

## Factors Influencing Integrated Marketing Communication Strategy: Empirical Evidence from Fashionable Apparel Businesses in Thailand

Sorawit Ngamsutti, Prathanporn Jhundra-indra and Saranya Raksong

### Abstract

The research examined the relationship between integrated marketing communication strategy and its antecedents including market-driving vision, organizational collaboration, marketing learning, information technology resources, and market turbulence. The data were collected by using questionnaires from 126 fashionable apparel businesses in Thailand. The hypothesized relationships among the variables were examined by using regression analysis. The results showed that market-driving vision and organizational collaboration had a positive influence on integrated marketing communication strategy. The influence of market turbulence also suggested a moderate level of impact. Therefore, marketing executives should encourage market-driving vision, organization collaboration, and give attention to market turbulence to achieve a successful integrated marketing communication strategy. Suggestions and directions for future research are also highlighted.

**Keywords:** *Integrated marketing communication strategy, market-driving vision, organizational collaboration, marketing learning, information technology resource, market turbulence*

### Introduction

An integrated marketing communication strategy is goal driven towards generating, developing, communicating, and creating a relationship with customers in order to gain a competitive positioning advantage (Pickton & Broderick, 2001). Additionally, there are many factors – including internal and external ones – that influence organizational processes. Organizations in Thailand are under continual competitive pressures from the changing marketing environment and advances in technology, making it necessary to search for new strategies to enable them to achieve their objectives and goals (Lekmat & Chelliah, 2014).

The source of many competitive pressures has been the emergence of new technology, the arrival of new competitors in markets, and an expansion in customer preferences (Sriboonlue, Ussahawanitchakit, & Raksong, 2015). Secondly, the response to environmental changes is different for each small to medium business enterprise, and the possibilities for responding are limited by the Thai organization's resources and expertise (Chittithaworn, Islam, Keawchana, & Yusuf, 2011). In previous research conducted in marketing thought, integrated marketing communication strategies focused on three main areas: the marketplace, communication, and the consumer. This emphasis was in recognition of the growing significance and potential of the interactive nature of the media and changes in consumer demand. These changes have been focused primarily on advances in information technology and changing of customer perceptions (Kliatchko, 2005).

Integrated marketing communication strategies represent theoretical attempts to understand why customers respond to some marketing communications messages more positively than others and how marketing communications can be better organized (Schultz & Kitchen, 2000; Kliatchko, 2005). Researchers have given a few reasons for interest in integrated marketing communication strategy. First, the ongoing fragmentation of mass media makes it harder to comprehensively reach all customers with one or a simple set of promotional tools. Secondly, integrated marketing communication has adopted different concepts or approaches, and these have evolved over the years (Kliatchko, 2005). Effective integrated marketing communication strategy is potentially critical to organizational success because it has the capability to provide a future competitive advantage (Eagle & Kitchen 2000). The design literature suggests five antecedents to a sound integrated marketing communication strategy: a market-driving vision, organizational collaboration, marketing learning, information technology resource, and market turbulence (Reid, 2005; Luxton, Reid & Mavondo, 2015).

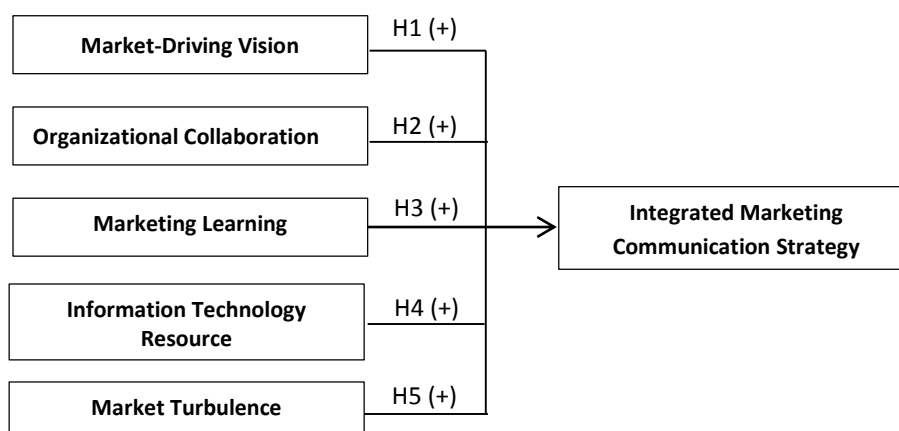
Our research used Thai fashionable apparel businesses as the focus group. Fashion apparel businesses face increasing competition from new entrants into the market and from existing competitors (Kamenidou, Mylonakis, & Nikolouli, 2007). Thus, every business must find and quickly respond to customer demands. The general characteristics of fashion apparel are a short product life cycle, relatively simple product design, and high demand uncertainty (Ren, Chan, & Ram, 2016). Moreover, over the past five decades, Thailand's apparel industry has shown continual growth and it has increased 2-6 percent per year (Watchravesringkan, Karpova, Nelson & Copeland, 2010). In the first quarter of 2017, import of textiles into Thailand increased 1.91 percent to US\$ 800.28 million compared with the same period from the previous year (Changchenkit, 2018).

