Barriers to Integrated Marketing Communications for Organizations: A Qualitative Study in Malaysia

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APDMF2009MBA

November 2021

A dissertation submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of

Master of Business Administration

Asia Pacific University of Technology & Innovation (APU)

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a detailed explanation in regards to this study's background, which helps to inform and support the problem statement and the research objectives. The significance of this study for marketing practitioners in Malaysia and researchers is outlined, and the limitations are considered and clearly described. This chapter also covers the operational definitions used throughout this study so as to promote understanding and eliminate any possible ambiguity.

1.1 Background of Study

Over the last decade, integrating and aligning marketing communication activities has become of ultimate importance to organizations. This is evidenced by the widespread adoption and usage of integrated marketing communications (henceforth IMC) by various types of companies and communication agencies (Kitchen and Tourky, 2020), as well as in numerous industries across the world such as telecommunications (Elrayah, 2017), tourism (Kattiyapornpong and Yu, 2019) and higher education (Gordon-Isasi et al., 2021) to name a few. Organizations recognize IMC's ability to help realize long term goals through pricing, distribution and value strategies, thus making the approach one of the most widely known business strategies to efficienize marketing communication functions and bring a competitive advantage (Batra and Keller, 2016; Kitchen and Burgmann, 2015; Kitchen and Burgmann, 2010; Yasin and Yusoff, n.d.).

Within an organization, IMC is believed to have an impact at several levels (with reference to the Kitchen and Schultz (2000) four level implementation model), but its final stage or 'true integration' is thought to be at the corporate or strategy level, where its effects can be felt throughout the organization (Mortimer and Laurie, 2017a; Laurie and Mortimer, 2011). It is therefore unsurprising that the resulting strategic

synergy from IMC implementation has become increasingly attractive for both advertising agencies and client organizations (Ots and Nyilasy, 2017). In the past, as observed by Mortimer and Laurie (2017a); Kitchen and Burgmann (2010); Kitchen and Schultz (2009), IMC implementation has been more commonly examined from the perspective of advertising/communication agencies. However there has been growing evidence that it is in fact client organizations that are the main drivers for implementing the IMC approach (Manoli and Hodgkinson, 2020), with clients themselves acknowledging their important role in its implementation (Mortimer and Laurie, 2017a).

And yet, research indicates that IMC implementation within client firms has often been found to be difficult in practice (Kitchen and Tourky, 2020; Mortimer and Laurie, 2017; Dmitrijeva and Batraga, 2012; Kitchen and Burgmann, 2010). As Ots and Nyilasy (2015) argue, the key issue lies in the corporate context: the incapacity of organizations to overcome chronic implementation barriers. Indeed, supporting studies focusing on the client perspective have found that some of the biggest barriers to IMC implementation identified by marketers/executives within client organizations are rigid organizational structures, a lack of IMC understanding, insufficient top management support, internal conflict and poor cross-functional management/coordination among others (Mortimer and Laurie, 2017; Ots and Nyilasy, 2015; Hossny and Eltayeb, 2015).

Today, any of these challenges will have been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Kitchen and Tourky, 2020), as there has been a significant slowing of marketing investments and a global decline in advertising expenditure (-8.8%) and ad revenue (-4.2%) (Dentsu, 2021; Letang and Stillman, 2020). Pandey (2021) further remarks that COVID-19 has influenced implementation of the IMC approach through its digital business spend as more customers have turned online, boosting digital marketing activities but also necessitating a change in marketing strategies. Thus, as Kitchen and Tourky (2020) posit, although the consequent challenges impacting

integration for companies due to COVID-19 are not novel, they are increasingly diverse and therefore require to be acknowledged in order to avoid reversion of IMC development to its earlier stages.

1.2 Problem Statement

As specified by Kitchen and Tourky (2020), IMC's numerous stages provide the ability for marketing technique enhancement and mobilization of data analytics for brand success which is needed during a global pandemic. And yet in practice, IMC adoption is not a given for all businesses (Šerić, 2018). While various types of businesses claim that they implement the IMC approach (the same goes for agencies which offer numerous integrated solutions), most businesses still struggle with IMC implementation due to numerous challenges (eg., insufficient understanding of the marketplace) (Mortimer and Laurie, 2017b; Kitchen and Burgmann, 2015). This is reinforced by Kitchen and Tourky (2020) who highlight that while many companies believe they are successfully executing a fully integrated IMC approach, they are actually embodying a sales oriented mass marketing approach (the first stage of IMC). Similarly, in academic work, full integration of IMC (across all four stages) in organizations has not yet been observed by researchers due to difficulties in implementation (Kitchen and Tourky, 2020; Kitchen and Burgmann, 2015; Dmitrijeva and Batraga, 2012). And although some sources (Patti *et al.*, 2017; Kliatchko and Schultz, 2014) argue that IMC is widely implemented (albeit at the tactical level of the Schultz and Kitchen (2000) model), Kitchen and Burgmann (2015) posit that the further progression of IMC implementation into the last two stages is unlikely as it is hindered by barriers. Therefore, despite IMC having achieved message integration, it has yet to fulfill its purpose as part of a strategic business process when it comes to organizational and strategic integration (Kitchen and Tourky, 2020; Kitchen, 2017).

Just as the planning and implementation varies according to markets, organization

types, developing/emerging economies, so do the challenges for which there is a call to investigate (Butkouskaya *et al.*, 2021; Mortimer and Laurie, 2017a). Earlier studies have argued that there is an insufficient explanation in integrated marketing communication theory in regards to the organizational barriers which prevent effective implementation of IMC by organizations (Niemann, 2006). Barriers to integration need to be identified in order to be dismantled so that better IMC implementation within the organization can be facilitated (Mortimer and Laurie, 2017b; Syahputra, 2015). This is also needed as agencies don't have the sufficient influence or power over the clients to instigate such an approach (Mortimer and Laurie, 2012). More recent studies (Mortimer and Laurie, 2017b) continue to state that there still remains a dearth of research of IMC from a client perspective in academic/practitioner literature.

Moreover, the few IMC studies available from the client perspective have focused on Europe as the primary region of research (see Palazzo *et al.*, 2021; Ots and Nyilasy, 2017), US (Beard, 1997), New Zealand (Eagle and Kitchen, 2000), UK (Mortimer and Laurie, 2017a; Henninger *et al.*, 2017), Sweden (Ots and Nyilasy, 2015), with few examining the IMC situation within Asia Pacific region (Schultz *et al.*, 2016; Kliatchko and Schultz, 2014), and only some studies covering Thailand (Ngamsutti et al.,, 2018; Tancharoen, 2016) and Malaysia (Ceil, 2019; Yasin and Yusoff, n.d.; Abdullah and Yusoff, 2015). Addressing this paucity of research in the region of Malaysia, this study aims to contribute by exploring the barriers to IMC implementation from the client side of the marketing agency/client organization interface during this challenging time.

1.3 Research Questions

RQ1: How do marketing professionals in Malaysia define IMC?

RQ2: What is the process of IMC implementation for organizations in Malaysia?

RQ3: What are the barriers to IMC implementation for organizations in Malaysia?

RQ4: How can the barriers to IMC implementation be overcome by organizations in Malaysia?

RQ5: What barriers to IMC implementation do organizations in Malaysia expect to encounter in the next five years?

1.4 Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the barriers to IMC implementation for organizations in Malaysia.

1.5 Significance of Study

The significance of this study lies in its attempt to narrow the gap in knowledge of barriers to IMC implementation for Malaysian organizations in order to help move the IMC approach from the tactical to the strategic level. Thus, it is of common interest for professional schools, academics, marketing and advertising practitioners on all organizational levels. Furthermore, this study's theoretical significance lies in it being underpinned by change management theories such as the social exchange theory and conflict theory. In general, organizations receive an updated understanding of the existing barriers to IMC implementation at the strategic level through this study's findings, which enables them to better enact the necessary strategies in order to dismantle those barriers. By picking an under researched region in regards to the topic of this study, this research further contributes to growing the IMC academic/literature through new findings and aids future researchers by laying out the foundations of this topic within this region.

1.6 Scope of Study

This study focuses on organizations which are not confined to a specific industry as the study aims to obtain as holistic a view as possible of the overall barriers faced by organizations. As these organizations are located in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's capital city has been chosen as the primary region for the study. This study employs qualitative methods in its data collection with the unit of analysis being individual.

1.7 Operational Definitions

The conceptual definitions of the key operational terms used throughout the study are depicted in table 1 below.

Term	Conceptual Definition	Operational Definition
Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC)	Integrated marketing communications is an audience-centric business method for managing and organizing stakeholders, content, platforms, and brand engagement programme outcomes in a systematic and coordinated manner (Kliatchko, 2008).	Integrated marketing communications in this study refers to the integration of organizational, analytic, and collaborative processes across all tactical (marketing functions) and strategic (corporate) levels.
Stakeholders	All the related public and/or various markets with which any given firm interacts are referred to as stakeholders (Kliatchko, 2008).	Stakeholders in this study refer to all participants in the IMC process including CEO's, managers, employees and consumers.
Tactical/Operational level	Refers to manager activities such as coordination of advertising and media agencies as well as the development of IMC programmes (eg., campaigns) (Kliatchko, 2008).	In this study the tactical level refers to marketing functions within an organization.
Strategic/Corporate level	Refers to senior management and its various activities, corporate priorities, objectives and business management (Kliatchko, 2008).	In this study corporate level refers to senior management functions within an organization.

IMC messages	Brand principles, ideas or associations, beliefs, and consumer views are all examples of IMC messages (Kliatchko, 2008).	In this study, IMC messages refer to any form of unified communication.
IMC implementation	Schultz and Kitchen's (2000) four stage model explains the implementation of IMC within organizations as: 1) Tactical coordination of marketing communications 2) Redefining the scope of marketing communications 3) Application of Information Technology 4) Financial and Strategic Integration	IMC implementation in this study refers to IMC implementation from the company or organizational perspective.

Table 1: Operational Definitions.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review previous related literature in the field of integrated marketing communications (IMC). The evolution of IMC's definition, conceptualization and the relative frameworks and models are reviewed. Furthermore, in relation to this study's objectives, a review of IMC's implementation is discussed from a company/corporate perspective instead of a tactical perspective. An overview of previously conducted studies on the barriers to IMC implementation is consequently provided, and is followed up by a breakdown of each barrier in more detail. Lastly, this literature review underpins the discussion of barriers to IMC implementation with reference to change management theories (social exchange theory and conflict in decision making theory) which are relevant to this study due to the affect their constructs have on employees within an organization, and thus the process of IMC.

2.2 Definition of IMC

The bulk of academic work produced since 2000 has focused on discussing the definitional and theoretical foundations (Kreidly *et al.*, 2014; Kliatchko, 2008). As such, it is unsurprising that the definition of IMC has undergone many revisions across time periods with authors such as Kliatchko (2008) who reviewed it from 1990-2006 and Šerić (2018) who examined content published from 2000-2015. Most literary works such as those by Desai and Shah (2019); Kreidly *et al.* (2014) start by mentioning the first ever definition of IMC produced by the American Association of Advertising Agencies (4A's) in 1989, which states that IMC is a comprehensive marketing communications plan which combines disciplines for an optimum communicative impact. However, as can be seen in studies by Mortimer and Laurie

(2017b); Kliatchko and Schultz (2014); Kreidly *et al.*, (2014); Naeem *et al.* (2013); Kitchen and Burgmann (2010), the most frequently quoted definitions are still those by Schultz and Schultz (1998) and Kliatchko (2008). For better reference, Schultz and Schultz (1998) evolved the original conceptualization of IMC from a synergized combination of marketing tools into the strategic business planning, developing and execution of communication programmes with both external/internal audiences in mind. This is linked to other definitions presented in Fig. 1.

Author	Date	Definition
American Association of Advertising Agencies	1989	A concept of marketing communications planning that recognizes the added value in a program that integrates a variety of strategic disciplines—e.g., general advertising, direct response, sales promotion and public relations—and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency, and maximum impact.
Schultz	1991	The process of managing all sources of information about a product/service to which a customer or prospect is exposed, which behaviorally moves the customer towards a sale and maintains customer loyalty.
Keegan *et al.*	1992	The strategic coordination of all messages and media used by an organization to collectively influence its perceived brand value.
Kotler *et al.*	1999	IMC is the concept under which a company carefully integrates and coordinates its many communication channels to deliver a clear, consistent and compelling message about the organization and its products.
Duncan	2002	A cross-functional process for creating and nourishing profitable relationships with customers and other stakeholders by strategically controlling or influencing all messages sent to these groups and encouraging data-driven purposeful dialogue with them.
Schultz & Schultz	2004	IMC is a strategic business process used to plan, develop, execute and evaluate coordinated, measurable, persuasive brand communication programs over time with consumers, customers, prospects, and other targeted, relevant external and internal audiences.
Kliatchko	2005	IMC is a concept and process of strategically managing audience-focused, channel-centered and results-driven brand communication programs over time.

Figure 1: Summary of IMC Definitions (1989-2005) (Source: Kliatchko, 2008).

In comparison, Kliatchko (2008) later redefined IMC as an "audience-centric business process of strategically managing and coordinating stakeholders, content, channels and brand communication program results". Irregardless, IMC's 'customer first' (also known as outward oriented) instead of a 'tool first' approach is a central theme running through the various discussions concerning its definition (Mortimer and Laurie, 2017a; Kliatchko and Schultz, 2014; Kliatchko, 2008). Furthermore, Kliatchko (2008) was the first to attempt a 'broad' definition by combining the 'narrow' (product level) and 'firm-wide'(corporate level) approaches (Butkouskaya *et al.*, 2019). This led to more recent studies expanding on and adopting the 'broad'

definition, characterized by a shifted locus of integration which encompasses the whole organizational entity (as opposed to conceptualizations which solely focused on marketing communications) (Butkouskaya *et al.*, 2019; Tafesse and Kitchen, 2017; Porcu *et al.*, 2017). Based off of a combination of more modern definitions from numerous studies, IMC can be said to be an interactive, stakeholder-focused business process involving cross functional alignment and arrangement of organizational, communication and systematic processes to allow for a seamless, synergized and sustainable dialogue (across multiple media channels) (Hyder, 2018; Porcu *et al.*, 2017; Batra and Keller, 2016; Naeem *et al.*, 2013; Dmitrijeva and Batraga, 2012). Another development is that recent literature has been utilizing different terminologies which accentuate the strategic dimension of IMC, for example: integrated communication management (Einwiller and Boenigk, 2012), integrated communication (Einwiller and Boenigk, 2012), strategic integrated communications (Barker, 2013) and strategic integration (Kerr and Patti, 2015)(cited in Mortimer and Laurie, 2017a) as well as integrated planning and full service integration (Chaihanchanchai and Anantachart, 2019).

2.3 Conceptualization and Modeling of IMC

Author and Year	Concepts Introduced
Caywood, Schultz, and Wang (1991) and Caywood, Schultz, and Wang (1991b)	• Coordination and consistency of messages and communication channels (one sight, one sound) • Use of a variety of communication disciplines to work in synergy based on a comprehensive plan • IMC as a concept
Schultz (1991)	• Inclusion of consumers, prospects • Behavioral responses • Nurture relationship and customer loyalty • IMC as a process
Duncan and Everett (1993)	• Profitable relationships expanded audience scope from customers to other stakeholders
Nowak and Phelps (1994)	• Reinforced notions of consistency, coordination, and behavioral response
Schultz and Schultz (1998)	• Strategic business process • Expanded notion of brand communication • Measurability • Specified the multiple markets more explicitly, inclusive of external and internal audiences
Schultz (2004b) and American Marketing Association (2007)	• Strategic business process • Extensive brand communication • Evaluation and measurement • External and internal stakeholder groups • Long-term brand value focus
Kliatchko (2005)	• Process and concept • Audience-focused • Communication program • Result-driven

Figure 2: Conceptualization of IMC Summary (Source: Kitchen and Burgmann, 2010, p.3)

The conceptualization of IMC has gone through an evolution of frameworks from various perspectives (eg., integrative, strategic, communication, performance oriented) (Butkouskaya *et al.*, 2019; Tafesse and Kitchen 2017). This can be traced back to the original interpretations of the concept by Kitchen and Schultz (2001); Nowak and Phelps (1994), where the approach was focused on considering the needs/interests of consumers and companies through its value of integrated marketing communication components (Diaconu *et al.*, 2016). More specifically, the Nowak and Phelps (1994) framework conceptualizes IMC from the viewpoint of marketing campaigns, where IMC integrates markets, messages and mediums to create behavioral based campaign outcomes. In contrast, IMC is conceptualized at the organizational level by the Duncan and Moriarty (1998) framework which views IMC as a multidisciplinary approach that builds customer relationships and brand value. The Kitchen and Schultz (2000) framework (Fig.3) brings IMC further by recognizing the importance of advertising agencies for IMC implementation as well as advancement from tactical to strategic integration.
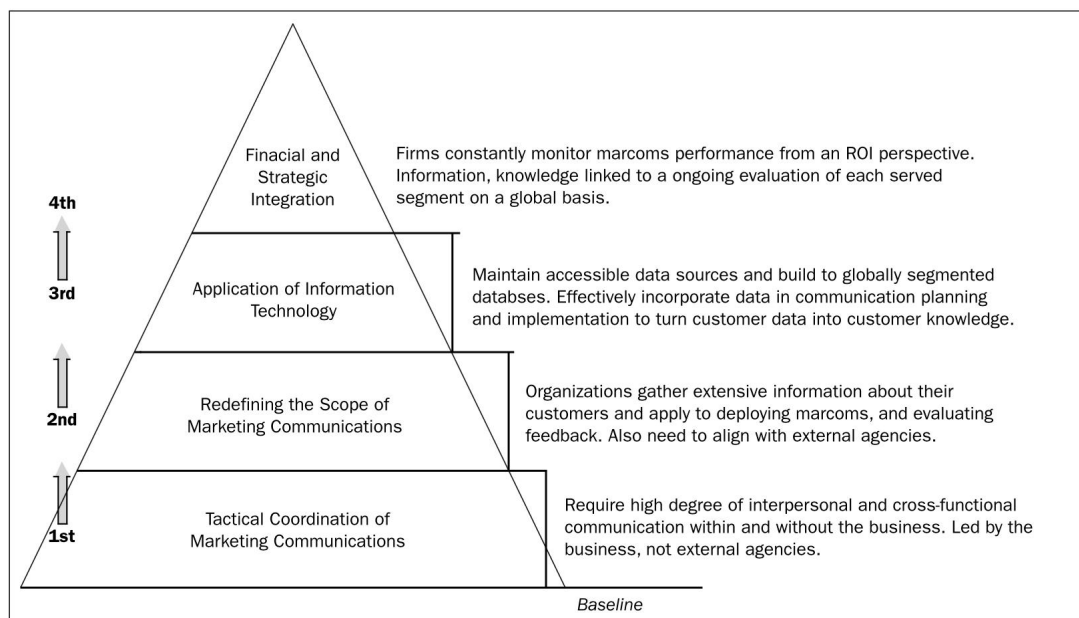
Figure 3: Four Stages in IMC Development (Source: Kitchen et al, 2004).

The 4 stages model/framework is often mentioned in literature along other notable IMC models such as the establishment of IMC model by Fill (2002) and IMC's

robostic model (Pickton and Broderick, 2005) (cited in Kitchen and Burgmann, 2010). Tafesse and Kitchen (2017) moved the IMC concept further by reviewing these three widely conceptual IMC frameworks to synthesize a comprehensive integrated framework which offers a more complete exposition on the planning/implementation process of IMC.

Furthermore, a notable study by Kliatchko (2008) has introduced the four pillars of IMC (stakeholders, content, channels, results) and examined their interconnection with the Kitchen and Schultz (2000) four stages model/four levels of development to highlight the dynamics of each pillar's role during the stages of IMC integration/implementation.
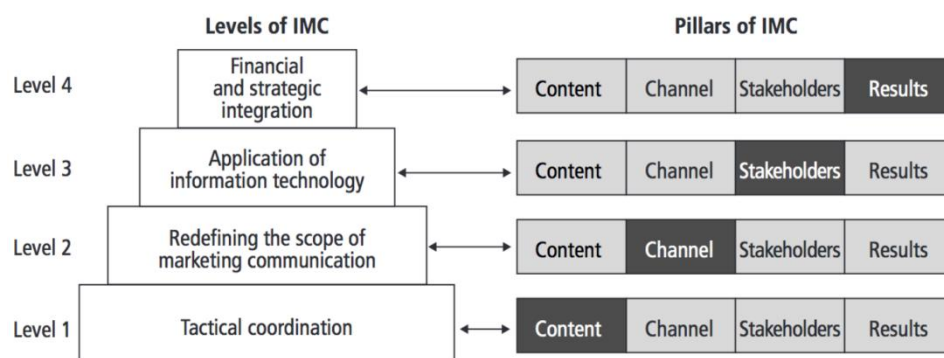
Figure 4: Interplay of levels and pillars of IMC (Source: Kliatchko, 2008, p.153).

Stage 1: Tactical Coordination

According to Kitchen and Schultz (2014); Kliatchko (2008); Schultz and Schultz (1998), Stage 1 refers to the 'one sight, one sound' (also known as inside-out) approach where firms aim to integrate elements in the promotional mix (eg., advertising, sales promotion, PR) while agencies aim to magnify brand exposure through multiple mediums. Kliatchko (2008) states that the end goal at this stage is to deliver clear and consistent messages (content) for optimal impact. Kitchen and Tourky (2020) argue that this is actually an inflexible approach which been largely condemned since the 1960s by researchers such as Levitt (1960) as it is in fact mass

marketing/sales orientation in disguise and thus can be disastrous due to cultural differences of global markets.

Stage 2: Redefining the Scope of Marketing Communication

This is where the outside-in perspective comes into play, with organizations approaching customers as partners, and thus aiming to align all marketing communications with customer needs by considering all the various touch points they might have with a service, brand or product (Kitchen and Schultz, 2014; Kitchen and Burgmann, 2010). Kliatchko (2008) indicates that the end goal at this level is to view 'channels' from the perspective of stakeholders. Kitchen and Tourky (2020) explain that as this stage requires considerable investment, COVID-19 may hamper the progression of businesses to this stage as budgets are cut, and there is a necessity to revert to Stage 1.

Stage 3: Application of Information Technology

This is where organizations utilize their data to monitor the results of their IMC efforts on the selected target audiences over a period of time in order to improve performance (Kitchen and Schultz, 2014). This stems from the need to deepen knowledge in order to curate targeted content that enables companies to connect more effectively with audiences (stakeholders) (Kliatchko, 2008). Advanced data analytics and upskilling of managerial know-how increases the cost in comparison to Stage 2 and is often hindered by lack of IT infrastructure (Kitchen and Tourky, 2020).

Stage 4: Financial and Strategic Integration

This is the highest level of integration where organizations revise their financial systems to enable 'closed-loop' planning so as to measure and anticipate marketing expenditures through return on investment (ROI) and drive strategic directions

(Kitchen and Schultz, 2014; Kitchen and Burgmann, 2010). Kliatchko (2008) explains that the primary concern at this stage is the accurate measurement of results. Kitchen and Tourky (2020) state that very few firms have arrived at this stage, as there are numerous impediments to this development. Furthermore, both Kitchen and Tourky (2020) highlight the existence of a fifth stage known as the 'integrated marketing' stage where all the characteristics of a brand are combined into a holistic and seamless customer experience, helped by a integrated multidisciplinary strategy.

2.4 IMC Implementation from the Organization Perspective

Within an organization, IMC is implemented at the corporate (senior management) and operational (tactical) levels. Senior managers have the responsibility for not only guarding the identity and reputation of a firm but also for integrating all functional units, thereby utilizing IMC as a tool for strategic management (Kliatchko, 2008). Kitchen and Burgmann (2010) highlight the need for integration between both tactical and corporate levels, explaining that with commitment only at the tactical level (marketing functions), there is a lesser dedication to the implementation of an IMC programme by senior managers and CEOs. In fact, multiple studies support and find that real integration takes place at the strategic (corporate) level (Kitchen and Tourky, 2020; Mortimer and Laurie, 2017a; Mortimer and Laurie, 2012), as does an article by Kitchen and Burgmann (2015) which stresses that IMC should progress as a strategic business process (unlike a set of tactical tools) within a company. This ties back to relationship development with both internal and external audiences, and the business alliance approach which has been found necessary not only to create loyalty and business ownership needed for the success of IMC, but to achieve integration across all customer touch points (Mortimer and Laurie, 2017b; Kliatcho, 2008).

2.5 Barriers to IMC Implementation

Kliatchko (2008) identified barriers to IMC implementation as one of the key topics in the field of IMC research in his literature breakdown. Some earlier work identified a lack of inter-disciplinary management skills (Moriarty, 1994), egos and turf battles (Duncan and Everett, 1993) as key barriers. In comparison, more recent studies such as that by Dmitrijeva and Batraga (2012), who investigated barriers to implementation in Latvian markets, found a lack of competence in IMC programme design; a lack of resources (HR and finance); narrow specialization of marketing agencies (eg., separate advertising and web solution agencies); and a lack of understanding by corporate representatives to be significant obstacles. Kliatchko and Schultz (2014) further looked at the views of clients towards challenges and barriers faced in IMC implementation in the Asia-Pacific region, identifying the top barriers (on both agency and client sides) as resistance to change, lack of IMC training (expertise development in other areas apart from advertising) and inefficient financial measurement tools. Agency respondents stated that clients were slow to adapt to technological changes, were risk averse, and still heavily invested in traditional media.

This was supported by findings of Mortimer and Laurie (2017a) who examined the comprehension of IMC by UK clients and found the perceived barriers to be a lack of knowledge in IMC, a lack of a 'IMC champion' or 'voice' at higher organizational levels and a lack of assistance by agencies in IMC implementation. A study by Syahputra (2015) which examined the influence of IMC towards marketing performances, reviewed previous research and pinpointed a lack of horizontal communication; insufficient resources; decentralization; functional specialization; lack of IMC planning; fear of change; lack of IMC expertise and corporate culture as significant barriers. Other barriers commonly identified by more recent studies are found to stem from organizational structure/culture issues (eg., functional silos), agency/client/company specialization, turf battles, agency-client relationships,

operational processes, behavioral issues, coordination complications, time scale conflicts, flexibility/modification issues; IMC measurement difficulties, cross disciplinary managerial skills, IT and infrastructure restrictions (Ots and Nyilasy, 2017; Keegan *et al.*, 2017; Syahputra, 2015; Sethi *et al.*, 2014; Dmitrijeva and Batraga, 2012; Kitchen and Burgmann, 2010).

2.5.1 Agency-Client Relationships (ACR)

The effect of the digital revolution (eg., social media marketing) on IMC has significantly added to the complexity of ACR through specialized players, multi-agency partnerships, new power distribution and growth of network conflict (Ceccotti *et al.*, 2019). Throughout academic and practitioner literature, the contribution of the agency-client relationship to achieve integration is prominent (as determined by Kitchen and Schultz (1999) 4 level framework) and its importance is recognized, as relationship building with external stakeholders is considered crucial to enjoy the benefits of IMC implementation (Ceccotti *et al.*, 2019; Laurie and Mortimer, 2019; Keegan *et al.,* 2017; Duncan and Moriarty, 1998). Earlier findings by Kitchen *et al.* (2004) show that agencies adopt integrated approaches based on client requirements, and as such, there is a need for clients to adopt best practices and be integrated themselves in order to successfully work together. Swain (2004) agreed that although there is an acceptance throughout literature regarding clients to be the more able party in managing IMC, an agreement on internal IMC leadership within organizations is still missing.

Over the years, the growing number of brand touch points has further increased the need for collaboration/cooperation between agencies. Laurie and Mortimer (2019); Mortimer and Laurie (2017b) explain the difficulties agency-client relationships face in achieving collaboration, stating that it is heavily affected by mistrust and miscommunication resulting from clients bringing strategic decisions in-house and thus treating agencies as suppliers rather than partners (Mortimer and Laurie, 2017b).

In fact, The Future of Brand and Agency Relationships report by IPA examined agency/brand approaches to marketing and identified 5 core models, among which the 'In-house model' had a moderate growth potential in the near future (IPA, 2020).

Keegan *et al.* (2017) provided a systematic review of ACR literature and found that one of the major themes is agency-client conflict as well. From the perspective of Mortimer and Laurie (2017b), this is due to the high expectations of clients towards their agencies and an increased need of agencies to have clients undertake a more active leadership role. This is reinforced by Mortimer and Laurie (2012) who mention that agencies regard IMC implementation initiatives as needing to originate from clients, but this is impacted by organizational barriers and understanding deficiencies. Similar results from a study by Sethi *et al.* (2014) on the F&B industry show that a significant obstacle is leadership and the 'top-down' approach. Nevertheless, findings by Mortimer and Laurie (2017b); Kliatchko and Schultz (2014), show that agencies recognize the need for a shift towards a more strategic, consultancy position in order to contribute to clients at the strategic level. Meanwhile, findings by Laurie and Mortimer (2019) suggest that clients need to recognize and establish roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders so as to minimize conflict and facilitate trust and collaboration.

2.5.2 Organizational Structures

Usually in organizations, there is are established processes of 'doing things', consolidated positions, turfs and corporate cultures (Niemann, 2006). However, 'this is the way we do it' attitudes can impact integrated planning (Niemann, 2006), and occur both internally (within the organization) and externally (with agencies) which makes organizational structure a continuous challenge unless focus is shifted towards outcomes rather than output (Schultz, 2000). Organizational structures and the reluctance to improve them has been a barrier identified by Mortimer and Laurie (2012) and mentioned by Mortimer and Laurie (2017a), where numerous client

companies have conventional departmental structures working based off functional specialties. Chaihanchanchai and Anantachart (2019) investigated Thai academic perspectives towards IMC, and found an existing consensus that organizational structure impacts implementation of IMC, further highlighting that cross functional teamwork is important as it increases synchronization and decreases inter-departmental rifts. A poor organizational structure was referred to as the segmentation of professionals, individualistic working environments, inflexible organizational culture, turf battles and poor alignment of objectives (Chaihanchanchai and Anantachart, 2017).

Organizational background, tradition, culture and experience can also be an impediment to IMC implementation (Kitchen and Burgmann, 2015). For example, while a currently satisfactory organizational culture may not require any adjustment now, this can cause resistance to change further on. And yet, the openness for organizational restructuring being a double edged sword has been noted long ago by Schultz (1993). Furthermore, an earlier study Eagle and Kitchen's (2000) found that dismissing a possible misalignment of organizational cultures between companies and the relatively different expectations (towards coordination/control) is a noteworthy obstacle to marcom relationship development, and creates a need for the integration of IMC into organizational cultures. Similarly, assuring secure communication across functional units needed for integration, requires an open minded organizational business culture (Kim *et al.*, 2004).

2.5.3 Top Management Support

A want of IMC champions at the strategic organizational levels (eg., board/CEO level) with the authority to facilitate IMC implementation and to avoid the reversion to 'old habits' has long been recognized as well (Mortimer and Laurie, 2017a; Eagle and Kitchen, 2000). In the case of a missing IMC champion at the board level, only limited control and authority can be implemented over other organizational divisions.

This is supported by numerous studies which have found that the success of IMC is dependent on support from senior management (Chaihanchanchai and Anantachart, 2019; Kitchen and Burgmann, 2015; Swain, 2004). Furthermore, the recognition of the strategic benefits of IMC application by senior managers is absent when commitment to integrated communication exists primarily at the tactical level, as senior managers are then not as actively involved in IMC's implementation (Kitchen and Burgmann, 2015).

2.5.4 Lack of IMC Knowledge and Understanding

Studies such as those by Dmitrijeva and Batraga (2012) found a lack of know-how and understanding of corporate representatives to be a significant barrier. As pointed out by Mortimer and Laurie (2017a), a lack of knowledge leads to a resistance to change working practices and roles as required by the complicated planning/coordinating process of IMC. Furthermore, as underlined in an earlier study by Duncan (2005), the concern stems from managers understanding IMC to be just a process of generating corresponding messages. This lack of understanding is also underpinned by a shortage of communication proficiency within organizations, potentially causing disagreements in terms of marketing objective directions and the IMC approach (Niemann, 2006). A connection is found to the preliminary understanding of the short term nature of campaigns which differs strongly from IMC's purpose of constructing long term relationships (Schultz, 2001). Clients were found to have inaccurate perceptions of advertising agency capabilities as well (Eagle and Kitchen, 2000). In contrast, more recent findings by Mortimer and Laurie (2012) suggest that agencies view the understanding of clients to be higher than clients themselves. Nevertheless, Chaihanchanchai and Anantachart's (2019) findings suggest that increasing IMC understanding through training of all employees will provide the necessary knowledge and drive audience first thinking, and there is a general consensus among Thai academics that marketers at managerial levels need to possess IMC knowledge.

2.5.5 Lack of Measurement

Swain (2004) found that little progress has been made from traditional mass marketing towards IMC measurement/agency remuneration systems, and highlighted that the Kitchen and Schultz (2000) model hasn't been adopted fully enough for new measures to emerge. In research, IMC effectiveness has been constrained by measuring the effects of message delivery through advertising, PR and other promotional tools (Delgado-Ballester *et al.*, 2012; Kitchen and Schultz, 2004). This barrier is of importance as the purpose of IMC implementation is to drive effective results (measured by behavioral responses (purchases made) and outcomes (financial returns) (Kliatchko, 2008).

As such, there have been arguments made about whether the measurement of IMC programme effectiveness provides the metrics needed for the efficient allocation of a firm's resources (Kliatchko, 2008). Kitchen and Schultz (2004) found that UK ad agencies have developed certain standardized metrics (eg., brand awareness scores, sales increase, ROI), but these methods depended on marketing objectives. Measuring behavioral outcomes by ad agencies was observed as a significant obstacle, as measurement adds to client costs and client customer databases aren't always accessible by agencies unless a solid and trustworthy relationship is present. Nevertheless, Porcu *et al.* (2017) attempted at answering this call to research by expanding on the limited empirical evidence of positive results from IMC implementation and the need of valid scales for IMC measurement with a proposed measurement tool (four IMC measures were used to capture each IMC dimension).

2.5.6 Functional Specialization

Earlier literature (Moriarty, 1994) posited that cross disciplinary managerial skills are one of the biggest hurdles to overcome in IMC implementation. An important investigation by Schultz *et al.* (1993) on the functional specialists as a barrier to IMC implementation, noted that most organizations have invested in vertical programme

development instead of horizontal. As such, the parallel structures, multiple departments and functional specialties discourage the communication needed (Niemann, 2006). This means that the brand managers which do the strategic planning for IMC have little authority in organizations and no weight in terms of budget, thus relying on managers outside their scope (Niemann, 2006). Furthermore, Kitchen and Burgmann (2010) highlight that an agency's functional specialization leads clients to hire multiple agency partners. This is a result of numerous agencies still being functionally oriented (eg., advertising, public relations, direct marketing) and thus creating a need for clients to employ independently specialized agencies when aiming for an integrated approach (Kitchen and Burgmann, 2015). Dmitrijeva and Batraga (2012) supports this by explaining that suppliers and specialized services are typically outsourced and include advertising agencies, public relations firms, sales promotion agencies, direct-advertising firms, special event marketers. Specialization also can exist within a client organization where IMC may challenge communication across SBUs, brands and departments and thus create a split in employee duties, perpetrate disputes, cause fears over loss of authority and lead to a perceived sacrifice of power by employees (Kitchen and Burgmann, 2010). This then makes the close coordination and cross functionality of all elements that an integrated programme requires, difficult to achieve (Dmitrijeva and Batraga, 2012).

2.5.7 Power, Coordination and Control

All agencies have identified turf wars and preconceptions as a significant issue according to earlier studies by Eagle and Kitchen (2000); Duncan and Everett (1993). This is reiterated in an article by Kitchen and Burgmann (2015) who stresses that the need for both vertical and horizontal communication for integration is an area that often causes turf conflicts between employees. Findings by Mortimer and Laurie (2012) show that both agency and clients consider the influence of other departments internally within an organization an issue. Managers and employees have been found to often associate power renouncement with IMC implementation, manifested through

changes in compensation from integrated communications (Niemann, 2006). Eagle and Kitchen (2000) emphasize that advertising agencies rebut the notion that they are solely responsible for control and strategic direction when it comes to IMC implementation, stressing that it's a core responsibility to be shared with clients. Ewing *et al.* (2000), who specifically explored the effects of agency self-interest along with conflict of interest and unethical behaviors in regards to the IMC approaches verified that implementing bigger responsibilities was the most challenging out of the four IMC dimensions.

2.6 Social Exchange Theory

Social behavior as an exchange takes its roots from behavioral sciences (eg., sociology, psychology, anthropology) as well as from marital, bargaining and power theories in terms of quantitative factor analysis (Varey, 2015). The social exchange theory (SET) is known to encompass a number of social scientific disciplines (eg., management, social psychology, anthropology) and is composed of a family of conceptual models (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017). SET is one of the earlier perspectives on social interaction and structure as seen through the work of sociologists like Homans (1961), Blau (1964) and Emerson (1962).

Homans (1961) built on the core processes of social behavior (influence, conformity, status, leadership) and explained social behavior through the relationship between actors A and B, with A reinforcing B's behavior and vice versa, thus defining social exchange as the trading of activity (Cook *et al.*, 2013). In contrast, instead of expanding on reinforcement principles, Blau's (1964) perspective is more utilitarian and economic, viewing social exchange as central to social life and as a basis for both individual and group relationships (Cook *et al*., 2013). Overall through, the theory focuses on reciprocity by actors through cost-reward benefits from exchanging resources (eg., food, products, information, affection, money, services, status) where actions that are rewarded are likely to be repeated in the future (Chernyak-Hai and

Rabenu, 2018; Varey, 2015). Relationships are process based, interdependent and behavior reciprocal, examined through concepts of value, sanctions, cost, profit, reward, altruism, and equality, with actors altering their resources in response to each others expectations (Varey, 2015).

Specific models relating to SET include perceived organizational support (POS) and leader member exchange (LMX) models, which operationalize relationship quality along with other constructs such as trust, identification and commitment (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). In academic literature, SET has often been used as a viewpoint to examine and analyze topics in organizational behavior and has received much attention in workplace relationship research (Chernyak-Hai and Rabenu, 2018; Neves and Caetano, 2006). It has been recognized that when POS is high, employees are more likely to exhibit organizational citizenship behavior, improved job performance and decreased absenteeism (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). Thus, a social exchange relationship frequently acts as a mediator/intervening variable, which can grow through the positive outcomes (productive work behaviors and positive attitudes) resulting from the support employers give their employees in the form of fair social transactions which increases trust (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). Furthermore, through these series of transactions, an economic exchange relationship can be transformed into a top quality social exchange relationship (depicted in Fig. 5), increasing the commitment of employees towards their organizations (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017).

