

CONCEPTUAL MODEL IN INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION

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Abstract. *Integrated marketing communications are developing, with IMC approaches to communication with consumers seeing further enhancements in the scientific literature. However, in order to reach the marketing targets, a variety of IMC tools may be used in combination when implementing marketing activities. Despite each IMC tool in itself being highly distinctive, they all depend on each other in the creation of product consumption value and the enhancement of economic, communicational and social benefits. Purpose of the paper: The goal of the research is to assess the integrated marketing communications used in the marketing strategy of Latvian food retail chains. Methodology/methods: The following scientific research methods are used in the research study: analytical, comparative, graphical, statistical, observatory and interrogative. The research focuses on the Latvian food retail sector, with leading specialists from all Latvian food retail chains polled. The object of the research is Latvian food retail chains, and the subject of the research is integrated marketing communication as a set of tools. Findings: The results of the research are of both theoretical and practical value, as it confirmed the hypothesis that a complex use of IMC promotes a long-term relationship among all stakeholders of the selling and buying process. The authors have collected and classified IMC tools and, based on the results of the research, drawn up a conceptual model of integrated marketing communications.*

Keywords: *food industry, food retail sector, integrated marketing communications, integrated marketing communication tools, conceptual integrated marketing communication model.*

Introduction

The approaches proposed and discussed in scientific literature mostly reveal the philosophical aspect of the integrated marketing communication process, covering the communication process as such within IMC. However, while the existing models serve well for the understanding and studying of the process, none of the IMC approaches is directly applicable in practice, as there are no particular IMC tools provided which businesses could use in their daily work. The current theory of integrated marketing communication lacks concrete tools, classification, methods whereupon businesses could base their action plan for the promotion of marketing activities. This suggests that customer-oriented IMC require more detailed research to define tools that would help towards a precise and effective

communication with consumers. The goal of the research is to assess the integrated marketing communications used in the marketing strategy of Latvian food retail chains. In order to accomplish the goal, the following **objectives** were set out: to study scientific literature in the field of IMC, to collect, classify and develop IMC tools, to draw up an expert questionnaire, to conduct expert interviews, to aggregate and analyse data, and to develop a conceptual IMC model based on the results of the research and scientific literature.

The following scientific research methods are used in the study: analytical, comparative, graphical, statistical, observatory and interrogative. The research focuses on the Latvian food retail sector, with leading specialists from all Latvian food retail chains polled. The **object** of the research is Latvian food retail chains, and the **subject** of the research is integrated marketing communication as a set of tools.

Role and importance of integrating marketing communications and their tools

The founder of the marketing theory Philip Kotler (Kotler, 2006) has defined marketing communications where essentially there exist the following types of marketing communications: advertising, sales promotion, public relations and publicity, direct marketing, personal selling, and events and experience. David Jobber (Jobber, 2007) lists nine types of marketing communications, as does Patrick De Pelsmacker (Pelsmacker, 2007). Sandra Moriarty (Moriarty, 2001), however, lists 11.

The theoretical defining of marketing communications is thus in a constant process of development. Justin Foxton (Foxton, 2008), for instance, points out that, with the market growing and changing, there emerge ever new tools and theories of marketing communications. Examples are product placement or PP, point-of-purchase, interactive marketing, e-communications, event marketing and others. While all these tools are considered unconventional marketing methods, each of them falls under the marketing communication types or elements defined by Philip Kotler (Kotler, 2006).

According to Indrė Rimkienė (Rimkienė, 2013), the IMC process is very similar to that of marketing communication, yet includes an approach of conveying one consistent message to the recipient through organisational promotional activities which may simultaneously encompass a broad range of media, including television, radio, magazines, the Internet, mobile phones, professional selling, social media.

The essence, role and importance of IMC is also addressed by Mike Reid (Reid, 2012) who presents IMC as a new philosophy of communication and a strategic managerial process for the creation and management of strong brands

short-term and long-term based upon nine categories with different communication channels: 1) advertising based media – television, radio, newspapers, magazines; 2) target and interactive advertising – e-mail, phone, printed advertisements etc.; 3) local and outdoor advertising – posters, films etc.; 4) points-of-sale advertising – a notice board, an advertisement in the shopping cart etc.; 5) promotions – various offers etc.; 6) proposals taking – product samples, coupons etc.; 7) private sales; 8) event marketing and sponsorship – sporting event sponsorship etc.; 9) public relations – a product or company review. Hence, the authors conclude that the IMC process begins with the identification of existing or potential customers and the forms and methods which communication programmes should be based on. According to Don Edward Schultz (Schultz, 2000), IMC represents a new way of looking at the entirety when we have seen just individual parts like advertising, public relations, sales promotion, employee communications etc.

