
South African marketing and communication agencies' understanding of integrated communication (IC): A true reflection of the concept?

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Abstract

After almost 20 years of existence an agreement on the definition and scope of integrated communication (IC) has not been reached, and furthermore, the concept of IC is still seen as difficult to implement. The authors argue that in the stakeholder-centric twenty-first century, integrated communication (IC) is the evolved offspring of integrated marketing communication (IMC), the no longer valid customer focus of the twentieth century. For this reason, definitions and assumptions of integrated communication were subjected to critical scrutiny and divided into four eras of evolution to arrive at a clear understanding of integrated communication (IC) as a concept. Qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted with the top 10 marketing and communication agencies in South Africa to determine their understanding of the concept of IC; to assess if IC principles are implemented in the South African marketplace; and if not, what the barriers preventing them from doing so are.

Introduction

Integrated communication (IC) has been practiced and researched for more than two decades, yet consensus on its definition and its scope has not been reached (Kitchen, 2005; Kliatchko, 2005; and Swain, 2004). Kliatchko (2008, p. 133) states that IC is also still seen as difficult to implement. Due to far greater access to information since the advent of social media in the twenty-first century marketplace, customers/consumers and clients have become more active role-players. The emphasis is now placed on communication and the core concepts of

building and nourishing profitable long-term relationships and brand equity with many other stakeholders such as employees, channel members, media and suppliers (Luck & Moffat, 2009, p. 311). Kitchen and Schultz (2000, p. 7) refers to building real relationships with real stakeholders through all marketing and communication efforts. Grove, Carlson and Dorsch (2007, p. 37) suggests that, as the marketplace has become more fragmented, organisations have adopted integrated communication (IC) as a way to effectively and efficiently steer and attract the splintering mass market through the transmission of a cohesive message across all contact points between organisations and their consumers.

The development of new communication technologies, and specifically social media, has compounded the issue of the 'one spirit, one look or one voice' which is implied in the above-mentioned cohesive message through all the different contact points to customers/consumers/clients, as well as other relevant stakeholders in an already fragmented global marketplace. Communication through social media has the potential to be more global, strategic, two-way and interactive, symmetrical or dialogical and socially responsible (Grunig, 2009, p. 1). Organisations have also become more visible as accountable corporate citizens and they will have to exercise a greater extent of social responsibility than ever before towards their entire stakeholder grouping (Palacios, 2004, p. 383). Organisational leaders who compile knowledge on best practices on how to meet the needs of these stakeholders will remain sustainable and will produce a return on their cooperative efforts that will add up to more than the sum of the different parts (Grove, et al. 2007).

No research results indicating the current state of the practice of IC communication in the

South African marketplace could be found. Furthermore, research on the impact of new media and social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as blogs, on integrated communication locally and in the global arena is not yet readily available.

The questions at hand are whether marketing and communication agencies in South Africa firstly fully understand the concept of integrated communication (IC); secondly, whether they offer it as a business function to their clients in their effort to help organisations build and sustain long-term relationships between the organisation, its brands and its stakeholders; and thirdly, which aspects are indicated as barriers for the implementation of IC. Answers to these questions will assist South African scholars in understanding the current practice of IC in the local market and will act as backdrop against which future research on the added impact of social media on integrated communication locally and globally can be designed.

The relationship between integrated marketing communication (IMC) and integrated communication (IC) first needs clarification. This is done by an in-depth review of the literature on the evolution of IMC and IC and by identifying four eras of its evolution. Seven possible barriers to the implementation of IC are then presented.

Defining integrated communication (IC)

The difference between IMC and IC has continually been blurred. Not only does IMC still suffer from controversies and contentions on its definition, its theoretical concepts and issues are also uncertain (Kitchen, 2005; Kliatchko, 2005; and Swain, 2004). After scrutinising the literature it is argued that in the stakeholder centric twenty-first century integrated communication (IC) is the evolved offspring of integrated marketing communication (IMC) with its arguable outdated twentieth century customer/consumer focus. The concept IC became more common from 2000 and has been in use since 1997. Some authors (such as Schultz and Schultz (2004); Schultz, Kerr, Kim and Patti (2007); Grove, et al. (2007))

still prefer to refer to the concept of IMC. It is contended that the concept referred to, especially after 1997, is in reality mostly that of IC. IC will in fact therefore retain some characteristics of IMC, but IC is defined as a separate, but interlinked discipline.

