

Strategic Communication Integration in Omnichannel Commerce Ecosystems

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Abstract: *The growth of omnichannel commerce has caused the retail contexts to be enmeshed ecologies that require conciliated communications on the internet and on the field of reality. Though andragogy of technology integration and customer experience outcomes have received focus in earlier researches, there has been limited focus that has been given to strategic communication integration as a construct of its own. This study has examined how communication integration has been operationalized in the three retail brands using communication artifacts using the three communication platforms under the omnichannel. A qualitative content analysis was used to code the content and was composed of those found on the websites, in mobile applications messages, social media accounts, and email communication campaigns. The existence of the constructive categories (which comprised of the major categories) like message consistency, narrative continuity, cross-platform coordination, personalization integration and promotional synchronization was determined by a hybrid coding scheme. The cross-channel comparison revealed that there were disparities in the areas of greater integration and more solid areas of integration were better coordinated at a central platform. On the basis of the findings, the theory of Integrated Marketing Communication is applied to the environment of the omnichannel ecosystem and defines communication integration as a multidimensional force of strategic power, allowing the brand to experience continuity and continuity of the customer experience.*

Keywords: communication integration, integrated marketing communication, omnichannel commerce, strategic communication integration

I. INTRODUCTION

The ever-icy pace of digitalization has radically changed the framework of modern business, as companies have adopted omnichannel systems, where physical and digital touchpoints unite to create the seamless consumer experience. In contrast to the traditional model of multichannel, where the channels do not have a well-established timeline, omnichannel commerce focuses on the coherent coordination of channels through websites, mobile applications, brick-and-mortar outlets, and social media platforms, and emerging interactive interfaces (Verhoeff, Kannan, and Inman, 2015). This is the mark of overall changes in consumer behaviours, which have become channel-neutral as customers make cross-channel moves as they deem them necessary in their buying processes to acquire the continuity, personalization and brand fidelity in their interactions (Shi, Wang, Chen, and Zhang, 2020). As a result, the presence in the channels ceases to be the strategic challenge of the organizations and proper integration of the communication, data and operational processes provided on a certain interconnected platform.

Within this evolving environment, strategic communication plays the most important role in generating the impression of the customers and continuity of the ecosystem. This principle of consistency in the messages and cross-functional alignment has always been inherent in the quality of the enhancement of brand positioning and the further promotion of value propositions within the framework of the theory of the Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) (Kitchen and Burgmann, 2015). However, the interlacing of the omnichannel environments is beyond the traditional thinking of IMC, and the coordination of the digital content, personal communication and interactive communication offerings



must be made on the fly. Payne and Frow (2014) postulate that the best value propositions are based on integrated communication practices that connect the organizational intent with the interactions with customers. This coordination needs to be performed between technological infrastructures, analytics, and various touchpoints of a customer in omnichannel ecosystems, and communication integration is the strategic and operational requirement.

The ecosystem approach also draws attention to the fact that omnichannel business includes the networks of actors - retailers, platform providers, logistics partners, and consumers -that are interdependent and co-create value via interdependent systems (Gerea, Gonzalez-Lopez, and Herskovic, 2021). The communication integration (within such ecosystem) serves as the connective mechanism in which it streamlines narratives, strengthens brand identity, and helps to build trust across channels. Discontinuous or incomplete communication may negatively affect perceived trustworthiness and reduce customer credibility, whereas consistent communication has a positive impact on perceived professionalism, transparency and authenticity. It has been proven by empirical studies that perceived channel integration has a positive impact on the quality of customer experience and purchase intention (Shi et al., 2020), which leads to the conclusion that maintaining communication coherence is a factor that causes behavioural effects to appear. Although there has been an increase in research on omnichannel, the previous studies has focused on technological integration, logistics, and quantitative measures of customer experience. To a relatively lesser extent, seldom attention has been paid to investigate the concept of strategic communication integration as a differentiated and multidimensional concept in omnichannel ecosystems. Current research tends to treat communication implicitly by assessing the resulting customer satisfaction, or service quality, but not to break down exactly how communication artifacts in platforms would vary, diverge, or be consistent. Moreover, the theorization of traditional IMC conception into digitally mediated ecosystem-scale integration has not been developed yet and results in theory and practice gaps concerning how narrative continuity, brand voice alignment, and cross-channel coordination can be mobilised in complicated business contexts.