In the course of development, IMC approaches are updated and directed towards consumer. Manfred Bruhn (Bruhn, 2017) and Stefanie Schnebelen (Schnebelen, 2017) emphasise that the existing IMC concepts do not discuss IMC in detail in the context of social media and IMC is treated as a new communication tool that enriches the range of communication measures. The scientific literature pays little attention to the fact that social media have structurally changed the communication market and that the traditional sender-recipient approach no longer works in IMC – senders and recipients cannot be clearly defined and may change infinitely.

Åke Finne and Christian Grönroos (Finne & Grönroos, 2017) describe the communication process as one where the company is the subject (active sender) and the customer is the object (passive recipient), and one which may be interfered by rumours, misunderstandings or misrepresentations.

Kristina Heinonen (Heinonen, 2013), Tore Strandvik (Strandvik, 2013) and Päivi Voima (Voima, 2013) argue that sometimes the company does not even take part in this communication process, as it may be beyond their visibility, beyond the planned messages. Anne Rindell (Rindell, 2010) and Tore Strandvik (Strandvik, 2010) opine that customers receive a lot of information from sources in their daily lives, whereas Anker, Moutinho, Sparks and Grönroos (Anker, Moutinho, Sparks, & Grönroos, 2015) admit that it may be difficult for businesses to find out what messages and sources are – i.e., to identify the interface points. An example of hidden message could be brand information used by competitors to change another brand's image in the perception of other customers.

The authors find that the scientific literature defines IMC in a variety of ways, e.g., as tools, elements, ways etc. IMC is developing and consumer-oriented IMC approaches are constantly revised and enhanced, mostly revealing the philosophical aspect of the process and covering the communication process as

such within IMC. However, the existing models only serve well for the understanding and studying of the process. None of the IMC approaches is directly applicable in practice, as there are no particular IMC tools provided which businesses could use in their daily work. The current theory of IMC lacks concrete tools, classification, methods whereupon businesses could base their action plan for the promotion of marketing activities. Customer-oriented IMC require more detailed research to define tools that would help towards a precise and effective communication with consumers. The consumer of nowadays requires well-aimed and detailed information with delving into the customer's wishes and opinion, the company has to cover all sensitive issues. The authors conclude that such IMC tools need to encompass processes, experience, actions etc., rather than just the company's goals and a superficial understanding on the IMC process.

Based on the above, the authors have collected integrated marketing communication tools (105) and classified them into 8 main groups: **1) management tools** (13) for running a marketing management system and marketing strategy within IMC; **2) product-related tools** (21) for building the company's supply; **3) price-related tools** (8) for setting the overall pricing policy and system based on the company's market positioning; **4) promotion-related tools** (18) for making information available to consumers within and beyond the shop premises; **5) digital promotion-related tools** (10) for communication beyond the shop premises using the vast options of current technologies; **6) staff professionalism- and selling-related tools** (7) for ensuring an effective personal selling; **7) corporate identity-related tools** (11) for building and strengthening the company's overall image; **8) geographic placement- and technology-related tools** (17) for making shopping more accessible and convenient (see Table 1).

Table 1 **Classification of integrated marketing communication tools**
(source: IMC tools collected and classified by the authors)

No.	Integrated marketing communication tools
1. Management tools	
1.1.	Marketing communication management system
1.2.	Strategic planning of marketing communications
1.3.	Assessment of efficiency of marketing communications
1.4.	Brand management system
1.5.	Marketing and market research
1.6.	Shop positioning in the market (high-, low-quality assortment)
1.7.	In-house marketing department
1.8.	Qualified marketing specialists (incl. those of the marketing department)
1.9.	<i>Cooperation of the marketing department with other functional departments*</i>
1.10.	<i>Cooperation of the marketing department with the procurement department*</i>

