

# An inside-out approach to integrated marketing communication

## An international analysis

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The 'inside-out' approach used in this paper describes the implied educators' perceptions of integrated marketing communication (IMC). From an analysis of 87 IMC course syllabi from six countries, and in-depth conversations with IMC programme directors and developers, we sought to determine whether those who teach IMC have reached a consensus on what IMC is; whether they embrace, reject or simply tolerate this new discipline area; and, specifically, how they are presenting IMC to the next generation of practitioners and scholars.

The findings suggest that what is being taught around the world continues to be what would traditionally be considered promotions strategy, advertising management or marketing communication with minor IMC theory or content. For the most part, the syllabi we evaluated neither drew from the key constructs of IMC, nor were the key writers and published disciplinary research included in the course offerings. This gap – between what IMC writers have put forth, the established industry practices and what is being taught to the next generation of practitioners and academics – presents a significant challenge. This is a particular challenge to the scholars and teachers who are charged with the responsibility of encouraging best practices, presenting the most current and relevant applications and research approaches, and including the most current theory in their course delivery.

## Introduction

For the past decade, academics and practitioners alike have looked to research, textbooks, shared knowledge through conferences and seminars and field practice to define and apply integrated marketing communication (IMC) – that is, what it is, how it works in practice, and what it might most contribute to marketing communication and brand development in the future. Descriptive studies have investigated practitioner perceptions of IMC, organisational structures and challenges in implementation of IMC in the US and in other parts of the world (Duncan & Everett 1993; Petrison & Wang 1996; Kitchen & Schultz 1999; Swain 2004). Process models have been developed and theory drawn from these observations in an attempt to better understand the foundations of IMC and to identify future research directions (Schultz *et al.* 1993; Moriarty 1996; Hartley & Pickton 1999; Low 2000; Zahay *et al.* 2004). In more recent years, various writers have analysed and put forth alternative definitions of IMC, including attempts to identify its constructs (Kitchen *et al.* 2004; Schultz & Schultz 2004; Kliatchko 2005).

While these streams of research and documentation have been taking place, the number of university-level courses – as well as executive education programmes – have increased substantially, reflecting the growing interest in IMC academically, as well as recognition of its importance in practical marketing strategy and brand building. To date, our understanding of the field has been based primarily on the perceptions and practices of practitioners. This has largely ignored an important stakeholder group who are not only charged with the education of the next generation of practitioners and academics, but who also define the discipline by what they teach. This study looks at educators to determine whether those who teach IMC have reached a consensus on what IMC is; whether they embrace, reject or simply tolerate this new discipline area; and, specifically, how they are presenting IMC to the next generation of practitioners and scholars. By doing this, we hope to identify the gaps between IMC theory and classroom content, and to help guide the creation of IMC course content that will inspire productive, creative research that will further advance the field.

## **The inside-out approach and its importance to the future of IMC**

To use the IMC vernacular, this study examines whether IMC courses are built inside-out – that is, by agglomerating traditional advertising management, promotion management and marketing communication approaches inherent in university curricula and country of origin, and presenting them as integrated marketing communication, or whether a new field of study and teaching is developing. An ‘inside-out’ approach is the traditional teaching methodology in marketing communication. It begins with planning that takes place ‘inside’ the organisation, and identifies what it hopes to achieve. This is commonly based on what has always been done ‘inside’, before trying to sell it ‘outside’ to the customer. In terms of IMC education, this might mean taking an existing advertising or promotion management course, adding some IMC terminology along with some additional marketing communication concepts, and presenting it as IMC, seemingly ignoring the research base and extensive writings that have previously been developed.

The opposite of ‘inside-out’ is a concept of IMC planning first proposed by Schultz (Schultz *et al.* 1993) called ‘outside-in’. In this approach, educators would look outside the established disciplines to begin with what marketing organisations are trying to achieve – that is, a total customer focus that provides a new, relevant and very different view of planning, developing and implementing a marketing communication programme, typically called an ‘integrated marketing communication’, or IMC, approach. Using that methodology, material would then be internalised in IMC courses, and developed and extended as IMC theory.

Whether the approach being used is ‘inside-out’ or ‘outside-in’ is important for future curriculum development. It is also important for the development of IMC theory and practice. In much IMC research, academicians and researchers alike have traditionally looked at what has been practised in the field by professionals, rather than what has been taught in the classroom. Thus, this study offers a different and relevant alternative analysis.

This study is also important because it identifies what the next generation of practitioners and scholars are learning about IMC. Unless an informed and consensual understanding of what makes IMC unique – or at least different – is imparted in the classroom, the quality of IMC

scholarship and practice will continue to encounter implementation obstacles and the disciplinary area will not reach the next level of theory development.

## **Before we can teach it, we need to agree on what it is**

### *Integration*

The concept of integration has existed in advertising and marketing literature for many decades, but the practice appears to have been minimally implemented. As early as 1930, the need for integration in marketing was recognised by Converse (in Spotts *et al.* 1998), who urged greater cooperation between the sales team and advertising to optimise results (a subject that is still being debated today). Levitt, in 1960 (in Spotts *et al.* 1998), also proposed that the entire business process should be an integrated effort. Many others have 'preached' integration, but few followers have developed. This is clearly evident from the continuation of the functional silos found in almost all advertising, communication, promotion and marketing practices, educational courses and academic journals.

