



**INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION TO INTERACTIVE MEDIA CONTACT POINTS: A  
LITERATURE ANALYSIS**

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**ABSTRACT**

The rapid shift from analogue to digital to interactive is happening globally. Interactive is the future of marketing. Increasing number of people browsing content through smartphones, downloading apps, enhanced usage of laptops, tablets, I-pads are clear indicators for brands to adapt to this interactive wave. Interactive Media is reshaping the industries and reinventing the ways consumers shop. A tremendous shift has been observed from marketing perspectives with advancing technologies. The research paper takes a closer look at the foresaid issue and examines how Brand Communication through Interactive Media Contact Points is advancing via Literature Analysis.

**KEYWORDS**

Interactive Media, Contact Points, Brand Communication, Digital Media, IMC

## INTRODUCTION

Over the previous years, understanding Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) from both conceptual and strategic perspective has been an important concern. However, the sudden rise of electronic media has greatly altered the strategic aspects of brand communication especially Integrated Marketing Communication (Hoffman & Novak 1996; Bezjian-Avery et al. 1998). Interactive Media has provided platform to empower shoppers. Several qualitative researches have been conducted in the past to understand the shopping behavior of consumers via digital and traditional mediums. However the concept of Interactive Media used as Contact Point is novel and has received surprisingly little attention in marketing research.

It is believed that Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is the driving force behind Interactive Media. Steenkamp and Geyskens (2006) found that interactivity and brand learning is directly related to each other, greater interactivity promotes greater brand learning through better information assimilation and could help companies forge cognitive and emotional bonds with their brand users. Belch and Belch (2009) found that IMC plays a major role in developing sustainable brand identity and equity.

The idea of Integrated Marketing Communication has been in discussions since last 2 decades (Schultz and Barnes 1999; Schultz 2003; Shimp 2007). The concept initiated from Integrated Marketing Communication and is now transforming towards interactive and engagement models (Swain, 2004). Some of the researchers initially believed Interactive Media to be just Direct Marketing aspect of marketing communication while there were many during that time who accepted this media as a new wave which will alter marketing communication strategies (Glazer 1999; Korgaonkor 1999; Lavidge 1999) especially IMC (Low 2000) and accepted it as a challenge to understand and discover new tools to incorporate into communication strategies.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

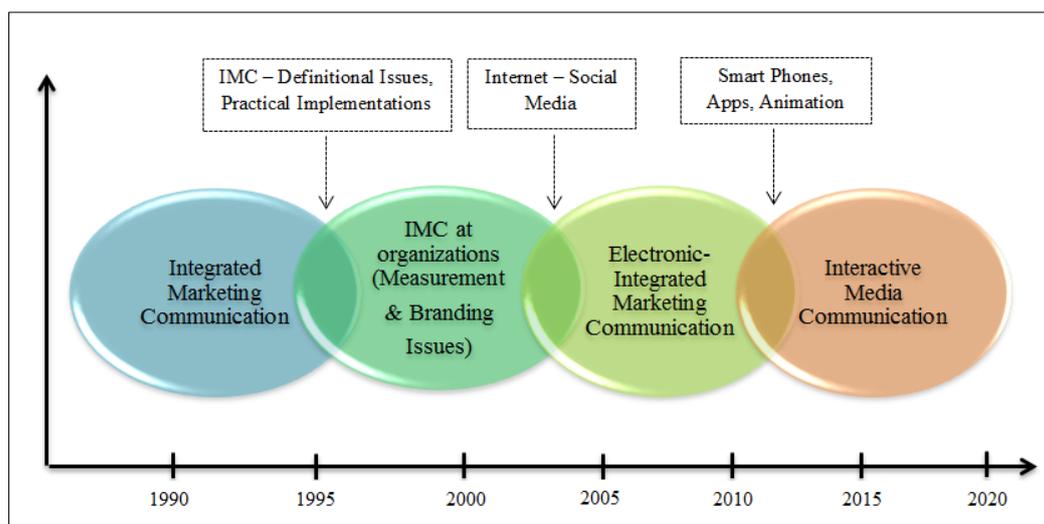
### EVOLUTION FROM INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION

During 1990's the studies of IMC research were focused on theoretical definitions, development and understanding of concepts, perceptions and issues. Research related to IMC has been of foremost concern to academicians and practitioners since its conception (Duncan & Everett 1993; Nowak & Phelps 1994; Grein & Gould 1996; Phelps & Johnson 1996; Brown 1997; Schultz 1997; Schultz & Kitchen 1997; Schultz & Schultz 1998; Hartley & Pickton 1999). Nowak & Phelps 1994; Phelps & Johnson 1996 conducted research on understanding the impact of implementing IMC strategies on traditional branding and communication practices. Likewise, there are studies which have proven how Integrated Marketing Communication have an effect on consumers' perception (e.g.

Baumgartner & Sujan, 1997; Brown & Stayman, 1992; Chandon, Chtourou, & Fortin, 2003; Chatterjee et al., 2003; Lobtia, Donthu, & Hershberger, 2003) or the brand (e.g. Jedidi, Mela, & Gupta, 1999; MacInnis & Jaworski, 1989; Naik & Raman, 2003; Robinson, Wysocka, & Hand, 2007).

With the advent of 20<sup>th</sup> century the literature witnessed a shift in the focus of the research from understanding IMC to IMC and internal marketing issues, corporate communications, IMC and branding, brand equity dimensions, media planning and measurement, and synchronous use of various media (Kliatchko, 2005). IMC was broadly defined as ‘a concept of marketing communication planning that recognizes the added value of using a comprehensive plan to evaluate the strategic roles of a variety of communication disciplines’ (Peltier, Schibrowski and Schultz, 2003).

The integrated marketing communication in the following years of research got retransformed by the increasing involvement of customers in social media. Richter and Koch, (2007) defined social media as ‘platforms and online applications which aim to facilitate interactions, collaborations and the sharing of content’ (Richter & Koch, 2007). Research has been conducted on understanding differences between traditional and electronic media (Hoffman & Novak 1996). However in today’s marketing paradigm, businesses cannot solely depend on one single medium when it comes to communication with its customers. Synchronous use of various kinds of mediums is required due to alliance existing between them (Naik, Mantrala, and Sawyer, 1998; Naik and Raman, 2003; Reid, 2003). As rightly said, we cannot choose one of the two – Traditional or Digital. It has to be a mix of both depending upon the nature of the business. The explorative study on the simultaneous use of mediums is now the prime focus of many researchers Nowak, Cameron, and Krugman (1993); Stammerjohan, Wood, Chang, and Thorson (2005).



**Figure 1: Evolution of Marketing Communication**

Ahlqvist, et al., (2008) defines the term 'social media' in a broader way by considering it as a basis of interactions among Internet users who create, share, and exchange content information via networks. The expanded definition of Social media delimits it from only being considered as Orkut, Facebook or Instagram or sharing of photos and videos, it can be viewed as forums or discussion groups where people registered/unregistered discuss on various matters. Weblogs, social blogs, micro blogs, wikis, podcasts, also ratings and social bookmarking sites are all forms of social media. Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) Agichtein (2008) states social networking platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest offer a combination of all the media function features with an emphasis on the relationships among the users in the community.

There is another definition of Social media in terms of branding proposed by Rubinstein and Griffiths (2001): 'social media help build a brand personality and make the brand more approachable for customers'. Along with various industries including e-commerce, manufacturing, and logistics to name a few, in recent years, the growth of social media has caught fashion retailers' attention as well. According to the research conducted by L2ThinkTank, the key indicators of effectiveness in promoting brand value lie in brand presence, community size, content, and engagement (Galloway, 2012). (Merriam-Webster, 2013) redefined the classical definition of social marketing "the process or technique of promoting, selling, and distributing a product or service" by constituting communication as an interchange of thoughts, opinions and information by means of medium.