Panel 1: Positive Hedonic Value

Actor Provides Benefit to Target → High Quality Social Exchange Relationship → Target Provides Benefit to Actor

Panel 2: Negative Hedonic Value

Actor Does Harm to Target → Low Quality Economic Exchange Relationship → Target Does Harm to Actor
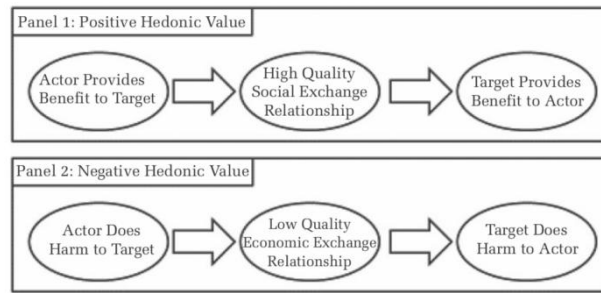
Figure 5: Generic Model of Social Exchange (Source: Cropanzano et al, 2017, p.480).

Social interactions aren't the same as social exchanges, as social exchanges are based on trust (Varey, 2015). According to SET, trust occurs as a result of successful social exchanges due to the fact that there are specified obligations not bound by a formal agreement (Neves and Caetano, 2006). Trust (by influencing each party's behavior towards the other) has been connected to positive results of job satisfaction, citizenship behaviors, effort and performance (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017; Neves and Caetano, 2006). Mortimer and Laurie (2017b) highlight that in agency-client relationships, trust has decreased as a result of reduced information exchange and communication between the two groups, caused by client's increased access to behavioral data which allows more power for decision making in-house.

Conflict among organizational groups, as seen through the view of the social exchange theory is the friction between the goals of the power holding party and the goals of the dependent party seeking independence (Blau, 1964) (McCarter *et al.*, 2018). Parties with more power can force the opposing party to provide benefits despite little reciprocity, where the scant party in their dependence on the more powerful party will oblige leading to power asymmetry (McCarter *et al.*, 2018). Overall, the social exchange perspective views conflict as negative, however it can be viewed positively by the party which yields increased power as a result.

2.7 Conflict Theory of Decision Making

The model of conflict theory by Janis and Mann (1977) has become widely accepted by decision making researchers. Janis and Mann (1977) explain that the need for decision making creates stress which affects the end choice (De Hereida *et al.*, 2004). Thus individuals use different coping mechanisms such as procrastination (delaying decision making), shifting of responsibility (to other individuals/groups) and bolstering (magnifying benefits of the 'least worse' option) to help cope with the stress (Wright *et al.,* 2004).

The resulting two outcomes are the incomplete search/evaluation of information to assist decision making and a lack of contingency planning which stems from concerns about personal objective (material) and subjective (self esteem) losses (Wright *et al.*, 2004; De Hereida *et al.*, 2004). Additionally, because the initial feeling of threat is reduced by psychological coping patterns, it often increases the gap between an organization's strategic position and the actual environment. As clients don't always possess the necessary resources for IMC implementation at all four stages, they thus avoid delegating control to one agency and prefer instead to divide power/control among multiple agencies (Kitchen and Burgmann, 2010). This can lead to new issues in coordination between partners, power distribution, conflict and an intensified deterioration of relationships (Ceccotti *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, if conflict is left unresolved, it can magnify the strength of the dominant party's perspective on a problem and lead to organizational fragmentation (Wright *et al.*, 2004).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
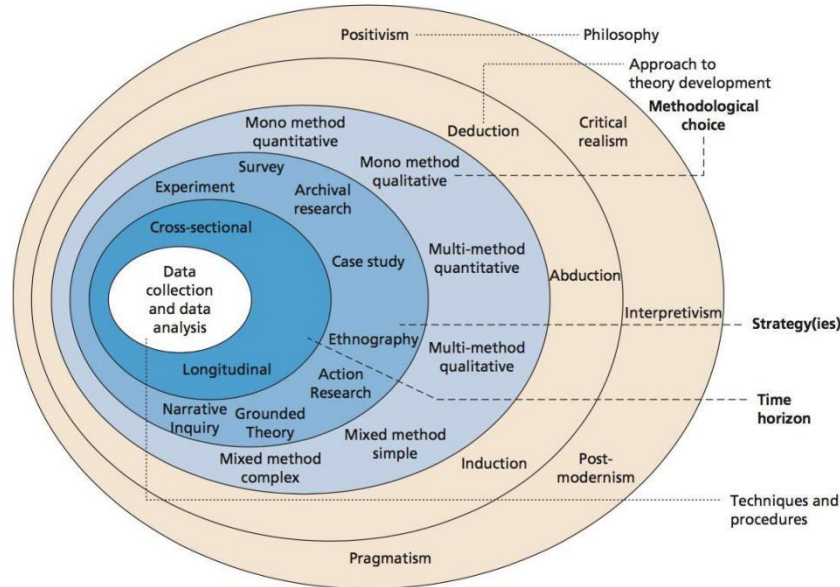
Figure 6: The Research Onion (Source: Saunders et al., 2016, p.164)

Chapter Three goes through in detail about how this study's data is collected, prepared, processed and analyzed in order to meet the research objectives.This chapter also covers the basic ethical guidelines this research project adheres to.

3.1 Research Design

This is a basic qualitative exploratory study, which is built on an interpretivist philosophy, hence the inductive approach (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). This study also utilizes semi-structured interviews as its primary qualitative research method. Interviews are conducted with five marketing practitioners in Malaysia's marketing communications industry through the purposeful sampling method. Thematic analysis is then used to identify patterns and themes in order to later present those in the findings section.

3.2 Research Philosophy

This study starts by taking an ontological assumption. Ontology relates to concepts such as the nature of reality, existence and being, and in business/management, it is known to look at organizations and management (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). Ontology is one of the philosophical assumptions incorporated into interpretive structures in qualitative studies (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). From this understanding, the study thus adopts the philosophical position of **interpretivism** as it is founded on subjectivist ontological assumptions (Melnikovas, 2018). In interpretivism (also referred to as social constructivism) individuals aim to comprehend the world which they inhabit by assigning subjective meanings to their experiences (Creswell and Poth, 2018). As interpretivism believes that social phenomena cannot be studied in the same way as physical phenomena it aims to generate a richer understanding of social worlds while appreciating the differences between people from various backgrounds, cultures and experiences of different realities (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). The aim of such research thus heavily relies upon the respondent's view on a situation as the complexity of perspectives (rather than narrowed and categorized meanings) are of specific interest. Similarly, as an interpretive paradigm concerns itself with uncovering fundamental meanings in relation to organizational life (Saunders *et al.*, 2016), it was deemed appropriate to apply it in this study. Thus, as is natural with this philosophy, this study asks broad open ended questions in discussions with other individuals in order to explore multiple perspectives, focusing on the specific context of barriers to IMC implementation in order to shape an accurate interpretation in the end result.

3.3 Research Classification and Approach

This is an **exploratory study** which uses **inductive reasoning**. Inductive reasoning (also known as the bottoms up approach) uses known premises to produce untested conclusions, starting with detailed data and then generalizing patterns from it (eg., themes, codes) (Clark and Creswell, 2015). Research is started by collecting data to

explore themes, phenomenons and patterns in order to produce or build theories or conceptual frameworks to explain said patterns (Blackstone, 2012). The benefit of this approach would be that it can reveal alternative explanations to the barriers and challenges faced by clients other than what has already been studied and covered in previous academic/practitioner literary work (Rahman, 2020).The inductive approach was deemed relevant because the purpose of the study is to capture the views of a specific sample group (clients in Malaysia) that have an understanding/authority to influence IMC implementation, but might have subjective perceptions as a result of personal backgrounds and experiences (this ties back to interpretivism which is subjectivist) (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). Additionally, this research approach usually involves a smaller subject sample in comparison to the deductive approach, and often works with qualitative data (involving numerous collecting methods) to better establish different perspectives of the phenomena (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). Taking such an approach also answers the call of Ots and Nyilasy (2017) who believe that IMC theorizing needs a more inductive rather prescriptive approach in order to allow for IMC theory to evolve from the viewpoint of practitioners and their everyday practices.

3.4 Research Strategy

This study utilizes a **basic qualitative research strategy** to explore the phenomenon of barriers to IMC implementation and aims to investigate multiple individual perspectives by collecting the data, analyzing it to develop themes and discussing the general conclusions about the themes (Clark and Creswell, 2015). A basic interpretive study is the most common type of research in applied fields such as administration and business (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Individuals *construct* reality in contact with their social environments, which is a core feature of all qualitative studies, and as a result, *constructivism* underpins what is referred to as a basic qualitative analysis (Merriam Tisdell, 2016).

3.5 Research Choices

This research is **qualitative** as the data collection and analysis utilizes non numerical data (eg., words). Qualitative research is usually associated with interpretive philosophy because it aims to interpret the meanings of the situation being studied (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011), and takes an inductive approach to theory development (starts with detailed observations) (Saunders *et al.*, 2016; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Characteristics of qualitative research are naturalism and interactivity, usage of non standardized data, access to physical settings by the researcher, context dependency, emergent design (data collection may be altered; questions may be changed), and a necessary level of sensitivity to gain access to participant knowledge (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Saunders *et al.*, 2016). Thus, the aim of qualitative researchers is to study the respondent's meanings and the relationships between those meanings (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). Qualitative research is conducted when there is a need to explore an issue or problem of which the variables cannot easily be measured as well as to gain a comprehensive and complex understanding of details that can only be achieved through social interactions, as is the case with the topic of this study (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

3.6 Time Horizon

Choosing a time horizon depends on the nature of the research question and can be longitudinal or cross sectional (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). To answer the research questions of this study, data collection at one point of time is sufficient, thus making this a **cross-sectional** study. Although cross-sectional studies are usually associated with quantitative research strategies, they can also be used with qualitative research strategies (Saunders *et al.,* 2016). As this study employs a qualitative based research design, it focuses on providing an interpretive account of the population it is observing, which is helped by a cross sectional time horizon which aims to characterize a specific population/make a comparison between subgroups of that population (Allen, 2017; Levin, 2006).

3.7 Data

Secondary data includes raw data and published work that was gathered originally for purposes that may differ from what is being studied, and is analyzed in order to add to the body of knowledge and/or provide conclusions (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). Conversely, primary data is first hand data that answers a researcher's needs and is collected by researchers themselves in real time (Ajayi, 2017).This study utilizes interviewing as it is often used as the **primary data** collection technique in qualitative research (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

3.8 Instrumentation

For this study, **semi-structured interviews** were chosen as they are often used in exploratory studies, are tied to an interpretivist philosophy and also facilitate the obtainment of valuable background/contextual material (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). The purpose for conducting semi-structured interviews is to clarify the reasons behind the attitudes and opinions of the respondents in regards to this study's topic (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). This style of interview protocol is referred to as 'semi-structured' by researchers because it has a planned layout of a few open ended questions, but the majority of the follow-up questions are not planned ahead of time (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016), thus allowing answers of interviewees to be 'probed' to facilitate further development of answers already provided, and adding more richness, detail and depth to the data gathered as a result (Clark and Creswell, 2015).

3.9 Data Collection

Data is gathered through semi-structured online interviews, as online interviews with a video component are a suitable substitute for face-to-face interviews during the COVID-19 outbreak (Lobe *et al.*, 2020). Online interviews also enable the interpretation of non-verbal cues (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016) and are unobstructed by geographical limitations (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016).

3.9.1 Recruitment of Participants

In qualitative studies, the process of recruiting participants follows a common process of recruiting samples until saturation point is reached (meaning there is no new data or information to be obtained from adding new participants) (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). As such, the primary source for recruitment of participants was the Marketing Research Society Malaysia (MRSM) organization in Malaysia, which is known to be certified professional body for marketing professionals. Once participant contact information was shared from the respective person in MRSM, each contact was approached personally through either email or direct messaging to arrange for an interview session, upon agreeing to which they were provided with a detailed Participant Information form (see Appendix 7.2) and a consent form (see Appendix 7.3). In order to achieve data saturation, a secondary source for participant recruitment in the form of the researcher's own professional network was utilized as well, following the same process.

3.9.2 Interview Process

In total, this study interviews seven Malaysian marketing practitioners. An interview protocol was designed to help create a flow for the interview, listing general questions, followed by major questions which are supported by probes as is typical with semi-structured interviews (Clark and Creswell, 2015). Each interview begins with reassurance of confidentiality and an obtainment of informed verbal consent from the interviewee before the recording starts (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). Following the recommendation of Clark and Creswell (2015) to include an ice breaking section using close ended questions, the interview proceeds to ask respondents about their current position in the organization, their years of experience and type of industry their organization belongs to before moving on to the main research questions.

3.10 Sampling

This study uses a **non-probability sampling design** which is a popular method of choice for qualitative research and involves a group of alternative sample selection methods which incorporate the subjective feature of judgment (Saunders *et al.*, 2016; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). **Purposeful sampling** (the method of purposefully choosing specific locations and people to meet research needs) was chosen as it fulfills the aim of qualitative research in establishing a comprehensive understanding of a central phenomenon (barriers to IMC implementation) (Clark and Creswell, 2015) through the provision of 'information rich' descriptive data (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

This study also follows the minimum non probability sample size for semi-structured interviews of 5 to 25 as recommended by Creswell (2013), starting with 5 respondents and adding on interviews later depending on whether data saturation is reached. More specifically, the *homogeneous sampling technique* is used since this study concentrates on a single subgroup in which all sample participants are identical in terms of belonging to the same marketing profession (marketing practitioners/clients) and the middle to top organizational hierarchy level (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). To accurately reflect the purpose of this study, *criterion-based selection* is used (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). The sampling selection criteria is adopted from similar studies such as those by Mortimer and Laurie (2017a); Mortimer and Laurie (2017b); Kliatchko and Schultz (2014) and as such includes:

1. The managerial position of interviewees, where marketing professionals picked come from a range of positions ranging from executive as the lowest, to marketing director/ manager and founder/CEO as the highest.

2. A necessary marketing experience of at least 5 years is the most crucial criterion in order to ensure that interviewees possess expert knowledge, along with a sufficient

understanding and control over the implementation of marketing communications in order to appreciate and recognize the difficulties involved.

3. Interviewees must be currently working for organizations that are located in Malaysia.

Exclusion:

Interviewees that have the necessary marketing experience and knowledge but are currently working in communication/advertising agencies were excluded from this study.

3.10.1 Withdrawal

Participants were informed about their right to withdraw or stop the interview should they not wish to continue. Informants that were unwilling to carry on with the interview for whatever reason were substituted with other candidates.

3.11 Data Processing and Preparation

Interviews were audio and video recorded as a means to control bias and generate dependable data (Saunders *et al.*, 2016), followed by a verbatim transcription of the recorded interviews as this is considered to be the most effective database by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). Data was then cleaned by checking for any transcription errors in the final transcript, before producing a finalized transcript summary (Saunders *et al.*, 2016).

3.12 Data Analysis

Data is analyzed in this study through **thematic analysis**, as it is a well known generic framework in qualitative data analysis (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). The purpose of thematic analysis is to perform a thematic search throughout the gathered data set

after data gathering is completed, and includes a number of steps as outlined by Clark and Creswell (2015) below:
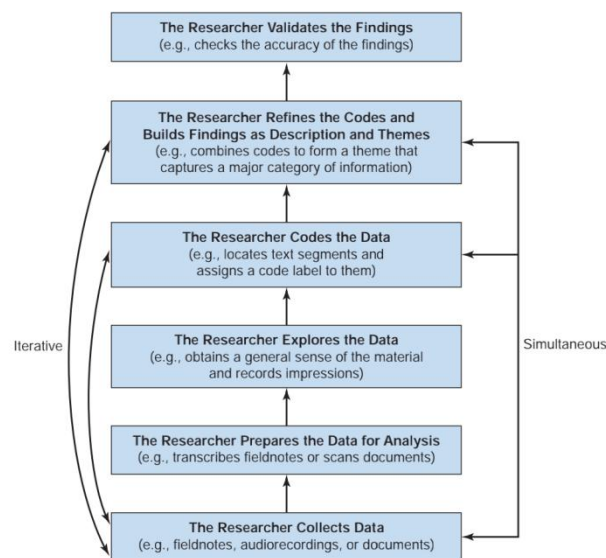
Figure 7: Qualitative Data Analysis Process (Source: Clark and Creswell, 2015).

Step 1 involves data preparation, where the accuracy of transcripts along with possible errors are checked. *Step 2* is the familiarization process where the transcripts are read over numerous times to ensure sufficient comprehension and initiate idea formation in regards to the data (Clark and Creswell, 2015). *Step 3* involves the re-categorization and re-coding of the data gathered in order to assist the identification of significant themes and patterns (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). Within the transcripts, data is labeled with a code that conveys the meaning of that excerpt so as to help with data management during the analysis process. *Step 4* refers to the search for patterns and themes after all data has been coded, which may involve the grouping of several related codes into analytic categories to signify a certain viewpoint or idea in answer to the research question (Saunders *et al.*, 2016), and further building, layering and connecting themes to form a framework/model (Clark and Creswell, 2015). *Step 5* is the validation of findings through the testing of the resulting propositions against the obtained data and the explanation of negative cases (Saunders *et al.*, 2016).

3.13 Pilot Study

Malmqist *et al.* (2019) states that a few of the aims of conducting a pilot study is to improve the quality of data collection, the research design as well as test and modify the interview protocol/guide as needed to obtain rich data. Although pilot studies are commonly associated with quantitative research, the importance of a pilot study has been expanded to qualitative inquiry (Majid *et al.*, 2017). As such, this research study follows the pilot study process outlined by Majid *et al.* (2017) below:
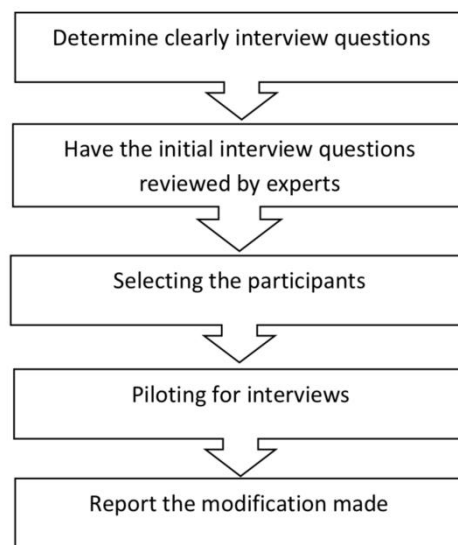
Figure 8: Steps in Conducting a Pilot Study (Majid et al., 2017).

The initial interview questions were open ended and based on this study's research questions. After the question guide was reviewed by this study's supervisor, selection of the participants was conducted through the researcher's own professional network with the inclusion criteria in mind. The time range of the interviews was between 15 to 30 minutes and were conducted in English.

Pilot Study Interviewee No.	Job Title	Years of Experience	Industry
1	Producer/Administrator/Marketer	7	Public Broadcasting
2	Copywriter	3	Digital

			Marketing

Table 2: Pilot Study Interviewees

Adjustments were later made to include more probing follow up questions as well as an inquiry over what was the biggest barrier to IMC encountered by the interviewee throughout their career. It became clear that participants would provide more clear and/or related answers to this topic when provided with an IMC definition. This called for a modification to be made in the sequencing of the interview flow, where a definition of IMC is to be provided *before* the key questions are asked in the main study, instead of later as was originally intended. Finally, this pilot study can be considered as external as it's purpose was to rehearse the main study, therefore the outcome data will not be included in the main findings (Avery *et al.*, 2017).

3.14 Validity and Reliability

In qualitative research, triangulation is a strategy that is frequently connected with reliability and validity (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). The concept behind triangulation is there is more confidence in results/findings if they are obtained through the use of multiple methods or sources (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). Data triangulation was a means of assuring the validity of this research by collecting data from a mix of numerous sources (eg., professional networks, personal contacts, an official marketing research body in Malaysia) and from a range of different types of informants that come from different/unrelated industries. This convergence of data from several sources helped to determine internal validity, by looking for similar outcomes/categories that were agreed upon by all informant groups, despite looking at the topic from different perspectives/experiences (Guion *et al.*, 2011).

Member checking, or participant/informant validation, is a technique for determining whether or not the data/results are accurate and/or reliable (Birt *et al.*, 2016). More specifically, it is the process of sharing data from interviews, for example, in the form of transcripts, so that research participants can ensure that the data is

reliably/accurately represented (López-Zerón *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, in order to add credibility to this research, interview transcripts were verified by being shared with the participants of this study. Following the recommendations mentioned by Torrance (2012); Carlson (2010), participants were asked to review the data and comment on whether they saw the result as a fair/reasonable reflection of their voice, as well as edit, elaborate or clarify as they saw fit.

4.0 Ethical Considerations

According to Saunders *et al.* (2016), ethics are a code of conduct guiding a research project in relation to the consideration of the rights and interests of respondents and the researcher. Ethical guidelines create an ethical basis for foreseeing risk and taking action to evade conflict. This study follows basic ethical principles by respecting others, avoiding causing any harm to participants, maintaining the privacy of participants, not forcing participation, providing sufficient information and time to interviewees about the research project in order to obtain informed consent, protecting anonymity, ensuring maximum accuracy and validity of findings and prioritizing the safety of both the researcher and participants through the selection of the most optimal methodological choices in alignment with what social, environmental and legal circumstances permit during the period in which this study is conducted (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016; Saunders *et al.*, 2016).

Similarly, the rights of participants to withdraw, decline answering to questions, decline sharing of the requested data, to change the particulars of their consent and also to withdraw provided data are respected (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, upon submission of this study, approval is requested from the review board at the Asia Pacific University of Technology and Innovation in order to guarantee that the procedures are reviewed and sanctioned by an overseeing group such as an ethics committee (Clark and Creswell, 2015). Before conducting the interviews, either written or verbal informed consent was obtained from participants as well.

4.1 Publication Policy

Should this study be published, no identifiers of the participating marketing professionals will be disclosed in this study's findings.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter introduces the research findings and offers a detailed analysis of the qualitative data gathered. As such, this chapter covers the location of the study, the process of data collection, followed by sample description and research findings. Data was collected with this study's five research questions in mind. This study explored barriers to integrated marketing communications in organizations in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Prior to approaching possible participating organizations/individuals, supporting letters were issued by the Asia Pacific University (APU) in order to help obtain consent, whether verbal and/or written from informants as well as a proof of the reliability and trustworthiness of the researcher's background.

The Marketing Research Society Malaysia (MRSM) was the main organization that was invited to supply suitable participants in the form of marketing professionals from the client side. Apart from that, participants were also sourced from the researcher's professional network and personal contacts. Overall, out of the 10 participants invited to participate in this study, 7 informants decided to proceed. Below is the profile list of participants:

Interviewee No.	Current Job Title	Years of Experience (as a marketing professional)	Industry/ Organization Type
Interviewee #1	Head of Digital and CRM	17	FMCG
Interviewee #2	Founder	20+	Telecom
Interviewee #3	Head of Strategy and Insights	13	Airlines
Interviewee #4	Strategy and Insights	12+	Banking

Interviewee #5	Marketing Communications Manager	10	Education
Interviewee #6	Associate Marketing Communications Manager	6	Technology
Interviewee #7	Marketing Manager	10+	Baby/Child Care

Table 3: Profile list of Participants.

Once participants had had a chance to read the participant information form provided and respond with consent either formally (eg., through the consent form supplied) or informally (eg., verbally or through email or social media communication), interviews were then conducted online through Zoom, with each interview video and audio recorded, lasting from 20 minutes (minimum) to over an hour (maximum).

4.1 Results

The data collected during the interviews was coded/analyzed through manual coding, which is considered as a valid and important method for qualitative data analysis (Saldaña, 2013). Developed core categories are presented in the preceding sections with the corresponding major themes/sub-themes as part of the content analysis. Manual coding was chosen as the coding strategy, following the recommendation of Saldaña (2013) who recommends it to newcomers to qualitative research analysis.

4.2 Definition of IMC

RQ1: How do marketing professionals in Malaysia define IMC?

The first research question was to ask participants about their understanding of the term 'Integrated Marketing Communications' so as to confirm their expertise in this area. The emerging definitions correspond closely with the meanings assigned by the first 3 stages of the 4 stage IMC model by Kitchen and Schultz (2000).

Category (Theme)	Definition for Theme	Sub Themes (Codes)
Corporate Identity	Focus on aligning all aspects of brand identity in terms of visuals and communication.	-
Audience Centricity	Customer focused approach, 'outside-in' perspective.	• Achieving a goal • Multiple touch points/channels
Application of Technology	Using data analytics and monitoring the results of IMC efforts	-

Table 4: Themes and Codes for RQ1.

Theme 1: Corporate Identity

Participant #4 heavily emphasized on corporate and brand identity when defining IMC, using the brand Apple as an example.

Participant #4: "...whether you land on their website or, buy something from the e-commerce platform, you generally get the same look and feel, you get the same language, you get the same tonality in terms of how they kind of brand themselves. And all this trickles into even their product design. Right. So everything that started from a corporate communication and branding communication standpoint, it literally trickles down to every little thing you do, even like the cleanliness of the buttons...".

Theme 2: Audience Centricity

The second theme refers to the audience centric approach as the definition of how IMC is perceived within organizations. Participant #2 remarked that audiences can be external (customers) or internal (employees), and this in turn affects the delivery of IMC.

Participant #2:"...the definition to me, is based on what is the audience that you want

to talk to".

Subtheme 1: Achieving a goal

Participant #6 and #7 pointed out that the definition of IMC is centered around communicating to the customer so as to achieve a specific goal like selling a service/product by influencing a customer's purchase decisions.

Participant #6: "...when it's integrated, into your company, it's a very, very important thing, because you know, you need marketing to sell your product or to, create awareness or to attract consumers or customers or whatever. So that's how I would I would kind of define integrated marketing".

Participant #7: "...integrated marketing communication for us starts with the consumer at the center right. The way we look at it is the entire marketing has to influence the consumer certainly. Be it through communication, be it through product experience, and be it through repeat purchases and so on. So, if we look at marketing, overall, we want consumers to do two things, one is recruit them into our brands. And second is to have them repeatedly purchasing our brands".

Subtheme 2: Multiple touch points/channels

Participants #1, #2 and #7 expanded on their definitions of IMC by adding that it involves the integration of multiple touch points and channels both online and offline as a means of connecting and communicating specific and consistent messages/ propositions to customers.

Participant #1: "...when people tell me integrated marketing, I always like to say that it's as simple as whatever you do digitally, it's the same, it's tied into whatever you're doing logistically. So for example, if you are doing

something like having a promo in store, do you get to have the same promo illustrated online also? If you're having a launch of a new product, so to speak, offline, are you also making sure that online is able to get the best experience? Are they able to chat with people online to ask about the product? Are they available to look at questions/answers, are they able to watch videos, and things like that".

Participant #2: "...to optimize all the channels that are available, all the media that are available, to connect with a company to connect with a customer, be it business, be it consumer, and try and deliver a consistent message across all of that. Try and build up a story on that journey".

Participant #7: "To me, it would mean trying to find all consumer touch points over which I can communicate with my consumer and activating my marketing messages in all these touch points in the way that it's best received by the consumer".

Theme 3: Application of Technology

Only 1 participant out of the 7 provided a definition of IMC which corresponds to that of level 3 in the 4 level IMC model by Kitchen and Schultz (2000), which relates to using IT to monitor the results of IMC efforts.

Participant #3: "Integrated marketing communication for us is working flawlessly, using the right sets of data insights, analytics, based on consumer research to come up with any marketing, any brand, any communication strategy, so that all your decisions are informed based on data and analytics...So now the usage and the ROI impact of marketing communications, are purely based on data and insight."

4.3 IMC as a Process

RQ2: What is the process of IMC implementation for organizations in Malaysia?

Category (Theme)	Definition for Theme	Sub Themes (Codes)
Stage 1 (Tactical Coordination)	Focus on aligning all aspects of brand identity in terms of visuals and communication.	• Internal IMC
Stage 2 (Redefining the scope of marketing communications)	Customer focused approach, 'outside-in' perspective.	-
Stage 3 (Application of IT)	Using data analytics and monitoring the results of IMC efforts	-

Table 5: Themes and Codes for RQ2.

Theme 1: Stage 1 (Tactical Coordination)

Participants #5, #6, #7 described the IMC process within their organization as a series of 2 to 4 general steps that involve the planning of an IMC effort. This is shown in the cross tabulation analysis below:

IMC Process Steps	Participant #5	Participant #6	Participant #7
Step 1	Start with having a theme/direction/message at the start of the year	Create a marketing plan with consideration of the product, channels and audience.	Identifying the brand task.
Quotation (s)			
	Participant #5: *"...we normally have a theme, or a direction at the start of the year, which of course, stems from the sales direction as well."*	Participant #6: *"...what we do is that we kind of plan...what's the product? Or was the service that we want to market?...what's the best marketing channel...trying to decide who is the right audience for this product...from that, we will*	Participant #7: *"...we ask ourselves the question, then what is the brand task? What is the brand's job to be done?...if there's a specific brand job to be done, let's say, take, share or switch consumers from brand B to brand A, which*

		then create a marketing plan...”	*is us...”*
Step 2	Pick various formats for the determined message/theme	Once the proposal is approved, proceed to work with the creative team.	Produce long term (2-3 years) and short term plans that relate back to the key brand task. Focus of the long term plan is to drive equity, while the focus of the short term plan is tactical engagement and brand interaction creation.
Quotation (s)			
	Participant #5: “...we have to decide on what the overarching message or the theme is, in order to get our message out right, in, of course, various different formats, which at the end of the day will produce results”.	Participant #6: *“...and the proposal once is approved, we will then work with either our kind of our creative team, or we even work with an agency that execute these plans, and then roll them out in the market”.*	Participant #7:“*...with respect to the key plan task then it's broken down into a long term communication plan and the short term communication plan”.*
Step 3	Streamline across multiple departments (eg., sales tells the targets, which market they aim for; finance department considers budgeting for the outputs)	-	-
Quotation (s)			
	Participant #5: “*...communication needs to be streamlined across multiple departments. So sales has to tell us what targets do they have in mind, what numbers are they lacking? Is it the international market that they're more concerned about? Or is it the local market? Or are we looking at it like in a totally global scale..”* And, Participant #5:*“...another very important department that we have to consider is the finance department. Because we need to talk about budgeting. Definitely. And of course, the outputs are going to be a lot right, digital, physical, statics, billboard, gantry, media, radio, television, those kind of things...”*		
Step 4	Aligning the marketing team for the year with objectives - to produce	-	-

	results.		
Quotation (s)			
	Participant #5: *"And then we have to align those into our marketing team for the year to of course, meet the objectives and produce results".*		

Table 6: Steps in the IMC process at Stage 1 Tactical Coordination.

Subtheme 1: Internal IMC

Furthermore, the IMC process at this stage was described as including internal two-way communication with employees by Participant #2, that ranges from communication at a group/company level:

Participant #2: "...there are various kinds of internal you know, communication that happens, one is of course, from a brand corporate standpoint. You know, results, quarterly results or annual results, etc, and what happens, how is the company performing, what are the key milestones that we need to deliver in a year, in a quarter and therefore, what's the role of a particular employee as you know, as defined or as agreed to between the employee and the manager. So, there is that part which is a broad level...".

At an individual level, internal communication with employees can be in regards to their career growth and skill development, as well as roles and responsibilities, and the level of hierarchy when it comes to managing crises within the organization:

Participant #2: "The other part is from communication that happens also from the organization to the employee, which is with regards to skill development, upskilling, understanding their, you know, needs, processes and career growth. So, which is a very learning and development kind of communication that happens. So that happens on a more personal level".

Participant #2: "...there are crisis communications, which are also internal. So if something were to go wrong, if you are in a telco and network goes down, what are the protocols or internal crisis communication?"

Theme 2: Stage 2 (Redefining the Scope of Marketing Communications)

Participant #2 was the only participant to describe the process of IMC that corresponded with stage 2 of the 4 stage IMC model by Kitchen and Schultz (2000). In summary, the IMC process at this stage was broken down by Participant #2 into 1) understanding the customer need:

Participant #2: "...external communication starts by understanding your customer...it's very critical that one needs to understand the customer need, which is number one".

2) Understanding the customer journey:

Participant #2: "...one also needs to understand in this whole communication chain, value chain, what we call customer journey, what is the journey that a customer goes through from the time he or she requires or feels that he or she requires a product or a service, to the time he or she puts out a cheque or a credit card or whatever online payment and purchases it".

3) Taking into consideration the after purchase scenario:

Participant #2: "Even then of course, there's the whole after service, after purchase scenario. So it's very important and that's where you plot your whole channels in that journey."

Theme 3: Stage 3 (Application of IT)

Only one participant out of 7 (Participant #3), described their organization's IMC process as the effective incorporation of customer data in communication planning/implementation and successful integration of internal teams. This process of IMC carried out at Participant #3's company corresponds with stage 3 of the 4 stage IMC model. In summary, the IMC process was broken down by Participant #3 into:

1) Have an integrated growth marketing team:

Participant #3: "...the terminology for the teams are called growth marketing, they are not tied in team branding and separate data analytics. No, especially in my company, the team together is an integrated team...A growth marketing team has a business analyst, data analyst, marketing team, consumer research and a business analyst. So now imagine, all these cross functional skill set people are a part of one thing. That's the change in step number one."

2) Clearly define target audiences:

Participant #3: "Step number two is that before we come up with any marketing campaign, we start backwards first. We find the target audience, we define the size of the audience, we define the analytics behind audience..."

3) Estimate and determine the awareness, reach and KPIs:

Participant #3: "Now we reverse the funnel. Now we do, who are we going to target? What should be the impact? What should be the customer segment? How much awareness do we want? How much reach do we want? So all my KPIs, you know, all my user funnel KPIs are at the starting of

the campaign, not the post mortem".

The participant also remarked that the goal of this process was both about achieving results from IMC efforts as well as optimizing marketing spend which is possible due to a decrease in customer acquisition costs:

Participant #3: "It's not only about the results, it's about cutting the marketing spend also. The results are not only about awareness, and reach and loyalty and conversion, it's also about optimizing your marketing spend. Because previously I am reaching 300,000 people and only 30 people get converted, correct? Yeah. Now it's not like that, now I only reach 100 people and 30 are still converted. So imagine my cost of acquisition is very low".

4.3 Barriers to Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC)

RQ3: What are the barriers to IMC implementation for organizations in Malaysia?

This research question explored which barriers to IMC implementation are being currently encountered by participants in their respective organizations in Malaysia. The thematic analysis revealed nine main themes as being barriers to IMC implementation for organizations in Malaysia. They are: coordination, collaboration, working in silos, lack of IMC prioritization, Agency-Client relationship (ACR), upper management, organization culture, consumer inertia and unified channel approach.

Category (Theme)	Definition for Theme	Sub Themes (Codes)
Coordination (a)	The integration, organization and alignment between different teams and departments within an organization	• Communication between departments • Size of organization • Coordinating different

		• teams
		• Organizing
Collaboration (b)	The teamwork and process of different people working together within a team/department to achieve the same goal	• Diversity • Collaborative Tools
Working in Silos (c)	Employees/teams that work independently from other groups whether at the individual or departmental level.	• Rifts between employees
Lack of IMC Prioritization (d)	IMC is not viewed as a priority by certain organizations in favor of other goals such as increasing sales	-
Agency-Client Relationship (ACR) (e)	Client organization barriers when working with creative communication agencies	• Client's Perspective • Agency's Perspective
Upper Management (f)	Upper management barriers in integrating IMC	• High expectations from management • Lack of openness to creativity • Budget allocation
Organization Culture (g)	An organization's culture effect on IMC	• Burnout
Consumer Inertia(i)	Factors that hinder a consumer from buying a brand, product or category	-
Unified Channel Approach (k)	Achieving seamless integration and unified communication in between channels, platforms, online and offline etc.	• Numerous online channels • Disjointedness

Theme 1: Coordination

Coordination is known as the interrelationship of functions, structures, and resources in an organizational setting, which can occur at several levels, or consist of various dimensions (Osifo, 2013). It is also one of the main elements of organizational activity and involves the establishment of communication channels between individuals who are working on separate tasks, and is a way to rectify the actions of the executors that do not follow a predetermined plan (Vanagas and Stankevič, 2014). As there are numerous elements tied to coordination such as planning, organizing (Osifo, 2013), these are explored further in the sub themes that have emerged. Overall, 6 out of 7 participants (85%) have mentioned coordination as being the top barrier when it comes to implementing IMC within their organization.

Subtheme 1: Non streamlined communication

This also applies to communication between departments, with participants explaining that non-streamlined communication between different department/teams causes miscommunication issues and causes bickering amongst employees that have received different instructions.

Participant #5: "...imagine you're supposed to be working on project A, two teams are supposed to be working on project A, but team one gets a different message and team two gets a different message. And after all that hard work, we end up with two different projects".

And therefore, inconsistent messaging can further affect the creative output because it disrupts brand messaging consistency.

Participant #5: "...if you have five or six different content writers, and you sub each

project to them, all of them are not going to write the same thing...in terms of maintaining brand and messaging consistency, it will create quite a chaos".

Similarly, non streamlined communication between different departments can also negatively impact the results of IMC efforts/campaigns as a whole as shown by the following case example:

Participant #3: "...the biggest problem happened is that because integrated marketing was only so called integrated marketing by name and it was not talking to product team...For the first two campaigns, none of the purchases went through because nobody checked with the product team...A payment error, a big time payment error of 30,000 transactions failed."

Subtheme 2: Size of organizations

The size of an organization is often a barrier because planning IMC for big organizations is much more difficult in comparison to smaller organizations, due to it involving a lot more stakeholders.

Participant #5: "...anything more than 10 is already a headache, you know? So imagine creating an IMC, for 50 companies or 100 companies that belong to the same group, it is almost always impossible".

Participant #6: "...planning for a big organization always takes a lot of work. There's a lot of stakeholders that you need to work with".

Subtheme 3: Coordinating different teams

Participants #2, #4 and #6 all indicated that coordinating, aligning and integrating

different teams was an issue due because each team/individual has their own goals, agendas and KPIs that they want to achieve.This is especially prevalent between different teams within an organization (eg., creative and strategy).

