



An exploratory study on modern media planning and the gap between theory and reality

Dr. Asok Biswas

Professor and Head of the Department,
Journalism & Multimedia,
CGC Jhanjeri
Mohali, Punjab, India
Email: as.ok.100@gmail.com
Tel: 0830 684 9669

ABSTRACT

Concepts of IMC and a range of scientific models for media planning have received recent attention in the academic literature. At the same time, marketing academia has been criticized for being out of touch with practice. This paper begins with a review of the current literature on IMC and media planning before detailing an exploratory study conducted to ascertain the attitudes of advertising practitioners towards both IMC and modern media planning. The paper concludes by drawing a comparison between theory and practice.

Keywords: Integrated marketing communications (IMC), Sales promotion, FMCG, Coulter and Sarkis, Boivin and Coderre

INTRODUCTION

Media expenditure constitutes the largest share of all advertising expenditure (Tellis 2005), with the UK advertising industry experiencing an 82 per cent increase in advertising expenditure between 1996 and 2005 (World Advertising Research Center 2005). In addition to this growth, the development of new media and modern tools for media measurement are changing media planning from both practical and theoretical perspectives. Furthermore, the integrated marketing communications (IMC) concept has become a widely accepted ideology in marketing academia and has received tremendous attention from marketing academics over the past two decades (Kitchen et al. 2004). The integration suggested by the IMC paradigm is directly related to the integration in media planning and use, so changes driven by IMC can also impact media planning. However, as Boddy (2007) contends, marketing academic research is often criticized as myopic and actually contributes to the academic–practice divide. This study reviews recent marketing literature related to media planning, from which several relevant themes are identified. These themes then form the basis of an exploratory study into current media planning perceptions among practitioners. Gaps between theory and practice are discussed.

MEDIA PLANNING

There is still some disagreement about the definition of IMC and both the concept and process (Beard 1997; Kliatchko 2005), despite, or perhaps because of, its rapid change in such a short period of time (Keller 2001). Kliatchko's (2005) recent literature review notes that various definitions encompass the theme of one voice across all messages and media, coordination, total branding, integration, coordination of supporting communication tools (sales promotion, PR, etc.). With advertising, and its ability to influence consumer behavior. The value of IMC is said to be increased sales, profitability and cost savings (Kitchen 2005, 2007), resulting from a fundamental shift from an 'outside-in' approach to focus on customer needs (Swain 2004) and encourages loyalty. Eagle et al (1999) found IMC to be a driver of fundamental change within advertising firms, while Schultz and Kitchen (2000) strongly believe that IMC is a new paradigm and not merely a management fad. However, they agree that there appear to be some difficulties in translating IMC from a concept to practice (Eagle and Kitchen 2000), with Kliachko (2002) describing it as "conceptually old but functionally new". This seems to be particularly true in Great Britain, where the concept is theoretically mature but still in early stages of development from a practical perspective (Kitchen et al 2004; Kitchen 2007). Therefore, a basic research question is still to confirm the practical workability of IMC (Swain 2004).

One of the main challenges in implementing IMC is the structural changes required for organizations (Kitchen et al 2004). The integrated approach of IMC tends towards centralized decision-making to ensure control and

coordination of messages. However, as Christensen et al (2005) note, the fragmentation of consumer markets and the need for decentralization to move decision-making power as close to the customer as possible as consumers become active as opposed to passive. At the same time, as suggested by Morrison and Hayley (2006), media strategy can be influenced by the integration of account planning with overall business solution development. Although not yet fully researched, these authors found that account planners need more integration with media planning than other planning areas of the agency. It also appears that integration of planning in full service firms seems to be lacking in media strategy, public relations and sales promotion planning (Coulter and Sarkis 2005; Morrison and Haley 2006).

Since its inception, the focus of media planning as part of the overall advertising effort has been on how to optimize choice and value for money among the various types of available media. Hansen and Christiansen (2005) discuss modern developments in media spending and suggest that the level of market share for FMCG determines the amount of money spent on advertising. Brands with higher market share can maintain a lower share of voice (ie, spend less on advertising) while capitalizing on the brand's existing strength. At the same time, new entrants and smaller brands will have to spend more to grow. Thus, in both oligopoly and competitive market conditions, correct estimation in favor of large brands can lead to a reduction in share of voice, therefore reducing advertising expenditure to the right extent for positive brand and economic results. As the industry advances, digital technology, consumer fragmentation and the need for greater accountability are factors that are challenging established practices (Lloyd et al 2000). Emphasis is shifting toward greater accountability and lower commission rates, thus changing the focus of agency compensation (Bogart 2000).

