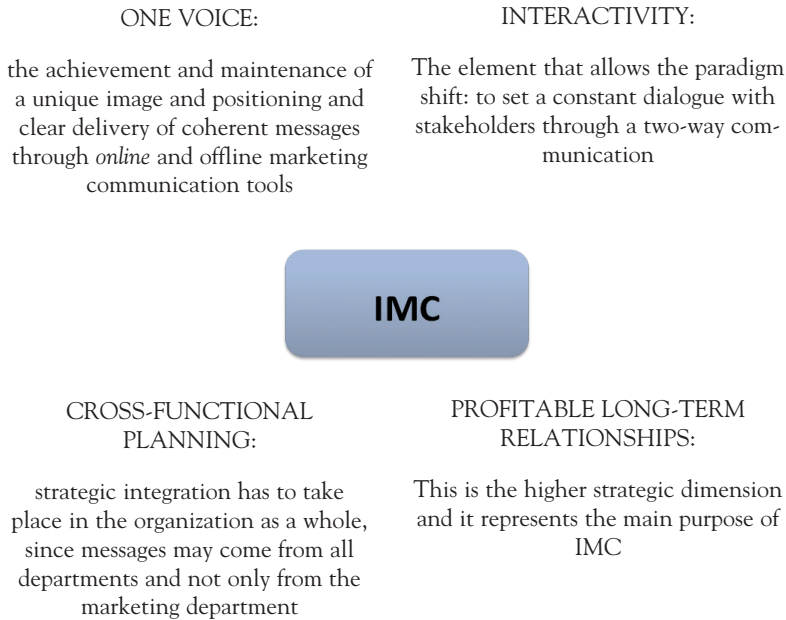
“Profitable long-term relationships”: Duncan and Moriarty argued that interactive communication at the corporate, marketing and marketing com-

⁴⁰ Cfr. NOWAK, Glen, F., PHELPS, Joseph F., *op. cit.*, pp. 49-66; PHELPS, Joseph F., JOHNSON, Edward, “Entering the quagmire, examining the ‘meaning’ of integrated marketing communications”, *Journal of Marketing Communications*, vol. 2, n° 3, 1996, pp. 159-172.

⁴¹ DUNCAN, Thomas, MORIARTY, Sandra, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

munication levels leads to long-term relationships and positively influence brand value⁴². As IMC should be deeply strategic, this should aim at the achievement of long-term objectives.

Figure 2. IMC dimensions



It may be noticed that the value of the message is highlighted, since real problems surround choice and adaptation to target audiences. A common element of the most recent definitions seems to be the representation of IMC as a process in a double dimension: tactical and strategic. In a wide sense, the strategic approach emphasizes the adequate identification of opportunities as a base for marketing planning and business growth with the aim of building a sustainable competitive advantage. On the other hand, the tactical dimension refers to short-term activities that should lead to a better implementation of certain tactics in order to achieve the strategic objectives of marketing.

⁴² Cfr. DUNCAN, Thomas, MORIARTY, Sandra, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-13.

To sum up, the proposed definition aims to juxtapose the strategic components of IMC, such as planning based on market and financial expectations⁴³, cross-functional integration⁴⁴, involvement in resources investments⁴⁵, interactivity and connectivity with clients and stakeholders and strategic coherence⁴⁶.

3. Modeling driving factors and effects of IMC

The literature review suggests that the theoretical framework of IMC is confused and that only a few articles have shown empirical evidence of its barriers, driving-factors and effects and, in most cases, they have led to contradictory findings. We believe that this is mainly due to the lack of robust measurement tools, which derives from a weak conceptual basis. Many authors called for a holistic approach in order to “connect the dots” and achieve a complete vision of what IMC is. This is the gap we attempt to fill by making an effort to better understand IMC paradigm. In order to achieve this purpose, a review of IMC articles published in academic journals and textbooks that were included as they gather scholars’ views.

⁴³ Cfr. DUNCAN, Thomas, MORIARTY, Sandra, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-13; DUNCAN, Thomas, MULHERN, Francis, *op. cit.*; KITCHEN, Philip J., BRIGNELL, Joanne, LI, Tao, SPICKETT-JONES, Graham and KITCHEN, Philip J., “The Emergence of IMC: A Theoretical Perspective”, *Journal of Advertising Research*, vol. 44, n° 1, 2004, pp. 19-30; LOW, George S. “Correlates of Integrated Marketing Communications”, *Journal of Advertising Research*, vol. 40, n° 3, 2000, pp. 27-39; SCHULTZ, Don E., “The inevitability of...”, *op. cit.*, pp. 139-146.

⁴⁴ Cfr. CORNELISSEN, Joep P., “Integrated marketing communications and the language of marketing development”, *Journal of Marketing Communications*, vol. 20, n° 4, 2001, pp. 483-498; DUNCAN, Thomas, MORIARTY, Sandra, “A Communication-Based Marketing...”, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-13; PHELPS, Joseph F., JOHNSON, Edward, “Entering the quagmire, examining the ‘meaning’ of integrated marketing communications”, *Journal of Marketing Communications*, vol. 2, n° 3, 1996, pp. 159-172; SMITH, Paul, “Benefits and Barriers to Integrated Marketing Communications”, *Admap*, February, 1996, pp. 19-22.

