

How the principles of IMC can be utilised
to build and promote a sustainable
tourism sector was discussed

INTERGRATED MARKETING MODEL

HOW TO BUILD A
SUSTAINABLE TOURISM
SECTOR USING IMC

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this report the IMC concept, the definition, its benefits and limitations will be discussed. For a tourism business to flourish, it needed to go beyond satisfying its customer needs. The business needed to ensure that it maintains long term and profitable relationships with all its stakeholders which includes creditors, directors, employees, government, shareholders, suppliers and the community at large. To this extent, this report, will look at the IMC concept as a means to develop and promote a destinations tourism.

2. The IMC Concept

A well-developed tourism sector impacts positively on the gross domestic product of a country, which in turn develops the country's economy as a whole.

In this report, the IMC concept will be analysed as a strategic planning tool that will be adopted to grow and promote sustainable tourism for a destination. To fully understand the IMC concept, a few definitions will be discussed and adopted. IMC is described as a concept that goes beyond marketing communication planning. It is a process at a strategic level that emphasises the business process of brand communication which involves internal and external audiences.

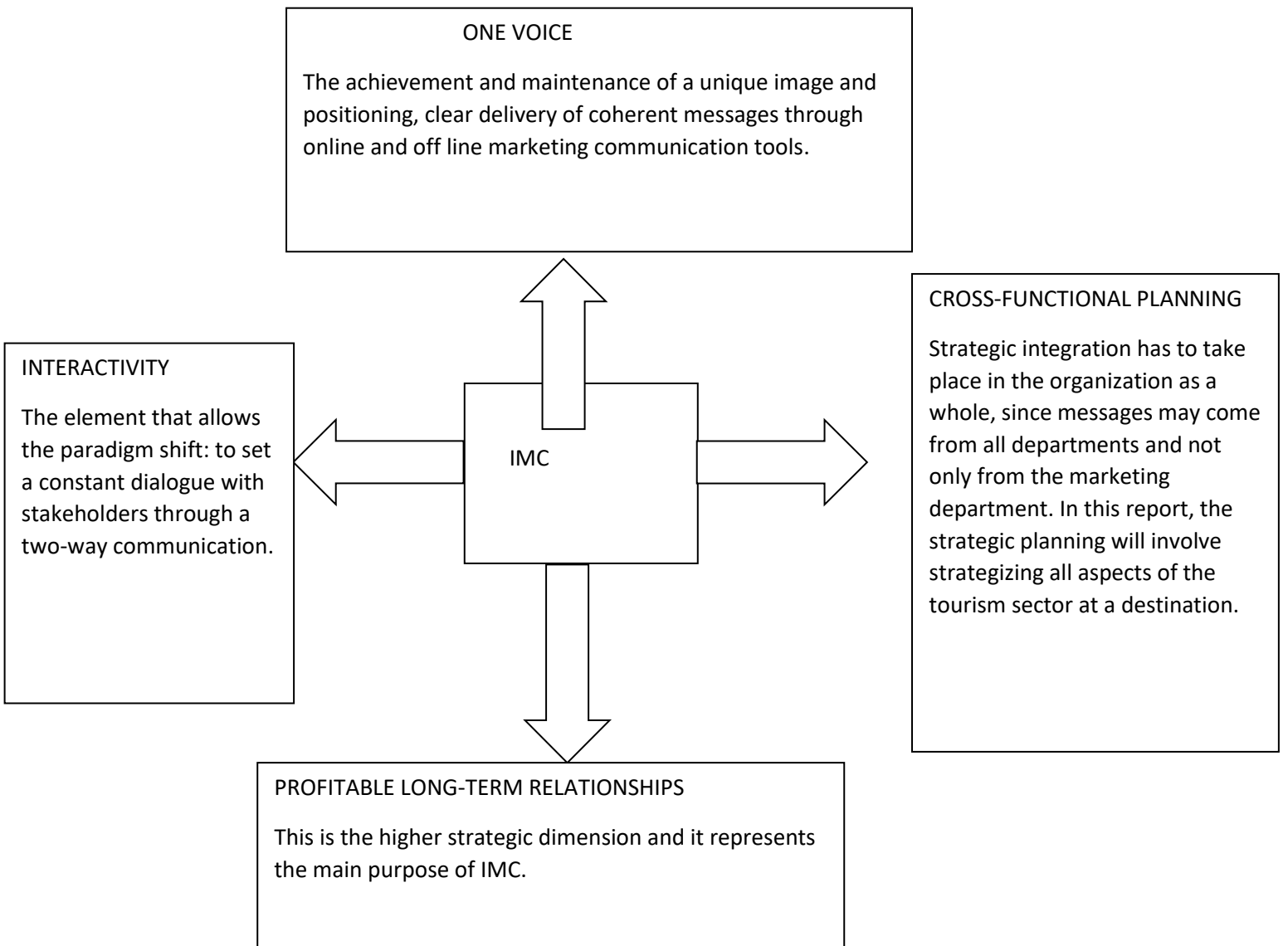
Kitchen and Burgmann (2010) define IMC as a concept of marketing communication planning which recognises the added value of a comprehensive plan that evaluates the strategic roles of a variety of communication disciplines (for example, general advertising, direct response, sales promotion and public relations), and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency and maximum communication impact. In this definition, IMC concept is looked at as a marketing strategy that involves the combined use of all IMC tools to promote a business. Using all the IMC tools results in added value as it increases the awareness of the company's product or service. A study done to develop IMC for tourists in Norway discovered that there was a strong relationship between integrated marketing communication and market orientation. Market orientation being a situation where an organisation creates a culture whereby employees are determined to create value for customers.