1.11.	Customer loyalty programmes
1.12.	Customer satisfaction surveys (databases)
1.13.	<i>System and procedure of submission and a review of complaints*</i>
2. Product-related tools	
2.1.	Breadth of a product assortment
2.2.	Variety of goods in one product group
2.3.	<i>Units per product type on the shelf*</i>
2.4.	<i>Variety of pre-packaging per product type on the shelf*</i>
2.5.	<i>Protective product packaging*</i>
2.6.	Design and appeal of product packaging
2.7.	Product packaging with information on product application
2.8.	Appeal of product labels
2.9.	<i>Placement of labels on the product without covering original manufacturer information*</i>
2.10.	<i>Information about the product on labels*</i>
2.11.	<i>Information about product composition on marking*</i>
2.12.	<i>Information about product origin, the manufacturer country, the importer, weight, best before date etc. on marking*</i>
2.13.	Proportion of products marked with barcodes
2.14.	<i>High proportion of products with a short best before period*</i>
2.15.	<i>High proportion of products with a long best before period*</i>
2.16.	<i>Proportion of new product categories*</i>
2.17.	<i>Proportion of premium products*</i>
2.18.	<i>Proportion of affordable products*</i>
2.19.	Proportion of daily consumption products (bread, milk, meat etc.)
2.20.	Proportion of alcoholic products
2.21.	Proportion of household goods, incl. household chemical
3. Price-related tools	
3.1.	Pricing policy
3.2.	Retail chain's positioning in the market ("leader in low prices" etc.)
3.3.	Price level
3.4.	Discount system
3.5.	Sales promotion activities related to price changes
3.6.	One-off sales promotion activities for individual products or product groups (one-off discounts, coupons, gifts for purchase etc.)
3.7.	<i>High proportion of discounted products*</i>
3.8.	<i>Low proportion of discounted products*</i>
4. Promotion-related tools	
4.1.	Outdoor advertisements about the shop location (at the block, village, town, district etc.)
4.2.	Competitions, lotteries, coupons, souvenirs to promote product sales
4.3.	Sales promotion activities not related to price
4.4.	Location of products in the store
4.5.	Arrangement of products on shelves
4.6.	Arrangement of products in store premises

4.7.	Arrangement of products in the store in outer packaging (on palettes, in boxes etc.)
4.8.	<i>Regular repositioning of products on shelves*</i>
4.9.	Informational messages in the store about the location of product groups
4.10.	Informational messages at eye height about the location of products on shelves
4.11.	Visual messages about product discounts
4.12.	Online advertisements about product quality, composition, storage and application
4.13.	Advertisements in mass media (TV, radio, press etc.) about product quality, composition, storage and application
4.14.	Outdoor advertisements on product quality, composition, storage and application
4.15.	Advertisement stands (in stores, exhibitions) about product quality, composition, storage and application
4.16.	Special newspapers and catalogues by companies about products and their application, incl. information about product quality, composition, storage
4.17.	Salesperson consultations about product, composition and application
4.18.	In-store product degustations
5. Digital promotion-related tools	
5.1.	<i>Mobile app for convenient online shopping*</i>
5.2.	<i>Mobile app providing information about the shop and its products*</i>
5.3.	<i>Product information displayed on the barcode (application, pictures, website address etc.)*</i>
5.4.	<i>Barcode and QR code reading with smartphones (barcode scanner)*</i>
5.5.	Customer notification of discounts by SMS
5.6.	Customer notification of discounts by e-mail
5.7.	Company website design, ease of use, structure
5.8.	Company website providing information on the shop and its products
5.9.	Company website for convenient online shopping
5.10.	Option for consumers to receive information and follow the company on social media
6. Staff professionalism- and selling-related tools	
6.1.	Speed and quality of service
6.2.	Staff professionalism
6.3.	Staff education
6.4.	Staff training and qualification-raising
6.5.	<i>Employee motivation system (rewards for sales increase, customer appreciation etc.)*</i>
6.6.	Staff outfit, uniform
6.7.	Building of a customer database for direct marketing (address, phone number, e-mail etc.)
7. Corporate identity-related tools	
7.1.	Corporate culture (company's values, principles, philosophy etc.)
7.2.	Corporate strategy (company positioning strategy)
7.3.	Product manufacturer's corporate strategy
7.4.	Company brand promotion
7.5.	Company brand recognition

7.6.	Sponsorship and support for public events
7.7.	Charity initiatives and social responsibility
7.8.	<i>Corporate behaviour (public behaviour of top-level management, staff behaviour)*</i>
7.9.	<i>Corporate design system (single visual identity, its application, company website, social media, store layout, interior, staff uniforms, assortment, price level, market positioning, image etc.)*</i>
7.10.	Company's reputation
7.11.	Product manufacturer's reputation
8. Geographic placement- and technology-related tools	
8.1.	Shop location
8.2.	Warehouse location
8.3.	Proximity of a public transport stop
8.4.	Availability of parking space
8.5.	Proximity of other service providers (footwear repair, clothes cleaning, banking services etc.)
8.6.	<i>Free Internet access within shop premises*</i>
8.7.	Adapted entrance for disabled persons
8.8.	Adapted entrance for parents with a pram
8.9.	Storage of personal property in lockers
8.10.	Catering services offered by the shop
8.11.	External catering offered by the shop
8.12.	Self-service system offered by the shop
8.13.	<i>Call centre offered by the shop (for phone orders, additional service requests) *</i>
8.14.	<i>Online store</i>
8.15.	<i>Information centre*</i>
8.16.	<i>Food delivery*</i>
8.17.	Availability of take-away shopping bags and other packaging