The concept of integration has also been recommended for promotion. Davis (1966, in Spotts *et al.* 1998, p. 214) stated, 'To achieve the optimum return from promotional expenditures, there is a need to integrate the contribution of each of the various forms of promotion, the allocation of funds among them, their respective messages, timing and format.' Sound advice, but marketing communication organisations at all levels, at the beginning of the 21st century, are still struggling with resource allocation, and how to budget for and measure the impact of traditional marketing and marketing communication programmes, separately and individually, not from an integrated or holistic viewpoint.

By the early 1990s, the integration concept had become a new discipline area. At least, it was proclaimed new, as Northwestern University abandoned its three-track promotional marketing communication curriculum and adopted an integrated approach. In their 1993 report, *Preparing Advertising and Public Relations Students for the Communication Industry in the 21st Century*, Duncan *et al.* (in Duncan & Caywood 1996) considered the terms integrated communications, total communications and IMC to describe this new discipline. The name that has become adopted, IMC,

has since been defined in many ways and by many people, with no clear consensus evident. There is deserved concern among academics that this lack of agreement upon a universal definition of IMC has weakened its emergence as a new discipline (Kitchen & Schultz 1999; Low 2000; Duncan & Mulhern 2004) and certainly challenged the development of a relevant theory base. Table 1 presents a number of the most commonly proposed definitions.

These definitions demonstrate an evolution in our understanding of the concept of IMC. The original AAAA definition (developed in cooperation with the Northwestern faculty) is still widely used today, even though it focuses mainly on the process of IMC and the tactical integration of the

**Table 1: Definitions of IMC**

Writer	Date	Definition
American Association of Advertising Agencies	1989	A concept of marketing communications planning that recognises the added value in a programme that integrates a variety of strategic disciplines – e.g. general advertising, direct response, sales promotion and public relations – and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency and maximum communication impact.
Schultz	1991	The process of managing all sources of information about a product/service to which a customer or prospect is exposed, which behaviourally moves the customer towards a sale and maintains customer loyalty.
Keegan <i>et al.</i>	1992	The strategic coordination of all messages and media used by an organisation to collectively influence its perceived brand value.
Kotler <i>et al.</i>	1999	IMC is the concept under which a company carefully integrates and coordinates its many communications channels to deliver a clear, consistent and compelling message about the organisation and its products.
Duncan	2002	A cross-functional process for creating and nourishing profitable relationships with customers and other stakeholders by strategically controlling or influencing all messages sent to these groups and encouraging data-driven purposeful dialogue with them.
Schultz & Schultz	2004	IMC is a strategic business process used to plan, develop, execute and evaluate coordinated, measurable, persuasive brand communication programmes over time with consumers, customers, prospects, and other targeted, relevant external and internal audiences.
Kliatchko	2005	IMC is the concept and process of strategically managing audience-focused, channel-centred and results-driven brand communication programmes over time.

Source: Compiled by the authors for this research

four main disciplines. Since this landmark definition, the concept of audience has been expanded from consumers to all stakeholders, and long-term outcomes such as brand and relationship building have been introduced. Strategy has been stated as a vital component in almost all definitions, yet the applications focus almost entirely on tactical activities. Further, the scope of the communication has been broadened to include all messages or sources of information a customer or consumer might receive from the marketing organisation. This is an attempt to bring a customer-orientated view to the IMC approach.

The concept of communication as dialogue is an important part of this evolution. Commonly, this is extended internally through various forms of cross-functional cooperation. This appears to reflect the major impact electronic communication – primarily the World Wide Web, the internet and now mobile telephony – has had on how communication occurs. Behavioural outcomes are another major development. These are sought and measured through data-driven communication made possible by the diffusion of various forms of technology.

This continual redefinition of IMC reflects little more than a decade of research and practice of the IMC concept. The growing body of literature has addressed issues of concept definition, such as explanations of IMC, stages of IMC and message typologies, as well as implementation issues such as structure, organisational responsibility, attitudes towards IMC and integration of IMC disciplines. As such, IMC theory has largely emerged from observations of IMC practice, as reported by a host of researchers and writers (Duncan & Everett 1993; Hartley & Pickton 1999; Kitchen & Schultz 1999; Low 2000; Swain 2004).

The ambiguity over definitional issues and lack of a theoretical base has caused many writers to question whether IMC is a new concept at all or simply an updated version of what communication practitioners have always tried to do, arguably with limited success. While some writers point out IMC's lack of academic content and rigour, its simplification and prescriptive solutions, and its use of rhetoric as justification (Cornelissen & Lock 2000), others claim that this is not uncommon for many new management or marketing concepts (Gould 2000).

Gould (2000, p. 22) suggests that:

IMC as a major strategic concept is not much different from other marketing or management concepts, methodologies or strategies that have arisen (e.g. the marketing concept, the product lifecycle, brand equity, or total quality management). All have an evolutionary, discursive and behavioral history in which the particular concept is defined and redefined, often many times. Never is there complete agreement on the meaning or value of any single concept.

