

# Integrated Marketing Communications: Practice Leads Theory

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In the last 20 years, the integration of marketing functions has moved from theory to practice. Its specific applications may vary from market to market—indeed, from enterprise to enterprise—but integrated marketing communications (IMC) programs have become standard for marketing organizations, agencies, and the academic community. A review of the best IMC advertising and public relations practices in the United States, Korea, and Great Britain, however, reveals not just cultural divergence in adoption and practice, but also underlying weaknesses regarding IMC as a process and practice. The findings support the need to focus future IMC research within client organizations.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The uses of integrated marketing communications (IMC) are widespread and varied. Throughout the world, a variety of concepts, approaches, methodologies, and applications exist around the mean that academic agreement is difficult. Yet, in spite of the continuing theoretical confusion, a large numbers of agencies and marketing organizations continue to deploy “integrated marketing” or “integrated marketing communication” programs. In a 2004 study, 89 percent of nearly 300 U.S.-based marketing decision makers reported they were “executing integrated marketing campaigns” (Millward Brown, 2004). The list of global IMC program sponsors include the likes of IBM, Microsoft, FedEx, and Accenture (Kitchen and De Pelsmacker, 2004; Kitchen and Li, 2005; McArthur and Griffin, 1997; Prensky, McCarty, and Lucas, 1996).

Despite nearly two decades of active use, the concept of IMC still is in academic and professional development. And those challenges to the practice often represent honest efforts by researchers and theoreticians to meet the radical marketplace changes that IMC espouses. Change is never easy. And, changes in concepts, theories, and methodologies that long have been accepted are even more difficult.

## **WHY ANOTHER PRACTITIONER APPLICATION STUDY?**

Implementation generally provides the impetus for IMC conceptualization. It allows that businesses can develop and use IMC even as the theoretical debate of its proper definition continues. Traditionally, IMC academic research has concentrated on perception and understanding of marketplace practice, i.e., the perspective from either the advertiser or the agency. In fact, one of the reasons that the understanding of IMC understanding has emerged so slowly is because its practitioners have been more interested in its development and implementation than its measurement and value.

Implementation research is the first step in developing information that would be required to verify IMC—or, more specifically, articulate its conceptualization, theorization, implementation, and evaluation. The results, in turn, could provide additional implementation research that would be essential for the further maturation of this new paradigm.

This study considers IMC applications and implementation in South Korea, the United Kingdom, and the United States. It was developed in three phases:

**A review of the best IMC advertising and public relations practices in the United States, Korea, and Great Britain reveals not just cultural divergence in adoption and practice, but also underlying weaknesses regarding IMC as a process and practice. The findings support the need to focus future IMC research within client organizations.**

First, we developed an extensive literature on the global and national perceptions of IMC. We found little relevant PR agency-oriented IMC research and none that compared the views of IMC by PR agency practitioners with those of advertising agency professionals.

Second, we focused on understanding the universality and particularity of the IMC development process—knowledge that enabled us to explore a variety of marketing and communication factors such as unification of communication media, consistent message transmission, and different management styles.

Third, we studied the global diffusion of IMC implementation. South Korea, the United Kingdom, and the United States represent three radically different marketing environments. The inclusion of South Korea is particularly significant, in that we believe only one other article has included a non-English-speaking country as a key component (Kitchen and Li, 2005).

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

We break with academic tradition of opening with a review of previous studies simply because there are not many IMC research findings that would either support or negate our research. IMC is still an emerging discipline; most prior IMC research provides few cross-cultural com-

parisons and even fewer comparative views of advertising and public relations agency managers on the subject. The sampling of IMC research that follows is related to—but not specifically supportive of—the study.

**Research directions based on previous implementation findings**

IMC is difficult to research in that it involves both concepts and processes (Duncan and Caywood, 1996). Moreover, those concepts and implementations vary from one organization to another, from one researcher to the next. IMC essentially is a management approach that aligns and optimizes the communications impact of various disciplines. Reviews of previous IMC research are tempered by the degree of implementation employed, by the focus of organizational strategic development, by the cooperation between different groups involved, by existing (and emerging) barriers inside (and outside) the organization, by compensation systems employed, and by metrics of outcomes (Kitchen and De Pelsmacker, 2004).

Because of this complexity, it was difficult to find research that directly examined implementation in all three markets. Though our literature review deals with results in general, the material may not be very generalizable (Drobis, 1997; Duncan

and Everett, 1993; Eagle et al., 1999; Gould, 2000; Kalimeyer and Abratt, 2001; Kim, 1998; Kitchen, Brignell, Li, and Spickett-Jones, 2004; Kitchen and Schultz, 1999; Schultz and Kitchen, 1997).

One major shortcoming of previous research attempts is that they most often measured short-term outcomes (Kitchen and Li, 2005)—a failing that inevitably leads to evaluation problems. IMC likely needs to be viewed as a dynamic three-dimensional model rather than a flat, standardized, operating definition—as opposed to the linear basis of all other marketing and/or communication theories.

In previous IMC implementations, functional disciplines were key categories. Today, most IMC focuses on developing communication programs through a growing mix of communication alternatives rather than the four major mass-media forms that grounded earlier. Any current implementation research should measure and evaluate the importance of each communications tool being used in current IMC, not just those that appeared in previous research.

Previous IMC studies mandated four critical conditions:

- planning that starts with receivers, not senders
- strategic consistency
- efficient control of participating agencies
- perceived client understanding of IMC concepts

The implementation research reported in the pages that follow also evaluates the effectiveness of these items as they affect both advertising and public relations agencies.

IMC implementation can be generated by a variety of communication agencies, even firms that are independent of each other. Perception research needs to measure the expectation that such cooperation might

bring. Any implementation research therefore also should measure the level of effectiveness that might be gained through interagency cooperation.

Compensation considerations also are an important part of IMC evaluation. Some agencies agree to a flat compensation system based on an annual contract. Others prefer a merit system based on a commission contract that provides an objective measurement criterion (Kim, 1998). As a more precise alternative, Schultz and Kitchen (1997) claimed that a compensation system based on the measurement of Return-On-Communication or Customer-Investment (ROCI) can be a key element in the future development and management acceptance of IMC. When measurement is properly conducted, IMC evaluation becomes possible (Eagle et al., 1999; Kim, 1998; Kim, Han, and Schultz, 2004; Schultz and Kitchen, 1997), a practicality that could resolve many IMC practitioner and academic developmental problems.