⁴⁵ DUNCAN, Thomas, MULHERN, Francis, *op. cit.*; EAGLE, Lynne, KITCHEN, Philip J., “IMC, brand communications, and corporate cultures, client/advertising agency co-ordination and cohesion”, *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 34, n° 5/6, 2000, pp. 667-686; SMITH, Paul, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-22.

⁴⁶ DUNCAN, Thomas, MULHERN, Francis, *op. cit.*; EAGLE, Lynne, KITCHEN, Philip J., *op. cit.*, pp. 667-686; SMITH, Paul, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-22; LOW, George S., *op. cit.*, pp. 27-39; SCHULTZ, Don E., “The inevitability of...”, *op. cit.*, pp. 139-146; PICKTON, David, HARTLEY, Robert, “Measuring Integration: an assessment of the quality of integrated marketing communications”, *International Journal of Advertising*, vol. 17, n° 4, 1998, pp. 447-465; DUNCAN, Thomas, MORIARTY, Sandra, *Driving Brand Value: Using Integrated Marketing to Drive Stakeholder Relationships*, McGraw-Hill, Burr Ridge IL, 1997.

More specifically, the sample included IMC articles published from 1991 (the emergence of the first definition of the concept) to 2011 in the international journal titles indexed in SCOPUS. A total of 85 articles were reviewed and analyzed by focusing on the contributions related to drivers/barriers and effects of IMC. In carrying out this review we followed the methodology applied by Kliatchko⁴⁷ in its identification of IMC tendencies and “four pillars”. Therefore, this review limits itself to an examination of academic research on IMC drivers and effects and makes no claim that this selection is exhaustive and complete.

Following the results obtained from the literature review, this article examines and groups the driving factors and effects of IMC with the aim of setting out a theoretical model about how the IMC process operates. In the following sections, these antecedents and consequences are presented and described in detail and the research hypotheses are formulated to develop the whole theoretical model of IMC.

3.1. Antecedents of IMC

The analysis of the factors that drive or hinder the achievement of certain level of integration allows gathering them into two large groups: endogenous and exogenous antecedents.

The first group, **endogenous antecedents**, encloses the factors related to: top management, interdepartmental dynamic, organizational systems, business size, its typology/sector, and other variables related to business management.

The **factors related to top management** can be subdivided into the following:

a. *Top management commitment in IMC implementation* has been identified by authors as one of the aspects that most influence the management of IMC as a business process. Top management commitment implies that senior managers assure coherence between what they say and what they do in order to prevent middle managers from perceiving ambiguity that can damage desired integration. A general lack of commitment with integrated communication at

⁴⁷ Cfr. KLIATCHKO, Jerry, “Revisiting the IMC construct: A revised definition and four pillars”, *International Journal of Advertising*, vol. 27, n° 1, 2008, pp. 113-160.

senior management level usually entails a structural isolation of communicative tools and communication managers⁴⁸.

b. Some authors argue that *top management attitude towards change* positively influences IMC: top management must have the will to change corporate policies that hinder IMC implementation⁴⁹.

c. Likewise, *risk aversion/tolerance* is also a relevant factor which positively influences application of IMC. The adoption of this concept requires top management to assume the inherent risk in monitoring of dynamic changing markets⁵⁰.

A great number of IMC authors and scholars consider this antecedent to be structural issue, or related to formal responsibility and top management. For instance, Schultz suggests that the responsibility of managing messages and symbols should be situated at the peak of the organizational pyramid, i.e. top management⁵¹. Schultz and Kitchen emphasize that need for control whole marketing communication process from a central location is even more important in a global context⁵². This communication management system, based on centralization and control, allows setting and keeping a customer-based orientation. According to these observations, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1a: Top management's commitment positively influences the implementation of IMC programs.

H1b: Top management's attitude towards change positively influences the implementation of IMC programs.

H1c: Top management's risk tolerance positively influences the implementation of IMC programs.

⁴⁸ Cfr. SMITH, Paul, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-22; EINWILLER, Sabine, BOENIGK, Michael, "Examining the link between integrated communication management and communication effectiveness in medium-sized enterprises", *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 18, forthcoming (available online since 2/2011 at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13527266.2010.530055>).

⁴⁹ Cfr. PHELPS, Joseph, HARRIS, Thomas, E. and JOHNSON, Edward, "Exploring decision-making approaches and responsibility for developing marketing communications strategy", *Journal of Business research*, vol. 37, n° 3, pp. 217-223; SMITH, Paul, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-22; DUNCAN, Thomas, MULHERN, Francis, *op. cit.*; DUNCAN, Thomas, MORIARTY, Sandra, "A Communication-Based Marketing...", *op. cit.*, pp. 1-13; KITCHEN, Philip J., BRIGNELL, Joanne, LI, Tao and SPICKETT-JONES, Graham, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-30; LOW, George S., "Correlates of Integrated Marketing Communications", *Journal of Advertising Research*, vol. 40 n° 3, 2000, pp. 27-39; SCHULTZ, Don E., "The inevitability of...", *op. cit.*, pp. 139-146.