Even proponents of IMC, such as Duncan (2002) and Hartley and Pickton (1999), declare that IMC is not a new concept. However, they contend that integration has never been achieved previously because the processes and technology have not facilitated it or have not been available to facilitate it. Duncan (2002, p. 25) notes that, 'Although the concept of IMC – managing customer relationships – is not new, the processes used in managing IMC are new.'

The development of IMC as a discipline is reflected in the division of opinions, as shown in Table 2.

<b>IMC is a new discipline</b>	<b>IMC is nothing new</b>
Similar to other new disciplines which define and redefine themselves (Gould 2000)	Ambiguous definition and lack of rigorous theory (Cornelissen & Lock 2000)
All new disciplines evolve from other disciplines (Gould 2000)	Repackaging of existing marketing concepts (Spotts <i>et al.</i> 1998; Cornelissen & Lock 2000)
The concept of IMC is not new, but the processes of managing it are (Hartley & Pickton 1999; Duncan 2002)	The concept of IMC is not new (Cornelissen & Lock 2000)
Strategy is what separates IMC – marketing communication in past not strategically coordinated (Duncan & Caywood 1996; Schultz 1996)	Advertising agencies have always coordinated other marketing communications
Result of changes in communication, technology, consumers and the marketplace (Schultz <i>et al.</i> 1993)	Result of economic imperative by advertising agencies to address the shift of marketing communication dollars and expansionist move by Schools of Mass Communication (Spotts <i>et al.</i> 1998)
IMC can use financial value and behavioural measures to evaluate performance (Zahay <i>et al.</i> 2004)	Marketing communication is traditionally evaluated through attitudinal and communication measures (Keller 1996)
Source: Developed for this research from Keller 1996; Schultz 1996; Spotts <i>et al.</i> 1998; Hartley & Pickton 1999; Cornelissen & Lock 2000; Gould 2000; Duncan 2002; Zahay <i>et al.</i> 2004	

In addition to those 'for' and 'against' the new discipline, there is perhaps a third group of academics who are conspicuous by their absence. Some well-respected scholars have seemingly avoided the entire IMC debate. A failure to acknowledge IMC suggests that they may consider the debate and the discipline irrelevant, or that it does not conform to or support their own presumptive, largely functional, methodologies and approaches. For example, an advertising scholar would have little reason to embrace IMC, which might broaden his or her perspective on that functional speciality. Such a recognition might either make his or her research and areas of expertise redundant or irrelevant, or both, in the current world of communication.

Others, however, consider the debate irrelevant, but the discipline important. Hutton (1996) contends that few scholars or practitioners would argue in favour of non-integration. Schultz goes further, to suggest that the intent of the marketer is irrelevant, as consumers naturally integrate messages from different sources:

The question of integration or not is moot. It is not a question of whether the marketer or advertiser should integrate his or her communication programs. The fact is, it doesn't really matter. The consumer integrates the marketer's and advertiser's communication, whether the marketing or advertising organization does or not. (Schultz 1996, p. 139)

In summary, the literature presents a diversity of definitions, experiences and opinions on IMC. As Phelps *et al.* (1996, p. 219) note, 'The lack of an agreed upon definition reduces the ability to develop valid and reliable measures of IMC.' One could also add that it impedes the progress of a sound educational and learning platform. The literature also raises a number of questions that led us to the research questions explored in this study.

## **Issues in IMC curriculum development and diffusion**

### *Curriculum development*

The development of curricula is one of the most important tasks of educators. It brings vitality to the programme, attracts students, determines the level of financial support, shapes the future of the professions, and



helps identify the main areas for research and theory development (Mayo & Miciak 1991). Despite the care and professionalism with which educators undertake curriculum development, it is not without considerable criticism from students and the business community (Cannon & Sheth 1994).

The main criticisms revolve around the areas of curriculum content, teaching methods, and the pedagogy and relevance of academic research. Many critics believe educators are too slow in introducing innovative management practices and relevant research into the classroom. Clearly, there is a failure to integrate courses across functional areas (Mayo & Miciak 1991; Cannon & Sheth 1994), much of which is dictated by the functional structure of educational institutions into departments, schools and colleges. But perhaps the most difficult curriculum decision, and the one most relevant to the emergent discipline of IMC, appears to be balancing the education of the discipline and the practice of it (Mayo & Miciak 1991; Smith & Razzouk 1993). Faculty members, through their curriculum choices, make a contribution to the future of the profession and to the discipline area's research agenda, either good or bad, based on what they present to students, for that identifies how they feel about the topic.

The syllabus is the key manifestation of these curriculum decisions. The syllabus has been an important guide to university courses since the 19th century. Its purpose is three-fold: (1) as a contract, specifying grading and administrative procedures; (2) as a permanent record of how the course was structured and run with credit hours earned, date of offer, prerequisite courses, course objectives and content; and (3) as a learning guide, offering planning and management skills, access to course and campus resources, etc. (Parkes & Harris 2002). The second of these functions has been studied by many researchers to identify what is being taught in the classroom and how content is organised and, it is hoped, delivered (Smith & Razzouk 1993; Baecker 1998; Bain *et al.* 2002).

