



Integrated Marketing Communication Strategies on Patronage of Hospitality Organisations in Akwa Ibom State

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) strategies on customer patronage of selected hospitality organisations in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The increasing competition within the hospitality sector has necessitated the adoption of coordinated marketing communication strategies that ensure consistency and effectiveness in reaching target audiences. IMC integrates advertising, sales promotion, public relations, and direct marketing to deliver a unified brand message across multiple channels. Despite the widespread adoption of IMC strategies by hospitality firms, concerns remain regarding their effectiveness in influencing customer patronage. This study adopts a survey research design, collecting data from customers of selected hospitality organisations across the three senatorial districts of Akwa Ibom State. Findings reveal that advertising significantly enhances awareness and attracts customers, while sales promotion stimulates immediate purchase decisions through incentives such as discounts and bonus offers. Public relations, on the other hand, plays a crucial role in building trust, credibility, and long-term customer relationships. The study further establishes that the integration of these communication tools leads to improved brand perception and increased customer loyalty. However, challenges such as inadequate marketing budgets, lack of skilled personnel, and poor coordination hinder effective IMC implementation. The study

concludes that IMC is a vital strategic tool for enhancing customer patronage in the hospitality industry. It recommends that organisations adopt a holistic and data-driven approach to IMC, ensuring consistency across all communication platforms to maximise impact and achieve sustainable competitive advantage.

Keywords: Advertising, Customer Patronage, Hospitality Industry, Integrated Marketing Communication, Public Relations, Sales Promotion

Introduction

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) has emerged as a vital strategic tool for organisations seeking to enhance their market performance and customer engagement. IMC involves the coordination of various promotional tools such as advertising, sales promotion, public relations, and direct marketing to deliver a consistent and unified message to target audiences (Wantara & Prasetyo, 2023). In the hospitality industry, where customer perception and experience are crucial, effective communication plays a significant role in influencing patronage decisions. The Nigerian hospitality sector has experienced considerable growth in recent years due to increased domestic and international tourism, urbanisation, and rising demand for leisure and business travel services (Vanguard, 2024). This growth has led to increased competition among hospitality organisations, requiring them to adopt innovative marketing strategies to attract and retain customers. As noted by Ndizera (2018), the competitive nature of the industry compels organisations to improve their marketing communication efforts to gain a larger market share.

In Akwa Ibom State, the hospitality sector has expanded significantly, driven by the availability of tourist attractions and improved infrastructure. The presence of numerous hotels, restaurants, and recreational centres has intensified competition, making it necessary for organisations to differentiate themselves through effective marketing communication strategies (Eneyo, 2018). IMC provides a framework for achieving this by ensuring message consistency and enhancing brand identity across multiple communication channels.

Furthermore, advancements in digital technology and social media have transformed the way hospitality organisations interact with customers. Digital platforms enable real-time communication, personalised marketing, and broader audience reach, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of IMC strategies (Etuk et al., 2021). However, despite these opportunities, challenges such as limited resources and inadequate coordination persist. This study therefore examines the role of IMC



strategies in influencing customer patronage in selected hospitality organisations in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The hospitality industry in Akwa Ibom State has witnessed significant growth over the years, resulting in increased competition among organisations offering similar services. As more hospitality establishments emerge, the need for effective marketing communication strategies becomes increasingly important. Many of these organisations have adopted Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) strategies, utilising various tools such as advertising, sales promotion, and public relations to attract and retain customers. However, the effectiveness of these strategies in influencing customer patronage remains uncertain.

Despite the adoption of multiple communication channels, there is still a lack of clarity regarding how well these strategies are integrated and whether they achieve the desired impact on customer behaviour. According to Etim et al. (2021), IMC is most effective when communication tools are properly coordinated to deliver a consistent message. However, in practice, many organisations implement these tools independently, leading to inconsistencies in messaging and reduced effectiveness.

Another major issue is the limited empirical research focusing on the combined effect of IMC strategies on customer patronage in the hospitality sector. Most existing studies have examined individual promotional tools such as advertising or public relations in isolation, without considering their synergistic impact when integrated (Usani et al., 2021). This gap in literature makes it difficult to fully understand how IMC influences customer decision-making and loyalty.

Additionally, hospitality organisations face several challenges in implementing effective IMC strategies. These include inadequate marketing budgets, lack of skilled personnel, poor technological infrastructure, and difficulties in coordinating communication activities across different platforms (Camelia, 2022). These challenges can hinder the ability of organisations to fully leverage IMC for competitive advantage.