Participant #2: "The logistical nightmare is that all departments in your organization should be aligned to doing this, which is one of the biggest barriers which happened...those are one of the few challenges which every organization faces, in trying to integrate, in trying to get people to work together in teams...Flow of communication, understanding of job responsibilities and role".

Participant #4: "...it's very difficult to you know, to make sure everybody plays ball at the same time, while they're making sure that you know, you're on brand, and you're talking about the same thing, you're talking in the same tone as well...Everyone's KPIs are very different. Like, I'm supposed to bring in more sales. They're more focused on getting the numbers in...".

Participant #6: "...it involves a lot of different people to be part of this project or to be part of a campaign, because you have...creative teams...you have planning, you have strategy, so everyone always kind of has their differences in terms of how things should happen, or how they should roll out".

Subtheme 4: Organizing

Participant #1 mentioned that organizing basic work activities such as managing personal schedules and limiting the amount of unnecessary meetings for employees was a challenge due to the multi-faceted nature of digital IMC.

Participant #1: "...people have trouble organizing themselves beyond meetings and phone calls. And that is a problem when digital, especially integrated

marketing is very complex, very, very complex, with so many things happening at once...Meetings are important, but it's good to make sure that's kept to a as needed basis only".

Theme 2: Collaboration

Collaboration in an organizational setting is the process of various parties exchanging information, duties and resources in order to plan and execute activities with a common goal in mind. In short, it is both the shared creation and active sharing of risks, opportunities and responsibilities between individuals in a group/team, based on mutual trust (Camarihna-Matos and Afsarmanesh, 2008). This is supported by Participant #2 that voiced out that employees are often fearful of the uneven distribution of successes/failures/responsibilities which hinders collaboration.

Participant #2: "They're also worried about if I collaborate with someone, what happens to my KPI, if it's a successful thing, how is the credit therefore distributed? If it's a failure, how are the reprimands distributed? Will I be held responsible if the department in charge of distribution is unable to deliver?".

Subtheme 1: Diversity

A key and necessary requirement for collaboration to work is the acceptance of the diversity that exists in different individuals within an organization by understanding cultural differences and beliefs.

Participant #2: "...the challenge of culture, so you look at things different, because you grew up in a different culture...But diversity also has an underlying challenge of other people trying to accept it. It's not easy...accepting the various points, coordinating, collaborating and

making sure nobody just blindly follows a process".

Furthermore, creating a joint IMC for multiple markets at once presents the challenge of understanding the different cultures and viewpoints of not only the target audience of that market, but also of the employees behind the IMC effort.

Participant #2: "How do you get Singaporeans, Malaysians, Indonesians doing the same thing, a product which is sold in all three markets? How do you do that, there is somebody sitting on the region trying to say okay, I think, you know, this is what it is, then somebody is going to say what understanding do you have of the Indonesian market? So getting all of those viewpoints together, getting all of that together and then to make that collaboration happen, is a skill that you learn with experience".

Trust in diverse teams is necessary for collaboration to happen, but is an obstacle especially when executing IMC across different regions.

Participant #1: "...trust in teams to actually deploy local solutions that make sense. It's very important. I think that's one of the biggest challenges because they don't know who to trust and what they can do to it".

Subtheme 2: Collaborative Tools

Participant #1 mentioned that part of collaboration is using tools and systems such as JIRA and Trello that enable fast and effective sharing and storage of emails, files and chats between employees within an organization.

Participant #1: "...platforms that actually share all your emails, your chat and things like that, and it has everything located in certain places. So yes, there are systems like JIRA, or Trello, where organizations can collaborate

on a physical platform or anything else. Those kind of things are hard, hard to do".

However, implementing active usage of collaborative tools is a huge challenge when there is resistance in adopting and using these collaborative tools and systems by top management:

Participant #1: "If the boss doesn't use it, then the people below won't use it...the number one factor was no top level management buy in and usage. The top management will no doubt say that it's great, but they'll never use it ".

Employees also regard using collaborative tools as extra work:

Participant #1: "...the biggest problem of using these tools is it's not, it's not that nobody knows how to use it or not as difficult to use, but it is that people see it as extra work. So you put staff on JIRA, and half the people are not on JIRA so I have to go and email them. My boss doesn't use JIRA, so I got to WhatsApp him. So it's a lot of extra work".

Theme 3: Working in Silos

The tendency of individuals/departments to work in silos was mentioned as one of the biggest barriers to IMC.

Participant #3: "Departments and the specialists work in silos, they don't work with each other. It's a very common factor, especially in a large scale organization, it always happens, you got a marketing team, you got a growth team, you got a branding team, and then comes the product team".

Participant #5: "One biggest one is when people, by people, I mean, either individuals or departments, who tend to work in silos..."

Part of the reason for working in silos can be attributed to the different objectives each department may have:

Participant #3: "Brand marketing and sales can never be friends, we all know, because one has to sell and one must come up with the idea so they can never be friends. That's a classic example of working in silos."

Subtheme 1: Rifts

Because there is often no singular authority that oversees the IMC process within an organization, the understanding of IMC gets mixed up between different departments/individuals.

Participant #5: "There is no one person who is in power or authority when it comes to IMC because it's from various departments, right? So, in various departments, you have their own managers, you have their own directors, you have their own supervisors. So when you do something collaborative, like the IMC, that definition gets blurred".

When the definition is unclear, this can further cause rifts because of the different opinions and the individual desire to be right:

Participant #5: "If people think that they are all right, in which most cases are, so that creates a lot of rift. So working in silos basically just disrupts the entire IMCs ".

On an individual level, working in silos can be caused by the personal characteristics and tendencies of different individuals within an organization.

Participant #5: "...definitely happens in my organization obviously, it's not everyone, it's just, you can pick like the very few people who sometimes cause problems. But I think this is quite common...I don't think it's about which industry or how big or small the companies, but I think that there are tendencies, if it's about your own personal characters, you know...".

Theme 4: Lack of IMC Prioritization

A couple of participants underscored that organizations often didn't see the value of IMC, and thus did not prioritize producing and creating IMC results. According to Participant #4, this is especially the case for SMEs that tend to disregard IMC if it doesn't significantly increase sales, as they prioritize bottom line revenue more.

Participant #4: "...if you're looking at the sort of medium size corporates, smaller sized corporates? That's when like, the integration just doesn't, to them is if it brings in the bottom line sales, then it's ok...I think integrated marketing communication is a must for big corporations, because you have an identity that you need to sustain. But it's a shiny, nice thing to have, if you are not a big corporation".

Another reason why there is a lack of IMC prioritization for a lot of organizations is that it is difficult to measure its inherent value.

Participant #4: "It's very hard to justify what value integrated marketing communication brings to the table actually, if you think about it this way, right? People talk about brand value and all this kind of thing that you can give a valuation to a brand. But that's a byproduct of a very long, sustained, continuous effort of integrated marketing communication".

Moreover, a lack of understanding of IMC's long term value can be connected to a general lack of knowledge when it comes to the importance of IMC.

Participant #5: "...the problem is, a lot of people lack, they don't have the knowledge of how important an IMC is. So hence, they find this a waste of time la, especially those who are in the sales team, for example, because their objective is just to get the money in, they don't, they don't really care about what we write or what we do".

Theme 5: Agency-Client Relationship (ACR)

A successful agency-client relationship plays a significant role in allowing client organizations to reap the benefits of an IMC approach (Laurie and Mortimer, 2019). However, there are numerous challenges present on both sides of this relationship.

Subtheme 1: Client's Perspective

One of the issues in the agency-client relationship from the client perspective (especially for smaller organizations) is the need for cost competitiveness, which results in client organizations often changing agencies to find the cheapest option. This can cause a loss of brand cohesiveness in terms of language and cohesiveness:

Participant #2: "...what happens is the so called medium, smaller companies, which don't necessarily have a huge budget to always spend on keeping, you know, brand integrated, keeping product integrated. Every time there's a new thing they want to do, then they will open a bid, right, you open a bidding, and then they ask, hey, this is my objective. Yeah, I have brand books and things like that. I will go with the cheapest. I wouldn't say they always go with the cheapest. But when you go with the most cost competitive all the time, what you lose is historical

context of how your brand has always been positioned, what language you always use ".

Organizations are known to outsource IMC to outside creative/communication agencies. The issue with this is that procurement time may take longer as asking for tweaks/revisions of creative work is harder because it being done via emails/online meetings instead of face to face and is often on project basis.

Participant #5: "So if you have outhouse staff, if you hire your own agency, you will definitely have an IMC, that is a definite thing that will happen...The only problem is... what do you call that? Procurement time might be a lot longer because you have to communicate with somebody who's not even in your office, and you can't just be like hey, open it now, show me, do this tweak. No, it all has to be via emails and meetings. They probably have 100 other clients to take care of. So they go by their project base and it's all you know, according. So that could be a hindrance."

Subtheme 2: Agency's Perspective

Agency-client relationship related challenges from an agency's perspective was mentioned by Participant #4 as agency employees having limited level of access:

Participant #4: "...the agencies that work with these organizations, with big organizations, big corporations, they don't necessarily get a) the level of access, where you talk to the most important people in organizations that dictates this kind of strategy".

Creative communication agency employees are not allocated enough time to properly execute IMC efforts:

Participant #4: "...they aren't necessarily given the right amount of time, as well, by the higher level people ".

Another issue for agencies is that clients are focused on the tactical (one sight, one sound) aspect of IMC instead of its other stages.

Participant #4: "The problem with working with them on a consistent level is they're always very tactical in nature. They don't necessarily have the long term view of how this specific campaign, this specific product launch is going to actually affect how the larger company is supposed to present itself to the consumer. And I think that's a huge challenge on the agency side".

Theme 6: Upper Management

Upper management commitment entails senior executives maintaining consistency between what is said and what is done in order to avoid creating ambiguity for middle/managers and/or employees, which could jeopardize planned integration. Furthermore, upper management involvement in IMC implementation is necessary to achieve greater degrees of integration than what already exists (Hočevar *et al.*, 2007). Without upper management support, corporate policies that act a barrier to effective IMC implementation cannot be overcome (Porcu *et al.*, 2012).

Subtheme 1: High Expectation from Management

Participant #1 mentioned that upper management having high expectations from its employees to quickly deliver results creates pressure and decreases the willingness of employees to take more chances.

Participant #1: "I think management's expectation of immediate success leads people

to actually be less daring, so to speak. So you have got situations where you have people who say 'where's my ROI?' straightaway".

Similarly, when upper management expects instant results, it propagates a fear of failure within employees, resulting in mediocre or below average work.

Participant #1: "...a lot of times people are just not embracing new things because they're too busy or they're too scared to fail, because they, as I said, the expectation to deliver straight away numbers, that is equal to the revenue will kick in..."

Subtheme 2: Lack of Openness to Creativity

As Participant #5 explains, management in corporate companies are often rigid and not open to new ideas, thus enforcing a lot of constraints on creatives, which hinders new ideas.

Participant #5: "We have 100 ideas, and then we'll shortlist the five best ones, that the clients would be wowed by, you know, those kind of things. But when it comes to corporate companies, and you have in-house teams, for example, it's more difficult to do this, especially when management are not open to a lot of new ideas. So they are very rigid, they have a lot of constraints in how to do their elements. And they prefer the old school type of marketing or branding".

According to Participant #5, upper management prefers to play it safe and stick within their comfort zones when it came to creativity.

Participant #5: "...And they prefer the old school type of marketing or branding".

However, for designers, creativity is a very important aspect of their work:

Participant #5: "The most important thing for these designers is definitely their creativity. And, unfortunately, creativity is very subjective. And if you are running a company, or if you are a supervisor, or if you're in any management role, you need, I feel you need to be a bit open about creativity".

Therefore, when designers are hindered in their ability to express and execute their creative ideas, this in turn can cause pent up resentment between designers and the upper management, which not only negatively affects IMC efforts, but the organization as a whole (encourages a high turnover of design staff).

Participant #5: "I would say that it limits a lot of freedom to a lot of designers, and that might cause pent up anger and frustration. So in the long run, it might not be so good, because then you will see a lot of these creative people leaving and that's the last thing we want, right?".

Subtheme 3: Burnout

Participant #5 elaborated that burnout is a byproduct and a con of when organizations source their creative efforts from in-house staff. In-housing causes staff to burnout faster and become frustrated due to unclear directions from upper management which results in constant amendments.

Participant #5: "It's exhaustive. Because you don't put any deep thought in what you're going to change first, you know, the amendments, you just want to see, "I want to see this, I want to see that, oh, no, let's go back to this". So it's not clear, you're confused. You're going to confuse other people, and then they just gonna get frustrated".

Subtheme 4: Budget Allocation

Because an IMC approach usually involves multiple channels and outputs, cost and budget allocation is important factor to consider, in order to understand whether components of an IMC plan exceed or work well within the budget. However, upper management tends to be cost sensitive towards IMC in favor of other departments/priorities.

Participant #4: "I will say the other barrier would be costs. Overly sensitive cost management, right...Especially now with e-commerce it's getting even worse".

Participant #6: "...one of the biggest obstacles, always things like, number one is budget...you know...always kind of figure out which you know, where the budget is best allocated for. Is it best for creatives? Is it best used for hiring an agency? Is it best used for digital marketing or is it best used for PR?"

As such, limited budgets create the need to be more creative with how an IMC effort is executed and which channels are used:

Participant #6: "...obviously, having more money means you have more channels to market your product or your things to, but that's not to say it's not a bad thing, sometimes, you know, when you have a limited budget, it makes you more creative to figure out how to sell your brand..."

Theme 7: Organization Culture

Toxic and unhealthy organizational cultures heavily affect the effective implementation of an IMC approach because it causes disagreements between employees.

Participant #5: "Unfortunately, a lot of companies are also known for their toxic and negative culture. So if, yeah, if it's toxic and negative, then we definitely, even if you have an IMC briefing, I think everybody will be just yelling and shouting at each other".

Theme 8: Consumer Inertia

A key goal of any IMC effort is to overcome consumer inertia by convincing a consumer to convert to a specific brand, or to purchase a category. This in itself, is a huge challenge:

Participant #7: "So the consumer barrier is that the consumer is not interested in buying the category at all. And you're trying to change the consumers habit into buying the category...".

The challenge of overcoming consumer inertia arises because consumers are loyal to the current brand that they are using:

Participant #7: "...if you're going to a mom, who is already using a different brand of diapers, and then you go and say that look, why don't you use 'me'? It's very difficult to convince her in that case, because she's already bought in. And she's loyal to that brand. So consumer inertia is the biggest barrier. Consumers being happy with the existing brand. I think that's the toughest job. That's the toughest barrier to be able to break".

Another cause of consumer inertia and lack of buy in is that it is difficult to change a consumer's perception of a brand:

Participant #7: "...the second barrier that we face is in terms of brand. So here it is

very relevant to any category where a consumer may not want to buy my brand for XYZ reasons ".

Theme 9: Unified Channel Approach

Achieving a unified channel approach (seamless channel integration) was said to be one of the biggest barriers to IMC due to the growing number of channels both online/offline:

Participant #3: "Oh the biggest challenge in integrated marketing communication in a unified channel approach. You have online, then you have offline, then within online, you have web, you have platform, you have app, app based communication, then you have an entire new channel called social media, correct?".

Similarly, seamlessly integrating multiple channels through a unified marketing communication is difficult when there are many different audience profiles to consider:

Participant #3: "So the problem with an airline is that some people buy me from the sales counter. Some people buy me from travel agent, some people buy me from my app, some people go and buy me from my social media campaigns. Now imagine, the profile of these audience by every channel is so different. Correct? How can I have unified marketing communication?"

Participant #7: "...what is the right way to target mothers on TikTok, because TikTok, for the last two and a half years has come up in a big way. But their audience over there is expecting very different behaviors than what they will be expecting now, in YouTube or Facebook".

This also applies to numerous growing online channels and platforms such as TikTok, and overcoming asset barriers (creating assets that can be applied universally across all these platforms/channels):

Participant #3: "But now my other problem is that within online, different layers between social commerce to platform commerce, you know, between influencer marketing to the, you know, they're talking about all these TikTok videos".

Participant #4: "...last time marketing you need to handle radio, TV, newspaper. That's it. So now you have to handle newspaper, I don't know, Instagram, TikTok, Instagram reels".

Participant #7: "...so we create a asset for TV, it runs best on TV, but I can't put it up as an Instagram story. It's not as interactive on Instagram. So that's a asset barrier that comes in, in terms of the platform".

Another barrier is integrating IMC communication in a unified way across all the different languages spoken in Malaysia, as meanings are often lost in translation:

Participant #4: "But in Malaysia...how do you integrate something when you need to take care of four languages like, English, BM, Mandarin, and obviously the most neglected one is Tamil...so how do you integrate as a company, right, how do you integrate something when you have to talk in first thing, four different languages? And when you translate? Already, certain things are a bit lost".

Subtheme 1: Disjointedness

Disjointedness is a lack of cohesiveness between the tactical aspects of IMC efforts (eg., activation campaigns) whether it be visuals or brand messaging and is a considerable challenge for smaller companies.

Participant #4: "So the tactical and product campaigns is where I normally see this integrated effort start to, I wouldn't say fall apart, but it starts to have inconsistencies in different places...That is where I think there's a huge disconnect for most companies, not just Malaysian companies...The smaller the company, the more disjointed it gets".

4.4 Overcoming Barriers to Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC)

RQ4: How can the barriers to IMC implementation be overcome by organizations in Malaysia?

The second research question explored which factors would help in overcoming the barriers to IMC implementation faced by marketing professionals in their organization. The thematic analysis revealed 8 core themes as coordination, collaboration, upper management, specialization, flexibility, unified channel solutions, in-housing and consumer/brand strategies with numerous sub themes that are discussed more in depth below.

Categories (Themes)	Definition of Themes	Sub Themes (Codes)
Coordination (a)	The integration, organization and alignment between different teams and departments within an organization.	• Cross functionality • Specialized teams • Team representatives • IMC briefings
Collaboration (b)	The teamwork and process of different people working together within a team/department to achieve the same goal.	• Using collaborative tools • Top-down collaborative efforts
Upper Management (c)	Guidelines in how upper management related barriers to effective IMC implementation can be overcome.	• Handling high expectations from management • Clear roles/responsibilities • Good senior management

Cross-disciplinary Skills (d)	Organizations/employees specializing in a niche area (eg., Search Engine Optimization)	-
Flexibility (e)	IMC related processes that are flexible and adaptable to quick changes	• Flexible Processes • Work from home
Unified Channel Approach (f)	Overcoming IMC barriers through a singular unified strategy	• IMC 360 • Doing less with more impact
In-housing (g)	Reducing the external procurement and number of vendors in an organization has its benefits	-
Marketing Strategies and Tools (j)	Strategies that can help overcome consumer inertia/brand barrier	-

Table 8: Themes and Codes for RQ4.

Theme 1: Coordination

There are numerous aspects of coordination such as specification, work grouping, division of responsibilities and preparation of plans (Vanagas and Stankevič, 2014) which are reflected in the developed subthemes. When these aspects of coordination are managed well, they positively impact all organization processes, including IMC.

Subtheme 1: Specialized Teams
Agile teams, task force teams and market entry teams have been used interchangeably by participants.

Participant #2: "...cross specialty marketing, which is one of the outcomes of integrated marketing is when you have different members of a team, to a brand. So somebody who's handling, take any brand, for example, somebody who's handling LifeBuoy, would have a marketing person, would have a communications person or distribution person. So all people have different skill sets come together ".

As Participant #3 explains, task force teams help facilitate an agile culture which enables quick and efficient solution finding to problems:

Participant #3: "But in integrated marketing, the whole point of this disruption is that creating a task force team, you know, that agile culture where everybody is a part of the project".

Participant #3: "And the reason we work in this agile teams is that you throw a problem and there are 10 other cross functional teams helping you out, because sometimes your problem cannot be answered by only your team members".

A task force team consists of champions from various departments with different specialties that work together to accomplish a particular task through everyday updates:

Participant #3: "...we quickly formed a market entry team...we just put together marketing brand, platform, channel, legal finance, operation, customer happiness, insights, data product team, you know, we picked up the champions of each of the domain made of 15 member teams, every day, we update, we go back and work in our respective department in 24 hours, we come next day, and we update what needs to be done".

Participant #3: "Task force teams is a brilliant idea why, because you stay focused, you have everyday updates, which is called you know, your every day morning update, everyday chats around where we are and a task force team has eight to nine people within one task force team. Working in agile teams and a scrum master and a task leader is not only a product team anymore, it's an integrated marketing brand, and a channel kind of strategy because it really, really was super impactful and brings your overall time-lines".

Subtheme 2: IMC Briefings

Participants #5 and #6 have emphasized the importance of having one general briefing for all employees in charge of an IMC effort so as to ensure everyone's understanding and activities are coordinated and aligned.

Participant #5: "...just stick to one briefing, maybe, you know, that's what an IMC is right, you get everybody at the same time, yeah, insights so that you don't avoid all these separate meetings. If it's an IMC briefing, then everybody should be at the same time at the same place, getting the same message".

Participant #6: "...whenever you go into a campaign or you're going to brainstorm or you go into planning with different teams, you always have a set kind of guideline or maybe like a set agenda that your company follows to. So that at least everyone is also on the same page".

Subtheme 3: Team Representatives

Team representatives can be used to help overcome miscommunication and upper management barriers as they will unanimously represent the voices of the team members in a department/group.

Participant #5: "...an MMC has like over 20 to 30 different departments, and each department has a lot of team members. So what they could do is just pick one or two people from each team to be present for the IMC meeting".

Similarly, team representatives can collect all the viewpoints of their team during separate pre briefings first:

Participant #5: "...another solution would be for each department to have their pre

IMC meeting first. So they gather all the thoughts and opinions of their team members and during the IMC brief, the project, the team leader or the manager from that particular department or team represents his or her entire team and presents to the management. So that would also be a seamless communication".

Theme 2: Collaboration

Subtheme 1: Using Collaborative Tools

The use of collaborative systems like JIRA and Trello is extremely helpful in making sure all employees within an organization have a place to work together.

Participant #1: "...we are able to embrace platforms that actually share all your emails, your chat and things like that, and it has everything located in certain places. So yes, there are systems like JIRA, or Trello, where organizations can collaborate on a physical platform or anything else".

Upper management and bosses have to initiate the active usage of collaborative tools by acting as role models for their employees.

Participant #1: "...That's the number one factor...if the boss doesn't use it, then the people below won't use it".

Subtheme 2: Top-down collaborative efforts

The organization as a whole should actively drive collaborative efforts through its managers by training, reevaluation and communication of any issues with collaboration to its employees:

Participant #2: "...it's very important for managers to drive the collaboration that happens...".

Participant #2: "And the way to make it better as part of addressing or mitigating the challenge is how your organization communicates internally with you. How does the organization, train skill, change mindset and communicate the importance of collaboration. If collaboration does not happen, integration is not going to happen".

Theme 3: Upper Management

IMC can flourish when there is a good and supportive upper management which clearly delegates roles and responsibilities as well as has reasonable expectations.

Subtheme 1: Handling high expectations from management

Participant #1 explains the key to manage high expectations from management is to properly explain and update management on what are the stages in the process and the expected time-line before tangible revenue can come in.

Participant #1: "...it's up to the product manager to actually build in stages. So ROI is coming. But then these are things you measure first, which will lead to these other things, which you should measure second, which will lead to these other things which you measure third".

Participant #1: "Well set, set different KPIs that relate to the end goal. Okay. So although you are not able to get money straight away, what are you able to track still to make sure your project is on track, and then you're slowly progressing towards this".

Participant #1: "...as long as the management is, and as a product manager, whoever is doing this project has got to draw the line for management, you

cannot expect management to figure out for themselves".

Subtheme 2: Clear roles and responsibilities

Participant #2 highlighted that for integrated marketing to succeed, all individuals within the organization must have a clear understanding of what their roles and responsibilities are.

Participant #2: "I think, in a situation where you're driving integrated marketing across channels, it's very important that everyone in the system in the chain, knows exactly what is required of them".

It is especially important that team members are well aware of backup plans and are well informed of each step in a process so that they can easily adapt to unpredictable changes:

Participant #2: "...first thing is as the team members should know what is expected of them and what they should do number one, second is they should know what the endgame is and what the deliverables are and why we are doing it. Third, everyone in the team should know inside out what the process is, they should know what the process is, they should know what the backup is, they should know in case of failure of the process, what they should do. And this needs to be translated to them at their level of their job responsibilities by the managers and the team leaders...".

Subtheme 3: Good senior management

Generally, a management that values and supports all employees creates a positive working environment, which facilitates successful IMC implementation.

Participant #5: "Some companies have good senior management who are willing to listen and who encourage employees a lot and they create a very positive vibe at the workplace".

Theme 4: Cross-disciplinary

Participant #5 believes that individuals with specific skills are more productive in comparison to individuals that focus on cross-disciplinary skills.

Participant #5: "I am a person who believes a certain person can only specialize in one or just a few of one of these many, many areas of digital marketing. So my niche is definitely social media marketing, and email marketing".

Participant #5: "...also my company, we have an elaborate team. So somebody else does the SEO rankings. Somebody else does the website optimization, somebody else does the website content. So if you break it down, and you have specialists for each of, not even all, at least most of these areas, then I think you would fare better because this person really understands the depth of what they're you know, known for, rather than having one person doing it all. Then it will be a bit messy la".

Similarly, there is a need to be more digitally literate, and one of the ways to do that is to train marketers as new platforms emerge.

Participant #1: "For marketing people, especially, be more digital marketing literate, you know what I'm saying, so that you're able to tie it together with your sales, you're able to tie together with your business more than anything else".

Participant #7: "...platform inertia, not knowing how to handle a particular platform,

because there are so many new platforms coming up. I think the best way is to keep training marketers, the more you train marketers on digital and the new things happening in digital, that's how they will best be able to leverage the new platforms".

Theme 5: Flexibility

Flexibility/modification has always been an issue for IMC implementation (Dmitrijeva and Batraga, 2012; Kitchen *et al.*, 2004).

Participant #2: "...it's very important for any process in the organization, specially communication processes, to be flexible, sensitive to those changes, and connect with people because at the end of the day, the most important thing moving forward is to make sure that the connect with people, the collaboration, etc...".

Subtheme 1: Work From Home (WFH)

Working from home in the future is a possible solution:

Participant #5: "...we are all working from home, there's no technological constraint. You can have 1000 people in one room. It's not a problem. Right? So I think an IMC is way much easier to do when you're not in front of each other honestly. Because you pen your thoughts down before the meeting. And then when you go there, everyone has a chance to speak".

Participant #5: "So I think this solution would be to have a digital IMC whether you're in the office or whether you're working from home, I think it'll get more people to talk. And especially if their cameras are turned off, right. They have this better confidence level of talking, and they don't

mind expressing their ideas".

Theme 6: Unified Channel Solution

As Participant #3 explains, integrated marketing isn't only about product, marketing, growth and delivery, but it's also about achieving a singular unified channel strategy.

Participant #3: "Integrated marketing is not only about marketing, it's about growth. It's about product, it's about delivery. It's about end to end value chain. And it is also about throughout the channel, a singular unified channel strategy".

Subtheme 1: IMC 360

There is a need to think of IMC in 360 degrees, which means understanding that customer behavior can't always be segregated into months/quarters in a year.

Participant #3: "I think as a marketeer, especially in integrated marketing communication we need to look at 360, we need to see that the behavior may not be always divided by 12 months of the year".

Such a strategy also means doing things with larger impact, but at a smaller frequency than normal, so as to leverage properly on the IMC efforts.

Participant #3: "Some of these barriers can be overcome by doing fewer things with higher impact, rather than doing more things throughout the year".

Theme 7: In-housing

Over the years, the lack of trust in the agency-client relationship paradigm has led more organizations to start bringing creative work in-house (Laurie and Mortimer,

2019). As, Participant #5 elucidates some of the reasons for this is that it's a more cost efficient option and procurement and communication can be done faster.

Participant #5: "I also see that we will be reducing the number of external vendors or external staff. Yeah, because it has been proven, at least in the current organization that I am, having in house team works much better and more efficient in terms of time and also manpower to be honest, I mean, if you're going to be paying external vendors, are not exactly cheap anyway. So you might as well be paying a staff every month, and it probably comes up to the same or less, to be honest".

Participant #5: "So for in house...pros would be, you can definitely communicate to your team member faster. They're just there. And you can get the product outcome much faster as well, which is good".

Theme 8: Marketing Strategies and Tools

Overcoming barriers such as consumer inertia and brand barriers can be done by marketing methods such as product sampling and word of mouth recommendation.

Participant #7: "One is by sampling your product to the consumer, possibly free sampling, such that they experience your product, and then realize that their baby is actually happy in this product as well. And then, once you've seeded that thought in their mind that they may be happy in your brand, your product as well, then the next time they visit a store, they may choose between the brand they already buy versus the brand that they will consider now".

Participant #7: "The other way in which I think we can break this barrier is by word of mouth recommendation, by key influencers. So when I say influencers, I don't mean social media influencers alone. I also mean,

that usually who does a mom talk to? Does she talk to her mother to get some feedback? Does she talk to her aunt? Does she talk to her sister? and how do we influence this entire word of mouth recommendation world that is around her".

4.5 Future Barriers to Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC)

RQ5: What barriers to IMC implementation do organizations in Malaysia expect to encounter in the next five years?

This third research question explored which barriers to IMC implementation in organizations do marketing professionals expect to encounter in the future. The resulting thematic analysis revealed 5 core themes which are scaling IMC globally, technology, key opinion leader (KOL) marketing, company expansion and competition.

Categories (Themes)	Definition of Themes	Sub Themes (Codes)
IMC on a global scale (a)	Applying IMC at a global scale across different countries, markets and platforms	• Internet language barrier
Technology (b)	Technological developments result in increased number of channels and consumer touch points	• Shorter attention spans • Dependency on technology
Key Opinion Leader (KOL) marketing (c)	The challenges that arise for brands that involve Key Opinion Leaders (KOL) in their marketing	• Brand devaluation
Company Expansion (e)	The challenges brought about by company expansion/acquisition.	-
Competition (f)	New start ups, market players and saturated markets	-

Theme 1: IMC on a global scale

Applying IMC on a global scale is going to continue to be a challenge because platforms between different countries differ.

Participant #1: "One of the biggest barriers is that when you roll things out globally, locally, it doesn't make sense. Somebody rolls out something in the UK or the US and it says, 'hey, this very nice for my market, whole world please use this!' But actually it doesn't make sense, because of the difference in the type of platform they use".

Platforms that are popular in other countries don't necessarily apply in Malaysia.

Participant #1: "...for example, Malaysia doesn't have a very good Twitter base, very few people use it actually. Most people don't use it everyday. Okay, people use Facebook in this country. Facebook and WhatsApp is like a big ass thing. In the U.S., nobody uses WhatsApp. Everybody uses like iMessage and things like that. So, what does that mean? So when you roll out something that's very suitable for marketing on iMessage for example, it doesn't make sense here, completely".

Due to these differences, regional teams feel strained to expand and apply international IMC efforts.

Participant #1: "But these kind of things, it is not easy to scale out to the whole world, you know. So it is troublesome to roll out and local teams currently feel very frustrated sometimes because it's like it, why is this logo still shaped that way?".

Subtheme 1: Internet Language Barrier

A significant issue in scaling IMC globally, or combining IMC efforts with other markets is that according to Participant #1, Malaysia has an internet language barrier where although most consumers feel more comfortable with speaking Bahasa Malaysia, they prefer most websites to be in English.

Participant #1: "...Malaysia has one of the worst, internet barrier languages that I've ever seen. I don't know any country as bad as Malaysia. Because the world's internet is in English. Most people feel more conversant in Bahasa Malaysia..."

Participant #1: "Even on websites, you build a website in Malay, nobody visits it. Why? Because people's mindset already is websites are all English. Okay, so there are very few big Malay sites. There are. Don't get me wrong, there are. But it's extremely, extremely, extremely rare, alright, compared to English websites".

Theme 2: Technology

As technology gives rise to new platforms such as TikTok, and as they continue to grow, there is a need to be aware of, learn and revisit consumer journeys in context of how to integrate IMC.

Participant #2: "Now, TikTok is one of the most, you know, talked and important marketing channels that you are looking at so therefore learning, adding these various kinds of touch points which come on, understanding and re-looking at the customer journey, as I was telling you, we'll re-look at the customer journey every six months. That's the only way I know if my integrated marketing story is going to

work or not".

Participant #2: "...it's also really good to also always be sure that you are aware of what is the new kind of formats that people kind of consume, media and marketing information".

Furthermore, the advance of technology has also caused attention spans of people to significantly decrease:

Participant #2: "you know, in terms of communication, we believe people no longer look at 30 seconds or 62 second commercials, they look at five seconds, seven seconds and stuff, are we doing that? These are all of the things that come in and it's a much more faster way of approaching these things that will become a challenge".

Theme 3: Key Opinion Leader (KOL) Marketing

Participant #4 elaborated on the challenges that KOL marketing brings to implementing IMC, such as an increase of assets and persona/channel management:

Participant #4: "So the next five years, with more and more of this kind of KOL marketing being probably, going to be a mainstay, I think it's here is going to be here to stay. It's going to be even more challenging, I think to actually work towards an integrated marketing communication, because you are suddenly handling so many different assets from just channel management, you now have to handle persona management, the KOL as well".

Subtheme 1: Brand Devaluation

Brand devaluation can become a result of KOL marketing as bringing in new brand

personas changes a brand messaging and affects the perception of consumers towards the brand.

Participant #4: "...to bring in different people that traditionally your brand doesn't talk to good, right, brings in more business, brings in more profit, brings in a different audience, a different type of consumer. But what happens is their understanding or precision of your brand is very different. And they might actually devalue your brand for the people who have always been loyalists to your brand".

Participant #4: "I think this is probably going to be a trend probably in the next five years or so that big companies will probably have to start to bend towards fitting their content into what the KOLs generally then need to talk stylistically, and things like that".

Theme 4: Company Expansion

Continuing to do IMC is difficult when a company is constantly making new acquisitions and expanding due to all the new stakeholders involved:

Participant #5: "...another thing I foresee happening is definitely very much challenging to do the IMC itself. Because the company is still expanding, every year, there is somebody new that they acquire or buy or takeover. So it's difficult to keep up sometimes".

Participant #5: "...when companies acquire existing companies, in the first three months, a lot of people leave from the new company. It's either you adapt or you don't. So you become very uncomfortable. And then you just give up and leave, rather "have another job than work for somebody who doesn't get me you know?"

Participant #5: "...I mean, you can't blame them, they are so used to their own style of management. So now when they have a new boss for a lack of better

terms, and definitely the working culture is going to be at least slightly different".

Theme 5: Competition

Participants #6 and #7 underlined their worry of competition as being a future barrier when considering IMC implementation, due to there being many start-ups and a saturated market when it comes to a brand/product.

Participant #6: "...something that you have to be careful of is that, you know, someday there might be a brand that does what you're doing better than you or people might like another brand more than you".

Participant #7: "There will be brand barrier that is the consistent one that we will be facing, because it's a very saturated market...I want to do about my brand, there are five other marketing managers and my competitors in Malaysia who will talk about their brands the same way right. So there's going to be a lot of competition in the market for because the size of prize is really high, and everybody's doing their own piece and pulling the consumer to themselves".

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

5.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of this exploratory study on barriers to integrated marketing communications (IMC) implementation in organizations in Malaysia. This study focused on the client/organization perspective towards IMC, and interviewed a total of 7 marketing professionals from 7 different organizations and industries, namely, FMCG, Telecommunications, Airlines, Banking, Education, Technology and Baby/Child care. This chapter commences with a discourse on the definition and process of IMC that participants have provided. The next part moves on to discuss the barriers that the interviewed marketing professionals have faced when implementing IMC at their respective organizations, as well as the possible solutions and the strategies they propose to overcome said barriers. This is followed by a discussion on the future barriers to IMC implementation in organizations that participants of this study expect to encounter. Finally, this chapter culminates with an overall conclusion of the discussion, offers its recommendations for future studies as well as outlines the limitations of this study.

5.1 Definition of IMC

There are three major definitions that can be summarized out of the findings. Only 1 (Participant #4) out of 7 participants defined IMC within the parameters of corporate identity, relating IMC back to the tactical coordination of all visual, design and communication elements ranging from corporate/brand communication all the way down to tonality, language and product design. This definition corresponds somewhat to original definition of IMC proposed by the 4A's (1989): "A concept of marketing communications planning that recognizes added value in a 1989 programme that integrates a variety of strategic disciplines – e.g. general advertising, direct response,

sales promotion, and public relations − and combines these disciplines in order to provide clarity, consistency and maximum communication impact".

The majority of participants however, (5 out of 7) defined IMC within the parameters of audience-centricity, where IMC is viewed as a marketing process that is focused on communicating, attracting and influencing a specific audience by using various channels and touch points, usually with a specific goal in mind such as selling a product and/or service. This aligns with the definition by Kliatchko (2008): "IMC is an audience-driven business process of strategically managing stakeholders, content, channels and results of brand communication programs". Only 1 participant out 7 (Participant #3), defined IMC as the use of consumer research with the help of data insights and analytics to inform any marketing execution, strategy or decision as well as a way to measure the impact of their marketing communication efforts.

5.2 Process of IMC

5.2.1 Stage 1 (Tactical Coordination)

3 out of 7 participants reported the process of IMC at their organizations as a series of steps which correspond to the tactical coordination stage, which is stage one of the 4 stages in the IMC process model by Kitchen and Schultz (2000). Tactical coordination of IMC at this stage is often divided into internal communication (with employees) and external communication (with customers).The process usually starts with the identification of a brand task, direction, theme or message to be communicated. The next step involves producing long term and short term marketing plans and picking the necessary formats for the predetermined message/theme. The third step would be to streamline across the relevant departments and take into consideration aspects of budgeting, sale targets etc. Expanding further would involve streamlining the marketing team with the determined objectives for the whole year ahead.

5.2.2 Stage 2 (Redefining the Scope of Marketing Communications)

The IMC process that occurs at this stage can be broken down into three parts: understanding the customer need (studying the customer need), understanding the customer journey (evaluating and planning the whole communication chain with customers) and considering the after purchase scenario (plotting all the channels along the customer journey). The process reported by participants at this stage corresponds with second level in the Kitchen and Schultz (2000) 4 stage IMC process model where organizations focus on gather information about their customers and applying marcoms, and later assessing feedback.

