

EVOLUTION OF INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION FROM TELECOMMUNICATIONS MODELS TO AI FRENZY

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Abstract: *The general objective pursued in the doctoral thesis "Management of Marketing Communication in the Context of the Development of the Communication Industry and Post-pandemic Challenges" is to establish the impact that marketing communication can have on sustainable economic development at the national level and to validate a communication-based marketing model that would facilitate this process.*

To this end, we specifically aim to analyze the communication industry: its structure, constituent elements, dimensions, and trends; to develop through exploratory research, an Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) Model; to validate the IMC Model among representatives of the business environment and the academic community; and to develop, based on the obtained results, some practical recommendations and reference principles for the national economy decision-makers, for representatives of the academic field, and for marketing professionals within the business environment.

The key findings are a Matrix of Integrated Marketing Communication Channels, Carriers & Vehicles which maps all current marketing communication tools and provides a classification of IMC vehicles and media; and a IMC communication model based on a flow of seven distinct processes which incorporate all nowadays practices and activities related to IMC.

Key words: *integrated marketing communication, marketing model, marketing strategy, promotional mix*

JEL: M31

1. Introduction

Over the past three decades, among the key drivers of the Moldovan national economic development, a significant impulse has been played by the implementation and development of the marketing concept within local companies.

Many innovations and new approaches have been introduced based on international experience. The openness of many enterprises and organizations to a marketing-oriented approach is reflected in how they promote themselves, especially in the manner and content of the messages they communicate publicly. However, the large majority does not show a genuine concern for customer needs and their satisfaction still remains a current challenge for many of those mentioned.

The pandemic that marked the beginning of the 2020s imposed new game rules, the companies now seek new approaches within existing business models and new public communication strategies, in order to adapt, survive, and potentially grow.

We believe that the incorrect and superficial implementation of marketing – or often the complete absence of it in local business models – and in particular the erroneous or faulty management of *marketing communication*, lead to stagnation or failure for many enterprises and, consequently, for the national economy in general.

Therefore, in the undertaken exploratory research, we aim to study this phenomenon and, ultimately, develop a marketing model that would be useful both for academic study and research purposes and for specialists within the administrative sector, for continuous training needs within the business environment, and, last but not least, for strategic and tactical planning.

2. Evolution and conceptualization of Integrated Marketing Communication

What is Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC)? Although it may seem like a simple question at first glance, the answer requires a few introductory clarifications.

To begin with, there must be an agreement on a common definition of the term "Marketing," a definition that may seem obvious in a professional environment. In reality, the semantic inflation of this term has penetrated even the academic sphere. Today, we often hear "marketing" used to mean "advertising," "promotion," "sales," or "public relations." While these elements are certainly related to marketing, they are either subcategories or related domains. For the purpose of this paper, we will define Marketing as the *strategic decision-making approach within a company, oriented towards consumer interests*.

Secondly, we must clarify what we mean when we speak about *marketing communication*. The economy is a vast field of human activity that includes specialized areas such as finance and accounting, production, distribution, sales, management, human resources, raw materials, banking, energy resources, logistics and transport, and international trade. However, all of these are ultimately shaped by the fundamental phenomenon of economics: *the transaction* – the specific moment when supply and demand meet.

A transaction is essentially the communication of the offer's aspects: benefits, parameters, price, location, etc., along with the negotiation, acceptance of terms, and conclusion of the exchange. All of this constitutes *marketing communication*.

Finally, to clarify the last element of the term Integrated Marketing Communication – "Integrated", we return to the classic model of explaining Marketing through the Marketing Mix: Product, Price, Place, Promotion (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). The last element, Promotion, encompasses Marketing Communication. Promotion itself has its own mix: Personal Selling, Sales Promotion, Direct Response, Advertising, Publicity, and Corporate Image.

What turns Marketing Communication into *Integrated* Marketing Communication is the combined (integrated) use of all six promotional techniques (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018).

With these clarifications in mind, we are now faced with the challenge of explaining the IMC processes: what elements are involved, what actions are taken, and who are the actors in these actions and processes.

During the evolution of the Marketing concept, there appeared the need to clarify, as well, the concept of Integrated Marketing Communication. A diagram (Fig. 1) was initially borrowed from a new branch of mathematics – Mathematical Communication Theory (Shannon, 1948), to serve as a conceptual model for communication. This diagram originally provided some general answers, such as the basic elements: Source, Message, Channel, Receiver, etc. However, over time, the field of IMC has become so complex and sophisticated that this model now requires substantial updating.

