

## Integrated Marketing Communication

American Association of Advertising defines IMC as “a concept of marketing communications planning that recognizes the added value of a comprehensive plan that evaluates the strategic roles of a variety of communication disciplines – for ex., general advertising, direct response, sales promotions and PR- and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency and maximum impact.”

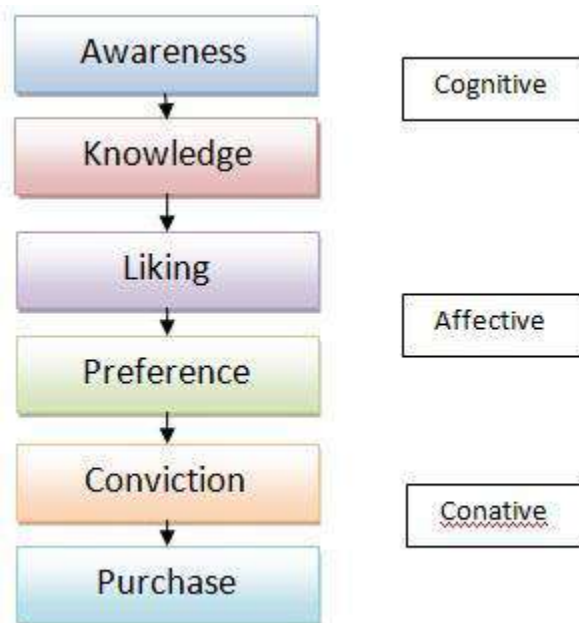
### Steps in IMC process

#### 1. Identifying the target audience

Marketing communications should start with a clear target audience in mind. Target audience may be potential buyers or current users, actual buyers/influencers. Marketing communicators should understand their demographics and psychographics, media habits and level of awareness.

#### 2. Determining communication objectives

Next, marketing communicators must decide on the desired set of responses from the target market. The most widely accepted consumer response model is “Hierarchy of effects model” also known as “buyers’ readiness states”



First the communicator must know how aware the target audience is of the product or organization. If most of it is unaware then awareness has to be built. Once awareness is generated, the next communication objective will be to spread product knowledge. After the target audience has the requisite product knowledge, marketers should generate liking for the product. Even after developing liking for the product, people may still not prefer to buy the

product. Communicators must then try to build consumer preference by promoting the brand's quality, value, price and other features. When the target audience prefers but is not yet convinced to buy the product, communicator's job is to convince them as to why this product should be bought and not other; why is this the best choice. Some members of the target audience may have conviction but do not make a purchase. They may wait for more information or post pone purchase. Communicator must lead them to take the final step by offering the product at low price or offering a premium or samples.

### 3. Designing the message

An effective message must produce AIDA.

#### The AIDA Model

- **Attention**
  - Get noticed.
- **Interest**
  - What's in it for me?
  - Problem solving?
- **Desire**
  - 'Want' factor
  - Brand
- **Action**
  - How do I get it?

This step involves deciding on the (i) message content – what to say; appeals to be used (emotional, rational or ethical) (ii) message structure – how to say it logically (iii) message format – how to say it symbolically (iv) message source – who should say/source of the message. A source having expertise, trustworthiness and likability is considered a credible source.

### 4. Selecting communication channels

Personal (people based) or non personal (non people based using mass communication tools) channels may be used to carry the communication message. Personal channel includes (i) expert channel - acknowledged individual experts promote the company's products (ii) advocate channel – person hired by the company advocates the product (iii) social channel – word-of-mouth communication among neighbors, friends or colleagues. Non personal channels include (i) media like print, broadcast, etc. (ii) atmospheres/environments designed to create buyers' leanings toward product and (iii) events designed to communicate particular messages to target audiences

### 5. Establishing communication budget

One of the tough decisions facing a company is to decide how much to spend on communication. Following percentage of sales method, promotional budget is set as percentage of current or forecasted sales or as percentage of sales price of the product. In affordable method budget is fixed at a level that the company can afford irrespective of sales or sales price of the product. It is subjective method in which the executive will decide the budget based on facts and figures. In competitive parity method promotion budgets are set to match competitors' outlay. Under objective and task method, tasks required to be done to achieve specific communication objectives are determined. The cost of performing these tasks are then estimated and promotional budget fixed accordingly.

#### 6. Deciding on communication mix

The company has to divide the total promotional budget among the five elements – advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, public relations & publicity and direct marketing. Advertising is significant for consumer goods while personal selling is more useful in case of industrial goods. Advertising and public relations work better in generating awareness about the product while personal selling is required to create conviction and purchase action. Similarly during introduction stage of the product life cycle, intensive advertising is required to create awareness. Sales promotions will help induce early trial. Decline stage calls for more promotional offers to increase sales figures.

#### 7. Measuring results and taking feedback

After sending the message the communicator must research its effect on the target audience. Measurement involves an understanding of whether the target audience remember the message or not, how many times and at what points they saw the message, their past and current attitudes towards the product and the company, how many liked the product, how many bought it and how many talked about it to others.

#### 8. Managing and coordinating MC process

In this final step the company works out the roles that various promotional tools will play and the extent to which each will be used. Coordination of promotional activities and their timing is then required to modify the same according to PLC stage and thus improve efficiency.