The evolution process is explained by introducing the definitions that prevailed in each phase. A combined definition, reflecting that practise of IC during that specific phase, is then suggested.

Four eras of evolution

Integrated communication has been defined as a management philosophy (Cornellisen, 2000, p. 3; Stewart, 1996, p. 149), an educational movement (Hutton, 1996, p. 155) and a unifying business practice (Burnett & Moriarty, 1998). More recent research typifies it a “system of beliefs or engagement, embedded in an organisation’s culture, underpinned by communication, driven by technology, and embraced by senior management” (Luck & Moffat, 2009, p. 321). It is reasoned that analogous with the emergence of the concept of IC from IMC, various definitions transpired, based on the way in which IC was practiced. Definitions of IC abound and as such reference is made to some selected definitions.

The eighties: IC as a combination of communication tactics

In view of the practice of IC in the 1980s, it was described as the integration of various communication vehicles in a specific campaign (Spotts & Lambert, 1998, p. 211). IC was not merely the combination of various communication functions – as is dominant in marketing communication literature (Broom, Lauzen & Tucker, 1991, p. 220; Pickton & Broderick, 2001, p. 3) - but was taken one step beyond. This description was based on the premise of marketing synergy (Duncan, 1997). The focus remained on specific campaigns and not on the ‘bigger picture’ of how these functions in the campaigns relate to the overall organisational efforts. A combined definition for integrated communication in the eighties could read as follows: “Integrated communication is the integration of various

communication vehicles and tactics within a specific communication campaign.”

Early and mid-nineties: IC as the coordination of messages for customer loyalty

During the early nineties, various definitions were developed to describe the relatively new concept of IC (Keegan, Moriarty & Duncan, 1992; Schultz, 1991, p. 101; Tannenbaum, 1991). The definition of Schultz (1991) focused on the process of IC that should be managed actively and implied that it is not a process that would just happen. The need for a conscious, behavioural outcome from customers was added. More importantly, this definition referred to customer loyalty, which indicated that there was a shift towards being a customer-focused organisation. In addition, the definition of Tannenbaum (1991) added a new internal focus in stating that internal communication and actions also contribute to the communication efforts of the organisation. Another important contribution was the prominence of dialogue, by moving away from the transactional style, to focus on a conversational style. By including this principle, Tannenbaum (1991) acknowledged that customers wanted the ability to interact with organisations and initiate a discussion when they have a need to do so. Tannenbaum (1991) further brought brand loyalty into the definition by identifying it as the behavioural change that should occur.

Another definition in this era, this time by Keegan et al. (1992, p. 631), also viewed IC as the “strategic coordination of all messages and media used by an organisation to collectively influence its perceived brand value”. Three focal aspects are highlighted: The use of “strategic coordination”, which implied synergy through the coordination of complementary messages; the notion that all messages and media should be used collectively to create a greater impact; and the focus was more on influencing the perception of the brand, which resulted in attitudinal and possibly behavioural changes. A combined definition for IC from the early 1990s could therefore be: “Integrated communication is the strategic coordination of all messages

(internally and externally) to create dialogue between the customer and the organisation, which will attitudinally and behaviourally move the customer towards brand loyalty.”

Late nineties: IC as the coordination of messages for stakeholder relationships

During 1996 and 1998 the most prominent definitions were from Duncan (1997) and Harris (1998). Duncan (1997) defined IC as the “process of strategically controlling or influencing all messages and encouraging purposeful dialogue to create and nourish profitable relationships with *customers* and other *stakeholders*”. Harris (1998) defined it as “a cross-functional process for creating and nourishing profitable relationships with customers and other stakeholders by strategically controlling or influencing all messages sent to these groups and encouraging purposeful dialogue with them” (own emphasis). The focus was (particularly Duncan’s (1997)) more on relationship building than on the outcome of the approach (e.g. “create and nourish profitable relationships”). This implied attracting new customers and then interacting with them to find ways in which the organisation could further satisfy their wants and needs.

