



An integrated communication implementation model for the post-2000 business environment



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 16 May 2012

Accepted 27 August 2013

Keywords:

Strategic communication

Integration

Implementation

Integrated marketing communication

Integrated communication

ABSTRACT

Strategic integrated communication in the relationship between an organization, its stakeholders, and the post-2000 business environment is fundamental to ensure that the organization is viewed as unified in its intent. Literature proposes various implementation models of strategic integrated communication but most literature is pertinent to the last century. Consequently there is a need for an integrated communication implementation model for the post-2000 business landscape with its specific challenges and opportunities. The primary objective of this article is to present the model for implementing strategic integrated communication post-2000. This model was developed in a study consisting of three phases: a critical review of existing literature; in-depth qualitative interviews in and phase 3 where the authentic model was conceptualized. As a result, the integration of three levels to promote a united effort in relationship building constitutes the organization itself, its stakeholders, and the environment as a whole.

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1. Introduction

One of the challenges facing businesses world-wide is the need for change in the globalization of markets. Change is imperative in production and manufacturing, logistics and distribution, and, most importantly, in marketing and communication. Organizations cannot continue using marketing and communications approaches developed in the last millennium as globalization, E-commerce, instant communications, and – especially – new social media, have made old ideas redundant (Christensen, Torp, & Firat, 2005, p. 162). Schultz and Schultz (2000) suggest that the best way to ensure the transition in marketing and communication in the new era is to integrate the processes and systems involved in marketing and communication. In short, all communications inside and outside the organization need to be considered holistically.

Integrating communications gives an organization a competitive advantage. However, for this advantage to be consistent in the face of the complexity of human communications, tenacious *integration* is required. Recently there has been a shift in the familiar concept of integrated marketing communication and ‘integrated communication’ has become an umbrella term covering all strategic organizational communications. Integrated communication is the strategic management process of controlling and influencing all communications, and of encouraging purposeful, data-driven interaction with external stakeholders in order to create and nourish long-term, profitable relationships (Maenetha, 2009, p. 16; Niemann-Struweg & Grobler, 2007, p. 60; Niemann-Struweg & Grobler, 2011, p. 1).

However, integrated communication requires a strategic orientation on the part of the organization; strategists have to aggressively manage and drive the total brand experience. These professionals need to contribute to the business bottom line by co-ordinating all of the organization’s communications.

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In the early stages of developing the idea of integrated communication, various authors came up with ideas for the implementation of the concept (Duncan & Caywood, 1996; Gronstedt, 1996, 2000; Grunig & Grunig, 1998; Hunter, 1997; Kitchen & Schultz, 2000). However, there is still a lack of information on how to implement this concept (after more than three decades of existence), especially in the context of the 21st century. The study reported in this article addresses this lacuna, using as its starting point the principles of integrated communication – as have been defined in the literature on the subject from as early as the 1980s.

If organizations are going to overcome problems associated with implementation of the integrated communication strategy, they will benefit from a model developed based on current principles identified in the literature in keeping with modern strategies appropriate for the new millennium. This model for strategic integrated communication implementation, proposes that strategic integrated communication between an organization, its stakeholders, and the post-2000 environment is fundamental to ensure relationship building so that the organization is viewed as unified in its intent.

This article commences with a discussion of the research process for arriving at an implementation model for strategic integrated communication. Then there is a discussion of the proposed implementation model, with the emphasis on the three integration levels namely the organization, stakeholders and the environment as a whole. The article concludes with an illustration of how the proposed model promotes integrated communication, and how it may be used to critique existing strategies for the implementation of integrated communication.

2. Process to develop the conceptual implementation model for strategic integrated communication

The research process considered to be appropriate for the study reported in this article was based on the Mitroff model (Mitroff, Betz, Pondi, & Sagasti, 1974) which outlines a scientific process for studying a phenomenon from a holistic or systems point of view in order to arrive at a conceptual model and later a scientific model once the conceptual model has been tested.

In developing the conceptual model, three phases of research, based on a qualitative research paradigm were used. Phase 1 attended to four concerns, through a literature review. These concerns included firstly establishing theoretically the link between strategic communication and integrated communication in the implementation of strategic integrated communication. Secondly, determining theoretically the perceptible universal problematic issues in the implementation of integrated communication. Fourthly describing the current global approach to integrated communication implementation from a theoretical perspective and finally to study existing models of integrated communication implementation in order to conceptualize an implementation model for the management of strategic integrated communication for the South African marketplace.

Phase 2 determined, by means of in-depth interviews with the Strategic Planning Directors of the Top 10 South African advertising and communication agencies, the state of integrated communication implementation among the top ten advertising and communication agencies in South Africa. Three broad themes were addressed during these interviews, namely the understanding of the concept of integrated communication; the implementation of integrated communication; and the barriers to the implementation of integrated communication. The data-processing method used for phase 2 is the Morse and Field approach to qualitative data analysis (1996). This qualitative data analysis approach consists of the four phases of comprehending, synthesizing (de-contextualizing), theorizing and re-contextualizing.

Phase 3 of developing the model consisted of the non-empirical phase, which focused on the actual development and presentation of a conceptual implementation model for the strategic integrated communication in a post-2000 business environment. The development of the model was therefore based on the theory of phase 1 and the empirical findings in phase 2 (Niemann-Struweg & Grobler, 2007, 2011).

To meet the aims of this article, the third phase will be presented and discussed. The findings of the first two phases formed the basis of this model development but will not be discussed in detail in this article.

3. Presenting the conceptual model for post-2000 integrated communication implementation

The focal point of this section is the introduction and discussion of the proposed conceptual model for integrated communication implementation in a post-2000 business world. This model is multi-levelled grounded by two distinct principles and three areas of integration. The conceptual model is positioned here (Fig. 1) in the article for reference and will be explained in detail during the course of the article.

To ease the discussion of the proposed model, it will be approached as follows: firstly, a systems approach to the proposed conceptual model is mentioned with an explanation of the application of a systems approach in the graphical representation of the model. Secondly, the two underlying principles of model and thirdly the three distinct areas of integration are claimed.

3.1. A systems approach to the implementation of strategic integrated communication

The model for the implementation of strategic integrated communication in the new century is based on a meta-theoretical framework of the general systems theory in that it proposes an open-systems approach. In the graphical presentation of the model (see Fig. 1), the principles of the general systems theory are applied to support the meta-theoretical framework of the model and are discussed below.

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