5.2.3 Stage 3 (Application of IT)

The IMC process at this stage is the effective incorporation of customer data in communication planning/implementation and successful integration of internal teams. The process involves three main steps, which are: 1) creating an integrated growth marketing team comprised of a cross functional set of people (business analyst, data analyst, marketing team, consumer research and business analyst); 2) use analytics to define the target audience; 3) reverse the user funnel by determining the awareness, reach and KPI's needed to be reached. This particular IMC process helps to optimize marketing spend while decreasing customer acquisition costs because marketing becomes singular, and thus lesser resources and brand assets are needed. This in turn drives economies of scale. Overall, the process at this stage corresponds with the third level in the Kitchen and Schultz (2000) 4 stage IMC process model where organizations maintain accessible data sources and build to globally segmented databases.

5.2 Barriers to Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC)

The purpose of this study was to explore the barriers to IMC implementation for organizations in Malaysia. Findings indicate that there are 9 main barriers to IMC implementation for organizations, and these are coordination, collaboration, working in silos, lack of IMC prioritization, agency-client relationship (ACR), upper management, organization culture, consumer inertia and achieving a unified channel approach.

5.2.1 Coordination

The findings of this study suggest that coordination was the top barrier that organizations experience when implementing IMC. One of the issues with coordination, is the existence of non streamlined communication between departments, upper management and teams, where different/inconsistent instructions result in miscommunication issues, and affect the creative output (due to a disruption of brand messaging consistency) as well as the entirety of an IMC effort (eg., launch of a new campaign). Any coordination barriers are even more pronounced for big organizations as coordination for them involves aligning different stakeholders and teams. Aligning various departments and teams often hinders the integration of IMC as each individual, team and department has their own KPIs, goals and objectives they want to achieve, for example, between the creative and strategy/creative and sales. The goal for creatives is usually to ideate, while sales are more focused on driving profits, hence the possible clashes in objectives. The coordination barrier has further been linked to issues with the daily organizing of primary work activities such as emails and meetings, which can often get excessive and overwhelming as digital IMC is multi-faceted and there are many channels/mediums that need simultaneous management. Overall, the coordination barrier in implementing IMC is in line with findings by Eagle and Kitchen (2000).

5.2.2 Collaboration

The various characteristics of groups and teams are important when defining rules and principles for collaboration (Siemon *et al.*, 2019). Diversity refers to the degree of which members of an organization vary from each other, and includes an extensive span of characteristics such as gender, race/ethnicity, and age among others (Gonzalez *et al.*, 2015). Diversity applies to the different markets that IMC efforts are geared towards, as there is often the challenge of understanding the various cultures and viewpoints of both customers and regional employees. Participants have mentioned that when managing collaboration, diversity is often a challenge due to the rich cultural backgrounds, differences and beliefs of employees in Malaysia. Furthermore, managing diversity becomes an even bigger challenge when a brand executes an IMC effort jointly with other markets/countries (eg., Singapore and Indonesia). Here diversity has to be considered not only the behalf of the employees but also on the target audiences of those markets. Additionally, trust has been discovered to be the most important factor influencing team members' collaborative behaviors (Choi and Cho, 2019). However, a lack of trust in teams to produce local solutions for IMC efforts is an issue mentioned by one of the participants, especially with cross regional collaboration.

Virtual teams need collaboration to get work done and therefore realize the need for digital communication tools to maintain productivity across a distributed workforce base (Burkhalter, 2021). Examples of such tools are JIRA and Trello. However, respondents in this study have expressed that the actual implementation of collaborative tool usage in organizations is difficult for two reasons: employees perceive the using of such collaborative tools as extra work; and a lack of top management buy in. Lastly, collaboration is a barrier to IMC implementation in organizations because employees are frequently afraid of the unequal allocation of successes, failures and responsibilities, which makes teamwork necessary for collaboration difficult. Employees feel a lack of clarity in terms of how their KPIs

will be affected, as well as how credit/reprimands be distributed if they collaborate.

5.2.3 Working in Silos

Working in 'silos' is a metaphor for the separation between the different departments in an organization, and can exist across vertical divisions, or in teams with horizontal functions (de Waal *et al.*, 2019). As findings show, part of the reason why silo working occurs in organizations when executing IMC efforts is because they may have different agendas and objectives (eg., brand marketing department has to come up with ideas, while sales department has to bring in sales). However, when individuals or teams work in silos, this is a significant barrier for IMC implementation because it causes rifts between departments and employees. This is due to a few reasons: there is no single governing authority that overlooks the IMC process; each individual/department has their perception and understanding of IMC and there is a desire to be right; there are numerous types of personalities that exist within an organization. This is further explained by the conflict theory of decision making (Wright *et al.,* 2004), where procrastination, shifting blame, or deciding to do nothing have all contributed to a lack of progress in high-risk circumstances.

5.2.4 Lack of IMC Prioritization

A lack of IMC understanding and it's importance by upper management and organizations in general has been found by Dmitrijeva and Batraga (2012). Older findings by Schultz and Kitchen (1997) have also found that client organizations lacked knowledge and skills when it came to IMC. This study's results support these previous findings by adding that the lack of IMC understanding leads to a lack of IMC prioritization. Multiple participants highlighted that organizations don't understand the value of IMC and don't visualize the tangible long term benefits it can bring such as increased brand value. Therefore, most managers don't prioritize IMC efforts as they consider it a waste of time unless it is able to bring in significant bottom line revenue.

5.2.5 Agency-Client Relationship

Findings by Mortimer and Laurie (2019) show that the agency-client relationship has been suffering as more organizations and clients bring marketing communications in-house, as there are issues to coordinate, trust and collaborate together. This is followed by a call for clients to invest in agency relationships more as important creative resources. From the client perspective, the results of this study align with previous findings as participants have remarked that the client organizations drive for cost competitiveness results in them changing agencies often, making a long term relationship difficult. Furthermore, organizations that are used to out-sourcing agencies now find it a hassle due to longer procurement and revision process times, and therefore prefer to in-house more. From the agency perspective, agency employees have a limited level of access when communicating with upper management of client organizations; are often not allocated sufficient time for execution, and struggle with tactical and short term view of IMC that client organizations have.

5.2.6 Upper Management

This study's findings slightly correlate to that of Chaihanchanchai and Anantachart (2019); Kitchen and Burgmann (2015); Swain, (2004), in that a lack of upper management support was found to be a general barrier. However, findings show that it is in fact high expectations from management to quickly deliver results pressures employees that creates a fear of failure, and results in poor or average work. Designers play a key part in executing any IMC effort, and need to employ creativity to reach holistic solutions for an organization/brand. But yet, participants have commented on a lack of openness to creativity by upper management, which puts constraints on how and what creatives can execute for marketing and branding. This is because managers typically prefer to take the 'safe' route of old school marketing/branding ideas instead of taking riskier options that may not pay off. This causes frustration and resentment of designers towards upper management.

Furthermore, in-house creatives often suffer from burnout because of the constant amendments initiated by upper management. Overall, this has a negative impact on IMC efforts. Overly sensitive cost management also impact IMC as this means there is a limited budget available for creative use of mediums/channels. This aligns with findings by Schultz (1995) which showed that IMC has been misconstrued by various levels of management in numerous firms as a cause to reduce the marketing budget.

5.2.7 Organization Culture

Most previous findings of studies such as those by Mortimer and Laurie (2012); Kitchen et al. (2004) have reported organization structure as being a barrier to IMC implementation. However, not many studies (aside from one by Kitchen and Burgmann, 2015) have mentioned organization culture as a barrier. This study has found that toxic and negative organizational cultures have been found to negatively affect the implementation of IMC approaches. This is because such cultures propagate turf battles and disagreements between employees, which hinders the development of IMC processes.

5.2.8 Consumer Inertia

Consumer inertia alludes to the generalization that earlier consumption patterns conceive further consumption patterns of a similar kind (Henderson *et al.*, 2021). Participants explained that their IMC efforts are usually geared towards a certain objective such as persuading customers to change a brand or category, and to encourage more buy-ins. Therefore, any existing consumer inertia is always a difficult barrier to overcome. This is due to high consumer loyalty that exists towards a specific product/brand as well as a consumer's perception of a brand.

5.2.9 Unified Channel Approach

Achieving seamless integration between all the channels has been quoted by participants as the one of the biggest challenges. This is because the rise of the

platform economy has spurted an increase in new media channels (van der Aalst *et al.*, 2019). Online, there is web, platforms, apps and app based communication as well as all the social media channels. Furthermore, seamless integration is made difficult because audience profiles differ on different channels. For example, first time mothers may not be as present on TikTok, as they are on YouTube/Facebook, and hence may have different behaviors from audiences on TikTok. This creates the question of how to achieve the right tonality and the creative content needed to communicate with a platform's specific audience profile. Asset barriers also hinder a unified channel approach, as different platforms vary in their requirements. For example, creative assets that are created to run on TV may not be as interactive on Instagram. Lastly, the variety of languages spoken in Malaysia such as English, Bahasa Malaysia, Mandarin, Tamil and others further complicate the unified integration of IMC communication as meanings get lost in translation. This creates a disjointedness between the tactical aspects of IMC campaigns and can cause a loss of brand messaging.

5.3 Overcoming Barriers to IMC Implementation

This study found that not all the barriers mentioned previously by participants have solutions or can be overcome. Furthermore, new themes emerged that suggest how to better implement IMC in organizations, but not necessarily how to overcome all the previously mentioned barriers. Nevertheless, there were some solutions and ideas that participants shared which correspond to aforementioned barriers such as coordination, collaboration, upper management and unified channel approach. Other suggestions revolved on themes of specialization, flexibility, in-housing and marketing strategies/tools.

5.3.1 Coordination

In general, the coordination barrier can be overcome through careful planning and by coming up with a set of guidelines, agenda or plan for each phase in a project. Part of

overcoming the coordination barrier is enabling specialized cross functional teams as these teams bring different skill sets to the table and therefore can accurately and quickly present relevant solutions that IMC efforts require.This includes agile teams, task force teams and market entry teams. Such small independent teams are built to stay close to their clients and respond fast to changing circumstances (Rigby *et al.*, 2018) while task force teams in particular can be formed to complete a one-off project specific to an organization within a predetermined time period (Sarokin, 2019). Task force teams play a key role in enabling agile culture as they consist of leaders from various departments such as marketing brand, platform, channel, legal finance, operation, customer happiness, insights, data product team and etc., and are therefore able to provide solutions in cases when problems cannot be answered just by one team. Therefore, this is an integrated marketing channel strategy that allows the convergence of overall time-lines and improves coordination.

Additionally, having one general IMC briefing at one go has been strongly advised as this ensures that everyone's understanding, goals and objectives are aligned. Team representatives can be helpful in that they can speak on behalf of all their team members to management during a general briefing, and even have pre-IMC meetings first with their own groups. This will enforce seamless coordination of communication.

5.3.2 Collaboration

By embracing collaborative tools such as JIRA and Trello, organizations can get their various employees to align and work together within a team on the same goal by detailing progress until completion (Finnegan, 2018), as well as keep track of all conversations, emails, briefings etc. Initiating active usage of these systems starts top down, and is important for bosses to use these systems first as role models for their employees. Furthermore, when managers regularly train, reevaluate and communicate any issues with collaboration to their subordinates, it mitigates the challenge of

collaboration. Similarly, when trust can be built and maintained between cross regional employees/departments, collaboration can still be successful. This is supported by the social exchange theory which states that co-operation can still occur if the level of trust is high despite lowered levels of control and authority (Das and Teng, 1998).

5.3.3 Upper Management

Upper management support of IMC at strategic organizational levels plays a definitive role in implementing IMC as found by Kitchen and Burgmann (2015). One of the participants has explained that to handle the high expectations which management places on employees to quickly deliver results, middle managers and other employees should plan out the KPIs and the steps in a project before the estimated ROI is reached. This includes regular updates on a project's progress and tangible time-lines that show when revenue will kick in. Upper management also plays an important part of reinforcing the bigger picture for each individual and the purpose of their roles and responsibilities in achieving IMC implementation. When each employee is clear on what is required of them, the process of IMC is more smooth, especially when adapting to abrupt changes.

5.3.4 Cross-disciplinary

Findings of this study show that specialization of individuals and/or teams within a client organization were deemed as a more productive approach by a participant in comparison to cross disciplinary specialization of an employee or a 'jack of all trades' approach. This contradicts the findings of Hartley and Pickton (1999) who found that specialization leads to the fragmentation of individual tasks in each department and this can limit the success of an IMC program. Similarly, the lack of skilled and expert staff to implement IMC initiatives can be combated by providing more qualification and training (specifically digital) for existing marketers so that they can take advantage of new platforms. Findings of Chaihanchanchai and Anantachart (2019)

and Mortimer and Laurie (2017) similarly remarked that a better understanding of IMC can be achieved by training and equipping employees with knowledge about IMC and audience-centricity.

5.3.5 Flexibility

Organizational flexibility is the fundamental capability that enables businesses to face environmental changes and their ability to quickly adapt to change (Madhani, 2013). That is why organizations should have adaptable communication and IMC processes that are sensitive to unpredictable changes, especially in times such as COVID-19. Some of the ways organizations can do this, or continue to do this is to use work from home (WFH) as a solution, as digital IMC creates more flexibility in communication processes in an organization because it allows for a large gathering capacity of people and provides a chance for everyone to voice out and contribute their ideas.

5.3.6 Unified Channel Solution

A unified marketing strategy is a marketing approach that communicates with consumers through all possible marketing, social media and web channels (Linton, n.d.). The goal is to ensure consistent and cohesive communication through every medium. Findings show that some of the ways to achieve a unified channel strategy is to think of IMC in 360 degrees and do less (meaning at lesser frequencies) but with bigger impact. Thinking of IMC in 360 degrees means developing a 360 degree marketing plan which involves driving a single unified message that is consistent and uses all possible channels and consumer touch points (Chou, 2019).

5.3.7 In-housing

Recently, more organizations have been growing their internal capabilities while challenging the original justification for having a creative/communication agency partner. This has resulted in the development of in-house agencies, which consist of a dedicated team of marketing specialists and fills the internal skill gap while lowering

vendor costs and therefore allows the organization to operate at a higher level of efficiency (O'Brien, 2019). Furthermore, in-housing solves an issue that is often prevalent in agency-client relationships, and that is an agency's incapacity for a deep understanding of a brand (O'Brien, 2019). Findings of this study support this as participants have elucidated that bringing creative work in-house allows for more cost efficiency and faster procurement, communication and product outcomes as well.

5.3.8 Marketing Strategies and Tools

One of the participants has outlined that overcoming barriers such as consumer inertia and brand barriers can be done by marketing strategies such as product sampling and word of mouth recommendation. Product sampling is one of the tools that is used to support sales from a marketing standpoint. The purpose of the sampling is to introduce the product to a possible consumer, and thereby by capturing the attention of that customer, aim to persuade the customer to make an ethical buying decision (Sedliacikova *et al.*, 2020). Correspondingly, a participant has explained that product sampling allows the consumer to experience the product, which seeds the thought that they may be happy with another brand from what they currently purchase. A word-of-mouth strategy on the other hand, is the casual discussion and suggestion regarding products and services from current and potential customers. These recommendations have been known to have a huge impact on sales because of their credibility (Karlíček *et al.*, 2010). As findings show, breaking the consumer inertia/brand barrier is possible by word-of-mouth recommendation through key influencers, such as a consumer's trusted social and family circle, that already favors a particular brand/product.

5.4 Future Barriers to Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC)

The findings of this study indicate that marketing professionals in organizations in Malaysia expect to encounter five barriers to IMC in the next five years, which are scaling IMC globally, technological developments, key opinion leader (KOL)

marketing, company expansions and competition.

5.4.1 IMC on a global scale

Applying IMC on a global scale is going to continue to be a challenge due to the various differences in target audiences, markets and platforms that different countries use, which is especially true for Malaysia. For example, while WhatsApp is a popular platform in Malaysia, it is not as widely used in the U.S., where iMessage is more popular. Furthermore, a subsequent challenge is that of the internet language barrier in Malaysia. In Malaysia, although most people feel very conversant in Bahasa Malaysia, there is a lack of Malay website ecosystem, as the preference and mindset of the public is still geared towards English websites.

5.4.2 Technology

Kliatchko and Schultz (2015) have found that there is a big need to maintain media neutrality across the expanding media options/channels available. Indeed, technology has also been reported to affect IMC from both the sides of marketing and consumer perspectives by Kitchen et al. (2004) (mentioned by Kitchen and Burgmann, 2010). Furthermore, technology has led to the development and popularity of new channels and apps such as TikTok, which uses AI and recommendation algorithms to drive user engagement (Rangaiah, 2020). As one of the participants explained, for organizations, this has created a new need to revisit consumer journeys in order to better implement IMC, which includes adding new consumer touch points and being aware of the new media formats that people consume. Moreover, the advance of technology has enabled immediate gratification, which has caused attention spans of people to significantly decrease (The Guardian, 2021; Subramanian, 2017). This has created a need for new solutions to approach this issue. Therefore, with a rapidly changing external landscape, attributed to the expanding growth of information technology, there is need for greater confidence in IMC for client organizations in order to make strategic decisions within such an environment.

5.4.3 KOL Marketing

Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) are a phenomenon of social network marketing and are those that are actively sharing their thoughts and ideas with large audiences on social networks, hereby attracting attention and impacting said audiences (Zhao and Ying, 2017). Unfortunately, KOL marketing brings with it a lot of new challenges such as the need to handle more creative assets as well as the added persona/channel management of the influencer as well. Moreover, there is also a chance of brand devaluation that comes from KOL marketing, which can negatively impact brand communication and consumer perception. This study's participant estimates that in the next five years, KOL marketing is going to be a trend especially for big organizations that will mold their IMC content to embrace KOLs.

5.4.4 Company Expansion

Company growth means that IMC efforts have to be expanded towards enveloping new acquisitions, which complicates the integration of IMC and can furthermore create newer challenges such as higher staff turnover and a clash of management styles/work cultures occurs.

5.4.5 Competition

The pandemic has fueled the growth of start-ups and entrepreneurship in Malaysia, with new companies emerging across different sectors such as F&B, e-commerce, health-care, fintech and others (Sunbiz, 2021). As such, participants explained that any IMC effort now and in the future has to also take into consideration what the competition is doing. Therefore it is important to brands to consider how to overcome brand barriers and other IMC barriers as certain markets (eg., Baby and Child Care) are getting saturated.

5.5 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the barrier to integrated marketing communications (IMC) that organizations face in Malaysia. This study was focused on exploring the barriers through the lens of marketing professionals as opposed to that of creative communication agencies as is more commonly found in literature. Findings reveal nine main barriers which organizations across seven different industries encounter, and these are coordination, collaboration, working in silos, lack of IMC prioritization, agency-client relationship (ACR), upper management, organization culture, consumer inertia and a unified channel approach. When participants were asked about how can these barriers be overcome, solutions and ideas were only proposed for the coordination, collaboration, upper management and unified channel approach barriers. These results correspond somewhat to studies from other countries done over a span of 20 years, and this indicates that the experiences of client organizations in regards to IMC may still be backward in some aspect. Nevertheless, other solutions involved themes that will better help to implement IMC in organizations and these revolve around topics of specialization, flexibility, in-housing and marketing strategies and tools such as product sampling and word-of-mouth recommendation. Lastly, this study also looked at what are the future barriers to implementing IMC in organizations in Malaysia within the next five years, and found that the key likely challenges would revolve around implementing IMC on a global scale, adapting to new technological developments, incorporating KOL marketing, managing IMC in the event of company expansion and handling competition from the newly emerging start-ups. Irregardless, it is important for both academics and practitioners to impart the necessary support in terms of guidelines, best practice and training in order to assist client organizations in making the necessary changes, as well as convince them of the many benefits of IMC.

5.6 Recommendation

This research provides an insight on perceptions of client organizations in Malaysia on the challenges of IMC implementation. It has brought together the views of directors and marketing managers across a range of industries. From the findings, it is evident the definition and process of IMC may need another general review in academic literature to better encompass the newer understandings of IMC that modern marketing professionals now have. It is also recommended that more studies should continue to be done on the client organization perspective to contribute to the existing, but limited findings of previous research. Case studies of successful integration of IMC would be useful in showing the tangible benefits of IMC for academic and practitioner purposes, as well as creating a set of criterion and guidelines that organizations can follow. The need for such case studies has also been highlighted by Kitchen and Burgmann (2015). Because the findings suggest that barriers in implementing IMC can vary in accordance with different client organization/industry types, investigating specific industries such as FMCG or Baby/Child Care and various organization structures can help illuminate any differences. Further investigations will also benefit from exploratory inductive research approaches similar to this study, as there is a dearth of such approaches in current literature which focus mainly on quantitative methods of surveys. Lastly, more research is needed to cover IMC in the many organizations and industries that are present in Malaysia, and it is suggested to expand the research scope geographically to cover not only West but East Malaysia (eg., Sarawak) as well.

5.7 Limitations of Study

Given the limited sample size of this study, any generalizations must be made with caution, as additional research may be needed. This study also gathers data based off of one individual's perspective within a chosen client organization, meaning that other individuals within the same organization may hold different perspectives. It must be kept in mind that the perspective studied was also that of a client organization and not

of the advertising or media agency. As marketing practitioners/executives/managers were picked from different organizations spanning across various industries, it is possible that the barriers to IMC implementation that they encounter are specific to the nature of their sector, and may vary across other organizations and industries. Additionally, this study's qualitative research process does not provide statistical representation, thus making the replication of results difficult and acting only as a basis of comparison for future studies. In terms of data collection, in-depth exploration of this study's topic was limited to the maximum time interviewees could allocate for participation as they are busy marketing professionals.

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7.0 APPENDIX

7.1 University Research Letter

Date: 28 July 2021

Brickfields Asia College (BAC)

Re:Research by Asia Pacific University Student

This is to confirm that the student below is currently pursuing a full time course leading to the Master of Business Administration at the Asia Pacific University of Technology & Innovation (APU).

STUDENT NAME	ID NUMBER
VICTORIYA TITOVA	TP061787

We will be grateful if you could render her assistance in providing information related to her research assignment.

Should you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact us.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Kuek Wee Ling
Assistant Manager

7.2 Participant Information Form

Participant Information Form:

Title of Study:-

Barriers to Integrated Marketing Communications for Organizations: A Qualitative Study in Malaysia

I would like to invite you to take part in my research study. Before you decide it is helpful to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve for you. Please ask questions if anything is not clear or if you require additional information.

Purpose of this Study:

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the barriers to IMC implementation for organizations in Malaysia.

Objectives of the Study:

- To explore the barriers to IMC implementation for organizations in Malaysia
- To explore how can the barriers to IMC implementation be overcome by organizations in Malaysia
- To explore which barriers to IMC implementation do organizations in Malaysia expect to encounter in the next five years

Background of the Study:

In research, IMC is often defined as "....an audience-centric business of strategically managing and coordinating stakeholders, content, channels and brand communication results".

However, there is some research that states that numerous organizations experience hindrances when integrating marketing communications. These hindrances point to the existence of specific barriers, which need to be dismantled in order for an

organization to implement integrated marketing communications as optimally as possible. Furthermore, Malaysia is an under researched region in regards to this particular topic. Therefore, addressing this paucity of research in the region of Malaysia, this study aims to contribute by exploring the barriers to IMC implementation from the client side of the marketing agency/client organization interface during this challenging time.

Confidentiality:

There will be confidentiality at all stages of the study and all data obtained will remain confidential. Any information provided by the participant will be strictly confidential and will be used specifically for the study and purpose intended. Participation is completely voluntary and the informant has the right to refuse participation, refuse any question and withdraw at any time without any consequence whatsoever.

Risks of the study:

There are no risks involved in taking part in this study. However should any issues arise or the participant does not feel comfortable answering any questions they may withdraw from the interview at any stage and are not obliged to give an explanation.

Details about the Information provided:

The interview will be recorded and data stored on hard copy folder on the researcher's laptop in a locked secured file with passcode for a specified period until the dissertation results are released by the exams board. Only the researcher and the researcher's supervisor will have access to this data. Signed consent forms and original video recordings will be retained in a hard drive copy until after the degree has been conferred. A transcript of interviews in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for a further two years after this. Under freedom of information legislation you are entitled to access the information you have provided at any time.

Contact of further information:
If you seek further information please do not hesitate to contact me:
Victoriya Titova - Tp061787@mail.apu.edu.my
Supervisor - Dr. Jugindar Singh jugindar.singh@staffemail.apu.edu.my

If you agree to take part in this study please sign the consent form.
Please keep this sheet in your records.

Thank you for your time in assisting in this study.

7.3 Participant Consent Form

Consent Form

Purpose of this study:

The primary purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the barriers to IMC implementation for organizations in Malaysia.

- I_____ voluntary agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation involves being interviewed and data recorded.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I agree to my interview being video-recorded
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the dissertation discussion chapter.
- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio/video recordings will be retained in a specific location on the researcher's laptop in a locked file with a passcode and only the researcher has access to this data until the relevant period until the exam board confirms the results of the dissertation.
- I understand that under freedom of information legislation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- By signing below I am agreeing to: Participate in this study, Participate voluntarily and give permission for the interviewer to video record the interview.

Signed by Participant: _____
Date:_____

Signed by Researcher: _____ _____Date:__2021__
Contact Details: Victoriya Titova Tp061787@mail.apu.edu.my
Supervisor: Dr. Jugindar Singh jugindar.singh@staffemail.apu.edu.my

7.4 Fast Track Ethical Approval Form

Office Record	Receipt – Fast-Track Ethical Approval
Date Received:	Student name: Victoriya Titova
	Student number: TP061787
	Received by:
Received by whom:	Date:

APU / APIIT FAST-TRACK ETHICAL APPROVAL FORM (STUDENTS)

Tick one box (level of study):
☑ POSTGRADUATE (PhD / MPhil / Masters)
☐ UNDERGRADUATE (Bachelors degree)
☐ FOUNDATION / DIPLOMA / Other categories

Tick one box (purpose of approval):
☑ Thesis / Dissertation / FYP project
☐ Module assignment
☐ Other: _____

Title of Programme on which enrolled … …Masters in Business Administration (MBA) …

Tick one box: ☑ Full-Time Study or ☐ Part-Time Study

Title of project / assignment … … … … …Dissertation (BM053-12-M-PRJCT)… … … … … … … …

Name of student researcher … … … … … … Victoriya Titova … … … … … … … … … … … … … … …

Student Researchers- please note that certain professional organisations have ethical guidelines that you may need to consult when completing this form.

Supervisors/Module Lecturers - please seek guidance from the Chair of the APU Research Ethics Committee if you are uncertain about any ethical issue arising from this application.

		YES	NO	N/A
1	Will you describe the main procedures to participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect?	Yes		
2	Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	Yes		
3	Will you obtain written consent for participation?	Yes		
4	If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?	Yes		
5	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason?	Yes		
6	With questionnaires and interviews will you give participants the option of omitting questions they do not want to answer?	Yes		
7	Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?	Yes		
8	Will you give participants the opportunity to be debriefed i.e. to find out more about the study and its results?	Yes		

If you have ticked **No** to any of Q1-8 you should complete the full Ethics Approval Form.

		YES	NO	N/A
9	Will your project/assignment deliberately mislead participants in any way?		No	
10	Is there any realistic risk of any participants experiencing either physical or psychological distress or discomfort?		No	
11	Is the nature of the research such that contentious or sensitive issues might be involved?		No	

If you have ticked **Yes** to 9, 10 or 11 you should complete the full Ethics Approval Form. In relation to question 10 this should include details of what you will tell participants to do if they should experience any problems (e.g. who they can contact for help). You may also need to consider risk assessment issues.

		YES	NO	N/A
12	Does your project/assignment involve work with animals?		No	
13	Do participants fall into any of the following special groups? **Note that you may also need to obtain satisfactory clearance from the relevant authorities**	Children (under 18 years of age)		No	
		People with communication or learning difficulties			
		Patients			
		People in custody			
		People who could be regarded as vulnerable			
		People engaged in illegal activities (eg drug taking)			
14	Does the project/assignment involve external funding or external collaboration where the funding body or external collaborative partner requires the University to provide evidence that the project/assignment had been subject to ethical scrutiny?		No	

If you have ticked **Yes** to 12, 13 or 14 you should complete the full Ethics Approval Form. There is an obligation on student and supervisor to bring to the attention of the APU Research Ethics Committee any issues with ethical implications not clearly covered by the above checklist.

STUDENT RESEARCHER
Provide in the boxes below (plus any other appended details) information required in support of your application, THEN SIGN THE FORM.

Please Tick Boxes

I consider that this project/assignment has no significant ethical implications requiring a full ethics submission to the APU Research Ethics Committee.	✓

Give a brief description of participants and procedure (methods, tests used etc) in up to 150 words.
Participants come from organizations in various sectors (eg., FMCG, Telecom, etc.) and usually work or have experience with working with the marketing communication department of their respective organization. Participants are contacted through email or Whatsapp where the researcher introduces herself and provides an overview of the research study, asking whether the participant is interested in participating. Willing participants are then provided with details of the study before the interview, and before the interview begins online, verbal consent is obtained for participation and recording, as well as standard operating procedures (eg., assurance of privacy and confidentiality) is debriefed. Following this, the interview starts and takes approximately 30-40 minutes of each interviewees time (they are informed about this beforehand as well).

I also confirm that: i) All key documents e.g. consent form, information sheet, questionnaire/interview are appended to this application. Or	✓
ii) Any key documents e.g. consent form, information sheet, questionnaire/interview schedules which need to be finalised following initial investigations will be submitted for approval by the project/assignment supervisor/module lecturer before they are used in primary data collection.	✓

Signed... ... ... Print Name... ... ... Victoriya Titova... ... ...
Date... ... ...02/08/2021 ...

(Student Researcher)

Please note that any variation to that contained within this document that in any way affects ethical issues of the stated research requires the appending of new ethical details. New ethical consent may need to be sought.

The completed form (and any attachments) should be submitted for consideration by your Supervisor/Module Lecturer

SUPERVISOR/MODULE LECTURER
PLEASE CONFIRM THE FOLLOWING:

Please Tick Box

I consider that this project/assignment has no significant ethical implications requiring a full ethics submission to the APU Research Ethics Committee	✓
i) I have checked and approved the key documents required for this proposal (e.g. consent form, information sheet, questionnaire, interview schedule) Or	✓
ii) I have checked and approved draft documents required for this proposal which provide a basis for the preliminary investigations which will inform the main research study. I have informed the student researcher that finalised and additional documents (e.g. consent form, information sheet, questionnaire, interview schedule) must be submitted for approval by me before they are used for primary data collection.	✓

SUPERVISOR AND SECOND ACADEMIC SIGNATORY

STATEMENT OF ETHICAL APPROVAL (please delete as appropriate)

1) **THIS PROJECT/ASSIGNMENT HAS BEEN CONSIDERED USING AGREED APU/SU PROCEDURES AND IS NOW APPROVED**

2) **THIS PROJECT/ASSIGNMENT HAS BEEN APPROVED IN PRINCIPLE AS INVOLVING NO SIGNIFICANT ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS, BUT FINAL APPROVAL FOR DATA COLLECTION IS SUBJECT TO THE SUBMISSION OF KEY DOCUMENTS FOR APPROVAL BY SUPERVISOR (see Appendix A)**

Signed.. *Dr Jugindar Singh*   Print Name.. Dr. Jugindar Singh   02/08/2021... ... ...
(Supervisor/Lecturer)

Signed... ... ... Print Name... ... ... Date... ... ...
(Second Academic Signatory)

APPENDIX A
AUTHORISATION FOR USE OF KEY DOCUMENTS

Completion of Appendix A is required when for good reasons key documents are not available when a fast track application is approved by the supervisor/module lecturer and second academic signatory.

I have now checked and approved all the key documents associated with this proposal e.g. consent form, information sheet, questionnaire, interview schedule

Title of project/assignment… … … … Barriers to Integrated Marketing Communications for Organizations: A Qualitative Study in Malaysia… …

… ……………..……..

Name of student researcher … … …Victoriya Titova … …… … … … … … … … … … … … … ….

Student ID: ………TP061787……………………….
        Intake: … … … … …APDMF2009MBA … … … … … … … … … … …

Dr Jugindar Singh
Signed…   … … … … … … … … … … … … Print Name…   Dr. Jugindar Singh
Date… 02/08/2021… …….. …
(Supervisor/Lecturer)

Interviewee #1

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, organization, integrated marketing, malay, stages, integrated marketing communications, jira, bahasa, malaysia, barriers, english, boss, important, websites, management, collaboration, roll, problem, speak, digital

SPEAKERS

Speaker 2 (Interviewee), Speaker 1 (Researcher)

Speaker 1 00:02
Yes, absolutely not, I would just like to reassure you that no risk of a breach of confidentiality, your name is not going to be linked to anything that you say, either in the transcript of this interview, or in the text of my dissertation or any other publication. If have any other questions to me, you can also ask me.

Speaker 2 00:33
I'm fine.

Speaker 1 00:34
Okay. All right. Great. Thank you.

Speaker 2 00:36
So is your focus on marketing or focus on business?

Speaker 1 00:39
Okay, so my focus is on marketing, on marketing communications in organizations. So, I would just like to ask you, what is your current job title?

Speaker 2 00:51
So currently, I'm the head of digital and CRM.

Speaker 1 00:57
I see. Alright. And how many years of experience Have you had in your field?

Speaker 2 01:01
The field? I mean, how many years of experience I've had? 17 I would say. But it's not just all digital marketing, its been market research and then also, I move to digital platforms.

Speaker 1 01:22
That's amazing. And which industry actually does your organization belong to?

Speaker 2 01:28
FMCG.

Speaker 1 01:30
Alright, so, to start, research usually defines integrated marketing communications, as an audience centric business process of strategically managing and coordinating stakeholders, content, channels, and brand communication program results. However, I would like to know what is your personal understanding of the term integrated marketing communications?

Speaker 2 02:00
Well, there's no right answer for this. So when people tell me integrated marketing, I always like to say that it's as simple as whatever you do digitally, it's the same, it's tied into whatever you're doing logistically. So for example, if you are doing something like having a promo in store, do you get to have the same promo illustrated online also? If you're having a launch of a new product, so to speak, offline, are you also making sure that online is able to get the best experience? Are they able to chat with people online to ask about the product? Are they available to look at questions/answers, are they able to watch videos, and things like that. So integrated marketing does need to be fancy, it can be just as simple as that, and how online can add to the marketing aspect of things.

Speaker 1 03:00
That's very interesting. I would just like to add on, because according to research, IMC, as that's short for integrated marketing communications, it is commonly implemented across four stages, where the first stage you take a one sight, one sound approach and then the second stage, you take a more customer needs focused approach. And at the third stage, we have data analytics, and they utilize to monitor results of integrated marketing communication efforts. Now, the last stage which is the fourth stage, there is strategic and financial integration, where organizations are able to define, measure and achieve their desired return on customer investment. So based off of this statement, could you please share your opinion on which actually of the four stages you would consider your organization to be on?

Speaker 2 04:00
I think all organizations are on all four. Yeah, I mean, there is no way to say that I only care about the financial, I don't care about the money, I don't care for the customer. At the same time, there is no organization that will also say I only care about the customer, I don't care about the money. Everybody is doing all four at the same time. Whether they like to admit it or not. Most people in the public will say that they care

more about the customer, I don't care about the money, but that's lies.

Speaker 1 04:30
Okay, so my next question would be what barriers actually do you currently face when integrating marketing communication practices in your organization?

Speaker 2 04:42
I think the main barrier would be coordination. I mean there are several barriers I think. Coordination is one of them. Typically, people have trouble organizing themselves beyond meetings and phone calls. And that is a problem when digital especially integrated marketing is very complex, very, very complex, with so many things happening at once. If you need to have a meeting every single time that happens that's not going to work out. I mean, yes, you should have your cadence of meetings, I am not saying that meetings are not important. Meetings are important, but it's good to make sure that's kept to a as needed basis only. Whereby we are able to embrace platforms that actually share all your emails, your chat and things like that, and it has everything located in certain places. So yes, there are systems like JIRA, or Trello, where organizations can collaborate on a physical platform or anything else. Those kind of things are hard, hard to do. But when it does happen, I see it work really, really, really well I would say. Learning digital marketing is not that difficult also. I think management's expectation of immediate success leads people to actually be less daring, so to speak. So you have got situations where you have people who say 'where's my ROI?' straightaway. And these kind of things, it's up to the product manager to actually build in stages. So ROI is coming. But then these are things you measure first, which will lead to these other things, which you should measure second, which will lead to these other things which you measure third. And then finally, the ROI will come. Of course, you cannot be saying that one is better, or let's not measure anything. You have to measure things, you have to make sure that things are progressing. And at the end result, like it or not, has to be money, it's fine. Okay, but saying that things need to be straight away, making cash now or not, that's a problem. So most likely projects I know have a lifespan of three years, so to speak. The returns are expected to come back in. The projects that get approved are typically less than a year the returns will come back. That's fine. Less than a year, it's fine. But actually, people actually showed them that the runway to more revenue or, or the target there is good enough really I would say. So. Yeah. So that's all, it's a collaboration, as well as all expectations and not really understanding digital and when the money is going to come in. Especially when you have a boss who reads like big magazines and goes 'wow, how come they can do we cannot do?' So, you will have things like that. These kind of things happen. You can't blame bosses for being like that.They are bosses because they're bosses, right? They're ambitious and all that, fine. But it's up to us to be able to frame that properly, and manage that properly, so to speak. But being ambitious, but yet making sure you're pragmatic, and be able to actually plan for the future stages. Not expecting everything, immediate gratification is important. So

coordination, as well as expectation management.

Speaker 1 08:29
That's very interesting. Would that be like the biggest barrier that you have encountered so far? Are there any others?

Speaker 2 08:38
I mean, things like, you know, honestly, like skill sets that all have portrayed, you just don't hire idiots for an organization. So, it's okay, so most things, you know, people can learn, and it's not that difficult. And if not, you can get agency to help you do stuff in between things. You know, a lot of times people are just not embracing new things because they're too busy or they're too scared to fail, because they, as I said, the expectation to deliver straight away numbers, that is equal to the revenue will kick in, you know what I'm saying? So people sometimes, they just do some site thing, just to show the boss they're doing something, you know, but then no real change really happens. It's kind of sad, but that's the way it is. You can't blame people also because their jobs are like...

Speaker 1 09:37
Oh, for sure. Yeah.

Speaker 2 10:12
Right. Ok cool. MRSM is an interesting place to start looking for integrated marketing by the way, just saying. Why did you start there?

Speaker 1 10:22
That was the first organization I looked at because APU actually had a workshop not too long ago with MRSM. I heard your talk, so that highlighted MRSM in my mind.