#### **The nucleus of implementation**

IMC decision-making architecture comes in two forms: (a) internal operations primarily focused on each of the various marketing communication disciplines and (b) external agencies that provide expertise, guidance, and implementation.

The various client internal models vary according to managerial structure, organizational philosophy, the specific industry or field in which the organization competes, as well as the firm's cultural context (its scope and specialty).

The external role likewise depends on a number of considerations apart from the IMC function, most particularly by how the organizing firm coordinates the services supplied by the various insourced communication disciplines. This process necessarily is mediated by the perceptions, attitudes, and even contractual agreements of the agencies involved. Discussions of the com-

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bination of decision processes starts with the client organization (Caywood, Schultz, and Wang, 1991; Duncan and Moriarty, 1997; Kitchen and Schultz, 1999; Schultz, Tannenbaum, and Lauterborn, 1993) and moves on to advertising agencies (Eagle et al., 1999; Kallmeyer and Abratt, 2001; Schultz and Kitchen, 1997). Considerations of how public relations (PR) functions might be integrated into the mix largely have been absent from this body of research.

A number of PR practitioners contend that their industry has long practiced IMC (Duncan and Caywood, 1996; Harris, 1991; Kitchen and IPR Marketing Communications Group Members, 2006). For IMC to have long-term success, it must be grounded by a unified approach based on strategic dimensionality research. The findings reported here from PR executives are a critical part of this debate, as they augment and support the integrated effort.

#### **Comparative study among nations**

Although most IMC research has originated from the United States, it is actively researched, studied, and taught in more than 25 countries (Kerr, Kim, Kobayashi, and Schultz, 2005; Rose, 1996). Although most practitioners perceive IMC very positively, almost all the studies supporting this contention were one-time events, with no follow-up information.

In these single-event studies, researchers repeatedly confirmed IMC was developing in the country studied and the concept generally had high perceived

value. But consistent research to track the phenomenon over time simply does not exist. A comprehensive 1999 comparative IMC study of the United States, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and India (Kitchen and Schultz, 1999) lacked a consistent data-gathering questionnaire.

#### **RESEARCH ISSUES**

Despite the slow progress of IMC academic conceptualization and theory development, businesses have developed and implemented what they believe to be successful IMC programs and activities. Indeed, many practitioners think that their IMC implementation has directly led to marketplace success. They rightfully argue their activities have enhanced and improved IMC practice, going beyond academic-community conceptualizations.

Still, by multilateral comparison and testing of practitioner perceptions, researchers should be able to diagnose and evaluate IMC implementation and, in turn, further develop an IMC theory base. Comparisons will provide insights among the various agencies and countries investigated. The central issues of this study include:

#### **Evaluation of IMC as a Concept**

How do the attitudes and perceptions about IMC differ among highly experienced agencies? Do those perceptions vary between advertising and PR agencies? Do they vary by country and by management structure?

**In previous IMC implementations, functional disciplines were key categories. Today, most IMC focuses on developing communication programs through a growing mix of communication alternatives rather than the four major mass-media forms that grounded earlier.**

#### Evaluation of IMC as a Strategy

How does the use of an IMC strategy-development process influence the perception, implementation, impact, and evaluation of more traditional approaches? What is the impact of an IMC program on each of the individual disciplines?

#### Evaluation of IMC-Driven Programs

What are the advantages, benefits, and barriers to the implementation of an IMC program both inside and outside the agency? What is the impact of IMC on existing metrics? What, if any, impact can new measurement standards have on the development of agency compensation systems?

#### RESEARCH METHOD

Questions focused upon IMC implementation were shaped by previous research instruments and by an extensive literature search. A questionnaire consisting of 25 questions was pretested with a group of agency practitioners and minor revisions made. A 7-point Likert-type scale was used to record responses, (1 = not important; 7 = very important). Differences in the three markets, however, mandate country-specific data-gathering approaches:

*Korea Sample:* In Korea, advertising agency names were taken from the *AD*

*Yearbook* developed by Cheil Communications, a Korean advertising agency. We used the top 20 agencies based on such quantitative measures as billings and number of employees. Within those organizations, 200 surveys were distributed to employees based on job titles and responsibilities. This sampling generated 116 responses (58 percent).

The affiliate list of the Korea Public Relations Business Association, November 2001, was the source for the distribution of a PR questionnaire. The top 19 agencies were identified with comparable indices—the number of full-time employees, billings, field service facilities, etc. Among those agencies, 200 questionnaires generated 109 (54 percent) responses.

*U.S. Sample:* Membership lists of the American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA) and the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) provided 100 randomly selected advertising and 100 public-relations agencies. The AAAA mailing to a member of the senior management team resulted in a 35 percent response rate. The PRSA questionnaire generated 23 usable responses.

*U.K. Sample:* A questionnaire was sent to 120 contact people drawn from the membership list of the Institute of Advertising Practitioners (IPA) and the mailing produced 80 usable responses (67 percent). An additional 80 surveys were mailed to the

Public Relations Consultants Association (PRCA); 27 (34 percent) responded.

All data were entered, adjusted, analyzed, and processed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) in each country. Results were then integrated by agency type and country. For the Korean and U.S. data, the mean and standard deviation were analyzed down to two decimal places. Although the U.K. data were a mixture of one or two decimal places, according to the type of analysis, the difference should not have impacted the study results.

#### RESEARCH FINDINGS

Prior to analyzing the questionnaire returns, the research team reviewed the responses to evaluate the special nature of any of the responding agencies. For example, many Korean advertising agencies are considered to be “in-house” (i.e., owned or controlled by client organizations). Similarly, many U.S. and U.K. agencies are owned or controlled by global holding companies. In PR—particularly in Korea—many agencies are branches of global organizations that serve multinational clients in their specific markets.

