Differences in the Meaning of IMC: A Study of Advertising, Public Relations, and Marketing Professionals

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ABSTRACT: Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) has developed into a well-established discipline, shaped by the evolving role of communication technology, which now serves both as a contextual factor and a practical tool in its implementation. This study investigates differences in the interpretation of IMC across three professional groups: marketing, advertising, and public relations. A quantitative, exploratory research design was adopted, employing purposive and quota sampling techniques, with 30 respondents selected from each profession. Data analysis was performed using ANOVA and Tukey tests. The findings indicate no significant differences among the professions regarding IMC as an approach and a business-oriented framework. This shared understanding encompasses internal communication, customer-focused evaluation, and external communication elements such as marketing communication, audience management, dialogue, branding, communication technology, and evaluation. However, notable differences emerged between public relations and advertising compared to marketing in their interpretation of IMC as a strategy and tactic. These differences also extended to aspects such as comprehensive planning, coordination, integration, and synergy of tools and channels, the use of communication technology, and the implementation of two-way communication. Moreover, the differing interpretations included an emphasis on understanding customers, providing them with the freedom to discuss the brand, and ensuring clarity and consistency in brand messaging. Further distinctions were observed between public relations versus advertising and marketing regarding IMC as a management process for channel oversight, as well as the evaluation of IMC's strategic role, brand behavior, and brand loyalty. Finally, all three professions exhibited unique interpretations of IMC as a component of brand equity strategy. Future research is necessary to explore the distinct understanding of IMC by public relations professionals, whose perspectives consistently differ from those in marketing. Such studies could delve deeper into how public relations practitioners conceptualize IMC and its relationship to marketing practices.

KEYWORDS: Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), differences in meaning of IMC, brand Equity, marketing professionals

INTRODUCTION

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) has evolved and become established, studied, and practiced worldwide, including in Indonesia. In a study by Estaswara et al. (2023) in Indonesia, approximately half of the respondents practiced IMC with a focus on branding as the primary message, while the rest implemented IMC solely as a means to communicate products using various communication elements and media, particularly online and social media. According to Estaswara and Said (2004a), the understanding of IMC in Indonesia involves comprehensive planning that integrates various promotional elements. This aligns with Kliatchko's (2009) holistic perspective on IMC, which aims to deliver consistent messaging through the integration of all promotional mix elements. However, IMC was initially developed in response to changing market dynamics (Kim et al., 2004; Delgado-Ballester et al., 2012; Šerić et al., 2013).

Kitchen et al. (2008) argued that research on IMC varies, but the first step in advancing the field involves developing the necessary information to verify conceptualization and theorization, thereby building a robust theoretical foundation for IMC. To promote the effectiveness of IMC theory, some researchers suggest a shift from theory to practice (Kitchen et al., 2008), asserting that transitioning from tactical to strategic orientation can help businesses advance (Holm, 2006). In Indonesia, nearly all IMC-related journals focus on practice or implementation and remain at the tactical level, addressing various communication elements such as advertising, direct response, sales promotion, and public relations (Estaswara, 2008a). However, some studies have highlighted

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branding as a primary message and the use of social media (Estaswara et al., 2023). These studies generally acknowledge IMC's added value, which stems from the combined impact of various activities involving communication elements and media. In other words, the synergistic effect of these activities exceeds the sum of their individual impacts, a phenomenon referred to as synergy (Naik & Peters, 2009). Despite being well-documented and researched, these efforts have yet to fully encapsulate the current state of IMC.

In the realm of information technology, IMC positions communication technology not only as a context but also as a strategy and technique for communicating brands. IMC now involves selecting not only traditional media but also online, internet-based media such as social media and websites (Šerić, 2016). Scholars have recognized the importance of IMC in relation to interactive media, branding, and internal corporate processes (Kliatchko, 2008). Companies must adopt or invest in communication technology as a necessity in a world increasingly driven by technological advancements (Mihalič & Buhalis, 2013; Sirirak et al., 2011). Nevertheless, Šerić (2016) noted that debates surrounding the productivity of communication technology in companies remain inconclusive, even as such technology significantly shapes IMC and advances its implementation.