**IMC tools developed by the authors*

IMC management tools. In the authors' opinion, the tools of this group serve as basis for the development, application and assessment of marketing strategy. The authors have classified and distinguish IMC management tools as the first group of tools because they believe that without a single marketing communication management system a company cannot work on IMC effectively. Within this group, the marketing department is tasked with the planning, implementation and efficiency assessment of marketing communications based on market and marketing research, and the authors have also pointed out the marketing department's cooperation with other functional departments, notably the procurement department. The authors see the procurement department as the one that selects the products to be put on sale not just by purchase price but also by quality, design, packaging and other criteria, which, in turn, are closely related to selling and marketing. Also included among IMC management tools are market

positioning and the brand management system, customer loyalty programmes, satisfaction surveys, complaint review procedure and its system overall.

IMC product-related tools. The authors find the essence of a product to be related to the creation of a product value. IMC product-related tools are a key component of communication. A product is an amalgamation of its consumption value, quality, design, marking, packaging, presentation etc. Hence, the key tools featured under the group of IMC product-related tools are the breadth of a product assortment, variety in one product group, the variety of pre-packaging, protective product packaging, appealing design, incl. the appeal and information of the label, the proportion of products with a short and long best before period etc.

IMC price-related tools. Selling extends beyond the pricing policy itself – in communication with consumers it needs to be supplemented with such IMC tools as sales promotion activities related to price changes, the company's general price level and discount system, as well as the proportion of discounted products. Another key IMC price-related tool is one-off sales promotion activities, such as discounts, coupons, gifts for purchase etc., as well as a high or low proportion of discounted products depending on market positioning and overall marketing strategy. Price changes is one of the reasons why consumers sometimes pay attention to new products that have the same composition, features, quality functions etc. as products purchased previously. The authors concede that discounts may be a contributory factor to drawing consumers' attention to a specific product on the shelf or to promoting new products.

IMC promotion-related tools. The authors find that IMC promotion-related tools also include such tools as outdoor advertisements about the shop location; competitions, lotteries, coupons, souvenirs; sales promotion activities not related to price; the location of products in the store; directions to the product location, as well as the arrangement of products in the store; online advertisements about product quality, composition, storage and application; advertisements in mass media; special newspapers and catalogues by companies about products and their application, incl. information on product quality, composition, storage; salesperson consultations about the product, composition and application, in-store degustations etc. The essence of the IMC promotion tools proposed by the authors is accessibility.

IMC digital promotion-related tools. With the development of e-commerce and technologies and consumers having vast options of communication, businesses, too, have vast options to communicate with consumers. This is why the authors have made digital promotion tools a separate group featuring mobile apps for convenient online shopping; product information displayed on the barcode; barcode and QR code reading with smartphones; customer notification by SMS and e-mail; company website design, ease of use,

structure; the option for consumers to receive information and follow the company on social media.

IMC staff professionalism- and selling-related tools, in the authors' view, covers such core elements as speed and quality of service, staff education and professionalism (practical experience and skills combined with talent and right character), regular staff training and qualification-raising. In order for businesses to run a perfect selling process, it is crucial to have a staff motivation system implemented through various motivational programmes – rewards for sales increase or meeting sales plans, customer appreciation etc. Not only the professional capabilities, skills and education, but also their appearance, uniform, speech etc. matters and are key marketing communication tools for raising the sales volumes.

IMC corporate identity-related tools are ones that describe the corporate culture and strategy as an integral part and include company brand promotion and recognition, sponsorship and support for public events, charity initiatives, social responsibility. With the quest for a flawless identity, the authors have also added the corporate design system as a tool. Single visual identity, its application, the company website, social media, store layout, the interior, staff uniforms, the assortment, the price level, market positioning, the image and other factors are basic conditions in a corporate design system serving as basis for the reputation of the company and of the manufacturer of the products it offers and are therefore specifically highlighted by the authors.

IMC geographic placement- and technology-related tools. This group includes tools pertaining to the location and its capabilities to make the selling process more convenient and accessible to customers and quicker and more economical to provide. A particular emphasis is placed on the location of a shop and warehouse, which affects the cost of product selling and the providability of supply. As concerns the customer-oriented approach, the authors have included such tools as proximity of a public transport stop, availability of parking space, an adapted entrance for disabled persons and parents with a pram, proximity of other service providers (footwear repair, clothes cleaning, pharmacy, banking and postal services etc.), free Internet access and storage of personal property in lockers, catering services, a self-service shopping system, a call centre, an online shop, delivery services and, lastly, availability of take-away shopping bags.