⁵⁰ Cfr. PHELPS, Joseph, HARRIS, Thomas, E. and JOHNSON, Edward, *op. cit.*, pp. 217-223.

⁵¹ Cfr. SCHULTZ, Don E., "The inevitability of...", *op. cit.*, pp. 139-146.

⁵² Cfr. SCHULTZ, Don E., KITCHEN, Philip J., *Communicating globally...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-153.

The **factors related to the interdepartmental dynamic** can be specified in:

a. Market and brand orientation. Some empirical studies have found a positive influence of implementation of market orientation and brand orientation in the levels of IMC adopted. Likewise, each of these factors affects the others reciprocally⁵³.

b. Qualification/training, experience and abilities. Moriarty affirms that cross-functional management abilities are a main barrier for IMC implementation⁵⁴. Similarly, Beard stated that one of the main obstacles for a successful application of IMC is the fact that managers of external agencies and managers of client-businesses aren't able to find trained and expert human resources/staff needed to implement IMC programs⁵⁵.

c. Cross-functional management. According to Duncan and Moriarty this is the most important organizational factor⁵⁶. Undoubtedly complexity lies in the creation of cross-functional teams that operate at the brand equity level. Similarly, Ambler and Barrow consider that the separate areas of marketing and human resources should work more closely together: "strong corporate equity with brand customers can improve the return for HR, while at the same time improved HR can improve the return on brand equity from external customers"⁵⁷. This phenomenon will only take place if top management is committed to remove departmental silos. Cross-functional management also helps institutionalize feedback and learning.

d. Cross-departmental conflicts (internal turf battles) and lack of horizontal communication. Among the most cited factors in the literature, due to its negative influence in the development of IMC are: cross-departmental conflicts (internal turf battles) and the lack of horizontal communication. Without adequate cross-departmental communication, companies can encounter serious difficulties in exchanging and sharing crucial information about target audiences. Kim, Han and Schultz consider that, in the United States, developed

⁵³ Cfr. REID, Mike, "Performance Auditing of Integrated Communication (IMC) actions and outcomes", *Journal of Advertising*, vol. 34, n° 4, 2005, pp. 41-54; REID, Mike, LUXTON, Sandra and MAVONDO, Felix, "The relationship between Integrated Marketing Communication, Market Orientation and Brand Orientation", *Journal of Advertising*, vol. 34, n° 4, 2005, pp. 11-23.

⁵⁴ Cfr. MORIARTY, Sandra, *op. cit.*

⁵⁵ Cfr. BEARD, Fred, "Integrated Marketing Communications: New Role Expectations and Performance Issues in the Client-Ad Agency Relationship?", *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 37, n° 3, 1996, pp. 207-215.

⁵⁶ Cfr. DUNCAN, Thomas, MORIARTY, Sandra, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-13.

⁵⁷ Cfr. AMBLER, Tim, BARROW, Simon, "The employer Brand", *Journal of Brand Management*, vol. 4, n° 3, 1996, pp. 185-206.

horizontal communications and reasonable competition have broadened the range of customer choice in a capitalist context⁵⁸.

e. Cross-functional coordination. According to Schultz and Kitchen, horizontal processes are necessary to surpass the barriers of specialization and hierarchical structures that drive professionals from different departments towards non- alignment of their activities⁵⁹. Only by aligning the strategic development process, creation of value, information management, and so forth, the organizations may have authentic customer and market orientation.

According to these contributions, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H2a: Market orientation positively influences implementation of IMC programs.

H2b: Brand orientation positively influences implementation of IMC programs.

H2c: Professional training and expertise in cross-functional management positively influences implementation of IMC programs.

H2d: Horizontal communication positively influences implementation of IMC programs.

H2e: Internal conflicts and departmentalization negatively influence implementation of IMC programs.

H2f: The level of cross-functional coordination positively influences implementation of IMC programs.

H2g: Market orientation and brand orientation have a reciprocal positive influence.

The issue of how to organize the integration process is crucial, hence **factors related to the organizational systems and structures** influence IMC implementation. Schultz concludes that antecedents with a higher influence on integration are related to the organizational system⁶⁰. The IMC literature suggests that brand responsibility and marketing communication do not have to be necessarily settled in a unique central location, but the real content of each communication program must be centrally organized to ensure the coherence of messages and avoid dispersion of communication resources.

Comprehension of communication control is also a key issue. Duncan and Everett considered IMC as a mechanism to control messages the customers and stakeholders use to form a unique and coherent image about the organi-

⁵⁸ Cfr. KIM, Ilchul, HAN, Dongsu and SCHULTZ, Don E., "Understanding the Diffusion of Integrated Marketing Communication", *Journal of Advertising Research*, vol. 44, n° 11/12, 2004, pp. 31-45.