Regarding communication technology, Šerić (2016) offered the following definition of IMC (Šerić et al., 2015):

> "A tactical and strategic consumer-centric business process, boosted by advances in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) which, on the basis of information obtained from customer databases, delivers a clear and consistent message through the coordination and synergies of different communications tools and channels, in order to nourish long-lasting profitable relationships with customers and other stakeholders and create and maintain brand equity."

This definition highlights several key aspects: customer databases, clear and consistent brand messaging, coordination and synergy among various tools and channels, dialogue with customers and stakeholders expressed as profitable relationships, and evaluation (measurement). These aspects have been identified in previous definitions (Estaswara, 2008a, 2008b; Duncan, 2002; Schultz & Schultz, 1998, 2004; Kliatchko, 2005). However, one overlooked component in most IMC definitions is the role of information and communication technology (ICT). Based on these definitions, the key aspects of IMC can be summarized as follows (Kliatchko, 2009):

1. Coordination and synergy across marketing communication disciplines and various channels or tools within the IMC program;
2. Maximized consistency and coordination of messages and communication effectiveness;
3. Understanding and fostering profitable relationships with specific audiences or stakeholders and their brands;
4. Evaluation and measurement of IMC programs;
5. Strategic management of marketing communication planning and business processes.

Differences in IMC perceptions across various studies extend beyond definitional issues, which, while significant, also raise broader questions regarding brand communication and the effectiveness of IMC program evaluations (Swain, 2004; Kim et al., 2004; Kitchen & Li, 2005). In Indonesia, research on IMC typically relies on definitions provided by the 4As (American Association of Advertising Agencies), emphasizing a "tools-first" rather than a "consumer-first" approach (Kliatchko, 2009). Moreover, many companies in Indonesia apply IMC using an inside-out marketing approach, combining all promotional elements into a semblance of IMC, although true IMC extends beyond this stage (Kitchen et al., 2004). Nonetheless, studies on IMC in Indonesia have demonstrated the use of communication technology and social media, albeit primarily in one-way communication (Estaswara & Said, 2024a, 2024b).

From a practitioner's perspective, the aforementioned IMC definitions are relevant to understanding how communication programs should be developed, implemented, and linked with various management initiatives (Kitchen & Schultz, 2009). This relevance stems from the positive effects of IMC on core concepts such as market share and profitability (Zabkar et al., 2015), sales (Reid, 2005), customer satisfaction (Reid, 2003, 2005; Šerić et al., 2015), loyalty (Reid, 2002; Šerić et al., 2013), and brand equity (Duncan & Moriarty, 1997; McGrath, 2005; Navarro et al., 2009; Delgado-Ballester et al., 2012; Šerić et al., 2014). IMC also requires companies to integrate communication technology internally for database management and externally for customer engagement (Vernuccio & Cecotti, 2015). Thus, IMC and communication technology have become indispensable in today's business environment (Šerić, 2016).

Consumer-generated content, media audience fragmentation, media saturation, the growth of social media, and mobile technology have reshaped the landscape since IMC emerged approximately 35 years ago. The most evident impact on marketing communication has been in branding and brand-building activities (Batra & Keller, 2016; Madhavaram et al., 2005; Orazi et al., 2017). Regarding media evolution in IMC, research has addressed media and audience fragmentation (Mulhern, 2009) and cross-media and media synergy developments (Naik & Peters, 2009). Meanwhile, Kerr and Schultz (2010) highlighted the significance of changes in media and messaging, leading to two marketing communication models that managers struggle to manage. In the

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traditional outbound or push model, communication is one-to-many, and companies control both messages and channels. Conversely, the new inbound or pull system features interactive communication, with consumers or customers actively engaging with social media and performing multitasking roles (Pilotta et al., 2004). Consumers increasingly connect with one another, participate in electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), and exist ubiquitously (Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009).

The definitions and developments above indicate that IMC is not only driven by advances in communication technology (or ICT, as described by Šerić et al. [2015]) but also implemented through communication technology, both tactically and strategically. Aligning with the notion that IMC should transition from concept to practice (Kitchen et al., 2008; Holm, 2006), its implementation must involve developing the information required to verify and articulate its conceptualization and theorization (Kitchen et al., 2008).