To fill this gap, the current study looks into the strategic communication integration in the ecosystem of omnichannel commerce by analysing the communication artifacts in a variety of platforms. Through a qualitative content analysis methodology with systematic coding schemes, the study aims at developing patterns of consistent use of messages, narrative consistency, and content coordination across the platform, which serve to describe integrated omnichannel strategies. By doing this, the research project takes the IMC theory to digitally connected ecosystems and can contribute to the existing discussion on the omnichannel commerce by pre-empting the role of foregrounding communication as an integrative strategy. By settling on this, the proposed study endeavours to offer both conceptual and empirical dimensions to how institutions establish integrative communicative architectures, which enable business organizations to continue producing value that keeps customer experience continuous in a more and more complex business world.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The fast changes in both retail and service settings of multiple to omnichannel arrangements has altered the strategic purpose of communication in commerce setups fundamentally. The types of models developed in early multichannel were focused on channel expansion and channel coordination; omnichannel Type of commerce is focused at keeping the integration in both physical and digital touchpoints to form one customer experience (Verhoff, Kannan, and Inman, 2015). Omnichannel strategies aim at synchronizing the data, communications, and as well as interactions across the websites, mobile applications, social media sites, email campaigns, and brick-and-mortar stores to create a cohesive customer experience, instead of viewing them as parallel distribution channels (Shi, Wang, Chen, and Zhang, 2020). This integration does not restrict to alignment in an operation but goes further to include strategic consistency of communication as well that forms a key aspect in creating perception and beliefs among customers. Within the ecosystem, omnichannel commerce constitutes a reliant relationship between retailers, digital systems, logistics, and customers who produce joint value, in terms of both technological and communicational systems (Gerea, Gonzalez-Lopez, and Herskovic, 2021). In this type of ecosystem, incomplete communication may be an indicator of



organizational division and decrease perceived trustworthiness, though merged communication may help increase supposed professionalism and brand reality. Communication integration finds its theoretical basis in the concept of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), which focuses on the idea of strategic consistency of messages to be delivered to target audiences via promotional means in order to assure cohesions and strengthen brand positioning (Kitchen and Burgmann, 2015). Payne and Frow (2014) go even further to suggest that coherent value propositions demand the harmonized communicational practices within the organizational functions and the connection between strategic intent and interactions with customers. Nonetheless, legacy IMC models have been created before the introduction of the complexity during the digital ecosystems and as such, should be extended to include real-time personalization, interactive platforms, and orchestration of data-driven content. In the case of omnichannel, integration of communication does not entail uniformity of messages only but also the continuity of narratives, the brand voice must be synchronous, and the mechanisms of customer engagement need to be coordinated across channels. Empirical studies also have proven that perceived integration between channels has a positive effect on the purchase intention and customer satisfaction (Shi et al., 2020), and ecosystem-scale reviews emphasize that coherence in communication is vital to the quality of customer experience (Gerea et al., 2021). The qualitative research helps develop an additional insight into the role of thematic consistency in digital communication in developing brand meaning and consumer choice (Mogaji and Yoon, 2019; Rossolatos, 2019;).Such results imply that the role of strategic communication integration acts as symbolic and structural aspect of omnichannel effectiveness. Qualitatively, qualitative content analysis provides a consistent, and repeatable method of analysing communication products in both digital and physical platforms. Krippendorff (2018) views content analysis as a rigorous approach to extract meaningful inferences on textual data, whereas Mayring (2000) and Schreier (2012) focus on the systematic creation of the categories and coherent coding practices to guarantee the reliability of their analytics. More than ever, research on what is happening in marketing and communication has become more transparent and auditable due to the growing reliance on computer-assisted qualitative data analysis programs, including NVivo (Cabiddu, Frau, and Moi, 2018; Goyal and Deshwal, 2023). Studies that have been analysed using NVivo have effectively tackled the digital marketing adoption story (Eze, Chinedu-Eze, and Okike, 2020), influencer communication approaches (Alves de Castro, 2023), and crossed-platform communication thematical (Chawla, Sareen, Gupta, and Joshi, 2023; Zhang, Hasan, Chiong), which attest to the appropriateness of the tool in studying cross-platform communication processes. Although the literature on omnichannel is growing steadily, contemporary studies have predominantly focused on all aspects of technological integration, measurement of customer experiences and operational coordination where more focus has been on comparatively less strategic communication integration as a construct. Moreover, the cross-channel narrative coherence qualitative studies are not well-developed, and the theoretical aspect of difference between the IMC of traditional and ecosystem level of communication integration needs additional theoretical elaboration. In this respect, exploring the strategic communication integration as a part of the omnichannel commerce ecosystems with the help of qualitative content analysis helps to further extend the theory of IMC to the digitally mediated setting since the interaction of narrative alignment, brand voice consistency, and the coordination across the platforms has a cumulative influence on creating customer perceptions and the ecosystem functionality.