In brief, the authors conclude that, in order to achieve marketing targets and implement marketing activities, IMC should be done using concrete, detailed, customer-oriented IMC tools conducive to the consumption value, as collected and classified by the authors.

A well-aimed communication makes it possible to achieve the goals of marketing activities, reach the target audience, and influence the buyers' behaviour in the market. However, at each particular stage of buyer behaviour the

application of IMC tools yields more or less benefits – economic, communicational and social, hence the use of IMC tools on their merits with an integration among each other would contribute to reaching the company's specific goals in respect of buyer behaviour – generating a need, providing information to consumers for them to assess alternatives, to make a buying decision, and to buy and use the product, thus fostering a long-term relationship among the stakeholders of the buying and selling process.

Study of use of integrated marketing communications

In order to assess IMC tools, the authors put forward a hypothesis that a complex use of IMC fosters a long-term relationship among all the stakeholders of the buying and selling process. Accordingly, in order to confirm or reject the hypothesis, the authors conducted research on the use of IMC at Latvian food retail chains. An expert questionnaire was drawn up, and leading specialists from food retail chains were polled. The expert poll was held in 2017. The MS Excel software was used for data aggregation and analysis. The purpose of the expert poll was to find out the IMC applied in the marketing strategy by Latvian food retail chains.

The experts were asked to rate IMC tools applied in marketing strategies and their impact upon demand at retail chains by the following scale:

- N* – the company does not use the marketing communication in question
- 1* – the marketing communication in question reduces demand
- 0* – the marketing communication in question does not affect demand
- 1* – the marketing communication in question slightly increases demand
- 2* – the marketing communication in question substantially increases demand.

In Figure 1 the authors have summarised the expert ratings to illustrate the importance of each group of IMC tools in the marketing strategy of the retail chains.

The results of the expert poll identify 1) the group of IMC price-related tools, 2) the group of IMC staff professionalism- and selling-related tools, and 3) the group of IMC corporate identity-related tools as the ones deemed by experts as most influential in terms of increasing demand in the marketing communication with consumers applied by retail chains. Only then follows the group of IMC management tools and the group of IMC product-related tools, suggesting that the companies have not prioritised a systemic approach in their marketing communication with consumers. The three lowest rated are the group of IMC promotion-related tools, the group of IMC geographic placement- and technology-related tools, and the group of IMC digital promotion-related tools. The authors conclude that IMC digital promotion is a relatively new method of

marketing communications, and the tools of this group are little used or not used at all by the businesses. Nevertheless, the companies that use these tools in their marketing strategy have found them demand-increasing. Still, the majority of the retail chains do not use the said tools in their marketing communications with consumers. The authors encourage businesses to incorporate digital IMC tools in their marketing communication management system, given the development of technologies, the extensive possibilities of communication with consumers (incl. masses, based on the “anytime anywhere” principle).

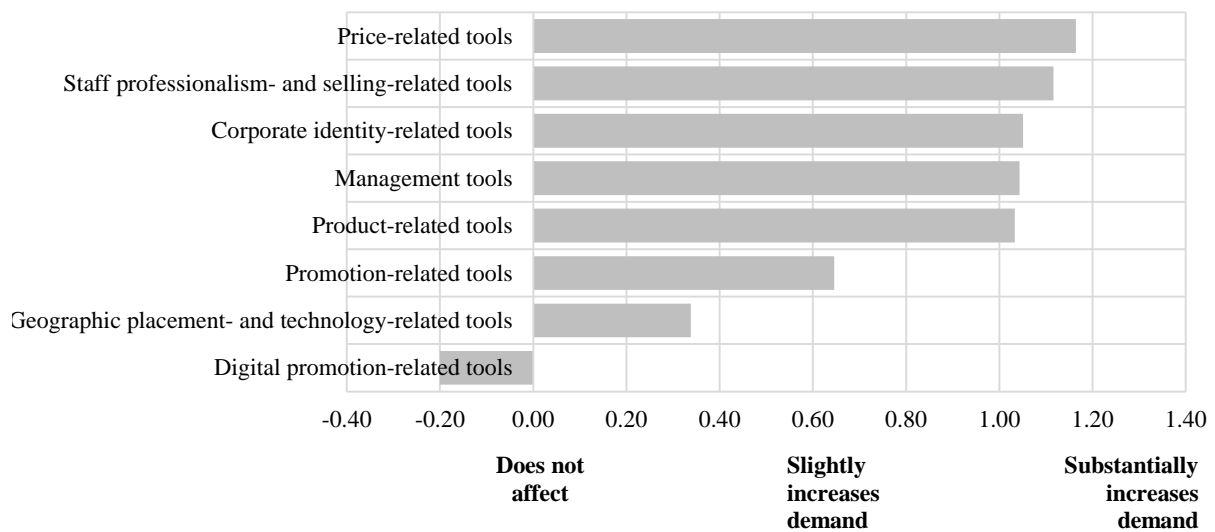


Fig. 1. Impact of IMC tool groups upon demand, a summary of expert ratings (arithmetic mean) (source: Figure developed by the authors)