As media buying habits have evolved, other trends have emerged. As in any industry, maturity has led to consolidation and consolidation, primarily due to increased purchasing power. Other important factors driving change are consumer fragmentation, increase in options and types of media, increasing amount of technology and information required to make media planning more scientific. Bogart (2000) explained that the typical media department structure has shifted from consideration of all media-related functions, including buying, planning, execution and follow-up, to the unbundling of media buying and planning.

Planning is often retained by agencies when purchasing for increased efficiency. As buying centers (a company specializing in media buying) have grown in size, the emphasis has generally shifted from financial to operational efficiency. This has led to the development of a range of optimization models. Media planning at a basic level should include at least two variables: media options and reach options, and this basic planning method is usually viewed as cost per thousand. Today, however, multiple planning and measurement techniques considering reach and optimal frequency for fragmented audiences have led to more complex models, while computer-aided programs allow multiple campaign structures to be compared against each other.

Yet, even with a range of optimization models from which to choose, there is still the need to balance art and science at the heart of media planning. Artistic ability, as well as experience, product type, target audience, budget, etc. are largely combined with scientific modeling. Indeed, as Bogart (2000) notes, there is no formula guaranteed to bring success, although sole reliance on formulas can be a recipe for failure. Furthermore, Coulter and Sarkis (2005) suggest that media planning has relied heavily on judgment-based decision making in the past. The need to formalize these decisions in the modern media environment is a challenge that involves the integration of qualitative and quantitative techniques for measuring media efficiency for planning purposes (Tektaş and Alakavuk 2003).

Coulter and Sarkis (2005) suggest an analytical processing model for media planning that considers both the qualitative and quantitative aspects of traditional media to help media planners make more informed decisions. Media planners today use 5 - 15 distinct factors that relate to the qualitative aspects of various media options. The relative advantages and disadvantages of individual vehicles are considered from the three main objectives of exposure, communication and response generation. Hence the difficulty of incorporating expert knowledge into computer based systems is an important factor. However, the focus of much academic research related to media planning centers around the use of more sophisticated and scientific methods that incorporate all quantifiable factors and at the same time reduce traditional judgments (Boivin and Coderre 2000).

Cheong's (2005) review of the literature on modern developments in media planning identified two main approaches: the 'media approach' and the 'consumer audience approach'. The former incorporates developments such as frequency value planning and media lagged effects, while the latter focuses more on product and brand usage and value factor distance measurement. Recent research seems to suggest a shift in focus towards consumers. Kusumoto (2002), for example, suggests that typical computer-based optimization models, with their emphasis on demographics and cost efficiency, do not necessarily cover highly engaged audiences, and do not consider psychographics. He designed the value factor distance model which, he claims, overcomes many of the problems of the traditional model, because it does not depend on demographics, but rather on shared values between brand users and magazine readers.

Similarly, Heath and Nairn (2005) contradict the long-held view of measuring advertising effectiveness through recall and suggest a model based on recognition. Recall is believed to affect direct or explicit memory processes, whereas recognition affects implicit memory, leading to emotional changes. Implicit memory processing does not require the consumer's attention, thus can change mental behavior even when attention or involvement is low. Heath and Nairn's (2005) study therefore shifts the focus of research on effectiveness from traditional recall to a cross-analysis of recognition as they are able to assess the emotional power that advertisements possess. indeed, Recent studies suggest that media decisions should include awareness of a medium's influence on a specific type of message for a specific product category (Shabit et al, 2004; Vakratsas and Ma 2005). The use of media context to provide an experiential framework for consumers is discussed by Calder and Malthouse (2005), who suggest that media metrics must go beyond reach and frequency to consider the ability to influence consumer minds. Messages should therefore be seen as customer contact points as opposed to persuasive arguments alone, thus evaluating media requires considering the quality of experience through media communication rather than just the likelihood of exposure.

More recent studies also focus on the consumer behavioral consequences of advertisements Advertising spaces in terms of pre- and post-product use were studied by Brun-Latour and Latour (2005) who found that consumer experience in different situations can be transformed by post-experience advertising and a pre-experience advertisement. These situational studies of consumer behavior provide important information about the resulting behavioral changes, suggesting that effectiveness tests can be transformed by psychographic studies of consumers so that media planners are able to alter content or placement decisions for improved results.