### **FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVE**

The growing concern of the scholars underwent a rapid shift on financial measurement and effectiveness of IMC to evaluate the accountability and returns on businesses (Low 2000; Reid 2003; Schultz 2004a; Schultz et al. 2004; Ratnatunga & Ewing 2005). Furthermore, Schivinski and Dąbrowski (2015) studied the effect of firm created social media communication and user generated social media communication on consumer perception and brand equity. The study was conducted on samples from varied industries. The proposed model shows that while firm generated communication only affected brand attitude, user generated communication has a positive effect on both brand attitude and brand equity. Moreover, purchase intension was positively affected by brand attitude and brand equity. Villanueva, Yoo and Hanssens (2008), Taylor (2013), Christodoulides, Jevons, and Bonhomme (2012); Smith, Fischer, and Yongjian (2012), Hutter, Hautz, Dennhardt, Füller (2013), Vries, N. J. D., & Carlson, J. (2014), Yasin and Zahari (2011), Murtiasih, S., Sucherly, , & Siringoringo, H. (2013), Severi, E., Ling, K.C., Nasermodeli, A. (2014) Laroche, Habibi, Richard, Sankaranarayanan (2012), Bruhn, Schoenmueller, Schäfer (2012) have conducted similar

studies evaluating the impact of social media communication and social media marketing on brand equity considering different brand elements and industry.

Perdue 2010 presents the conceptual analysis of social media marketing by stating how to create and capture value with social media and formulation of social media marketing strategies. Rumman and Alhadid, 2014 found out the impact of social media marketing on brand equity by empirical analysis on mobile service brands. The marketing activity was studied from six dimensions - Online Communities, Interaction, Sharing of Content, Accessibility, and Credibility.

(Christodoulides and Chernatony, 2004) concentrated his study on one of the Interactive Media Contact Point apart from Social Media i.e. Website. They elucidate that 'the website of a brand provides great contextual information and facilitate high users' interactions with the brand; also providing an excellent platform to foster genuine relationships with potential and actual customers based on a continuous dialogue.' Therefore, designing effective brand websites contributes significantly to firms' brand equity building efforts (Argyriou, Kitchen, and Melewar, 2006). Brand sites are the foremost platforms that boost the levels of interactivity with the customers and can fulfill their online brand building missions more effectively. The literature thus identified the key elements of brand that may contribute to their branding effectiveness.

Scarpi (2010) investigates online brand communities, the causal relationship between brand community identification, brand affect, community loyalty, and brand loyalty etc. 'Comparing small and large web-based brand communities, members of small communities develop higher community loyalty contribute more to brand loyalty than from brand affect; but, small communities engage in word of mouth for the community more than in word of mouth for the brand.'

There has been research conducted in the past to understand effect of Social Media Marketing on Brand Equity. Babac (2011) found the impact of social media marketing on brand equity for one of the magazine brands. This was amongst the foremost times when social media became part of the marketing strategies. Erdogan and Cicek, 2012 talked about the effect of social media marketing on Brand Loyalty. These were the times, when social media started gaining importance from the direction of strategic marketing. Furthermore, Odhiambo, 2012 carried out the comparative analysis to discover the effectiveness of social media over traditional mediums by case study analysis.

Bushelow, 2012 expanded the vision and concentrated the study on Facebook fan pages which were termed as Online Brand Communities. Bushelow's research envisaged the relationship between Facebook Fan Page Interactions and Brand Loyalty. Kang, 2011 studied the relationship between community participation and the brand equity elements namely brand trust and commitment with

reference to hotel industry. Naveed, 2012 analyzed the impact of social media on consumer buying behavior and brand commitment by empirical study.

Engagement in Online Brand Communities suggests that members are interested in helping other members, keen to participate in joint activities, to act volitionally in ways that the community endorses, and in ways that enhance the OBC's value for themselves and others (Algesheimer et al., 2005).