Another unique contribution of the Duncan (1997) definition is the inclusion of profitable stakeholders as not all relationships are of equal value. Organisations should determine which relationships are profitable and then invest, reward, and work with those that can most influence cost and revenue (Shimp, 2002, p. 522). Furthermore, adding “stakeholders” to the definition moved the concept beyond the customer target audiences, to include all the relevant parties that have a direct or indirect impact on, or stake in, organisational operations and profitability.

The Harris (1998) definition also included a cross-functional process - all the major departments that affect customers should have a means of working collectively in the planning and monitoring of brand relationships. It integrated managers from different departments and agencies working on the same brand to plan and manage the messages an organisation sends to – and received from – customers and

other stakeholders (Duncan & Moriarty, 1997, p. 169). The combined definition for the late 1990s is: “Integrated communication is the cross-functional process of strategically influencing or controlling all messages and encouraging purposeful dialogue to create and nourish profitable relationships with customers and others stakeholders.”

With these definitions’ emphasis on interaction and relationship building through messages, the channel of the messages becomes significant. It should be pointed out that improved information technology was starting to impact. Point-of-sale systems, scanners, retail data gathering resources and the like resulted in more and greater information about the consumer and the marketplace. Companies started to know what was working in the marketplace and what was not, as well as who is buying, how much and how often.

Early 2000s: IC as a strategic management process for long-term relationships

Leading contributions between 1999 and 2003 included Gronstedt (2000) and Duncan (2001). The former defined IC as “the strategic management process of facilitating a desired meaning of the company and its brands by creating unity of effort at every point of contact with key customers and stakeholders for the purpose of building profitable relationships with them”. It emphasised that integration should be encouraged from managerial level. Another added dimension was the use of “unity of effort” whenever organisations communicated or came into contact with stakeholders and vice versa. This was not a new point of view as it related back to the combination of communication forms used in the definition of Tannenbaum (1991) in the first era. However, the unity of effort was an important addition, as it stretched beyond the planned messages to include everything the organisation does and does not do, and does and does not say. Therefore, the definition focused on IC as a process that must permeate through the entire organisation, rather than a quick-fix programme from the marketing or

communication department (Niemann, 2005, p. 97).

The Gronstedt (2000, p. 8) definition added the element of learning for improved cultivation of relationships with key stakeholders. This stressed that organisations should be ‘learning organisations’ by fostering long-term relationships with their stakeholders. The more organisations know about current customers and use this information when communicating, the more credible their communication will be and the stronger the relationship will become.

Duncan’s (2001, p. 8) definition, the most comprehensive and inclusive thus far, reads: “A cross-functional process for creating and nourishing profitable relationships with customers and other stakeholders by strategically controlling or influencing all messages sent to these groups and encouraging data-driven, purposeful dialogue with them”. It included all key elements contributed by the other authors, but most importantly added that the focus on dialogue (i.e. two-way communication) should be data driven. This was the result of an increasing amount of communication that was taking place between organisations and stakeholders, based on information obtained from and captured in improved information technologies such as the Internet, mobile phones and the proliferation of software programs. IC processes now achieved three goals more effectively and efficiently than the traditional promotional mix, namely: acquiring, retaining and using prospect and customer information. In fact, the explosion of change that has taken place in the twenty-first century marketplace, particularly with technology impacting on greater information accessibility, the early marketing concepts of the twentieth century are no longer valid (Luck & Moffat, 2009, p. 322). The resultant two-way communication that Schultz (1997-1998) hinted at in the late nineties, when he stated that stakeholders in the new millennium will not be individuals organisations talk to or with; they will be people to whom organisations listen and respond, has become a reality in the early 2000s.

The following suggestion is a combination of the different definitions during this period:

“Integrated communication is the strategic management process of organisationally controlling or influencing all messages and encouraging purposeful, data-driven dialogue to create and nourish long-term, profitable relationships with stakeholders.” It also serves as the guiding definition for this article.