⁵⁹ Cfr. SCHULTZ, Don E., KITCHEN, Philip J., *Communicating globally...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-152.

⁶⁰ Cfr. SCHULTZ, Don E., SCHULTZ, Heidi, *IMC The next generation. Five Steps for delivering value and measuring Financial Returns Using Marketing Communications*, McGraw Hill, New York, 2003, pp. 1-97.

zation⁶¹. Nevertheless, this central control of messages may lead frustration when consumers require responses for their special needs or extraordinary circumstances.

As indicated by different authors, main barriers for the integration are usually rigid organizational structures. The traditional centre-based structures focused on 'order and control' should be replaced by models of quick response in modern organizations⁶².

On the one hand, Beard⁶³ suggests that rigid organizational structures represent an important source of conflict and barriers for IMC implementation. On the other hand, Schultz *et al.*⁶⁴ (1994) state that companies can overcome these internal difficulties by reaching consensus about the approach they apply.

Firstly, individual rewards produce problems when a department is only judged by short term outcomes. The organization creates negative value encouraging individual realization, since recognition is exclusively based on rapid response instead of clear solutions.

Secondly, certain management styles hinder team work. Consensus-based decision making approach carries an apparent loss of power for top management, since it requires that this kind of manager be more than a leader. Senior managers have traditionally controlled budgets and set deadlines. A good leader is able to develop strong subordinates, encourage team work, and he/she know how to empower their employees. If most senior managers defend the principles of leadership, in a context of pressure and because of the need of a quick decision, many managers abandon the premises of the consensus model and adopt a "heroic" model, imposing their own criteria instead of accepting the team's position. This style, in spite of solving problem temporarily, can ruin all trust created around decision making based on consensus. Finally, even when individual rewards and managerial actions do not hinder the implementation of a decision making model based on consensus, organizations may encourage departmentalization. The results of a study carried out by Phelps, Harris and Johnson indicate an increase of consensus-based

61 Cfr. DUNCAN, Thomas, EVERETT, Stephen E., *op. cit.*, pp. 33-39.

62 Cfr. CHRISTENSEN, Lars Thøger, FIRAT, A. Fuat and TORP, Simon, *op. cit.*, 2008, pp. 423-452; CHRISTENSEN, Lars Thøger, CORNELISSEN, Joep P., "Bridging Corporate and Organizational Communication: Review, Development and a Look to the Future", *Management Communication Quarterly*, vol. 25, n° 3, 2011, pp. 383-414.

63 Cfr. BEARD, Fred, *op. cit.*, pp. 207-215.

64 Cfr. SCHULTZ, Don E., TANNENBAUM, Stanley I. and LAUTERBORN, Robert F., *op. cit.*

responsibility, instead of individual responsibility, but they do not indicate specifically the degree of IMC⁶⁵. From all these arguments, the following hypotheses are advanced.

H3a: The division of the organization into a large number of departments negatively influences implementation of integration programs.

H3b: A centre-based structure of the organization negatively influences implementation of IMC programs.

H3c: Consensus decision making models positively influence implementation of IMC programs.

H3d: Individual compensation systems negatively influence implementation of IMC programs.

Besides the previous antecedents, the literature indicates **other variables** as internal factors of IMC: the size and the typology of the organization.

a) *The size of the organization.* Some authors suggest that the size of the organization can influence ability to implement IMC⁶⁶. Particularly, Low carried out an empirical study which concluded that smaller organizations with less complex brand hierarchy are less likely to apply different marketing communication programs⁶⁷. Furthermore, several studies found that the larger an organization the lower the degree of implementation of IMC⁶⁸.

b) *As regards the type of company,* on the one hand Low suggests that service organizations are more inclined to be integrated than product-focused organizations. This is based on the premise that service organizations have direct access to its customers. On the other hand, Reid shows that it is more likely to find a high degree of IMC implementation in large manufacturing companies than in smaller service organization⁶⁹, since larger companies will have more resources to improve the planning processes and they will be able to manage and coordinate a higher number of cross-functional teams and external agencies.

According to these debates, the following hypotheses are advanced:

⁶⁵ Cfr. PHELPS, Joseph, HARRIS, Thomas. E. and JOHNSON, Edward, *op. cit.*, pp. 217-223.

⁶⁶ Cfr. LOW, George L., "Correlates of Integrated Marketing Communications," *Journal of Advertising Research*, vol. 40, n° 3, 2000, pp. 27-39; NOWAK, Glen, F., PHELPS, Joseph E., *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51; REID, Mike, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-54.

⁶⁷ Cfr. LOW, George L., *op. cit.*, pp. 27-39.

⁶⁸ Cfr. CORNELISSEN, Joep P., LOCK, R. Andrew and GARDNER, Hanne, "The Organization of External Communication Disciplines: an Integrative Framework of Dimensions and Determinants", *International Journal of Advertising*, vol. 20, n° 1, 2001, pp. 67-88; NOWAK, Glen F., PHELPS, Joseph E., *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51.

