

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION

SPECIALTY IN PUBLIC RELATIONS AND STRATEGIC

COMMUNICATIONS

**THE PRACTICE OF INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS:
THE CASE OF ETHIO TELECOM**

BY

METAGES MASRESHA

**A Thesis Submitted to the School of Journalism and Communication
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master
of Arts in Public Relations and Strategic Communications**

June 2020

Addis Ababa

Ethiopia

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ADVISOR: AMANUEL GEBRU (PhD)

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this thesis entitled: Exploring the Practice of Integrated Marketing Communications: The case of ethio telecom is my original work and to the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where proper citation and due acknowledgement has been made. I do further affirm that this thesis has not been presented or being submitted as part of the requirements of any other academic degree or publication, in English or in any other language.

This is a true copy of the thesis.

Metages Masresha Abitew

Signature_____ Date_____

Addis Ababa University

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This is to certify that the thesis prepared by Metages Masresha Abitew entitled: Exploring the Practice of Integrated Marketing Communications: The case of ethio telecom and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of arts in journalism and communications, specialization in Public relations and strategic communications complies with the regulations of the university and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Approved by: Board of Examiners

Dr. Amanueal Gebru

Advisor's Name

Signature

Date

Internal Examiner's Name

Signature

Date

External Examiner's Name

Signature

Date

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ACRONYMS

AAU	Addis Ababa University
AAAA	American Association of Advertising Agencies
Ads	Advertisements
AU	African Union
CD	Communication Division
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CEO	Chief Financial Officer
CMO	Chief Marketing Officer
COVID -19	Corona Virus International Disease 2019
CRM	Customer Relations Management
CSD	Customer Service Division
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DVD	Digital Versatile Disc
E-mail	Electronic Mail
Four Ps	Product, Price, Place and Promotion
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IMC	Integrated Marketing Communications
MC	Marketing communication
PPLA	Post Product Launch Assessment
PRs	Public Relations
ROI	Return on Investment
SD	Sales Division
SMS	Short Message Service
TV	Television
WWW	World Wide Web

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ABSTRACT

Now a days, integrated marketing communication is becoming a necessary condition for the existence of an organization. Knowing its immense value, many organizations of the world have been practicing for their marketing communication purposes. The intent of this study was to explore the practice of IMC in ethio telecom. To this end, the researcher employed qualitative research approach and in regard to generating data from interviewees, an in-depth interview, document analysis, and observation were conducted. Accordingly, an in-depth interview was conducted with purposively selected staffs, company's profile document was reviewed and personal observation was conducted. The findings of this research indicated that digital marketing, sales promotions and sponsorship are the most widely utilized MC instruments. On the other hand, public relations, trade shows and packaging are not extensively and frequently exploited. The utilization of personal selling and direct marketing is limited to key account customers and it is not inclusive of all customers to an individual level. The entire level of practice of IMC from the perspective of stages of IMC framework in ethio telecom is slow moving. In stage one, integration of all marketing communication instruments to provide a consistent message for audiences is not full-fledged. In stage two, there is no regular assessment conducted on customers about IMC practices. As to stage three, there is utilization of ICT for the marketing communication activities. Call center service and social media are mostly utilized channels. Stage four has not yet attained that there is no measuring return on customers about IMC. Staffs have positive perceptions towards the implementation of integrated marketing communications in ethio telecom explaining their agreement that IMC has much benefit in saving resources, making easy work relations as well creating integrity with various stakeholders. As to the impediments of practicing IMC, the monopoly nature of the company, absence of marketing communication plan and lead time, presence of technical jargons, and lack of technical trainings were baldly mentioned by interviewees. This study finally recommended that the entire integrated marketing communication activities should be conducted on the basis of comprehensive planning and structural flaws shall be ameliorated. Moreover, frequent assessments about marketing communication activities on customers shall be made. Lastly, the researcher suggested further study on examining the effectiveness of marketing communication instruments, and integrated marketing communication for employee motivation.

Key Words: *Communication, Integrated Marketing communication, marketing communication instruments, stages of Integrated Marketing communication Framework*

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

As far as human nature is concerned, communication is inevitable so much so that individuals, small groups, societies, and other human entities of the world are under its hub. With this regard, at the end of the 1950's a group of Californian psychologist theorized that "*one cannot not communicate*" (Watzlawick et al., 1967). Therefore, irrespective of the state or condition of mankind, communication is inevitable and no one cannot escape from it.

Organizations in general and business oriented ones in particular are operated by human beings and therefore, they are inevitably susceptible for the notion and traits of communication. According to Frazier and summers (1984), communication is the process of conveying thoughts and sharing the meanings among individuals or organizations. In any transactions or bargaining of an organization with its customers, communication plays a marketing role by integrating channels of distribution so as to convey influential information (Jamieson, 2006). As long as communication is concerned, it is a means for creating interactions or interrelationships so much so that business organizations are obliged to deal with its various attributions in order to reach their desired goal as profoundly as possible. Any company has compelling economic reasons to invest in communication (Kotler, 2006). Hence, a company is obsessed to employ the notion of communication so as to make profit as well as being competent in the market.

Marketing communication is one of the aspects of communication that has been employed by many multinational, national and private owned organizations across the world. As Kotler and Armstrong (2008) stated, marketing communication is the means by which firms attempt to inform, persuade and remind customers - directly or indirectly - about the brands, products and services they market. Hence, it is because of the lubricant characteristics marketing communications that companies interact and reach their existed and prospective customers smoothly. Marketing communications is pervasive and it occurs formally and informally, internally and externally to the organization, at all contact points, wherever and whenever people

interact with the organization (Pickton & Broderick, 2004). Therefore, as long as an organization is concerned, marketing communication is unescapable and it is inevitable as well.

Under the umbrella of marketing communications, there are promotional elements of the marketing mix which are a means of creating an integration and solidarity between an organization and its customers. In this regard, the most common promotional tools include advertising, sales promotion, public relations, direct marketing and personal selling (Jamieson, 2006). Accordingly, these tools of marketing communications are essential in reaching the various demands of customers of a certain organization as meritoriously as possible.

Much as marketing promotional instruments are important, an integration among themselves is more important. Having marketing promotional tools may not lead an organization to be successful unless they are combined in accordance with their merit and context of applications. Though marketing communication covers a wide range of promotional activities, the greatest marketing communications impact will be achieved if all the promotional tools involved are integrated into a unified whole (Camilleri, 2018). Moreover, according to Duncan and Everett (1993), although marketing communications have been used for several years as an umbrella term to refer to the various communication functions used by marketing, the need for strategic integration of these functional areas leads to integrated marketing communications which is a new approach to reaching consumers and other stakeholders.

The inevitability of change and dynamics of the world in general and marketing in particular has brought a new insight on organization on how to implement its various marketing communication instruments. Accordingly, the development and diffusion of digital technology across the entire spectrum of business operations, a growing need for increased levels of accountability, the increasing emphasis on brands and branding as the major competitive differentiating tool and the increasing focus on multi-nationalization and globalization as marketers spread across the traditional geographic boundaries obliged marketers of the world to recognize the need of implementing integrated marketing communication in their entire business operations (Clow & Baack, 2007). Therefore, these reasons have triggered many companies of the world to rearrange their marketing communications and move on towards the new trend called integrated marketing communications.

As Schultz and Schultz (2003) stated, integrated marketing communication is a strategic business process used to plan, develop, execute, evaluate coordinate, and measure, the persuasive marketing communication programs over time with consumers, customers, prospects, and other targeted, relevant external and internal audience. Accordingly, executing the principles and attributions of integrated marketing communications in this competitive world enables any business organization lucrative, cost effective, competitive and pervasive as well. Because customers have a multidimensional desires, a good marketer is expected to be tough enough in coordinating the promotional instruments or disciplines to provide a consistent, seamless, and relevant information of the company (Schultz & Schultz, 2003).

Integrated marketing communication attempts to combine, integrate, and synergize elements of the marketing communications mix, as the strengths of one are used to offset the weaknesses of others (Hackley & Kitchen, 1998). Knowing the merit, many companies of the world are implementing IMC without any hesitations. As Abdullaha and Yusoffb (2015) stated, IMC has been studied and practiced in mostly developed English-speaking countries, such as the United States of America, United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand since the beginning of the twentieth century. Moreover, several fast-developing Asian countries, such as India, Indonesia, Taiwan, Thailand and Malaysia are starting to adopt the concept of IMC in their industries. Therefore, in this competitive global market, African business organizations in general and Ethiopian's in particular are obliged to employ the notion of IMC in their entire business process particularly in marketing communication programs.

Established in 1894 by Emperor Menelik II, the national and government owned company, ethio telecom has been giving various kinds of telecommunication services across the country Ethiopia and the world as a whole. In its historical record, it has passed various changes regarding the kind of service, product, customer handling and many other aspects. In order to reach its mission and vision marvelously, ethio telecom should go in line with the new trend of global marketing communication i.e. IMC orientations where customer centric approach and integration of marketing communication tools have been given an immense and tremendous concern. Telecommunications firms should invest appropriately on the IMC dimensions with high beta values, as they indicate positive predictive ability to enhance customer loyalty to the firm, thereby

helping telecoms firms in actualizing both short and long-term benefits of marketing communications (Oluwafemi, & Adebisi, 2018).

The intent of this study is to explore the current practice of integrated marketing communication in Ethio telecom.

1.2. Problem Statement

Integrated marketing communication plays a tremendous role in oiling the relationships of a company with its existed and prospective customers. In such so, the company can easily reach its products and services at a minimum cost, and boosts its profit as well as retains customers. Moreover, customers could easily get informed with the company's entire activities in an easy, meaningful, smooth, and unified manner (Shultz & Shultz, 1998). Integrated marketing communications provides the firm with the best means to reach the target audience with the desired message, and it enhances the value story by offering a clear and consistent message (Grewal & Levy, 2008). Hence, this trend in fact reinforces rapport and pervasive interconnectedness between the company and its customers. According to Churchill and Peter (1995), many organizations should view integrated marketing communication as a means that serve their purpose especially in increasing customers' awareness and creating high demand for their products and services by conveying a consistent and clear message.

As Hackley and Kitchen (1998) stated, many organizations have actively undertaken integration of their communications disciplines or instruments under the umbrella of one strategic marketing communications function, specifically IMC. Thus, employing IMC in business oriented companies is helpful in making profit, retaining customers and employees as well as in being tough in a competitive market environment. Therefore, from this scholar insight, one can understand that in the global market, it is found essential that integrated marketing communication has been becoming a remedy in allowing a companies to effectually perpetuate in their various business activities even though the marketing competition is tough and the customers are critical. However, this could not be prevailed without a remarkable effort of executing the essence and principles of integrated marketing communications (Camilleri, 2018).

No matter how tremendous benefit integrated marketing communication has and inevitable it is, its practice in Ethiopian organizations in general and in ethio telecom in particular is still sluggish. Even though ethio telecom has been offering multiple kinds of services and products for various customers leveled as residential, public and private institutions, Embassies, Consoles, and many other several stakeholders since its establishment, the practice of integrated marketing communications in reaching the aforementioned bodies and other prospected customers is still lethargic.

Business organizations are forced to redefine their marketing communications strategies in order to counter the fierce competitions in the market place. Hence, business trends have directly showed that the importance of integrated marketing communication approach in the commercial sector is inevitable (Garfield, 2005). Accordingly, it is certain that such trends of marketing communications unavoidably start to cause a fundamental shift in ethio telecom to operate its entire business activities by giving intensive emphasis to its IMC practices than ever before.

Regarding this, a study on assessment of effectiveness of marketing communication mix elements in Ethiopian service sectors depicted that marketing communications are not performed in an integrated way to provide consistent and coherent information to their customers (Potluri, 2008).

Moreover, according to the result of a study on the practices and challenges of integrated marketing communication in Ethiopia by Singla and Tilahun (2016), integrated marketing communications in Ethiopia is implemented in a loose sense and there are a lot of bottlenecks and challenges facing the industry and they suggested further study has to be conducted.

As some previous studies revealed, ethio telecom is not conducting its marketing communications in accordance with the change and tendency across marketing communications philosophies. According to a study by Abeselom (2013), ethio telecom's marketing promotional activities are poor, ineffective and suffer from lack of integration. More specifically, the advertisement and public relations activities are poor in reaching its customers while disseminating information about the product and service that it offers. Moreover, as Kalkidan (2019) vividly stated, the marketing communication activities of ethio telecom is still lacks uniformity, integrity, and consistency in the promotional efforts across all marketing communication instruments. This researcher suggested that much effort has to be done for the betterment of entire marketing communication

activities of ethio telecom. As a gap, these studies did not employ the stages of IMC framework which is a scientific lens that enables to analyze the level of practice and integration as well. Moreover, they did not explore the implementation of each marketing communication instruments in a deep and separated manner. This in fact confirms that the practice IMC in ethio telecom requires more exploration and investigation in order to create a convenient marketing communication platforms and environments through which it can communicate properly and conveniently with customers in its every contacts.