Furthermore, regarding brand communication, Michael Maskus, Head of Group Marketing at Allianz Group, stated that "you have to deliver what you promise" (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005). From this point, it can be concluded that a brand is a promise (Estaswara, 2008b). However, this promise must be fulfilled by the company. The phrase "high promise, low delivery" (Estaswara, 2008a) should never arise. To build a strong brand, the brand's promise must be clear, consistent, and aligned with what the company delivers (Aaker, 1996).

Several authors have explicitly addressed branding, including Keagen et al. (1992), Schultz and Schultz (2004), Kliatchko (2005), and Duncan (2002). The term 'brand communication' in the definition by Keagen et al. (1992) is described as "its perceived brand value," meaning that IMC, through coordination and synergy across various promotional elements, must communicate brand value to customers. Schultz and Schultz (2004) further elaborate on this by stating, "execute and evaluate coordinated, measurable, persuasive brand communication programs," which aligns with Keagen et al. (1992) but delves into the detailed execution of these programs. Kliatchko (2005) adds that IMC involves "strategically managing audience-focused, channel-centered, and results-driven brand communication programs over time," offering a broader interpretation of IMC and brand communication. Lastly, Duncan (2002) emphasizes that IMC must engage in meaningful dialogue with its customers, underscoring that brand communication is critically important.

The concept of meaningful dialogue and channel-centered communication cannot be separated from advancements in communication technology. Relevant statements include "all messages and media" (Keagan et al., 1992), "many communication channels" (Kotler, 1999), and "all messages sent to these groups and encouraging data-driven" (Duncan, 2002). Currently, media developments have surpassed traditional marketing communication concepts based on conventional media. As previously mentioned, websites and social media have evolved and become integral to everyday life (Schultz & Patti, 2009; Šerić, 2016; Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009). Furthermore, database-driven communication technology has advanced significantly, making it imperative for companies to engage in meaningful dialogue with customers, which can be achieved using various communication technologies that must also be documented (Šerić, 2016; Estaswara, 2016; Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009; Pilotta et al., 2004).

The most challenging aspect of IMC lies in developing effective measurement techniques. Swain (2004) and Semenik (2002) noted that attention to IMC measurement in books and articles remains weak and superficial. Schultz and Schultz (1998) approached this issue by redefining IMC as a hierarchical process comprising four stages: first, communication coordination; second, defining marketing communication through research and consumer feedback; third, building globally segmented databases to provide a foundation for communication and consumer behavior measurement; and fourth, integrating strategic and financial planning, which includes monitoring ROI performance across audience segments.

As a foundation for planning and measuring IMC, Kitchen and Schultz (1999) recommended an outside-in approach to market planning, emphasizing customer orientation and focusing on audiences as the primary goal rather than relying on a push-pull inside-out product approach. Additionally, attention should be given to all potential contact points a company or brand has with prospective or existing customers as part of IMC's impact. Moreover, communication technology applications are essential for building customer relationships (Šerić, 2016; Estaswara, 2016; Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009; Pilotta et al., 2004; Zahay et al., 2004).

Schultz and Barnes (2005) sought to bridge the gap between traditional advertising campaigns (inside-out) and marketing communication campaigns. In such cases, the first measurable aspect of an IMC campaign is planning, which begins with customer databases and proceeds to segmentation. Schultz and Barnes (2005) proposed a measurement method called ROI (Return on Investment). This ROI method focuses on consumer behavior, such as marketing databases, and uses this information to segment customers. These databases are then utilized to analyze various potential groups and enhance IMC resources for the future by targeting groups that offer the highest return on marketing communication investments (ROI). Schultz and Barnes (2005) concluded that behavioral segmentation is crucial for decision-making regarding the allocation of advertising and marketing communication resources.

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There are many differing views on IMC between practitioners and academics. This is unsurprising, as their respective disciplines shape specific concepts and practices. Generally, each group perceives the IMC phenomenon through the lens of their own understanding and actions (Swain, 2004). IMC practices must be explored to achieve a level of integration that reflects the actual thoughts and actions of its practitioners. Each discipline and profession represents a site of meaning. IMC is discussed and applied in various ways, but the most critical aspect to interpret is what practitioners do, which must be understood from their perspective (Gould, 2004).

Understanding IMC inevitably leads to identifying which professions are involved with it. Quantitative research by Kim et al. (2004) focused on advertising executives in South Korean companies. Similarly, Kitchen and Li (2005) conducted a study in China on advertising and public relations. Later, Estaswara (2008b) conducted research in Indonesia on public relations, advertising, and marketing.