In Figure 2 the authors have picked the most popular demand-increasing IMC tools from each group applied by Latvian food retail chains in their marketing strategy.

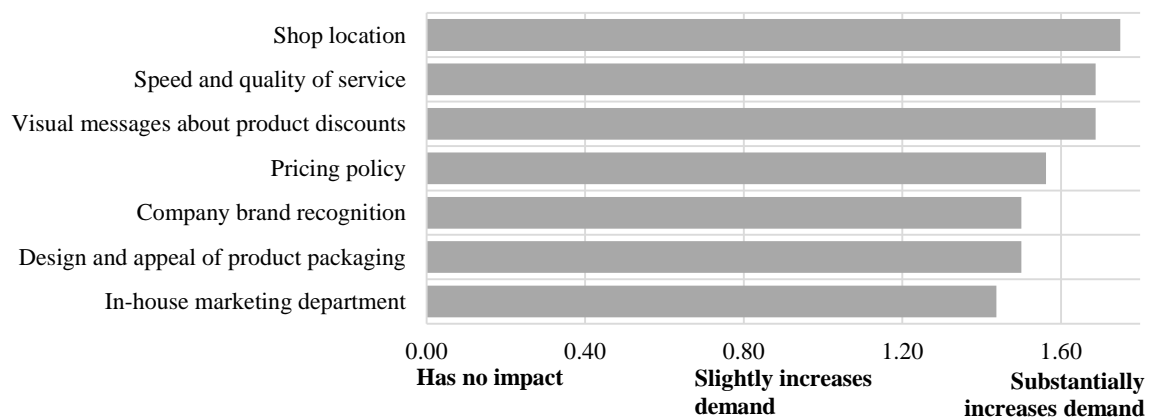


Fig. 2. Most popular demand-increasing IMC tools, average expert ratings (source: Figure developed by the authors)

Figure 2 identifies the shop location as one of the main demand-increasing tools. The authors concur with the expert opinion and add that the shop location definitely correlates with such IMC tools as proximity of a public transport stop, availability of parking space, and proximity of other service providers. Depending on these factors, retail chains acquire loyal long-term customers who return to the shop and make repeated purchases.

The authors agree with the experts on that speed and quality of service is a major demand-increasing factor and a precondition of competition. Businesses need to realise that staff professionalism (incl. speed and quality of service) depends on the level of staff education.

The authors also agree with the experts on that pricing policy as a price-related IMC tool affects demand because the level of prices substantially affects the company's market position, competitive prospects, attractable audience, and overall sales figures etc. The authors conclude that an appropriate pricing policy may yield not only immediate economic benefits, but also a long-term effect – loyal buyers, repeated purchases etc.

As concerns company brand recognition, the authors concur with the expert opinion and find that a key condition in building, raising and promoting a company's brand is the company itself – the body of its values, principles, philosophy etc., including behaviour in the market. Hence, the authors believe that it is also the company's and product manufacturer's reputation that matters in the brand recognition and promotion process. Reputation makes identity, while identity succeeds if there are positive associations. In the authors' opinion, a single systemic approach to building the corporate identity is possible with all IMC tools, but brand recognition stands out as a corporate identity-related IMC tool with an effect upon demand.

The presence of a marketing department, in the authors' view, is one of the key factors in the development or improvement of the overall marketing strategy. Nowadays the major Latvian food retail chains outsource their marketing activities to marketing and advertising agencies. Hence, marketing activities foreseen in the marketing strategy may be implemented for specific short-term projects with short-term goals and corresponding gains or losses, but a systemic approach by integrating and combining IMC activities long-term to achieve better sales figures is not possible with outsourcing. The authors recommend for Latvian food retail chains to budget for an in-house marketing department, including qualified marketing specialists. Such an approach would facilitate not only a systemic approach to marketing activities aimed at better sales figures, but also integrated action with such IMC management tools as cooperation between the marketing department and the procurement department that would help the company make its offer more competitive and not just a campaigned customer-oriented IMC approach, but also the planning, implementation and performance

assessment of IMC based on market research and accordingly consumer demand, thus fostering the further business development and the long-term relationship among all the stakeholders of the buying and selling process.