III. METHODOLOGY

The research design applied in the study was qualitative based on qualitative content analysis to view the strategy communication integration in the ecosystem of omnichannel commerce. Qualitative content analysis was chosen as it allows conducting systematic, replicable, and theory-based analysis of textual and visual communication artifacts and still maintaining the contextual meaning (Krippendorff, 2018, Schreier, 2012). The method was especially suitable to explore the message alignment patterns, narrative coherence, and a multi-channel integration of each of the numerous communication platforms. Since the study is exploratory and the empirical focus on the concept of strategic communication integration as an independent variable is little, a qualitative research design made it possible to conduct a detailed analysis of communicative structures in actual omnichannel scenarios.



The sampling strategy was purposive, which selected cases that confirmed the presence of omnichannel. Three retail brands with integrated physical and online platforms were chosen on the basis of their active activity through web and mobile applications, social media platforms and email marketing systems. The medium of analysis was the brand-created communication artifacts, such as home page messages, promotional banners, mobile application notifications, Instagram and Facebook posts, as well as email campaign messages. Three months were used to gather the data in order to provide a temporal consistency and comparability across the brands. About 25-30 communication items were stored in a brand, and this made a corpus of about 80 communication artifacts. All the materials were taken in digital form and imported to NVivo version 14 to help them in making a systematic coding and the management of data.

The analysis of data was prepared using well defined methods of qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2000; Schreier, 2012). This was initiated by familiarization where all communication materials were looked at to have a holistic view of the pattern of narratives and thematic settings. Hybrid coding approach was further used, which incorporated deductive and inductive category development. Based on the available literature on integrated marketing communication and the use of the omnichannel, the developed deductive categories comprised message consistency, brand voice alignment, personalization cues, cross-channel referencing, and value proposition clarity (Kitchen and Burgmann, 2015; Payne and Frow, 2014; Verhoef, Kannan, and Inman, 2015). In the open coding, the new themes appearing out of the data were determined and integrated into the coding structure, which permitted to improve categories and develop better contextual sensitivity.

The coding was performed in NVivo through hierarchical node structures in order to differentiate between main dimensions of communication integration and subthemes. Patterns across channels and brands were compared with the use of matrix coding queries, which allowed cross-case and cross-platform analysis. This analytical approach eased the finding of convergent and divergent communication in use, as well as analysis of continuity in narration in terms of the digital and physical touchpoints. During the analysis, analytic memos were kept to record the decisions taken in code, refinement of categories, and the new meaning, which increased transparency and auditability (Krippendorff, 2018).

A number of rigor-enhancing processes were adopted to bring out reliability. Before complete coding, a comprehensive codebook to indicate the definition of categories and inclusion parameters was drafted. Sometime later, a small part of the data (approximately 15 percent) was re-coded to find some consistency in coding and a few inconsistencies were reduced by doing some fine tuning of the category definitions. The research also provided that audit trail was done in NVivo where sources of data, coding iterations, and query outputs were recorded. These measures contributed towards credibility and confirmability according to the provisions of the qualitative research standards (Schreier, 2012). Ethical side was not given much thought as all the materials taken into account were generic corporate messages; no one or secret information was gained.

The qualitative content analysis using NVivo made possible allows the rigorous analysis of narrative coherence, brand consistency, and the cross-channel integration and contributes to the conceptual concept development at the crossroads of the integrated marketing communication research and the one of omnichannel ecosystem.

IV. ANALYSIS

The data was analysed through qualitative content analysis which was assisted by NVivo 14 to allow the provision of a systematic analysis of the prevalent patterns of integration of strategic communications in omnichannel platforms. Upon the knowledge of the information, all the communication artifacts were also read repeatedly in order to ensure invisibility and context. Initial open coding was applied to identify units of analysis that had a meaningful meaning like promotional words, value propositions, tone indicators, personalization signalling, and campaign stories and cross-platform mentions. The analysis was iterative, reflexive when categories were created as we then proceeded to analyse the data in a more particular manner and find patterns of subtle incorporation.