⁶⁹ Cfr. REID, Mike, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-54.

H4a: Organization size positively influences implementation of integration programs.

H4b: A leadership position of the organization in the marketplace positively influences implementation of IMC programs.

H4c: The typology of the organization significantly influences implementation of IMC programs.

Within the *exogenous antecedents* group that drive or hinder the development of IMC, we observed the following: *level of competition*, *technology turbulence*, and the *cultural and institutional environment* in which the organization operates.

A hostile market environment with intense competition and/or dynamic environments characterized by fast technological developments and ongoing changes in consumers' preferences significantly influence organization and outcomes. Reid confirmed in his empirical work that competitive turbulence positive influences IMC⁷⁰.

Being competitive in this context may drive organizations to implement IMC with the aim of encouraging strategic coordination of brand messages. These results are coherent with the study of Low⁷¹, which indicates that competitive intensity positively influences IMC application. The organizations that compete in a market characterized by an intense and turbulent competition may find important benefits in the strategic integration of brand communication to maximize the effects of the communication activities.

According to Schultz, a crucial element that encourages the need of an integrating approach is the rapid evolution of technology. Technology is bringing together communication and distribution, making the world a globalized and interconnected market. The irreversibility of technology implies a necessity and demand for integration⁷².

According to Kim, Han and Schultz, IMC will be accepted as a new marketing paradigm if the market environment promotes its implementation. Within this theoretical framework, they propose a 'development path for the IMC model' describing the IMC process as highly dynamic, where the marketplace and the marketing environment represent the driving forces which promote (or impede) the implementation of IMC. If elements influence

⁷⁰ Cfr. *Ibid.*, pp. 41-54.

⁷¹ Cfr. LOW, George L., *op. cit.*, pp. 27-39.

⁷² Cfr. SCHULTZ, Don E., "The inevitability of...", *op. cit.*, pp. 139-146.

positively the application of IMC and other factors hinder it, then dialectic situations will emerge⁷³.

Although the strength of IMC barriers could be limited thanks to the economic advantages and benefits of the implementation of this new paradigm, it is not possible to predict with certainty which are the prominent factors in each process. Following the previous arguments, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H5a: The level of competition in a marketplace where the organization operates positively influences implementation of IMC programs.

H5b: Technological turbulence positively influences implementation of IMC programs.

H5c: The cultural and institutional environment where the organization operates significantly influences the implementation of IMC programs.

3.2. The effects of IMC

This section aims to analyze and classify the consequences derived from the application of the IMC paradigm and review the main conclusions achieved in previous studies. According to the studies carried out by numerous authors⁷⁴ three categories of consequences can be identified and they are related to **marketing communications performance, brand performance** and **stakeholders**.

The results achieved by Low⁷⁵ indicate that the effectiveness of advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing and public relations is higher when the organization achieved a high level of IMC, thus a strong relation between IMC and *marketing communication performances* can be observed.

Due to the lack of empirical evidence about the influence of IMC on the outcomes obtained by the organization, it is difficult to specify accurately the effects of IMC on organizational performance. However, from an operational perspective, we could deduct that IMC is likely to produce benefits in the coordination of marketing communication activities and in the coordina-

⁷³ Cfr. KIM, Ilchul, HAN, Dongsu and SCHULTZ, Don E., *op. cit.*, pp. 31-45.

⁷⁴ Cfr. DUNCAN, Thomas, MULHERN, Francis, *op. cit.*; KITCHEN and SCHULTZ, 1999; REID, Mike, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-54; SWAIN, William N., "Perceptions of IMC after a Decade of Development: Who's at the Wheel, and How Can We Measure Success?", *Journal of Advertising Research*, vol. 44, n° 1, 2004, pp. 46-65; REID, Mike, LUXTON, Sandra and MAVONDO, Felix, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-23.

⁷⁵ Cfr. LOW, George L., *op. cit.*, pp. 27-39.

tion of the different functions involved in the implementation of marketing campaigns⁷⁶.

Cornelissen and Lock present these benefits as psychological and they observe also a reduction of internal conflicts and a decrease of transactional costs among functions⁷⁷. IMC provides important savings in additional costs relating to the organizational facilities. Cooperation among departments avoids unnecessary duplication of communication strategies and implies an improvement in operational efficiency and in message coherence.

From an individual campaign perspective, it would be reasonable to find out that organizations implementing IMC will achieve higher incomes for each campaign, as a functional outcome, together with the synergy among the elements of communication mix and the improvement of the ability of using a wider and more appropriate range of tools⁷⁸.

The success of campaigns could be measured using economic analysis of ROI through direct objectives, or in a more subjective way, by analyzing managerial perceptions about the relative success by comparison with competitors' campaigns.