Recently, ethio telecom is striving tremendously to increase quality services, profit, and customer satisfaction as a result of various forces like tremendous desire from the government, global development in technology, and the increase in multiple demand from the customers. These and other factors in the business environment causes a need for paying attention to the implementation integrated marketing communications than ever before. Thus, with all these understandings, the researcher views that it would seem to be the right time to explore the integrated marketing communications practice in ethio telecom so as to analyze the gaps and provide scientific directions from the perspective of integrated marketing communications philosophies. Moreover, it is also necessary to investigate what the transformation on marketing communication has brought in ethio telecom as well as the employee reflections towards the implementation.

Hence, this study would fill the gap and add knowledge by dealing the practice of IMC from scientific framework which shows how marketing communication tools should be utilized and integrated to convey a clear and consistent message. As far as the researcher's knowledge and experience is concerned, there is no earlier study regarding the practice of IMC in ethio telecom particularly in executing each marketing communication tools as well as its implementation from scientific frameworks particularly from stages of IMC framework. Therefore, this study explored the current practice of integrated marketing communications in ethio telecom.

1.3. Research Questions

As to the intent of this study, the following research questions are coined.

- How are different marketing communication instruments utilized in marketing communication?
- How is the practice of integrated marketing communications from the perspectives of stages of integrated marketing communications framework?
- What is the perception of communication division staffs towards the implementation of integrated marketing communications?
- What are the challenges of practicing integrated marketing communications?

1.4. Objectives of the Study

The study has the following general and specific objectives.

1.4.1. General Objective

The general objective of this study is to explore the practice of integrated marketing communications in ethio telecom.

1.4.2. Specific Objectives

Based on the above general objective, the following key points would be the specific objectives of the study.

- To explore how the marketing communication instruments are utilized in ethio telecom
- To investigate the level of practice of integrated marketing communications in ethio telecom based on the four stages of IMC framework
- To analyze the perception of communication division staffs towards the implementation of integrated marketing communications
- To investigate the challenges of implementing integrated marketing communications in ethio telecom

1.5. Significance of the Study

Even though integrated marketing communications is being studied immensely across the world, there is lack of empirical study conducted on its practice in Ethiopia in general and ethio telecom in particular. The objective of the study mentioned earlier is specifically designed to explore IMC practices in ethio telecom.

Accordingly, the study benefits ethio telecom on how to execute its integrated marketing communications tools in order to deliver consistent message for its existed and prospective customers. Moreover, the study vividly depicts the execution integrated marketing communication activities from the perspective scientific framework i.e. stages of IMC framework. In addition, the study provides an immense detail about the current IMC practice strength and weakness to the top-level management, marketing experts and other concerned bodies of the company. Moreover, the findings in this study benefit especially for the marketing communication experts, specialists, directors as well as managers of ethio telecom to better utilize integrated marketing communication in any of their marketing programs. On the top of that, exploring the practice of IMC and identifying the potential challenges gives ethio telecom an in depth understanding of its situation and the gaps in the implementation of entire integrated marketing communication strategy. Subsequently, the findings from the study and new perspectives of IMC practices have a contribution to the existing body of knowledge in the organization. Eventually, the study serves as a benchmark or springboard for other private and government owned companies to aspire and inculcate the philosophy integrated marketing communications in their marketing communication practices.

1.6. Scope of the Study

The headquarter ethio telecom is a giant government organization structured in various divisions having their respective subdivisions at department, section and directorate levels. The intent of this study is exploring the practice of IMC in the organization. Accordingly, the company's communication division under which the vast majority of marketing communications activities are being conducted is the prominent unit of concern of the issue under study.

Under communication division there are three responsible departments namely marketing and corporate communication, Media relation and agency management, and corporate social responsibility.

The Marketing and Corporate Communication department is divided in to four sections. The first is Graphics and Digital Communication Section- is responsible for managing the digital communication platforms of the company (Website, Facebook, Tweeter, Instagram and Telegram). The section produces timely, attractive and relevant information and disseminate them through those platforms. Different graphics and motion artworks are also produced for Digital, Print and Outdoor advertisements.

The second section is Corporate Communication Section. It is responsible for building the image of the company and serves the company as a bridge to link it with the public and internal stakeholders. The section produces press releases, corporate announcements, speeches, response for media request, magazines, and internal announcements, followed by the third section called Marketing Communication Section- is responsible for promoting service and products of the company by producing counts for Bulk Text Message, digital media and different publication.

Finally, the fourth section is Outdoor Advertising Section- is responsible for promoting service and products of the company using outdoor advertisement channels such as billboards, wall branding, and digital signage, transit Ads etc. The Outdoor advertising Section- is responsible for promoting service and products of the company using outdoor advertisement channels such as billboards, wall branding, digital signage, transit Ads etc.

Media relation and agency management department is submerged in to three sections. The first section is media monitoring and it is responsible for compile information about ethio telecom from social media, main stream media, print media and other media outlets and report to CEO. The second is production section. This section mainly focuses on in house production of audiovisuals not by agencies. The other is media strategy section and it is responsible for selection Medias, following up contents of TV and radio creative productions which are done by agencies.

The corporate social responsibility department prominently focuses on community relations and engagement in various humanitarian actions.

Apart from the aforementioned subdivisions there is regional coordination section that coordinates, and guides regional directors and it is directly responsible for CD. Moreover, event management section is also directly responsible for communication division and it mainly focuses on organizing, managing and planning various kinds' events.

The aforementioned division with respect to its departments, sections, and directorates are the direct concerned unit of the problem under study due to the fact that the vast majority of marketing communications activities are being conducted. Regarding this, the study focused only on the current integrated marketing communications practices of ethio telecom, headquarter.

1.7. Limitation of the study

As far as a certain research work is concerned, it is important to mention the limitations the researcher may encounters. Accordingly, one of the fundamental limitations that can be deemed to this research is regarding frustration of some managers, directors and experts. Fearing to lose their position, they may be frustrated in providing some data. Moreover, some bureaucratic trends in the company under study may be tiresome for the researcher in collecting data. Furthermore, the pandemic disease COVID-19 was a potential threat in the data collection period.

1.8. Organization of the Paper

For the purpose of convenience as well as logical presentation of the study, this paper is organized in to five chapters. Chapter one deals with background of the study, statement of the problem, objective of the study, scope of the study, significance of the study and limitations that the researcher encountered while conducting this paper. In the second chapter, review of related literature is presented. The third chapter incorporates the methodology of the study. It comprises of the research approach and rationale of selecting the organization, the sample selection process, data collection methods, and how the data is analyzed. Moreover, this chapter consists of ethical considerations and validity of the research. The data obtained from the study participants were presented and analyzed in the fourth chapter. The data analysis is made based on the specific objectives of the study. Finally, the fifth chapter encapsulates summary of findings, brief conclusion, and recommendations based on the finding of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This section entirely deals with various literatures associated with the issue under study. Accordingly, definitions, development of IMC, reasons for the growing importance of IMC, stages of IMC frameworks, instruments of IMC mix, and challenges of IMC are encapsulated. Moreover, the theoretical and conceptual framework with reference to the study are also incorporated. In doing so, various published documents were intensely reviewed.

2.1. Development of Integrated Marketing Communications

Before recognizing the essence of integrated marketing communications, it is helpful to understand its origin and development with some comprehensive illustrations. Accordingly, the idea of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) was firstly introduced in the late 1980's and many companies began taking a broader perspective of marketing communication and recognizing the need for a more strategic integration of their promotional tools. The decade was characterized by the fast growing on areas such as sales promotion, direct marketing, and public relations which began challenging advertising's role as the dominant form of marketing communication and later on firms began moving towards the process of integrated marketing communications that involves coordinating the various promotional instruments for communicating with their customers (Belch & Michael, 2018).

Correspondingly, Fill (2009), stated that the rapid development of direct marketing initiatives and Internet since the second half of the 1980's have brought a movement towards what has become regarded as integrated marketing communications through which a further significant development has been the shift in marketing philosophies from transaction to relationship marketing orientations. Clients have begun to redefine their communications away from mass media orientations to increased levels of interaction with customers because the structural inadequacies of the marketing communication industry obliged them to do so. To this end, integrated marketing communications has emerged partially as a response to this structural inadequacy and the

realization by clients that their communication need to be achieved more efficiently and profoundly than the previous time.

As marketers recognized the notion of integrated marketing communications, they began asking their advertising agencies to synchronize the use of a variety of promotional instruments than relying mainly on media advertising. Many agencies responded to the call for synergy among the promotional tools by acquiring public relations, sales promotion, and direct-marketing and companies declaring themselves as IMC agencies that offer a coordinated service their clients' marketing communication desires. Accordingly, the advertising industry soon recognized that IMC was more than just a fad or fashion and terms such as new advertising, orchestration, and seamless communication were used to describe the concept of integration (Belch & Michael, 2018). Similarly, Duncan and Everett (1993) recall that this new, largely media-oriented approach, has been referred to variously as orchestration, whole egg and seamless communications.

As Belch and Belch (2018) further stated, many companies of the world are realizing that communicating effectively with customers and other stakeholders involves more than traditional marketing communications tools. Many marketers as well as advertising agencies are applying the IMC approach to create and sustain relationships between companies and their customers recognizing the fact that the integrated marketing communications approach is proving to be a perpetual change that offers an important value to the rapidly changing communications environment. Regarding this, IMC has been described as one of the new generation marketing communication approaches being used by companies to better emphasis their efforts in acquiring, retaining, and developing pervasive connections with customers and other stakeholders.

2.2. Definitions of Integrated Marketing Communications

The definition of integrated marketing communications is trace back to some decades ago. Regarding this, a task force from the American Association of Advertising Agencies (the "AAAA") developed one of the first definitions of integrated marketing communications in 1989. Based on the study conducted by Christensen, Torp, & Firat, (2005), AAAA defines integrated marketing communications as

“A concept of marketing communication planning that recognizes the added value of a comprehensive plan that evaluates the strategic roles of a variety of communication disciplines – for example, general advertising, direct response, sales promotion, and public relations (PRs) – and combines them to provide clarity, consistency and maximum communication impact through the seamless integration of discrete messages.”

In such so, the integrated marketing communications approach seeks to have all of a company’s marketing and promotional activities project with a consistent, unified image to the marketplace as it calls for a centralized messaging function so that everything a company says and does communicates a common theme and positioning as well (Belch & Michael, 2018).

Furthermore, Porcu, García, and Kitchen (2012) developed a new definition and defined IMC as:

“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.”

Accordingly, this definition conveys that IMC is a means to integrate the entire marketing communications processes of an organization to a unified whole aiming at eliciting a coaxial interactions between an organization and its customers.

2.3. Reasons for the Growing Importance of Integrated Marketing Communications

The integrated marketing communications approach to marketing communications strategy is being adopted by both large and small companies and has become popular among firms marketing consumer products and services as well as business-to-business marketers (Belch & Michael, 2018). Accordingly, many scholars and marketers have forwarded the reasons behind the growing importance of IMC approach. No matter how many are they in number, some of the subversive and prominent reasons are illustrated as follows.

According to Belch and Belch (2018), the Internet revolution is well prevailing and the Internet audience is growing rapidly than ever before and it is becoming an integral part of business and communication strategy for many companies. Thus, the Internet revolution is affecting everyone involved in the marketing and promotional process. Companies are recognizing that they must

change the ways they market and promote their products and services. They can no longer be tied to a specific communication tool such as media advertising rather they should use whatever contact methods offer the best way of delivering the message to their target audiences. Digital/ internet marketing has evolved into a mandatory ingredient rather than an option for companies and causes the marketing communications to be integrated.

As Belch and Belch (2018), stated, the rapid growth and development of database marketing is the reason for occurrence of integrated marketing communications. Many companies are building databases containing customer names, geographic, demographic, and psychographic profiles, purchase patterns, media preferences, credit ratings, and other features. Marketers are using this information to target consumers through a variety of direct-marketing methods such as telemarketing, direct mail, and direct-response advertising rather than depending on mass media. Thus, database marketing is a cause to the development and importance of effective IMC.

According to Clow and Baack (2007), the demands for greater accountability from advertising agencies is a cause for the development of IMC. Company leaders expect advertising agencies to produce tangible outcomes. They spend promotional dollars carefully. Any coupon promotion, contest, social media program, or advertising campaign should yield measurable gains in sales, market share, brand awareness, customer loyalty, and other noticeable results to be considered successful. The increasing emphasis on accountability and measurable results has obliged chief executive officers (CEOs), chief financial officers (CFOs), and chief marketing officers (CMOs) to stick to integrated marketing communications approach.

Furthermore, shifting from Media advertising to other forms of promotion, particularly consumer and trade oriented promotion is another reason. Many marketers feel that traditional media advertising has become too expensive and is not cost-effective. There has been a movement away from relying on advertising-focused approaches which emphasize mass media such as network television and national magazines and in order to solve the marketing communication problems however, many companies are turning to lower-cost, and more targeted communication tools such as event marketing and sponsorships, direct mail, sales promotion, and the Internet as they develop their marketing communications strategies (Belch & Michael, 2018).