We determined that some responses therefore likely had been influenced by the form of agency ownership and the control exerted on the regional enterprise from nonlocal management. Moreover, the nature of the client base—whether the assignments were local or part of a larger global program—was another important consideration in the analysis of responses. While both likely played an important role in the survey findings, the variables were so case-specific that their inclusion in the analysis would have been counterproductive.

#### Perceptual dimensions

**Respondents.** Differences in business cultures meant that job classification of

respondents proved difficult. Middle-manager and general-manager positions are much more important in Korea than they are in the United Kingdom or United States. Furthermore, the length of work or career involvement of the employee/manager class in Korea is comparable to the U.K. and U.S. manager/executive class. Although there seem to be more responses from managers in Great Britain than other countries (Table 1), we believe this anomaly had little significance in the intercountry comparisons. Our questionnaire sought information on general views and agency IMC experiences, not on the specific views of individual managers.

Reported advertising-agency billings (Table 2) were considerably higher than those of the PR agencies. Advertising agencies commonly report gross billings, while PR agencies typically report their income as fees—in other words, a percentage of the gross billings, not the entire expenditure.

**Types of clients.** In all three sample markets, most (72.8 percent) advertising agencies focus primarily on domestic clients. By contrast, PR organizations, particularly in Korea (90 percent), primarily serve multinational clients. While multinational organizations may rely on local practi-

tioners, they usually drive their communication activities from headquarters, commonly outside Korea. In fact, the primary responsibility of Korean PR agencies typically consists only of field-service assistance through the local offices.

The domestic/multinational service system appears to have encouraged the development of IMC capabilities in all three countries, as multinational enterprises are more likely to have developed multidisciplinary approaches to communications. Interestingly, in all three nations, the number of large-, medium-, and small-sized companies served by IMC was similar for both agency types. This finding confirms

**TABLE 1**  
Job Class Comparison

Position	Korea		United States		United Kingdom	
	Advertising Agency	PR Agency	Advertising Agency	PR Agency	Advertising Agency	PR Agency
General manager	56 (48.3%)	63 (57.8%)	1 (2.8%)	1 (4.3%)	34 (42.5%)	6 (22.2%)
Manager	45 (38.8%)	31 (28.4%)	5 (14.3%)	3 (13.0%)	46 (57.5%)	21 (77.8%)
Executive position	4 (3.4%)	12 (11.0%)	29 (82.9%)	18 (78.3%)	—	—
Other	11 (9.5%)	3 (2.8%)	—	1 (4.3%)	—	—
Total	116 (100%)	109 (100%)	35 (100%)	23 (100%)	80 (100%)	27 (100%)

**TABLE 2**  
Sales Scope of Companies (Annual Sales Basis)\*

Scope	Korea		United States		United Kingdom	
	Advertising Agency	PR Agency	Advertising Agency	PR Agency	Advertising Agency	PR Agency
Less than 0.5	1 (0.9%)	8 (6.9%)	—	—	—	—
0.5–1	2 (1.8%)	30 (27.6%)	—	—	21 (26.3%)	12 (44.4%)
1–5	6 (5.3%)	59 (55.2%)	9 (25.7%)	11 (48.6%)	38 (47.5%)	8 (29.6%)
5–10	13 (11.4%)	8 (6.9%)	9 (25.7%)	7 (30.4%)	21 (26.3%)	4 (14.8%)
Over 10	94 (80.7%)	4 (3.4%)	17 (48.6%)	5 (21.8%)	4 (5.0%)	3 (11.1%)
Total	116 (100%)	109 (100%)	35 (100%)	23 (100%)	80 (100%)	27 (100%)

\*Unit: Million U.S.\$

the belief that Korean IMC serves large client organizations, but that smaller- and mid-sized enterprises in the United Kingdom and the United States (see Table 3) seek out the services.

There also are differences between advertising and PR client bases within each of our samples. In a general sense, the types of clients served tend to reflect the focus of their domestic economies and the immersion of IMC is driven by the needs of that economy. In Korea, for instance, advertising agencies tend to represent manufacturing clients and PR companies tend to work for service industries. In the United States, advertising agencies focus primarily on service industries (69 percent); PR firms tend to serve manufacturers (56 percent). In the United Kingdom, both types of agencies provide IMC activities primarily to service organizations (advertising, 56 percent; PR, 70 percent), and thus the types of clients served tend to reflect the focus of their domestic economies.

The responses seem to run counter to previous reports that suggested that the strength of IMC rested in particular industries, not in the demands and needs of particular markets and countries. In all three countries (see Table 4), both agency types are heavily engaged in the development and practice of IMC. While this may be an artifact of the responding agencies (i.e., IMC-centric agencies may have been more inclined to respond to the questionnaire), there is strong evidence that IMC has become a well developed, widely practiced approach to communication implementation.

**Degree of IMC implementation.** More than half of all Korean and U.S. advertising agencies report that their clients request/demand some sort of IMC programs or capabilities. But in Great Britain, the situation is just the opposite:

**TABLE 3**  
Business Type of Clients—Degree of IMC Implementation/Agency Rate (%)

Implementation	Korea			United States			United Kingdom			
	Advertising Agency	PR		Advertising Agency	PR		Advertising Agency	PR		
		Agency	Total		Agency	Total		Agency	Total	
MNC/national										
	Multinational company	32 (27.2%)	98 (90.0%)	130 (58.2%)	3 (8.6%)	2 (8.7%)	5 (9.6%)	17 (21.3%)	8 (29.6%)	25 (23.4%)
	National	84 (72.8%)	11 (10.0%)	95 (41.8%)	32 (91.4%)	21 (91.3%)	53 (91.4%)	63 (78.7%)	19 (70.4%)	82 (76.6%)
	Total	116 (100%)	109 (100%)	225 (100%)	35 (100%)	23 (100%)	58 (100%)	80 (100%)	27 (100%)	107 (100%)
Large company/SME										
	Large company	85 (73.9%)	68 (62.2%)	153 (68.7%)	18 (51.4%)	6 (26.1%)	24 (41.3%)	40 (50.0%)	14 (51.9%)	54 (50.5%)
	Small- and medium-sized companies	31 (26.1%)	41 (37.8%)	72 (31.3%)	17 (48.6%)	17 (73.9%)	34 (58.7%)	40 (50.0%)	13 (48.1%)	53 (49.5%)
	Total	116 (100%)	109 (100%)	225 (100%)	35 (100%)	23 (100%)	58 (100%)	80 (100%)	27 (100%)	107 (100%)
Manufacturing/service industry										
	Manufacturing industry	66 (56.8%)	53 (48.7%)	119 (52.9%)	11 (31.5%)	13 (56.5%)	24 (41.3%)	35 (43.8%)	8 (29.6%)	43 (40.2%)
	Service	50 (43.2%)	56 (51.3%)	106 (47.1%)	24 (68.5%)	10 (43.5%)	34 (58.7%)	45 (56.2%)	19 (70.4%)	64 (59.8%)
	Total	116 (100%)	109 (100%)	225 (100%)	35 (100%)	23 (100%)	58 (100%)	80 (100%)	27 (100%)	107 (100%)