Speaker 2 10:41
Oh yeah I remember that, yes.

Speaker 1 10:44
Yeah. It was very interesting. It's very interesting to a lot of us actually doing MBA and MBA students. My next question will be, how do you think that some of the barriers that you've mentioned earlier, how can they be overcome?

Speaker 2 11:04
Those barriers? Well, I'll take it to two stages, so you've got that collaboration thing, which I talked about. That one, I think the bosses use it. That's the number one, that's the number one factor, I guarantee you this, okay. If the boss doesn't use it, then the people below won't use it. And the biggest problem of using these tools is it's not, it's not that nobody knows how to use it or not as difficult to use, but it is that people see it as extra work. So you put staff on JIRA, and half the people are not on JIRA so I have

to go and email them. My boss doesn't use JIRA, so I got to WhatsApp him. So it's a lot of extra work. So do I really want to put staff on JIRA? No, I don't, I just don't need that. I just email, I just WhatsApp and that's it. But everybody including the boss is very strict on this and says, hey you know what, I as the boss am going to use this. This is not an engineering tool only, I understand that you want that collaboration, but I can't be the one getting everybody else except me, that's nonsense. Okay. So you have to be standing to say hello, I won't even approve your things if you send them by email. Send it to me by this platform, then I'll look at it, then it sends a message to the whole organization, okay, this guy's serious. And if I don't get on this platform, I cannot talk to my boss. So you better get this system, you know, not very difficult to use. Very easy. And I told people, come on, 'I don't know how to use this it's too confusing'. I was like, 'you put up stuff, you comment on stuff?' If you know how to use Facebook, you know how to use JIRA. If you're too stupid for Facebook, then different story altogether. So that's that's how it is let's put it this way. But mainly it's because of extra work. And I am really...in my teams, I rolled these systems out, I made it very clear that this is the first place I'll look for any complication. I hardly check my email, my email is like overflowing and difficult to manage. And I'll probably lose your email if you send it there. Please don't do that. Please, collaborate here. And then the whole idea here is that you have got the system going and people are collaborating. And the more people get used to it, it's fine. The number one factor was no top level management buy in and usage. The top management will no doubt say that it's great, but they'll never use it. Okay, so you have to get top management to use it and then that's good. The second one is? Second one is that you have to make it replace work, not add work. That's what I mentioned just now earlier, right? As long as it doesn't add to work, but replace work, people can see it's faster. Not extra work they have to do. It's fine. I think those are the two biggest, biggest things for collaboration aspect. Okay. The second...ah, give me two minutes, let me think about it.   The first one was collaboration, second...I need to be honest, it was the same right wasn't it? Second was management buy in right?

Speaker 1   14:43
Yeah, they were linked together.

Speaker 2   14:46
Oh, yeah. So yeah, so technically, it is the same thing. Oh no! no no no. Management buy in for instant results. Yes yes yes, sorry. The second one is instant results. So instant results? What can an organization do better? Well set, set different KPIs that relate to the end goal. Okay. So although you are not able to get money straight away, what are you able to track still to make sure your project is on track, and then you're slowly progressing towards this. So for example, I give you a good example. apps, mobile apps, people will say, I want to make a million dollars from mobile apps, but when I launch it, not going to happen. So what do you need to do? You need to link back, you're going to need to say, okay, I need to get more installs. Number one. Okay, no installs, you don't have people...second thing you need to progress after you

get installs your next set of KPIs are to do with active users. You need to get more active users on your app. Active users means, in 30 days how many people use your app? Because a lot of people will install, uninstall, install, uninstall. And then people will just have your app on your phone but nobody uses it, makes no difference. If you have nobody using your app versus you don't have your app on the phone, it almost has no impact to you, makes no difference ok. So you want to have some people who use the app. Then you go down to how many people depending on the app, how many people use the app for fourteen days? How many people use your app in one day, in seven days? And then from there, how many people actually transact? How much do we actually buy from the transaction, and then it becomes money. But it is never I want to launch an app, it becomes money. There are seven different stages which I mentioned just now. But then as long as the management is, and as a product manager, whoever is doing this project has got to draw the line for management, you cannot expect management to figure out for themselves. So you have got to draw that line. And then management will be able to see oh, yeah, in the end it's money. And then they are fine. Okay. But then they know that it's not a 'I launched an app, I get money'. No, it's not. There are many stages that need to happen. And then of course you need their support to drive active users. You need their support to drive installs, you need their support to drive a transaction, all these things need to come together. But then it's one stage after the other.

Speaker 1   17:18
Okay, understood. That's seven stages in total.

Speaker 2   17:23
That's just stages. I can say eight stages. But multiple stages is the correct thing to say. I wouldn't say seven, you can put it in five or three also can.

Speaker 1   17:36
Okay, well, the next question would then be which barriers to integrating marketing communications do you expect to encounter in your organization in the next five years?

Speaker 2   17:53
You're talking about communications directly, right?

Speaker 1   17:58
Marketing communications, integrating your messages, everything, in the next five years, what are the possible challenges?

Speaker 2   18:13
Okay there are a few. So one, okay, this one is for global organizations. Okay. So typically, global organizations like to move, or like to try to move in scale. Everybody moves at once, everybody uses the same system and things like that. One of the

biggest challenges, so hang on, did you say opportunities or challenges just now?

Speaker 1 18:45
Challenges or barriers.

Speaker 2 18:49
One of the biggest barriers is that when you roll things out globally, locally, it doesn't make sense. Somebody rolls out something in the UK or the US and it says, 'hey, this very nice for my market, whole world please use this!' But actually it doesn't make sense, because of the difference in the type of platform they use. Let's say first of all, this is very good in Twitter, for example, Malaysia doesn't have a very good Twitter base, very few people use it actually. Most people don't use it everyday. Okay, people use Facebook in this country. Facebook and WhatsApp is like a big ass thing. In the US. nobody uses WhatsApp. Everybody uses like iMessage and things like that. So, what does that mean? So when you roll out something that's very suitable for marketing on iMessage for example, it doesn't make sense here, completely. So having that, trust in teams to actually deploy local solutions that make sense. It's very important. I think that's one of the biggest challenges because they don't know who to trust and what they can do to it. I think previously in traditional marketing it's been pretty simple, right? Oh, I have a simple marketing message for CocaCola, everything's red or whatever. It's very easy to scale to the whole world. It's all very easy. But these kind of things, it is not easy to scale out to the whole world, you know. So it is troublesome to roll out and local teams currently feel very frustrated sometimes because it's like it, why is this logo still shaped that way? You know, what I'm saying? So that's one of them. Integrated marketing, second challenge in the next five years...see, I will say, I will say trying to, which is somewhat   related to the first one, trying to look too much at the trends that, then you see something on TechCrunch 11, say oh that's so cool. And then you want to do it, sometimes it's not your boss who wants to do something, sometimes you want to do it, but then you realize that you don't have the resources here to do it, because the vendors itself are not present in your country, for example. Malaysia is a good example, nobody launches anything first Malaysia, everybody launches first in USA, UK, whatever, then maybe once in a while, launch in Singapore, Malaysia, or then Indonesia first. Malaysia's like last. Malaysia is terrible at launching new products simply because of the language barrier. So Malaysia has one of the worst, internet barrier languages that I've ever seen. I don't know any country as bad as Malaysia. Because the world's internet is in English. Most people feel more conversant in Bahasa Malaysia. There is too few people that speak Malay to have a credible Malay ecosystem. Okay, so for example, if you go to South Korea, most of the websites are Korean. Go to Thailand, most of the websites are Thai. You go to Vietnam, most of the websites are Vietnamese. Go to Malaysia most of the websites are in English. Okay. And that's the biggest problem you have. The biggest problem. A lot of people will go on to understand it, in cities I think it's not a problem. I think Malays know how to speak in English in cities in most cases. But when you come to the majority of the country, it's

not the case. Simple way to verify this is if you look at the number one language on Facebook, or whatever. Okay, it's all Malay. And we're talking about things and messages and WhatsApp, it's all Malay, because people are messaging each other in Malay. People are reading stuff, people are talking to each other in Malay, commenting, they are all in Malay. So the problem is, it's very hard to actually build a Malay ecosystem. Even on websites, okay, you build a website in Malay, nobody visits it. Why? Because people's mindset already is websites are all English. Okay, so there are very few big Malay sites. There are. Don't get me wrong, there are. But it's extremely, extremely, extremely rare, alright, compared to English websites. Yeah, so literally, it's a big ass problem. You launch something in English. You wonder 'shit, am I supposed to write something in Bahasa?' You write something in Bahasa nobody really uses it. People come to the site through Google, they search on Google in English almost all the time because they don't respect Malay sites as I said. You know what I'm saying? Nobody searches in Bahasa. Bahasa searches in Google, I can tell you this because the workers work there, less than one percent. Nobody searches in Bahasa, although everybody speaks in Bahasa on Facebook, nobody searches on Bahasa in Google, because nobody expects anything good to come out of it. So it puts Malaysia in a very tragic state. Okay, so you can see that the websites are probably never ever going to improve ever. Language situation? Yeah, good luck la. Maybe you can get more people to speak English in the long term, but it's not going to be solved in the next one year or so I would say. So that's one of the biggest challenges that you find here. So your whatever thing you're doing with integrated marketing, has got to be very social media driven. Because that's where Malaysians are. The interesting things are coming up now like chat and stuff like that is still quite, quite okay. So then there was more or less language agnostic, you can actually do stuff in English quite well, do stuff in Bahasa Malaysia quite well it's fine. I think those are two obvious challenges, I would say If you give me more time I can think of more.

Speaker 1   25:04
Sure I have all the time. I can wait for you to think of more if you prefer.

Speaker 2   25:10
But I think those two are really there. Because Malaysia, the one thing it has good for them is the infrastructure is really good. Really good. A lot of people complain about their internet all the time. Yeah. It's actually really good. In terms of the amount of 4G they have in this country, the penetration you have, the extremely, extremely cheap packages that you have. Yeah, you have no idea how cheap internet is. When you go to Europe it's like freaking nonsense pricing.   Here it's like very cheap. Everybody has access to internet. You know, fiber is pretty decent, too. You know what I'm saying? So there is no real problem with infrastructure here at all. In terms of language, I think that yeah, I would say so. Yeah, so that means I think those are two main challenges, I would say for integrated marketing. Last time, there used to be a lot of like, holding on to TV or newspaper. But now that is gone. You see newspapers closing down, you see TV suffering, like crazy. So you know that's on the way out

really. So that's not really an issue over the next five years, I would say. Yeah, I will say organizations moving internally, are very important to switch. I'm not sure whether I mentioned that earlier. So it's not just about collaboration, about everything else, you know, I'm saying the ecosystems, aligning, should be all digital. No more signing papers, no more doing this, no more doing that. Because technically speaking, you have everything on the digital trail. So you do something stupid, people can trace back to you. So you don't have to sign multiple, multiple documents all the way out with I think, seven signatures. I think that's it.

Speaker 1   27:00
All right. Well, is there anything else that you would like to add to today's discussion?

Speaker 2   27:13
I don't know. No, but that topic is pretty broad. Is there anything in particular, you want to know about integrated marketing?

Speaker 1   27:26
Actually, I've had all my questions answered sufficiently. Thank you.

Speaker 2   27:33
Yeah, I think the one thing that people could do better for all organizations is to actually be more literate. For marketing people, especially, be more digital marketing literate, you know what I'm saying, so that you're able to tie it together with your sales, you're able to tie together with your business more than anything else. So integrated marketing is important. I would say for that, rather than trying to look for the latest hot thing, that's not important. The important thing is how do you link to whatever you are launching. Whatever you're rolling up for your business. Okay, that principle. That's about it.

Speaker 1   28:27
Thank you. Thank you so much. I'll stop recording right now.

Interviewee #2

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

organization, employees, IMC, customer, communication, people, integrated marketing communications, integrated marketing, process, challenges, collaboration, integrating, collaborate, important, marketing, company, barriers, marketing communications, channels, understanding

SPEAKERS
Speaker 2 (Interviewee), Speaker 1 (Researcher)

Speaker 1   00:02
Wonderful. So before I start, do you have any questions for me? About this research?

Speaker 2   00:09
Yes. Can you briefly tell me about the dissertation topic? And what's your objective for this interview? What do you want to take out from this interview?

Speaker 1   00:23
All right, yeah, no problem. So perhaps I will first define integrated marketing communications. How research defines it is basically, is that it is an audience centric business process of strategically managing and coordinating stakeholders, content, channels, and brand communication program results. At some levels, many companies look at it as having a one sound, one voice, one message for the whole company. So like a brand. At other levels, because it exists across four different levels, I can even give you a short summary of that as well. So at the first stage, when companies implement IMC, as in integrated marketing communications, they usually start by looking at that one side, one sound approach. And at the second stage, they go towards a more outside in approach where the customer needs is the most important part where they look at what the customer wants. And the third stage, data analytics is already being utilized to monitor results of integrated marketing communication efforts. So they track what their customers want, then they see the trends and so on. But at the fourth stage, which is arguably, the most important stage or the true integration stage of this concept, or just of marketing communications, in general, it happens when there is strategic and financial integration, which means basically, that organizations are able to define, they're able to measure, but they're also able to achieve their desired return on customer investments. So my objective of this interview and all my interviews in general, and of my research, is that I've come across other research studies that say that apparently, some organizations experience hindrances when integrating marketing communications. So that led me to think why is this so? Are there any barriers? If so, what are the barriers? So this is why I'm looking at what are the barriers that organizations face when integrating their marketing communication practices within their organization? And this is why I came

to you for this interview, which I hope you'll be able to answer just some of my questions, which shouldn't take too long.

Speaker 2 03:07
Fair enough. Okay. Have you ever been part of an organization? Or training or whatever?

Speaker 1 03:15
Well, yes, I actually have. Even though I'm doing an MBA right now, I have a background in advertising and design. So I did work for a while, with an advertising agency here. I did intern there for my degree. So now I'm doing my MBA at APU and I'm still very interested in marketing communications as you can tell.

Speaker 2 03:49
Okay.

Speaker 1 03:50
All right. So, if we are ready to start with the question, basically, I would just like to reiterate how research defines integrated marketing communication. It is an audience centric business process more than anything else of strategically managing and coordinating stakeholders, content channels and brand communication results. However, I am interested to know what is your personal understanding of this term after I have just given you this summary?

Speaker 2 04:25
Yeah, so I think the academic...definitions are mostly very Utopian. And, that's what academics is all about. But I think there are a couple of layers to IMC, in a way that one needs to look at it. So there is IMC which is internal to the company and then there is IMC which is what the definition at the very end says....customers. So, essentially, there is an integrated marketing communications which starts with customers and then there is an internal IMC which starts again with customers in this case, it's the employees. So, there is employees and there are customers, there are two different types of IMC's. It's very difficult to have a single IMC which goes from employees up to customers, very few cases that you can actually do that. And it all depends on the category that you are in. So, the definition to me, is based on what is the audience that you want to talk to. So, if your audience is employees, then your IMC has a particular way to be delivered. If you're a product or a service, then it is the customer needs which become fundamental to delivering communication through various channels in which a company reaches out to the customer. So, to me, that's a very simplified approach to IMC, which is they're essentially in both cases, the key component is who are we talking to? So, who are we talking to, the customer is the key for both of this and then of course, there are processes which define, guide etc, etc. The two things so internal communication has its own processes, external communication has its own channel and processes. And then you know, and then it

goes about doing the same thing. So, yeah, so, that's that to my mind is the effective simplified version of IMC which is that.

Speaker 1 07:05
Wonderful, thank you. So, then, if you could possibly share with me in brief, as generally as you can, how does your organization actually go about integrating marketing communications?

Speaker 2 07:24
Integrating with what?

Speaker 1 07:26
Alright, with employees?

Speaker 2 07:31
Okay, so essentially, when it comes to employees, there are two parts to it. One is to the employees, the company is a brand that needs to engage on a daily level, on a daily basis to the employees. And again, one thing you must take into account that I don't know how old that definition of IMC is from what you've just said um, the reason why I'm saying is that there is a lot of change that has happened in organizations over the last five years and a decade. Okay, a lot of things have changed a lot of things have become dynamic. So, specifically talking about employees and their communications, yes, you have the standard communication channels in which you reach out to an employee, you know, these days you add social media in my company, we have a specific application, which is a part of the HR initiative which allows the company, which allows the employees to actually directly interact with various stakeholders that they feel they should and they need to. But, essentially, there are various kinds of internal you know, communication that happens, one is of course, from a brand corporate standpoint. What is it? so, those are generally you see, you know, results, quarterly results or annual results, etc, etc and what happens, how is the company performing, what are the key milestones that we need to deliver in a year, in a quarter and therefore, what's the role of a particular employee as you know, as, as defined or as agreed to between the employee and the manager. So, there is that part which is a broad level, and then a very specific level, you get into group level communication, you need to get into managerial level communication with the employee. So, that's one part. The other part is from communication that happens also from the organization to the employee, which is with regards to skill development, upskilling, understanding their, you know, needs, processes and career growth. So, which is a very learning and development kind of communication that happens. So that happens on a more personal level, that happens on a more a group level on a personal level. And of course, there are crisis communications, which are also internal. So if something were to go wrong, if you are in a telco and network goes down, what are the protocols or internal crisis communication? What should you say, as an employee when that happens? Or you have a scandal at the highest level? if

somebody were to approach you, how would you decline? First of all, what is the level of hierarchy that you, you know, the employee should be aware that if he or she is allowed to speak to the media, so, various things of these are the way internal communication happens. But at the same time, I think broadly, the basic thing that happens for everyone is the broad thing, which is, what does the company stand for? What are the company values? What are the company missions, what are we delivering, etc, etc, etc. So that, and you know, those in today's day, and world, you've got email, you've got specific apps within the company that allows you to communicate, you've got social media internal, that you use to spread out these messages. So that's one part. That's how normally, in my experience, at least good companies, which have very strong values, engage with their employees. So again, I would like to say that today IMC's, specific to employees have moved on from being a one way street, to being a more engagement kind of a scenario. So I need to engage with employees, much more than one would have done 10 years ago. Employees ask, and rightly so have a lot more leeway in communication with the organization in terms of questions, visions, blah, blah, etc, etc, then what was there 10 years ago. So that is also something that one needs to understand. But the communication, so far as employees are concerned, even customers have shifted a lot from being one way to being both ways. You know, that, in effect changes...communication to conversation. So one of the things that happened specific to employees, so when you say IMC, I think it's about time we say, okay, whether we change communication, to conversation, because it's a conversation that you're having, this is no longer the old days, when I was growing up with the radio and TV, and that's it, somebody came and said, 'Hey, I'm the best blah, blah', whether you agree or you don't agree is different. You voted through your wallet, somebody would buy it, somebody would not buy. But today, you have to get into conversations with people. But in general, that's how internal communication happens.

Speaker 1   12:54
All right. How about external communication to the target audience?

Speaker 2   13:00
Yeah, I think external communication, again, begins at the core, external communication starts by understanding your customer. And therefore the segment, the customer. And that's, the beauty at the same time, and the challenge because each segment of customer has a different need, that one is trying to address through a product or a service. So it's very critical that one needs to understand the customer need, which is number one, second, one also needs to understand in this whole communication chain, value chain, what we call customer journey, what is the journey that a customer goes through from the time he or she requires or feels that he or she requires a product or a service, to the time he or she puts out a cheque or a credit card or whatever online payment and purchases it. Even then of course, there's the whole after service, after purchase scenario. So it's very important and that's where you plot your whole channels in that journey. So it's understanding the need,

understanding the journey. So it's like if, you just pick out any one if somebody today decides this morning, I get up, what do I have for breakfast, it's a decision journey. And it's very important for the company to understand that decision journey to make sure messages are plugged in. So integrated marketing, one of the things that an integrated marketing communication tries to achieve is that it is to optimize all the channels that are available, all the media that are available, to connect with a company to connect with a customer, be it business, be it consumer, and try and deliver a consistent message across all of that. Try and build up a story on that journey. So that in the customer's mind, the brand or the service, creates that specific proposition, which the customer wants at that point. In your case, for example, universities that would like you to come and be a part, have a specific understanding of your journey. How do you go about that? Good grades, choice, course, campus, alumni, jobs, etc, etc. Because they all have a, you know, they all have an understanding and okay, undergrad students, okay. I'm in Malaysia, if I have to, you know, attract undergrad students from across the world, what do I need to do? You know, how do I need to change my campus? What is the best thing that international students look for blah, blah, blah, so all of that. And then they start communicating the bigger promise of Asia Pacific University and say, okay, we stand for XYZ, and this is how it comes across, you know, if I stand for being, I don't know, the best in say, whatever marketing, then I would say, what happens in the classes, which make us the best? what happens in, your engagement with professors, which makes it the best? what happens in your engagement with industry leaders, which makes it the best? What can you do in the campus that, you know, makes it the best, you can probably start your own company in our campus, that will allow you to get hands on training or be a startup or whatever. So all these values then get plugged into a story, which you as somebody who's looking at, what do I learn? What do I do? I'm interested in marketing, where do I go? You say, okay, this is mapped, this is talking to me. And then, you know, it tells you a whole story in, as far as possible, in a coherent manner. So whether you look at a billboard, whether you look at your social media postings, you look at LinkedIn, you look at whatever. Do you get a familiarity of, okay, this is what the university stands for, or this is what the product stands for. So, it's a lot of coordinating messaging across channels...to make sure that what you want the person to take out is exactly what the person is taking out. The conversation happens when you want to say that I stand for A, but the guy says, I don't think you stand for A from what I get from your your messaging is used for A, B, and then you see if that is that only one person telling me that? Or is it coming across to a larger segment of people who are saying, 'I'm sorry, we don't get that you stand for A we think you stand for B'. So then it's up to you to decide, you know, how you're going to change, not change whatever, tinker blah, blah, etc, etc. Sometimes messaging is changed based on consumer, absolutely on what the consumer thinks, what is right. So yeah, so that's, again, that's in a very simple way. That's how you go about doing it. The logistical nightmare is that all departments in your organization should be aligned to doing this, which is one of the biggest barriers which happened.

Speaker 1 18:20

Talking about barriers, the next question would actually be which barriers do you currently face? You know, with integrating marketing communications?

Speaker 2 18:29

So barriers, there are a couple of things in barriers, a chalking out a process. This is chalking out a process, design is the easiest part of the whole chain. Okay, so you just sit down on a chalkboard, you get five people and just say okay, 12345. Most processes fail, because the implementation does not happen. And why does the implementation not happen because it involves human beings. And why that is important is because there are a lot of things that happen, teamwork across diverse people, teamwork across departments is difficult, because traditionally, we have come on to an age of collaboration, which is relatively new in the last five, seven years, but it has been pushed, largely, even the biggest and best organizations, my organization included, we see that one of the reasons these things fail is because people work in silos. People work in silos. They're also worried about if I collaborate with someone, what happens to my KPI, if it's a successful thing, who takes how is the credit therefore distributed? If it's a failure, how are the reprimands distributed? Will I be held responsible if the department in charge of distribution is unable to deliver. What happens. So there are all of these things which make collaboration easier said than done. And that's one of the challenges, has not changed the whole challenge of getting people to collaborate on a bigger scale organization, which is one of the reasons why start-ups eat who is better till they become big, because once you become big, you put in systems and processes, and then that is therefore liable to getting either abused or not used. And so therefore, it's very important for managers to drive the collaboration that happens, in this case messaging, for example, you might say it is what it is, somebody else will think that no, that's not what it is. How does that happen? that those are one of the few challenges which every organization faces, in trying to integrate, in trying to get people to work together in teams, you know. Flow of communication, understanding of job responsibilities and role. Connecting with peers, as well as, you know, your superior managers, etc, etc. those are things which need to be worked out, need to be monitored very closely so that, you know, I've gone through a situation where it's an exercise where we realize that the reason why it's failing is not because we had a bad plan. It's because we're not working together. So that integration in integrated is the biggest challenge that managers and organizations face. And it is an application of the integration, which is the most important. You ask anyone in the organization, 'hey, do you have an integrated marketing playbook plan?' Yes, they will give you a 50 slider. But eventually, the application of it becomes challenging, when collaboration is required, when the flow is driven. So those challenges are not changed, they are still here. And despite technology, despite all of us being connected 24/7, to whatever,   it's still the same, it's just that some organizations do it better than others. And the way to make it better as part of addressing or mitigating the challenge is how your organization communicates internally with you. How does the organization, train skill, change

mindset and communicate the importance of collaboration. If collaboration does not happen, integration is not going to happen. Because the first step of integrating something across many things is to make sure that your collaboration.....happens. People understand the reason for it, people understand, you know, cross marketing, for example, there are many structural changes in the organization. Cross marketing, you know, cross specialty marketing, which is one of the outcomes of integrated marketing is when you have different members of a team, to a brand. So somebody who's handling, take any brand, for example, somebody who's handling LifeBuoy, would have a marketing person, would have a communications person or distribution person. So all people have different skill sets come together. In the past, it was not like that, marketing did marketing, sales, did sales, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And then they all did their job and you thought that things will flow? Yes, of course it did flow. But efficiencies in the system was not capitalized. Now you try and do an experiment with various peoples, then it becomes a team issue, then becomes a human problem of how you're going to drive collaboration to drive integration. So those are things that one looks at it as managers and senior managers within the organization to make sure that integrated marketing as a whole works.

Speaker 1   24:16
That's very interesting to me. I would actually like to ask, how many years of experience have you had in your field?

Speaker 2   24:25
Oh, my God. How many years of experience? um 23?

Speaker 1   24:33
And would you say like, getting people to collaborate is one of the biggest barriers that you have encountered so far? Or do you have an example of another barrier?

Speaker 2   24:46
I would say that getting to get people to collaborate is one of the challenges that I have faced. Yeah. So there are challenges. And in that there are challenges of culture. For example, right, you're working in Malaysia, right? If you join an organization, you will have Malay, Chinese, yourself, I presume you're European and Indians, some other guy from Europe or Africa or whereas. So that then becomes a multi layered challenge. So the challenge of culture, so you look at things different, because you grew up in a different culture. And then you have different cultures, then you have different way of looking at the diversity is great. But diversity also has an underlying challenge of other people trying to accept it. It's not easy. It's very easy to say that yes diversity is great, it is great, I have no doubt about it. But accepting the various points, coordinating, collaborating and making sure because nobody just blindly follows a process. Because if you were to blindly follow the process, the first thing that happens is if there is a challenge, people will just stop. They will find shortcuts, they will find a way to game the system. And they will just make it work. Okay, because as human

beings, we always look for the path of least resistance. If I can do this in the shortest possible time, with the least resistance and least usage of the brain. That muscle is fairly lazy, then I'll just do that. And so it doesn't matter. So you might have a glorified process. But 10 people have got together and said, we don't need steps two to five yeah, we just do step one and step six. Okay, so those are stuff that I have seen, I have faced because I've worked in multiple countries, I've worked with regional capacities, and that's where it becomes very difficult, where you might have a process which is fine. But how do you integrate? How do you get Singaporeans, Malaysians, Indonesians doing the same thing, a product which is sold in all three markets? How do you do that there is somebody sitting on the region trying to say okay, I think, you know, this is what it is, then somebody is going to say what understanding do you have of the Indonesian market? So getting all of those viewpoints together, getting all of that together and then to make that collaboration happen, is a skill that you learn with experience. That's the only thing that I can I can tell you, and you won't get it perfect every time. There are lots of you know, challenges, there are lots of learning, lots of pivoting, that happens as you go along. And then you try and work out the system and say, okay, this is how we will work and now that we figured out a way to work between all of us, let's see how does the process flow here. Also, what has happened over time, are organizations have become at least the bigger the better organizations who engage with good talent, they have understood the importance of being flexible, yet firm, I mean, firm yet flexible, it's a bit an oxymoron of a statement, but essentially, the core values, you try and see if you can make the process slightly flexible. So as it's not that rigid, that you know, either it breaks or people are so fed up with it that you cannot change. So these processes now, for example, at the beginning of my career, those things, for example, an integrated marketing map is fixed. Now I have seen or at least over the last decade, there are lots of times when every two years, every three years, you look at the process because the world is also changing. People are changing along to it, it's absolutely unfair to say that I will use a process done in 1950s and address the problems of 2021. It doesn't happen. I'll give you a real life example, over the last 18 months, all the processes that was known to man as far as you know, you know, stuff in marketing has changed. How do you make integrated marketing work in a remote work setup? Even me, I am doing a zoom call right? Maybe 18 months ago, we would have found a cafe and we would have done this interview. That is change. Now imagine if I run teams every morning. I talked to my team, how do I do this in a remote work? How do all these processes therefore, work? So again, that means that as we go along, we are all trying to invent as we go along, and we see the process, but at the same time, we know we need to make some changes. Yeah, we need to do this, we need to do that. So these are things which are, which I wouldn't put it as barriers. But I would say that these are challenges that come up, and they are human challenges, and that needs to be solved.

Speaker 1 30:37
All right. All right. That's a wonderful discussion. Another question would actually be, how do you think that some of these challenges or barriers be overcome? I mean, we

know that Zoom is one way to adapt to them. But the other ones that you mentioned previously, where we talk about the diversity, getting people to align together to work together in an organization, as being some of the barriers, the logistics of it, how do we overcome that?

Speaker 2 31:14

So I think it's, yeah, so I think it to a large extent, that depends on the team leaders and how they themselves can manage and interact with the team. And there are a couple of things which are very important to make these things happen. I think, in a situation where you're driving integrated marketing across channels, it's very, very important that everyone in the system in the chain, knows exactly what is required of them. If they don't know...so there are two things here. One is they need to be very clear of what is required of them. And they also need to know where do they fit in, in the bigger scheme of things. It is very difficult for an employee, especially a good employee, to not know where they're going and just be told you just do this. And that's it. There's a disconnect. So if you yourself will ask the question after a couple of days. What am I doing this for? What's the endgame here? Okay, if I'm a part of the team, rightly so. Every employee, every team member needs to know what is it that we are trying to achieve? Why, first thing is as the team members should know what is expected of them and what they should do number one, second is they should know what the endgame is and what the deliverables are and why we are doing it. Third, everyone in the team should know inside out what the process is, they should know what the process is, they should know what the backup is, they should know in case of failure of the process, what they should do. And this needs to be translated to them at their level of their job responsibilities by the managers and the team leaders. This is very very important. So, somebody should know what happens when I'm handling social media, in the chain of command in integrated marketing, a customer is asking me a question what do I do? What is the kind of reply when the customer is angry? For example, I bought something and it flared up right? He didn't even call customer service. In the IMC journal it says customer will call customer service, he didn't go to customer service, he came straight to the Facebook page and said you promised 123 nothing has happened! There are hundreds of people on that Facebook page and he has written a question, what are you going to do? You know, so, all of these things need to be not only told, trained or skilled, but people should know that this is how to deal with it, and everyone should have a very hands on attitude, you have to make sure even in case of managers or whatever the case, you have to give them freedom to do it but at the same time you should know what is happening. But most importantly in that chain of communication in the chain of marketing, that is their people should know what their specific expectations are required of them, what the team expectations are and how you should work together. And of course, as I said that they should know the processes inside out. What needs to be done yeah, because in the end training helps.

Speaker 1 34:55
Oh, um, actually, then to follow up last question would be which barriers do you see or do you expect to encounter in the next five years actually?

Speaker 2 35:09
I don't know. I don't think standing from where we are, one can actually say what barriers but essentially a couple of things I can tell you, depending on how life moves forward. It's I think, unpredictable changes will become a norm moving forward. So therefore, it's very important for any process in the organization, specially communication processes, to be flexible, sensitive to those changes, and connect with people because at the end of the day, the most important thing moving forward is to make sure that the connect with people, the collaboration, etc, etc. These things happen at a far faster, and you know, far more than what happens today. So today, everyone is forced to communicate because we can't meet each other. And collaborate because we can't meet each other, we can't be physically in an office space. So which, which works both ways. So it is forcing people to communicate and collaborate but at the same time, you're not in one place. Everyone is everywhere. So how do you do this you know? productivity, etc. So I think and processes definitely need to be re-looked at and, in some cases reinvented because technology. The other thing that is happening is technology is growing at an unbelievably fast pace. Three years ago, forget three years ago, two years ago, yeah, TikTok as a marketing channel did not exist. Now, TikTok is one of the most, you know, talked and important marketing channels that you are looking at so therefore learning, adding these various kinds of touch points which come on, understanding and re-looking at the customer journey, as I was telling you, we'll relook at the customer journey every six months. That's the only way I know if my integrated marketing story is going to work or not. And I realized, oh my God, my brand, which is talking to you does not have a Tiktok representation. Okay, what do we do about it? It's not about the fact that because there is TikTok, I have to go there. No. I mean, in way there is Tinder, am I on Tinder? No, it doesn't make sense. But I need to be here. I need to be you know, in terms of communication, we believe people no longer look at 30 seconds or 62 second commercials, they look at five seconds, seven seconds and stuff, are we doing that? These are all of the things that come in and it's a much more faster way of approaching these things that will become a challenge. That becomes challenging, because attention span of both the employees and the customers are getting shorter and shorter and shorter. I think those are things which are critical moving forward. Especially collaborations. Empathy, from a human standpoint, empathy becomes very important as well. If I don't have empathy, it's not sympathy, it's empathy, if I don't have empathy, for my team members, etc, etc. Not going to work. It's not going to work. No.

Speaker 1 38:35
All right. That would be actually the end of my questions for today. Thank you very much. That was a very interesting discussion. I have so many notes.

Speaker 2   38:52
I wish you all the best in your dissertation, in your thesis submission and all the best for the future as well.

Speaker 1   39:00
Thank you so much. All the best to you as well. Thank you for taking the time.

Speaker 2   39:04
Thank you. Thank you. Take care. Bye Bye.

Speaker 1   39:07
Take care. Have a nice day.

Speaker 2   39:09
You too. Bye.

Interviewee #3

SUMMARY KEYWORDS
marketing, integrated marketing, integrated marketing communication, problem, team, impact, campaign, channel, barriers, organization, months, task force, customer, platform, audience, integrated, question, product, meal

SPEAKERS
Speaker 2 (Interviewee), Speaker 1 (Researcher)

Speaker 1   00:33
If you have any questions for me before I begin, please feel free to ask me.

Speaker 2   00:38
No you can begin, I will reserve my questions for the end.

Speaker 1   00:41
All right. Okay. So can I know how many years of experience have you had working in your field?

Speaker 2   00:47
I have 13 years of work experience.

Speaker 1   00:49
Wow. Okay. And your organization belongs to the airline industry? Am I correct?

Speaker 2   00:58
Correct. Correct.

Speaker 1   00:59
Okay. So, I will just reiterate how research defines integrated marketing communication, they often refer to it as an audience-centric business process of strategically managing and coordinating stakeholders, content channels, and brand communication results. But what I'm actually interested to know is what is your personal understanding of the term integrated marketing communications?

Speaker 2   01:29
Ok, integrated marketing communication for us is working flawlessly, using the right sets of data insights, analytics, based on consumer research to come up with any marketing, any brand, any communication strategy, so that all your decisions are informed based on data and analytics. It doesn't have to come between insights to data to communication to impact for us, especially in our business, everything is integrated and cohesive together. So now the usage and the ROI impact of marketing

communications, are purely based on data and insight.

Speaker 1 02:11
Okay, interesting. So if you could just tell me in brief, as general as you can, how does your organization actually go about integrating their marketing communication?

Speaker 2 02:28
Integrating marketing communication right now is basically, it's based on various factors. One thing is that now, the terminology for the teams are called growth marketing, they are not tied in team branding and separate data analytics. No, especially in my company, the team together is an integrated team. So that's the first step of change. We made a team called a growth marketing team.

Speaker 1 03:00
Very interesting.

Speaker 2 03:00
A growth marketing team has a business analyst, data analyst, marketing team, consumer research and a business analyst. So now imagine, all these cross functional skill set people are a part of one thing. That's the change in step number one. Step number two is that before we come up with any marketing campaign, we start backwards first. We find the target audience, we define the size of the audience, we define the analytics behind audience. Correct? So previously, what we used to do, we used to run a marketing campaign and then do a post mortem, you know how does it work? Now we reverse the funnel. Now we do, who are we going to target? What should be the impact? What should be the customer segment? How much awareness do we want? How much reach do we want? So all my KPIs, you know, all my user funnel KPIs are at the starting of the campaign, not the post mortem.

Speaker 1 04:05
Have you had better results with that?

Speaker 2 04:09
A lot better. It's not only about the results, it's about cutting the marketing spend also. The results are not only about awareness, and reach and loyalty and conversion, it's also about optimizing your marketing spend. Because previously I am reaching 300,000 people and only 30 people get converted, correct? Yeah. Now it's not like that, now I only reach 100 people and 30 are still converted. So imagine my cost of acquisition is very low. Correct?

Speaker 1 04:39
Yes.

Speaker 2   04:40
Because my audience is very, very defined. That's integrated marketing communication.

Speaker 1   04:46
Okay. All right. Great. Very interesting to me. So the next question would then be which barriers do you currently face with integrating marketing communications with this process actually?

Speaker 2   05:01
Oh the biggest challenge in integrated marketing communication in a unified channel approach. You know, when I work with a   different channel, having this integrated marketing strategy is very different because my audience behave very differently by various channels, you know, you see those fancy terms called unified channels strategy it's very different. You have online, then you have offline, then within online, you have web, you have platform, you have app, app based communication, then you have an entire new channel called social media, correct? Problem with integrated marketing communication is unified channel communication.

Speaker 1   05:47
Okay. I'm taking notes.

Speaker 2   05:52
Okay. So the problem with an airline is that some people buy me from the sales counter. Some people buy me from travel agent, some people buy me from my app, some people go and buy me from my social media campaigns. Now imagine, the profile of these audience by every channel is so different. Correct? How can I have unified marketing communication?

Speaker 1   06:15
Yes, definitely.

Speaker 2   06:17
So by integrating marketing, then we are talking about fragmented marketing.

Speaker 1   06:25
That's true. So in your career so far, would this have been the biggest barrier that you have encountered? Or are there any other barriers?

Speaker 2   06:35
Previous barrier was also related to channel but it was more about offline to online. Okay. So maybe you can say in last 10 years, a lot of my career challenges with the respect to marketing was keeping it simple. Keeping it targeted, keeping the marketing cost down for higher impact. So those goals were high level challenges.

Now, my goals are very, very, very specific and targeted. But now my problem is seamless channel integration.

Speaker 1   07:05
Okay.

Speaker 2   07:06
And now, the goal is not even online to offline now, literally, everything is online. Correct? But now my other problem is that within online, different layers between social commerce to platform commerce, you know, between influencer marketing to the, you know, they're talking about all these TikTok videos.