### *Diffusion of the IMC curriculum*

While the syllabus is a permanent record of the individual faculty and unit curriculum decisions, it is unique to the particular institution. Diffusion is the process by which the IMC concepts and curriculum spread across academia. As such, it represents the acceptance and perception by the

academic community of the new discipline, and thus offers an insight as to its importance and vitality.

The rate of diffusion of any subject is considered to be explained by five characteristics: complexity, compatibility, relative advantage, observability and trialability (Rogers 1995). Table 3 demonstrates how these characteristics of diffusion may be applied to the development of the IMC curriculum, drawing from both the literature on diffusion and curriculum development.

**Table 3: Diffusion and IMC curriculum development**

Product characteristic	Relation to IMC curriculum	Indicators of characteristic
Complexity	Degree of difficulty in understanding and adopting IMC courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structure and processes of universities – difficulty in introducing new courses</li> <li>• Availability of dedicated IMC texts and instructor resources</li> <li>• Models of IMC courses and programmes in other universities</li> <li>• Academics' knowledge of IMC</li> </ul>
Compatibility	Degree to which IMC curriculum is consistent with existing values, experience and needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fit with disciplinary structure</li> <li>• Fit within programme structure</li> <li>• Expertise and values of staff – IMC champions</li> </ul>
Relative advantage	Degree to which IMC curriculum is perceived as superior to existing courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attract students</li> <li>• Attract staff</li> <li>• Enhance existing programmes</li> <li>• Tie in with research interest</li> <li>• Determines level of financial support</li> <li>• Position university as innovator</li> <li>• Shapes future of professions</li> </ul>
Observability	Degree to which the benefits of adopting IMC curriculum can be observed by others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enrolment figures</li> <li>• Graduate destinations</li> <li>• High profile of IMC champions</li> <li>• Academic papers</li> </ul>
Trialability	Degree to which IMC curriculum can be trialled on a limited basis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Course vs programme</li> <li>• Executive education</li> <li>• Visiting professors bring IMC expertise</li> </ul>

Source: Developed for this research based on Mayo & Miciak 1991; Cannon & Sheth 1994; Rogers 1995; Summers et al. 2003; Muk 2007

The rate of diffusion of a concept or practice gives rise to five categories or kinds of adopters. These have been conceptualised as innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards (Summers *et al.* 2003). The innovators are generally thought to be the first 2.5% of adopters, and are the champions of the IMC concept and curriculum. Following them, the early adopters are the next 13.5% to adopt the IMC curriculum. These are the opinion leaders and have closer affiliation with other groups. The early majority are the next 34% to adopt. They seek information, evaluate and ask their friends, the opinion leaders. The late majority are the next 34% to adopt, mainly because of peer pressure. The laggards are the final 16% to adopt, tied very much to the traditions of the past.

No matter when or how they adopt an idea, any change, whether it be an academic concept, course or field of study, inevitably involves more work for the faculty member and his or her associates. Curriculum changes are lengthy and often ponderous processes requiring substantial support and documentation for both the individual faculty member and the group as a whole. Therefore, any decision to adopt, or even adapt to, an IMC curriculum must be based on an assessment of the potential benefits and rewards of innovation, as well as an intention to adopt, and the stamina to see the changes through the process. The theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein 1980) proposes two factors that affect this behaviour: the personal factor (personal interest) and the subject norm (social influence). In the case of IMC curriculum development, personal interest in IMC may be a result of research, study, interest or external pressure from practitioners in the area. Don Schultz, for example, would have greater personal interest in teaching IMC, as he has spent the last decade researching it. Schultz would fit into the innovator category.

Likewise, social influences are also an important source of information about innovation. In the academic world, this social influence is empowered by academic journals, special features, academic associations and academic conferences such as the American Academy of Advertising Conference in the US or Corporate and Marketing Communication Conference in Europe. The word of mouth of colleagues in their university departments or in social networks may also be an important contributor to the decision whether or not to adopt an IMC curriculum. In addition, practitioners may support the development and teaching of IMC as they move towards the concept and seek qualified graduates for positions in their firms.

In summary, the development and diffusion of the IMC curriculum is based on the characteristics similar to all innovation (complexity, compatibility, relative advantage, observability, trialability), as well as the personal interests and social influences of those academics who may be in a position to adopt an IMC curriculum.

For these reasons, a review of the syllabi, a published record of how the academic community has accepted, adopted and/or implemented IMC is just as important a method of documenting the growth of the field as are studies of practitioner acceptance and implementation.