**TABLE 4**  
IMC Implementation Degree

Implementation (Yes or No)	Korea		United States		United Kingdom	
	Advertising Agency	PR Agency	Advertising Agency	PR Agency	Advertising Agency	PR Agency
Yes	102 (87.9%)	87 (79.8%)	35 (100%)	14 (60.8%)	67 (83.8%)	25 (92.5%)
No	14 (12.1%)	22 (20.2%)	—	9 (39.2%)	13 (16.2%)	2 (7.5%)
Total	116 (100%)	109 (100%)	35 (100%)	23 (100%)	80 (100%)	27 (100%)

Considerably fewer than 50 percent of clients request IMC programs. In fact, 16 percent of U.K. advertising agencies said their clients have made no requests for any kind of IMC (see Table 5).

Our survey of PR firms shows that global penetration of IMC is not nearly as deep. Across our report, fewer than 50 percent of the PR agencies said clients had requested or demanded IMC programs or capabilities. Again, the U.K. numbers were much lower than in Korea and the United States. Fully 70 percent of all U.K. PR agencies said that fewer than 50 percent of their clients had requested IMC programs or capabilities.

What both advertising and PR agencies offer beyond their core services clearly determines those firms' abilities to truly

plan, develop, or implement an IMC program for their clients. When asked what additional client services the agency provides, again the results varied from country to country (Table 6). Nearly half the advertising agencies in all three countries offer varying levels of PR capabilities. On the other hand, considerably fewer PR agencies offer advertising capabilities.

Direct marketing (DM) is highly developed in U.S. and U.K. advertising agencies (97 percent in the United States and 73 percent in the United Kingdom), while only about one-quarter of Korean advertising agencies offer direct marketing. DM in PR agencies varies widely, being fairly widespread in the United States, with minimal presence in Korea and the United Kingdom.

At least a third of all advertising agencies reported offering promotion capabilities, but the penetration among PR agencies was particularly low (less than 20 percent) in Korea and the United Kingdom. Promotional services do seem on the rise in Great Britain (Kitchen and IPR Marketing Communications Group Members, 2006). In the United States, nearly 40 percent of the PR agencies offer some type of promotional capabilities (Duncan, 2002; Gronstedt and Thorson, 1996).

There is no communications discipline growing any faster than digital (Truong and Kitchen, 2008) and, according to our study, internet capabilities are very similar in the United States, Korea, and Great Britain, with well over half the advertising

**TABLE 5**  
Client Requests for IMC

Level	Korea		United States		United Kingdom	
	Advertising Agency	PR Agency	Advertising Agency	PR Agency	Advertising Agency	PR Agency
None	—	—	—	—	13 (16.2%)	—
Less than 50%	42 (36.2%)	72 (66.4%)	8 (22.8%)	10 (43.4%)	54 (67.5%)	19 (70.4%)
Over 50%	63 (54.3%)	36 (32.7%)	21 (60.0%)	11 (47.8%)	13 (16.2%)	8 (29.6%)
All	11 (9.5%)	1 (0.9%)	6 (17.2%)	2 (8.7%)	—	—
Total	116 (100%)	109 (100%)	35 (100%)	23 (100%)	80 (100%)	27 (100%)

**TABLE 6**

Marketing Communication Disciplines Agencies Offer (Multiple Responses, %)\*

Discipline	Korea		United States		United Kingdom	
	Advertising Agency	PR Agency	Advertising Agency	PR Agency	Advertising Agency	PR Agency
Advertising	104 (89.7)	26 (23.9)	34 (97.1)	11 (47.8)	67 (85.0)	10 (37.0)
PR	51 (44.0)	106 (97.2)	20 (57.1)	23 (100)	38 (47.5)	25 (92.6)
DM	30 (25.9)	26 (23.9)	34 (97.1)	12 (52.2)	59 (73.7)	6 (22.2)
Promotion	45 (38.8)	20 (18.3)	25 (71.4)	9 (39.1)	51 (63.7)	2 (7.4)
Internet	67 (57.8)	10 (9.2)	27 (77.1)	8 (34.7)	59 (73.8)	16 (59.3)
Other	9 (7.8)	11 (10.1)	—	—	25 (31.2)	12 (44.4)
Criterion	116 (100)	109 (100)	35 (100)	23 (100)	80 (100)	27 (100)

\*Multiple responses were allowed and encouraged. Thus, columns do not total 100 in most cases.

agencies reporting internet capabilities. The figures were not so impressive for PR agencies: 50 percent or greater digital capability was found only in U.K. agencies. In the United States (33 percent) and Korea (less than 10 percent), PR internet capabilities were much less developed.

**Evaluation of the IMC concept.** Our research demonstrates national differences in the priority order of the IMC concept that are even greater than the differences between advertising and PR agencies (see Table 7).

The most significant difference appears to be that many U.S. PR and advertising agencies consider IMC to be a mechanism around which they actually can organize marketing business. This confidence is a clear indicator of IMC's greater strategic advancement of IMC in that country, especially in comparison with Korea and the United Kingdom, where the discipline's effect is not nearly as universal and, in fact, often is perceived as no more than simply "coordination of communication disciplines."