From a review of the three studies conducted in China, South Korea, and the Asia-Pacific region, it is evident that three professional groups have been consistently studied in relation to IMC development: marketing, advertising, and public relations. Based on this context, this research was conducted to examine differences in the understanding of IMC among professionals involved in its practice, specifically in advertising, public relations, and marketing.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative approach, focusing on the quantification and analysis of variables to derive results by utilizing and analyzing numerical data and employing statistical methods (Apuke, 2017). The research examines differences in the interpretation of IMC among the fields of advertising, public relations, and marketing through the use of quantitative methods, analyzing numerical data with statistical techniques.

The study aims to empirically explore perceptions regarding IMC differences by comparing three professional groups. Therefore, the study is categorized as exploratory. According to Subyantoro and Suwarto (2006), exploratory research seeks to identify and uncover new problems to fill gaps or deficiencies in existing or new knowledge. Mudjiyanto (2018) further elaborates that exploratory research aims to deepen understanding, generate new ideas about specific phenomena, and explain how social phenomena occur. In this context, the research seeks to deepen knowledge about the differences in IMC interpretation among advertising, public relations, and marketing professionals by providing explanations.

The sampling process in this research follows a non-probability sampling principle, utilizing a combination of techniques. First, the researchers identified three professional groups relevant to IMC development—advertising, public relations, and marketing—and selected respondents working in Jakarta. Jakarta was chosen under the assumption that it serves as a trendsetter for business practices, marketing, and marketing communication in Indonesia. Thus, the purposive sampling method was applied.

Second, given the research objective of testing differences among the three sample groups, each group was set to include 30 respondents, resulting in a total of 90 respondents. Based on this requirement, the sampling technique used was quota sampling.

Table 1. Professional Groups and Sample Size

No	Sample Group	N
1	Public Relations	30
2	Advertising	30
3	Marketing	30
Total		90

Source: Researcher's Data, 2024

The empirical data analysis in this survey-based research used a questionnaire as the primary instrument. The questionnaire employed interval data with a semantic differential scale using a 7-point bipolar adjectives scale, analyzed using statistical techniques. To test differences among more than two sample groups, ANOVA was utilized. Furthermore, the Tukey test was applied to determine the interpretation of IMC across different and similar groups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Results

Based on descriptive statistical results, respondents' answers varied, with most responses not exceeding 50%. These responses were distributed across points 4, 5, 6, and 7, indicating that respondents interpreted IMC differently. However, three aspects scored

above 50%: IMC as a management process for managing channels (53.3%), IMC requiring strategic role evaluation (51.1%), and IMC needing evaluation based on brand behavior (50%). These aspects did not exceed 55%, suggesting that while most respondents focused on these aspects, their percentages were only slightly higher than other aspects.

From the Tukey test results, each aspect revealed that the three professions studied—advertising, public relations, and marketing—sometimes showed similarities with no significant differences, while at other times, differences were observed between advertising and marketing compared to public relations. Additionally, the Tukey test showed differences between public relations and advertising compared to marketing, with the last category displaying distinctions across all three professions. This indicates that respondents interpreted IMC differently.

Regarding the data, the first point highlights that no significant differences or interpretations were observed for certain aspects of IMC, as indicated by significance values above 0.05 (ANOVA test). The aspects considered similar among the three professions include IMC as a customer-oriented approach, IMC as a strategic business process, IMC as a management process in marketing communication and audience management, IMC fostering relationships with customers, and the requirement for IMC to engage in brand-based dialogue using communication technology. Finally, after implementing an IMC program, it must have a maximum impact. These results suggest that respondents interpreted IMC similarly concerning its role as a strategic business process and a management process in marketing communication, audience targeting, customer dialogue, and communication technology.