The advent of social media

Research on the impact of social media on greater society (politically, economically and socially) is still in its infancy and results on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, or blogging, to name a few, are not yet readily available. What is undeniably true is the fact that control over the amount and the flow of information no longer resides with companies, marketers or journalists. Information is widely available to everyone with little cost and effort. Anyone can now be a company, marketer or journalist. The various digital and social media platforms allow stakeholders to talk freely about organisations and their products and services. More importantly, stakeholders can express their opinions to a wider public and build constituencies easier (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Today, issues and topics, and not organisations, are at the centre of communication (Luoma-aho & Vos, 2010, p. 316). The locus of control of messages has shifted from the organisation to the stakeholder. Conversely many will agree that social media make control of messages largely impossible.

Barriers to the implementation of IC

As stated before, IC is also still perceived to be difficult to implement (Kliatchko, 2008, p. 133) and the reasons therefore need to be established. Resistance to change is a common phenomenon and in most organisations there are established ‘ways of doing things’, solidified positions, turf and budget concerns (and disputes) and, more importantly, corporate cultures that have grown to be accepted as ‘the right way to do things’. A comparative study of IC literature

yielded the following seven aspects are possible barriers to the implantation of IC.

Structural barriers

Schultz, Tannenbaum and Lauterborn (1993, p. 167) identified this barrier to be the key problem: “integration requires communication across brands, SBUs, and functional specialties”, yet “almost all organisations have spent their time developing vertical communication programs”. Integration demands cross-training, a process hindered by vertical structures (Gonring, 1994, p. 47). Duncan and Everett (1993, p. 32) state that a first step could be to develop teams throughout the organisation and create an opportunity for cross-functional assignments and advancement through acceptance of greater responsibility.

Managers’ perceptions of IC as a barrier

Managers from different backgrounds are likely to have different perceptions of what constitutes IC or of the roles employees should play in IC implementation. It is not surprising to find that there are a number of notions about how best to accomplish the implementation of IC. Duncan and Everett (1993, p. 30-39) investigated this barrier in a comprehensive study. Percy (1997, p. 178) argues that while the communication professional must take the lead in IC planning, a strategy should be developed among all relevant parties, who then execute creative work guided by the common creative brief(s), coordinated through the communication professional.

Compensational barriers

As remuneration systems are changing in agencies, compensational barriers are becoming more prominent and consequently dampen enthusiasm for IC. The real concern, according to Percy (1997, p. 179), lies with those agencies that serve the communication needs of the marketer. Especially in large marketing agencies that attempt to offer clients a full range of communication services. Group managers are conventionally rewarded derived from their total billings and income. Somehow managers should be compensated regardless of how much is spent on their particular specialty, but rather in terms of the overall business.

Without such a scheme, effective IC is impossible because those in charge of a particular type of communication will be more concerned with selling their specialty and not on how their specialty will best contribute to an overall IC approach.

Marketing trends as barriers

Trends such as niche marketing and micro marketing are general ways of addressing complex or diverse markets. Too many marketers believe that each segment requires individual and distinct communication programmes, but the reality is that if a single brand is involved, an IC programme is most effective. The executions need not be identical, but the overall look and feel should be similar. This refers to the idea of the previously mentioned synergy. Percy (1997, p. 181) states that multiple images have a negative impact on a brand. Images and messages should evolve, not change radically. This can be a danger with micro marketing and the flexibility of direct marketing. Duncan (2001, p. 23) agrees and argues that when an organisation is not integrated internally, it is difficult, if not impossible, for the brand to be integrated externally in the minds of the customer.

Organisations think they are already integrated

When the subject of integration is brought up, the primary reaction of employees is often that they are already integrated (Schultz, 1993, p. 16 and Percy, 1997, p. 180). For example, some employees responsible for public relations in an organisation, at the very least, consult with the human resources personnel in the organisation before releasing

a new campaign. Duncan and Moriarty (1997, p. 29) state that beyond such limited interaction there is often no, or very limited, communication regarding the overall communication objectives of an organisation.

Short-term planning as barrier

One of the effects of IC is to have an effect on customer behaviour over time. Short-term planning focuses on the idea that new customer acquisitions weaken an organisation’s ability to build a loyal customer base (Schultz, 1993, p. 16). It is therefore essential for an organisation to have a long-term strategic planning approach for IC, in order to align communication objectives with the organisation’s strategic intent, consisting of the overall vision, mission and corporate goals.