Speaker 1   07:26
Yes, yes. Blowing up.

Speaker 2   07:28
We are talking unified communication.

Speaker 2   07:38
Sorry, did I confuse you?

Speaker 1   07:38
No, I'm taking notes as well. That's why I'm maybe looking down and taking notes.

Speaker 2   07:47
Yes, I'm so sorry. Maybe I should not confuse you.

Speaker 1   07:51
No, no, no, no confusion. No worries. I would just like to ask, do you think that some of these barriers are specific to your industry or to other industries as well?

Speaker 2   08:07
I think all the industries are encountering this barrier. The majority of the industry also defines the majority of the barrier. So some industries like FMCG, diapers, you know, things like baby milk powder, you know, all these upscale onto offline integration. So their online audience is less. So their problem is not as complex as my integrated marketing problem. Okay, actually in e-comm industry, travel, banking, because we are being forced to go online in last two years, especially after COVID everything is literally online. I think the maturity of the industry and their exposure to online platform, also govern our challenges to be way more higher than traditional challenges.

Speaker 1   08:56
Hmm. All right. Okay. How do you think that some of these barriers can be overcome?

Speaker 2   09:12
Some of these barriers can be overcome by doing fewer things with higher impact, rather than doing more things throughout the year. One part of marketing was if you can remember, making a marketing calendar for 12 months.

Speaker 1   09:28
Oh, yes.

Speaker 2   09:30
It's a very standard approach of any marketing and brand team, pick up a calendar of 12 months and slot your activities by calendar, year, festival, month by month. Okay. I think as a marketeer, especially in integrated marketing communication we need to look at 360, we need to see that the behavior may not be always divided by 12 months of the year. So my suggestion and specially some of the things we follow at my organization is that doing fewer things of bigger impact than doing small things in higher frequency.

Speaker 1   10:05
Okay.

Speaker 2   10:10
So now irrespective of festival, irrespective of calendar, year, supposing my organization wants to do free meals. For example a campaign, we want to circulate free meals to anybody who come and try our organization's food, an example. That doesn't mean festivity, where you can only do that campaign four times a year, but you can have the equal amount of impact and traffic as you will have with your Christmas sale your, your summer sale. Yeah, we have a different approach, we will not go by the calendar frequency, instead we're going to create our assets, which we can replicate throughout the year with a lesser frequency and bigger impact. And those are the kinds of assets and impact we wanted to do in a unified channel solution. So you can also do it in app, in web, in social media, in your influencer marketing, so that once again, your cost to acquire customers becomes lower. You ask me, how come the cost required becomes lower? Because your marketing is singular, you need lesser resources, you need lesser, you know, brand assets, you can have economies of scale, because you are doing one thing at a bigger level than doing 10 things at a smaller level.

Speaker 1   11:35
Okay, I've noted that down. Yeah, actually, that does really make a lot of sense. And I bet that would make a huge change as well, for many organizations. Do you have a specific example maybe of a barrier of this kind, except maybe for a calendar frequency that you have encountered so far in your career and that you have found a way to overcome?

Speaker 2   12:13

Okay, let me tell you a recent example. Most of the time, in marketing, you know, what happens? Departments and the specialists work in silos, they don't work with each other. It's a very common factor, especially in a large scale organization, it always happens, you got a marketing team, you got a growth team, you got a branding team, and then comes the product team. Okay. Generally product teams are not a part of marketing tasks. Okay, we design a campaign, we talk about channel strategy, we talk about spend, we talk about the creative idea, the big idea, we develop the campaign we think, oh, we are a great integrated marketing team, everything is in house and in built. But nobody informed the product team and nobody checked with them, okay? Then the day of the campaign came in and we ran out the campaign and I think you would have seen it, we just launched it. So it's a very, very recent case. Okay, it was for the CSR impact of our team, which means that we want to give the entire Malaysia a meal for only one cent. Okay, this was a great marketing CSR impact, you can classify it as integrated marketing, why? Because it is CSR, it is marketing and at the same time it's a product based and a platform based impact. So you will have your awareness and your trials and your customer acquisition on inbuilt now the biggest problem happened is that because integrated marketing was only so called integrated marketing by name and it was not talking to product team you know what happened? For the first two campaigns, none of the purchases went through because nobody checked with the product team that one cent as a currency cannot have online banking.

Speaker 1   14:07

Oh dear wow. Okay.

Speaker 2   14:10

Nobody thought about that. Nobody thought that marketing comes with a great idea, we got to do a campaign and you know with one cent you can have one meal, imagine the amount of brand awareness and imagine the amount of hype and and the customers you can gain and the idea was even presented to our group CEO, he loved the idea, he loved the creative. Nobody went and checked with the product team. Can anybody actually be using one cent? How? Can you do online transfer? Cannot. Can you do credit card? Cannot. Can you do wallet transfer? Which currency can you transfer with one cent? You cannot. No payment go through. A payment error, a big time payment error of 30,000 transactions failed. Okay, this is a used case of failed integrated marketing. Because you did not talk about the product, you did not talk about what can go wrong. So this was why one of my best learning was that integrated marketing really needs to focus on 360 degree and platform first, which is a platform. Can your platform grow? Next time, my Bangkok, my Thailand team wants to do free meals, I ask the first question. 'Free' means what? How can somebody pay for a free meal? We learn from our mistakes. But that's the question of integrated marketing. Integrated marketing is not only about marketing, it's about growth. It's about product, it's about delivery. It's about end to end value chain. And it is also

about throughout the channel, a singular unified channel strategy. You must be laughing at our failed campaign. But yet we learned.

Speaker 1 16:05
Actually, I think those campaigns have the biggest potential for us to grow from, better than successful campaigns in a way. Because later on, we'll never make the same mistake again. So actually, for me, it is very interesting, because I wouldn't have thought of it as well, maybe. So it's very interesting. I used to be in the creative side, also, before I did my MBA, and in advertising and design.

Speaker 2 16:39
Marketing and branding come up with this breakthrough idea. One cent meal or maybe free meals. Nobody thought about the purchase funnel. How does the purchase work? Are you going to give a promo code? Are you going to give a special code for the checkout? How does the checkout happen if it is one cent or one dollar? Yeah. And then you know, what, the legal team called us because the bank called them, asking what are you guys doing? You have 30,000 failed transactions in one day. So the amount of penalty we have to pay was amazing.

Speaker 1 17:13
But you've got it resolved? So I think the team now has like a specific plan what to do next. If this ever occurs again, right?

Speaker 2 17:23
This will never happen, because we learned. But then we withdraw the campaign and we put the meals as free, but you have to pay one ringgit delivery charges so we top it up with delivery charges. So actually the checkout can happen.

Speaker 1 17:37
That's a fantastic solution.

Speaker 2 17:38
But we learned along the way. We said okay, I mean, we learned, but this, these are the shortfalls of integration marketing when you don't think 360.

Speaker 1 17:46
Definitely. So actually talking about the barriers, right. That was very interesting. And I heard you also mentioned earlier about working in silos, how a lot of organizations also ended up still working in silos, even creative teams, sometimes, maybe, could you just give me some of your personal experience that you observed about this situation?

Speaker 2 18:12
A lot. Creative team, especially between brand marketing and sales, you know, two

things. Brand marketing and sales can never be friends, we all know, because one has to sell and one must come up with the idea so they can never be friends. That's a classic example of working in silos. But in integrated marketing, the whole point of this disruption is that creating a task force team, you know, that agile culture where everybody is a part of the project. So the project success, not about sales versus marketing. It's a task force team. So now, a lot of our projects, when we launch a new route, when we launch customer satisfaction, when we launch a new market, now we don't work by department, we work by scrum teams, work by task force. And a task force team could have six to seven people from each of the cross functional.

Speaker 1   19:02
Task force teams?

Speaker 2   19:05
Task force teams is a brilliant idea why, because you stay focused, you have everyday updates, which is called you know, your every day morning update, everyday chats around where we are and a task force team has eight to nine people within one task force team. So for me, personally, I think this approach of you know, working in agile teams and a scrum master and a task leader is not only a product team anymore, it's an integrated marketing brand, and a channel kind of strategy because it really, really was super impactful and brings your overall timelines. Example will be we just launched our business in Thailand after acquiring another company. So maybe you have heard in the news we just acquired, so now we had 10 days to launch it in Thailand because we just acquired that company 10 days back.

Speaker 1   20:04
It's a very short time.

Speaker 2   20:07
Amazing. And you can't launch a market, you know, in 10 days if you're not working in this kind of approach. So we quickly formed a market entry team. And going back to your topic of integrated marketing, we just put together marketing brand, platform, channel, legal finance, operation, customer happiness, insights, data product team, you know, we picked up the champions of each of the domain made of 15 member teams, every day, we update, we go back and work in our respective department in 24 hours, we come next day, and we update what needs to be done. And the reason we work in this agile teams is that you throw a problem and there are 10 other cross functional teams helping you out, because sometimes your problem cannot be answered by only your team members. So if I have a problem, say customer migration, customer migration not happening, the acquired company is not giving me data on customer, supposingly I understood it was not a customer problem, it was a legal problem, because contract was not signed. You know, those are the things which as the integrated team really work, because then when I was updating the legal team thing, hey, that's not a customer migration problem, it's not about speed, it's because

we have not released the contract to them.

Speaker 1   21:26
Yes so many nuances to consider. But I think actually, that would be the end of my questions for you today. I don't want to take too much of your time.

Speaker 2   21:46
And I thought it would be one hour, I could have told you everything.

Speaker 1   21:50
If you like you can add on or let me know if you want to add on anything more to today's discussion. Anything is appreciated.

Speaker 2   21:59
Not for now, what you can do, is you can stay in touch with me, you work on your dissertation. If you need more use cases and more case studies you can write to me.

Speaker 1   22:07
I will I will. Thank you This is this actually has been one of the most interesting interviews I've had so far.

Speaker 2   22:14
Really? Yeah, I would have told you my last one month, if I tell you my job in 10 years, oh my God.

Speaker 1   22:21
I don't mind actually, it's very interesting to me, because I also happen to work and work more in advertising and design. But still, I come across marketing a lot. And this is why I was doing my MBA, now.

Speaker 1   22:53
So much experience that you have so many problems that you can solve now. That's amazing. That's amazing.

Speaker 2   23:00
I hope I was useful. And I don't have much question, but I want to contribute in your dissertation to keep throwing me more question as you go along.

Speaker 1   23:36
Yeah, of course. Of course. Thank you so much again.

Interviewee #4

SPEAKERS
Speaker 2 (Interviewee), Speaker 1 (Researcher)

Speaker 2   00:00
I'll answer the best I can, hopefully it will be helpful.

Speaker 1   00:03
Thank you so much.

Speaker 2   00:04
Yeah, hopefully it'll be helpful, but yeah I don't really have any...if I have any questions, I guess.

Speaker 1   00:09
Please feel free to let me know. Yeah. For the beginning, I would just like to know, what is your current job title?

Speaker 2   00:27
Yeah, maybe just a little bit of a background. So I was in, I started market research sometime in 2010. I think, what was it? Or 2009? I can't remember. I just only recently joined the banking industry in 2019, actually. So I've been with the bank for about two and a half years now. And I'm currently in an insights role. Basically, what I do is we talk to consumers and test out different concepts and ideas and talk to them about how they manage finances, and then we kind of report back the insights to the different stakeholders? So it could be product teams, it could be channel teams, could even be marketing teams and things like that. Yeah.

Speaker 1   01:27
Sounds challenging.

Speaker 2   01:27
Challenging, challenging, probably, because we get... so I wasn't too sure whether I would be a good fit to kind of fit into your topic. But after giving it a bit of a think, I think I would be primarily because we get to see how unified or how disjointed communication, or engagement, you know, plans are with each of the team, I think we'll probably kind of delve a little bit into that. So yeah, that's kind of a little bit about

me. I've always been an individual contributor since joining, individual contributor meaning so I will take care of a couple of different portfolios within the bank. But recently, because my line manager has been shifted to a different role, I just recently am managing a small team of four of us at the moment. Yep. And then we oversee it mostly in banking, you will probably have a split between consumer banking, which is kind of me and you, and the normal consumer bank, ATM, your credit cards, your loans and stuff. And then you have another side, which is primarily business banking. So like the big corporates of the world and you know, your Nestle's and your P&Gs and Unilevers of the world. Yeah, yeah. So yeah, our team sort of dabbles a little bit across both types of banking products, we don't necessarily get involved in creating new products, but we definitely are involved in testing them, and kind of know where they fit, whether it's a personal consumer or business consumer in sort of how it fits into their ecosystem. So yeah, that's kind of where I am at the moment.

Speaker 1   03:23
Okay, understood. So overall, that would be like more than 12 years of experience?

Speaker 2   03:31
Makes me sound kind of old. But yes.

Speaker 1   03:36
I think that makes you very experienced.

Speaker 2   03:39
Okay, well, thankfully, no wrinkles yet, but I do have a lot of white hair already. But yeah, I mean, yeah, about 10 to about 11-12 years or so of kind of insights experience. But I think because being in insights, you get to dabble in everything from product innovation to comms to I think, yeah, just strategy as well. So yeah, it's kind of not really a master of something, jack of all trades, but because of a jack of all trades, you have a little bit of view of everything and you kind of know when to tell people where things are good and where things are kind of not so great.

Speaker 1   04:17
Okay, I understand. That's very insightful for me as well. Okay, to start with the main questions of my interview, actually. I wrote in the participation form, that research usually defines integrated marketing communications in a long way, and they say it is an audience centric business process of strategically managing and coordinating stakeholders, content, channels and brand communication results. But what really interests me is to know what would be your personal understanding of the term integrated marketing communications.

Speaker 2   04:58
Okay, well, um, I think there are two parts to this. I think the first part, let's talk about the corporate identity. Let's talk about corporate identity, which you can name it

different things like corporate identity, brand identity and things like that. Right. And I think in many, many cases, a lot of companies in Malaysia do a pretty okay job, honestly speaking, because, you know, you obviously have a marketing and communication division, and they take care of the branding, they have brand books and all those kind of things. And I think by and large, this is a byproduct of a very Western way of kind of branding, right? Because if you're talking about big corporations, we've already been westernized. So I would like to use Apple as a good example. It doesn't matter whether you get an email from Apple, or you go to their website, you open the settings on your phone, or you step into their store, right? Or, you know, land on your website and you know, buy something from the e-commerce platform, you generally get the same look and feel, you get the same language, you get the same tonality in terms of how they kind of brand themselves. And all this trickles into even their product design. Right. So everything that started from a corporate communication and branding communication standpoint, it literally trickles down to every little thing you do, even like the cleanliness of the buttons and things like that. Just everything is key. Right. So in that sense, I think most Malaysian companies are doing all right. Okay, so corporate branding, marketing, branding, and all this kind of stuff is pretty okay. And because the bank that I work in is, well, it's a local bank, yes. But because it's huge and not in terms of size by probably in terms of value. You know, the more money you have, probably the easier it is to hire a marketing and comms division to make sure things and hire a brand consultant as well, to make sure everything's ready. That's pretty good. So remember, just now I talked about how things should naturally trickle down to you know, activation campaigns, emails, even products and things like that, right? That is where I think there's a huge disconnect for most companies, not just Malaysian companies, but if you just kind of filter and see Malaysian companies, then it gets worse, you know. The smaller the company, the more disjointed it gets. And you can see this a lot when it comes to tactical activations. So tactical campaigns where sometimes when you work with different agencies they give you...yeah you give the agency a brand book and you tell them this is the guideline, yeah, use these colors, use this text, but the way that they speak to consumers the way that they write, then you can see like cracks already, it doesn't necessarily become that integrated anymore. It looks and feels integrated because obviously the colors are the same. But if you maybe compare one campaign to the next, the tonality that they use, in terms of whether it's supposed to sound you know, fun, light, is it supposed to sound a bit formal, you know, are you speaking to me like a teacher, are you speaking to me like a father, are you speaking to me like a friend, like a bro, you start to see cracks. So the tactical and product campaigns is where I normally see this integrated effort start to, I wouldn't say fall apart, but it starts to have inconsistencies in different places. And I think... actually, if you talk to a marketing communication person, they tell you things are all fine and dandy, right? Which I would agree because they, most companies, whenever you want to do a public engagement, you definitely have to go through them first. Right? The legal and compliance people, they are just kind of there to make sure you don't break the law and they don't land in trouble. But the marketing communication and

brand guys will always tell you, hey, you're kind of off brand or on brand, so that's okay. But yeah, I don't think even despite a concerted effort where everything funnels through them, it's difficult to keep that high level of consistency. So Apple is like that, it's very hard to reach that kind of level where it literally trickles down to every little thing that happens even on your settings screen. Like for example, now I'm looking at my iPad, I'm looking at, my iPhone on the site. It's the same product with kind of different screens and everything kind of feels very familiar. Apart from iMac, so that might be a bit different. But what I'm thinking it's like handheld devices and even the watches that they have and whatnot, that feels very, very consistent. Yeah, including two interfaces. A very good example if you want to compare polarities if you look at...local banks is a good example if you want to quote examples versus say what's a big enough, so if you use PETRONAS, for example, you know, a huge global brand, actually, or even AirAsia, a huge global brand. They're doing pretty well. But if you're looking at the sort of medium size corporates, smaller sized corporates? That's when like, the integration just doesn't, to them is if it brings in the bottom line sales, then it's ok. Because I think, yeah, with this integrating, with this integration drive, what a lot of people have to balance is when I communicate something, or when I do a champion, I do a product, am I focusing most on bottom line revenue, which is like, you know, hey, here's the sales and promo it's supposed to bring in revenue immediately? Or is this supposed to also drive what you call that, brand cohesiveness? So how do you keep that balance? Most of the time, because you need to keep the bottom running, the top up gets a little bit like disregarded provided they kind of close one eye and let it slide.

Speaker 1   11:41
Okay, so, um, you know, from your past experience, if you could just tell me in general, how have you observed organizations to actually go about integrating the marketing practices within their organizations?

Speaker 2   12:02
Well, I think I'll probably start off with the challenge first la, like the challenge of why it's so difficult. The bigger the organization, the more specialized the kind of fence and streamline in the areas of work, right. So for banking, for example, it's by products. So between buying a house, buying a car, getting a card, opening an account, putting fixed deposits, into, you know, or using an app, they all have different kind of KPIs, and things that they talk about when they engage you. And more often than not, I think it's difficult to get this synergy. Because the marketing communication guys generally, yeah, at least from an incitement point of view, when we see them trying to talk to these different stakeholders, they all have their own agenda. And it's very difficult to you know, make sure everybody plays ball at the same time, while they're making sure that you know, you're on brand, and you're talking about the same thing, you're talking in the same tone as well. Right? So that becomes very difficult. But to be very, also fair to the marketing communication guys, they do try, rightly, they will tell you, hey, this other department is kind of doing something like this, do you want to kind of ride on the same window, you know, because there's opportunity to grow together.

And, for example, this campaign is, let's say about, for lack of a better one, let's say traveling, right? This is something that we are doing for traveling, this is a tonality, do you have anything within your house or product that you want to bring it together? Then let's talk about it together and ship it in this way. And we will reach out to essentially the same type of consumers, but just with different types of products are all bundled together. These kind of conversations happen pretty often, I think, because each campaign goes then, you know, everybody rides on the same campaign, then you get cost savings, right? Because you're talking to the same people, trying to bring more people into the banking, into different products. So that happens pretty often. So yeah. I don't know whether that answers your question. But yeah, and again, I'm using Apple again, because I have a feeling or rather you can probably look up more of these writings. There are a lot of published writings about how Apple managed to so successfully create this consistency across vertically and horizontally.

Speaker 1   14:47
Yeah there is a lot about the vertical and horizontal integration.

Speaker 2   14:52
Yeah, yeah. The downside of that is because I think when Steve Jobs was still around, it's a very top down approach. And it's, it's almost like he's running the company in a dictator style, a corporate way of running. So it's either my way or the highway. But because of this insistence, I think when he was running the company that time, it has created such a wonderful, integrated experience that we all see today. Which most companies these days don't have that already, because you have the marketing, the chief of the marketing doing something, and then you have the CEO who looks after all the different stuff, and then you have different product heads. And getting everybody to play ball together, it's kind of difficult. Imagine if you're the parent, and you have like, 10 kids, and trying to make all the kids kind of play with each other, it is difficult sometimes, especially in a corporate setting. And this is the kicker, right? Everyone's KPIs are very different. Like, I'm supposed to automate, let's say sales la, I'm supposed to bring in more sales. They're more, they're more focused on getting the numbers in, remember, I talked about the bottom line? Yeah, rather than ensuring that everything that we talk about is kind of always consistent within each of their house. So, you know, for example, mortgage will always talk about mortgage and as a way, cards will always talk about cards in a certain way, personal loans will always talk about personal loans in a certain way. Investment, yeah. Each of that will have a form of consistency. But when you look at the larger corporate setting, then you start to see, oh, it's kind of talking to different people. That's where we, where we do research, we come in and say, hey guys, when consumers deal with banks, right, they use you as a single entity, because the different products they handle with you, you're talking to the same person, I need a house, I need a car, I need a card. I need an account, you're talking to essentially the same person with just slightly different needs. With banking, it's always just numbers like, oh, these are the best rates! And let me tell you something about banking, right, there is very little differentiation in brand

persona, I can tell you that. If you want to do a little bit of searches of this, just look, have a look at the local banks. Have a look at the local banks in terms of how they kind of communicate, right? Their products are by life stage. Visually looks great, looks consistent. But the tonality differs a lot. So there's no like, brand persona. If you think about Red Bull, Red Bull across different products, they always talk the same way, energetic da da da. So it appeals to a certain type of consumers, a certain type of character, consumer profile. Yeah, but not necessarily banking. It's not like supposed to say oh, we as this bank, we want to bank with a certain type of persona with a certain type of lifestyle aspiration, you don't see that a lot.

Speaker 1 18:20
And so would you say like that, that would be one of the biggest barriers you'll have observed in banking organizations so far?

Speaker 2 18:31
Yes, I would say the biggest barrier is because of product vertical focused, I'll call it.

Speaker 1 18:40
So that is what happens within organizations, towards vertical integration, where you need different departments aligning together. Is that correct?

Speaker 2 18:51
Correct, correct. Correct.

Speaker 2 18:55
Yeah, Correct. Correct. Your understanding is absolutely spot on. And, yeah, maybe beyond banking, I think if you into FMCG companies, same, I think as well. Yeah.

Speaker 2 19:07
Okay. All right. Actually, my next question would be, what are some of the barriers you have faced, but so far, we have covered actually quite a few barriers you've mentioned like there are some barriers with the agencies. Then the other challenge is that a lot of organizations do worry about meeting the bottom line, which is the finance aspect of it, and then there is coordination and the vertical integration like you've just now mentioned. I think I've noted another one, which is, the bigger the organization, the harder it is to align everyone together towards the same vision and goal. Apart from that, would you like to add on any other barriers that you have observed?

Speaker 2 20:06
Have I seen any local companies that deal with... so the issue I generally see with not necessarily just Malaysian companies, but just Malaysia in general? Because we are generally very...okay, I'm going to stray a little bit away from our core before I come back again, okay. Malaysia as a nation, the consumer, the consumerism behavior, we are very, we are one of the highest index promotional driven people. Right, meaning

we don't buy or we don't engage if there's no promotions. Okay. And with the e-commerce platforms, being aggressively, pushing that, right, it has pushed Malaysia to like, we are way over index, you can Google that I think, we are probably ahead of I think Indonesia. When you run promos, who eats into margins, right? So who has to take the hit on margins? companies obviously. And when you have affect on margins, it stops you from working with the same like, for example, McDonald's, it always works with Leo Burnett as their one and only agency and all communications across all channels, every time is the same. Because they have committed themselves to I don't care that I might spend a bit more but then all my marketing communications are always integrated, or with the same tonality, you know, a little bit of fun, a little bit of, call it food porn, you know, you focus more on the food and things like that Malaysians love that somehow. But because of how Malaysians like to kind of do promos and things like that, what happens is you have lesser money to spend, remember just now I mentioned, you have to take care of the bottom line? So what happens is the so called medium, smaller companies, which don't necessarily have a huge budget to always spend on keeping, you know, brand integrated, keeping product integrated. Every time there's a new thing they want to do, then they will open a bid, right, you open a bidding, and then they ask, hey, this is my objective. Yeah, I have brand books and things like that. I will go with the cheapest. I wouldn't say they always go with the cheapest. But when you go with the most cost competitive all the time, what you lose is historical context of how your brand has always been positioned, what language you always use. What are even the deployment tactics, that you know, and even with the writing styles and things, it's very minute, but I think when you combine all these elements together, it gives you that integration feeling right? When you always like every three months, you have a different agency helping you to roll out something, how are you supposed to be integrated? Even if you have someone like me, or you, to oversee that process, there's just too many moving parts for you to manage to make sure that this is kind of the same as that. And so what you often see, is colors are great, always integrated. Images are great, always integrated, because that is the very look and feel we kind of know, but when you look at the sort of totality in terms of the writing, the little details in the design and things like that, that's when you start to see things kind of falling apart. So I will say the other barrier would be costs. Overly sensitive cost management, right. But that is also another byproduct of how Malaysians generally buy, which is you know, promos, and you know, that's been eating into margins probably years and years now. Especially now with e-commerce it's getting even worse. So you see how this has a domino effect? Right? So when I see them do this, I kind of, okay, I know. I know why, but it's still painful to see. From a strategy standpoint.

Speaker 1 24:26
Yeah. That actually gets me to my next question, which is how do you think these barriers like, you know, costs and working with agencies and other barriers. How do you think they can be overcome by organizations? Do you have any solutions in mind?

Speaker 2 24:39

I might sound very, I might sound very Draconian. But I think what Steve Jobs did, which is like, you know, top down dictators style approach, and it's very tedious. Everything you do has to go through one single person's eyeballs first, before it gets rolled out. That would be, but it's very idealistic. I'm pretty sure you agree, right? Imagine every single communication that your roll out, for example, every single communication in your company, has to go through your eyes, when are you ever going to sleep? You're never going to get a good night's rest, right? When I mean every little thing, it also includes emails, right? What you then have to do is you probably need to set up like a team, that polices literally everything. So within even the marketing communication department, we call it corporate comm, marcomm or brand comm. You need to literally then have a team, that polices these people. Again this is idealistic, doesn't happen in the corporate world. So in corporate worlds, the legal and compliance teams would generally have a representative sitting with each product or each channel people, what they do is they advise them because mistakes around this issue is very costly, right, any compliance or legality issues. So they would actually spend the money to make sure they don't get into trouble. And how this translates into that is they have someone, a representative, that sits with the product, team dotted line. But they report directly to the legal and compliance team. Right. So they're kind of in between people. So what happens is at all times, the product teams know what they can or cannot do. So when you look across absolute consistency. Now the thing with marcomm is if you do this the same way, meaning you plant a marcomm, brand comm, corporate competence, whatever you call that role, into every single product and channel, setup, you are additionally adding one operations hit count, because let's not forget, marketing communication is a cost center it's not a revenue center. So in most companies, you either are a revenue center, or you are a cost center. In my case in insights, it's a cost center. Would you want to spend? Yeah, that's the question. Would companies want to spend? Additional hit counts to make sure that in the spirit of integrated marketing communication, make sure that this is like across the board, I've made sure that every single product and channel team has a representative to achieve this goal. I don't think most companies are ready to do that, honestly. That's why they have a central team. And if you need to go to the central team, rather than all the central teams actually have like a branch or rather a representative within each team to work with you. They don't really necessarily have that kind of manpower, I think, or even if you do have the manpower, it's very costly. And that cost naturally translates to consumers. Sometimes to cover the costs you will either bump up the prices, or it will eat into the margins. So again, it goes back to the financial books. So my suggestion is idealistic, but because I've seen how compliance and legal manages to do this quite successfully, because there's risk costs involved right? Because if shit hits the fan, yeah, you better make sure that someone is there, to make sure that shit doesn't hit the fan. So there's a risk, there's a risk cost involved. That's why they then, okay, I calculate the risk costs, and if I hire someone to put in, I can negate these risk costs, great. But there is no such similar argument for integrated marketing, right? It's very hard to justify what value integrated marketing

communication brings to the table actually, if you think about it this way, right? People talk about brand value and all this kind of thing that you can give a valuation to a brand. But that's a byproduct of a very long, sustained, continuous effort of integrated marketing communication. That's why Apple is as big as it is. But to begin with, they probably spend a lot of money doing this kind of activities already, which is not seen by people, they only see the end value like wow, integrated marketing, so cool! Goes down to even the little buttons and icons. But most companies aren't ready to commit themselves to that level of integration when it comes to you know, branding, marketing, corporate communication and things like that. So yeah, my suggestion is do what the compliance and legal people do. Tie a representative. Because that representative, what he or she can do is, they are close to the business close enough to the business to know what exactly they need, what exactly their KPIs are, what do they need to achieve, what different campaigns that they have throughout the year? But at the same time, that person also has a view of what the total corporate needs to be, and what are the sort of guiding principles of what's happening across the other departments. So let's say if you are part of a department, I'm a part of another department, but we report back to the same vertical. We also talk to each other and say, hey, we're doing something. What about you guys? So that conversation can happen on outside and we can align and make sure that then it falls back, it doesn't stray too far away from trying to bring things together in a very cohesive manner. But yeah, that would be my suggestion. Very idealistic, never seen it happen before.

Speaker 1 31:14
Interesting to hear your opinion, honestly. Actually what do you think about the agency and client barrier? How do you think that can be overcome?

Speaker 2 31:25
Agency and client barrier? Well, I think both sides see the benefit of a long term working relationship, right? Because despite people coming in and out, you will always have a bunch of historical things ongoing. And there's always continuation from both sides to make sure things are consistent. The agencies will have, obviously, longevity in terms of revenue. They try. I think both, especially the companies they try, but again, if you fall back to the same costs, slash benefit analysis, that's when the companies when they need to tighten their purses for again, start opening, opening up the biddings. Whenever I think about this kind of long term agency kind of partnerships and things like that. I truly only see this in very big corporations. You know, PETRONAS, McDonald's, Apple. Like McDonald's Malaysia is a very good example. Because to a certain extent, McDonald's is a global brand, right. But I think what happens is at the country level, they allow a certain level of autonomy in terms of how that country wants to run the McDonald's branding. So they can decide on the kind of tonality you want to apply and they provide a high level of localization. Because a schoolmate of mine works in Leo Burnett, servicing team for McDonald's. And I can see that consistent level of, of marcomm with you know, agency client working relationship. And obviously, you take good care of each other la, obviously,

the agency takes very good care of the client. So they have that kind of objective, and you do see the results. And what happens with this kind of level of working together, it's not just the things that we see as consumers. The agency themselves become the advocates. The agency people who service the companies also become the advocates of this campaign, they share the work they do, they share the kind of...

Speaker 1   33:56
...spirit that they want to celebrate, right? You see a lot of that in McDonald's. So yeah, I thought that was a very good local, glocal? global slash local type of kind of...collaboration. So that is a very good example. Um, but like, again, I said, because one of my cousins, I do know a few people work in different size SMEs, right. So props, partnerships, medium-ish skill enterprises. This integration, working consistency, branding consistency, all that right, it's pretty far down in terms of their prioritization list, I would say. Meaning, if you don't have the budget, if you're not big enough, you're only ever going to focus on kind of bottom line revenues and making sure the profits and earnings and margins are taken care of before you even think of integrated marketing communication as a pillar to sustain. If I can put it succinctly, I think integrated marketing communication is a must for big corporations, because you have an identity that you need to sustain. But it's a shiny, nice thing to have, if you are not a big corporation. And in Malaysia, I think they're not that many big corporations in Malaysia, I mean, we are about a 33 million large population only right? So population size is also another thing. And I wanted to bring this, I don't know whether this is something you have considered to include in your dissertation. I think Malaysia is very unique. So everyone calls the United States, the US a melting pot of culture, right? As opposed to say, Japan, which is a very unified culture, right? Single race, single language, or even Thai, right single race, single language, single cultural references, pretty similar. You use one language, everyone gets the same sense of humor. If you do, yeah. But in Malaysia, we are kind of the more condensed version of the United States, whereby we have a lot of, obviously the three major races, and then also, obviously, including the different local ethnicities and different religious beliefs as well. We are very split up one. And second thing is, when we split it up so much we don't have the volume. So that's another consideration for integrated marketing. How do you integrate something when you need to take care of four languages like, English, BM, Mandarin, and obviously the most neglected one is Tamil. So in the past 11 or 12 years or so. So how do you integrate as a company, right, how do you integrate something when you have to talk in first thing, four different languages? And when you translate? Already, certain things are a bit lost. Yeah. And different.

Speaker 2   37:18
Correct. And vastly different consumer beliefs. Again, you go back to the cost, how do you justify when you are targeting a very small, niche, um,   population? Right. I'll give you another local example. Curry powder, curry powder. So I've seen how curry powder companies kind of talk about curry powder. Right? So food is the underlying code, obviously, for Malaysia, easy, right? But curry is primarily or very closely

associated with Indian culture. Right? Indian or what we call as the Borneo culture. So Indonesia, the Javanese, kind of that area, right? It's, technically imported culture from other places. But when you talk about curry, the brand name itself sounds Indian. How do you integrate that and make sure it's something that kind of cuts across with, when you translate it, you get the same essence, and things like that. So you then often fall back into the same trap of I guess we celebrate food la. So then when one curry brand does that, every single curry brand does that. Then it becomes basically a food porn competition. Everybody talks about how great the curry powder is. And then you already start losing the communication around like brand positioning, brand charisma, you lose that already. So yeah, I think all these areas are kind of interlinked. And yeah, yeah, that's generally what happens. I don't know whether you've included that la. But I always tell people about Malaysia as a market. I think that's always kind of this...it's a very big challenge. Like I said, three million. I mean, what is the three million? We are super small man. We're probably slightly ahead of, I don't know, we'll probably ahead of Singapore and Brunei obviously, geographically, they are smaller. But compared to most of the other Southeast Asian nations, we're not that big.

Speaker 1 39:44
I get your point. It's an interesting point to bring up. But also that makes me think,have you personally, you know, throughout your career encountered such a barrier as this, and have you managed to overcome it in any way?

Speaker 2 40:11
Honestly, the short answer is no. We have not managed to overcome this in a way. What happens is whenever we do an integrated something, yeah. We tried to deliver the same message. Yeah, right. The same message. Delivering the same visual experience. No issues. Definitely okay. That's, like always pretty on point. Easy, right? You can't go wrong with pictures, always elicit the same feelings, the same emotion, colors as well, shapes as well, right? But when it comes to the messaging, that gets lost in translation very often.

Speaker 1 41:01
Okay, so it joins back to the previous point as well. Correct?

Speaker 2 41:05
Correct. And, and what we then normally tell the people is, who is your primary core target? It might sound same same, but different. But if your core target is, let's say the slightly more affluent people, your top 20. The English language is probably going to be okay. Everybody reads the same. Everybody understands the same, the command of English is kind of about the same. So you kind of get the same scene. Yeah, so that's okay. But when you start talking to the masses, when you start to say this product, or rather, this campaign is for the masses, that's when translation gets sometimes lost a little bit. So English probably needs this much to tell you that story. Mandarin needs slightly lesser because of the richer vocabulary. Malay probably

needs double the amount because of the limited vocabulary. It's true, really look at the same description in Google translation, and the nuances of the kind of conversations that happens after you talk about something already, right? That also gives people a vastly different experience, right? How people experience the brand. How a Malay experiences the brand versus how a Chinese experiences, versus how an Indian experiences the brand is like kind of very different. Right? So yeah, the short answer is, I don't think anybody has quite cracked that yet. We try. We try.

Speaker 1   41:56
Yeah, this is why I'm researching this topic as well.

Speaker 2   43:03
So copy-writing is an area right to have a think about when it comes to integrated marketing communication, the tonality and how you're supposed to translate. Conversations always happen in English. Pretty much right? In most corporations. Or if you're a very Chinese SME, then obviously, it goes on Chinese gets translated into English. The copy-writing appreciation in Malaysia to shift content tonality and intent from language to language, I think that's also not a hugely invested area of work. How I know this, right? If you know anyone who works in copy-writing, they don't get paid a lot. Because to them is they're just like, oh, you're just another translator. You're just supposed to write things creatively. But people kind of lose the importance of making sure the same intent the same tonality is translated from language to language. It's very hard you know? I'm pretty sure you know that right.

Speaker 1   44:10
I do, I actually happened to work in advertising.

Speaker 2   44:17
It's very hard. Yeah, there you go! I'm pretty sure you know what I'm talking about. It's very, very hard.

Speaker 1   44:23
I do have friends that are copywriters as well. It's a challenge.

Speaker 2   44:27
They don't get paid very well. And they don't necessarily get the recognition.

Speaker 1   44:37
Yeah, it's hard because they there are a lot of stereotypes as well that it's an easy job when it's not.

Speaker 2   44:45
No it's not. I mean, if you just look up, if you just look up the thesaurus, right, there are don't know how many different ways to compliment to say good, like good. Good is

just the word. If you put good in a thesaurus, just google it up right, five seconds they give you like don't know how many different ways to say good already. It's very different.

Speaker 1 45:03
Yeah. And I have a lot of respect for it. So yes, I understand what you're saying. Okay, yeah. So in connection to all of this, which barriers do you actually see organizations in this country facing in the next five years? What do you foresee?