Another definition looks at IMC as a process through which companies accelerate returns by aligning communication objectives with corporate goals. Corporate goals

and objectives describe a company's mission and values. A business sets expectations for employees, investors and customers by defining clear goals. Common examples typically include customer loyalty, profit, growth, leadership and commitment to employees, customers and the community. It is a process by which an organisation uses marketing communication as a strategy to achieve its goals and objectives. In utilising this definition, a destination can use IMC tools to communicate with all of its stakeholders in its goal to deliver superior service to its tourists. IMC involves the merging of distinct communication functions in a way that allows an organisation to speak with “one voice” and one vision to create a more effective message.

Porcu *et al.* (2012) define IMC as an interactive and systematic process of cross functional planning and optimisation of messages to stakeholders with the aim of communicating with coherence and transparency to achieve synergies and encourage profitable relationships in the short and long term. In this definition IMC is recognised as a strategic integration of the whole organisation as messages will come from all departments and not only marketing department. Below is a figure that explains the four main IMC dimensions that are identified in the definition by Porcu and others.

Table 3: IMC dimensions



SOURCE: (Porcu *et al.*, 2012)

A discussion will follow to clarify on the IMC dimensions in Table 3

2.1 *One voice* has its principal concept originating from the fact that IMC must maximise each communication tool by applying consistency and harmony when promoting the brand for an organisation.

2.2 *Interactivity* part of the IMC dimension has its influence in interactive marketing which can be defined as the process by which customer needs and desires are discovered, met, adapted and satisfied by the organisation that is providing the service or product in question. All this is done with the mission to protect the existing market share or increase a firm's market share from its competitors.

2.3 The concept of cross-functional planning has its origins from the need to enable the coordination between departments to position them well as the organisation prepares to promote itself in the market place. Cross functional-planning looks at IMC at another level. Integration is expected not only with promotional mix tools and marketing mix but also at the strategic level when drafting the vision, mission and the company's strategic goals. Marketing communication is looked at with the whole organisation in mind. This is the principal that should be adopted in building or rejuvenating a destinations tourism sector. The whole tourism sector should be analysed and evaluated. A well-documented policy should be drafted to work as a basis of promoting the tourism sector using the IMC tools.

2.4. Profitable long-term relationship with customers are created through the organisations effort to retain customers. The more advanced approach to IMC calls for companies to have effective communication across board. This entails building communication relationships with customers as well as stakeholders that include employees, suppliers, investors, governments and the public at large.