Generally, we would expect that the organizations applying IMC will have a greater capacity to achieve its direct and indirect objectives, such as a higher brand knowledge and preference, a more favorable attitude towards the brand and the increase of purchase intention. Furthermore, Duncan and Mulhern⁷⁹ underline that organizations implementing IMC in a more adequate way will have a greater ability to achieve the direct and indirect campaign objectives. Given the above considerations, hypotheses will be advanced as follows:

H6a: The level of implementation of IMC positively influences marketing communication performance.

H6b: The level of implementation of IMC has a positive influence in achieving campaign objectives (direct and indirect).

H6c: The level of implementation of IMC positively influences operational/operative efficiency and the reduction of internal turf battles.

⁷⁶ Cfr. BEARD, Fred, *op. cit.*, pp. 207-215; CORNELISSEN, Joep P., LOCK, Andrew R., "Theoretical concept or management fashion: Examining the significance of integrated marketing communications", *Journal of Advertising Research*, vol. 40, n° 5, 2000, pp. 7-15; SCHULTZ, Don E., "Integrated Marketing Communications...", p. 17; STEWART, David W., *op. cit.*, pp. 159-172.

⁷⁷ Cfr. CORNELISSEN, Joep P., LOCK, Andrew R., *op. cit.*, pp. 7-15.

⁷⁸ DUNCAN, Thomas, MORIARTY, Sandra, "Driving Brand Value...", *op. cit.*

⁷⁹ DUNCAN, Thomas, MULHERN, Francis, *op. cit.*

H6d: Marketing communication performance positively influences brand performance.

In general, academic researchers are agreed about the correlation between the implementation of IMC process and business performance. Kitchen, Brignell, Li and Spickett-Jones show that IMC is not just a communication process, but a process related to *brand management*⁸⁰. Reid, Luxton and Mavondo suggested to measure brand performance at two interdependent levels, including marketing communications performance and brand performance⁸¹. One of the more desirable effects of an effective IMC is the achievement of a competitive advantage in the market. Moreover, Swain considered the need of including a set of outcomes related to the brand and the customer: a better brand reputation and brand knowledge, an improvement of the attitudes towards the brand, a greater preference and purchase intention related to the brand and the encouragement of the purchase⁸².

Low conducted one of the first researches supporting the relationship between IMC and brand performance, but the author notes that the results are difficult to explain⁸³. These results highlight the need for a more comprehensive conceptualization and definition of IMC as well as the development of stronger tools for measuring it. Recently, have addressed the analysis of a range of customer relationships and brand measurement instruments to study its relation with the implementation of IMC⁸⁴. According to these contributions, the following hypotheses are advanced:

H7a: The level of implementation of IMC positively influences brand reputation/awareness.

H7b: The level of implementation of IMC leads favorable attitudes towards the brand.

H7c: The level of implementation of IMC has a positive impact on brand preference.

H7d: The level of implementation of IMC has a positive influence on brand purchase intentions.

⁸⁰ KITCHEN, Philip J., BRIGNELL, Joanne, LI, Tao and SPICKETT-JONES, Graham, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-30.

⁸¹ Cfr. REID, Mike, LUXTON, Sandra, MAVONDO, Felix, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-23.

⁸² Cfr. SWAIN, William N., *op. cit.*, pp. 46-65.

⁸³ Cfr. LOW, George L., *op. cit.*, pp. 27-39.

⁸⁴ Cfr. ZAHAY, Debra, PELTIER, James, SCHULTZ, Don E. and GRIFFIN, Abbie, "The Role of Transactional versus Relational Data in IMC Programs: Bringing Customer Data Together", *Journal of Advertising Research*, vol. 44, n° 1, pp. 46-65.

Rust, Ambler *et al.* developed a theoretical framework that links marketing strategy with *benefits related to customers*, markets and finances, identifying the impact of marketing strategy and tactics on attitudes, loyalty, satisfaction and retention of customers⁸⁵.

These intermediate measures of performance could be aggregated at the marketing level and assessed throughout scales related to brand equity and customer value. These actions have effects on the financial impact, measured by the financial position enclosing profits and cash flow. The result of this loop system of impacts will determine an increased business value and brand market share.

Ambler *et al.* considered the return on investment (ROI)⁸⁶ as a valid measurement of the benefits provided by IMC, while others authors prefer the ROTPI (return on touch point investment), measuring the ROI via contact point with customer and an assessment of improvement in brand equity and customer value⁸⁷. Also Reid, Luxton and Mavondo support the existence of an 'IMC chain of productivity' to connect marketing communication management and campaigns performance related to customers and brand value⁸⁸.

Schultz and Schultz introduced the measurement of return on customer investment (ROCI), as an alternative to ROI to assess the effectiveness of IMC⁸⁹. According to them, attention is no longer focused on trying to measure the effect of individual communication efforts in response to a particular advertisement or a special event, since it is impossible to isolate the effects of individual efforts. On the contrary, the attention should be focused on studying the relation of investments in well-defined target group with an increase (or decrease) in incomes flows from the same customers. Once the organizations have started to run the processes necessary to carefully assess the ROI at a general level, they can test different mixes of communication or investment in order to fit the plan to future cycles.