According to Pickton, and Broderick (2004), the reason for the dominance of IMC is the increase in international marketing activities. As companies have faced the challenge of marketing in many countries they have had to face up to the need for internationally recognized brands that have been capable of transcending national borders and cultural boundaries. This has required a strong sense of integration of marketing communications with corresponding consideration of internationally acceptable brand names and creative treatments.

In addition, global competition causes for development of IMC. Consumers desire high quality along with low prices. The company that delivers the best value of quality and price makes the sale often regardless of location. Advancements in delivery systems make it possible for purchases to arrive in a matter of days from anywhere in the world (Clow & Baack, 2007).

As Fill (2009) stated in a very concise way, the reasons for the growth of IMC are submerged as organizational, market and communication based drivers. The organizational drivers consists of increasing profits through improved efficiency, increasing need for greater levels of accountability, rapid move towards cross-border marketing and the need for changing structures and communications, coordinated brand development and competitive advantage, opportunities to utilize management time more productively and provide direction and purpose for employees. The Market-based drivers for IMC includes the greater levels of audience communications literacy, Media cost inflation, Media and audience fragmentation, stakeholders' need for increasing amounts and diversity of information , Competitor activity and low levels of brand differentiation, the move towards relationship marketing from transaction-based marketing, development of networks and collaboration and alliances. Finally, communication-based drivers for IMC comprises of the technological advances (Internet, databases, segmentation techniques), increased message effectiveness through consistency and reinforcement of core messages, the more effective triggers for brand and message recall , the more consistent and less confusing brand images, the need to build brand reputations and to provide clear identity cues.

2.4. The Four Stages of Integrated Marketing Communications Framework

The four stages of IMC framework was first developed by Schultz and Schultz (1998) and it refers to the general patterns to the implementation of integration in which organizations appear to go through phases or levels of integration in their marketing communication efforts or endeavors. These scholars identified four levels of IMC through which organizations appear to progress. Accordingly, the four levels are identified as, Stage 1: Tactical coordination of marketing communications, Stage 2: Redefining the scope of marketing communications, Stage 3: Application of information technology, and Stage 4: Financial and strategic integration. However, this study employed the framework modified by (Shultz and Shultz, 2004).

2.4.1. Stage One: Tactical Coordination of Marketing Communications

According to Schultz and Schultz (2004), stage one refers to the initial point of implementation of IMC notion in the organization by which the marketing communications activities are coordinated at this tactical level. Moreover, this stage is associated with employment of various marketing communication tools such as sales promotion direct marketing, event marketing, electronic and printed media, internet advertising, and sponsorship in their marketing activities in a coordinated manner in order to establish a one sight and one sound message, and to achieve greater synergy as well. They further explained another prominent aspect of this stage is that the company establishes proper processes for mounting and creating communication messages and practice cross-functionality in its efforts to create proficiency at the highest level. In doing so, the company tries to unify its communication directed from inside the company to outside the company so as to speak one voice, to convey a coherent and consistent message and image about the company for all receivers of communication in all interaction situations.

2.4.2. Stage Two: Redefining the Scope of Marketing Communications

This stage is about redefinition of the scope of marketing communication. At this stage, the company moves its point of view from a corporate operation driven to its customer, consumers and end users. The company is also considering various points of contact for customers to get in touch with the company's marketing activities. At this stage, the company conducts regular assessment on the marketing communication activities to check the fact that results from

assessments allow companies to change their focus from sending messages to customers to learn about what actually received by customers. At this stage company ensures marketing communication activities for both internal or externally audiences in line with company's marketing communication programs. Moreover, this stage is a radical move toward customer-oriented communication and its essential goal is to give attention to customers' desires like: what they want to hear or see, where, when, and in which media should be they communicated. In practice, this is executed by gathering information about customers, analyzing gathered information, and finally analyzed information is utilized to support or reinforce the company's marketing decisions (Schultz & Schultz, 2004).

2.4.3. Stage Three: Application of Information Technology in Marketing Communications

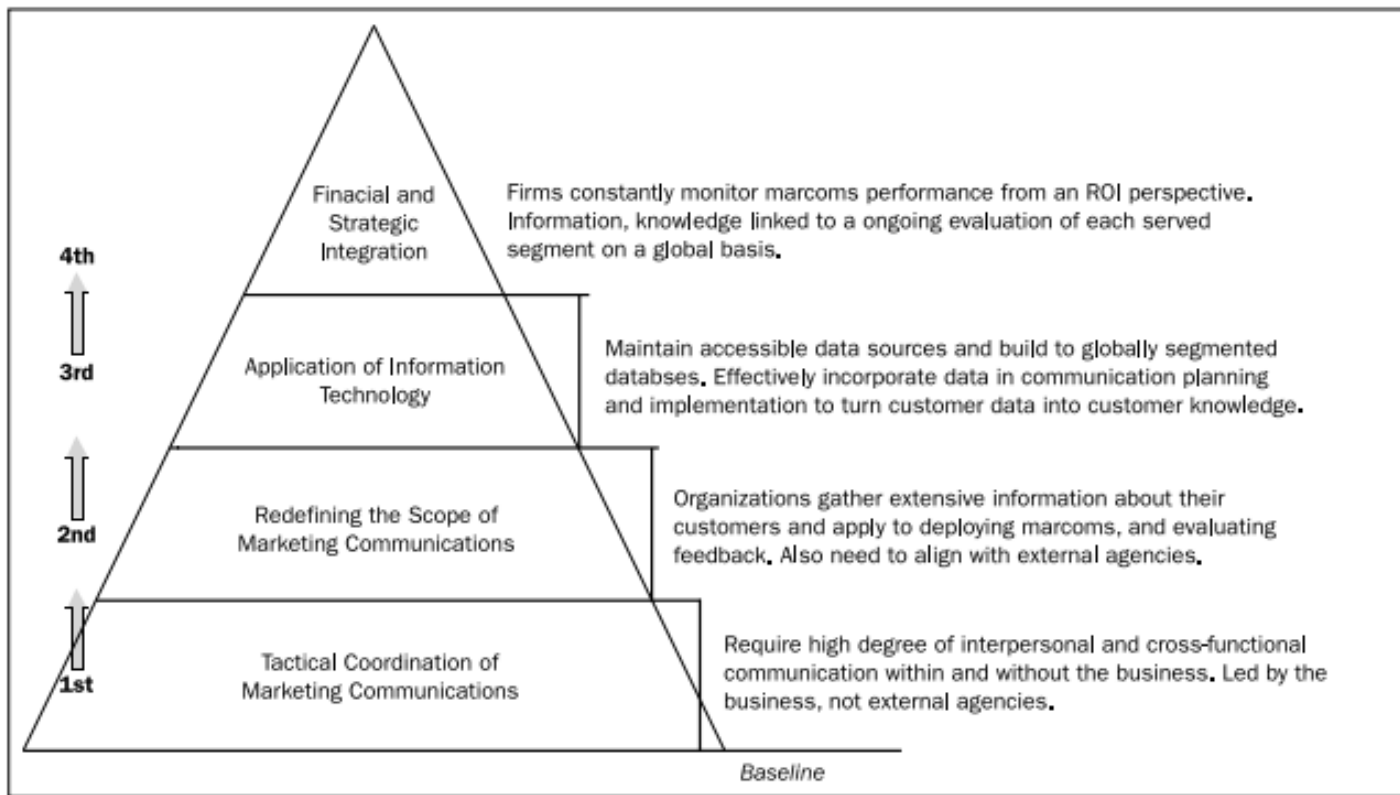
According to Schultz and Schultz (2004), this stage stresses on how a company applies information technology in its business operations in support of its marketing communication efforts. It does not mean that technology is used only for communication's purposes, but also for objectives of customer relationship management and database marketing. The result of successful implementation of this stage is strengthens understanding of customers in which case simple customer information has succeeded to turn into deep understanding of customers. Basically, company at this stage is seen as investing substantial amount of capital on high tech mailing operations system in its attempt to send personalized information about company's product and services offered. Besides, company also distributes information through the internet or intranets. In addition, the company is also pairing customers' needs and requirements with relevant technology. At the same time the company gives options to its customers and stakeholders on various methods to seek relevant information about company's products or services offered at any times and anywhere at their convenience. Database is profoundly use in processing and storing customers and prospects' personal information.

2.4.4. Stage Four: Financial and Strategic Integration

At this stage, marketing communication is seen as a strategic matter for company and the whole business operation is a coherent entity which is focusing on company's customers. The company examines results of its marketing communication and aspires to measure marketing investments

in comparison with profits that are gained by marketing. In addition, company's marketing communication is integrated not only with externally, but also internally between different actors and functions such as sales, research and development, and finance. At this stage, company is said to have the appropriate ways in measuring returns on investment made on customers. At the same time the company is able to relate revenues received from the same customers that the company have invested. On another point, the company is able to allocate investment made on customers in the same analytical footing as any other decision made on financial investment. Ideally, this can be done when company moves away from its operation-driven, inside-out approach to an outside-in approach that focuses on value creating for customers and prospects in all dimensions of the brand experience (Schultz & Schultz, 2004).

Figure 1: The four stages of IMC framework



Source: Stages of IMC Framework Adapted from (Schultz and Schultz, 2004)

2.5. The Integrated Marketing Communications Mix Instruments

Marketing communication is typically divided into separate communication instruments that are used for different purposes depending on how marketers want to communicate with the target groups and how the target audience wants to be communicated. Each instrument has its own strengths and limitations and marketers usually utilize some sort of mix of instruments to generate as effective influence as possible (De Pelsmacker et al., 2007). Promotional strategy is closely related to the process of communication because as humans, we assign meaning to feelings, ideas, facts, attitudes, and emotions. Communication is the process by which we exchange or share meanings through a common set of symbols. When a company develops a new product, changes an old one, or simply tries to increase sales of an existing good or service, it must communicate its selling message to potential customers. In doing so, marketers communicate information about the firm and its products to the target market and various publics through various marketing promotional tools (Lamb, Hair, and McDaniel, 2010). Accordingly, the various integrated marketing communications instruments are discussed concisely as follows.

2.5.1. Advertising

Advertising is any paid form of non-personal communication about an organization, product, service, or idea by an identified sponsor. The paid aspect reflects the fact that the space or time for an advertising message generally must be bought. The non-personal component means that advertising involves mass media (e.g., TV, radio, magazines, newspapers) that can transmit a message to large groups of individuals, often at the same time. The non-personal nature of advertising means that there is generally no opportunity for immediate feedback from the message recipient (except in direct-response advertising). Therefore, before the message is sent, the advertiser must consider how the audience will interpret and respond to it and advertising is the best-known because of its pervasiveness. For marketers who want to build or maintain brand awareness and reach mass markets with their advertising message, media advertising remains an excellent way to do so. Advertising is also a valuable tool for building company or brand equity because it is a powerful way to provide consumers with information as well as to influence their perceptions (Belch, & Belch, 2018).

2.5.2. Sales Promotion

It is generally defined as those marketing activities that provide extra value or incentives to the sales force, the distributors, or the ultimate consumer and can stimulate immediate sales. Sales promotion is generally broken into two major categories: consumer oriented and trade-oriented activities. Consumer-oriented sales promotion is targeted to the ultimate user of a product or service and includes couponing, sampling, premiums, rebates, contests, sweepstakes, and various point-of-purchase materials. These promotional tools encourage consumers to make an immediate purchase and thus can stimulate short-term sales. Trade-oriented sales promotion is targeted toward marketing intermediaries such as wholesalers, distributors, and retailers, promotional and merchandising allowances, price deals, sales contests, and trade shows are some of the promotional tools used to encourage the trade to stock and promote a company's products (Belch, & Belch, 2018). Marketers typically design these incentives for use in combination with other advertising or personal selling programs. Many sales promotions, like free samples or point-of-purchase displays are designed to build short-term sales though others, like contests and sweepstakes (lottery) have become integral components of firms' CRM (customer relationship management) programs as means to build customer loyalty (Grewal, & Levy, 2008).

2.5.3. Direct Marketing

The direct marketing tool kit or instrument contains a variety of marketing communication initiatives, including telephone, mail, program-length television commercials (infomercials), catalogs, the Internet, and E-mail as well as newer communication technologies such as podcasts, and cell phones. All these initiatives address the customer in very different ways. Regarding to this, the increased use of customer databases has enabled marketers to identify consumers over time and across purchase situations which has contributed to the rapid growth of direct marketing. Marketers have been able to build these databases merit to consumers' increased use of credit and debit cards store-specific credit and loyalty cards, and online shopping all of which require the buyer to give the seller personal information that becomes part of its database (Grewal. & Levy, 2008).

Direct marketing plays a big role in the integrated marketing communications programs of consumer-product companies and business-to-business marketers. They use telemarketing to call customers directly and attempt to sell products and services or qualify them as sales leads. Marketers also send out E-mails, direct-mail pieces ranging from simple letters and flyers to detailed brochures, catalogs and DVD to give potential customers information about their products or services. In connection with this, many companies now have extensive databases containing customer names, mail and E-mail addresses, geographic, demographic, and psychographic profiles, purchase patterns, media preferences, credit, and other financial information, and other relevant customer characteristics. Marketers use this information to target their current and prospective customers through a variety of direct-marketing methods such as direct mail, E-mail marketing, telemarketing, and others. These databases are an integral part of companies' customer relationship management (CRM) programs which involve the systematic tracking of customer preferences and behaviors and modifying a product or service to meet individual needs and wants (Belch, & Belch, 2018).