3. Benefits of the IMC Model

- 3.1 The importance of the use of IMC as a promotional tool is that it emphasises many aspects of the product. The product's use and benefits link the product to a brand, people, events, experiences, feelings and so forth.
- 3.2 The IMC concept has also been recognised as a key determinant of a firm's competitiveness. IMC will help build a destinations competitive advantage with regard to its tourism industry. Competitive advantage has been defined as a process of when an organisation develops attributes that place it in a position to outperform its competition. Competitive advantage is gained by offering customers greater value than the competition offers; and by providing additional benefits which justify the organisation's pricing.
- 3.3 IMC is useful in enhancing relationship with customers and in sending unified messages. Using IMC as a marketing model in marketing tourism will also help nurture the relationship between tourists and the destination marketers.
- 3.4 An IMC plan implemented in its totality will result in greater profits as opposed to one-way marketing communication.
- 3.5 To increase brand loyalty and build lasting relationships with customers, hotels are turning to new marketing principles such as integrated marketing in trying to achieve new levels of performance.
- 3.6 IMC has become an important marketing tool used in the process of managing and marketing of organisations.
- 3.7 IMC saves money as it eliminates duplication of work in places like photography. IMC also assist in making messages more consistent and comprehensive.
- 3.8 IMC helps ensure that messages an organisation sends to all its stakeholders produce maximum impact.
- 3.9 IMC is beneficial to organisations at all levels. It helps position brands of organisations with their business strategies, and in so doing provides organisations with a similar perception in all aspects of their communication. Implementation of IMC is known to increase brand awareness, brand loyalty and bring about an increase in sales.

- 3.10 The use of IMC encourages managers to have a comprehensive overview of all aspects of a business in terms of its activities, plans for the future, personnel, products and services, as they prepare to formulate a more effective marketing campaign.
- 3.11 IMC also promotes close monitoring of business activities to ensure that the business is obtaining the planned results intended from utilising the IMC concept.
- 3.12 IMC helps limit confusion with a target audience by insisting on an organisation being consistent in its messages and on speaking with one voice. In following this principle of IMC, an organisation increases its marketing effectiveness.
- 3.13 IMC strategies create brands that are different from those of the competition. It is known to contribute greatly in the process of building a company's brand equity.
- 3.14 IMC is also known to benefit organisations through the creation of synergy. In combining different forms of promotion strategically, the marketers of a destination have the opportunity to increase the number of tourists visiting the country, and in doing so increase the destination's revenues.
- 3.15 It is known to achieve higher levels of performance when used as part of the marketing strategy for organisations. This is the case because IMC encourages the use of multi-media communication tools and as such, stands a higher chance of reaching a greater number of customers more effectively.
- 3.16 IMC helps organisations create relationships with their customers. This helps in building loyalty towards brands, resulting in repeat business and referrals. It also assists in allowing organisations to overcome the limitations they encounter when using only unidimensional marketing strategies.
- 3.17 IMC has proven itself to be an effective marketing tool for organisations to use when implementing aggressive marketing campaigns.

- 3.18 The use of IMC can also assist in ensuring that an organisation's resources are well-planned and sustained. This is the case, since management is required to strategically plan all of its activities before implementing and executing any promotional scheme.
- 3.19 The IMC concept entails that organisation improve their resources and competencies in order to create value for their customers and to maintain the relationship with customers over a longer term.
- 3.20 IMC encourages the marketers of destinations to provide tourists with various information in order to learn more about the destination. Information is also made available to tourists through videos. By using the various components of IMC tourists can also engage in discussions with marketers to obtain further information about destinations.

4 Limitations of the use of IMC Model

- 4.1 The IMC concept has had different definitions over the years advanced by different organisations. This makes it difficult for management to understand what definition to pursue and which will fit their line of activities.
- 4.2 The IMC concept is regarded as a difficult concept to implement and as such, some organisations avoid using it.
- 4.3 Management tends to lack an understanding and knowledge of the IMC concept and the role it would play if introduced to their organisation.
- 4.4 Organisations also tend to lack required resources like human and financial resources that an entity needs to run a successful IMC programme. The revolution of the Internet and communication technology has made the adoption of the IMC concept by firms essential. As such, it is important that management goes for training in this area if need be. It is also important that management budgets for the required resources needed to effectively implement its IMC programme.
- 4.5 The planning, coordination and extensive analysis required by the IMC concept is perceived by many as being cumbersome and complex. Though cumbersome, when carried out properly, IMC can bring great value to a company.

4.6 In certain cases, specialists are required to carry out the duties prescribed by the IMC concept. For a company to obtain these skills, in most cases it needs to outsource some of these skills. This becomes a problem if many specialists, operating independently, are engaged in carrying out the duties required. To avoid such a situation, the tourism destinations needs to ensure that they have sufficient budget to employ all the specialised skills required for them to carry out their IMC marketing plan.

In many ways, the benefits of implementing an IMC programme outweigh its limitations.

Conclusion

It is recommended that a destination use the IMC model to build and promote a sustainable tourism industry. The Use of the IMC Model will help in building a good strategy for the tourism sector and it will also help to reinforce good standards in the provision of services.