In the Thai fashionable apparel industry, understanding what integrated marketing communication strategy to adopt is of interest to executives in order to increase their opportunities for success. This research examined the effect of five antecedents on integrated marketing communication strategy, namely, market-driving vision, organizational collaboration, marketing learning, information technology resources, and market turbulence. This means that four internal factors and one external factor were investigated. The results of this study should assist in delivering positive organizational outcomes.

### Literature Review

This research employed contingency theory (Fiedler, 1964; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Luthans, 1976). This theory holds that no one single approach is best for managing the process of organizing, decision-making, and leadership, since difference environments provide various antecedents. Organizational strategy is contingency-based on the degree of fit between organizational and environmental variables that are determinants of organization success (Shenhar, 2001). Contingency theory suggests that the decisions of the firm, such as marketing strategy and marketing planning, depend on the interaction between internal and external factors. This means it can explain the relationship among internal factors (including market-driving vision, organizational collaboration, marketing learning, and information technology resource) and external factors (market turbulence). Therefore, any decision regarding the use of integrated marketing communication strategy must consider both internal and external factors that impact the organization.

The objective of integrated marketing communications initially is to attract buyers' attention by inspiring interest in the products offered and the organization. A second stage objective is to help organizations induce buyers to make repeat purchases and become regular customers (Praude & Bormane, 2014). Unfortunately, very little is known about the antecedents to an integrated marketing communication strategy. The conceptual model developed in this study is shown in Figure 1, and presents hypothesized relations among antecedents of integrated marketing communication strategy.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Model of Antecedents of Integrated Marketing Communication

### **Marketing Driving Vision**

This research adopted the concept of market driving and market vision. Market driving analysis is defined as the process of forecasting a firm's long-term market operation that can be achieved in anticipation of marketing changes and that will become a future marketing trend (Pungboonpanich & Ussahawanitchakit, 2010). Vision relates to an organization's plans for the future that consider the present situation and the objectives that the organization wishes to reach in the future (Tungbunyasiri, Jhundra-indra, & Sujchaphong, 2014).

A market driving vision supports implementation of an integrated marketing communication strategy, as employees understand the long-term objective of the organization. Kantabutra (2006) found a positive effect on vision content and vision alignment with employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction, and financial outcomes. Barker, Plessis, and Hanekom (2013) found that the success of marketing communication begins with a clear market vision. An excellent example of vision is provided by organizations such as Amazon.com and EBay. These organizations are market driving. This term is used to characterizing new competitors who transform an industry by bringing a substantial leap in customer value through either an innovative technology or adopting a marketing system made possible by using distinctive different business processes and strategically developing networks and alliances (Helder, 2005). Therefore, the associations are hypothesized as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Marketing driving vision will positively relate to an integrated marketing communication strategy.

### **Organizational Collaboration**

Collaboration functions both within the organization and – for the most successful – also between organizations. Organizational collaboration is an interactive process. It can involve well-coordinated communication strategies primarily within an organization to enable the exchange of ideas, skills, and knowledge in order to achieve better marketing performance (Chang, 2013). On the other hand, O'Leary & Bingham (2009) defined organizational collaboration as a concept that describes the process of facilitating and operating in multi-organizational arrangements to solve problems that cannot be solved or easily solved by single organizations. This enables achievement of common goals across boundaries, and in multi-sector and multi-actor relationships (Esteve, Boyne, Sierra, & Ysa, 2012).