2.5.4. Personal Selling

Personal selling is the two-way flow of communication between a buyer and a seller that is designed to influence the buyer's purchase decision. Personal selling can take place in various settings: face-to-face, video teleconferencing, on the telephone, or over the Internet. Although consumers don't often interact with professional salespeople, personal selling represents an important component of many IMC programs, especially in business-to-business settings. The cost of communicating directly with a potential customer is quite high compared with other forms of promotion, but it is simply the best and most efficient way to sell certain products and services. Customers can buy many products and services without the help of a salesperson, but salespeople simplify the buying process by providing information and services that save customers time and effort (Grewal, & Levy, 2008).

2.5.5. Public Relations

Public relations is the marketing function that evaluates public attitudes, identifies areas within the organization the public may be interested in, and executes a program of action to earn public understanding and acceptance. Public relations helps an organization communicate with its

customers, suppliers, stockholders, government officials, employees, and the community in which it operates. Marketers use public relations not only to maintain a positive image but also to educate the public about the company's goals and objectives, introduce new products, and help support the sales effort. The company or organization attempts to get the media to cover or run a favorable story on a product, service, cause, or event to affect awareness, knowledge, opinions, and/or behavior. Techniques used to gain publicity include press releases, press conferences, feature articles, photographs, films, and video news releases (Lamb et al., 2010).

2.5.6. Packaging

Packaging is a marketing communication tool that combines graphic design with marketing concepts to create an identity for the brand. It can be effectively used to influence customer choice at the point of sale in terms of reducing the uncertainty and risk inherent in product choice and it acts as a concrete reminder at the point of sale. Most importantly, its appeal plays an important role in attracting consumers' attention. As a result, packaging can make a major contribution to the success of the brand as a whole. Packaging comprises a number of physical or functional benefits including the storage of the product, the extension of the product's shelf life, the facilitation of physical storage, the protection of the product during distribution, the communication of usage information, and the assurance of consistent quality (De Pelsmacker, et al., 2010). Moreover, as Pickton, & Broderick, (2004) stated, the emotional and psychological benefits of packaging are to elicit a strong visual impact to stand out, to be eye-catching, to differentiate itself from the other brands, to attract the eyes of the consumers, to communicate what the brand stands for, to act as a reminder for the brand at the point of sale and at home, to provide cues to the consumers to express their loyalty to the brand and to create an emotional link with the right kind of target audience.

2.5.7. Digital or Electronic Marketing

The rapid growth of the Internet and more recently, social media is changing the nature of how companies do business and the ways they communicate and interact with consumers. Every day more consumers around the world are gaining access to the Internet's World Wide Web (WWW) of information available to users. Electronic marketing allow users to perform a variety of activities such as receive, alter, and share information and images, make inquiries, respond to questions, and

even make purchases online. The Internet can also be used as a marketing communication tool in its own right because it is a medium that can be used to execute all of the elements of the promotional mix. In addition to advertising on the Web, marketers offer sales promotion incentives such as coupons, contests, and sweepstakes online, and they use the Internet to conduct direct marketing, personal selling, and public relations activities more effectively and efficiently (Belch, & Belch, 2018).

2.5.8. Exhibitions and Trade Shows

An exhibition or trade fair is a place where manufacturers and retailers of a certain product category or sector meet each other to talk about trade, to present and demonstrate their products and services, to exchange ideas and network and actually to buy and sell products (De Pelsmacker, et al., 2010).

Exhibitions and trade shows create a temporary forum for sellers to exhibit and demonstrate their products to prospective purchasers. Some exhibitions exist as marketplaces where buyers and sellers meet and these are called selling exhibitions on the other hand others exist with no actual buying and selling taking place at the exhibitions called non-selling exhibitions. Some exhibitions are open to the public while others are business-to-business aspects. Exhibitions and trade shows can take many forms from humble in-store special displays, to conferences, to very large international trade and consumer shows and other circumstances and they are widely regarded as a powerful way for firms to reach a large number of potential customers face-to-face at a cost far below that of calls by salespeople (Pickton, & Broderick, 2004).

2.5.9. Sponsorship

Sponsorship is defined as an investment in cash or kind in an activity in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with this activity. The company promotes its interests and brands by tying them to a specific and meaningfully related event or cause. It is a thematic communications instrument by which the sponsor assists the sponsee in realizing his or her project and in return the sponsee co-operates in realizing the communications objectives of the sponsoring company. If the latter is not the case, the investment of the sponsor is nothing more than altruism, charity, patronage or benefaction. To sum up, sponsorship shares two of the fundamental

objectives of advertising, i.e. the generation of awareness about the product or company and the promotion of positive messages about the product or company (De Pelsmacker, et al., 2010).

2.6. Challenges of Integrated Marketing Communications

Integrated marketing communications is not easily achieved because it is trapped by various factors. There are several of reasons forwarded by different scholars and some of the prominent ones are explained in a vivid way as follows.

Financial structures and frameworks organizations fail to fully appreciate the more strategic and longer-term values of marketing communications. Expenditure on them is rarely considered an investment although with the growth in the recognition of the value of brands and this situation is slowly changing. Budgets are often set with the short term in mind rather than the long term and as a cost rather than an investment. The result is that budgets are lower than those needed for the full integration of marketing communications. Furthermore, the attitudes and structure of suppliers and agencies is another challenge of IMC. Advertising agencies have maintained their traditional structures and methods of operating, while their clients have begun to adapt and reform themselves. The thinking behind this is that for a long time advertising agencies have tried to maintain their dominance of mass advertising as the principal means of brand development. In doing so they seek to retain the largest proportion of agency fee income rather than having these fees diluted as work is allocated below the line (to other organizations). The establishment of IMC threatens the current role of the main advertising agencies. This is not to say that all agencies think and act in this way. While clients have seen the benefits of integrated marketing communications, their attempts to achieve them have often been frustrated by the structures of the agencies they need to work with and by the attitudes of their main agencies communications (Pickton, & Broderick, (2004).

As Percy (2008) stated, organizational structure is a trap for IMC practice. Although there is a broad agreement among marketing managers over the need for IMC, the very organizational structure of many marketing companies stands in the way of it being effectively implemented. At the core of this problem is an organization's ability to manage the interrelationships of information and materials among the various agencies and vendors involved in supplying marketing communication services. Furthermore, Culture of the organization can be a challenge for IMC.

How managers think is conditioned by both their own background and the culture of the company. This potential problem is then compounded in the IMC case when the culture of the marketer must interact with the culture of marketing communication agencies and vendors. Managers from different companies are likely to have different views of what makes effective marketing communication. A great deal of literature on management addresses the idea that an organization will have its own defining culture, and that employees of the firm will absorb that culture. While that culture will not completely determine an individual manager's way of doing things, it will certainly have a significant impact upon its development. In addition, how managers perceive IMC can often impede the implementation of effective IMC. When managers come from different backgrounds or different marketing communication specialties, either within the marketing organization or at marketing communications agencies or vendors, they are likely to have different perceptions of what constitutes IMCs and the roles various people should play in IMC planning and implementation.

2.7. Theoretical Framework of the Study

As far as integrated marketing communication is concerned, there are many theories, and to the best of this study, systems theory is adopted and employed.

2.7.1. Systems Theory

The story of systems theory begins in 1956 by the Canadian biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy first published his book general system theory which proposed that traits found in biological systems could be applied to any system. Accordingly, the crux or the notion in systems theory is that the parts of the system depend on one another in order to properly function. Therefore, system theory is about being interdependent that the system enjoys the property of holism or of being greater than the sum of its parts. This is to mean that the notion in systems theory is that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts that rather than doing things independently, doing them jointly brings greater effect. Accordingly, this is primarily achieved through combination of two or more activities, processes or businesses to create greater value than they would be able to create independently. Thus, the parts of the system must work together and should be reasonably and strategically intermingled and interconnected to bring a surpassed and remarkable result.

Accordingly, systems theory in the realm of communication elicits the spread information by integrating the parts together to function better (Miller, 2012).

This study is about IMC and focuses on the utilization of marketing communication instruments in an integrated manner in order to convey a seamless, consistent and one voice message for audiences. Moreover, IMC is also emphasizes that rather than using marketing communication instruments separately, combining them together the various aspects of marketing communications in a mutually supportive and enhancing way really brings an enormous effect because the whole is more than the simple sum of its parts. Thus, the prominent benefit resulting from the integrated marketing communications is consistent message delivery which is from the spot of the company's business and other activities. Regarding this, the IMC mix instruments i.e. advertising, sales promotion, public relations, sponsorship, digital marketing, exhibitions and others should be executed in an integrated way for bringing an incredible and massive change in marketing communication processes. This can be seen when, for example, images and messages used in television advertising are carried through poster and magazine advertisements and are also presented at point-of- sale display, on packaging, sales promotion and merchandising and in other promotional activities and this enhances and supports the others in a consistent fashion. Therefore, the lens of this study is system theory in a way that working together than working disjointedly enables to generate greater value. In doing so, utilizing the marketing communication instruments in a meaningful combination results in high efficiency in reaching audiences with all aspects of the company programs, and promotes sharing of skills , knowledge and other assets among staffs. Similarly, conducting activities in solidarity averts unwanted dissipation of energy, resources and many other distractions.

2.8. The Guiding Conceptual Framework of the Study

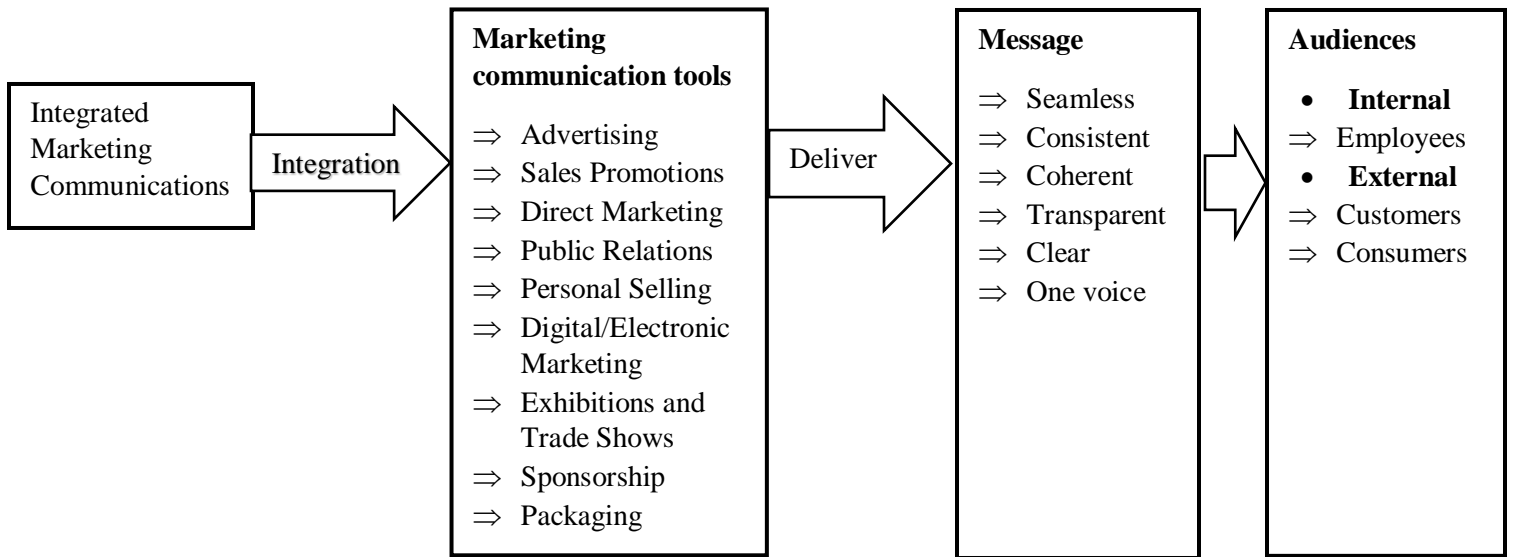
As far as integrated Marketing Communications is concerned, there is something more on marketing communications than a loose set of activities. It is a concept under which a company integrates and coordinates many marketing communications instruments to deliver a clear and consistent message about the organization products, services and programs as well. Accordingly, the greatest marketing communications impact will be achieved if all the elements involved are integrated into a unified whole. When integrating the range of promotional mix tools, they work

in harmony and synergy with each other so that opportunities are created to improve the effectiveness of the total marketing communications effort (Pickton, & Broderick, 2004).