**TABLE 7**

Priorities of Evaluation

Statement	U.S. Rank	Korea Rank	U.K. Rank
A way to organize the business of the firm	1	3	4
Coordination of the various communication disciplines	2	1	1
A way to deliver unified messages to customers and consumers	3	2	2
A way to develop and direct brand strategy	4	4	3
Another terms for coordinated advertising or PR programs	5	5	4

We also were surprised to find a lack of brand-strategy focus on IMC in the United Kingdom and Korea, even though Schultz and Kitchen argued in 2000, "the brand was the crucible into which IMC should be poured." Table 8 demonstrates—by country and by agencies—the different ways in which respondents to our survey countries evaluate IMC. Among the considerations: coordination of the various communication disciplines; a way to organize the business of the firm; a way to

develop and direct brand strategy; a way to deliver unified messages to the customer or consumer; a term to describe coordinated advertising and/or PR programs.

**Strategy dimension**

Our study also examined IMC as a communication strategy, based on both the agencies' implementation experiences as well as its operating procedures, and so on. The process involved three stages: in



**TABLE 8**  
Priority Order of Value for the IMC Concept

Item	Agency	Korea		United States		United Kingdom	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
A	Advertising	3.94	1.21	3.31	1.35	4.2	1.7
	PR	4.22	1.01	3.53	1.43	3.8	1.4
B	Advertising	2.32	1.31	3.78	1.29	2.6	1.6
	PR	2.58	1.24	3.86	1.31	2.1	1.4
C	Advertising	3.54	1.07	2.75	1.46	3.4	1.3
	PR	3.17	1.07	2.44	1.1	3.4	1.1
D	Advertising	3.54	1.09	3.28	1.14	3.9	1.3
	PR	3.54	1.13	3.61	1.14	4.0	1.6
E	Advertising	1.63	0.84	2.16	1.5	3.1	1.9
	PR	1.46	0.83	2.14	1.55	3.4	2.4

Note: A = coordination of the various communication disciplines; B = a way to organize the business of the firm; C = a way to develop and direct brand strategy; D = a way to deliver unified messages to the customer or consumer; E = another term for coordinated advertising or PR programs.

a strategic evaluation of IMC, agencies first identified their attitudes toward the various promotional disciplines, then discussed their views of implementation, and finally articulated their expectations for the future.

**Evaluation for the disciplines of IMC.**

As expected, all agencies in all countries reported that the number of communication disciplines considered was important. In this study, however, discussion was limited to six fields: advertising, public relations, sales promotion, direct marketing, internet, and personal selling. Responding agencies were asked to rate each one in terms of its importance to an overall IMC plan. Advertising agencies rated advertising quite highly and as did PR firms (see Tables 9 and 10). Both agency types also gave high ratings to several other forms of communication (see Table 8),

indicating widespread use of all promotional disciplines.

**Evaluation for the strategy of IMC.** In this second phase of the strategy-dimension evaluation, considerations included focusing the campaign on the customer, maintaining consistent campaign strategy, management of the various agencies, and clients' understanding of IMC.

Advertising and PR respondents gave high ratings to customer-focused IMC campaigns and consistent campaign strategy. There was, however, less importance attached to agency management of IMC campaigns. This could be because such management is often the prerogative of clients, not the agencies themselves. It also is interesting to note that both advertising and PR agencies did not consider client understanding of IMC as an important attribute.

**The nucleus of IMC strategy development.** In discussing the drivers of IMC strategy development (see Table 11), we made a sharp distinction between “who is” (current practice) and “who should” (anticipated future leadership). Even though each group claims a leadership role for its own discipline, it is difficult to evaluate these results without accompanying in-company evaluations.

In fact, clients actually seem to have the most control over driving “successful” IMC campaigns. Other research clearly shows that clients hold the ultimate responsibility for IMC implementation (Kitchen and Burgmann, 2008). Even though this finding supports earlier assertions of client control (Duncan and Moriarty, 1997), it is clear that advertising and PR agencies still insist they have the ability to strategically develop and implement such campaigns; their best intentions are empty unless clients will cede IMC managerial responsibility.

**The future of IMC**

Both advertising and PR agencies recognize that a widespread application of all communication is required (see Table 12) for IMC success. No agency type seems to be singularly focused on its primary function (though denying its conceptual base and practice would seem foolhardy). It would appear that all marketing-communications services are set to expand in myriad media forms and widespread mechanisms for communicating with consumers interactively.

To help determine the future of IMC, we considered eight different scenarios: we will see the development of more marcom-service agencies; advertising agencies will expand their service to other marcom areas; PR agencies will expand their service to other marcom areas; clients will use one major advertising agency; clients will use one major PR agency;

**TABLE 9**  
 Evaluation of the Importance of Various Disciplines (on Developing IMC Strategy)

	Korea		United States		United Kingdom	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<i>Advertising</i>						
Advertising agency	6.14	1.15	6.42	0.71	6.6	1.2
PR agency	5.71	1.06	5.8	1.15	5.1	1.2
<i>PR</i>						
Advertising agency	5.90	1.14	5.09	1.53	6.4	0.9
PR agency	6.36	0.77	5.80	1.15	6.4	0.9
<i>SP</i>						
Advertising agency	5.49	1.02	4.64	1.27	5.9	1.1
PR agency	5.21	1.06	4.53	1.46	3.7	1.7
<i>DM</i>						
Advertising agency	4.97	1.20	4.78	1.24	6.3	0.8
PR agency	4.64	1.21	4.60	1.24	4.9	1.5
<i>PS</i>						
Advertising agency	5.41	1.31	4.69	1.86	5.2	1.8
PR agency	5.30	1.02	4.53	1.19	4.9	1.5
<i>Internet</i>						
Advertising agency	5.16	1.23	4.64	1.37	5.5	1.6
PR agency	5.33	1.09	5.00	1.01	4.0	1.9
<i>Other</i>						
Advertising agency	4.93	1.36	5.60	1.78	—	—
PR agency	4.74	1.24	5.67	1.53	—	—

Note: Using a 7-point scale where 1 = not important and 7 = very important; PR = public relations; SP = sales promotion; DM = direct marketing; PS = personal selling.

clients will use several marcom service agencies; agencies will improve coordination of the integrated services they offer their clients; agencies will accept performance-based compensation if they can lead the campaign.