Kale, Dyer, and Singh (2002) argued that collaboration can facilitate the creation of new knowledge, and not just transfer of existing knowledge, exchange of information, and illumination about the links and commonalities among them. Researchers have argued that collaboration is a key to organizational success in the long term. Smith, Gopalakrishna, and Chatterjee (2006) investigated a three-stage model of integrated marketing communication. Their results showed that collaboration among organization departments increased the effectiveness of a marketing communication strategy. Thus, the related hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 2: Organizational collaboration will be positively related to an integrated marketing communication strategy.

### **Marketing Learning**

Marketing learning is defined as the dynamic process of acquiring marketing capabilities with integrated new knowledge or insight that has the potential to improve understanding of customer behavior and to generate satisfaction among the target audience (Ibeh & Kasem, 2014). Marketing learning involves the process by which firms accumulation knowledge that leads to improved capabilities in key marketing activities, such as an organization responding to customers' needs, research and new-product development, building brand image, and channeling established relationships (Meesuptong, Jhundra-indra, & Raksong, 2014). Additionally, most marketing scholars also emphasize that new knowledge and skills gained through learning enhance an organization's innovative skills, ultimately improve the level of a firm's competitiveness and performance (Kieser & Koch, 2008).

Percy (2014) argued that learning about the customer, market environment, and competitors is important to increase the effectiveness of an integrated marketing communication strategy. Moreover, Christensen, Firat, and Torp (2008) claimed that organizational learning has a positive effect on integrated marketing communication because the organization can use it to adapt more skillfully to the customer's needs. Thus, when an organization develops new knowledge and implements this information to build a relationship with a target audience, it can help an organization to meet its objectives. Therefore, the association hypothesized is as follows:

Hypothesis 3: Marketing learning will be positively related to integrated marketing communication strategy.

### **Information Technology Resource**

An information technology resource represents the technological foundation and managerial information technology skills of an organization that ensure accurate, real-time, and comprehensive information availability for communication (Mao, Liu, Zhang, & Deng, 2016). Information technology (IT) resources can be a valuable marketing communication tools for collecting, processing, and reporting data (Humphrey & Beard, 2014). Information technology resources are important factors that help firms to be more competitive, to achieve their vision, goals, mission, and to develop strategies by using both tangible and intangible information technology resource in marketing planning (Porter, 1981).

As information technology resources becomes more powerful, many organizations use advanced technological tools to manage knowledge and related processes (Iyengar, Sweeney, & Montealegre, 2015). Ravichandran and Lertwongsatien (2005) found a positive effect of information technology resources on a firm's performance. This was achieved directly through advancing employees' skills. Holm (2006) suggested that information technology is a core element that leads to the achievement of integrated marketing communication because advances in technology permit quick and easy analysis of customers' requirements. Thus, the related hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 4: information technology resources will be positively related to an integrated marketing communication strategy.

### **Market Turbulence**

Market turbulence is the degree of uncertainty and instability in market environments, such as customer needs, product information, and government policy that influence firm competencies in response to markets (Luangsakdapich, Jhundra-indra & Muenthaisong 2015). Calantone, Garcia, and Droge (2003) defined turbulent environments as those in which market or technological variations are frequent and unpredictable and have a major effect on the new product development strategic planning. Overall, market turbulence is related to the degree of unpredictability and ambiguity within a firm's markets (Song, Droge, Hanvanich, & Calantone, 2005). Turbulent environments increase causal uncertainty. However, they decrease a competitor's ability to imitate a firm's capabilities. This inadequacy may also help firms to achieve superior innovation and performance based on their dynamic capabilities (Helfat et al., 2009).