Bambauer- Sachse, Mangold (2010) examined consumer-based brand equity dilution in social media. The studies only focus on the cognitive aspect of Brand Equity and the meaning of social media it limited to Facebook, and similar photo and video sharing platforms whereas in the present scenario there are more digital tools that have come into picture and are affecting brand equity to a large extent which has led to theory related gap. Technology encourages customers to interact with brands. These customer interactions build the brand by increasing awareness, involvement, and engagement; thus, adding to brand recall and stimulating purchases. Tweets, blogs, and social networks like Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Instagram, and Pinterest offer brands ways to connect with audiences.

One of the successful examples to showcase the positive Impact of Interactive Media on Brand Equity is of Converse. In 2004, Converse launched one of the first interactive advertising initiatives as part of which consumers were asked to create videos showing what the brand meant to them. As a result, the Converse Gallery is a collection of 24 second-videos, made entirely by customers, the best of whom were broadcasted on the Converse website, as well as on cable networks. It solved dual purpose for the brand – Firstly creation of ads promoted the brand image among target audiences, Secondly acted as a market research for Converse to understand real meaning of the Brand from customer's point of view.

Ten years of interactive advertising research has confirmed the importance of the internet as a major source of information on brands (Hollis, 2005). Brand sites are increasingly being used as preferred destination sites for other forms of advertising, such as TV advertisements, banner advertisements, email advertisements, print advertisements, etc.

Berger and Milkman (2012) investigate the relationship between article characteristics and blogging. Their research suggests that viral marketing as well as blogging are driven by similar factors that are emotional, positive, interesting, and anger-inducing. On the contrary some sadness-inducing stories are likely to drive the most blogged list. Also for photos or videos to go viral the two most concerning factors are right platform and right media. Additionally, they found out that content related to daily issues and which is practically useful is marginally less likely to be blogged about,

reason can be its nature of information. The researchers point out that 'while movie reviews, technology perspectives, and recipes all contain useful information, it is a commentary, so there may be less blogger added value in contributing his or her spin on the issue.'

### **PROGRESSING FROM IMC TO INTERACTIVE MEDIA**

With the advancement of electronic digital media, transition from integrated marketing communication to Interactive Media is happening in context of buyer seller relationships (Peltier et al., 2002b). The ability of interactive media to provide effective, controlled two-way communication between parties is leveraging power of communication to Digital Interactive Media. As a resultant, the companies are evolving their digital strategies to increase revenues and customer base (Glazer 1999).

Since last few years, Interactive Media has experienced meteoric growth. Shoppers are adopting omni-channel behavior of shopping. Brands online websites, blogs, presence of e-commerce portals are strongly featuring in the customer's shopping journey. Today's consumers have far more opportunities of experiencing and shopping from a greater range of online and offline channels than ever before. Therefore the approach to Integrated Marketing Communication needs to be reinvented from Interactive Media perspective. The relationship between IMC and Interactive Media therefore should be treated as symbiotic relationship.

Interactivity has been defined in the literature from several contexts. Bezjian-Avery et al. (1998) defined it as 'the immediately iterative process by which customer needs and desires are uncovered, met, modified, and satisfied by the providing firm'. Haeckel (1998) portrayed interactive marketing as an approach that uses customer data captured via 'person-to-person or person-to-technology' contacts to create individualized exchanges designed to effect a change in knowledge or behaviour of at least one person. Comprehending the definition of interactivity from digital media approach 'Digital Interactive Media' can be referred to as a digital platform which successfully establishes effective two way communication between the two parties.

The prerequisite for transition from Integrated Marketing Communication to Interactive Media Communication are effective 2-way communication system, personalization of communication relationship, and control over various levels of communication that both the parties have (Peltier, Schibrowski and Schultz, 2003). Interactive Media has transformed the way brand communication is reported, shared and consumed. On the contrary, most of the researchers, marketers, brand managers agree to the fact that the true potential of digital media lies in the rising level of interactivity, but still the concept has not seeped in into industries, and utilizing complete potential of Interactive Media is more of a thought than a practised reality (Davenport et al. 2001).