Once the open coding process was complete, similar codes was clustered in higher order thematic clusters representing fundamental dimensions of strategic communication integration. The coding system was a deductively informatively coded combination with deductively informative deduces based on the literature of integrated marketing



communications and omnichannel (as well as inductively generated themes in the dataset). Constant comparison was used to refine codes and overlapping or redundant categories were merged in order to increase the conceptual clarity. Table 1 shows the last thematic structure.

Table 1: Thematic Structure of Strategic Communication Integration

Main Theme	Subthemes	Analytical Description
Message Consistency	Brand tone alignment; Value proposition stability	Extent to which brand voice, positioning, and core claims remained consistent across platforms
Narrative Continuity	Cross-channel storytelling; Campaign coherence	Presence of unified narrative themes linking website, app, email, and social media messaging
Cross-Platform Coordination	Channel referencing; Platform integration cues	Explicit references connecting platforms (e.g., app promotion in email; in-store pickup mentioned online)
Personalization Integration	Behavioural targeting; Customized messaging	Evidence of individualized communication aligned with user interaction patterns
Promotional Synchronization	Timing alignment; Offer consistency	Consistency of promotional campaigns and discounts across channels

In order to look into cross-channel integration, matrix coding queries were included in NVivo. These questions allowed making a comparative analysis of thematic density and frequency in websites, mobile applications, social media and in email communications in a systematic way. The qualitative categories of High, Moderate and Low that have been provided in Table 2 are all relative thematic prominence and repeat in the coded data as opposed to statistical quantification. These labels were based on the comparative intensity and some level of consistency between platforms with respect to coding.

Table 2: Cross-Channel Integration Patterns

Theme	Website	Mobile App	Social media	Email Campaigns
Message Consistency	High	High	Moderate	High
Narrative Continuity	High	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Cross-Platform Coordination	Moderate	High	Low	High
Personalization Integration	Low	High	Moderate	High
Promotional Synchronization	High	High	Moderate	High

The cross-channel analysis has indicated that strategic communication has various levels of integration. The email campaigns and websites were found to offer a high level of consistency in messages and promotional synchronization, and in most cases provided support to the congruent value propositions and synchronized campaign themes. The degree of personalisation integration that existed in the mobile applications was also relatively higher which suggests higher level of integration of behavioural targeting and personalized messages. The social media platforms lacked congruence to a moderate extent of some dissimilar tone and focus on the campaigns in comparison to the site and email messages. In-case analysis revealed that some of the brands could enjoy good continuity of narratives across the platform, particularly promotional campaigns that were ACE coordinated. These cases encompassed consistency in the visual appearance of websites, identical slogans and identical propositions in where of the websites, mobile programs and in mails. Conversely, biased fragmentation was found in the example of social media contents according to the principle of engagement-oriented message tied in terms of the tone of voice or emphasis versus of formal brand positioning presented in company websites.



The structural difference in the practices of communication integration was also shown in cross-case comparison. The brands exhibiting centralized mechanisms of digital communication depicted the more considerable incorporation in the topics described and the ones with the less centralized channel management had a greater misfit in the narrative frame and the schedule of the advertisements. The implication of these differences was that the organizational coordination processes affected the levels of alignment in communication in omnichannel ecosystems.

The themes were also frequently checked in the course of the analysis procedure as the coded extracts were harmonized with the larger interpretative themes. The disconfirmation cases were also worked on actively to test the strength of thematic interpretations and where there was some ambiguity, category was defined. In order to promote high levels of transparency and the ability to be methodologically rigorous, analytical memos were maintained so as to document coding choices and evolving interpretations. NVivo allowed making a comparison of brands and platform systematically and helped to follow the tendencies of coding.

Overall, the thematic and matrix study was systematic and provided a systematic qualitative information of integration of strategic communication as it was operationalised in the intergraded omnichannel environments. Despite the disparate influence of full integration in all platforms, the outcomes demonstrates that the higher the message consistency and narrative coherence, the more coordination between platforms, the more the omnichannel communication architecture and strategy of communication architecture fit together in the commerce ecosystems.