According to Grewal, and Levy, (2008), integrated Marketing Communications represents the Promotion P of the four Ps (product, price, place and promotion) and it encompasses a variety of communication disciplines i.e. general advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, public relations, direct marketing, and electronic media in combination to provide clarity, consistency, and maximum communicative impact. They added that rather than consisting of separated marketing communication instruments with no unified control, IMC program regard each of the firm's marketing communications elements as part of a whole, each of which offers a different means to connect with the target audience. This integration of elements provides the firm with the best means to reach the target audience with the desired message, and it enhances the value story by offering a clear and consistent message. Correspondingly, integrated marketing communications is of the coordination and integration of all marketing communications tools, avenues, and sources in a company into a seamless program designed to maximize the impact on customers and other stakeholders. The program covers all of a firm's business-to-business, market channel, customer focused, and internally-directed communications. For years, one view was that promotional activities included advertising, sales promotions, and personal selling activities. This approach has expanded to incorporate digital marketing, social media, and alternative methods of communication and it also includes activities such as database marketing, direct response marketing, sponsorships, and public relations programs (Clow, & Baack, 2007).

Integrated marketing communications is more likely to occur when organizations attempt to interact with their various internal and external audiences. The communication mix used in any interaction should be audience-centered and internally consistent with the organization's objectives and strategies. Effective IMC should certainly encourage strong customer relationships through effective planning in order to develop an integrated communication program that will optimize specific communication objectives that lead to a desired behavior on the part of a target audience (Fill, 2009). In fact Kotler (2003) describes IMC as a way of looking at the whole marketing process from the viewpoint of the customer. Accordingly, the guiding conceptual framework of this study is designed and postulated based on the concepts and detail of IMC as follows.

Figure 2: The Guiding Conceptual Framework of the study



Source: Researcher's construction based on the review of related literatures (2020).

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter incorporates reasons behind the selection of the organization under study, the research approach, research design, methods employed for data collection, sample selection process, data analysis procedures, ethical considerations as well as validity of the research.

3.1. Reason behind the Selection of the Organization

From the giant government owned organizations in Ethiopia, ethio telecom has been playing a great role in the development process. This organization has many customers across the national and international level. These customers are the potential source of income for the organization and the country at large. Thus, in order to meet the various desires of such numerous potential and prospective stakeholders, studying the marketing communication activities is very essential as far as everything is marketing oriented activity.

Hence, in order to let the organization to be more effective and let competent than ever before, studies regarding to integrated marketing communications have a tremendous role and consequently, the country at large would be economically benefited. Studying such government owned giant organization from the scientific perspectives and framework can assure in reaching ultimate possibilities that would even escalate the country holistic development. Moreover, the globe is developing in science and technology and essentially it is ethio telecom that has a potential capacity to bring Ethiopia to the hub of technology. Therefore, selecting this organization means paving a way for all Ethiopians to engage in the global technology, market, and many other businesses and interactions.

3.2. Research Approach

Regarding this study, qualitative research approach was employed. The reason behind employing qualitative approach for this study is, it is an appropriate approach for social science researches that seeks to explore, investigate, and understand events, activities and human behaviors (Creswell, 2003). Similarly, it is also an appropriate research approach to answer what, who and why

questions (Patton and Cochran, 2002). Accordingly, the intent of this thesis is to explore the practice of integrated marketing communications in ethio telecom and this approach would help the researcher to investigate and analyze details about the actual practice of integrated marketing communications in ethio telecom.

More specifically, the qualitative approach would address to the questions of how marketing communication tools are being utilized and analyze the level of IMC practices based on the four stages of IMC framework developed by (Schultz and Schultz, 2004). Accordingly, the stages of integrated marketing communications framework is a lens which enables to analyze the level of practice IMC in an organization. Each stages has its own scenarios and characteristics i.e. stage one is about tactical coordination, followed by stage two which talks on redefining marketing communications, and stage three on utilization of ICT for marketing communications and the final stage is strategic level of communication (Schultz & Schultz, 2004). Moreover, in ethio telecom currently is getting much emphasis than ever before and new reform on marketing communication has been designed and implemented. Accordingly the researcher intends to analyze the work experiences of professionals, specialists, managers and directors of communication division up on the current practice of IMC in ethio telecom. Thus, analyzing their reflections of the aforementioned staffs of communication division enables to understand what should be more ameliorated and reinforced on the implementation of IMC. Therefore, analyzing the perceptions of CD staffs on the IMC practice is essential for creating better marketing communication by designing new strategies and averting traps on the IMC processes in ethio telecom. Accordingly, interview question would be formulated and the data would be collected qualitatively. Similarly, the challenges while practicing IMC in ethio telecom would be explored qualitatively.

Therefore, employing a qualitative research approach is this study appropriate due to the fact that it pays a way to deeply gain a comprehensive and intensive details regarding the entire practice of IMC in ethio telecom.

3.3. Research Design

The study employed case study research design. Case studies are a design of inquiry found in many fields, especially evaluation, in which the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case, often a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. Cases are bounded by time and

activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time (Creswell, 2009).

Accordingly, the study intends to explore details about the current practice of integrated marketing communications in ethio telecom. Accordingly, qualitative data would be used in order to meet the objectives of the study. In doing so, interviewee's feedback on the implementation of marketing communication instruments, execution of integrated marketing communications from the perspective of stages of IMC framework, their perceptions towards IMC practice as well as the impediments in practicing IMC were intensely explored and analyzed.

3.4. Sample Selection Process

As to this study, the researcher employed purposive sampling method so as to select interviewees from divisions, departments, and sections that are relevant to the issue under study. In this regard, the interviewees are from ethio telecom, headquarter. Purposive sampling involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon. Purposive sampling is where the researcher selects a typical sample based on specialist knowledge or selection criteria (Creswell, 2003). Accordingly, interviewees were selected purposively based on their knowledge, experience and position they have in the organization.

3.5. Methods of Data Collection

The study used qualitative research approach so much so that, it would employ qualitative methods of data collection particularly, in-depth interviews, document analysis, and observation.

3.5.1. In-depth Interview

In-depth interview was conducted with 11 purposively selected professionals, specialists, directors, managers, from communication division to obtain detailed information about of the current practice of IMC ethio telecom. As Paton and Cochran (2002), elaborated an in -depth interview is used to explore details about deep understanding of the respondents' perception and attitudes about the issues and it allows the researcher to achieve a holistic understanding of the interviewees' point of view on the issue through probing for more details. Accordingly, the

researcher used semi-structured interview to extract the data needed. According to Dawson (2002), Semi-structured interview allows the researcher to be flexible and to probe into more important information to arise.

Accordingly, the in-depth interview was conducted with the aforementioned purposively selected interviewees to get deep information regarding about the utilization of marketing communication instruments, the level of execution integrated marketing communications based on stages of IMC framework, their perceptions towards the practice and the challenges while practicing IMC in ethio telecom. In doing so, the researcher was persisting gathering data until it reaches saturation level by taking the findings and results investigated in to considerations. The interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants and Interview checklists were prepared to guide in-depth interviews. Accordingly, interview checklists were prepared first in English and later translated to Amharic language.

3.5.2. Document Analysis

As far as research work is concerned, document analysis a technique that is being employed to gather data. As Descombe (2007) stated, there are different kinds of documents that can be served as data sources and documents could be both visual and audio sources. The visual document sources include pictures, artifacts, and the audio like music whereas the written documents comprises of government publications and official statistics, newspapers, and magazines, records from meetings, letters and memos, diaries website page and the internet.

This study also employed document analysis for triangulation purpose as well as to enhance the validity of the findings. Accordingly, to achieve the objectives of the study, ethio telecom's company profile document was intensively reviewed. To do so, special and curious focus of analyses was given to the organizational structure part of the company's profile document. Thus, for triangulation and complimentary purpose, the findings from the document analysis were corroborated with data collected through interview and personal observations.

3.5.3. Observation

As Creswell (2009) mentioned, there are four types of observation i.e. Observer as participant (non-participant observation), complete participant, participant as observer and complete observer. Accordingly, to the best of this study, the researcher employed observer as participant type of observation.

Accordingly, observer as participant (non-participant observation) is a type of observation where the role of the researcher is known and the researcher can record information as it occurs without participating in the situation. This is to mean that the researcher is known and recognized by the participants and the researcher is an outsider of the group under study, watching and taking field notes from a distance and can record data without direct involvement with activity or people. Moreover, there is some interaction with the participants, but the interaction is limited and the researcher's aim is to play a neutral role as much as possible (Creswell, 2009).

Thus, observer as participant type of observation was conducted and the researcher went to communication division, sales division and marketing division offices of ethio telecom and observed the existing situation from the spot of integrated marketing communications philosophies. In this direct observation, the researcher was moving and observed to the aforementioned offices where they are found. In doing so, the researcher was observing without participating or involving in the conduct of the entire integrated marketing communications practices of ethio telecom.

3.6. Data Analysis Procedures

With regard to the analysis qualitative data, interviews were recorded and transcribed and later analyzed thematically. The researcher choose thematic analysis because of the fact that thematic analysis is a way of identifying what is common to the way a topic is talked or written about, and of making sense of those commonalities (Joffe, 2012). Accordingly, the researcher employed thematic analysis so as to investigate the practice of each marketing communication instruments, the practice of IMC based on the stages of IMC framework, the perception of employees towards IMC practice and lastly, the challenges of IMC in the organization.

3.7. Ethical considerations

Researches should respect the research sites and most importantly the research participants in all processes of the research (Creswell, 2007). Moreover, research must be regulated by ethical norms and values (Yeraswork Admassie, 2010). This research would therefore, give due attention to ethical issues while collecting data, analyzing and interpreting as well as during the reporting phases. This research respects and ensures confidentiality and anonymity of the participants.

Keeping the formality, the researcher took a permission letter from the school of journalism of Addis Ababa University. Accordingly, the researcher clearly discussed with the concerned bodies of Ethio telecom to get permission for collecting data regarding the issue under study.

The researcher contacted the interview participants based on their willingness and explained them how the research would not let them put under risks. Accordingly, in order to keep the anonymity and confidentiality of the research respondents, the researcher refrained from using their names during the interpretation and reporting phase of the study.

3.8. Validity of the Study

As Gibbs (2007) vividly stated, qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures. Thus, by employing certain qualitative validity strategies, the researcher can augment the trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility as well as accuracy of findings of the study. Furthermore, validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research and it is based on determining whether the findings of the study are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Hence, by considering the above scholarly details, the researcher strived to enhance the validity of the study.

Accordingly, for the accuracy of the findings as well as convincing readers about the issue under study, the researcher employed the following validity strategies as intensively as possible.

- In the first place, the researcher employed triangulation strategy using different data sources of information. In regard to this, the researcher employed, an in-depth interview,

document analysis and observation methods of data collection. Accordingly, themes were established on the basis of uniting the aforementioned sources of data from participants.

Thus, utilization of several data collection instruments was employed by the researcher so as to enhance the validity of the findings of study.

- Furthermore, in order to enhance the truth value of the findings, the researcher conducted a follow-up interview with participants using probing questions regarding integrated marketing communications. The researcher also offered an opportunity for two of the interviewees to comment on the entire analysis process and findings.
- In addition, the researcher tried to use thick description on each thematic elements of the study in order to augment to the validity of the findings. Accordingly, the researcher tried to intensively describe particularly interviews conducted with participants.
- Lastly, in order to achieve or enhance trustworthiness of the study, the researcher further employed peer examination or review strategy. In so doing, doctoral students of AAU particularly in the department of sociology and language studies offered their constructive comments for the researcher on the entire thesis work. Accordingly, their marvelous comments were indeed subversive and enabled the researcher to go deeply through the nuances in the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

This chapter explicates the major findings of the issue under study based on the data obtained through qualitative methods of data collection instruments. Regarding the study, four principal themes have been identified based on the research questions and the data was gathered from an in-depth interview, document analysis, and personal observation. Accordingly, the first theme deals with the utilization of marketing communication instruments followed by the second theme which talks about the execution of integrated marketing communications based on the stages of IMC framework. The third theme focuses on staff's perceptions towards the practice of IMC and lastly, the challenges while executing IMC in ethio telecom are also incorporated. Subsequently, an intensive analysis on the collected data has been made considering to attain and fully respond the identified specific objectives of the study.

4.1. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERVIEWEES

Table 1 Interviewees' Socio-demographic Composition

		Frequency
Sex of Interviewees	Male	9
	Female	2
	Total	11
Age of Interviewees	25-36	8
	37-46	3
	Total	11
Level of Education of Interviewees	Degree	8
	MA and above	3
	Total	11
Position of Interviewees	Professionals	5
	Specialists	2
	Managers	2
	Directors	2
	Total	11

As it is shown in the above table, the socio-demographic composition of the study participants particularly interviewees is categorized in sex, age, level of education and the position they have in the organization.

Accordingly, as to age category, nine interviewees were males while the remaining two interviewees were females. The age of interviewees ranged from 25 years to 36 is eight and followed by from 37- 46 is three. Regarding the level of education of interviewees, eight were first degree holders and the remaining three were masters and above. Accordingly, we can conclude all the interviewees were first degree and above.

In relation the position of interview participants, five were professionals (experts), two were specialists followed by two managers and lastly two directors.