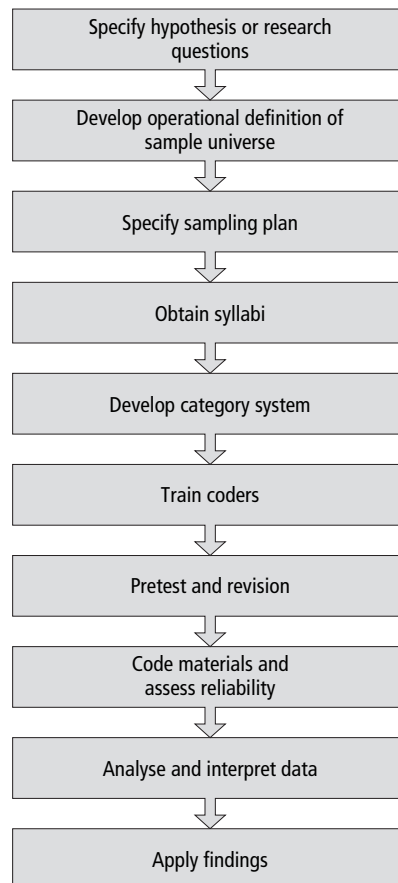
## **Methodology**

The methodological approach of this syllabi analysis is based on the flow-chart shown in Figure 1. It begins by demonstrating the link between the gaps in knowledge highlighted in the literature review, and formulating the hypothesis and research questions.

### *Development of hypotheses and research questions*

The literature review affirms the widespread belief that after more than a decade of IMC research and theory building, there is still no universal definition of IMC. Much of our understanding of IMC has come from research into the perspectives of practitioners, the study of their practice and the content of relevant texts and business books. Faculty members, who help define the discipline through what they teach, seemingly have not been consulted on their perspectives and practice of IMC theory, or at least there is no published documentation of these attitudes and beliefs. Yet, it is the faculty who teach and research IMC, playing a significant role in shaping what future practitioners and other researchers believe are the most relevant theories, concepts, models and management processes.

This research seeks to address this gap by looking at how educators define IMC through the development and publishing of their syllabi. We hypothesise that IMC courses worldwide are created using an inside-out approach. That is, educators begin with an existing course or series of courses and modify it or them, if only slightly, to present what might be an acceptable IMC focus. In this way, the academician can be perceived as being current with external trends, with relatively little intellectual effort required.

**Figure 1: Methodological process**

Source: Davis (1997)

The adoption of an ‘inside-out’ approach can be explained by the fact that university structures and processes, and even academics themselves, are not conducive to change. Over the years, we have seen the IMC diffusion process championed by a small group of innovators, most likely those with a personal interest and an established record of research in the IMC area. However both diffusion and curriculum development theory would suggest that the majority of academics are not innovators since they are encumbered by university structure and process. Therefore, it would seem more likely that the IMC curriculum would be adapted from or within existing courses, rather than being introduced as a new course or a

new curriculum. It is therefore hypothesised that IMC courses worldwide are created using an inside-out approach. That is, educators begin with an existing course and modify it slightly to take an IMC focus. To test our hypothesis, this research asks three questions.

- RQ1:** What curriculum choices have educators made that help define and teach IMC? Specifically, this question examines IMC curriculum structure, name, disciplinary home, degree level, teaching mode, assessment items and textbook.
- RQ2:** What is being taught? Do IMC syllabi encapsulate the key IMC constructs and research developed over the past decade? Is this a reflection of the diffusion of research and practice?
- RQ3:** Are these true IMC courses or simply adaptations of existing courses? To what extent do IMC courses and subjects differ from their predecessors – namely advertising and promotion management and marketing communication – are we seeing an inside-out approach? Is it adaption, rather than adoption?

To answer these questions, this study looks to the syllabus as an instrument of analysis. This is supported by the main function of the syllabus, which Parkes and Harris (2002) identified as a contract between the university and its students and a permanent record of how the unit was structured and run, including its content and textbook support. In addition, the syllabus is a widely accepted unit of analysis that has been used to evaluate curricula as diverse as interpersonal communication, research methods units, spirituality in counselling, agriculture, e-commerce and international marketing. It has been applied at the undergraduate, graduate and doctoral level, with the number of syllabi analysed ranging between 10 and 100 (Stephens & O'Hara 2001; Sullivan & Maxfield 2003; Cashwell & Young 2004; Crittenden & Wilson 2005; Rezaee *et al.* 2006).

### *Operational definition of sample universe*

A previous study by Kerr *et al.* (2004) also used the syllabus as an instrument of analysis to examine how IMC was taught in Australia and New Zealand. This study expands upon that work, widening the scope of

**Table 4: Population, sample and analysis rate**

	Total population of IMC courses	Number of IMC courses analysed	Analysis rate (%)
Australia	39	32	82
Korea	14	7	50
New Zealand	6	5	83
Taiwan	13	5	38
United Kingdom	11	10	90
United States	51	28	54
Total	134	87	65

investigation to US, UK, Taiwanese and Korean universities. In this study, a course is defined as one unit or one subject in the IMC area. Groups or sequences of these courses form majors or programmes in the disciplinary area. The sample universe for this study is all identifiable and available IMC courses, graduate and undergraduate, offered by universities in Australia, Korea, New Zealand, Taiwan, the UK and the US. The total population, number of syllabi analysed and the response rate are summarised in Table 4.

### *Sampling plan*

The sample countries were chosen from a preliminary study of IMC education in 17 countries, which involved data gathered by a group of graduate students, under the direction of the authors of this study. A subset of six countries was chosen for this study on the basis of: (1) the location of recognised leading professors in IMC; (2) the research quantum in those countries; (3) the number of enrolled students in IMC programmes; (4) the attendance of faculty at IMC conferences; and (5) the results of a special session paper on IMC education at the AAA Asia-Pacific Conference, 2005.