## INTERACTIVE MEDIA TO INTERACTIVE MEDIA CONTACT POINTS

'The integrated marketing paradigm focuses on the full set of contacts that affect the consumer's brand experience.' Calder and Malhotra, (2005) The challenge faced by the marketers is thus evaluating the importance of each contact point as per the individual business requirement and incorporating the ones that are most useful considering the same advertising budget. They have to take a decision of involving multiple contact points in delivering the brand message in a profound and most convenient fashion.

The brand experience, the essence of a relationship, is created by contact points. A brand contact point refers to any contact/touch offline/online where a person interacts with the brand in the whole market environment. For a better improvised brand experience, companies need marketers to identify and understand all contact points at first, then prioritize and implement strategies to incorporate the ones that are not on the brand.

Customers want a contact point experience to be simple, easy to use, navigate and understand. They do not want complexity, information overload and frustration. The power of simplicity is shown by its effect on customer decisions. A study published in the Harvard Business Review found that those brands that scored in the top quarter on delivering simply, relevant information were 86% more likely to be purchased and 115% more like to be recommended to others.

Pieter Jongerius (2012) provides with an effective strategy for contact points to maximize the exchange of value. The strategies will be effective if the three i.e. Brand, Contact Points and Target Group go hand in hand. He also provides us with the Digital Interactive Contact Points division which can be broadly categorized under 3 headings: OWNED MEDIA - b2c website, b2b website, web shop, mobile web, mobile app, tablet app, e-mail, interactive point of sale, narrowcasting, desktop widgets, embedded software, campaign site, affiliates, sales content, social media; BOUGHT MEDIA – Banners, Search Engine Advertising, Advertorials, Interactive television; EARNED MEDIA – Social Media, Viral Campaigns, Blogs & News.

Wyner's (2006) assertion implies that a greater number of contact points provide valuable opportunity for the brand as it increases the number of potential contacts with target groups, in turn increasing potential sales. With emerging communication channels such as online and mobile phones, marketers must constantly examine functionality in relation to consumer need, to discover new and exciting ways to engage them. However, with fragmentation of markets and traditional communication channels, such as mass media, it is progressively more difficult for marketers to execute meaningful and measurable communications to target groups and individuals.

However, there are some practical difficulties in agreeing with the theory that necessarily all brand contact points must be used. For instance, the cost or the budget will clearly escalate. And as Ries & Ries (2005) explain that the brand communications arena is highly competitive and cluttered. The result is proliferation of communication messages directed at the consumers, creating communication overload. We live in an over communicated society. Schultz & Barends (2003) observe too many messages, too many advertisers, too much noise, and too much stimulation to the consumer. Therefore, selection of the most appropriate contact points would be a more pragmatic approach. According to David Kwestin the first step is identifying the set of contact points that need to be evaluated. This can be done through qualitative research as well as internal brainstorming.

Duncan & Moriarty (1998) refer to those points of brand contact which create more powerful impressions of the brand, as key brand contacts. Schultz & Barends (1999) feel that the consumer's perception of a company/brand is the result of a synthesis of messages received at every level of contact. They feel that it is strategically fatal to define, categorize and plan marketing communications from the practical point of view, a mindset that the authors define as inside-out thinking. They indicate that the outside-in identification of brand contact points must be based on actual in-market behaviour and experiences.

As Ries & Ries, 2005 state, the view from the outside is very different from the view from inside. It is vital to plan from the consumer's frame of reference. Taking the outside-in approach, this research will focus on answering -How do we measure the effectiveness of a brand through its contact points?