Speaker 2 45:26
Integration right? So on top of all these existing problems, right, and I'm not saying that all of them, I think each of them are getting resolved at a different pace. Some more successfully, some not so great. But I think all these existing problems will still persist at the very least for Malaysia. I don't see it getting solved almost quite as instantaneously, it's probably going to be a long running problem. Okay. Unless some advertising or marketing genius comes in, we can only hope and pray. I think the next or rather, in the next five years, the challenge would be how do you make sure? So KOL marketing, it's a thing already, because what you do is you get the highly captive audience who are very engaged with that platform or that persona that you engage with. But what happens is, you're spreading yourself even more thinner, across much more assets than you need to handle. So last time marketing you need to handle radio, TV, newspaper. That's it. So now you have to handle newspaper, I don't know, Instagram, TikTok, Instagram reels. Yeah. Okay. When you add in KOL, now as it is. How do you ensure that your brand essence doesn't get diluted? Because of how this KOL generally delivers his or her content? Yeah, I'll give you a very interesting example. I'm pretty sure you I don't think you know her as well. SoImJen, is a very famous key opinion leader, you can Google for content, yes, she has actually worked with pretty prestigious brands. What I mean by prestigious brands is they are generally known as a bit more premium. And they have a certain level of way that they communicate, but when it reaches the KOL level, at her level, because her style of presenting her content is always as such, and she needs to stick to that style, while also bringing your brand into the fray, you start to see that the brand managers who manage these brands, say 'hey, I want to talk to this KOL because she has a very captive audience and I like her style', it starts to break away from the original branding pillars that the brand is supposed to follow. So the next five years, with more and more of this kind of KOL marketing being probably, going to be a mainstay, I think it's here is going to be here to stay. It's going to be even more challenging, I think to actually work towards an integrated marketing communication, because you are suddenly handling so many different assets from just channel management, you now have to handle persona management, the KOL as well. So that's probably going to be another huge challenge. Right? And because of this, you might then see, okay, it's a double edged sword. One thing is you're going to bring in different people that traditionally your brand doesn't talk to good, right, brings in more business, brings in more profit, brings in a different audience, a different type of consumer. But what happens is their

understanding or precision of your brand is very different. And they might actually devalue your brand for the people who have always been loyalists to your brand. Right, a different example. So recently Tag Heuer, this is something that I can't afford, it actually is very expensive. But to me, it has always been a brand that is kind of it's there, right? It's kind of mid level luxury. If you want to enter into luxury. It's kind of late to entry level luxury watches. I think it holds a certain level of obviously prestige and desirability for people that want to up yourself to that level. And recently they went and did a collaboration. And again, I think this is because the audience liked this kind of stuff, even in collaboration with Super Mario. That, to me is like a form of dilution already. Because they want to tap into a kind of slightly different audience, they use a different platform. So this doesn't necessarily go into KOL. But because there's a huge subculture going on, they want to tap into that subculture, you start to probably see a little bit of dilution in, that kind of integrated brand talk, right? Yeah, cause TagHeuer always talks about don't crack under pressure, it's always about F1, it's always about living a certain type of lifestyle, then suddenly, you see Super Mario. So it's a very extreme example, but a very recent example, which I think is very good. And if you translate this into how big corporations or big brands trying to use, and tap into this kind of KOL, because KOL's, are in a way, a type of subculture as well, right, you engage with a certain type of persona, and you'd like the kind of content that's being pushed out by this KOL, and you go back, and it's very sticky. It's highly sticky, right? And you follow this person through with a certain level of, of loyalty and frequency. And you will follow them through with a certain lifestyle, you literally grow up with this KOL as the person goes from teen to you know, motherhood to parenthood to be married, yeah, so, that kind of KOL thing I think is probably going to be a lot more common. A very good case study of this, I think you can refer to this Singaporean lady her name is Xia Xue.

Speaker 1 51:59
I did hear about her.

Speaker 2 52:04
Yes. Okay. So she was I think the early early...she was almost like generation one of KOL marketing, right? Where she came from the blogging...

Speaker 1 52:15
When it was like, first blogspot..

Speaker 2 52:18
Yeah, correct. First Gen. Her presentation method, her persona hasn't changed that much, despite her life stage evolution. Right. She is obviously married already, she has kids now, you know, she's a mother. And you know, she's kind of obviously moved on to different life stage, you know as she should.

Speaker 1 52:43

Yeah.

Speaker 2 52:44
But working with her means you need it to publicly fit your branding, your content, your way of communicating to match your audience. And I think more and more, so I think this is probably going to be a trend probably in the next five years or so that big companies will probably have to start to bend towards fitting their content into what the KOLs generally then need to talk stylistically, and things like that. So the KOL might say, okay, I will stick to your brand identity, I will stick to you know, obviously, I can't change your brand logo, I can't change your packaging. But the way you talk about your product, the way your brand might appear, will probably then be more diluted. As you speak to more and more different KOLs. I think that's probably going to be one of the biggest challenges in terms of how corporations need to have regain back control from from this area. Yeah.

Speaker 1 53:45
Yes. Sorry. I was just saying that do you think that more organizations in the banking industry are also going to follow this, are they going to start going more into this, the more corporate organizations?

Speaker 2 54:02
So banking is interesting, in a sense that it's very slow to ride on any waves of innovation. That's why like FinTech is disrupting us left right center. To be honest, at this point in time, I do see that we are getting into that already. I do see that. Even more traditional, you know, industries like banking are already starting to look into you know, being more present on social media. And being on social media requires a certain way of engagement, which is not so traditional because now that I looked into our corporate website, which is kind of a little bit still quite serious, versus how we communicate on Facebook, how we communicate on Instagram, and things like that there is a little bit of divergence already. Like on Instagram, and I mean, just generally on social media, it's very lifestyle, it talks to you a little bit more personally rather than, hey, I'm a bank or consumer. But that's still okay. But I don't quite see banks yet have to go to the FMCG level of working with KOLs. I don't quite see that yet. But, the very fact with that is certain publications that work with banks. For example, if you work with World of Buzz, for example, yeah, for example, MGAG, or 9GAG and things like that, you start to see that we don't necessarily get to keep the way of...we don't necessarily get to keep or get to dictate the way we talk. Or the language anymore, the tonality. So you're starting to see, like I said, a little bit of bending towards how the channels or how the KOLs, or the so called assets you want to use dictate the way you communicate. And this is, I think, gonna be a huge problem with, again, going back to integration exercise, right? How do you integrate something, apart from this visual and branding identity when you need to manage so many different styles of communication out there? Because you want to optimize your outreach? That's probably going to be a massive challenge. I think. On top of all the existing challenges.

If you think about it, I think we're already slowly seeing, yeah, starting to see more lifestyle related things. Very oddly enough, I don't think it's just Malaysia. Or at least maybe it's just me, I don't know. If you look at an article, and you say, five things you should know. Yeah, it's like, oh, I'm gonna read five things, and I'm gonna be done. A lot of the social media driven channels kind of use that right, or other, they always give you a very lifestyle comedic twist. And then you slowly, you start to see brands kind of shifting towards that lifestyle, cognitive driven, kind of an area, I think more and more so you will start to see brand, because the product people, the agencies, if they want to talk about their product in a certain way, they start going down this route, it might not necessarily jive with how the organization as a whole want to move towards, or because you need to hit your KPIs, you start to branch out branch out branch, and it will start to splinter quite a lot more I feel in the future. So I think without that idealistic setup that I mentioned to you, it's probably going to get worse. Yeah, I yeah. I don't really have a very optimistic view of integrating because not many big companies are willing to spend. That's probably another bigger... but we talked about that problem. Yeah, right.

Speaker 1   58:17
Yes, we did. We covered a lot, actually. Yeah, we covered most of the major barriers. That was my last question. So if you would like to add anything else please feel free.

Speaker 2   58:30
No, I think, yeah, I think I've covered, yeah, I don't know if I managed to answer most of your questions.

Speaker 1   58:37
Actually you covered quite a lot for me today. Thank you so much. I enjoyed this discussion a lot. I wish I could contribute more, but my job is to let you speak.

Speaker 2   58:51
Yeah, sure. I mean, I would love to hear your point of view as well. I mean, you mentioned that you came from an advertising slash marketing communication background, I guess, what's your view on now? What's your view on this challenge that we have? I don't think it's just Malaysia. Obviously, Malaysia is your focus area. But I think just genuinely corporations are probably facing this challenge. I'd love to hear what what your thoughts are on this area.

Speaker 1   59:16
I'm still researching it. I can't disclose it yet, because I'm collecting data. So I am still in the midst of figuring out what the final conclusion would be. But this is a topic that has always piqued my interest when I've been working also in advertising. So when I started doing my MBA with APU this is why I decided to pick it as a topic from my dissertation. And I thought if there is any way that some of these issues can be able to be overcome. Like what are the underlying causes maybe of these issues?

Speaker 2   1:00:08
But I think because you also came from an agency background and I also came from, for the longest time from the agency background, I think the problem that we will also have is we don't necessarily have access, or rather the agencies that work with these organizations, with big organizations, big corporations, they don't necessarily get a) the level of access, where you talk to the most important people in organizations that dictates this kind of strategy. So one is access. The other one is time, they aren't necessarily given the right amount of time, as well, by the higher level people. I don't mean this as a disrespect to the people you deal with, like the brand manager or the product manager. But the problem with working with them on a consistent level is they're always very tactical in nature. They don't necessarily have the long term view of how this specific campaign, this specific product launch is going to actually affect how the larger company is supposed to present itself to the consumer. And I think that's a huge challenge on the agency side. The other side of the argument would be for agencies to consistently push for this kind of conversation, because I think when you reach that level of conversations, I don't know if your dissertation will probably also include some agency side findings, as well, is for constantly for them to just push for these kind of conversations to take place at the servicing level. Where you always talk to the chiefs of the comms, the chiefs of strategy, you know, the chiefs of the people who manage the entire corporate identity, yeah, then you will get results like McDonald's and Leo Burnett. I'm pretty sure they work very closely with the chiefs and kind of just people in the organization.

Speaker 1   1:02:15
The relationship takes time to build trust.

Speaker 2   1:02:23
It's not just about building on trust, because a lot of companies build on 'how much savings can you give me?'

Speaker 1   1:02:29
But you trust that the savings can be given you see, you trust that the goals will be achieved. You have faith in that.

Speaker 2   1:02:43
Yeah. Until the agency sends the invoice or send the quotation. Then it's like, 'yeah, I trust you so much, how can you give me a discount?'

Speaker 2   1:02:54
Yeah, I'm pretty sure you're familiar with that. Yeah. Hopefully, it's helpful. I think, you know, after this, if you have any kind of further areas, you want to check and discuss, more than happy to have email exchanges. So yeah, I don't think I've kind of much more else to add any more. I think I've covered comms, I've covered how product

verticals work, I've also covered the argument about revenue and kind of costs versus profit. And yeah, bottom line with this, how important is it to build brand value in this kind of areas as well.

Speaker 1   1:03:52
I will definitely keep in touch with you. Please feel free to keep in touch with me as well. You have my email. So yeah.

Speaker 2   1:06:03
But yeah, I mean, all best, good luck with your the rest of your dissertation? Um, I'm not sure if you want to, because I think you're primarily talking to, because what, from what I've heard, you're primarily looking for people who are working in organizations slash companies. Yeah. But if you do want to talk to someone from I don't know, you know, agency people, but if you want to talk to them, that person might connect you with him. If he's interested to talk to you. If you are, I can help you to connect you with him? Yeah, if you're interested.

Speaker 1   1:06:49
I will let you know if I am interested. I might ask my supervisor, but so far, my primary objective is just to look at organizations and the marketing communication side of this whole area.

Speaker 2   1:07:03
Okay, okay. But yeah, I think from our organization, yeah, you can probably see what the challenges are. Am I your first interview?

Speaker 1   1:07:15
No, no, no.

Speaker 2   1:07:16
Okay. Okay. Is it consistent? Are the challenges, some points overlap?

Speaker 1   1:07:23
Some points overlap, while some others are surprisingly very different actually.

Speaker 2   1:07:30
I see. Yeah. I think yeah, I think it's probably very good that I'm not straying too far. There are some overlaps.

Speaker 1   1:07:38
There's a lot of overlapping, but there's also an issue you're starting to see. There's a lot of things, which you say, okay, as a researcher, this is what I'm looking for, which is great. So thank you. Hopefully this information will benefit someone.

Speaker 2   1:07:57
I'm pretty sure it will, yeah, it's very good to have these kinds of conversations, I think not just for companies, but definitely for agencies as well, because they are one half of that equation. It's interesting, because...

Speaker 1   1:08:11
Yeah, in the academic world, actually, there's a lot on the agency side. So a lot of people have done this barrier to IMC, from the agency perspective, but there is little work on the client side, from organizations, from marketers, and from what they face. And this is why I chose to do the other side of the equation to see what people from that side have to say.

Speaker 2   1:08:38
I see. I think, probably my final point to you is the large scale organizations that we talk about, right, they are probably bogged down by a lot of legacy setup issues in terms of how the organization is structured. That makes it very hard to...if you've always been specialized already, I think, you've always diverged. I think to converge back again, is quite a Herculean task for most kind of big organizations. So I think that's probably the last point I'll bring to you.

Speaker 1   1:09:11
I'll take note of that. Yeah.

Speaker 2   1:09:13
Yeah. Because startups, have a great integrated marketing campaign, right? They talk about the same thing and things like that, but like big organizations always struggle probably because of legacy as well. Yeah. The history of the company. You know, how they're set up, how the departments and divisions are set up, how the call centers are tracked.

Speaker 1   1:09:35
Yeah even down to how HR works.

Speaker 2   1:09:40
Ah thank you very much, that too. But yeah, legacy issues. I think there's a lot of legacy baggage that is kind of bogging the...yeah. So that will be like the last point I wanted to bring up with you. All right. Organization stuff. Yeah. So thank you. Sorry. Sort of slightly overran.

Speaker 1   1:10:00
Not a problem for me personally, I enjoyed this discussion very much. So, thank you so much. Do stay safe, do reach out to me if anything, I will be looking through this interview. I'm sure I'll discover more new points by listening again, so yeah, thank you.

Speaker 2   1:10:20
So thank you, Victoriya for having a session very good discussion, definitely given me a bit of thought of revisiting some of my earlier beliefs as well. Thank you so much, Victoriya, was a great pleasure talking to you. So all the best with our dissertation, and yeah, feel free to reach out. Hopefully, things will go smoothly for you and yeah, to keep safe and hopefully.

Speaker 1   1:10:48
Okay. All right. Good bye.

Interviewee #5

SPEAKERS
Speaker 2 (Interviewee), Speaker 1 (Researcher)

Speaker 1 00:03
So I just like, want to know a little bit about yourself, like, how many years of experience have you actually had in your field?

Speaker 2 00:14
Okay. A lot actually. So I started working in 2011. So that's what 10 years now.

Speaker 1 00:27
Around 10 years. Yes. And your organization belongs to the education industry? Correct?

Speaker 2 00:36
My current organization? yes.

Speaker 1 00:39
Okay. Alright, so then I will start with my main questions, I will just reiterate what I already put in my participant information form. So basically, research often defines integrated marketing communications as an audience centric business process of strategically managing and coordinating stakeholders, content, channels, and brand communication results. However, I'm really interested to know what is your personal understanding of the term integrated marketing communications?

Speaker 2 01:18
Okay, in my opinion, yes, IMC is definitely very important. And, of course, ideally, that's the best thing to use in all organizations or agencies for that matter, so that you get proper direction and consistent collaterals across the board. However it is quite tricky and challenging. Like, for example, especially if you belong to a group of companies, like in my scenario, the group owns multiple companies. And, by multiple I mean, anything more than 10 is already a headache, you know? So imagine creating an IMC, for 50 companies or 100 companies that belong to the same group, it is almost always impossible. So it's a big challenge. But if the company is smaller, I believe the smaller the company, it's very much easy to do the IMC and it should be done. Ideally, that's my opinion.

Speaker 1   02:36

Okay. Understood. So my next question would then be if it's possible for you to just very briefly, tell me, how does your organization go about integrating its marketing communication with the companies?

Speaker 2   02:57

So usually what happens is, we normally have a theme, or a direction at the start of the year, which of course, stems from the sales direction as well. So because what we have to decide on what the overarching message or the theme is, in order to get our message out, right, in, of course, various different formats, which at the end of the day will produce results.

Speaker 1   03:32

Yeah.

Speaker 2   03:34

So but in order for this to happen, of course, communication needs to be streamlined across multiple departments. So sales has to tell us what targets do they have in mind, what numbers are they lacking? Is it the international market that they're more concerned about? Or is it the local market? Or are we looking at it like in a totally global scale, so they have to give us some, some facts and factors that they are concerned about. And then we have to align those into our marketing team for the year to of course, meet the objectives and produce results. So that's how it starts about.

Speaker 1   04:11

Okay, thank you. That's very comprehensive.

Speaker 2   04:14

And another important thing, when we're doing this IMC of course, another very important department that we have to consider is the finance department. Because we need to talk about budgeting. Definitely. And of course, the outputs are going to be a lot right, digital, physical, statics, billboard, gantry, media, radio, television, those kind of things. So we need to get a budget from them and see whether we can work within the budget and if we are going to exceed, then of course, there needs to be a justification for that as well.

Speaker 1   04:51

Okay, understood. All right. That answers my question. So the next one would be, what are the barriers that you currently face when integrating marketing communications in your organization?

Speaker 2   05:05

Okay, so there's a few, there's a few. One biggest one is when people, by people, I

mean, either individuals or departments, who tend to work in silos. Okay, see now, when you create an IMC, there's no...how do you put it? There is no one person who is in power or authority when it comes to IMC because it's from various departments, right? So, in various departments, you have their own managers, you have their own directors, you have their own supervisors. So when you do something collaborative, like the IMC, that definition gets blurred. So if people think that they are all right, in which most cases are, so that creates a lot of rift. So working in silos basically just disrupts the entire IMCs.

Speaker 1 06:06
Would you say that these, this barrier of working in silos is particular to your organization? Or would you say that maybe other organizations also face this, even other industries?

Speaker 2 06:20
It definitely happens in my organization obviously, it's not everyone, it's just, you can pick like the very few people who sometimes cause problems. But I think this is quite common. Even when I was in my previous company, it was an advertising agency media house, basically, even then, there were some people who worked in silos, and it was much smaller, it was not an SME, like I am in now. It was way smaller. And they had a niche market that clients were all from one industry only, even then they had silos. So I don't think it's about which industry or how big or small the companies, but I think that there are tendencies, if it's about your own personal characters, you know, and people you meet, so I guess it exists everywhere, across the board.

Speaker 1 07:12
Understood. And apart from that, are there any other barriers?

Speaker 2 07:17
Ah yes, plenty.

Speaker 1 07:20
Okay, because I'm taking notes also.

Speaker 2 07:23
Yeah, no problem. So another one would be what I call organizational communication problems. So there is either no communication, or miscommunication between each team or departments. So this usually happens when whoever is like, maybe those upper management, who are giving us the direction might communicate differently to different teams. So nobody gets the same message. So imagine you're supposed to be working on project A, two teams are supposed to be working on project A, but team one gets a different message and team two gets a different message. And after all that hard work, we end up with two different projects. And then we are bickering among each other. Because 'that's what my boss told me to do', you know, but so this,

yeah, this comes from above. But if they could just stick to one briefing, maybe, you know, that's what an IMC is right, you get everybody at the same time, yeah, insights so that you don't avoid all these separate meetings. If it's an IMC briefing, then everybody should be at the same time at the same place, getting the same message.

Speaker 1 08:51
Oh, this is actually why I'm also researching this.

Speaker 2 08:55
But this, this is difficult, because like I said, right, let's just take an MMC. An MMC has like over 20 to 30 different departments, and each department has a lot of team members. So what they could do is just pick one or two people from each team to be present for the IMC meeting. But some people don't even bother because it involves a lot of manpower and coordination to just get a time and date where everybody is available. So a lot of people rather just not do it. They just do it separately. I'll do it this time you do it that time it's fine. So this is where the miscommunication happens.

Speaker 1 09:35
So that's barrier number two.

Speaker 2 09:38
Yes. So barrier number, three. Number three is actually unclear, or inconsistent messaging, which is related to barrier number two. So like I said, Team A gets a different message and Team B gets a different message. Okay, I'll keep that short. And, okay. And another thing about this inconsistent messaging is also related to the output. So for example, when it comes to creative content writing, it definitely depends on individuals. So if one person were to do the entire set of collaterals, through messaging, and the branding is going to be the same, because this person writes the same thing, but if you, let's say, for example, you have five or six different content writers, and you sub each project to them, all of them are not going to write the same thing, they definitely have their own way of writing. So this is good. In terms of creativity, this is definitely good. But in terms of maintaining brand and messaging consistency, it's quite, it will create quite a chaos, which is why an IMC is important, because during the briefing, they will clearly give you guidelines of what are the tone to use? What's the direction of the messaging? What are the call to actions that we should include? And how the style should be incorporated? Or be casual, a mix of both? You know, those kind of things? Okay, shall I continue? I have a few more.

Speaker 1 11:46
Oh you have a few more barriers!

Speaker 2 11:48
Yeah, I mean, they're all in I mean, they have to, obviously interrelated between each other. So you can pick and choose how you want to, yeah, filter them. So this one is a

repetition to my introduction. So this is a major factor, it's totally time consuming. And the problem is, a lot of people lack, they don't have the knowledge of how important an IMC is. So hence, they find this a waste of time la, especially those who are in the sales team, for example, because their objective is just to get the money in, they don't, they don't really care about what we write or what we do. But that's what they say initially, but when they see something, and they don't like it, that's when they start communicating, you know?

Speaker 1   12:39
Yes. Understand.

Speaker 2   12:42
Yeah. Okay. So one more, one more barrier would be, I would say the lack of specialists. Okay, yeah. So some people are jack of all trades, master of none. So they got a knowledge of everything you know, but honestly, especially in my field, in the digital marketing sphere, I am a person who believes you cannot be a master of everything. See, when I even took the digital marketing exam, they test you in multiple fields, right, there's social media marketing, there is website optimization, search engine optimization, so many different fields, email marketing, and all that. But I am a person who believes a certain person can only specialize in one or just a few of one of these many, many areas of digital marketing. So my niche is definitely social media marketing, and email marketing. And also my company, we have an elaborate team. So somebody else does the SEO rankings. Somebody else does the website optimization, somebody else does the website content. So if you break it down, and you have specialists for each of, not even all, at least most of these areas, then I think you would fare better because this person really understands the depth of what they're you know, known for, rather than having one person doing it all. Then it will be a bit messy la. Like I said, you can't be good at every single thing.

Speaker 1   14:22
Yeah. Yeah.

Speaker 2   14:27
Okay. So, yes, so, one more thing that is a barrier would be a company's culture. So this is difficult. Some companies have good senior management who are willing to listen and who encourage employees a lot and they create a very positive vibe at the workplace. Unfortunately, a lot of companies are also known for their toxic and negative culture. So if, yeah, if it's toxic and negative, then we definitely, even if you have an IMC briefing, I think everybody will be just yelling and shouting at each other. So that is one very good, a very important factor to consider when it comes to the IMC. Okay, and the other one would be openness to creativity. So how open minded are you? I mean, you're a designer, I think you should know what I'm trying to get at.

Speaker 1 15:33
I do.

Speaker 2 15:34
Yeah, I have so many years of experience in my previous company, and also my current company of working with designers. Let it be creative designers or let it be with video graph designers or graphic motion those, anyone. The most important thing for these designers is definitely their creativity. And, unfortunately, creativity is very subjective. And if you are running a company, or if you are a supervisor, or if you're in any management role, you need, I feel you need to be a bit open about creativity. Because it's definitely in your mind. In a managerial position, in your mind you have an idea of how the messaging should be or how the creative should be. Yeah. So they, they already have something in their mind, right? Oh, it will look cool, if I have like a student in the background, like a sports car in the background, or something like that, but when you tell the designer, okay, this is the message, I want you to create an artwork or a video based on this script or the message, the designer is 100% not going to think like you in most cases, yeah, of course, the niche, it becomes the like, if it's really got nothing else, the elements would be the same. But if it's an open broad topic, like just, for example, sports, every designer thinks in a very different way. And they might think that, you know, using certain elements will bring up the character or you know, what they aim to do is make sure the collateral stands out. So when somebody sees it, they go like, wow, and then they don't forget it. Definitely! I mean, when I'm in the advertising line, that's what we aim to do. So we don't have one idea. We have 100 ideas, and then we'll shortlist the five best ones, that the clients would be wowed by, you know, those kind of things. But when it comes to corporate companies, and you have in-house teams, for example, it's more difficult to do this, especially when management are not open to a lot of new ideas. So they are very rigid, they have a lot of constraints in how to do their elements. And they prefer the old school type of marketing or branding. So even if it works, I would say that it limits a lot of freedom to a lot of designers, and that might cause pent up anger and frustration. So in the long run, it might not be so good, because then you will see a lot of these creative people leaving and that's the last thing we want, right? So yeah, that is a very important factor. And one more barrier would be, I think, if you choose to have an internal or external set of employees. So what I mean is if you have an in house team or an outhouse team. So of course, they both work, but they both have their pros and cons. So if you have outhouse staff, if you hire your own agency, you will definitely have an IMC, that is a definite thing that will happen. Yeah, you will have a client brief. You will have assets. Everything is organized and in order. The only problem is... what do you call that? Procurement time might be a lot longer because you have to communicate with somebody who's not even in your office, and you can't just be like hey, open it now, show me, do this tweak. No, it all has to be via emails and meetings. They probably have 100 other clients to take care of. So they go by their project base and it's all you know, according. So that could be a hindrance. So for in house, in house, of course it has it, it has its pros la, pros would be, you can definitely

communicate to your team member faster. They're just there. And you can get the product outcome much faster as well, which is good. But it's also bad in a sense that I think a lot of people might burn out faster. Because, yeah, if that person is sitting right next to you, you probably get he or she to change the same collateral 10 times in a day.

Speaker 1 20:54
Yes.

Speaker 2 20:56
It's exhaustive. Because you don't put any deep thought in what you're going to change first, you know, the amendments, you just want to see, "I want to see this, I want to see that, oh, no, let's go back to this". So it's not clear, you're confused. You're going to confuse other people, and then they just gonna get frustrated. So yeah, there are pros and cons with in and out house staffing. Okay, I think the last one is related to my introduction as well. I really think an IMC is more challenging for bigger companies. Yeah. Just for them to get it, get everybody together. You have enough barriers?

Speaker 1 21:43
Yes. Wonderful. Thank you.

Speaker 2 21:47
This are all that I can think of off the top of my head. But yes, go on if you have other questions.

Speaker 1 21:55
I do have other questions related to them. Actually. The second one was, how do you think some of these barriers can be overcome? Maybe you have some solutions in mind.

Speaker 2 22:07
Honestly, right. Now, ever since the pandemic has begun, and we are all working from home, there's no technological constraint. You can have 1000 people in one room. It's not a problem. Right? So I think an IMC is way much easier to do when you're not in front of each other honestly. Because you pen your thoughts down before the meeting. And then when you go there, everyone has a chance to speak. Because I also feel, especially in Asian culture, a lot of Asians are still not open to the idea of speaking out loud, or expressing their opinions or their views. And this is not good for IMC because if there's, if I'm giving you a message or an idea, and you're from the finance or the sales team, or an entirely different department, and you have your thoughts about how this would work, you need to tell me, I'm not gonna know if you don't talk. Yeah. So I think this solution would be to have a digital IMC whether you're in the office or whether you're working from home, I think it'll get more people to talk. And especially if their cameras are turned off, right. They have this better confidence level of talking,

and they don't mind expressing their ideas. Or, another solution would be for each department to have their pre IMC meeting first. So they gather all the thoughts and opinions of their team members and during the IMC brief, the project, the team leader or the manager from that particular department or team represents his or her entire team and presents to the management. So that would also be a seamless communication. So then when they finally decide on the IMC, the IMC can be passed on to each heads of departments to be passed on to their own teams, which works as well. I don't see, don't see why it wouldn't, make everybody's lives easier.

Speaker 1 24:19
Okay. All right. So then, my next question would be actually, in your opinion, which barriers to IMC do you actually expect to encounter in your organization within the next five years?

Speaker 2 24:40
Next five years. Ok, let me see, like I said, working in silos. It's there, but I feel it's ending now, because we are all working from home. So I think people realize that you're dependent on technology to send things across. So not a lot of people choose to ignore you or you know, things like that. But it works the other way too. There are people, once you start this work from home thing, they just disappear. They don't reply to emails, HR doesn't know where they are, they don't clock in or clock out. Yeah. So it works both ways. But yeah, it depends on how you want to look at it. Let me see. Okay, so unorganized directions or inconsistent messaging, like I told you, I think I foresee that happening. It's a bit tricky to avoid that. Especially like I said, if you have a huge team of writers or designers, and they all obviously have their own skill set, and very vast and different, right, they all have their own style and flair. Correct. So I see that happening. I also see that we will be reducing the number of external vendors or external staff. Yeah, because it has been proven, at least in the current organization that I am, having in house team works much better and more efficient in terms of time and also manpower to be honest, I mean, if you're going to be paying external vendors, are not exactly cheap anyway. So you might as well be paying a staff every month, and it probably comes up to the same or less, to be honest.

Speaker 1 26:49
Yeah. So going more in house.

Speaker 2 26:54
Yes. And another thing I foresee happening is definitely very much challenging to do the IMC itself. Because the company is still expanding, every year, there is somebody new that they acquire or buy or takeover. So it's difficult to keep up sometimes. And see, the problem is another thing is company culture. So it's different when you set up your own company, how you work, and they all understand how your mindset is, and it's easier for them to get along. But it's really very much challenging, I've experienced this, I've seen it with my own eyes so I know, when you acquire an existing company.

And they I mean, you can't blame them, they are so used to their own style of management. So now when they have a new boss for the lack of better terms, and definitely the working culture is going to be at least slightly different. They, a lot of them might not be able to digest it or they cannot get comfortable with it. So usually what I see when a lot of... companies acquire existing companies, in the first three months, a lot of people leave from the new company. It's either you adapt or you don't. So you become very uncomfortable. And then you just give up and leave, rather "have another job than work for somebody who doesn't get me you know?"

Speaker 1 28:31
What do you think COVID 19 will do to IMC, in companies and organizations. How will it continue affecting it the next two years?

Speaker 2 28:46
The plan itself, like I said, I think it will affect it for the better. Because we are working from home like so I feel the communication is strengthened. And people don't feel how do you put...they don't feel like they're put in the spot or they need to make a huge presentation. I think people are quite comfortable from home and not showing their faces but letting people hear their voices. I think it could be a game changer of all for the better. I really hope.

Speaker 1 29:21
Okay, that was my last question, I got all my answers. Yeah, that's that's it. I don't want to take too much of your time. And thank you so much for your comprehensive answers. I actually got a lot of notes and I got a lot of interesting points for me to look back and reflect on.

Speaker 2 29:43
No problem at all. If you think of anything new or something develops after we finish, you just feel free to WhatsApp me or email me that I can answer those as well. No problem.

Speaker 1 29:53
I definitely will. I'll stop the recording now.

Interviewee #6

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

marketing, organization, barriers, brand, market, work, important, marketing communications, integrated marketing communication, planning, campaign, integrated marketing, budget, company, product, integrating, marcom, creative, terms, communication

SPEAKERS
Speaker 2, Speaker 1

Speaker 1 00:00
Okay, all right. Okay, so could you please tell me about your current job title?

Speaker 2 00:07
Okay, so I am currently an associate manager in charge of marcom. So marketing communications.

Speaker 1 00:17
Okay, great. And how many years of experience have you had actually, in marcom?

Speaker 2 00:28
So I would say now it'll be coming up to six years total experience in marketing.

Speaker 1 00:40
Can you please let me know which industry does your organization belong to?

Speaker 2 00:44
Tech.

Speaker 1 00:50
Very interesting. So um, basically, I'm researching barriers to integrated marketing, communication. And research often defines integrated marketing communication as something that is an audience centric business process of strategically managing and coordinating stakeholders, content channels, and brand communication problem results. However, what actually interests me is to know what is your personal understanding of the term integrated marketing communications?

Speaker 2 01:26
Okay, so maybe, if I were to kind of describe what that meant, meaning that whenever an organization tries to sell a product, or tries to sell a service, or anything like that, marketing will always be part of that process. So what I understand is that, you know, sometimes some brands will kind of say like, okay, marketing is just kind of a side,

maybe like a side objective or something, that's not so important. But when it's integrated into your, into your company, it's a very, very important thing, because you know, that you need marketing to sell your product or to, or create awareness or to attract consumers or customers or whatever. So that's how I would I would kind of define integrated marketing. Yeah.

Speaker 1 02:16
Okay, cool. The next question would then be like, if you could just very briefly and as gentle as possible, tell me how your organization goes about integrating marketing communications.

Speaker 2 02:31
Okay. So usually, how we will go about is, there's many different ways. So obviously, my company it's either to do with a product launch, or if it's a brand new campaign, or if it's something to do with, even just like social media, marketing, will always be involved in the first step, because it's important that as a tech company, so people will need to use these products or use our services or even to attract more people to use our product. It's important to already plan with marketing from beginning. So what we do is that we kind of plan, okay, what's, what's the product? Or was the service that we want to market? And then we would then go into brainstorming, okay, so what's the best way to go about it? Is it best to go with, you know, what's the best marketing channel with, and then also going, you know, trying to decide who is the right audience for this product, or this service or what have you. So then what we will do is, then from that, we will then create a marketing plan, and the marketing plan, and proposal once that is approved, we will then work with either our kind of our creative team, or we even work with an agency that execute these plans, and then roll them out in the market, basically. So in a nutshell, if I can make it really simple, that's basically the way we do it at my organization.

Speaker 1 03:50
Okay. Very clear to me. Thanks. So moving on to the general questions, or the main questions? What barriers do you currently face when actually integrating these marketing communication practices in your organization?

Speaker 2 04:09
It's a really good question. So I would say one of the biggest objectives, one of the biggest obstacles, always things like, number one is budget. So budget is always a big thing. You know, it's always trying to figure out not to say its not enough budget, but it's the same like you know, always kind of figure out which you know, where the budget is best allocated for. Is it best for creatives, is it best used for hiring an agency is it best used for digital marketing or is best used for PR? So I think it's always important to always kind of, you know, figure that out, because that's always where kind of, a lot of people kind of, kind of always find a bit of not difficulty, but that's where you find a lot of obstacles in terms of making decisions now, obviously, you know,

that's part of the process, right? Yep, you, can always figure out what's the best option for you. I would say on top budget, second of all will also be maybe things like competition. So I think, you know, when you roll out, it's always it, you know, you always need to know what your competition is doing at the time. So you know, like, not rolling out a similar product. Or if you are, you want to make sure that you, you answer why your product is better than your competitors product, or service or whatever they're trying to sell to you at the time. Yeah. So I would say those are, those are two of the main things. I think I can think of that. That the main obstacles when it comes to marketing? Yeah.

Speaker 1 05:39
Okay. Would you say that? That is the biggest barrier? Or have you faced any other barriers that trump, these barriers that you've mentioned?

Speaker 2 05:48
Um, I would say that maybe in my experience, those are, those are some of the biggest, but whether or not they're part of something bigger, maybe it's things like, I think you can guess then, you know, like, you could say, planning, you know, planning for a big organization always takes a lot of work. There's a lot of stakeholders that you need to work with. And I think also with marketing, right, because you said integrated marketing? Yes. The other aspect of that is that it involves a lot of different people to be part of this, this project or to be part of a campaign, because you have, you know, creative teams, I'm sure you know, teams, you have planning, you have strategy, so everyone always kind of has their differences in terms of how things should happen, or how they should roll out. And I think, you know, kind of trying to find compromise is always a bit of a challenge as well. So I think your planning is definitely one of it as well, I think that's all I can think of right now.

Speaker 1 06:46
Okay, would you say that these barriers are specific to your organization?

Speaker 2 06:54
No, I think, you know, like, comparing, you know, previous jobs I've had in my marketing or even in advertising as well, I think you can always see that, like a trend where, you know, you have these really big ideas, right. But then because of not having enough or you know, you need to kind of not spend a certain on this thing, or you get given a certain budget that you need to work with, you realize that is a challenge that's always been around for a lot of people, obviously, having more money means you have more channels to market your product or your things to, but that's not to say it's not a bad thing, sometimes, you know, when you have a limited budget, it makes you more creative to figure out how to sell your brand, or how to sell your, your company, right, or your or your or your platform or whatever. In terms of also I think, planning and working with other people and stakeholder management, I think that's always the issue with wherever you go. Right, is that you always have

people have different opinions of what's the best campaign? Yeah. So I think I think that's something that's definitely not unique to just where I work, I think it's something that you can find everywhere, basically.

Speaker 1 08:01
I see, how do you think that these barriers that you've mentioned can be overcome? Or can they be overcome at all?

Speaker 2 08:10
You can't overcome but with something like, I'll go back to budget, right, if you're working with it, if you work for a company that has a small budget, right? That's not to say that you can't market anything, right. So it's not different ways you can find to market things. So I think it's up to the team or the other, or the marketing team, or, or whoever, or the agency to be creative and finding, okay, we have this same money, or we can't spend too much money, but we need to find a way to market this brand, right? So it's up to you to kind of be creative, and find ways that are cost effective. You know, that's what's so great about social media, right, is that you obviously you can spend money to market right and it helps a lot. But there's also a lot of great ways to be able to market your brand without spending money and then also kind of all kind of having a very light, very tight budget as well that's a great thing. In terms of kind of overcoming barriers with like, working with other stakeholders and other people. I think it's is definitely possible. But I think it's also important that then, you know, whenever you go into a campaign or you're going to brainstorm or you go into planning with different teams, you always have a set kind of guideline or maybe like a set agenda that your company follows to. So that at least everyone is also on the same page. Okay, is this campaign in tone with what our brand stands for? Or does it does it kind of relate to our brand, our tone of voice how we talk how consumers perceive our brand, how we market ourselves to consumers in the past? You know, it's kind of like if you think about it, right if you were Nike, and you know Nike always kind of, you know, sells sport shoes, right? And it's about kind of high performance, athletics and stuff, right? But then all of a sudden, you start talking about you know, something completely different, like I don't know, like talking about toothpaste or something right? It doesn't it fit. Yeah. So then it's always important to understand that. Or it makes sure that your whole team is always in line or aware that what's the messaging that you're trying to give off? So there's not so much like friction when it comes to planning these things?

Speaker 1 10:20
Yeah. All right. Okay. So in your opinion, like, what various two degrading marketing communications Do you expect to encounter in your organization? Maybe within the next five years?

Speaker 2 10:38
Um, definitely, I think, competition, I think, you know, now that there is a lot of startups,

and there's a lot of kind of ways for people to start their own business. That is definitely something that you have to be careful of is that, you know, someday there might be a brand that does what you're doing better than you or people might like another brand more than you. So it's always good to be aware of what's happening in the market, who are the new players? And also kind of like, what is going on? And then for that being said, is also things like, new technology. So I'm sure you know, right? Like, with marketing, obviously, there's so many different ways to market your brand, right? And obviously, not about kind of digital and social media. So it's also really good to also always be sure that you are aware of what is the new kind of formats that people kind of consume, media and marketing information, right? Because I think if you have not thought of that, then that's also an issue that we're not kind of keeping up to times. So I think yeah, that's really important as well. Yeah.

Speaker 1   11:49
Okay, so, um, actually, if you have nothing else to add, that is the end of my questions. Those were the main questions that I wanted to ask, I was really concerned with which barriers you face and if you have found a way to overcome them throughout your career.