In highly unstable market situations, it is possible that customer demands can change frequently. This might enable an organization to react to the customer more speedily than rivals (Luo, 2001). However, there are shorter product life cycles so that the development of new products becomes a more acute issue. Turbulence results in uncertainty regarding future states of the marketing environment, which constrains a firm's ability to anticipate changes in competitors' strategies and the emergence of new competitive forces (Engelen, Schmidt, & Buchsteiner, 2015). Murray, Gao, and Kotabe (2011) stated that organizations need to be more market-responsive to counter rivals' aggressive actions in a highly competitive market. Additionally, O'Reilly and Tushman (2008) argued that, in competitive marketing environments, firms must seek to develop dynamic competencies that will enable them to leverage marketing strategy. Thus, the related hypothesis is postulated as follows:

Hypothesis 5: Stakeholder expectation pressure will be positively related to emotional intelligence orientation.

### **Integrated Marketing Communication Strategy**

Business strategy is concerned with firm-wide decisions that focus on achieving competitive advantages over one's competitors (Slater, Olson, & Finnegan, 2011). Thus, integrated marketing communication strategy is defined as a set of implementations that involve planning, development, effective execution, and evaluation of measurable, strongly coordinated, effective firm communications programs interacting over time with stakeholders, customers, and appropriate internal and external audiences (Schultz, 2004). Belch and Belch (2007) suggested that an integrated marketing communication strategy is a major player in the process of developing and sustaining brand identity and brand equity, and it also increases long-term customer relationships. Therefore, to develop an effective, integrated marketing communications strategy requires awareness of and integration with variables in both the internal and external environments.

### **Methodology**

#### **Sample Selection and Data Collection Procedure**

Fashionable apparel businesses in Thailand were selected from the online database of the Thailand Textile Institute and Thailand Trade Information Service (TTIS) ([www.ttisonlinedirectory.com](http://www.ttisonlinedirectory.com), accessed on January 15, 2016). A list of 579 fashionable apparel businesses in Thailand were initially chosen for the mail survey. Based on prior business research of this type, a 20 percent response rate is needed (Aaker, Kumar & Day, 2001). A total of 47 questionnaire surveys were undeliverable because some business had moved to unknown locations. This means that the valid mailing number was 106 surveys. On completion of the survey, three questionnaires were found to be incomplete and were removed from further analysis. As a result, the completed questionnaires numbered 126, giving an effective response rate of 23.68 percent.

#### **Variable Measurement**

To measure each construct in the conceptual model, all variables were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In addition, all constructs were developed bearing in mind the definition of each construct, and the relationship between the theoretical framework and previous research findings. Hence, the variables measured in this research are described as follows.

#### **Dependent Variable**

Integrated marketing communication strategy was the dependent variable in this research. This construct was measured through message consistency orientation, channel congruence focus, cross-functional activity competency, media linkage concentration, and homogeneous image capability.

#### **Independent Variables**

Market-driving vision was measured by the organization's confidence that the future direction and marketing policies clearly will help the firm achieve its goals effectively. Confidence can be indicated by the fact that the firm focuses continually on allocating funds for research and development of new products and services (Pungboonpanich & Ussahawanitchakit, 2010).

Organizational collaboration was measured by the systematic participation of various departments in the organization's activities, the encouragement given to personnel to integrate ideas, and promotion of the teamwork concept.

Marketing learning was measured by the belief that continuous marketing learning leads to an increased knowledge and understanding of customers and competitors. Such learning might occur

when the firm encourages employees to attend training courses on modern marketing techniques (Ibeh & Kasem, 2014).

Information technology resources were measured by the firm’s ability to seek resources that are available and sufficient to compete in business, its ability to adapt technology development systems, and allocate a budget for the further development of information technology refinements (Mao, Liu, Zhang, & Deng, 2016).

Market turbulence was measured by the awareness of the firm to changes in the market environment and its response to such changes. The firm’s ability to conduct research and product development were also taken as indicators of its alertness (Luangsakdapich Jhundra-indra & Muenthaisong, 2015).

### Control Variables

Control variables in this study comprised firm age and firm size. Firm age is a dummy variable that is represented as follows (1 = fewer than 5 years, and 0 = 5 years or more). Firm size was also treated as a dummy variable (1 = total employees that are more than 100, and 0 = total employees that are equal to or less than 100).