Several studies have been conducted in the past based on the division of contact points. (Dunn & Davis, 2004) categorizes the contact points based upon the customer experience – Pre Purchase, Purchase and Post Purchase. Pre Purchase generally includes points like word-of-mouth, hoardings, references, Internet etc. Purchase points are those where a customer buys any product such as a merchandiser, store or a buy/checkout tab on the buying website. Post purchase is all those points where warranty/guarantee customer review feedback is available.

(Martenson, 2008) follows another categorization which says the contact points can be divided as controllable, influence able and uncontrollable. As the name explains, controllable contact points are those which are under company's control. Influence able is the ones which affect a buying decision of the customer but cannot be controlled under company implementation. Uncontrollable are those which cannot be controlled at all. She also followed another advanced division which is outbound contact points (which are initiated by the company) and inbound contacts (which are initiated by the

customers). (Spengler & Wirth, 2009) classifies it based on the purchase point of view. The categories of this classification include – One to One, Point of Sale, Indirect, and Mass Media.

Interactive Media Contact Points play a crucial role as before conversion of a prospect to a consumer, any contact point could help in decision-making. A customer could have gone through a social link, display advertisements, websites and emails before making a purchase. The principal analyst at Forrester Research Inc. Joanna O'Connell stated that fear of change and loss of marketing revenue create problems as channel owners manage channel budgets where organizations are set up by channels. As Loudon & Della Bitta, (1994) suggests that the decision process of any individual is affected by the psychosocial activity i.e. evaluating, acquiring, consuming or ordering of goods and services. The contact points should be appropriate as per the choice and mindset. The mismatch between the opinion and communication can result in losing a potential customer.

Chris Parkin, director of strategic alliances and Genesis Solutions at Adobe Systems, suggested a model where he can combine the Web Analytics and Email Analytics to determine the customer's potential. The prospective customers who signed up for email marketing after doing some activity like looking for a product, downloaded some information portrays that they are looking for some more information. Different landing pages and email templates were created for them to get them basis on that collateral. These efforts can be duplicated in addressing more prospects in future.

Thus, marketers are building strategies to focus at every contact point possible in context of their business requirement. A brand's key interactive media contact points should be those specific moments, interactions, and/or places where it inspires with compelling imagery, service delivery, and quality.

## **CONCLUSION**

The review of the literature as discussed in the paper from Integrated Marketing Communication perspective shows that topics related to IMC has always been of importance to academicians and practitioners until recent times. This paper presents how IMC has been redefined and retransformed with the conception of digital Interactive Media. The paper revisits the historical definitions of IMC and presents how it has undergone evolution in the current scenario. It also presents how digital media can be incorporated in the marketing strategies as Interactive Media Contact Points and analyzed their effect on Brand Equity perspective. Moreover, the classification of Contact Points from various researchers point of view is also examined.

Henceforth, the best time to go Interactive for companies is now. The rapid shift from analogue to digital to interactive is happening globally. Interactive is the future of marketing. With increasing number of people browsing content through smartphones, downloading apps, enhanced usage of

laptops, tablets, I-pads are clear indicators for brands to adapt to this interactive wave. Interactive Media is reshaping the industries. Interactive is the way to go. Interactive Media is reinventing the way consumers shop, thus it is crucial for the companies to incorporate the new channels in their marketing strategies if they want to sustain in the competitive marketing environment.

Interactive media is driving the present day lifestyle of customers. It is an essential accessory; it is no more a trend. A lot has changed from marketing perspectives with advancing technologies. The communication is no more one way it has retransformed itself into effective interactions at every point possible. Sharing of Opinions is no longer restricted by barriers; interactive media has continued to be platform to openly share thoughts. For this reason, the paper takes a closer look at the foresaid issue and examines how Brand Communication through Interactive Media Contact Points is advancing through Literature Analysis. As per the analysis, more and more brands are trying to incorporate technological advancement in each stage of consumer journey and using the Interactive Media benefit to capture and convert more customers online. One of the proficient ways is to develop the interactive platforms i.e. website, fan pages, blogs in a personalized and usable fashion so they are user friendly and conveniently perceived by the audiences.

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