Furthermore, changing consumer behaviour and increasing reliance on digital media have created new demands for personalised and interactive communication. Many hospitality organisations struggle to adapt to these changes, resulting in ineffective engagement with their target audience (Cizreliogullari et al., 2019).



Given these issues, there is a need to critically examine the effectiveness of IMC strategies in influencing customer patronage in hospitality organisations in Akwa Ibom State. This study aims to address this gap by providing empirical evidence on the relationship between IMC strategies and customer patronage.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the influence of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) strategies on customer patronage of selected hospitality organisations in Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- i. Determine the impact of advertising on customer patronage in selected hospitality organisations.
- ii. Examine the influence of sales promotion on customer patronage.
- iii. Assess the effect of public relations on customer patronage.
- iv. Evaluate the extent to which IMC strategies are adopted by hospitality organisations.
- v. Identify the challenges faced by hospitality organisations in implementing IMC strategies.

These objectives are designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how different IMC components contribute to customer behaviour and organisational performance in the hospitality industry.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

- i. What impact does advertising have on customer patronage in hospitality organisations?
- ii. How does sales promotion influence customer patronage?
- iii. What role does public relations play in shaping customer decisions?
- iv. To what extent are IMC strategies adopted by hospitality organisations?
- v. What challenges do hospitality organisations face in implementing IMC strategies?

These questions aim to explore the relationship between IMC strategies and customer patronage, providing insights into how hospitality organisations can improve their marketing communication efforts.



Literature Review

The concept of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) has gained significant attention in marketing literature due to its ability to enhance communication effectiveness and organisational performance. IMC involves the integration of various promotional tools to deliver a consistent and unified message to target audiences (Sharma et al., 2018). This approach ensures that all communication activities work together to achieve common marketing objectives.

In the hospitality industry, IMC plays a critical role in influencing customer behaviour and patronage. According to Usani et al. (2021), hospitality organisations rely on IMC strategies to create awareness, build brand identity, and attract customers. The integration of advertising, sales promotion, and public relations enables organisations to communicate effectively with their target audience and differentiate themselves from competitors.

Empirical studies have shown that advertising is a powerful tool for increasing customer awareness and influencing purchase decisions. Bezabih (2021) found that advertising significantly improved hotel performance by increasing customer patronage. Similarly, sales promotion has been identified as an effective strategy for stimulating immediate customer response through incentives such as discounts and bonus offers (Martey et al., 2022).

Public relations, on the other hand, focuses on building and maintaining a positive organisational image. Sergeev (2025) notes that effective public relations strategies enhance trust and credibility, which are essential for long-term customer relationships. In the hospitality industry, where customer experience is critical, maintaining a positive image can significantly influence patronage.

Theoretical perspectives such as Social Exchange Theory and Information Processing Theory provide a framework for understanding how IMC influences customer behaviour. Social Exchange Theory suggests that customers engage in relationships that provide maximum benefits and minimal costs, while Information Processing Theory explains how individuals perceive and respond to marketing messages (Sudarma et al., 2022).

Despite the benefits of IMC, several challenges hinder its effective implementation. These include lack of coordination, inadequate resources, and rapidly changing technological environments (Camelia, 2022). Additionally, the rise of digital media has introduced new complexities in managing communication strategies.

Review of Concepts

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is a strategic approach that combines various marketing communication tools to deliver a consistent message across different channels. According to Wantara and Prasetyo (2023), IMC integrates advertising, sales promotion, public relations, and direct marketing to ensure message consistency and maximise impact. The primary objective of IMC is to create a unified brand image and enhance customer engagement.

Advertising is one of the key components of IMC and involves the use of paid media to promote products and services. It is an effective tool for creating awareness and influencing customer perception (Abimbola et al., 2020). Sales promotion, on the other hand, involves short-term incentives designed to encourage immediate purchase decisions. These incentives may include discounts, coupons, and bonus offers, which stimulate customer interest and increase sales (Martey et al., 2022).

Public relations focuses on building and maintaining a positive organisational image through strategic communication with stakeholders. It involves activities such as media relations, community engagement, and corporate social responsibility initiatives (Sergeev, 2025). Effective public relations enhance trust and credibility, which are essential for customer loyalty.

Customer patronage refers to the decision of customers to choose and repeatedly use the services of a particular organisation. It is influenced by factors such as service quality, customer experience, and effective communication (Anucha, 2020). In the hospitality industry, patronage is closely linked to customer satisfaction and brand perception.