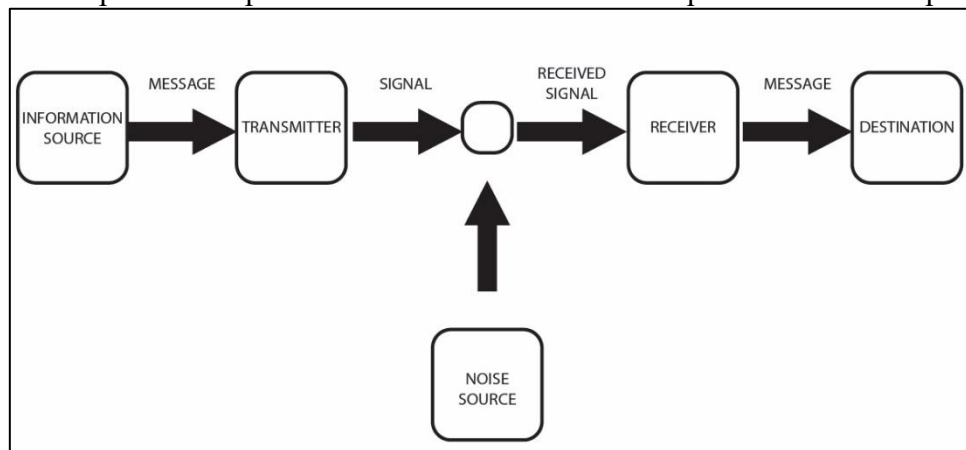


Figure 1. Schematic diagram of a general communication system

Source: Shannon

The evolution of IMC is tied to the broader evolution of marketing itself, which was most clearly explained by Robert J. Keith in 1960 through the periodization of marketing evolution: the Production Oriented Era, the Sales Oriented Era, and the Marketing Oriented Era. Keith formulated this periodization in 1960, therefore the final era he identified ends in 1960. Later works proposed further developments of this framework: Kurtz in *Contemporary Marketing*, Dibb & Simkin in *Marketing Briefs: A Revision and Study Guide*, Lancaster & Reynolds in *Management of Marketing*, Blythe & Martin in *Essentials of Marketing*, Drummond & Ensor in *Introduction to Marketing Concepts*.

These later authors adopted a different principle than Keith's. His original periodization reflected phases of technological advancement, where certain technical tools enabled businesses to evolve and formulate new objectives. Other authors concentrated on the nature of interaction between the company and the consumer and they mainly proposed a Relationship Era starting in the 80s or the 90s.

However starting with the 1980s significant technological advances occurred in a field which is critical to IMC and marketing in general – the *Information Technology and Computers*. This technological breakthrough offered new tools for communication, which came in several waves.

Following is a short review of the most important developments of this new age:

Table 2. Key technological advancements with impact on IMC

First wave:			
1981	Personal Computer	<i>IBM Personal Computer</i>	(Hormby, 2006)
1982	Fonts & Graphic Editors	Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign, Acrobat	(Adobe, 2025)
1989	Text editor	MS Office: Word, Excel, PowerPoint	(Microsoft, 2025)
Second wave:			
1991	Internet		(Couldry, 2012)
1994	Web Browser	Netscape Navigator	(Matthew, 2019)
1997	E-mail	Yahoo! Mail	(Yahoo, 1997)
1997	Computer Music	Winamp, MP3 format	(Bronson, 1998)
1997	E-commerce	eBay, Amazon	(The Telegraph, 2011) (Shen, 2017)
1998	Electronic Payments	PayPal	(Forrest, 2014)
Third wave:			
2000	Internet Advertising	Google AdWords	(Google, 2000)
2003	Audiochat / Videochat	Skype	(Tänavsuu, 2018)
2005	Computer Videos	YouTube	(Phrasee, 2016)
2006	Social Networks	Facebook	(Phillips, 2007)
Fourth wave: <i>Generative AI</i>			
2018	Video Deepfake	FakeApp, Faceswap	(Robertson, 2018)
2020	Audio Deepfake	15.ai	(Weitzman, 2025)
2021	Graphic Generative AI	DALL-E	(Johnson, 2021)
2022	Text Generative	AI Chat GPT	(Open AI, 2025)

Source: author

Due to its structure, in our view, this period should be regarded as a broader period – an *age*, with each wave determining a new era in marketing evolution.