Our results show that advertising and PR agencies likely will expand their services as clients continue to focus on mes-

sage delivery irrespective of agency type. Yet, simultaneously, it appears agencies must learn to better coordinate the range of integrated services they offer clients. The exception to this new standard would be Korean agencies, whose primary status as in-house operations necessarily restricts their ability to integrate different services.

**Operating dimension**

**Coordination among participating agencies.** Our research specifically examined five possible consequences of advertising/PR agency coordination in IMC campaign development/implementation: increased communications effectiveness, cost savings, improved decision making, more clearly defined roles, and prompt client response to environmental change.

Respondents from the United States and Korea agreed that “increased communications effectiveness” was a highly likely outcome. In Great Britain, on the other hand, participants in the research rated this possibility as “most unlikely” (see Table 13)—a completely unexpected finding that flies in the face of other studies that strongly suggest increased interaction between these two agency types (Kitchen and IPR Marketing Communications Group Members, 2006).

In all three countries, there was strong support for “prompt response to environmental change.” “Improved decision making” scores well in the United States and United Kingdom, but did not have the same strong support in Korea. Another break-out by nation: the concept of “greater role definition” was strongly endorsed in the United Kingdom, had less support in the United States, and had little value in Korea.

One major concern uncovered by our research was that none of the agency respondents in any of the three countries expected that IMC would lead to significant cost savings—a surprise in that cost-effectiveness had been one of the major planks of IMC strategy (Schultz, Tannenbaum, and Lauterborn, 1993).

**Barriers among agencies.** Our research also considered what could go wrong with IMC. More specifically, what were the obstacles that could stand in the way of agencies developing effective IMC

**TABLE 10**  
Necessary Elements to Succeed in IMC Campaigns

Item	Agency	Korea		United States		United Kingdom	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
A	Advertising	6.27	0.97	6.32	1.17	6.5	0.9
	PR	6.13	0.86	6.73	0.46	6.1	1.1
B	Advertising	6.36	0.85	6.29	0.76	6.5	0.7
	PR	6.15	0.91	6.73	0.59	5.8	1.0
C	Advertising	5.38	1.02	5.47	1.46	5.3	1.3
	PR	5.31	1.01	6.13	0.92	5.6	1.2
D	Advertising	5.90	1.04	5.62	1.33	6.1	1.1
	PR	6.15	0.90	5.87	1.13	5.8	1.3

Note: Using a 7-point scale where 1 = not important and 7 = very important; A = focusing the campaign on the customer; B = consistent campaign strategy; C = management of the various agencies; D = client's understanding of IMC.

implementation? We specifically presented our research sample with seven possible deterrents (see Table 14): involvement of client's top management, a drive to increase the existing budget, control over other participating agencies, resistance to control by the main agency, turf battles among the participating agencies, different organizational structures between different participating agencies,

and different corporate cultures among participating agencies.

"Involvement of client's top management" was believed to be the greatest barrier faced by advertising and PR agencies in Korea. "Being controlled by the main agency" and "turf battles among participating agencies" are of greater consequence in Korea and the United Kingdom than in the United States—an

indication that IMC implementation is more firmly established in America. In Korea, the need to increase existing budget in both advertising and PR agencies—a major source of turf battles and a significant barrier to IMC development—was a particularly sensitive subject, more so than in the United States or the United Kingdom.

Finally, "different organizational structures between participating agencies" and "different corporate cultures between participating agencies" were revealed as relatively low barriers to IMC enrichment.

**IMC measurement of IMC.** Very few agencies measure or evaluate IMC campaigns (see Table 15). For example, only a tiny proportion of Korean agencies "always" measure; in the United States, the "always" average among advertising and PR companies is approximately 25 percent. In the United Kingdom, more than half the advertising agencies claim to "always" measure; PR agencies only 20 percent of the time.

The majority of measurement is done "sometimes" by agencies in all three countries. Remarkably, 30 percent of Korean agencies reported that they carry out no evaluation or assessment of IMC results.

**TABLE 11**  
IMC Strategy Development (Current Practice % : Anticipated Practice %)

Subject	Korea		United States		United Kingdom	
	Advertising Agency	PR Agency	Advertising Agency	PR Agency	Advertising Agency	PR Agency
Client	21.4 : 61.9	43.1 : 40.0	24.0 : 24.0	33.0 : 50.0	21.1 : 26.5	22.2 : 33.8
Advertising agency	75.0 : 28.3	9.8 : 3.8	59.0 : 29.0	20.4 : 7.0	47.4 : 54.2	16.6 : 16.2
PR agency	1.8 : 1.8	43.1 : 42.9	—	20.6 : 14.0	5.3 : 7.2	44.4 : 38.2
Other	1.8 : 8.0	3.9 : 13.3	18.0 : 47.0	26.0 : 29.0	26.3 : 14.4	16.6 : 11.8

**TABLE 12**  
The Future of IMC

Item	Agency	Korea		United States		United Kingdom	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
A	Advertising	5.54	1.32	4.97	1.26	5.00	1.41
	PR	5.65	1.14	5.21	1.48	4.85	1.52
B	Advertising	5.70	1.31	5.74	1.21	5.78	0.73
	PR	5.58	1.21	5.86	1.10	5.54	1.45
C	Advertising	4.97	1.40	4.00	1.65	3.88	1.45
	PR	5.87	1.09	2.93	1.33	3.46	1.13
D	Advertising	4.22	1.64	3.91	1.64	4.76	1.43
	PR	4.18	1.53	2.93	1.33	4.45	1.43
E	Advertising	4.14	1.60	3.91	1.64	4.30	1.17
	PR	4.79	1.43	3.79	1.67	5.00	1.16
F	Advertising	5.25	1.44	4.85	1.68	51.2	1.62
	PR	5.59	1.06	5.31	1.65	4.12	1.07
G	Advertising	5.28	1.28	5.21	1.34	5.94	1.35
	PR	5.28	1.15	5.64	1.15	5.40	1.56
H	Advertising	5.19	1.35	4.56	1.35	5.84	1.52
	PR	4.95	1.23	3.62	2.10	4.85	1.52

Note: A = more marcom service agencies will develop; B = advertising agencies will expand their service to other marcom areas; C = PR agencies will expand their service to other marcom areas; D = clients will use one major advertising agency in the future; E = clients will use one major PR agency in the future; F = clients will use several marcom service agencies in the future; G = agencies will coordinate more in providing integrated services for their clients; H = agencies will accept performance-based compensation if they can lead the campaign.