Lack of a core capability in communication

Duncan and Moriarty (1997, p. 29) propose that the lack of communication competence results further in disagreement on the marketing and communication objectives. In return, this also leads to a misapprehension of the relative and changing significance of customers and stakeholders (Duncan & Everett, 1993, p. 32). The organisational communicator should have knowledge of the core organisational competencies in order to align communication objectives with those of the organisation as a whole.

The purpose of the current research was to define the concept of integrated communication by examining the historic devolvement thereof and to then identify possible barriers that could hinder the implementation of IC in the South African marketplace.

Table 1: Propositions on IC

	PROPOSITIONS
A	Marketing and communication agencies in South African understand the concept of IC.
B	IC is practiced from a strategic perspective.
C	There is a link between communication objectives and achieving organisational objectives in South Africa.
D	Structural alignment takes place in organisations with which South African marketing and communication agencies deal, in order to ensure cross-functional communication planning.
E	Media are used to ensure interactivity in building stakeholder relationships.

F	Mission marketing plays a role in the implementation of IC of the clients of South African marketing and communication agencies.
G	Measures are taken to ensure strategic consistency in the implementation of IC.
H	Various means of evaluation are used to determine the level of integration of the actions of South African marketing and communication agencies.

In the next section the results from how the top 10 marketing and communication agencies in the country define IC; the implementation of IC; and what they perceived to be barriers to the implementation of IC strategies are given after a brief discussion on the research methodology.

Research methodology

A qualitative research design was selected to obtain an insider perspective on a social action and to describe and understand (Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p. 270; Marshall & Rossman 2006, p. 1-5), as opposed to merely explaining it (Baker, 1999: 8; Strauss & Corbin, 1998: 10). The following propositions, derived from literature, are the fundamental assertions taken to be true.

The target population was South African communication agencies (including advertising/marketing and so-called full service agencies) and purposive sampling was utilised relying on expert judgement to select units of analysis that are representative (Henning, 2004, p. 71; Maree, 2007, p. 178). A list of top agencies featured in the South African marketing and communication specialist magazine, *Adfocus* (2004, p. 48) served as means for the sample selection. This annual publication is associated with the weekly journal, the *Financial Mail*, and features a list of the most pertinent issues in the field, including statistics of the most profitable agencies for that particular year. The top 10 agencies were FCB South Africa, TBWA Hunt Lascaris, Ogilvy, Young and Rubicum, J Walter Thompson, Network BBDO, Saatchi and Saatchi, HerdBuoys McCann-Erickson, Jupiter Drawing Room and Grey Global South Africa.

A pilot study ensured the efficacy of using the Morse and Field approach and tested for the validity of the interview schedule in order to optimise the overall reliability of the study

(De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2005, p. 183). Allowing an hour per interview was found to be sufficient and collecting information from the strategic planning directors affirmed the suitability of these designations. Face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted to afford the researcher the opportunity to enter into dialogue (Berg, 1998, p. 61) in order to collect detailed, richly textured, person-centred information (Kaufman, 1994, p. 123). A framework of open-ended questions was utilised so as not to suggest the terms in which respondents should answer a question (De Vos, et al. 2005, p. 292). None of the respondents requested confidentiality and responses were considered to be the voice of the agencies. The survey instrument is attached in Appendix 1.

The Morse and Field approach to data analysis was selected as Morse (1994, p. 25-35) is of the opinion that creative and solid data analysis entails a persistent search for answers, active observation and truthful recall. Four cognitive processes appear integral in this approach: comprehending, synthesising (decontextualising), theorising and recontextualising.

Findings

Findings are reported by means of the stated proposition, followed by an indication of the acceptance or the rejection thereof.

Understanding the concept of IC

A Marketing and communication agencies in South African understand the concept of IC.