Universities for the sample were identified through government listings and other sources. The websites of those schools were then searched for courses called IMC or any of IMC's associated titles, such as marketing communications, promotions management or communication, or promotions strategies. The syllabi were downloaded from the sites and screened

to ensure that they covered the broader area of marketing communication and were not purely advertising courses.

Those universities that did not post a syllabus, or who restricted access to it, were contacted by email with a request to submit their syllabi. In total, 87 course syllabi were analysed (approximately 65% of the total) in terms of discipline home, title and level; mode of teaching; content and its relationship to IMC theory. These dimensions are consistent with the three-function syllabi concept suggested by Parkes and Harris (2002).

### *Development of a category system*

The category system was borrowed from a previous study of IMC syllabi in Australia and New Zealand (Kerr *et al.* 2004). This category system was adopted for a number of reasons. First, the category system developed was comprehensive, and clearly related to the hypothesis under study and the three research questions identified in this study. Second, the category system was nominal, whereby the dimensions of each category were defined and then counted. This was considered most appropriate for the nature of the research. Third, the dimensions nominated in each category were mutually exclusive and exhaustive, providing a clear picture of IMC education. For example, in terms of the category 'Level of education', three dimensions were used: undergraduate, graduate and executive. In each category, the number of dimensions was considered sufficient to detect meaningful differences across dimensions. Finally, the category system was found to work effectively in the previous study, discriminating between dimensions in each category and categorising all required information.

In adopting this category system, this research further clarified it by developing a coding dictionary to clearly define categories and the dimensions within categories, as well as to assist with the training of coders. While the previous study had employed two coders, this study employed a larger team (six) of coders, making a coding dictionary essential. It also helped enhance the validity of the study, by further defining key terms.



### *Training of coders*

A team of six coders from two large, comprehensive universities was recruited for this research, based on their independence from one another, their similar backgrounds and previous research training (Davis 1997). The coders met as a group and were briefed on category definition, dimensions and process. Following this verbal instruction, the coders were given a pre-coding exercise to identify any potential coding issues and to clarify the coding instructions. A debriefing session between the coders and the principal researchers confirmed understanding of the task and resolution of questions.

### *Pretest and pre-coding exercise*

A pretest was not considered necessary as the previous study (Kerr *et al.* 2004) had uncovered any difficulties with the coding definitions, instruments and procedures. Also, the above-mentioned pre-coding exercise served as a proxy for a pre-test.

### *Code materials and assessing reliability*

Individual coders were assigned to categorise data from Korea, Taiwan, the UK and US, as well as one coder who worked with both the Australian and New Zealand data. Where possible, coders tabulated and evaluated the syllabi on the basis of their national background. This assisted with coders' understanding of the syllabi, especially in some Asian universities that offered both the native language and English translation versions of the syllabi.

To ensure reliability, a sixth coder coded the same syllabi for all six countries. Intercoder reliability, calculated by Holsti's formula (Davis 1997), was 82.35%. An inter-coder reliability score of between 0.80 to 0.89 is considered 'excellent agreement' (Altman 1991) or 'almost perfect agreement' (Landis & Koch 1977).

## Findings

### *Research question 1: What curriculum choices have educators made that help define and teach IMC?*

IMC is taught under many different names, structures and educational levels, and incorporates different content across the world. We discuss two areas: (1) instances in which only one course was found in the overall curriculum and (2) instances where more than one IMC course or a series of courses are offered.

#### *Name of course*

##### *(1) A single IMC course*

Where only one course is listed or only one syllabi is used, the course is largely known as IMC in the US (79% of courses), Taiwan (60% of courses) and Korea (40% of courses). A course with similar IMC-type content is called marketing communication in 75% of courses in the UK, 57% of courses in Korea and 50% of courses in Australia. It is also known by other names, such as promotion management or advertising management, in 80% of courses in New Zealand and 34% of courses in Australia.

It is interesting to note that the single course is most likely to be called IMC in the US. Many IMC champions, who were the early adopters of IMC or IMC-type curricula, were US-based professors such as Schultz and Duncan. The initial choice of course title and content were possibly diffused to the early adopters and opinion leaders through the social networks that abound in the US, such as the American Academy of Advertising or American Marketing Association or Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, along with the highly developed marketing, advertising and communication journals such as the *Journal of Advertising Research*, *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Advertising* and the like.

##### *(2) IMC programmes*

All programmes in Australia and the US were known as IMC programmes. This may suggest that these programmes are new and have been deliberately constructed according to the personal interest of the IMC champion

or the social influences of the university faculty or broader academic or practitioner community.

### *Courses or programmes?*

Only 6% of universities analysed in Australia and one-quarter in the US offered what could be described as IMC programmes – that is, more than one course and more than simply a survey of IMC principles. Most IMC offerings across the six countries were stand-alone courses. This reflects two of Rogers' (1995) characteristics of diffusion: its complexity and trialability. Courses require less investment in faculty time and effort than developing an entire IMC programme, which often requires school or university approval. Also in support of this single course offering is that 21% of courses in the US were at the executive education level. These shorter, professionally focused courses are also possible evidence of IMC being trialled in universities initially before being brought into the overall curriculum.