Hereafter we propose the following updated periodization of Marketing evolution:

Table 2. Updated Periodization of Marketing Evolution

Production Era	prior to 1920s
Sales Era	1920 - 1950
Marketing Era	1950 – 1980
Marketing Communication Age	1980 – ongoing
Digitalization Era	1980 - 1995
Internet Era	1995 - 2005
Social Networks Era	2005 – 2015
Artificial Generation Era	2015 – ongoing

Source: author

This new periodization is necessary in order to allow the integration, within the IMC model, of all elements, processes, actions, and stakeholders involved in the field as it exists today.

Additionally, recent developments in the field of information technology – especially in the area of Artificial Intelligence research – have led to an exponential increase in tools that are transforming the IMC environment. We now have generative AI tools for virtually every creative domain: *Jasper* for AI-powered marketing content, *Anyword* for writing support, *Shortwave* for email writing and management, *Notion AI* for creating a second brain, *Mem* for organized notes, *Runway* for freeform and creative videos, *Wondershare Filmora* for polishing video, *Midjourney* for the best AI image results, *DALL•E 3* for easy-to-use AI image generation, *Adobe Photoshop* for AI-generated image enhancement, *ElevenLabs* for a comprehensive AI voice library, *Suno* for easy-to-use AI music generation, *Beautiful.ai* for automated presentation design elements, *Pitch* for sales teams, *Wix* for intuitive website-building, *Framer* for AI-centric website-building, *Microsoft Power Apps* for in-depth app development, *Pico* for fully automated app-building, *ChatGPT* for versatility, *Claude* for great writing skills, *Zapier Chatbots* for custom-made chatbots (Ramki, 2024).

These tools allow for an increased output, broader diversity of solutions, and speed in areas such as copywriting, graphic design, and market research, establishing a new paradigm.

The frenzy surrounding this breakthrough not only disrupts the status quo but also generates entirely new dimensions. ChatGPT alone has evolved tremendously over recent months, reaching the 5th place (and rising) among the most visited websites globally, surpassed only by Google, YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram (Similarweb, 2025).

3. Conclusions.

Under these circumstances, relying solely on Claude Shannon's diagram (Fig. 1) is no longer sufficient.

Shannon's theory is fundamental to telecommunications – he laid the groundwork for what we now call the Internet and the digital communication itself. But as the title of his work explicitly states ("*A Mathematical Theory of Communication*") it is a *mathematical theory* suitable for electronic or digital communication between devices but not adequate to explain an economic phenomenon involving an anthropic factor.

The key difference lies in the fact that, unlike communication between two machines, human (anthropic) communication (Fig. 2) is aimed at transmitting an Idea that takes the form of a Message.