Overall, then, this brief review of recent academic literature on media planning suggests several important trends, from which specific research questions emerged. First, there is still disagreement among academics about what constitutes IMC, although there seems to be agreement on its value and usefulness. The literature also suggests that while the IMC concept has been around for some time, there are difficulties in its practical implementation, not least in terms of structural changes and integration of the necessary departments. In addition to the changes resulting from IMC, the literature suggests a shift toward greater accountability for media planners. However, despite the recognition of the need to balance judgment and scientific tools, the academic literature focuses on scientific methods that minimize judgement. Finally, there appears to be a major shift in the emphasis of academic research toward consumer approaches and recognition of the need to consider qualitative and psychographic data. This change suggests a change in the type of media planning tools used and the measurement of their effectiveness. It was the identification of these trends that drove the exploratory study.

METHOD

A structured questionnaire, consisting of both open and closed questions, was designed around the 10 specific research areas mentioned above, to ascertain the perceptions of advertising practitioners in these areas. The questionnaire was designed in electronic format as a web page using the services of ZapSurvey.com

The Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) member firms comprise the initial sampling frame, And access to these organizations is gained through online email communications available on the IPA website (www.ipa.co.uk). Both full service and media specific organizations were selected, resulting in initial email contact with 270 organizations These emails were sent to manager-level staff in the media department and explained the nature of the research and the web link to the questionnaire. Over a 4-week period, reminder emails were sent on a weekly basis to organizations that did not respond. At the end of the 4-week period, a formal letter was sent to those who had not yet participated. Because the response rate was still disappointing, a second sampling frame was identified. This included a further 436 agencies identified through the internet source 'Marketing and Creative Handbook 2007' (www.mch.co.uk), resulting in a total of 706 agencies contacted.

RESULTS

Despite efforts to encourage agencies to participate in the study, only 39 responses were received, giving an overall response rate of only 5.5%. Due to these small numbers, detailed statistical analysis is impossible, thus this section is limited to descriptive data analysis.

As can be seen from Table 1, the individual respondents were drawn from different categories and designations.

Table 1: Job Title/Department of Respondents

Department	n	%
Senior Management	12	31
Media	11	28

Account Planning	6	15
New Business Development	5	13
Other	5	13
Total	39	100

Table 2 shows the majority (77%) of respondents had extensive experience (11 or more years), while only a small number (8%) were relatively inexperienced.

Table 2: Years of Experience of Respondents

Years of Experience	n	%
1-5	3	8
6-10	6	15
11 or more	30	77
Total	39	100

Respondents were drawn from a fairly equal number of agency sizes (table 3).

Table 3: Agency Size

Size of Agency (employee numbers)	n	%
Small (10-20)	14	38
Medium (21-40)	10	27
Large (more than 40)	13	35
Total	37	100

The questionnaire began by asking respondents to define IMC, from a choice of definitions, all of which appeared in the literature. Respondents could choose any number of options, and as Table 4 shows, practitioners feel that IMC is best described as a combination and sequence of communication options to maximize impact. Many consider it a strategic initiative, and brand orientation is also linked to the IMC paradigm. Comprehensiveness and stakeholder orientation were less popular choices.

Table 4: Practitioner Definitions of IMC

Definition	n	%
Comprehensiveness	20	51
Strategic Orientation	34	87
Brand Orientation	26	67
Variety of Communications	28	72
Combination of Communications	36	92
Consistency	32	82
Maximisation of Communication Impact	33	85
Stakeholder Orientation	16	41

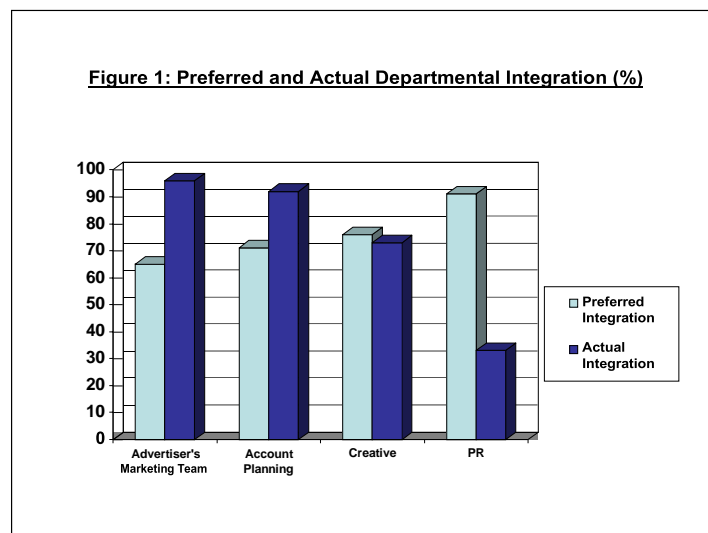
In terms of the scope of IMC, respondents were asked whether they believed IMC was a business process or a marketing-related activity, and how long they thought the concept had been around. While the majority (62%) thought it was a business process, more than a third (38%) of respondents believed IMC was only a marketing activity. Despite this, no one thought it was merely a passing management fad. Rather, only 5% believed it to be a new business concept, with the majority claiming that IMC as a concept has always existed.