The higher percentage of IMC programmes in the USA could also attest to the growing maturity of IMC curricula in the US. Certainly, this supports the idea that IMC is being diffused across the academic spectrum in much the same manner that has been observed with other curriculum concepts.

### *Undergraduate or graduate?*

#### *(1) A single IMC course*

The IMC course is taught mainly at the undergraduate level in Korea, Australia and New Zealand. The focus of IMC teaching is at the graduate level in the UK, Taiwan and the US. For example, 46% of IMC courses in the US are taught at a graduate level in either a Master's or MBA programme.

#### *(2) IMC programmes*

The IMC programme is taught at both the undergraduate and graduate level in Australia, and predominantly at the graduate level in the US. Also worthy of note here is the large number of executive education certificate programmes in the US. This second graduate market was not observed in

the other countries investigated, although it is known that executive education is often run by industry bodies. In the UK, for example, the Chartered Institute of Marketing has offered a Diploma in IMC, and the Institute of Direct Marketing also offers an IMC curriculum at the graduate level.

### *Disciplinary home*

For both single IMC courses and IMC programmes, IMC is taught almost exclusively in business schools in Australia, New Zealand and the UK. It is housed in communications schools in Korea, and split between business and liberal arts (commonly journalism) in Taiwan. In the US, IMC's disciplinary home is divided among business (58%), communications (29%) and liberal arts (generally schools of journalism) (13%). This predominant residence of IMC in the business faculty is perhaps a reflection of the theory of IMC, which describes it as a business function, rather than a communication, creative or media task.

Table 5 details the structure, disciplinary home, title and level of course in the six countries investigated.

**Table 5: Structure, discipline home, title and level of course as a percentage of IMC courses in six countries**

Country	Structure		Discipline home			Title			Level		
	Programme	Course	Liberal Arts	Business	Communications	IMC	Marcom	Other	Undergraduate	Graduate	Executive education
Australia	6	100		100		16	50	34	94	6	
Korea		100			100	43	57		100		
New Zealand		100		100			20	80	80	20	
Taiwan		100	60	40		60	40		40	60	
United Kingdom		100		100		11	78	11	33	67	
United States	25	100	13	58	29	79	8	13	33	46	21

### *Teaching mode*

Regardless of where IMC is taught, the content is delivered almost entirely face to face. There is evidence of some online tutorial work and some flexible delivery online as well, including two new online IMC degree programmes in the US.

### *Assessment instruments*

Another similarity across the courses is the instrument of learner assessment. Final exams and assignments, especially group IMC plan development, tend to account for most of the assessment in IMC courses. In addition, presentations are also used in most countries, except Korea, and class participation marks are awarded in the US and Taiwan.

### *Textbooks*

Academics also define the discipline by the textbooks they adopt. Worldwide, Belch and Belch is the most used text, adopted by 50% of Australian, 40% of Taiwanese, 20% of New Zealand and 17% of US professors. Yet, upon review, this text is essentially an advertising-dominated book, used primarily in undergraduate advertising principles courses. Integration, in the form of an additional few chapters, has been added over the past few years. The Belch and Belch text is a good example of what we have termed an inside-out approach to IMC textbook development. In this case, an existing advertising text has simply included a few overview chapters on IMC and been retitled seemingly to appeal to a broader audience.

The adoption of textbooks often has a homegrown bias. Marketing communication courses in the UK, for example, prefer Fill, or Pickton and Broderick. Lee and Kim are common in Korea. In the US, a range of texts are used, including Belch and Belch, Shimp, Clow and Baack, Schultz and Barnes, and Duncan. Australia is the exception, where more than half (53%) of IMC courses are based on the Belch and Belch text, with a further 22% opting for Shimp. This means that 75% of IMC courses in Australia use one of two texts. This raises important questions for curriculum design since neither book is specifically focused on IMC or has been purpose-built for an IMC curriculum.

### Research question 2: What is being taught?

In this research question, the single IMC course was the unit of analysis. The content of the IMC identified course was tabulated across the six countries. It was then further broken down into content modules by course and by country. These are reflected in Tables 6–8 and Figure 2. Tables 6–8 summarise the content of the IMC course across the six countries. To provide an easy basis for comparison, the number of courses in those countries that offered a particular topic of content (such as ‘Role of IMC’) was calculated as a percentage. This percentage was then assigned one of four  ratings, from  *Few* (where 1–33% of courses included the content topic) to  *Some* (where 34–66% of courses included the content topic) to  *Most* (where 67–99% of courses included the content topic) and  *All* (where 100% of courses included the content topic).