Table 2. Differences Among Professions Based on ANOVA and Tukey Tests

		Sig.	A	B	C
1	IMC is a concept with added value	0,016	5,6333	6,2667	6,3333
2	IMC is a strategic tactic in marketing communication	0,000	5,7000	5,8000	6,5667
3	IMC is comprehensive planning	0,000	5,4000	5,7333	6,4333
4	IMC is a customer-oriented approach	0,111	5,7333	5,9667	6,2667
5	IMC must coordinate communication across different tools and channels	0,000	5,2333	5,6333	6,3333
6	IMC must synergize communication across different tools and channels	0,001	5,1333	5,7333	6,3000
7	IMC must combine various communication elements	0,001	5,6333	5,8000	6,6000
8	IMC uses information technology in marketing communication	0,032	5,7000	5,9667	6,5000
9	IMC is a form of two-way communication	0,018	5,6000	5,6333	6,4000
10	IMC must observe and consider communication messages from customers	0,006	5,5333	5,9000	6,4333
11	IMC, customers are free to discuss the brand	0,033	5,6333	6,0333	6,2667
12	IMC is a form of customer-oriented communication	0,042	5,3333	5,8667	6,0667
13	IMC uses customer database management	0,024	5,7667	6,0333	6,4667
14	IMC strengthens database management with ICT development	0,000	5,4000	5,7000	6,4000
15	IMC communicates the brand as the main message	0,003	5,5000	5,7333	6,4333
16	IMC must deliver persuasive messages about the brand	0,008	5,3000	5,5333	6,2333
17	IMC provides clarity in brand messaging	0,006	5,4333	5,9333	6,3333
18	IMC requires consistency in brand messaging	0,000	5,1333	5,8000	6,4667
19	IMC is a component of brand equity strategy	0,022	5,4667	5,9667	6,2667
20	IMC is a strategic process in business	0,072	5,6000	5,9333	6,2333
21	IMC is cross-sectoral	0,003	5,2000	5,9333	6,2333
22	IMC is a management process in marketing communication	0,114	5,7667	5,9667	6,3667
23	IMC is a management process for managing the target audience	0,714	6,0667	6,1000	6,2667
24	IMC is a management process for managing channels	0,000	5,4667	6,4333	6,4667
25	IMC builds relationships with customers	0,055	5,6333	6,0333	6,3000
26	IMC builds relationships with other stakeholders (multi-stakeholders)	0,001	5,3333	5,7333	6,3667
27	IMC must engage in dialogue with customers	0,075	5,7333	5,9000	6,3667
28	IMC builds dialogues about the brand using ICT for customers	0,052	5,7000	6,1000	6,3333
29	IMC must deliver maximum impact	0,100	5,9333	6,4000	6,4333
30	IMC must evaluate its strategic role	0,000	5,4333	6,4000	6,5333
31	IMC must be evaluated based on brand behavior	0,000	5,6000	6,3667	6,5667
32	IMC must be evaluated based on brand loyalty	0,000	5,3667	6,3667	6,5333

Source: Research Data, 2024

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Secondly, advertising and marketing differ from public relations, as all aspects have significance values below 0.05 (ANOVA test). These differences (Tukey test) pertain to IMC as a concept with added value, IMC as a management process for channel management, and IMC requiring evaluation of its strategic role, brand behavior, and brand loyalty. This data indicates that respondents interpret IMC differently, where channel management and evaluation are perceived as added values in the practice of IMC.

Thirdly, advertising and public relations differ from marketing on almost all questions. This is evident in Table 2 above, where significance values are below 0.05 (ANOVA test). The aspects (Tukey test) include IMC as a strategy and tactic, comprehensive planning, coordination, combination, and synergy across various communication elements and channels, the implementation of communication technology, and IMC as a form of two-way communication. Additionally, it involves understanding customers, allowing them to freely discuss the brand, which necessitates the company to ensure clarity and consistency in brand messaging. These findings suggest that respondents interpret IMC differently.

Finally, IMC is interpreted differently across the three professions, as significance values are below 0.05 (ANOVA test). The differing aspect (Tukey test) is IMC as a component of brand equity strategy. Public relations professionals had the lowest level of understanding of this aspect, followed by advertising professionals, while marketing professionals exhibited the highest understanding, perceiving IMC as a component of brand equity.