4.2. Utilization of Marketing Communication Instruments in ethio telecom

According to results of the study, ethio telecom is utilizing marketing communication instruments and these marketing communication instruments includes advertising, digital marketing, sales promotion, personal selling, public relations, exhibitions and trade shows, direct marketing, sponsorship and packaging. However, the utilization of these marketing communication n instruments varies depending on the company's communication contexts like time as well as product and services types. Some of the marketing communication instruments are utilized frequently and the others are employed occasionally as well. In connection with this, let us see how and in what circumstances that each of the marketing communication instruments is being utilized in ethio telecom in the following thematically classified discussions.

The finding of this thesis shows that advertisement is not the most frequently used marketing communication instrument in ethio telecom. As interviewee seven said,

“The extent of utilizing advertisement for marketing communication is declining compared to the then times because of the advancement in digital marketing. However, still there are circumstances that we use advertisement occasionally. For example, when there is new service packages, new product and service offer. While we are advertising we use advertisement on TV, radio channel and print based on the appropriate context, time, nature of service and product.”

According to (Lamb et al., 2010), the primary benefits of advertising is its ability to remind customers about the products, services, and brand of the company. Moreover, advertisement is pervasive in such a way that it is best to communicate or reach to a large number of people at one time.

However ethio telecom does not employ advertising for reminding customers about products and services no matter how advertisement talks about. Regarding this, there are reasons behind for not using advertising for reminding customers. As interviewee two clearly stated, it is because of the monopoly nature of the company and customers are obliged to get information by themselves because they have no other choice. The interviewee further added that as there is an enormous development in science and technology, there are many various newly introduced kinds of services and products and saturation on advertisement is common in ethio telecom and this is a reason not to employ advertisement for reminding customers.

Furthermore, interviewee five also explained that the demand for accessing digital communication from customers is increasing at alarming rate and our focus now is moving on such tends other than sticking to advertisement. This interviewee further stated that sometimes a number of advertisements are many in number because of the multiple services and products offered by ethio telecom and this in fact does not allow to repeat advertisements for reminding or recalling our customers.

Therefore, advertising is not most extensively utilizing marketing communication instrument in ethio telecom. Thus, knowing the fact that there are many customers in the rural areas, much effort has to be done on advertisement in reaching the multiple desires of customers.

Digital or Electronic Marketing is being most widely and frequently exploited marketing communication instrument in ethio telecom. There is a massive demand from customers in using social media and it is being aggressively utilized and marvelous developments have been noted in its utilization in ethio telecom.

In relation to the implementation of digital marketing in ethio telecom, Interviewee two expressed as:

“Digital marketing the most busy marketing communication tool and every marketing activities are now being transmitted profoundly via social media more than ever before. We deliver different messages and communicate with many of our residential customers through SMS, call center service and various social Medias.”

Thus, we can understand that there is an enormous advancement in the utilization of digital marketing in ethio telecom.

Moreover, in regard to the utilization of electronic marketing, interviewee seven specified that the most common channels while utilizing electronic marketing includes, official Facebook page, website, telegram, Instagram, linked In, SMS, and you tube.

Regarding to the massive utilization of digital marketing in ethio telecom, there is a growth of statistical data in users. In this regard for example interviewee five explained as:

“We have more than 900,000 Facebook followers, 120000 for telegram, 65000 for Instagram, and 18,000 for linked In. Moreover, we have twitter for our premium customers, and we have also our own website and YouTube channels.”

Hence, this in fact shows there is an immense stimulation and demand of customers in using digital marketing in ethio telecom.

In addition, interviewee one also reinforced that there substantial or massive efforts are being conducted on marketing communication via various digital marketing communication platforms in ethio telecom. In doing so, social Medias, like Facebook, bulk SMS, and call center service are the most aggressively used channels in digital marketing communication. Moreover, there is utilization of digital marketing to our key account customers like enterprises customers via twitter, and special telecom line. Likewise, as the researcher observed the work of digital marketing section, the staffs are busy in reaching the multiple desires of customers using various digital channels of communication.

On the other hand, no matter how the digital marketing is showing a vigorous growth, still there are some imperfections in its structural relevance. In this regard, as the researcher reviewed from the company profile with reference to organizational structure and found out that call center service is one aspect of digital marketing communication however, structurally it is detached from communication division where the vast majority of marketing communication activities are being

performed. Thus, this structural misplacement and prevarication has an adverse effect in the implementation of integrated marketing communications to the best of all possibilities in ethio telecom.

The rapid growth of the Internet and more recently, social media is changing the nature of how companies do business and the ways they communicate and interact with consumers. Every day more consumers around the world are gaining access to the Internet's World Wide Web (WWW) of information available to users (Belch & Belch, 2018). As the researcher noticed, the utilization of digital marketing in ethio telecom should be boosted than ever before because it is unquestionable that every marketing activity is becoming internet or digital oriented. Moreover, Ethio telecom should consider digital marketing as enormous opportunity for its marketing communication in the future because many new developments in technology are being introduced across the world and new telecom companies are aspiring to invest in Ethiopia.

Sales promotion in ethio telecom is also the most frequently utilized marketing communication instrument like digital marketing. There are regular service discounts for customers as most of the offer of ethio telecom is service and very some products.

As to the utilization of sales promotion in ethio telecom, Interviewee three said,

“There are package discounts like stay at home discount package for preventing corona, holydays package, daily package, weekly package, monthly package on ethio telecom services. Moreover, when there is an introduction of new services, for example Yimulu service, fixed line telephone service discount for corona prevention.”

This informant further explained that ethio telecom offers discounts on such telecom services and others in order to let customers to know about the service and to encourage them to use the various service kinds and others.

Personal selling is not the most widely exploited marketing communication instrument in ethio telecom. It is being utilized for key account customers and it is not inclusive of all customers.

In this regard, interviewee three stated that the utilization of personal selling is specified to key account customers like enterprise customers, embassies, academic institutions, hotels and other organizations that are source of high revenue. This informant further explained that sales persons

are assigned to the aforementioned key account customers in any of their need and explain them about the service and product that ethio telecom offers.

Moreover, regarding the very limited utilization of personal selling to customers, interviewee three also stated that it is not inclusive for all kind of customers and this is because the monopoly nature of the company. This interviewee further explained that as science and technology is now advancing, there are various confusing telecom services that need simplifications from sales persons and there should be much effort in utilizing personal selling. Therefore, much has to be done in personal selling in taking the vast majority of customers in to account.

Furthermore, as the researcher found in his observation while collecting data, personal selling is one of the marketing communication instruments, but it is not in the communication division in and it is found in the sales division office. This is to mean that personal selling is not in the same building and it is detached from MC departments and found in another site or building. The sales activities are performed in sales division, but it would have been more efficient if it is intermingled in communication division in which many IMC instruments are being implemented together in accordance with their relevant context.

Moreover, as the researcher reviewed from the company profile of ethio telecom, personal selling is structurally separated from marketing communication department and it is found in other division. Though personal selling is one of the marketing communication instrument, but it is still in wrong structural division i.e. sales division. Accordingly, this is a big structural flaw and has a imperfections in the integrated marketing communication practice of the company. Hence, this results in message inconsistency and problem of integration or synergy in IMC practice in ethio telecom. Therefore, this structural problem should be solved and personal selling must be merged in to its right and relevant structure in the organization. To sum up, personal selling utilization in ethio telecom is still latent. Thus, personal selling should be submerged in to marketing communication department in which many and other marketing tools are incorporated for the sake of enhancing the IMC activities i.e. better synergy than ever before ethio telecom.

Direct Marketing is not extensively utilized marketing communication instrument in ethio telecom. Correspondingly, it is not inclusive of the vast majority of customers. It is utilized for key account

customers that uses high telecom services and who are source of huge amount of revenue for ethio telecom.

In this regard, interviewee one expressed as:

“Direct marketing is utilized for key account customers that are source of huge amount of income for the company. These customers includes, Airlines, banks, custom and revenue authority, embassies, giant business firms, educational institutions enterprise customers.”

This informant also stated that while utilizing direct marketing for the aforementioned customers, there are channels of communication like special telephone line, i.e. 980, E-mail, and twitter. These key account customers are hosted with a special concern because they are source of high revenue for ethio telecom. The interviewee further revealed that direct marketing is being utilized only for the aforementioned customers and it does not include the residential customers due to its monopoly nature and efforts should be done more in the future.

Accordingly, the utilization of direct marketing in ethio telecom is restricted to the aforementioned customers and it must be inclusive of other customer segments to make the practice of marketing IMC effective than ever before. This is further elaborated as the implementation of direct marketing should be even to personal or individual level and it has to be exploited and widely used in ethio telecom for creating harmonious relationships with customers in the future time.

Moreover, the researcher found out from document analysis that direct marketing is structurally isolated from marketing communication department and it is found in sales division. Similarly as the researcher observed, the activities of direct marketing are being executed in another office. Thus, no matter how basic MC direct marketing is, it is structurally prevaricated and detached from the right division. Accordingly, knowing the fact that direct marketing is a marketing communication instrument, it must be brought and intermingled in to communication division in order to improve the IMC doings in ethio telecom to better synergy than ever before.

Public relations is the most unexploited marketing and unsuccessful communication instrument in ethio telecom as the researcher investigated.

In relation to the utilization of public relations for marketing communication, interviewee one baldly said, *“public relations is the most lethargic, isolated, unexploited and disregarded*

marketing communication instrument in ethio telecom.” The interviewee further explained baldly that recognition, priority and follow up is not given for the marketing communication tool, public relations in ethio telecom and even it is not even considered or recognized as a marketing communication instrument.

From this we can understand that though the marketing communication tool public relations has immense benefit on image building and reputation, its utilization in ethio telecom is sluggish. Accordingly, the underutilization of public relations adversely affects the practice of IMC in ethio telecom in various dimensions like synergy and other aspects as well.

The marketing communication instruments public relations enables to build credibility and consumers generally tend to be less skeptical toward favorable information about a product or service when it comes from a source they perceive as unbiased (Belch, & Belch, 2018). Therefore, actions in escalating the implementation public relations in ethio telecom should be taken seriously so that immense possibility of retaining customers would be prevailed.

Sponsorship as a marketing communication instrument is being widely utilized in ethio telecom. The findings of the study show that sponsorship activities are primarily done by the corporate social responsibility (CSR) department of communication division. In doing so, the company has been discharging responsibilities by participating or engaging in various humanitarian and charity activities.

In regard to granting the community, interviewee seven deeply explained that ethio telecom has been profoundly sponsoring Macedonia, green environment projects, making *Sheger (Addis Ababa)* beauty project, school net projects, feeding and offering school materials for destitute students and supporting for evicted citizens. Moreover, as interviewee one also added that the company offered 100 million birr for COVID- 19 disease prevention, 500 million birr for mega projects like electric power supply, grand renaissance dam, road and small train projects. Accordingly, the above mentioned activities were done by CSR (corporate social responsibility) department and therefore, in this regard an appreciated grants have been offered by ethio telecom through sponsorship.

Packaging is not an exploited and widely used marketing communication tool in ethio telecom no matter how it has a great contribution in creating psychological and sensational image and brand. Very little activities have been done in packaging. For example Interviewee two vividly expressed as follows.

“Sometimes when products of other companies want their product to be sold via ethio telecom, we put ethio telecom’s brand like mobile phone products of techno company Moreover, we offer give away materials and brand gifts like note books, bags and others that have ethio telecom’s brand.” Thus we can understand that the utilization of packaging for marketing communication purpose is still slow moving.”

Therefore, knowing packaging as a marketing communication instrument, ethio telecom is expected to intensively utilize in the marketing communication oriented activities.

Exhibitions and Trade Shows are the most unutilized or unexploited marketing communication instruments in ethio telecom. However, occasionally there are some circumstances in regard to the exploitation or utilization of exhibitions and trade shows for marketing communication activities or purposes. In this regard interviewee five said,

“The marketing communication instruments trade show and exhibitions are very limited in utilization, but there is an occasional participation in annually technological related events like ICT expos and in that our sales persons introduces the product and service that ethio telecom offers to the customers.”

Furthermore, interviewee seven explained that the company gives priority participate in Mega events or grand like AU meeting in Addis Ababa and there are temporary sales points and much strive is exerted to give best thing because ethio telecom represents the country merely. The interviewee again stated that in the other occasions, ethio telecom organizes events in Hotels by calling key account customers to freely discuss about the products and service delivery. These key account customers can speak resentments, and other questions to the CEO of ethio telecom in person. Moreover, presentations about the products and service are delivered. In general, the utilization of the marketing communication instruments trade shows and exhibition is slow-moving.

Generally speaking, the marketing communication instruments digital marketing, sales promotion, and sponsorship are frequently and widely utilized in ethio telecom. However, on the other instruments especially in public relations, tradeshows, and packaging are not extensively and regularly exploited. In addition, there are misstructured marketing communication tools i.e. personal selling, and direct marketing and they are not intermingled with the other MC instruments. On the top of that, because of the monopoly nature of ethio telecom, the utilization of personal selling and direct marketing is limited to key account customers and it is not inclusive of all customers to an individual level or segment. This is to mean that the marketing communication effort need to target customers to the extent of individual level. Accordingly, knowing the fact that marketing communication instruments are the means to reach customers, much strive is expected from ethio telecom to the best of all it possible efforts. Low level of magnitude of utilization of some marketing communication tools in ethio telecom shall be ameliorated. In addition, structural flaws shall also be revised for bringing full implementation of integrated marketing communications in ethio telecom.