In addition to the nature of IMC, respondents were asked to demonstrate levels of agreement regarding a statement of structural changes indicated by IMC. As Table 5 shows, the majority of respondents consider this to be true (28%) or at least partially true (44%). However, 15% were unsure, and 13% felt that IMC could be implemented with no or little structural changes.

Table 5: IMC and Structural Changes

IMC Dictates Structural Changes to Business	n	%
Strongly Agree	11	28
Partially Agree	17	44
Neither Agree nor Disagree	6	15
Partially Disagree	2	5
Strongly Disagree	3	8

Respondents also gave their views on which departments they felt should be integrated with media planning when constructing an IMC campaign, and which were actually integrated in practice (figure 1).



As can be seen from Figure 1, the actual level of integration between the media planning department and the marketing team and account planning rime is higher than the respondent thought. In contrast, actual and desired integration with creative teams was about equal, while actual integration with PR lagged far behind the level of integration preferred by media planning people.

The literature also suggests an increased need for accountability, and overwhelmingly respondents agreed that this was true, with only 10% failing to experience increased levels of accountability. Similarly, practice reflects the literature in terms of media planning as it combines the planner's experience and judgment with modern optimization tools. In fact, 86% of respondents agreed that media planning should integrate both judgment and models. That said, there appears to be a gap between the literature's focus on scientific approaches to media planning and effectiveness measurement, and the proposed shift away from media approaches and toward the inclusion of psychographic data to get closer to the customer. Indeed, Table 6 shows that increasing media options are considered to be driving change to a greater extent than consumer segmentation, However, technological developments in media planning are not considered a major change driver compared to increased accountability.

Table 6: Change Drivers to Media Planning

Change Driver	n	%
Consumer Fragmentation	21	72
Technological Developments in Planning	11	38
Increased Media Options	25	86
Increased Accountability	22	56
Increased Information	2	7
Other	3	10

Likewise, despite the academic focus on psychographics, as table 7 highlights, communication, response generation and exposure targets are still given priority over psychographics when completing media schedules.

Table 7: Relative Importance of Factors for Consideration in Scheduling Practice

Factor for Consideration	Level of Importance (%)		
	High	Moderate	Low
Exposure Targets	47	52	0
Communication Targets	80	20	0
Response Generation Targets	58	37	4
Demographics	16	70	12
Psychographics	33	54	12

Finally, as Figure 2 shows, the media planning and measurement tools used in practice are not reflected in recent literature. While 100% of respondents claimed to be aware of the value factor index, only 16% claimed to use it. Similarly, the actual use of other planning models lags far behind the 100% awareness level for the Analytical Hierarchy Process (28% use level) and the Analytical Network Process (14% actual use level). Only frequency value planning and lagged effects of media appear to have similar levels of awareness and use among practitioners. As can be seen from Table 8, despite the academic focus on scientific measurement techniques, sales growth is still the most popular performance measure in practice. At the same time, the much-criticized ad recall is less used than brand identity surveys.