One failing common to all markets—and a major IMC weakness—is the absence of a globally standardized measurement discipline that could facilitate IMC evaluation. Development and acceptance of such a rubric is a critically missing link in the emergent IMC discipline (Kitchen and De Pelsmacker, 2004).

A second reason why evaluation may fare so poorly may relate to clients who commonly want control of this vital function. As the parties responsible for the IMC investment, the responsibility for pro-

gram measurement may just be too important to cede to agencies.

In Korea, the most desirable evaluative outcome was whether the communication program achieved its purpose, with less concern for sales responses or ROI (see Table 16). In sharp contrast, the case for ROI measurement in the U.S. and U.K. advertising agencies was relatively high.

The overall impression from this study is the need to focus rigorous research attention on the fundamental need for more meaningful IMC metrics. While many en-

terprises seem to be experimenting with analytics, none has demonstrated experimental overall generic applicability.

**IMC and compensation system.** Client contractual arrangements for IMC campaigns appear to be based on stable client-agency relationships maintained through full-service arrangements in all three countries. There are, however, some exceptions, among them a relatively unstable compensation architecture for U.K. PR agencies (see Table 17).

An overview of compensation arrangements (Table 18) shows that commission-by-annual-contract was common practice for Korean advertising agencies and contract-per-project was the rule in Korean PR agencies. The reason for the difference is that multinational companies fund most PR agency activity and large domestic companies are responsible for the majority in advertising agencies. Moreover, in advertising agencies, a close liaison between in-house agencies and their own clients reinforces the stability of relationships and compensation.

In the United States, 29 percent of the measured advertising agencies operated with a commission base and another 36 percent were compensated on a model that included both fees and commissions—figures that indicated a more competitive market than Korea. Commission penetration in U.S. PR agencies was 46 percent; the commission/fee mix served only 26 percent, of the measured companies. Both figures are strong indices of competitive and stability. Finally, in Great Britain, our estimates show that both advertising and PR agencies overwhelmingly operate on project-based arrangements, eschewing commission-based programs.

## TOWARD A CONCLUSION

This article has evaluated the direction and the degree of development of IMC by

**TABLE 13**  
The Expected Effect of Cooperation and Harmony among Advertising and PR Agencies on IMC Development/Implementation

Item	Agency	Korea		United States		United Kingdom	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
A	Advertising	4.81	0.55	4.32	1.43	1.00	N/A
	PR	4.67	0.77	4.07	1.67	1.00	N/A
B	Advertising	2.51	1.12	2.50	1.38	3.00	1.2
	PR	2.44	1.12	2.13	1.24	2.8	1.2
C	Advertising	2.80	0.94	3.29	1.01	3.4	0.9
	PR	2.88	0.95	3.53	0.92	3.3	1.1
D	Advertising	1.57	0.86	2.94	1.32	3.8	0.9
	PR	1.57	0.86	2.87	1.19	3.9	0.3
E	Advertising	3.32	1.05	2.88	1.37	3.7	1.4
	PR	3.41	1.09	2.67	1.40	3.7	1.5

Note: A = increased communications effectiveness; B = cost savings; C = improved decision making; D = clearly defined roles, etc.; E = prompt client response to environmental change.

**TABLE 14**  
The Barrier Elements in Agency Cooperation

Item	Agency	Korea		United States		United Kingdom	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
A	Advertising	4.94	1.58	3.28	1.84	3.1	2.0
	PR	4.74	1.54	2.79	1.63	3.2	1.6
B	Advertising	5.19	1.22	4.56	1.48	3.9	1.6
	PR	5.34	1.10	4.21	1.42	3.8	1.4
C	Advertising	4.75	5.91	5.16	1.19	4.2	1.6
	PR	4.53	0.96	5.64	1.15	4.3	1.5
D	Advertising	4.50	1.35	5.10	1.49	3.5	1.5
	PR	5.20	1.23	5.29	1.44	5.0	1.6
E	Advertising	4.71	1.34	5.68	1.22	5.2	1.4
	PR	4.99	1.38	5.93	1.14	4.9	1.8
F	Advertising	4.43	1.19	4.13	1.63	3.6	1.4
	PR	4.89	1.05	4.07	2.16	3.8	1.8
G	Advertising	4.22	1.15	4.72	1.59	5.1	2.7
	PR	4.86	1.27	4.07	2.02	3.7	1.7

Note: A = involvement of client's top management; B = a drive to increase existing budget; C = controlling other participating agencies; D = being controlled by the main agency; E = turf battles among the participating agencies; F = different organizational structures between participating agencies; G = different corporate cultures between participating agencies.

examining how it has changed over time in three separate, highly differentiated markets. The IMC investigation was done with advertising and PR agencies in Korea, the United States, and the United Kingdom. The study focused on such areas as conceptual change, strategic evaluation, and evaluation according to operation.

The findings show that a large majority of agencies in all three countries have the experience to implement IMC-based programs. Such expertise is proof that IMC is not a management fad, nor is it simply a perceptual phenomenon. Instead, IMC is being taken seriously and implemented by agencies *not only* on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, but also in the Far East. In particular, both advertising and PR agencies types are developing and implementing IMC programs.

Although the findings indicated that definitions of IMC are by no means acceptable globally, it is obvious that IMC as "a new marketing communication strategy" is being extensively utilized by advertising and PR agencies.

One principal problem remains: the lack of a commonly accepted IMC definition to which all respondents universally agree. The failing is complicated by discernible differences in practice by country. While Korean and U.K. agencies ranked consistency in communication as the primary goal, U.S. agency executives see IMC as a way to organize their marketing business.