⁸⁵ Cfr. RUST, Roland. T., AMBLER, Tim, CARPENTER, Gregory S., KUMAR, V. and SRIVASTAVA, Rajendra K., "Measuring Marketing Productivity: Current Knowledge and Future Directions", *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 68, n° 4, 2004, pp. 76-89.

⁸⁶ Cfr. AMBLER, Tim, BHATTACHARYA, Chitrabhan B., EDELL, Jane, KELLER, Kevin L., LEMON, Katherine N. and MITTAL, Vikas, "Relating Brand and Customer Perspectives on Marketing Management", *Journal of Service Research*, vol. 5, n° 1, 2002, pp. 13-25.

⁸⁷ Cfr. DUNCAN, Thomas, MULHERN, Francis, *op. cit.*; HUTTON, James G., *op. cit.*, pp. 139-146.

⁸⁸ Cfr. REID, Mike, LUXTON, Sandra and MAVONDO, Felix, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-23.

⁸⁹ Cfr. SCHULTZ, Don E., SCHULTZ, Heidi, "Transitioning Marketing Communications...", *op. cit.*, pp. 9-26.

Several authors⁹⁰ promoted the development of measurement instruments such as return on customer touch point, customer profitability, customer long-life value, reference lists, customers' migration rates, and market shares. In a wider sense, the market-based results deriving from IMC may be related to the concept of brand value chain, which identifies a number of marketing investments and their potential impact on consumer minds, market performance and value for shareholders.

According to these contributions, we could deduct that:

H8a: The level of implementation of IMC positively influences customer attitudes.

H8b: The level of implementation of IMC positively influences customer loyalty.

H8c: The level of implementation of IMC positively influences customer retention.

H8d: The level of implementation of IMC positive impacts upon the organization's relationships with external agencies.

H9a: Marketing communication outcomes positively influence financial results.

H9b: Brand performance positively impacts financial returns.

H9c: Customer-related outcomes positively influence financial performance.

H9d: The outcomes at the level of relationships between client-organization and external agencies positively influence the organization's outcomes.

3.3. IMC development theoretical model: antecedents and consequences

After the extensive literature review presented in the previous paragraphs, we present a theoretical model about the development of IMC process (see figure 3), which represents an important insight in capturing, in a holistic way, all those factors that are likely to influence the degree of integration. Likewise, the achievement of desired degree of integration will produce a number of effects on the effectiveness of marketing communication efforts, on brand equity and customer value. Finally, it will influence, in a more global sense, the financial performance of the organization.

We are aware of the complexity of the model and the difficulties in operationalize it. Nevertheless, as already mentioned, the main objective of this paper is to shed light on the IMC theoretical background and to make an

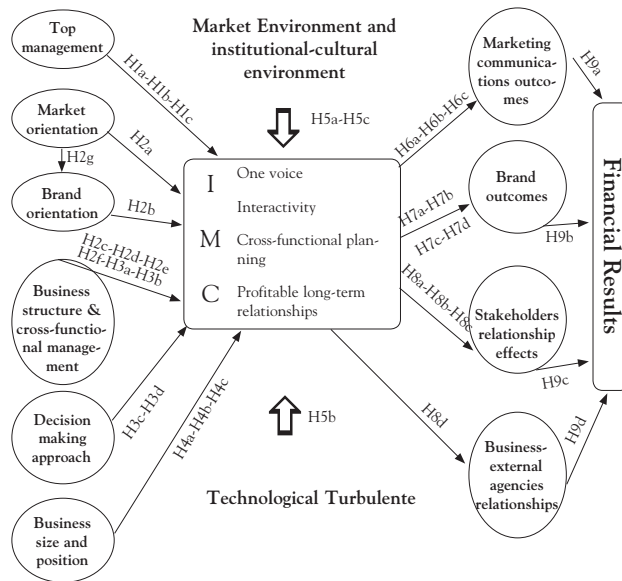
⁹⁰ For example, cfr. DUNCAN, Thomas, MULHERN, Francis, *op. cit.*; KITCHEN, Philip J. (ed.), *Integrated Brand Marketing...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-144.

attempt to clarify the still confused and debated IMC concept, its dimensions, its main drivers and effects.

Undoubtedly, the more difficult part of this model is related to the development and validation of scales that may capture the very essence of IMC. As a starting point, the measurement instrument of Duncan and Moriarty (the ‘mini-audit of integrated marketing communication’⁹¹) could be extremely useful to test these relationships. The most appropriate data analysis technique to test the model, due to the causal relations established, are structural equation models, either in its models based on the covariance (LISREL, Amos, and EQS) or variance (PLS).

Finally, the validation and assessment of the proposed model will provide academic researchers with a wider and deeper comprehension of what is the role IMC plays in business management, its main antecedents (and barriers) as well as the most important benefits the organizations could obtain through its implementation.

Figure 3. IMC development theoretical model: driving factors and effects



⁹¹ Cfr. DUNCAN, Thomas, MORIARTY, Sandra E., *Driving Brand Value...*, op. cit.