4.3. Implementation of stages of IMC Framework in ethio telecom

The four stages of IMC framework states the over-all patterns to the implementation of integrated marketing communication that an organization appear to go through the phases to vividly understand the magnitude of integration. Stage one states about the tactical coordination of marketing communications followed by stage two which talks about redefining the scope of marketing communications. Stage three is about the application of information technology in the marketing communication followed by the final Stage that discusses about financial and strategic integration (Schultz & Schultz, 2004).

Accordingly, as to the investigation of the implementation of IMC framework in ethio telecom, an in-depth interview was conducted with purposively selected staffs based on their experience and position they have in the organization. In doing so, professionals, specialists, managers and directors were interviewed and the data was analyzed. Thus, the practice of IMC of ethio telecom with reference to the four stages of IMC framework is discussed as follows.

4.3.1. Stage One: Tactical Coordination of Marketing Communication

Based on the findings of this study, the manifestations in stage one of IMC framework are not implemented in a full-fledged manner in ethio telecom because tools are not fully integrated. The integration of marketing communication instruments in delivering consistent message is not attained in complete manner. However, after the introduction of integrated marketing communications in ethio telecom, there are some betterments in delivering consistent and uniform message to audiences by utilizing the most common marketing communication tools, but it is not entirely consistent. Accordingly, informants explained their reflections as follows.

In regard to stage one of IMC framework, informant three said stated as:

“The structure of the organizational ethio telecom particularly marketing communications in was in a problem. Before the introduction of IMC and marketing communication concerned tasks were submerged in irrelevant and incompatible departments and sections. For example the internal communication which is responsible for informing the entire activities of ethio telecom to the internal publics was under of human resource where almost very little communication task is performed.”

The informant further explained that the structural defect was a trap for not to discharge responsibilities regarding to marketing communication activities to the best of our efforts and it was so difficult to call that the marketing communication practice was integrated and synergetic in ethio telecom.

However, regarding the organizational structural improvements in ethio telecom, informant two said,

“Recognizing the structural defect and the desire for implementing IMC, new amelioration on communications has been introduced since September 2020 and those communication oriented departments and sections that had been disintegrated were brought in to one new division which is one level down from CEO level called communication division. “

The informant stated in advance that the primary objective of this division i.e. communication division is to integrate the marketing communication activities of ethio telecom and the vast majority of marketing communication activities are now being conducted under the umbrella of

this division. Accordingly, there are some improvements in delivering consistent, coherent and one voice message for customers.

Thus, there is a structural amelioration in ethio telecom particularly taking integration marketing communication activities in to considerations. Therefore, this has to be encouraged because integration stimulates the entire business activities of the company and enhances coaxial relationship with its customers by delivering consistent message and keeping the marketing communication environment safe.

Regarding to the integration of marketing communication tools in ethio telecom in delivering one voice or consistent message to audiences, interviewee one expressed as:

“Some efforts are being exerted for integration of tools. For example, while we are delivering message to audiences, beginning from crafting message, selecting the right marketing communication tool, and other requirements. So, marketing communication instruments tools seems to be integrated at some conditions no matter how difficulties are happening sometimes.”

In addition, interviewee seven explained that before the introduction of the new organizational structural reform, the practice of marketing communication was too fragmented and there were many problems and the MC tools were employed without any sort of integration and consideration of many of their aspects. The interviewee further stated that even though there are some improvements in recent times in making the IMC better, still more effort should be done to make better integration of marketing communication instruments in ethio telecom by bringing fragmented tools together.

On the other hand, regarding to integration of marketing communication tools in ethio telecom in delivering one voice or consistent message to audiences, interviewee eleven stated as:

“Due of the monopoly nature of the organization and absence of readiness in marketing communication, the integration of marketing tools in Ethio telecom is still sluggish and for example, what broadcasted on air is inconsistent with what is going on ground.”

Moreover, as the researcher found in his observation, even though direct marketing and personal selling are the basic instruments of marketing communication, they are found in other office. Had they been in the same office, some traps of integration would have been averted.

On the top of that as the researcher found from company's document analysis, there is still structural disintegration regarding to marketing communication. For example, Even though personal selling is the basic elements of IMC, it is under sales division and it adversely affects while integrating tools. Moreover, though public relations is also one of the instruments of IMC, but structurally it is not considered as prominent marketing communication instrument. Public relations is not implemented in an integrated manner and thus, this makes difficult to have a full-fledged integration marketing communication practices in ethio telecom.

Generally, much as marketing communication instruments are important, their integration is more important and ethio telecom need to strive a lot in integrating the marketing communication instruments in the head of the time.

4.3.2. Stage Two: Redefining the Scope of Marketing communications

Based on the findings of this study, ethio telecom is still slow moving in achieving scenarios of the second stage of IMC framework which talks that the entire marketing communication must follow customer-centric approach. In the stage, customers must be emphasized and frequent assessments on customers in relation to the practice of marketing communication activities should be conducted (Shultz & Shultz, 1998). No matter how customer centered marketing communication assessment is very important, its concern in ethio telecom is sluggish. There is no regular assessment conducted on customer in regard to the entire integrated marketing communication activities of ethio telecom.

In this regard, informant seven explained that ethio telecom's marketing communication activities with reference to customer oriented operations particularly making assessments on the entire practice of marketing communication activities is still slow-moving. The informant further stated that because of the absence of competitor and the monopoly nature of the company, messages more informative and are not based on positioning and segmentation of customers. Moreover, the presence of multiple kind service and frequent saturation on services because of the advancements in science and technology does not give time for conducting marketing communication assessment on customers in ethio telecom.

Regarding the very little efforts on conducting customer-oriented assessment, interviewee two explained as:

“ethio telecom conducts Annual customer satisfaction survey (ACSS) and some issues regarding marketing communication activities are also encapsulated. The assessment is centralized and it is not much specific to marketing communication to customers.”

In time of Pre- message delivery and post -message delivery, customer’s feelings should be assessed frequently to delivery sound and coherent message, but such trend is not common in Ethio telecom. Thus, assessments on customers regarding the marketing communication activities is rare and uncommon.

In addition, informant one said,

“There is no formal assessment, but quarterly there is an effort of assessing customer insight towards marketing communication by taking data from comments and suggestions given by our customers on our official social media pages like Facebook, E-mail call center service and other channels, but it is not inclusive of all customers and limited to social media users. In doing so, the collected data were analyzed and based on the results, actions are taken.”

The informant further explained that the assessment is not comprehensive and frequent and this shows that still there should be more strive in the future regarding conducting marketing communication assessments on customers.

Moreover, interviewee three baldly stated that complains on services and products are being received via customer service department, and therefore this actually shows that the absence of regular marketing communication assessment on customers.

To sum up, ethio telecom’s effort in conducting marketing communication activities from the spot of customers’ needs to be improved. In doing so, regular assessments on the entire marketing communication activities should be conducted.

4.3.3. Stage Three: Application of Information Technology in Marketing Communications

In this stage information technology is utilized to support the integrated marketing communication development (Shultz & Shultz, 1998).

The findings of the show that there are some betterments exploitation information technology for marketing communication activities in ethio telecom. Interviewees forwarded their reflections regarding to the utilization of ICT (information communication technology) for marketing communication activities in ethio telecom as follows.

Regarding the betterment of using ICT for marketing communication purposes interviewee two explained that ICT is primarily connected with ethio telecom because it provides ICT service. Accordingly, there is digital communication section which manages social media tools and it is found at manager level. Moreover there is utilization of bulk SMS in the digital communication that enables to advertise the products and services ethio telecom offers. Thus, utilization of information communication technology in general and our digital communication in particular seems somehow encouraging.

Apparently, informant three also expressed as:

“Because of the development in science and technology, we are now obliged to give emphasis for digital marketing and we are striving accordingly. Regarding to utilizing ICT for MC in ethio telecom, there are considerable efforts. For example, in bill collection, customers were paying fee in front, but now there are digital platforms of payment like mobile banking. Digital technologies like social media tools, and bulk SMS are moderately implemented for MC activities, but they are much restricted to urban customers.”

In conclusion, no matter how different opinions forwarded from interviewees, ethio telecom should move on in better utilization of ICT for marketing communication activities so long as everything is becoming digital than ever before.

4.3.4. Stage Four: Financial and Strategic Integration

At this stage, company is said as having the appropriate ways in measuring returns on investment made on customers and examines results of its marketing communication and aspires to measure marketing investments in comparison with profits that are gained by marketing and the company's marketing communication is integrated not only with externally but also internally between different actors and functions such as sales, research and development, and finance (Shultz & Shultz, 1998).

As to the findings of the study, ethio telecom still have to do with many things until it will reach the fourth stage of IMC framework.

As interviewee seven explained:

“There is no measuring return in marketing communication purpose in ethio telecom. Because the company is the only one in providing telecom service in the country, customers are obliges to busy products and services with no any sense of hesitation. Measuring return in marketing communication still lethargic and needs much effort in the future.”

This interviewee further explained that the communication division structure is a recent phenomenon and still there are MC instruments which are still wrongly structured and this in fact makes difficult to measure MC return on customers and to make whole business operation is a coherent and synergetic. Thus, ethio telecom has not yet reached at this stage.

Regarding to internal integration, informant one said, *“Still there is a problem in working with other divisions and departments in a full-fledged solidarity and integrity.”*

Moreover, informant three explained that the co-operation between different functions and actors inside the company has still expected to do more, though there are some stimulations on integration among divisions, departments and sections after the introduction of the new organizational structure. Therefore, efforts in ascending integrated marketing communications practices for creating more coaxial and harmonious relationship among actors in ethio telecom should be done in the future.

Additionally, as the researcher found from company document analysis, departments that have very little contribution to marketing communication practices are misplaced or misstructured and merged in the communication division. Regarding to this, department of women affairs, and employee relations which is related to treating employee's resentments are incorporated in CD no matter how minuscule significance they have in the company's marketing communication activities. Thus, such organizational structural problems create a trap not to have a full-fledged integrated marketing communication in ethio telecom.

Moreover, the as the researcher found in his observation, departments and sections which are under communication division are not in the same building. Some are found in other area even though they are doing the same thing i.e. marketing communication. For example, the central office of communication division is found in other are and staffs are toiling and this in fact affects the integrated marketing practice of ethio telecom. Accordingly, dispersed departments and sections should be in the same building.

Generally speaking, based on the findings from an in-depth interview, observation and document analysis on the stages of IMC frameworks developed by Schultz & Schultz's (2004), ethio telecom seems to fulfill some attributions of stage one and stage three. In stage one, ethio telecom utilizes almost all marketing communication tools, but regarding to integration for delivering consistent and coherent message to customers much is expected to be done. Similarly, some scenarios of stage three of IMC framework are moderately implemented. Because essentially ethio telecom is a technological oriented company, it is moving better no matter how limitations in inclusiveness of all customers is still happening. However, the scenarios of stage two and stage four of IMC frameworks need to be focused and ethio telecom has to move on in exerting much effort. Making regular assessments on customers about the marketing communication activities as well as measuring returns on customers are not being conducted vigorously. Hence, the entire integrated marketing communications practice in ethio telecom from the perspective of stages of IMC framework is slow moving and much strive is expected.

4.4. Perceptions of Staffs towards Integrated Marketing Communications Practice in ethio telecom

As integrated marketing communications is the newly introduced practice in ethio telecom, the researcher intends to analyze the perceptions of purposively selected professionals, specialists, directors, and managers in the communication division because the vast majority of MC activities are being done by these aforementioned staffs. Accordingly, the researcher made an analysis of reflections of interviewees about their perceptions on the current IMC practice of ethio telecom. In doing so, the researcher made analysis about the experience of employees perceptions from three dimensions integrated marketing communications i.e. work conduct, resources saving and stakeholder's relations. Accordingly, the experience of interviewees towards the current practice of IMC in ethio telecom is thematically analyzed as follows.

4.4.1. Integrated Marketing Communications for Work Conduct

Almost all the interviewees agree that the implementation of IMC in ethio telecom has an enormous benefit and it must be reinforced and much has to be done. They have positive opinion for the implementation of IMC in the organization. They explained that IMC has immense benefit in providing consistent messages for audiences and it enhances operational efficiency and integration as well. They also confirmed described IMC has an importance in integrating many disintegrated activities and it creates easier work relations among staffs, helps for job clarity, and it also provides effectiveness in work place. Moreover, IMC also integrates the entire marketing communication activities in a profound manner. Therefore, IMC in ethio telecom should be moving on and much emphasis should be given from high level officials.