Clients remain major drivers of IMC initiatives, but agencies themselves are playing a more significant role in determining what IMC is and how it might be implemented. Although there is a tendency in all three nations for joint ownership of implementation strategy, issues of evaluation and measurement do not share the same consensus. However, where differences were revealed in terms of communication capability, this was underpinned by

**TABLE 15**  
Result Measurement after IMC Implementation

Yes or No	Korea		United States		United Kingdom	
	Advertising		Advertising		Advertising	
	Agency	PR Agency	Agency	PR Agency	Agency	PR Agency
Always	8 (6.9%)	6 (5.6%)	10 (28.6%)	6 (26.1%)	42 (52.5%)	6 (22.2%)
Sometimes	78 (67.2%)	65 (59.8%)	17 (48.6%)	17 (73.9%)	33 (41.2%)	17 (63%)
None	30 (25.9%)	38 (34.6%)	8 (22.8%)	—	5 (6.3%)	4 (14.8%)
Total	116 (100%)	109 (100%)	35 (100%)	23 (100%)	80 (100%)	27 (100%)

**TABLE 16**  
What Is Most Desirable to Evaluate

Method	Korea		United States		United Kingdom	
	Advertising		Advertising		Advertising	
	Agency	PR Agency	Agency	PR Agency	Agency	PR Agency
Redemption of investment	15 (12.9%)	14 (12.8%)	11 (31.4%)	6 (26.1%)	34 (42.5%)	3 (11.1%)
Communication purpose accomplishment	82 (70.7%)	81 (74.4%)	9 (25.7%)	6 (26.1%)	8 (10.0%)	12 (44.4%)
Sales purpose accomplishment	18 (15.5%)	9 (8.2%)	5 (14.3%)	2 (8.7%)	13 (16.2%)	6 (22.2%)
Other	1 (0.9%)	5 (4.6%)	10 (28.6%)	9 (39.1%)	25 (31.3%)	6 (22.2%)
Total	116 (100%)	109 (100%)	35 (100%)	23 (100%)	80 (100%)	27 (100%)

**TABLE 17**  
Contract Types with Clients

	Korea		United States		United Kingdom	
	Advertising		Advertising		Advertising	
	Agency	PR Agency	Agency	PR Agency	Agency	PR Agency
Project base	12.2%	10.8%	11%	8%	15.8%	28.6%
Partial service	19.1%	15.7%	3%	13%	15.8%	28.6%
Full service	68.7%	72.5%	86%	74%	68.4%	35.8%
Other	—	1.0%	0%	4%	—	7.1%

specific country and agency structural issues. Differences also existed in terms of contractual arrangements with clients.

One major finding of this study is that the results of IMC campaigns cannot yet be systematically measured in any of the

three countries. Additionally, there is no standardized measurement discipline that can be applied across all three countries either. The need for research firmly focused on the measurement/evaluative issues is clearly posited.

**SUMMARY**

IMC programs essentially require an amalgamation of several different fields. Conflicts regularly appear, among participating advertising agencies, among PR agencies not accustomed to working together, among the different disciplines and demands of advertising and PR agencies, as well as between all kinds of agencies and the clients that bring them together.

Unfortunately, discovering and solving the mistakes of implementation process too often occur *after* implementation has taken place, when some type of prior coherent planning could anticipate the problems before they start to compromise the efficacy of IMC programs.

Moreover, the strategic dimension of IMC is being formed among respondents only through implementation, rather than planning. That effort is weakened by the fact that IMC measurements most often are weak efforts that do not carry much authority. It is a failing that is particularly egregious because the development of an IMC program essentially *demands* evaluation and measurement. For IMC practitioners and theorists, a focus on metrics is urgent.

It would appear from this study that IMC theory has to make a paradigm shift to a new and higher level. If IMC theory is unable to make this needed shift, it will remain in the domain of tactics and its earlier promise will likely simply fade away.

A major limitation of this study is that it does not include the views or contributions of the newly emerging media agencies that are developing new measurement tools in conjunction with their marketing partners, and the services they create often take time to reach global penetration. Case in point: “integration-imc” may be prevalent in the United Kingdom and the United States, but it is hardly recognized in Korea.

We also have encountered research limitations such as the design of items, scale,

**TABLE 18**  
**IMC Campaign and Compensation System**

Method	Korea		United States		United Kingdom	
	Advertising Agency	PR Agency	Advertising Agency	PR Agency	Advertising Agency	PR Agency
Project base	31 (26.7%)	78 (71.2%)	3 (8.5%)	2 (8.7%)	43 (53.7%)	76.9%
Commission (retainer)	69 (59.5%)	18 (16.3%)	10 (28.8%)	11 (47.8%)	21 (26.3%)	23.0%
Incentive	3 (2.6%)	3 (2.9%)	5 (14.2%)	—	8 (10.0%)	7.7%
Other	13 (11.2%)	10 (9.6%)	Other: 5 (14.2%) Complex: 12 (34.3%)	Other: 4 (17.4%) Complex: 6 (26.1%)	8 (10.0%)	—
Total	116 (100%)	109 (100%)	35 (100%)	23 (100%)	80 (100%)	27 (100%)

terms of control, considerations of culture, advertising and PR industries, and other changeable elements in our comparisons among nations. Moreover, in addition to the differences in IMC implementation and experience among respondents, there were language problems between Korean and English that complicated the utility of our questionnaire.

Nearly 20 years have passed since the first whispers of integrated marketing communications. Although the academic world has yet to supply a robust IMC theoretical system, this article has outlined coordinates for closing gaps in practice. While awaiting theoretical robustness and generic acceptance, IMC is still making massive strides within client organizations and by agencies that have learned to service those needs.

The concept of IMC as “fad” is countermanded by the powerful evidence of its longevity and popularity. Nonetheless the weaknesses of definitional acceptability and the continued lack of evidence regarding measurement or evaluation will continue to undermine its further development. We, therefore, anticipate more client-based research to further evaluate the future and potential of IMC more clearly. **JAR**

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