Based on the results of the expert poll, the authors have developed a conceptual model to be applied by businesses in a marketing strategy for their further development (see Figure 3).

The authors have drawn up a conceptual IMC model consisting of six levels of communication – with the company’s marketing strategy in the centre or the 1st level, followed by the marketing mix (4P – product, price, place, promotion) in the 2nd level, and the types of marketing communications (advertising, public relations, personal selling, direct marketing and sales promotion), through which marketing activities are implemented using various communication channels, in the 3rd level. The IMC tools, shown in the 4th level, can help create the product consumption value and directly influence the buyers’ behaviour in the market (arising of need, information searching, buying decision, buying, product usage), presented in the 5th level.

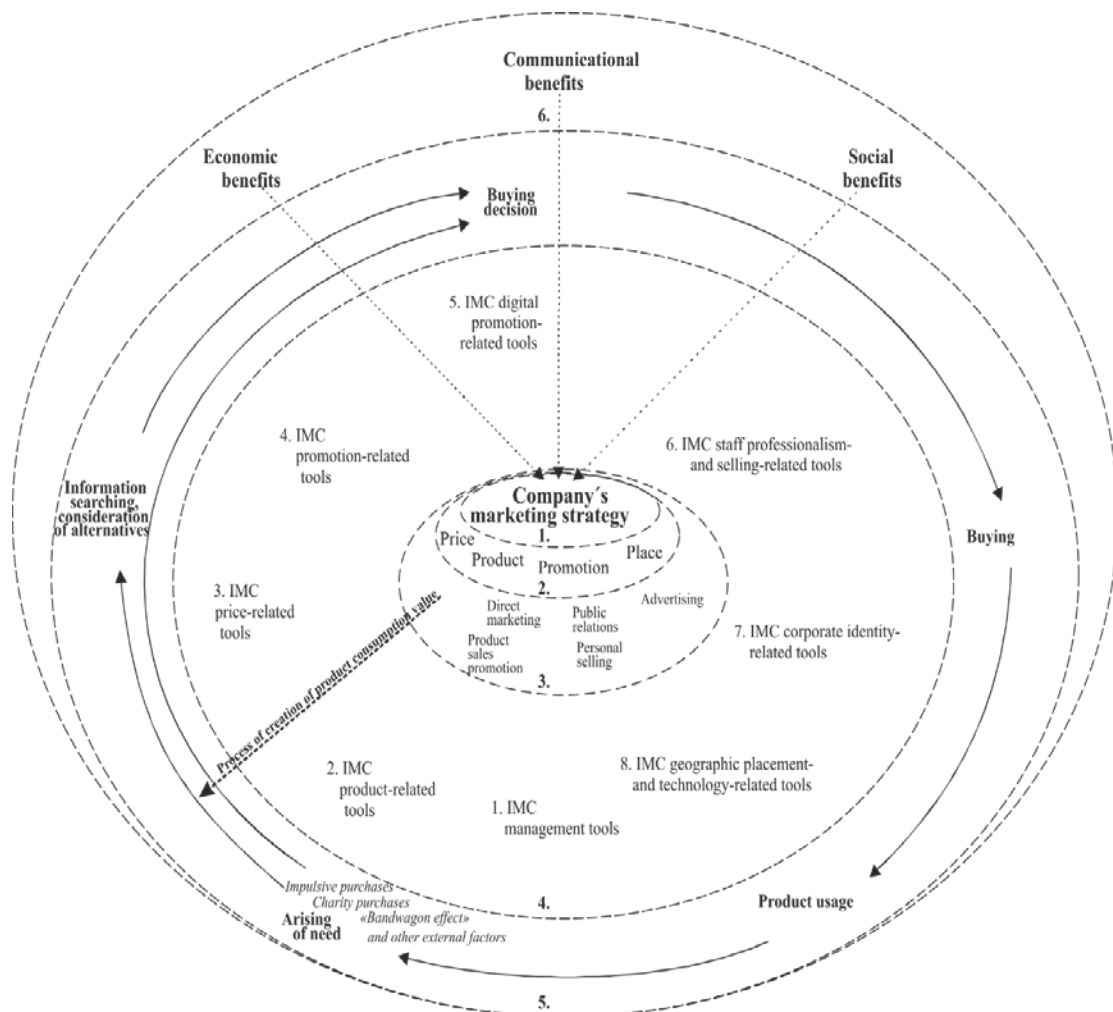


Fig. 3. **Conceptual IMC model** (source: model developed by the authors)