V. DISCUSSION

The finding provides empirical data on how the strategy communication integration was carried out in the omnichannel commerce ecosystems. The analysis of communication artifacts presented on the websites, mobile apps, social media service, and email campaigns included the finding that such ordered categories of integration occur, like a consistency of messages, narrative continuity, cross-platform integration, personalization integration, and promotional integration. These findings contribute to the existing body of research in the field of omnichannel by assuming that communication integration is a strategic construct with multiple dimensions rather than a marginal by-product of a technological fit.

As per the above paper that claimed the importance of the continuous experience of the customers within the omnichannel context (Verhoff, Kannan, and Inman, 2015; Shi, Wang, Chen, and Zhang, 2020), the analysis showed that platform-level communication coherence differences existed. There was somewhat more extent of message consistency and promotional synchronization in websites and email campaigns, which suggests that it is more centralized in official brand messages. Conversely, social media networks were more tonally diverse and narrative-framed, and sometimes violated the main value propositions that the official digital platforms had presented. This partial fragmentation is in line with the ecosystem viewpoints that lay emphasis on the complexity of coordinating various customer touchpoints in systems that are intertwined (Gerea, Gonzalez-Lopez, and Herskovic, 2021).

The results also apply the Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) theory to the digitally mediated ecosystems context. The common IMC models, based on the importance of harmonizing the messages and aligning them with functions (Kitchen and Burgmann, 2015), were created in a relatively linear media context. According to the current research, omnichannel ecosystems do not only have to be based on such consistent messaging but dynamic coordination among the platforms that are technologically integrated. Daily, the role of data-driven communication in the modern retail ecosystems is growing, which is reflected in personalization integration (especially with the use of mobile apps and email campaigns). This fact underpins claims that strategic value propositions should be backed up by aligned communication systems that are able to combine customer information and behavioural targeting services (Payne and Frow, 2014).

Notably, it was determined that organizational structures of coordination had an effect on communication integration. Brands with centralized approaches to digital communications had a better fit between categories compared to decentralized channel management. This does not mean that strategic communication integration is a technological implication merely but also an organizational capability. The communication within the systematically structured



architecture of the ecosystem serves an indexing type of infrastructure that assists in creating trust, brand authenticity, and perceived professionalism between the interconnected platforms.

The involvement of the study is a theoretical contribution of explaining the distinction between technological integration and communication integration avenue in omnichannel commerce. Even though the existing research tends to focus on those types of data that can be measured (e.g. operational efficiency and customer experience factors), the existing findings are based upon the idea that the communication architecture is one of the processes of strategy that can define the coherence of ecosystems. The qualitative content analysis approach presented as a methodological tool proved the usefulness of conducting a systematic analysis of communication artifacts to reveal the patterns of integration that can remain otherwise undetected by using survey-based research methodologies. This is a complementary point of view to the quantitative research of the omnichannel and it complements the knowledge of the way integration occurs on the level of the communicative practice.

VI. CONCLUSION

The study has considered strategic communication integration in a multi-platform commerce ecosystem through a qualitative content analysis of cross-platform communication artefacts. The results showed that the integration of communication works with each other on several related categories or message consistency, narrative continuity, cross-platform coordination, personalization integration, and promotional synchronization. Though inconsistent levels of integration were realized across platforms, the findings showed that higher levels of integration coherence manifested stronger alignment of omnichannel architectures strategically.

The study adds to omnichannel research, in that it applies the theory of Integrated Marketing Communication to a digital ecosystem, as well as, it conceptualizes the integration of communication as a multidimensional construct. The study defines the strategic importance of narrative integrity and coordinated communication in sustaining the customer trust and ecosystem functionality through an analytical construction of communication artifacts and channels of interrelations.

In terms of management, the findings introduce the need to have centralized coordination mechanisms and structure in omnichannel systems through governance of communication. The new economy requires not only the technological compatibility but the channel integration with channel partner coordination and channel planning between the groups of people engaged in the development of the contents.

Overall, the analysis proves that communication is one of the chief integrative processes of the ecosystem in omnichannel commerce that establishes the cohesiveness, continuity of customer experiences and the ecosystem stability. Future research with multi-methodologies can further supplement the currently established information on the role of communication integration in consumer behaviour and brand success in digitally networked markets in the long-run.

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