4. Conclusions

This paper is an important theoretical reflection about IMC concept, its main driving-factors and effects, which drives to run a more corporate definition and to the development of a theoretical IMC model, based on the hypotheses previously formulated.

From the analysis of the conceptualizations of IMC, developed since the introduction of the concept to the present time, emerges that the evolution of this concept passed from a strictly tactical tool until representing an important strategic element that involves the entire organization and not just the area of marketing communication. Throughout the development of the concept, a shift of focus has been observed, moving from the inside-out to the outside-in approach, towards a more customer-based perspective.

Recently different authors (i.e. Christensen and Cornelissen⁹²; Schultz, Patti, and Kitchen⁹³; Einwiller and Boenigk⁹⁴) have highlighted the importance of clarifying the conceptual issues of IMC in order to reinforce its theoretical basis, that in turn will facilitate its measurement, which is crucial to carry out empirical studies and therefore to assess how IMC works and how it may be beneficial in terms of organizational and business performance. Moreover, Laurie and Mortimer⁹⁵ carried out an empirical research and their analysis revealed that there are still areas of discrepancy between academics' and practitioners' perceptions of what IMC is and how it works (or it has to work) in the current dynamic business environment.

Following these premises, this paper proposes an original definition of IMC that represents the essential theoretical basis for developing a model of IMC as interactive process. Most academics and practitioners called for a more holistic theoretical framework of IMC to reduce the confusion derived from the contradictory results obtained by different empirical studies (due to the lack of robust measurement tools).

Thus, this study aims to fill this gap by carrying out an exhaustive literature review. The article presented an analysis of IMC articles published in

⁹² Cfr. CHRISTENSEN, Lars Thøger, CORNELISSEN, Joep P., *op. cit.*

⁹³ Cfr. SCHULTZ, Don E, PATTI, Charles and KITCHEN, Philip J. (eds.), *op. cit.*

⁹⁴ Cfr. EINWILLER, Sabine, BOENIGK, Michael, *op. cit.*

⁹⁵ Cfr. LAURIE, Sally, MORTIMER, Kathleen, "IMC is dead. Long live IMC: Academics' versus practitioners' views", *Journal of Marketing Management*, vol. 27, n° 13-14, 2011, pp. 1464-1478.

academic journals from 1991 (when the first definition emerged) to 2011 and five textbooks, that we selected because they gather several scholars' views.

The review allows the authors to formulate the research hypotheses and, finally, to model the driving-factors and effects of IMC. Firstly, the conceptual model highlights a set of internal factors, including aspects related to top management, market orientation, brand orientation, organization structure, decision-making model and cross-functional management. In addition, the organization size and its typology represent other internal antecedents. Secondly, some external influences are highlighted, such as technological and competitive turbulence and the cultural and institutional environment in which the company is operating. Finally, the paper sheds light on the main consequences and benefits of IMC in terms of brand and marketing communications outcomes, and effects on stakeholder and agency-client business relationships.

Furthermore, different academic and managerial implications may be identified and discussed. Undoubtedly, the lack of empirical justification of the proposed model is a limitation of this article. Nevertheless, the proposed model opens the way for future empirical researches on IMC by providing a conceptual framework and a better understanding of the role that Integrated Marketing Communication should play in contemporary business management, the main variables that determine or hinder its implementation, as well as the main benefits that it entails. In fact, the results underline the compelling need for robust IMC measurement tools and we suggest that future researches may focus on testing the hypotheses posed. Despite the complexity of the model, most necessary scales have been developed and validated to address previous academic research. Some constructs, i.e. market orientation, brand orientation, brand value, and so forth have been widely used by academic researchers and their assessment will not be difficult. Undoubtedly, the hardest part of the model is the development and validation of scales that are able to capture the essence of IMC. In the attempt to test the model, since it established several causal relationships, Structural Equations Modeling or Partial Least Squares are likely to be the most adequate methodology technique, by using the software package LISREL or SPSS.

From the managerial perspective, the identification of IMC drivers may allow managers achieve better administration of resources through the encouragement of practices related to decision-making models, organizational structure, and cross-departmental dynamics. Getting to know elements that positively influence IMC and those which, in turn, hinder implementation, will help senior managers become aware of weaknesses to be corrected with

the aim of achieving a greater degree of integration in the organizations they manage.

Nowadays, the continuous changes occurring in the field of Marketing Communications, are leading to an increasing relevance of research on IMC. The boom of social media and social networks, boosted by the increasing diffusion of mobile devices (i.e., smartphones, tablets) and the new services related to them (i.e., the Quick Response barcodes) are driving to a more dynamic way to use the Internet services and interactivity is becoming a more powerful element for marketing communications. Due to the fast pace of technological innovations, IMC is going to be a very dynamic discipline. Hence, we consider that the emerging changes should be taken into account in the conceptualization of IMC and in modeling its main drivers. From the professional perspective, this continuously changing media environment could be a strategic element for IMC implementation, since it enhances the interactivity, on the other hand its high complexity could make it difficult for practitioners to manage integration.

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