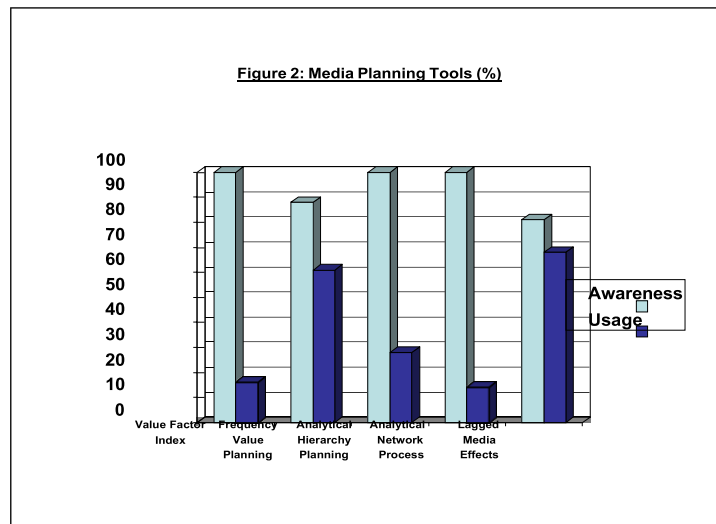


Table 8: Effectiveness Measurement Techniques Used

Measurement Technique	n	%
Cost Per Thousand	7	26
Sales Increase	20	74
Ad Recall	10	37
Brand Identity Survey	14	52
Other (including ROI & direct responses)	8	30

DISCUSSION

In terms of IMC, a comparison between theory on the one hand and belief and practice on the other indicates that the literature is correct that IMC is a conceptually old concept (Kliatchko 2002), and is perceived by both academics (Schultz and Kitchen 2000) and practitioners to be much more than a passing fad. However, although the sample as a whole agreed with the literature that IMC is a business process, many respondents failed to take a broader stakeholder perspective. Stakeholder orientation and pervasiveness in IMC ideology relate to communication above and beyond the brand and promotional levels and these findings support Kitchen's (2005) contention that UK organizations are still anchored in the infant stage of the process. Nevertheless, synergy and a strong brand focus seem to be advantages that some firms are reaping, although the consumer behavior consequences suggested by Schultz (2005) are less prominent at this time.

Implementing IMC as a business process requires integration across communication disciplines. The literature suggests that this requirement may require agencies to make relevant adjustments to their organizational structure (Kitchen et al 2004), a view that most respondents agree with. However, differences between actual and preferred departmental integration indicate that these changes are not yet complete. The lack of integration with the PR function not only supports previous research on full integration (Coulter and Sarkis 2005; Morrison and Haley 2006), but is particularly interesting given the relative lack of stakeholder perspectives taken by respondents. This suggests that PR, with its traditional focus beyond the brand and consumer level, can still play a major role in the full implementation of IMC, allowing agencies to take a broader view.

Respondents wholeheartedly agree with Bogart's (2000) assertion that media planning is a balance of art and science. Similarly, increased accountability often mentioned in the literature (Christensen et al 2005) was shown to be a major concern for media practitioners, with pressures perceived to be greater than ever. Contrast between theory and practice, However, a shift from a media to a more consumer audience perspective is found in the literature (Cheong 2005) and current practice. The results suggest that the most used media planning tools are still lagged effects of media and frequency value planning, both of which constitute a media approach. In contrast,

models such as value factor distance, which are rarely used by respondents, are used to ascertain the consumer audience's perspective, Hugs will be needed. Similarly, psychographics was given only a moderate level of importance, and needs to be given more priority if the consumer approach is to be advanced. Nevertheless, respondents suggested that brand surveys are currently used more than ad recall methods, fulfilling Heath and Nairn's (2005) call for a move away from measurement methods that focus solely on recall.

CONCLUSIONS

This study was conducted to determine the gap between theory and practice in media planning. A considerable amount of understanding and appreciation of the IMC concept was found among the respondents. However, there is still some uncertainty about the overall corporate nature of IMC. The study revealed the changing environment of media planning due to the increase in media options and changing consumer demands. A comparison of theory and practice regarding the use of professional judgment and the use of modern tools demonstrates that despite agreement between the two regarding the need for both, the actual use of more modern tools has not yet caught up with the literature. Moreover, belief in the importance of psychographic profiling in practice also lags behind academic recognition.

The main limitation of this study is the very small sample size, and the results cannot be generalized to the UK advertising industry as a whole. Marketing academia has been criticized as being out of touch with practice (Boddy 2007). Perhaps the most important factor to emerge from this study is that over 94% of practitioners contacted were repeatedly ignored, Long, and professional efforts to persuade them to participate in research. If the academic-practitioner divide is to be bridged, both sides need to collaborate. Until then, academics will continue to risk conducting research that fails to achieve its potential from a practical perspective.

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About the author:

Dr. Asok Biswas is a Professor, Head of the Department of Journalism & Multimedia in the Chandigarh Group of College-Jhanjeri, Mohali, Punjab. His research focuses on Media planning and buying, advertising, human behavior and media management, market research and survey.