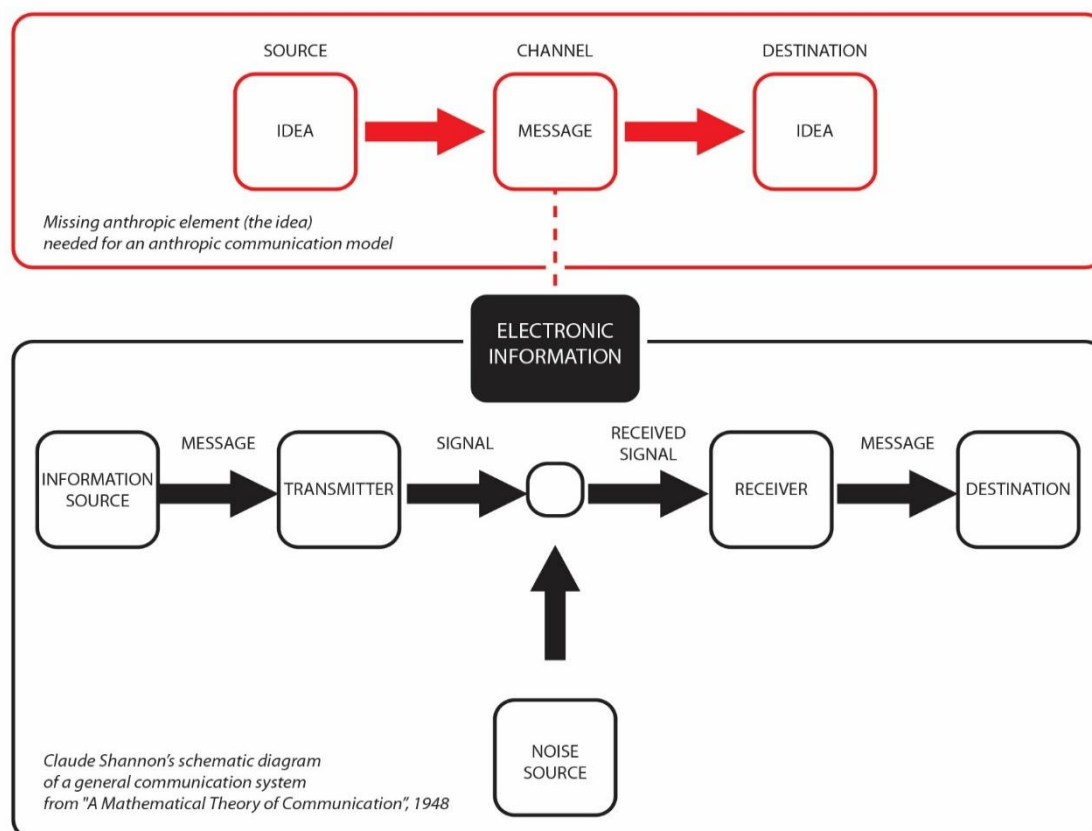


Figure 2. Missing anthropic element in the “Schematic diagram of a general communication system”

Source: Upper frame – author, lower frame – Shannon

The literature review provided us with the understanding that the largest number of conceptual models of IMC are derivatives of Shannon’s diagram with some adaptation depending on each author’s perspective on marketing evolution in general and IMC evolution in particular. The general trait is closing the loop of communication with a new element response/feedback/action that originates at destination and aims for the source. Such models are presented or reviewed by Kotler & Armstrong G in *Principles of Marketing*, Kurtz in *Contemporary Marketing*, Blythe & Martin in *Essentials of Marketing*, Drummond & Ensor in *Introduction to Marketing Concepts*, Kotler, Kartajaya & Setiawan in *Marketing 4.0 Moving from Traditional to Digital*, Kotler & Lane Keller in *Marketing Management*, Oancea in *Evolution of the Main Models of IMC Who Have the Role to Influence Consumer Buying Behavior*, Eiamkanchanalai in *Word of Mouth Marketing A Model of Personal Interaction in IMC*.

A different approach is presented by Varey in *Marketing Communication, Principles and Practice*, where he builds upon a spectrum of general communication models, that brings deep insight in understanding how to formulate the idea but does not offer sufficient ground in detailing how technically to channel it towards the destination.

A number of authors followed the path of Promotion Mix (as part of Marketing Mix) and revolve around it and media channels or by adjusting it to consumer behavior models, customer path etc. However these models do not include message development and adaptation to media vehicles. This approach is presented by Pickton in *What Is IMC Integrating ‘integrated marketing communications’ 3 Models, 4Cs, 4Es, 4Ss, and a Profile*, Kitchen & Burgmann in *Integrated Marketing Communication*, Oancea in *The Model of IMC Who has the Role to Influence Consumer Behaviour*, OpenLearn Open University in *Social marketing 5.2 An integrated marketing communications framework*.

Finally a new pursue is presented by Dumitrache in *DOCTORES model*, a PhD research, howether

this research is ongoing and from the summary it details an organizational approach to IMC.

The route we propose is more technical and technological, combining Promotional Mix with message construction, communication vehicles, carriers and channels and deconstruction by the source. In our exploratory research project, "*Management of Marketing Communication in the Context of the Development of the Communication Industry and Post-pandemic Challenges*", we have conducted a detailed mapping of all communication tools within IMC. We structured them and identified the elements, interdependencies, processes, and activities that make up the overall IMC flow.

This structuring enabled a general synthesis in the form of a Matrix of Channels, Carriers, and Vehicles, which provided clarity on how IMC vehicles are compartmentalized and how terms such as "channel" and "media" are more accurately defined.

We found that at this stage there are: 62 communication vehicles, 41 communication carriers, 22 communication channels, 9 communication media types, and 3 technological groups. In particular, a clearer picture of the *communication media* categories emerged, including: Street Media, POS (Point-of-Sale) Media, Entertainment Media, Direct Delivery, Print (text) Media, Telephone, News Media, Broadcasting Media, and Digital Media.

Returning to the anthropic factor and the transmission of ideas, we recognize that an idea must travel from the Source to the Destination, but ideas cannot be transmitted directly from mind to mind—telepathy is not an available option. The fundamental tool available to us humans is language, not only its vocal, sound aspects but more important – the mental dimension of language: the concept of language itself, thoughts, and ideas.

Our ideas come in two forms: mental representations (images of objects), and abstract concepts (e.g., good, evil, success, freedom, or emotions). We understand these concepts, but to share and communicate them, we need words and language. Therefore, our ideas must take on a verbal form. At an initial stage, this form is the Message – what we want to say. Further the process entangles and is more and more sophisticated as it continues. We tried to encapsulate all its aspects and the overall result of this research is a human-centered model of anthropic (human) Integrated Marketing Communication, hence the name: The Anthropic Integrated Marketing Communication Model – (AIMCOMM).