Speaker 2 12:11
Okay, sure. I can't think of anything else I can add at the moment. I think that's all that's all right. Then you have any more questions that you need me to answer more than happy to.

Speaker 1   12:19
Yeah, I'll just let you know if anything, but yeah, that's pretty much it. And thank you so much for your time. So yeah, yeah, sure. happy to help. Okay. Yeah. Thanks.

Speaker 2   12:31
I send the form either tonight or tomorrow if I have time.

Speaker 1   12:32
Yes, please do. Thank you so much. helped me a lot. Thank you.

Interviewee #7

SPEAKERS
Speaker 2 (Interviewee), Speaker 1(Researcher)

Speaker 1   00:00
Okay, so actually, before I start with the main questions, I would just like to know a little bit more about yourself as in what is your current job title?

Speaker 2   00:16
My current job title is a marketing manager for baby and child care.

Speaker 1   00:21
Okay, wonderful. And how many years of experience have you actually had working in your field overall?

Speaker 2   00:34
That will be about 10 years? 10 plus years?

Speaker 1   00:38
Oh, okay. If your organization is in baby and childcare, could you please let me know which industry does it belong to?

Speaker 2   00:52
It belongs to the industry of diapers and, basically, essentially diapers and wipes.

Speaker 1   00:59
Okay. So, now, I'll start with the main questions of today's interview. So, going back to integrated marketing communications...in the academic world, researchers often define integrated marketing communications as an audience-centric business process of strategically managing and coordinating stakeholders content channels, and when communication problems results, however, what interests me to know is your personal understanding of the term integrated marketing communications?

Speaker 2   01:42
Right. So, I might not have a very structured answer. I'll put it the way we understand it, so, integrated marketing communication for us starts with the consumer at the center right. The way we look at it is the entire marketing has to influence the

consumer certainly. Be it through communication, be it through product experience, and be it through repeat purchases and so on. So, if we look at marketing, overall, we want consumers to do two things, one is recruit them into our brands. And second is to have them repeatedly purchasing our brands. Simply put, it's these two things, now our integrated marketing communication works with either of these objectives, it may be either one of them or it may be both of them. And why we call it integrated marketing communication, is because it involves multiple touch points with consumers, over which we are able to convey or communicate messages to them in order to influence their brand purchase decisions, or their category purchase decisions as well. So when when you ask me that, what does integrated marketing communication mean to me? To me, it would mean trying to find all consumer touch points over which I can communicate with my consumer and activating my marketing messages in all these touch points in the way that it's best received by the consumer.

Speaker 1   03:37
Okay, wonderful. That's very comprehensive. Thank you. So if you don't mind to let me know, in general, how does your organization actually go about integrating marketing communications?

Speaker 2   03:52
So again, with specifically with respect to marketing communications, there is of course, a broader picture. The campaigns and executions that we do. So the broader picture generally is to have...what is the... we ask ourselves the question, then what is the brand task? What is the brand's job to be done? Right? So if there's a specific brand job to be done, let's say, take, share or switch consumers from brand B to brand A, which is us, let's say it's the brand task. And then the project, long term plan, maybe two or three years over which we will be communicating certain messages to the consumer, in order to move them from brand B to brand A. I'm saying brand B to brand A, but it may so be that they have never used the category before and we are recruiting them into the category as well, depending on the category we are in, right? So that's the key task, with respect to the key plan task then it's broken down into a long term communication plan and the short term communication plan. So the long term communication plan, usually, the message is consistent, because it is, you're establishing that message for a very long period of time. And we believe that message will help us win versus our competition and convert consumers to us. That's why there is a long term plan and then there is a short term plan, the short term plan is more focused. So, let me go back to long term. So long term is focused on driving equity for the brand. And the short term is focused on more of engagement and tactical engagements and brand interaction creation. So, what is a short term? A short term is basically different methods through which we are being able to give a part of the communication to the consumer, while making it very exciting. And short term usually happens in bursts, it does not happen consistently, it is not an always 'on' plan, it is in bursts, usually in the short term burst, the integrated marketing communication has more number of legs to it. So it may start by below the line activities like in store

communication, and then transcend into digital where it will be communicating to the consumer through digital, multiple platforms, and then also going into e-commerce and trying to use e-commerce to communicate with consumers through the upper funnel strategy. And at the same time, the other leg, let's take TV, sometimes with TV, so we want to communicate with the consumer, so those are the various legs. On these legs, there is also like, for example, we sell diapers, right, so it's very important for us to have the mum experienced the product when she's coming into the category. So we do a lot of sampling, which is also an integrated marketing communication piece, where along with the sampling, we land our key messages with the consumer, the objective of the sampling is that we are confident that we have a good product. And thereby if we sampled a free sample, let's say with the consumer, then the next time the consumer will come back to buy our brand and our product. So that's the entire integrated marketing communication piece. So as typically our IMC or the integrated marketing communication, as we call it, as a core message that stays consistent across short term and long term. And then the long term is probably more, shall I say, an orthodox approach where we have a few set platforms and awareness building methods through which we drive our communication. But short term is more exploratory, it goes into multiple channels in order to drive the communication back to the consumer. Be it through product, be it through brand message on our TV assets or digital avenues. So that's how we treat IMC or integrated marketing in our company.

Speaker 2   08:17
Okay, thank you for that answer. That's very interesting to me, actually, it's very detailed. The next question would then be what barriers do you currently face when integrating marketing communication in your organization? With driving the core message, with everything that you have mentioned right now, are there any barriers that you encounter?

Speaker 2   08:40
Well, there are barriers that we face, I mean, there are consumer values, there are platform related barriers. And then there are brand barriers as well. So I'll talk about these separately. So the consumer barrier is that the consumer is not interested in buying the category at all. And you're trying to change the consumers habit into buying the category, which is not, usually it does not happen in baby care. Because if a consumer is not using a diaper for her baby, then what is she using, right? So that means it does not happen as much in baby care. But in categories, for example, when I was back in shampoos, a consumer may not be using a shampoo at all.

Speaker 2   09:28
Maybe a main audience does not use a shampoo, I'm just saying. So then how do you make it relevant for them? So that's the consumer barrier that we face, the second barrier that we face is in terms of brand. So here it is very relevant to any category where a consumer may not want to buy my brand for XYZ reasons. They may have

faced a product issue with my brand, that's why they don't want to buy it or they just are not aware about my brand and that's why they don't want to buy it. Or the third is that they are very happy with their existing brand. And there's no reason to move away from it. There's extreme loyalty with the current brand, right? So there are various brand related barriers that come in. So I spoke about consumer barriers, the brand barriers and then about platform barriers. The other barrier is also in terms of sometimes the, the creative assets that we create, so we create a asset for TV, it runs best on TV, but I can't put it up as an Instagram story. It's not as interactive on Instagram. So that's a asset barrier that comes in, in terms of the platform. And then there is also the piece where with respect to certain platforms, say for example, maybe on TikTok, okay, on TikTok, I don't know on TikTok, if there are first time mothers that I can target. So what is the right way to target mothers on TikTok, because TikTok, for the last two and a half years has come up in a big way. But their audience over there is expecting very different behaviors than what they will be expecting now, in YouTube or Facebook. So what is the right tonality? What is the right creative content to be created in order to communicate with these consumers? That's another platform barrier that I can think of. So off the top of my mind, these are the barriers, there may be more. But these are ones I can think of.

Speaker 1 12:20
Alright, thank you. I've noted them all down. Actually, which barrier would you say is the biggest one that you have so far encountered in your career?

Speaker 2 12:32
Um, I think the biggest barrier till date has been consumer inertia. So consumers say I'm happy with the current brand and use it. And that's the most tough one to change. Because over there, you have to really, like if it's a new category and you're targeting a new mom, you can quickly present yourself and she will accept you. But if you're going to a mom, who is already using a different brand of diapers, and then you go and say that look, why don't you use 'me'? It's very difficult to convince her in that case, because she's already bought in. And she's loyal to that brand. So consumer inertia is the biggest barrier. Consumers being happy with the existing brand. I think that's the toughest job. That's the toughest barrier to be able to break.

Speaker 1 13:21
Okay, I actually have a follow up question, because I'm very curious right now, why do you think, that some mothers, once they are loyal to a brand, why is it so hard for them to switch to another brand?

Speaker 2 13:36
Um so specifically my category, I mean, in the diaper category, what happens is, moms tend to have, generally, moms tend to have a higher loyalty than in other categories, because once something works for the baby, they don't want to experiment on the baby too much. Yeah, so if they feel that the baby's happy with

something, they will go the extra mile to ensure that they're not breaking anything in the process, you know, by experimenting with new things. Then it also becomes a function of the country that you're in. So for example, extremely price sensitive countries may take a call on lowering their loyalty level, but going for a maybe more affordable brand and so on. Yeah, that happens. But in general, in this category, the loyalty is very high, about 50% to 60% loyalty, but if you see maybe a soft drinks or shampoo category, the loyalty is 15% to 20% only. So in that sense the main reason is because the mom does not want to experiment and once the baby is happy, she's happy.

Speaker 1 14:51
Okay, that explains it. So how do you think that some of these barriers that you've mentioned just now, how do you think they can be overcome?

Speaker 2 15:02
So, for example, the barrier in terms of, shall I say, the consumer inertia, or them being happy, I think the best way to overcome this barrier is by again, in my category is by two things. One is by sampling your product to the consumer, possibly free sampling, such that they experience your product, and then realize that their baby is actually happy in this product as well. And then, once you've seeded that thought in their mind that they may be happy in your brand, your product as well, then the next time they visit a store, they may choose between the brand they already buy versus the brand that they will consider now. So that's, that's one way. And for that, you need to have a really good product. So I think the product helps in breaking this barrier. And of course, sampling is the execution style in order to reach out. The other way in which I think we can break this barrier is by word of mouth recommendation, by key influencers. So when I say influencers, I don't mean social media influencers alone. I also mean, that usually who does a mom talk to? Does she talk to her mother to get some feedback? Does she talk to her aunt? Does she talk to her sister? and how do we influence this entire word of mouth recommendation world that is around her. So can we influence everybody around her to recommend our brand instead of the brand that she's choosing? Because she holds a lot of trust with these people. And the more that these people recommend, the more our brands trust gets built with the mom, even if she's using a brand that she's happy with. So I think word of mouth recommendation, basically, social proof is what we call it. And the second is, in terms of sampling, sampling with a great product of course. These two things are for the brand inertia. On the platform, I think, platform inertia, not knowing how to handle a particular platform, because there are so many new platforms coming up. I think the best way is to keep training marketers, the more you train marketers on digital and the new things happening in digital, that's how they will best be able to leverage the new platforms. That's a more easy one. And then again, the third is with respect to consumer inertia to the category itself. It's not so much a diaper thing, but it's more of different categories, let's say, a perfume category or so I think over there again, the route to going in is perhaps by sampling to the consumers in a category where the

consumers are not interested, perhaps by sampling and giving them a taste of the category, you know, so then after that, they take a call on whether they want to go ahead. So that's how I think about the barriers to platform at a consumer at a brand.

Speaker 1 18:14
Um, you also mentioned about the brand barrier, how about that one? How can that be overcome? Is it also with sampling?

Speaker 2 18:23
Yeah, so I mean, the consumer barrier, I mentioned consumer platform and brand, when you said free sampling with products, and word of mouth recommendation, I meant at the brand level. So that's how you overcome a brand barrier. When I said consumer barrier to the category that, again, is through sampling of the category to the consumer, not the brand, but the category, just because your particular brand used, you submit your brand for evaluation by the consumer, and you stand a chance of recruiting them into the category and the brand. But again, that's that. And platform of course, by training, continued training marketers on how to best use platforms is that you're efficiently speaking and engaging with your consumers.

Speaker 1 19:12
Okay, all right, I've got that down. So the next question will then be with everything that is happening right now, in your opinion, which barriers to integrating marketing communications do you expect to encounter in your category, and in your organization in the next five years?

Speaker 2 19:31
In my category, it will definitely be a brand barrier. There will be brand barrier that is the consistent one that we will be facing, because it's a very saturated market. And just like I am talking to you about what I want to do about my brand, there are five other marketing managers and my competitors in Malaysia who will talk about their brands the same way right. So there's going to be a lot of competition in the market for because the size of prize is really high, and everybody's doing their own piece and pulling the consumer to themselves. And that's probably the most consistent one, the easier one, which may be consistent, but probably easier to solve is the platform barrier. Because as you keep educating marketers on how to leverage different platforms, they will be able to figure out how to solve for finding the right target audience in the right places, and how, what is the right, medium and the right content, assets, etc, to communicate with them. So I think these two will be the consistent ones. In my category, I don't imagine in my category, there should be too much of consumer barrier, because there they will anyways, be using that.

Speaker 1 20:50
Okay. All right, that answers my question perfectly. Well, I just have a last follow up question. And then I think we'll be actually be done, because you've answered all my

questions quite comprehensively. So I just have a question about content assets. Sometimes it's difficult to get the right content, content assets, as you mentioned, because they can be applied maybe on TV, but maybe not on Instagram. So on the creative side of this equation, how would you go about solving that problem?

Speaker 2   21:23
So the way we look at it really, right now, Victoriya, is that we look at a mix of, so we start with the brand task, from the brand task, we understand that what is the message we want to drive? Then we look at where do we want to drive this message? For example, if it's a consumer, who is a mum, then majority of the moms have a smartphone today. So do we really want to be on TV? So that is the first question we answer. So once we understand that, okay, the channels of communication where we want to be are x, y, and z, and they are not necessarily TV, then it gives us a sense of what kind of assets we want to create. But even over there, there is a bit more layering, a YouTube content will be different from my Instagram story. So the other part that we use over here is that the content that we are creating can be a mix of master content that gets adapted into different platforms. And the second is, it can be user generated content. So for example, here, if you're using influencers, then we ask influencers to generate their own content and put it up on different platforms, and that those contents are, since they're user generated, they are platform friendly. So they do hold our key message as a brand that we want to deliver. But they also have more relevance to them, because a key influencer is talking about it, and is using a very relevant platform, like Instagram stories, or like Instagram reels, or Tik Tok videos or something like that, in order to communicate it. So it's a mix of both master asset getting adapted and adopted into different platforms, and also user generated content.

Speaker 1   23:26
Ok got it. Thank you so much. That was, like I said, again, a very comprehensive answer to my question. And that would be all actually, for my questions for you today. Thank you so much for making time. If you want to add anything more to our discussion, please feel free to do so.

Speaker 2   23:47
So I mean, nothing else to add I'm just, just for me to understand that this is a part of a project that you're working on. Is it on barriers?

Speaker 1   23:58
Okay. This is my final year dissertation project. I am an MBA student at Asia Pacific University, here in Kuala Lumpur. So basically, I'm writing a dissertation and it requires for me to do research and I chose IMC because I'm very interested in marketing, I come from an advertising and design background myself. So marketing is very interesting to me, and particularly the barriers that organizations face. So this is why I wanted to look at how organizations face the barriers regarding marketing

communications here in Malaysia.

Speaker 2   24:38
Yeah, ok got it. Okay, so that's your final year in APU and...

Speaker 1   24:44
Yeah final semester and final year. Yes.

Speaker 2   24:48
All the best. All the very best, I hope you come out with flying colors.

Speaker 1   24:53
I hope so. Thank you so much. I have a lot of interesting information.

Speaker 2   25:01
Okay, I enjoyed my conversation with you, Victoriya, yeah, thank you so much for the chat.

Speaker 1   25:05
Thank you, your work is very interesting to me. I enjoy also listening about this category because I've never had input about this category before actually. So it's very interesting to me as well.

Speaker 2   25:23
Bye. Take care. Goodbye.

Pilot Test #1

Speaker 1   0:02
So first of all, I would just like to obtain verbal consent that you would like to participate in this interview. Obviously, this is not going to be shared anywhere, this is just for research purposes only. So I'll only be using it for my study.

Speaker 2   0:27
Don't reveal my identity.

Speaker 1   0:33
Cannot reveal, yes, no, of course not. Because we do have to follow specific standards. So obviously, no one knows. Okay, so for me, I'm very interested to know what is your current job title?

Speaker 2   1:29
Okay, because we are in the government, right? So just sharing. Actually, we don't have like a specific name. Like, you come in with this piece, because that means under communication and broadcasting, right. So we are actually we are all called producer, but we do administrative, we do marketing. Yeah, all kinds of things, even like TV production, or radio, or even social media. So it covers you know all areas, but still, our main job title is producer.

Speaker 1   2:07
Awesome, like master of all trades. So, I'd like to follow up by finding out how many years of experience you've actually had.

Speaker 2   2:20
If you're talking about...with marketing?

Speaker 1   2:23
With marketing and also as holding your job title

Speaker 2   2:30
Maybe around seven years.

Speaker 1   2:31
That's wonderful. Okay, so your industry is telecommunications or...

Speaker 2   2:38
It's broadcasting actually.

Speaker 1   2:40
Okay. Right. So actually, I would just like to know what do you understand by the term integrated marketing communications? Well, yeah, it's a mouthful, so maybe I'll just say it slower, integrated marketing communications.

Speaker 2   3:04
Wow, I must write it down.

Speaker 1   3:06
No worries. No worries. Yeah, even for me, it is a mouthful. I refer to it as IMC as short.

Speaker 2   3:18
Okay. So basically, you are in the communication line of broadcasting, you have to broadcast and communicate with people. Like, very integrated where we deal...we do traditional and cover all actually even like ground events? We do that. I organize events even yeah. Yeah, it's not only like, yeah, so like on ground, we meet people face to face. And also like, using the medium like, you know, the traditional video or TV and radio. So this is what I mean by integrated because, you know, things have changed because of the technology we have progressed, right. So even it doesn't really... in terms of the structure of the organization. Actually, we don't even have like a dedicated structure for few media. Like you know, because of the technology, we created that actually, you know, we have our application. So you can watch TV, not only on YouTube, but also on your mobile, you just install and you can see all the channels in and it's also integrated with all the social media. So it covers all and then when it comes to marketing, okay, because we are government, so called government owned TV or radio stations or, so, there's a difference actually, you know, slightly different in terms of the commercial part, compared to the commercial entity. Because for us, it's not like, our KPI doesn't really have to be, you know, like, in terms of the revenue or income, it's like social obligation must come first, you know, whatever it is, like, for instance, we have rural area, very remote, we have maybe around less than 100 people of orang asli. The aborigines. We still have to, you know, put our transmitter out and make sure they can access to like Internet, you know, like, even like, a TV or radio broadcast. So that is the obligation of the government, like, equality for all. I don't know if that answers...yeah

Speaker 1   5:55
So for you, that is integrated marketing communications, or integrating marketing communication. So it's like for everyone, everyone has direct access, everyone is equal. And it's communicating equally to everyone. Is that correct?

Speaker 2   6:10
Yeah. But then under on the commercial side, I don't know whether it's part of the marketing. But actually, we also do networking, like even when it comes to doing

marketing, right. Your air time for commercial, where you have you know people in a production house or companies, they want to actually promote their products. Yes, you may come in, but there are certain charges. And it was one of my jobs in the past. So we get people to actually invest. You know, in our air time, you know, buy air time like spot buy or anything, for certain period of time. So because at the end of the day, even like you are government entity, we still have to make to generate income and give back to the government, to the people.

Speaker 1 7:07
Okay. Okay. Understood. I think that answers my question, also. And if you can, please just tell me in short, or elaborate more, because you've already started elaborating, actually, how your organization goes about integrating marketing communications. So what is the process?

Speaker 2 7:28
Can you I mean, you elaborate... what questions, I mean, the processes day to day or how?

Speaker 1 7:37
Basically, how does your organization go about integrating their marketing communications? practices like that?

Speaker 2 7:49
That's a bit hard for me to explain. But then um. Actually its very funny, you know, because in government, we don't have like a marketing arm. So we actually engage with a marketing agency that has connection with the government, but then like, like a core marketing agency, where it deals with other small small agencies, other companies main marketing arm, yeah. So the government, but then they are because their nature of operation is very commercial where you see rotation in and out the money's easier, right? Because it's just slow because just the procedures that we need to actually comply. So that's the reason why there's a marketing arm that naturally exists, like a mediator. Yeah, like agencies.

Speaker 1 8:58
Thank you that answers the question very well. So moving on to one of the main questions of this interview is actually what barriers do you currently face when implementing integrated marketing communications in your organization?

Speaker 2 9:19
Ok when it comes to barriers okay. I do not know about other radio TV stations. We have let our certain SOP you know that we need to comply. For instance, like when it comes to commercial right. It not only about the dressing, you know, but the message is no good. Has like moral values inside. And then also criteria you know, it depends on your, investment. Sometimes you can have a product display, sometimes you can't even you invest, because certain... how do I put it... but then when you buy a certain

time, right...

Speaker 1   10:23
No worries

Speaker 2   10:26
Can actually display the product. So because you want a certain amount of air time, but then there are also other challenges. Sometimes agencies, they don't have a lot of money. So they actually work with the, with the TV or radio stations, like they work hand in hand. So they sponsor certain kind of things, or, for instance, like we run contests, so they actually sponsored the prizes. And then we give them in return, it's like ROI, return on investment, so the exposure on the air time, its either TV or radio, or even the social media, but then, certain things that they have to comply is that they cannot over promoting their product, no product display, because you're not paying the money. It's just like more like a contra deal. So, they can actually tell by the activities and we give credit, okay, and that is sponsored by the name of product of the company, something like that. So, this kind of the barriers that sometimes clients don't understand this. Sometimes you know, it gives you when for TV right sometimes. Eh, how come these people they get known, they can display their product, and this one appeared, but they cannot display things, you know? Confusion that arises. Because like, like certain organization, even like for us, I do not know, but maybe we have like, I don't know say some rules at the organization, right? Certain media organizations, they don't take sponsorships you know. Or events. Sometimes like, this is big events. So they said yeah, they said they sponsored, they have to report whatever they want for their events. Like for people who actually maybe that might be sponsored, they have like, in return you know like give certain credit, certain exposure, that kind of thing, because we do that a lot because like for government, we have very limited recall..in terms of marketing, right? You don't get to see that actually government station get publicized or promoted even in a billboard or anything you go on the road or you know, you see around, you don't see them, hardly see. Right? Because no, actually, there's no specific amount of money that is being allocated for this kind of activity, because that's not the main, not our main core business. So in order for us sometimes to have that. Now we work with a lot of agencies, even a company to come up to actually, sponsor, you know, they use their money to actually provide those things for promotional items.

Speaker 1   14:04
All right. But out of all the barriers, out of all the barriers that you have experienced, could you give me an example of the biggest barrier to integrating marketing communications that you have personally faced in your career?

Speaker 2   14:20
I think when dealing with like a big shot, like I don't know if this is this answers you, but we have experienced where Barack Obama came, you know, so there's a conflict of

insurance. He comes on like G on G basis, like he is not invited by Malaysian government, he comes on his own, if you remember, he went to Taylor's University. Yeah, Taylor's Lakeside, 2015. Right. So that's an issue, because I was dealing, you know the PR person. So you know, they want to make it the, townhall session to be live, you know, throughout the world can be seen. So, we are telling them, you know, we are the media, government media, but we don't have allocation to uplink, you know, the thing, so that it can be broadcast to the world. So this is an issue, you know, like, ok in terms of our facility and also the costs. So, you know, as a VVIP number 1 President in the world, do we actually give that treatment? Like, it's all sponsored by us when we don't have that budget? Or we asked them to actually pay for the share of the cost. So, it was a lot of things like that because it never happened before. So it was like a precedence for us. No, like, in terms of the facilities you had to actually rent because the Full HD. But we are creating to, HD, UHD 4k now. Japan's on 8k or 11k technology. We are just about 2 HD right. So this kind of thing, like because for Malaysia, right, every every five years, we get a budget. So to actually change the facilities, it's not that easy, because it consumes like billions of ringgit. So, you know, not all the facilities are up to, like, you know, like a solid HD. So sometimes they don't know. Because they want it in full HD, we actually had to rent out from companies, commercial entity to actually get some of these. So these are the things when you want to work on commercial basis, or it's like a G2G kind of thing, but then still even like for the uplink, there is a term for that, for broadcasting that thing on social media as well as on their TV station live. So they call it uplink. So we have to actually make arrangement, engage with Telecom Malaysia, uplinking the event. At the same time hey, they're taking away air time you know, so, they have to pay for it and so, in our our our marketing part, so like, how long is the event? Yeah, one hour maybe, but end up like more than one hour. So, actually they did some calculation there, but then at the end event lasted more than one hour one and a half that is not reflected in the budget. So we actually gave them free air time, because when we do like, post mortem, they say why are you giving extra time? We don't know like, ok do we to have be like to entertain it on a commercial basis or like G2G.

Speaker 1   19:18
I see. Okay, understood. All right. Thank you. Okay, moving actually on to the next question is how do you think like some of these barriers that you've just mentioned? How can they be overcome, actually, in your opinion...

Speaker 2   19:38
I think there's no like over generalization of the SOP because sometimes we work on case by case. My case you know, but I don't know about others. Sometimes. You know like sometimes we have events where Brunei or Singapore having a live together. So sometimes, which one is, you know, paying for what, paying for whom? Because my previous experience when I was in radio, how we dealt with that thing, we actually take turns, okay, if we have four live events together, maybe two will be will be the cost be borne by them and another two by us.

Speaker 1   20:32

All right. Okay. So that could be one way to overcome that barrier. Okay, so in your opinion, which barriers to integrating marketing communications do you actually expect to encounter in the next five years?

Speaker 2   20:54

I think we are already facing it now. Very funny, because, you know, like, government, right, I do not know about how commercial, private TV station how they actually work, because I know, like certain friends who they have a certain target, okay, every month, I must make sure that, you know, my youtube channel goes up by 10,000 viewers, something like that. Because it's like, even though I'm still confused, you know, like, we have, like, in terms of government, right? We have a department where they call it Mampu I think. So they actually take charge of all the ICT facilities, including your town you know. So when it comes to social media especially, even not social media it is still a problem, because I think is the copyright issue. Because who actually owns something, you know, like, okay, whatever telecasts in the government media. So, right now, it is quite rampant, that people just simply actually record and they actually rebroadcast in their own channel. You know, in terms of monitoring, we actually don't have we don't even invest in a system that can actually detect whoever, you know, YouTuber or anybody who actually violate that, you know, simply take other people's, like plagiarism. So, this is a copyright issue. It's happening, you know, because compared to like certain media agencies, for instance, like Reuters, they provide news, they provide people like, pictures and also video. Yeah their service is not that cheap. Whatever they transmit to us, it comes with a code. So if you subscribe to them, okay, they will give you the right to actually rebroadcast for a certain period of time for instance maybe like for two years. So up to two years, wherever that you keep in your library and you don't maybe after two years, you don't renew you cannot even use that, they can sue you you know! so that is what happened sometimes we don't even know about. Remember the World Trade Centre in New York, it was hit by the aircraft. So even that one we don't have even the right to actually reuse the footage, even the photo because of that, you know, it happened to my organization where we almost being sued by them because we did it without purpose we didn't know we were not aware. You have like people from different legal departments taking charge different departments to take charge of the payment and different people are actually using it and end up to the users like you know editors you know broadcast journalist who don't know. So sometimes you use the picture you just take it like, steal a photo, anything you just put on the social media, the video, but then you don't actually been granted the right to do that. So this kind of thing is happening. And I mentioned earlier about the copyright. Okay, like for us because we don't have like...yeah we are given certain authority for actually, for us to have like official email account, but then you know, right, if you open up YouTube or Facebook, you need like, official account, right? So this is what happened because before social media pick up the last five years or is that also, you know, there is the initiative to promote their programmes on Facebook, YouTube,

Twitter or anything, they just post whatever programme so that they get people to actually they promote their progress that people are aware, you know, this is the programme that is airing, like tonight or tomorrow. So when they end up doing that, and also at the same time people, you know, any anybody with YouTube channel, you know, they just just putting things in, right. So at the end, it confused YouTube, Facebook. What are we paying? Who can we pay, you know, for the royalties? Because if you exceeded 1,000 subscriber, you can monetize? Right? Yeah. You know, what's the issue? Even for us? Okay, your organization have more than 100 accounts, you don't know which one is official!

Got 300,000? Or exceeded a million? Also cannot monetize, don't know, whose account is this. Some might have left, you know, the service can be anybody who actually doing that for you know, I will say that for a good purpose. Less than one, will do it like, you know, if they just simply take other people's work and rebroadcast. So these are the issue that we've been facing, because I think the legal side they are not very... I don't know, they're not that fast to actually catch up, you know, with things that are evolving in social media and also the copyright issue.

Speaker 1   27:20
Thank you very much for your sharing actually, thank you for this interview. That is actually my last question for today. And your sharing is very much appreciated. And yes, I would just like to thank you once again, for participating. I will be stopping my recording.

Speaker 2   27:40

Hope it is helpful for you.

Speaker 1   27:43
It is very helpful. Definitely. Thank you so much.

Pilot Study #2

SPEAKERS

Speaker 1 Researcher), Speaker 2 (Interviewee)

Speaker 1   0:02
Hello. Yep. So let's get into it. Okay. Right. So I would like to ask you, what is your job title currently in your organization?

Speaker 2   0:20
Currently, my title is still copywriter.

Speaker 1   0:44
How many years of experience have you had? And what is the nature of your organization? Meaning which industry does it belong to?

Speaker 2   0:52
Sorry, okay, about experience, I have about three, about three years, just over three years of experience. And the company does primarily digital marketing, so programmatic online banners, videos, if necessary, and they do a lot of social listening and all that stuff. So basically, data collection and anything to do with social media and digital marketing.

Speaker 1   1:28
Thank you. Right. So next question is, can you please tell me what you actually understand by the term integrated marketing communications? It's a mouthful, and I usually refer to it as IMC. So what do you understand by that term?

Speaker 2   1:55
Okay. So, um, I think when you're talking about communications, and when you say it's integrated, it is primarily a medium, an intersection of mediums. So I think marketing can be broken up into a few categories, right. Like some of them are more digital based, some of them are b2b. Some of them are like e commerce and other stuff. So integrated probably refers to a blend of all these mediums. So it kind of goes over like a number of channels that can be digital can be traditional mediums can be on ground, but basically, it's just integrated, exactly as it says.

Speaker 1   2:37
Okay, that's actually very close to the definition they use. Basically, there's so many

research studies that talk about this integrated marketing communication. Like I said, an audience centric business process, apparently, so they strategically manage and coordinate all these stakeholders. Kind of muffled now, How about now? Now? I can guess. Okay, I think it was my earphone. Okay. Okay. So when I was just sharing to you like the definition they actually use in research. So they always talk about IMC as being as this audience centric business process, where they strategically manage coordinate stakeholders, content channels, and brand communication program results. And then the next question is basically, if you could just tell me in short, how does your organization go about integrating marketing communications?

Speaker 2   3:45
Well, typically it always starts up with what the client even wants in the first place. Like what's the objective? Right? So if it's, for instance, they want to do like a purely e-commerce campaign, so it's about reach, or like for instance, getting more eyeballs on or engagement or viewership and all that kind of stuff. Sometimes, like it's, it's about translating leads into action. So they want people to kind of sign up that basically, it is more about conversion, and stuff like that. So I think it always starts with the objective of what the client's goals are first. And after that, you go into the channels of, you know, people always talk about money la so I guess the budget will also come involving early discussion. So to see you know, what's the extent that we can do and after that, we will probably kind of look at you know, what would be the best way to kind of achieve these goals for these people. So, within the amount of money that they can afford to spend. So it will be basically in the helping them maximize the bang for buck. Ah, that kind of thing. Yeah.

Speaker 1   5:00
Okay, got it. All right. Well, because we're talking about barriers here, the next question, who would actually be what barriers do you currently face when implementing integrated marketing communication practices?

Speaker 2   5:18
Well, I mean, if you're talking about from an agency's perspective, or it's always to me, money la, that's the first thing. And the ways that clients tend to go about is that I think they look into programmatic advertising a little bit too much. But you know, it's widely available. It's convenient. So like, you know, when you use like Facebook ads, Google ads, YouTube ads, you know, everything is, basically it's just a channel. And there's nothing wrong with those channels. But I think the biggest issue that people have is like they're trying to see too much. With a very, you know, they're trying to say too much in such a short period of time. Messages tend to be very unfocused, that's one thing. But I understand from like, a marketers point of view is also because, you know, they have a certain level, they have certain KPIs or objectives, they need to hit with a certain campaign. And because of that, they tried to squeeze everything into one. First problem. Um, and the second thing is, I think it's also a bit of this, it depends on organization, organization to organization, some of them is definitely you know,

because it has to go through a lot of layers of approvals. Messaging tends to get diluted. So that's what I think. And I'm sure like within organizations as well, like there's a lot of bureaucracy that's red tape. And they're also like certain... and despite all the actually there are certain limitations that come with programmatic advertising, like word limits, how how the banners actually run, like, you know, what the how the mechanics actually work, what limitations that are imposed. For banners, for instance, you cannot have like videos for certain banners. Or like, are you only have you only have like, static images to work with? Yeah, I see, by far like, the issue is making sure a clear message is getting is coming across to people and in an interesting way.

Speaker 1 7:28
Would you say that's the hardest, that that is the biggest barrier actually, getting that one message across?

Speaker 2 7:37
Yes, that is one. Um, I think, like, if you're talking about social media, specifically, I think it's because, you know, like, social media is so fast, right? There is so much, there's so much noise going on. Sometimes it's it's hard to just to cut through the clutter. Because so much is being said, and more often than not, you know, all brands are saying the same thing. But just in different ways. So there's an overlapping of messages, and there's nothing that really cuts through, cuts through everything. So I would say like, it's actually definitely a problem. So it's like, how do how you distinguish yourself as well, for sure. As a second point.

Speaker 1 7:59
Okay, all right. Okay, one more question actually would be, would you say that these barriers are just more on the agency side? Or would you say that actually, other organizations on the client side also face them?

Speaker 1 8:34
I think it's a combination, it can be a combination of both la. Sometimes agency teams don't align with clients. Because you know, creative agencies, they always want to, oh, we want to do good work, we want to do nice work, but it doesn't fulfill business problems, and they just want something that's artistic and message and nice, but it doesn't really say anything, you know what I mean? and the the truth of the matter is like the boring stuff actually gets the results. Because, you know, that's what you're saying. It's simple, it's clear, it's concise, and people get it immediately. On a client side, I think, for sure, like there's always like some level of, they have a comfort zone, of course. And of course, like, you know, even even if someone in the lower level wants to, you know, branch out or try to be a little bit more ambitious or brave, it doesn't necessarily mean that the people on the higher levels will feel that way as well. Yeah, so yes, I would say like there's definitely issues on both parts.

Speaker 1 9:44

Well, I think we've settled the first one, the first question, and the second one would be actually, how do you think the barriers that you've just mentioned earlier, how can they be overcome?

Speaker 2   10:01
I think everything can be overcome, for sure. But it definitely takes a lot of compromise on both parties. And, you know, what I used to sometimes say like, sometimes you need the stars to align? Yes, yes, it's really about that. Because sometimes, you know, if you're like, people kind of like, they're just selfish, you know, they want to do their own thing, like, agency wants to do their own thing. Client wants to do their own thing. I think, by far, like, the biggest contributor is just, you know, communication between both parties to achieve and do. And it's also understanding and compromising, uh, to a certain level to kind of, you know, achieve what they want. And, and seeing, from each other's perspective taking, being brave enough to take a chance on doing something that maybe that is uncommon, what is, in what is, you know, usually done in integrated marketing communications? But, um, yeah, I will say like, by far, it's the issue, at least in Malaysia, is just getting personalities to align. And not letting politics get in the way as well. But that is by far a very difficult la, because, you know, sometimes there are lots of snakes la, and a lot of, you know, usually is money on the line, so people kind of get very scared. And you'll rather play it safe. Because, you know, at least I'll know that, you know, at the very least I'll get this or I'll get that. But that, but just because it's safe doesn't mean that it's effective.

Speaker 1   11:44
Do you think that maybe middle or senior management has a role to play in this and overcoming this issue? And all these barriers?

Speaker 2   11:54
I mean, I think like for every level, if as long as there's some person above you, there's always gonna be some level of involvement that all these people can improve on, for sure. You know, whether no matter no matter which side they come from, whether it's agency, or it comes from the client side, you know, I think everyone can, everyone can make a change. But in the same vein, everyone can also make things worse.

Speaker 1   12:23
Yeah. Yeah. That's an interesting perspective. Thank you. I'm going to go to the third question. So here, I would like to know, like, in your opinion, which barriers to integrating marketing communication do you expect to encounter in the next five years?

Speaker 2   12:47
I mean, by far, the biggest issue will definitely be technology. Because I think, when it comes to tech, Malaysians are always five years behind, you know, just very slow to adopt technology that even with work from home, you have all these old people

saying like, oh, you know, I want to work in office, that kind of thing. And other stuff you know, that even though the cases are 10k as it is, I think is that, that mentality of refusing to change. I think another struggle that people have kind of come to face right is I'm just okay, in the context of Malaysia, I feel that cultural sensitivities are always something that need to be navigated. That's by far never going to change. You know, and if anything, I feel like it might get worse in the next few years. So definitely that and yeah, and aside from all the normal things like that, you know, that people not seeing eye to eye or like, just stuff like that. They don't see eye to eye, you know, they don't know how to maximize their technology.

Speaker 1 14:10
Okay, and do you think that COVID-19 will add to those barriers?

Speaker 2 14:20
I think it can be a barrier, but it also can be a launching pad for a lot of things. Because then if you if you look at Malaysia right before this will let you know you would never imagine you know letting people work from home completely. Yes. Yeah. You know, but but you know, because you've seen that it can be done. I think it's it's more of like a you can call it a motivation for people to almost change, but it also takes like a very significant incident to get Malaysians on your asses and moving otherwise they wouldn't you know, Yeah, I feel like it can be. It's a barrier for, you know, like traditional mediums that require a lot of contact hours and face to face interaction. But I'm sure that with, like certain innovations and whatsoever, you can actually find a way to adapt to the changes. And actually, you know, good advertising can and good marketing can come out of it. But it's also a matter of how willing people are to adapt to these changes.

Speaker 1 15:35
Alright. Okay. With that, I would like to thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this interview. We're done, and we have to stop recording now. Just to reassure you, as every other interviewee will be reassured that this information is very private and confidential. And the recording of this interview will not be disclosed and only be used for completing this study. So no one else will see or hear this interview except for me, because I need the data for my research. And that's pretty much it.