### Reliability and Validity

**Table 1.** Results of Measurement Validation

Variables	Factor Loadings	Cronbach’s Alpha
Market-Driving Vision (MVD)	0.728-0.767	0.740
Organizational Collaboration (OCO)	0.760-0.806	0.743
Marketing Learning (MLE)	0.734-0.800	0.770
Information Technology Resource (ITR)	0.772-0.831	0.803
Market Turbulence (MTU)	0.771-0.825	0.805
Integrated Marketing Communication Strategy (IMCS)	0.825-0.887	0.896

Cronbach’s alpha was used to test the reliability of the measurements. A coefficient alpha greater than 0.70 indicates an acceptable degree of internal consistency among items in a questionnaire (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). The results of measurement validation are shown in Table 1. All variables possessed construct validity. Moreover, the reliability of all variables was accepted because Cronbach’s alpha ranged between 0.740 and 0.896.

In this study, convergent validity was tested by the factor loadings. Constructs with values greater than a 0.40 cut-off were considered acceptable (Hair et al., 2010). It is noted that all factors were statistically significant.

### Statistical Techniques

All dependent and independent variables in this research are expressed in metric scales. Therefore, Ordinary Least Squares regression is a suitable technique to test all hypotheses because both dependent and independent variables in this research are interval data (Hair et al., 2010). From the conceptual model and hypotheses, the following four equation model was formulated:

$$IMCS = \alpha + \beta_3MVD + \beta_4OCO + \beta_5MLE + \beta_6ITR + \beta_7MTU + \beta_8FAG + \beta_9FSI + \epsilon$$

### Results and Discussion

Table 2 shows descriptive statistics and the correlation matrix for the six variables and control variables. Before assessing the model, we inspected potential multicollinearity among variables. The results show correlation coefficients ranging from 0.625 - 0.761, inferring that multicollinearity does not seriously influence our findings. Additionally, the variance inflation factors (VIF) on all six variables

ranged from 1.122 to 3.489, well below the cut-off value of 10 as recommended by Hair et al. (2010). Thus, all the variables were kept in this model for regression analysis.

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix Details for the Variables

Variables	MVD	OCO	MLE	ITR	MTU	IMCS
Mean	3.904	3.865	3.886	3.831	4.065	3.780
S.D	0.606	0.592	0.622	0.654	0.598	0.562
MVD	1					
OCO	0.761**	1				
MLE	0.718**	0.749**	1			
ITR	0.643**	0.737**	0.732**	1		
MTU	0.644**	0.646**	0.675**	0.657**	1	
IMCS	0.739**	0.702**	0.634**	0.625**	0.640**	1
FAG	0.153	0.045	0.095	0.088	0.184*	0.246**
FSI	0.244**	0.227*	0.204*	0.262*	0.101	0.221*

\*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

Table 3 reveals the results of the relationships between antecedents and integrated marketing communication strategy.

**Table 3.** Results of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Effects of Antecedents on Integrated Marketing Communication Strategy

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables <sup>a</sup>
	Integrated Marketing Communication Strategy (IMCS)
Market-Driving Vision (MVD : H1)	0.345** (0.087)
Organizational Collaboration (OCO : H2)	0.234* (0.098)
Marketing Learning (MLE : H3)	0.004 (0.089)
Information Technology Resource (ITR : H4)	0.077 (0.080)
Market Turbulence (MTU : H5)	0.151+ (0.079)
Firm Age (FAG)	0.166 (0.070)
Firm Size (FSI)	0.005 (0.067)
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.638

\*\* p < 0.01, \* p < 0.05, + p < 0.10, <sup>a</sup> Beta coefficients with standard errors in parenthesis

The results show that market-driving vision has a significant positive impact on integrated marketing communication strategy ( $\beta_3 = 0.345, p < 0.01$ ). Consistent with prior research, it was found that market-driving vision is linked with the organization's objectives, and tends to increase the effectiveness of integrated marketing communication strategy. Additionally, O'Connor and Veryzer (2001) suggested that market-driving vision includes a variety of mechanisms that may operate in a combination or serially. Validation and internal acceptance need to be assessed and may depend

greatly on reaching out beyond the familiar market set of a firm. Thus, the firm's market-driving vision is an important factor that reflects the long-term strategy of the integrated marketing communication strategy success. Therefore, **Hypothesis 1 is supported.**