Table 3. ANOVA Test

ANOVA					
	Sum of Squares	df	Means Squares	F	Sig.
Beetween Groups	9,489	2	4,744	9,750	0,000
Within Groups	42,333	87	0,487		

Source: Researcher's Data Processing, 2024

Table 4. Differences Between Professions Based on Tukey Test

Turkey HSD[a]

	N	Subset for alpha = 0,05	
		1	2
Public Relations	30	5,6333	
Advertising	30	5,8333	
Marketing	30		6,4000
Sig.		0,510	1,0000

Means of groups in homogeneus subsets are diplayed

Source: Researcher's Data Processing, 2024

From Table 3 on the ANOVA test above, it is evident that there are differences among the three professions—marketing, advertising, and public relations—with significance values below 0.05. These differences are detailed in Table 4, based on the Tukey test, which indicates that public relations and advertising differ from marketing. Thus, it can be interpreted that, overall, the data shows that the marketing profession differs from public relations and advertising.

DISCUSSION

The study on the three professions—public relations, advertising, and marketing—regarding differences in the interpretation of IMC shows no significant differences or that IMC is interpreted similarly by these professions in eight aspects. Out of the 32 aspects examined, eight were found to be similar, accounting for one-quarter of all aspects.

Firstly, the similarities pertain to theoretical aspects of how IMC should be conducted. These include both strategic and tactical perspectives. The strategic perspective highlights that IMC is an approach and operates within a business framework. In other words, IMC must always be conducted with a strategic business approach (Estaswara, 2008a). **Secondly**, the tactical perspective emphasizes that IMC involves executing marketing communication, managing the audience, being customer-oriented, engaging in brand-focused dialogue with customers, utilizing communication technology, and ensuring maximum impact in evaluations (Kliatchko, 2009; Šerić et al., 2015).

The above aspects represent a holistic understanding of IMC, encompassing internal, customer-oriented, and evaluative communication, as well as external elements such as marketing communication, audience management, dialogue, branding,

communication technology, and evaluation. These aspects illustrate how IMC can be implemented within companies (Estaswara, 2008a, 2024a, 2024b; Duncan, 2002; Schultz & Schultz, 2004; Kliatchko, 2005). However, this understanding of IMC remains general, even though it integrates communication technology into its definition (Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009; Pilotta et al., 2004; Zahay et al., 2004). Furthermore, evaluation is not detailed beyond the requirement that IMC should have a maximum impact. While this expectation is valid, the term "maximum impact" here relates to marketing communication or audience management. As Šerić (2016) noted, while communication technology's implementation and evaluation within IMC remain unclear, its application is already advancing rapidly.

Secondly, there are differences in the interpretation of IMC between advertising and marketing compared to public relations. While advertising and marketing share similar understandings of IMC, public relations professionals interpret it differently. The differing aspects involve IMC as a management process for channel management and its evaluation in terms of strategic roles, brand behavior, and brand loyalty. These differences highlight two main areas: how IMC should be implemented and how it should be evaluated. According to advertising and marketing professionals, IMC is implemented through channel management processes. Here, selecting appropriate channels from the numerous options available becomes crucial (Keagan et al., 1992; Kotler, 1999). However, this selection does not guarantee a pull system, which emphasizes interactive online channels (Pilotta et al., 2004).

For IMC evaluation, aspects include assessing its strategic role, brand behavior, and brand loyalty. IMC evaluation remains a challenging issue (Swain, 2004; Semenik, 2002) as it should address strategic roles within IMC, with brands as the central focus of evaluation. Although brands are the primary message in IMC (Estaswara, 2008a, 2024a), brand communication and meaningful dialogue have not been fully integrated into management processes (Schultz & Schultz, 2004; Kliatchko, 2009). Channel management processes alone are insufficient to evaluate brand performance. However, brand-focused evaluations, such as brand equity assessments (Duncan & Moriarty, 1997; McGrath, 2005; Navarro et al., 2009; Delgado-Ballester et al., 2012; Šerić et al., 2014), remain central to IMC evaluation (Estaswara, 2008a, 2008b). Unlike customer-oriented evaluations proposed by Schultz & Schultz (1998), Kitchen & Schultz (1999), and Schultz & Barnes (2005), these evaluations emphasize the outcome rather than the process.

Thirdly, differences also emerge regarding IMC as a concept with added value. IMC is recognized as adding value through customer-oriented management, with its orientation and evaluation also focusing on customers. This value-added perspective differs from channel-based management and brand-focused evaluation processes discussed earlier.