Hospitality organisations are businesses that provide services such as accommodation, food, and recreation to customers. These organisations rely heavily on effective marketing communication to attract and retain customers in a highly competitive environment (Singh, 2022).

Empirical Review

Empirical studies on Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) have consistently demonstrated its significant influence on marketing performance and customer patronage, particularly in the hospitality sector. Usani, Etuk, and Ekpenyong (2021) conducted a study on selected hotels in Calabar, Cross River State, using a survey research design and multiple regression analysis. Their findings revealed that advertising, sales promotion, and direct marketing jointly had a significant positive

effect on marketing performance, with advertising emerging as the most influential variable.

Similarly, Bezabih (2021) examined the impact of advertising on hotel performance in Addis Ababa and found that advertising significantly improved customer patronage and occupancy rates. In another study, Martey et al. (2022) reported that sales promotion strategies such as discounts, coupons, and bonus offers had a strong effect on customer purchase decisions and loyalty.

Public relations has also been identified as a critical factor influencing customer behaviour. Tsion (2021) found that effective public relations strategies significantly influenced customers' choice of hotels by enhancing brand image and credibility. Furthermore, Aniebiet and Unyime (2023) highlighted the role of social media as part of IMC in increasing customer engagement and patronage in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on three major theories that explain the relationship between Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) strategies and customer patronage: Social Exchange Theory, Information Processing Theory, and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM).

Social Exchange Theory (SET): propounded by Thibaut and Kelley (1952), posits that human interactions are guided by the principle of cost-benefit analysis. Individuals engage in relationships that provide maximum benefits at minimal costs. In the context of this study, customers patronise hospitality organisations when they perceive that the benefits (quality service, satisfaction, value for money) outweigh the costs (price, time, effort). IMC strategies such as advertising and promotions help communicate these benefits effectively, thereby influencing customer decisions (Oluwafemi & Adebisi, 2018).

Information Processing Theory: developed by McGuire (1968), explains how individuals perceive, process, store, and retrieve information. According to this theory, consumers are exposed to marketing messages, which they interpret and evaluate before making decisions. IMC plays a crucial role by ensuring that marketing messages are clear, consistent, and persuasive, thereby enhancing comprehension and recall (Sudarma et al., 2022). In hospitality marketing, repeated exposure to consistent messages across channels improves brand recognition and influences patronage behaviour.

Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM): proposed by Petty and Cacioppo, explains how persuasion occurs through two routes: the central route and the peripheral route. The central route involves careful and logical evaluation of information, while the peripheral route relies on cues such as attractiveness, emotions, or repetition. IMC strategies leverage both routes by combining detailed information (central route) and appealing visuals or promotions (peripheral route) to influence customer attitudes and decisions.

Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how IMC strategies influence customer patronage in the hospitality industry.

Methodology

This study adopted a survey research design to examine the influence of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) strategies on customer patronage in selected hospitality organisations in Akwa Ibom State. The survey design was considered appropriate because it allows for the collection of data from a large number of respondents and facilitates the analysis of relationships between variables.

The population of the study comprised customers of selected hospitality organisations across the three senatorial districts of Akwa Ibom State. A purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents who had prior experience with the services of the selected organisations. This ensured that participants possessed relevant knowledge to provide meaningful responses.

Data for the study were collected using a structured questionnaire designed in line with the study objectives. The questionnaire consisted of two sections: Section A captured demographic information, while Section B focused on IMC strategies (advertising, sales promotion, public relations) and customer patronage. Responses were measured using a Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

The instrument was validated through expert review, and its reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha to ensure internal consistency. Data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages, as well as inferential statistics including regression analysis to determine the relationship between IMC strategies and customer patronage. The results were presented in tables and interpreted accordingly to provide insights into the effectiveness of IMC strategies in the hospitality sector.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Table 1: Effect of IMC Strategies on Customer Patronage

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev	Beta (β)	p-value
Advertising	4.21	0.68	0.45	0.001
Sales Promotion	4.08	0.72	0.38	0.003
Public Relations	3.95	0.75	0.29	0.010

The results indicate that all IMC variables have a positive and significant effect on customer patronage. Advertising recorded the highest mean score (4.21) and the strongest influence ($\beta = 0.45$), suggesting that it plays a major role in attracting customers. This aligns with Bezabih (2021), who found that advertising significantly enhances hotel performance.