Secondly, organizational collaboration has a significant positive impact on integrated marketing communication strategy ( $\beta_4 = 0.234, p < 0.05$ ). This is consistent with the notion forwarded by Kitchen and Burgmann (2010). They claimed that collaboration among departments supported integrated marketing communication strategy through a gain of knowledge and many skills, so increasing performance. Organizational collaboration can improve skills in the areas of finance, marketing, research, development planning, or in gathering of employee knowledge to assist managerial decision-making. Thus, **Hypothesis 2 is supported.**

Thirdly, marketing learning had no significant positive effect on integrated marketing communication strategy ( $\beta_5 = 0.004, p > 0.10$ ). Information about the customer is an important factor for marketing planning because the fashionable apparel business is changing day-to-day (Alpat & Aksu, 2014). Hence, firms need to gather and learn how to adapt or find ways to persuade the target buyer group. A literature review of marketing learning can help firms obtain an understanding regarding markets and customers information so as to identify potential needs and preferences. The challenge is to understand additional customer needs that are presently unknown, and create excellent value for the customers' benefit, which would allow firms to be able to satisfy individual customer demands, respond, and adapt (Haddad & Algadeer, 2004). The results can be explained, but the firms surveyed could not find the best way of developing an integrated marketing communication strategy. Therefore, **Hypothesis 3 is not supported.**

Fourthly, information technology resources had no significant positive influence on integrated marketing communication strategy ( $\beta_6 = 0.077, p > 0.10$ ). The results of this research can be explained by Carr (2003) who argued that information technology resources are ubiquitous, increasingly inexpensive, and accessible to all organizations. Thus, they can't provide a differential advantage to any organization. A small firm can't develop or create this resource. Outsourcing is an alternative for organizations to increase the opportunity for strategy success. Therefore, **Hypothesis 4 is not supported.**

The last antecedent, market turbulence, has a suggestive positive impact on integrated marketing communication strategy ( $\beta_7 = 0.151, p < 0.10$ ). When market turbulence is high, fashionable apparel businesses face rapid changes in customers and their preferences, which represents shorter product life cycles to develop new products. Thus, organizations use marketing communication tools or methods to react to rapid change. It is obvious, as Murray, Gao, and Kotabe (2011) stated, that organizations need to be more market-responsive to counter rivals' actions in a highly competitive market. Therefore, **Hypothesis 5 is provisionally supported.** Sample size would need to be increased to confirm this trend.

### **Theoretical and Managerial Implications**

This study represents an attempt to provide a clearer understanding of antecedents of integrated marketing communication strategy. It provides theoretical contributions expanding on previous knowledge and literature regarding integrated marketing communication. Similarly, the research considered integrated marketing communication strategy antecedents, including market-driving vision, organizational collaboration, marketing learning, information technology resource, and market turbulence. Some progress was made in teasing out the above-mentioned relationships in respect to the fashionable apparel business in Thailand.

This research has potential implications for executives or practitioners. It helps executives or practitioners of fashionable apparel businesses to identify and justify attention to antecedents of integrated marketing communication strategy that may be critical to organizational success. Secondly, it gives greater confidence to practitioners who have a market-driving vision and organizational collaboration that they can adapt to market turbulence and enhance the efficiency of their integrated



marketing communication strategy. Finally, antecedents found to be of principal importance should be given priority by executives.

### Limitations and Future Research

This study has some limitations that should be mentioned. Firstly, the research study collected data from only one industry. Thus, future research should involve different industry groups (such as food and beverages, media, electronics) and/or use comparative populations to verify the generalizability of results. Secondly, in this research, some antecedents did not affect the integrated marketing communication strategy. As a result, future research might consider other variables to enhance the relationships between integrated marketing communication strategy and its antecedents. Lastly, future research may consider the moderating role played by organizational culture and organizational learning to tease out the relationship between antecedents and integrated marketing communication strategy.

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