A successful implementation of the IMC process yields benefits – **1) economic**, measured in money, for businesses – increased sales volumes, incl. an increased number of buyers, repeated purchases etc.; for consumers – the product consumption value (functions, gains from usage, information) for the given price. Businesses can weigh their economic benefits by making calculations, for instance: the ratio between the company's market share and the share of marketing communication costs in the industry, the company's marketing communication costs against a 1 % market share, the additional turnover gained from the implementation of marketing communication activities, the profit from the implementation of marketing communications against the costs of marketing communications etc. A variety of methods, internal data, industry, data, grouping, comparison etc. may be used for these purposes; **2) social** – a satisfied consumer, corporate social responsibility put into practice, the company's image, reputation, associations, participation in charity events etc. Social benefits are measured using social media research, sponsorship and its analysis, surveys etc.; **3) communicational** – brand loyalty, a high level of awareness and competence, the attraction of new buyers, the number of repeated purchases etc., measured using such methods as polling, expertise, information collection, data processing, aggregation and analysis, observation, focus groups etc.

The authors particularly stress that the economic, communicational or social benefit of the IMC process to the business, the consumer, or the general public, as shown in the 6th level, may be deemed achieved if the use of IMC tools has influenced the buyer's behaviour at such stages as arising of need or information searching and consideration of alternatives. It is these stages of buyer behaviour that the need for the product arises and the product consumption value is created (not necessarily related to economic benefits only, but also to awareness, information, deliberate choice, advantages of usage etc.), resulting in buyers taking the buying decision. They may also make impulsive purchases driven by various surrounding incentives or external factors (such as charity purposes), in which case the buyer takes the buying decision skipping the stage of information searching and consideration of alternatives and the IMC goal of creating the product consumption value is not accomplished because consumers may buy products without necessity, based on the "bandwagon effect", and not actually use them. They may also have insufficient product information, normally obtained at the stage of information collection and consideration of alternatives. Hence, a repeated purchase and product usage is more unlikely. The authors point out that a long-term relationship between the company and the consumer requires feedback, loyalty to the product, its brand and brand values, which provide the company with foreseeable revenues from regular customers and their repeated purchases, thus also affecting the company's development, assortment planning, provision of supply etc. It may therefore be concluded that the complex

implementation of integrated marketing communications in the market creates a long-term relationship between all three stakeholders and a favourable environment for the further growth of business.

Conclusions and Proposals

1. The use of IMC constantly evolves and the opportunities brought by this process are increasingly topical for small and large businesses alike. The IMC models presented in the literature enable to understand the IMC process, yet there is a lack of guidelines, classification of concrete tools, and methods by which businesses could in practice systematically plan, set up and apply IMC and optimise the processes thereof.
2. There is not enough research on customer-oriented IMC that would not only define tools for a precise and effective communication with consumers, but also provide a single model encompassing processes, experience, actions and benefits.
3. At each stage of buyer behaviour, the application of IMC tools yields more or less benefits, so businesses, in order to reach specific targets and influence the buyers' behaviour in the market, need to use IMC tools in a complex manner, integrating them among each other.
4. In order to reach the IMC goals – economic, communicational and social benefits – businesses may apply and integrate IMC tools classified in 8 groups: management tools, product-related tools, price-related tools, promotion-related tools, digital promotion-related tools, staff professionalism- and selling-related tools, corporate identity-related tools, and geographic placement- and technology-related tools.
5. Demand at Latvian food retail chains is substantially affected by the following IMC tools: pricing policy, speed and quality of service, company brand recognition, the shop location, design and appeal of product packaging, visual messages about product discounts, an in-house marketing department.
6. The objectives set out for the research study have been fulfilled and the goal has been accomplished. The theoretical and practical research and analysis confirms the initial hypothesis that a complex use of IMC tools fosters a long-term relationship among all the stakeholders involved in the buying and selling process.
7. In order to ensure a systemic approach to the management of IMC, businesses should set up a marketing department and have it cooperate with other functional departments, notably the procurement department.
8. When implementing IMC, one should take into account the current trends of development of digital marketing – the Internet as a marketing

communication environment; digital promotion based on vast options of communication among consumers; the increased role of direct marketing in the creation of a loyalty system; the link between marketing communications and stages of buyer behaviour that would enable businesses to reach their development targets.

9. When implementing IMC, one should not focus merely on increasing the sales volumes, but – in view of growth targets and economic, social and communicational benefits – also on the stages of buyer behaviour that generate a long-term relationship among the stakeholders of the buying and selling process.

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