Finally, differences arise between advertising and public relations professionals versus marketing professionals in interpreting IMC. These differences span nearly all aspects, including IMC as a strategy and tactic, comprehensive planning, coordination, combination, and synergy of various communication elements and channels, implementation of communication technology, two-way communication, customer understanding, and the freedom of customers to discuss the brand. Companies must ensure clarity and consistency in brand messaging. While these interpretations align with IMC principles, they lack sufficient evaluation.

Firstly, IMC as a strategy and tactic emphasizes comprehensive planning that coordinates, combines, and synergizes various communication elements and channels, reflecting early IMC practices (Swain, 2004; Kim et al., 2004; Kitchen & Li, 2005; Estaswara, 2008a, 2008b). However, the integration of communication technology, two-way communication, and customer understanding represents a more advanced perspective (Schultz & Schultz, 2004; Kliatchko, 2009; Šerić et al., 2015). Additionally, brand consistency and clarity in messaging align with the ideas of Duncan (2002) and Kliatchko (2009).

Secondly, evaluation remains a significant challenge. Evaluation must address all aspects of IMC implementation, whether focused on brand equity (McGrath, 2005; Navarro et al., 2009; Delgado-Ballester et al., 2012; Šerić et al., 2014) or customer orientation (Schultz & Schultz, 1998; Kitchen & Schultz, 1999; Schultz & Barnes, 2005). Determining the appropriate focus for evaluation is essential.

Finally, IMC is interpreted differently as a component of brand equity strategy. Each profession holds unique perspectives. Brand equity is understood as the value attached to a brand, derived from consumers' perceptions, preferences, and loyalty (Estaswara, 2008a; Duncan, 2002). Brand equity includes functional, emotional, or self-expressive values. Functional values require the product to deliver on its utility; emotional values demand a positive experience or unique feeling from the brand, while self-expressive values highlight the brand's public perception and self-image (Aaker, 1996). Thus, IMC management must define and communicate these brand values to build brand equity. While brand equity evaluation remains contentious among IMC theorists (Schultz & Schultz, 1998; Kitchen & Schultz, 1999; Schultz & Barnes, 2005), most agree that communication within IMC should focus on brand communication (Schultz & Schultz, 2004; Kliatchko, 2009).

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Table 5. Professional Differences Related to IMC Aspects

No	DIFFERENCE IN ASPECTS	PROFESSIONAL DIFFERENCES
1	IMC is an approach and business-oriented, encompassing internal communication (customer-focused and evaluative) as well as external communication, such as marketing communication, audience management, dialogue, branding, communication technology, and evaluation.	No differences
2	IMC is a management process for managing channels, and IMC must be evaluated based on its strategic role, brand behavior, and brand loyalty.	Advertising and marketing vs. public relations
3	IMC involves strategies and tactics; comprehensive planning; coordination, combination, and synergy across various communication elements and channels; implementation of communication technology; and two-way communication. Additionally, it requires understanding customers, allowing them to freely discuss the brand. Consequently, companies must ensure clarity and consistency in brand messaging.	Advertising and public relations vs. marketing
4	IMC as a component in brand equity strategy.	All professions differ

Source: Researcher's Data Analysis

In general, the interpretation of IMC among the three professions can be described as differing, with no significant differences between public relations and advertising, while marketing stands apart. This aligns with the findings of Swain (2004), which revealed differences among all three professions—public relations, advertising, and marketing. Similarly, it corresponds with the study by Kitchen and Li (2005), which identified differences between advertising and public relations. Additionally, Estaswara's (2008b) research also reflects comparable distinctions, showing differences between advertising and public relations compared to marketing.

CONCLUSION

This study examines differences among three professions—public relations, advertising, and marketing—and generally finds differences between public relations and advertising compared to marketing. However, there are also areas of similarity among the three professions, as well as differences between public relations and advertising or marketing, or even among all three professions. Nonetheless, all three professions recognize the importance of information technology in IMC, as indicated by their shared understanding of this aspect. The only aspect that continues to differ significantly among the three professions is brand equity.

Further research is needed to explore the reasons behind these differences across all professions. Broadly speaking, public relations consistently differs from marketing in this study, suggesting a need to delve deeper into how public relations interprets IMC and how it can be connected to marketing. Since this study was conducted in Jakarta as a representation of Indonesia, future research could expand to other regions in Southeast Asia to examine how IMC is perceived by professionals in public relations, advertising, and marketing within a broader context.

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