4.4.2. Integrated Marketing Communications for Saving Resources

Regarding IMC in saving resources, interviewees still have positive insight. According to them, the implementation of IMC in ethio telecom has a merit in averting unnecessary dissipation of human resource. Moreover, they explained that IMC saves money, and unwanted waste of material resources. From the experience of interviewees, we can understand that they the practice of IMC in ethio telecom has an importance in relation to saving material, human and financial

resources. Therefore, recognizing the merit of IMC from these and other dimensions, ethio telecom should keep on doing much in the head of the time.

4.4.3. Integrated Marketing Communications for Stakeholders Relations

Regarding stakeholders relations, the interviewees have positive outlook and almost all of them agreed that IMC has a massive benefit. They stated that IMC has a merit in strengthens internal stakeholder's relations and it also enhances external stakeholder's relations. The participants further stated that IMC is important to identify customer's desires, loyalty and enhances the demand of customer.

In this regard for example, interviewee two said, "*Integrated marketing communications helps to meet employee need and it is important for getting customers feedback as well as enables ethio telecom to know what to do on customer desires.*" Therefore, recognizing the merit of IMC ethio telecom must strive a lot in helping the marketing communication activities as everything is becoming marketing than ever before.

To sum up, interviewees have positive outlook towards IMC that it has to be practiced tremendously in ethio telecom. Accordingly, professionals, directors, specialists, and professionals suggested that integrated marketing communications is the right means of prevailing transparency, and responsibility among workers as well as in reaching one voice message for customers. They further explained that it averts unwanted dissipation of resources as well an appropriate way of creating fraternity with different stakeholders.

4.5. Challenges of Integrated Marketing Communications Practice in ethio telecom

No matter how integrated marketing communications has an immense benefit for an organization in its various activities, there are challenges in the application process. As to ethio telecom, the researcher has found out the following impediments of practicing integrated marketing communications.

Talking about the changes of implementing integrated marketing communications in ethio telecom, Interviewee seven explained as:

“Technical jargons on service and product kinds make IMC difficult to execute because many customers are illiterate and they fail to understand jargons languages on services and products. In addition, the company’s monopoly nature, presence of multiple kinds of services and product offers, IMC makes very complex to do it strategically.”

This interviewee further stated that because of the presence of frequent changes in services, and products offered by the ethio telecom, we faces challenges to fully implement integrated marketing communication.

Furthermore, interviewees one and eleven explained similar reason that there is no marketing communication plan and almost most of marketing communications are being done with very limited plan and this is a big challenge indeed. Thus, the entire integrated marketing communication lethargic and slow moving.

Moreover, as interviewee two baldly explained, there is no lead time to do marketing communications tasks and every marketing communications are urgent and unexpected that some advertisements are incompatible with the service and some others are much exaggerated. Moreover, some advertisements which are done by agencies are not much creative and there is lack of skills on some staffs of the company.

Regarding the challenge towards IMC practice in ethio telecom, interviewee three further added that there is no professional freedom and workers are not encourage to be creative and also there is no trust from high level officials. In addition to that, there is no technical trainings given for marketing communication workers. On the top of that, because of the company’s government owned, sometimes the presence of conservative processual or procedures are an impediment while practicing integrated marketing communications.

Lastly, interviewee one again said, *“As a country level we are challenged by COVID -19 like other companies faced.”* Thus, the pandemic disease corona virus affects the practice of integrated marketing communication of ethio telecom.

Thus, the above mentioned explanations are the traps or challenges of executing integrated marketing communications in ethio telecom. Thus, a lot is to be done at least to minimize the magnitude of the aforementioned challenges.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The intent of this study is to explore the current practice of integrated marketing communications in ethio telecom. Accordingly, this chapter entirely comprises of summary of findings, conclusion drawn from findings, researcher's recommendations on the basis of the research results and finally the research implications.

5.1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The overall findings of this study show that digital marketing, sales promotions and sponsorship are the most broadly employed marketing communication instruments. On the contrary, public relations, trade shows and packaging are not broadly and regularly employed. The application of personal selling and direct marketing is restricted to key account customers and it is not all-encompassing of customers to an individual level. The whole level of practice of IMC from the viewpoint of stages of IMC framework in ethio telecom is slow moving or sluggish. In stage one, integration of all marketing communication tools in providing consistent message for audiences is not full-fledged. In stage two, there is no frequent assessment done on customers about integrated marketing communication practices. As to stage three, there is utilization of ICT for the marketing communication activities. In doing so, Call center service and social media are mostly utilized channels. Stage four is has not yet achieved that there is no measuring return on customers about IMC. The other finding exhibits that Staffs have positive perception towards the implementation of integrated marketing communications in ethio telecom explaining their insight that IMC has much benefit in saving resources, making easy work relations as well creating coaxial relationships with various stakeholders. Eventually, as to the challenges of practicing integrated marketing communications in ethio telecom, the monopoly nature of the company, absence of integrated marketing communication plan and lead time, presence of technical jargons, presence of conservative processual trends and lack of technical trainings and absence of integrated marketing communications plan to conduct tasks were baldly mentioned by interview participants.

5.1. CONCLUSION

This research attempted to explore the practice of integrated marketing communications in ethio telecom focusing on how the marketing communication instruments are being utilized. It also tried to explore the practice of integrated marketing communications from the perspective of stages of IMC framework. Moreover, perception of CD staffs towards the practice of IMC and the challenges as well were analyzed. In doing so, the researcher has employed qualitative research approach. In regard to data collection instruments, an In-depth interview was conducted with purposively selected informants. Moreover, company's profile document was intensively reviewed as well as observation was held by the researcher.

The study has revealed that the practice of integrated marketing communications shows some improvements with regard to utilizing of some marketing communication instruments as well as in reaching some scenarios of stages of IMC framework. Moreover, staffs have positive perception towards the current practice of IMC in ethio telecom no matter how some challenges are still a trap not having a full-fledged integration among marketing communication instruments.

As the findings indicate, there are improvements in utilization of marketing communication instruments like digital or electronic marketing, sales promotion, and sponsorship. However, the utilization of marketing communication instruments like public relations, trade shows, and packaging are not exploited well. The utilization of direct marketing, and personal selling are specified to segmented customers and they are not inclusive of the vast majority of customers and are not used at individual level. As a peculiar finding, there is a remarkable growth in the utilization of digital marketing than ever before.

In regard to the level of practice of integrated marketing communications in ethio telecom from the perspective of stages of IMC framework, much is effort is expected to be done. Accordingly, most of the practice most scenarios in each stages are still sluggish no matter how some improvements are there at stage one and stage three.

As to stage one of the framework, ethio telecom has shown improvements in delivering consistent and coherent message for its customers compared to the previous times. However, the integration

of marketing communication instruments is still lethargic and this in fact refrains ethio telecom from achieving circumstances of stage one in a full-fledged manner.

In regard to stage two of IMC framework, ethio telecom is slow moving. The scenario says every act of the marketing communication should be customer oriented that there must be regular assessments. In doing so, conducting regular assessments on customers particularly on the activities of marketing communications has not yet attained even though some customer feedbacks are taken from social media platforms and analysis is being done.

The findings about the level of practice of integrated marketing communications based of stage three scenarios shows that there are enormous changes in utilizing information technology for marketing communication activities. Social media, call center services and bulk SMS are the most frequently used outlets.

In relation to stage four of IMC, nothing has been done other than progresses of fraternity among divisions, departments and sections. There is no measuring returns in the activities of marketing communications and this shows the financial integrity has not yet attained.

The interviewees explained for the researcher, there are an eye opening activities in improving IMC in ethio telecom, but the monopoly nature of the company, and structural misplacements are still the traps for not having a full-fledged practice in relation to utilization of marketing communication instruments as well in attaining scenarios of stages of IMC framework. .

With regard to principles the perception of staffs towards the practice of integrated marketing communications, the findings reveal that IMC strategy has benefits in creating easier work relations, providing consistent message, job clarity, saving material, and financial resources. More over staffs perceive that IMC practice in ethio telecom has a merit in harmonizing relationships with internal and external stakeholders. Thus, staffs have good perception towards the implementation of IMC in ethio telecom.

Regarding the challenges of IMC practice in ethio telecom, the findings of the study show that technical jargons on service and products, monopoly nature of the company, presence of multiple kinds of services and products, absence of lead time to conduct marketing communications tasks are the prominent ones. Moreover, absence of professional freedom, absence of technical trainings

given for marketing communication workers and the presence of conservative processual or procedures and the current pandemic disease COVID -19 are an impediments while practicing integrated marketing communications in ethio telecom.

Generally speaking, the finding suggests that there are tangible efforts in the implementation of IMC in ethio telecom no matter how its practice is slow moving particularly in bringing full integration of synergy. The achievements in IMC practice should be reinforced and much effort is expected in the head of the time so as to prevail remarkable development in the entire business activities.

5.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study show that there are some stimulations on the integrated marketing communications practices in ethio telecom however, still an enormous amount of effort should be done in the future for attaining better synergy and integration. In connection with this, almost all of the interviewees have good perception towards IMC so that ethio telecom should move on in practicing integrated marketing communications thinking in to considerations its mission, vision and values as well.

Accordingly, based on the findings of the study, below are recommendations suggested by the researcher.

- Technical trainings in marketing communication activities shall be given especially for marketing communication workers to escalate their creativity and competency.
- Fragmented or Misplaced marketing communication tools shall be brought together so as to have better practice of IMC in ethio telecom than ever before. For example, personal selling and direct marketing shall be incorporated in communication division.
- There should be professional freedom for workers to let them to be creative and competent as well.
- Comprehensive planning on the integrated marketing communication shall be made. For example, the organization should prepare its own integrated marketing communication plan and shall move on through scientific oriented strategies.

- Structural flaws shall be ameliorated. For example wrongly submerged sections like women affairs and employee resentment sections should be put in the relevant structure.
- Measuring returns on the marketing communication activities shall be made. Accordingly, measuring returns in MC shall be to the extent of single customer.
- Frequent assessments on customers about the practice of integrated marketing communications shall be conducted. Customer's feelings and desires towards the services and products offered by Ethio telecom shall be frequently assessed.
- The marketing communication division shall reinforce to work together with other divisions knowing the fact that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.
- The company need to target and personalize its marketing communication activities in order to be successful.

5.3. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

In relation to this study, the researcher has explored the practice of integrated marketing communications in ethio telecom from the company's perspective only. Accordingly, the findings of the research show that integrated marketing communication has a tremendous benefit from multi-dimensional perspectives. Most of the interviewees explained that IMC has an importance in saving resources, creating solidarity with various stakeholders as well as in harmonizing working environment.

Thus, further research on the effectiveness of marketing communication instruments, effectiveness of the entire marketing communication practices, and integrated marketing communication for employee motivation shall be conducted in ethio telecom.

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APPENDIX

I would like to thank you for taking the time to my study. I am currently a graduate student at Addis Ababa University- School of Journalism and Communications.-As a partial fulfilment for the Master of Arts in Public Relations and Strategic Communications. I am conducting a research study with a title “*Exploring the Practice of Integrated Marketing Communications in Ethio telecom.* “ Accordingly, I would like you to share your experiences regarding to the issue under study. In doing so, your participation is anonymous and the shared information will be used only for the research purpose.

Thank you very much for your participation.

GENERAL INFORMATION

- Could you tell me your name please?
- What is you level of education?
- What is your age?
- Could you tell me your position in the organization that you are working in?

PART ONE

Interview Guiding Questions on the Utilization of marketing communication Instruments

1. Would you please explain how the marketing communication instruments, Advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, public relations, internet marketing, exhibitions and trade shows, direct marketing?
2. What do you think are the challenges of practicing IMC in your organization?
3. What do you think should be done for improving IMC practice in your organization?

PART TWO

Interview Guiding Questions on Stages of IMC Framework

STAGE ONE: Tactical Coordination

1. How do you explain the practice of IMC in your organization from the perspective of integrating instruments for providing a consistent messages for audiences?
2. Could you please explain about the marketing communication action in delivering distinctive messages to specialized segments of audiences?

STAGE TWO: Redefining the scope of marketing communications

1. How do you explain the practice of IMC in your organization from customer centered perspective like assessing their desires, gathering information about customers to support company's marketing decisions and to learn about what actually received by customers?

STAGE THREE: Application of information technology in the marketing communications

1. Would you please explain the application of information technology in the marketing communication tasks in your organization?
2. What are the most frequently used ICT technologies?

STAGE FOUR: Financial and strategic integration

1. How do you explain the measuring return of IMC on customer investment?
2. What do you think should be done for improving IMC practice in your organization?
3. What do you think are the challenges of practicing IMC in your organization?

PART THREE

Interview Guiding Questions on the Perception of staffs towards the Practice of Integrated Marketing Communications

1. How do you perceive the practice of IMC in your organization in terms of work conduct?
2. How do you perceive the practice of IMC in your organization in terms of economic aspect? How do you explain it from the perspective of saving resources?
3. How do you perceive the practice of IMC in your organization in terms of stakeholder's relation? What is your perception of IMC from the perspective of internal and external stakeholders?
4. What do you think are the challenges of practicing IMC in your organization?
5. What do you think should be done for improving IMC practice in your organization?