The majority of the respondents' definitions were in line with that of Spotts and Lambert (1998, p. 211) in the 1980s: IC was about integrating various communication vehicles in a communication campaign. The definitions overwhelmingly continued to have an external

communication focus, and have not moved to the acknowledgement of the need to incorporate the integration of internal and external messages. As such, seven agencies' definitions do not even reflect the early and mid-nineties definitions of IC in which authors like Keegan, et al. (1992) and Tannenbaum (1991) speak about the importance of strategically coordinating all messages. Consequently, it would appear as if these respondents' definition of IC is actually an early IMC perspective from the eighties. The definitions of the other three agencies can be viewed as a representation of the late nineties

consistent with Harris's definition (1998). It can therefore be argued that the definitions of these three agencies are reflections of IC, rather than the IMC focus of the other respondents' definitions. This is also evident from the responses to the question of whether there is a difference between IMC and IC. All the respondents with an 'IMC definition' said that there is no difference between the concepts. Two agencies, using the late nineties definitions, argued that there is a difference, although one of the agencies could not articulate the difference between the two concepts. Table 2 summarises the results.

Table 2: Agencies' comprehension of IC

Comprehension of IC	Number	Represented Era of IC
Defining IC	7	Eighties
	3	Late nineties
Articulating the difference between IMC and IC	7	Eighties (Indicated no difference between concepts)
	2	Late nineties (Indicated a difference between concepts)
	1	Late nineties (Could not articulate the difference between the concepts)

Furthermore, the agencies had a consciousness of the concept of IC, but they did not comprehend the concept in its entirety. Although integration of communication is accepted in principle, integration tends to be implemented on a superficial level. Objectives are predominantly short-term driven because of various factors such as the lack of alignment. The implication of this is that true IC cannot be implemented, as it is based on a long-term strategic approach of brand building over time and not merely on what the client requires at a specific time. Research proposition A is rejected.

IC implementation in SA

B IC is practiced from a strategic perspective.

Although it was evident that all the respondents supported a strategic approach to IC, there was a major gap in the alignment of

communication objectives and the strategic intention of the organisation. Also, the mission of the organisation was not regarded as an integral part of IC implementation. Research proposition B is rejected.

C There is a link between communication objectives and achieving organisational objectives

Based on the findings that agencies did not, in general, ensure the alignment of organisational and communication objectives, research proposition C is rejected.

D Structural alignment takes place in organisations with which South African marketing and communication agencies deal, in order to ensure cross-functional communication planning.

Although a lack of cross-functional planning from the clients' side is considered as a barrier to the implementation of IC, most agencies have measures in place to ensure

cross-functionality. Therefore, though the agencies are focusing on cross-functionality, the clients they deal with do not include cross-functional planning in their communication. Research proposition D is rejected.

E Media are used to ensure interactivity in building stakeholder relationships.

Most agencies have measures in place to ensure interactivity in building stakeholder relationships, according to the needs of specific stakeholder groups. However, it should be noted that the majority of agencies refer to customers rather than a broad-based stakeholder approach to relationship building. Therefore, research proposition E is not conclusively accepted or rejected.

F Mission marketing plays a role in the implementation of IC of the clients of South African marketing and communication agencies.

The majority of the respondents did not view mission marketing as an integral part in the implementation of IC. There were, however, some respondents who did recognise the importance of mission marketing in the strategic alignment of communication objectives with the strategies of the organisation. Consequently, research proposition F is not convincingly accepted or rejected.

G Measures are taken to ensure strategic consistency in the implementation of IC.

Very few formal processes were in place to ensure strategic consistency; agencies generally adopted business models to ensure the consistency of brand messages. Only some agencies had a means of evaluation in place to determine the level of integration of their actions. The general opinion was that evaluation of integration was done on an informal basis. Consequently, research proposition G is not decisively accepted or rejected.

Barriers to IC implementation

A lack of a strategic management philosophy from clients was seen as the most common barrier. This philosophy is a necessity as IC involves a strategic orientation, but both

agencies and clients experienced incompetence around this issue. It would therefore appear that South African advertising and communication agencies' abilities to provide a strategic integrated communication offering to their clients is limited, as the focus is predominantly on external integration with the lack of internal horizontal and internal vertical integration.