The model (Fig. 3) is structured in three large parts: the Source, the Channel and the Destination with an Idea being channeled from the Source to the Destination.

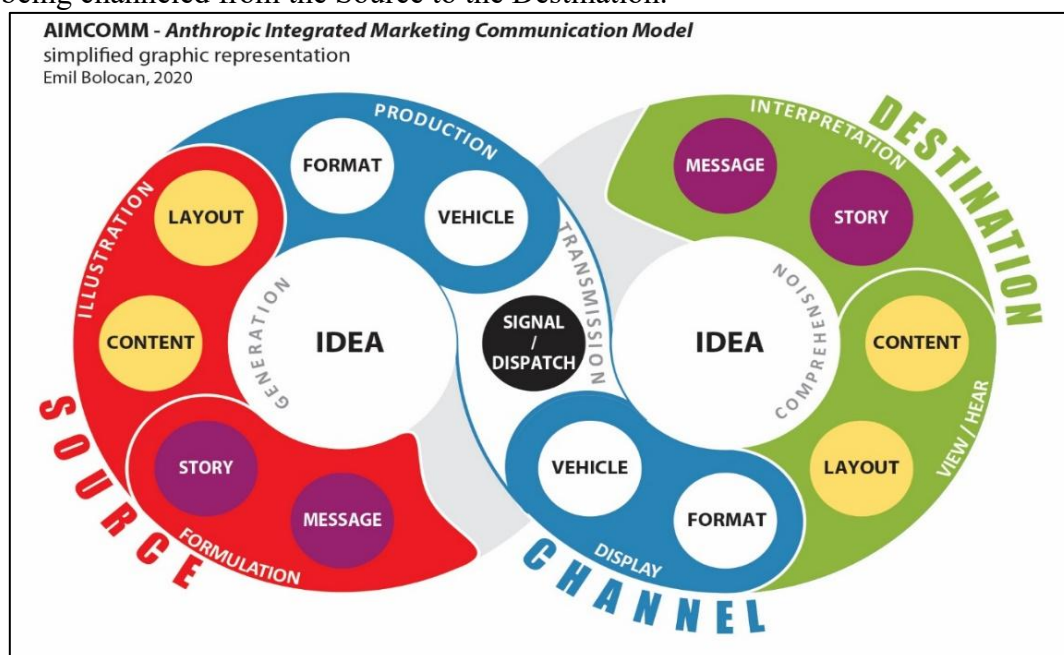


Figure 3. Simplified graphic representation of AIMCOMM

Source: author

This flow is sequenced in seven stages: *Formulation, Illustration, Production, Transmission, Display, View/Hear* and *Interpretation*. Each stage for the exception of the Transmission consists of two actions. The actions are mirrored from the Source to the Destination since they follow a process of construction and deconstruction. The construction is Message → Story → Content → Format → Vehicle, then Transmission (either as signal or in a physical shape) and then deconstructed in reverse order.

As seen, the message alone is not enough. It is sufficient for a mathematical system (as it is present in Shannon's diagram) but in IMC there is the need for human communication elements. It often needs to be explained through a relatable situation, familiar to the consumer we are communicating with – something they have personally experienced. This leads us to the next stage in building communication: the Story. The story we tell eventually ends with a conclusion or a moral, which is our actual message. But even when we construct a story, it is often not polished. It must be refined and edited so the audience can easily understand it – thus the story transforms into Content. Content (particularly web-content) is a form adapted to the way we transmit the idea further – whether in writing or spoken. And even then, the form the idea has taken may still not be efficient enough. So the next step is to illustrate the content, giving rise to the Layout. It may seem like the process is now complete, but this is where the specific marketing communication technologies begin. We must now adapt the Layout to the specific Communication Vehicles that will travel through the communication channel to reach the Destination. Thus, the Layout is formatted in the way required by the provider so it can be placed on the Communication Vehicle – this gives rise to the Format. The Format is then placed on the appropriate Vehicle, which travels through the Communication Channel. Usually, the Format and the Vehicle are essential elements for communication via telecommunication systems. After the Vehicle has traveled through the Channel, the reverse process of "deconstructing" the forms of the original Idea begins: the Vehicle and Format are displayed so the Layout and Content could be seen or read and this continues with interpretation of the Story and the Message, which ideally leads to the Source grasping the original Idea and eventually acquiring the product or service. The entire process of the economic transaction is therefore complete through Incorporated Marketing Communication.

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