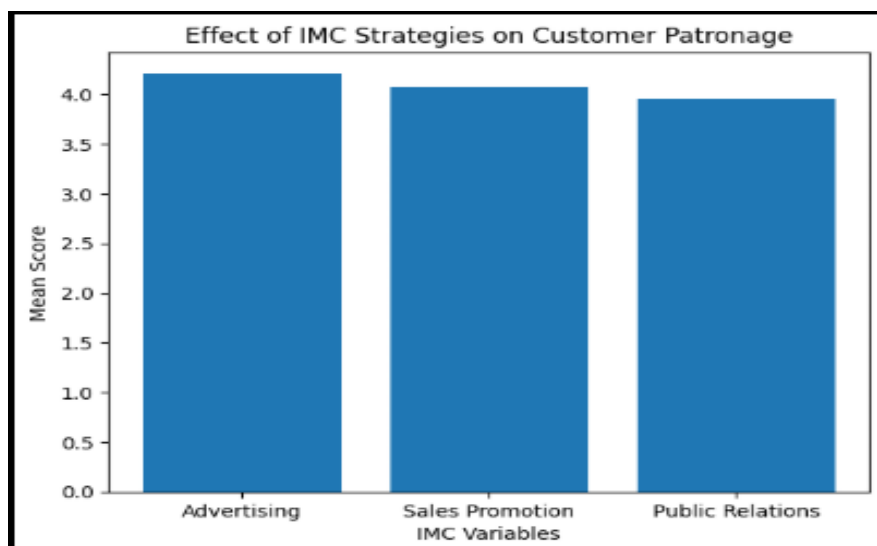


Figure 4.1: A Barchat for Effect of IMC Strategies on Customer Patronage

Sales promotion also shows a strong influence ($\beta = 0.38$), confirming that incentives such as discounts and offers stimulate immediate patronage (Martey et al., 2022). Public relations, though slightly lower, remains significant ($\beta = 0.29$), indicating its importance in building trust and long-term relationships (Sergeev, 2025).

The findings support the argument that integrated communication strategies are more effective when combined rather than used independently. However, challenges such as budget constraints and poor coordination may limit effectiveness.

Table 2: Responses on the Frequency of Patronising the Selected Hospitality Organisation

Options	Frequency
Very Often	102
Occasionally	115
Rarely	97
Just Once	61
Total	375
Weighted Mean	= 2.69

From the Table above, 163(44%) respondents indicate that the impact of advertisements on the use of particular hospitality organisations is that it creates awareness of the organisation. Another 120(32%) states that advertising provides helpful information but does not determine patronage.

Conclusion

In this study, the influence of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) strategies on customer patronage in selected hospitality organisations in Akwa Ibom State was examined. The findings reveal that IMC plays a significant role in shaping customer behaviour and enhancing organisational performance. Specifically, advertising, sales promotion, and public relations were found to have a positive and significant impact on customer patronage.

Advertising emerged as the most influential IMC component, as it effectively creates awareness and attracts customers. Sales promotion was also found to be highly effective in stimulating immediate purchase decisions through incentives such as discounts and promotional offers. Public relations contributed to building trust, credibility, and long-term customer relationships, which are essential for customer retention.

The study also established that the integration of these communication tools leads to improved brand perception and increased customer loyalty. This highlights the importance of adopting a holistic approach to marketing communication rather than relying on individual tools. However, the study identified several challenges affecting the effective implementation of IMC strategies, including limited financial

resources, lack of skilled personnel, and poor coordination among communication channels.

In conclusion, IMC is a critical strategic tool for enhancing customer patronage in the hospitality industry. Organisations that effectively integrate their communication strategies are more likely to achieve competitive advantage and sustain long-term growth in an increasingly competitive market.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Hospitality organisations should adopt a fully integrated marketing communication approach that ensures consistency in messaging across all communication channels. This will enhance brand identity and improve customer perception. Management should increase investment in advertising and digital marketing platforms to reach a wider audience and improve customer engagement. Social media should be effectively utilised as part of IMC strategies.
- ii. Organisations should design attractive sales promotion programmes such as discounts, loyalty rewards, and special offers to stimulate customer patronage and retention. There is a need for continuous training and development of marketing personnel to equip them with modern communication skills and knowledge of digital marketing tools.
- iii. Adequate budgetary allocation should be made for IMC activities to ensure effective implementation and coordination of communication strategies. Finally, hospitality organisations should regularly evaluate the effectiveness of their IMC strategies to identify areas for improvement and ensure optimal performance.

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