Although not specifically explored, it was observed that there is not a standardised description of how the internal (client) vs the agency perspective works in terms of the responsibilities of the two parties. From the responses, it could, however, be gathered that the responsibilities given to the agencies differed based on internal capacity, internal resources and the ability to strategically align IC to the vision of the client. Duncan and Moriarty (1997, p. 29) propose that the lack of core capacity can inhibit the effective implementation of IC. A further significant deduction was that very few reported that there is consistency in the responsibilities requested by their clients.

Unlike the literature that identifies resistance to change and organisations that believe that they are already integrated (Percy, 1997, p. 178) as barriers, in the South African context it was not the case, but it manifests as core competency and comprehension restrictions.

Although no research results as presented to substantiate it, it is logical to state that the lack of a strategic management philosophy will be exacerbated by the arrival of new media and the proliferation of the use of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter and blogs. Due to the greater access to information it could be argued that communication via social networking sites is fast becoming the key competitive advantage of marketing and communication efforts. To ensure a unity of effort, companies will have to have a solidified strategic management philosophy if they want to survive in an already fragmented marketplace, and profitable long-term relationships and brand equity should be built amongst all stakeholders, both internally and externally.

Conclusions

A clear gap exists between the theory of IC and the actual practice thereof in South Africa as marketing and communication agencies in the country did not fully understand the concept. Their comprehension of IC implementation was categorised as predominantly functioning in the first (eighties) and second (early and mid-nineties) eras in defining IC with fragments of the third and fourth eras (late nineties and early 2000s). Therefore, an IMC, as opposed to an IC orientation, still exists in the implementation of IC. The most important barrier to providing a fully integrated implementation is agencies' lack of a strategic management philosophy. It would appear that the ability of agencies to provide a strategic IC offering to their clients is limited, as the focus is predominantly on external integration with the lack of internal horizontal and internal vertical integration. While zero-based marketing is implemented, unity of effort is not achieved. The result is that marketing and communication agencies do not assist their clients to build and sustain long-term relationships between the organisation, its brands and its stakeholders.

Limitations

Any study has inherent and specific limitations, and for this study, the following limitations are identified:

There is a lack of cases and examples within the sphere of integrated communication

in the South African context, and specifically on the implementation thereof. This resulted in the use of international examples of best practice in this study. It could be argued that these examples do not necessarily apply to the South African context, which further necessitated the need for research on the implementation of integrated communication from a South African perspective.

It could also have contributed to the strength of the study if a comparison could have been made between an agency's perspective of what IC entails and that of their client's internal organisational perspective of the concept.

Recommendations

South African marketing and communication agencies' understanding of the true concept of integrated communication should firstly improve in order for them to secondly realise that a strategic management philosophy (their own and their clients') drives IC. It is suspected that the fact that IMC and not IC is currently practised in South Africa is not limited to the local market. Further global research is needed. Lastly, it is anticipated that new media, social networking sites and blogs are going to impact negatively on companies striving to have a strategic management philosophy to drive their business and more research should be undertaken before IC is to be implemented as a total business model to build and sustain long-term profitable relationships with stakeholders.

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Appendix 1: Survey instrument

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1) Does your communication agency make use of the concept of integrated communication?
- 2) How do you define this concept?
- 3) How do you see the current state of the communication industry in South Africa compared to international trends?
- 4) Do you think the concept of integrated communication is implementable?
- 5) What do you see as the most threatening barriers to the implementation of integrated communication in the South African context?
- 6) Does the agency internally see the process of managing brand/company reputation and building stakeholder relationships as a cross-functional responsibility that includes all departments?
- 7) How does the agency ensure cross-functional operations?
- 8) Does the agency include internal marketing for clients, informing all areas of the organisation about objectives and communication programmes?
- 9) How does the agency include internal marketing for client, informing all areas of the organisation about objectives and marketing programmes?
- 10) How often does the agency meet clients to align communication, marketing and organisational objectives?
- 11) What mediums/channels does the agency put in place for clients to ensure interactivity between clients and their stakeholders?
- 12) How does the agency ensure consistency in brand messages for clients?
- 13) What means of evaluation does your agency use to determine the integratedness of their actions?
- 14) Should the mission be part of the designed communication strategy of clients?
- 15) Would you say there is a difference between IMC and IC?
- 16) How do you see the future of the marketing communication industry in SA?