As a result of the analysis, groupings of content were developed by the researchers. These have been modularised under subject headings and are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6: Modularisation of IMC content**

Major IMC area	Topics within area	Major IMC area	Topics within area
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IMC in marketing</li> <li>• Consumer behaviour</li> <li>• Situation analysis</li> <li>• Segmentation, targeting and positioning</li> <li>• Product life cycle</li> </ul>	Planning components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Objectives</li> <li>• Budget</li> <li>• Creative</li> <li>• Media</li> <li>• Measurement</li> </ul>
IMC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role of IMC</li> <li>• Perceptions of IMC</li> <li>• Organisation of IMC</li> <li>• Planning and implementing IMC</li> <li>• Database marketing</li> <li>• Branding</li> </ul>	Marketing communication tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advertising</li> <li>• Public relations/publicity</li> <li>• Direct marketing</li> <li>• Sales promotion</li> <li>• Personal selling</li> <li>• Internet communication</li> <li>• Sponsorship</li> <li>• Conferences/trade shows/exhibits</li> </ul>
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication theory</li> <li>• Ethics and social responsibility</li> <li>• International perspective</li> </ul>		

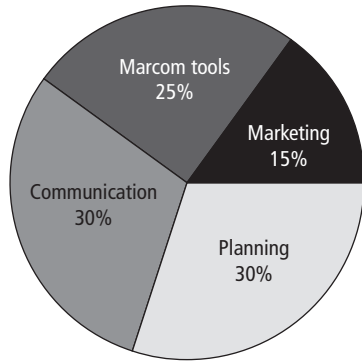
To compare the IMC content across countries, the IMC modules for each country are presented in Figure 2. The large modules represent a

**Table 7: Rating of IMC content across six countries**

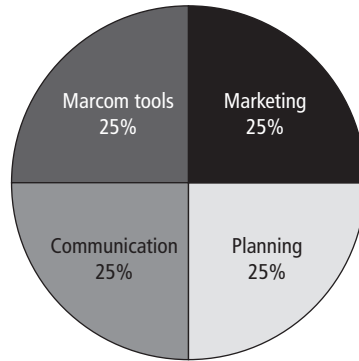
Topic	Country					
	Aus	Korea	NZ	Taiwan	UK	USA
Role of IMC	■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■
IMC in marketing	■	■ ■	■		■	■ ■
Perception of IMC	■				■	
Consumer behaviour	■ ■	■	■ ■	■	■	■
Organisation of IMC	■		■			■
Situation analysis	■	■	■			■
STP	■	■	■ ■			■
Product life cycle	■	■	■			
Communication theory	■ ■	■	■ ■ ■	■ ■	■ ■	■
Branding	■	■	■ ■	■ ■	■	■ ■
Database	■	■ ■		■ ■		■
How IMC works	■				■	
Plan/develop IMC	■			■ ■	■	■ ■
Implementation	■				■	
Objectives	■ ■		■ ■ ■	■	■	■ ■
Budget	■ ■	■	■ ■	■	■	■ ■
Creative	■ ■ ■	■	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■		■ ■ ■
Media	■ ■ ■	■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■	■	■	■ ■ ■
Measurement	■ ■ ■	■ ■	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■	■ ■	■ ■
AdRes/testing	■	■	■			■
Ethics/social	■ ■	■	■ ■		■	■
Legal	■		■ ■			■
International	■	■	■ ■			■
Advertising/corporate advertising	■ ■	■ ■ ■	■	■ ■	■ ■ ■	■ ■
PR	■ ■ ■	■	■ ■	■ ■	■ ■ ■	■ ■
DM	■ ■ ■	■	■ ■	■	■ ■ ■	■ ■
Sales promo	■ ■ ■	■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■	■	■ ■ ■	■ ■
Personal selling	■ ■	■ ■		■	■	■
Internet interactive	■ ■	■	■ ■			■
Sponsorship	■	■	■ ■	■	■	■
Conference	■					
Word of mouth	■					
Future challenges	■					

Key: ■ ■ ■ ■ All courses have content topic: 100%  
 ■ ■ ■ Most courses have content topic: 67–99%  
 ■ ■ Some courses have content topic: 34–66%  
 ■ Few courses have content topic: 1–33%

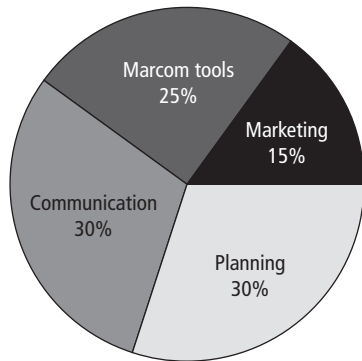
Figure 2: Modularising the content of IMC courses by country



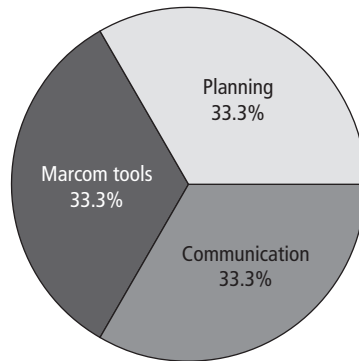
Australia



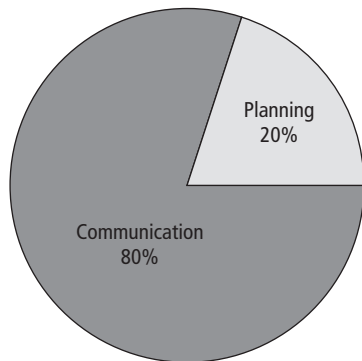
Korea



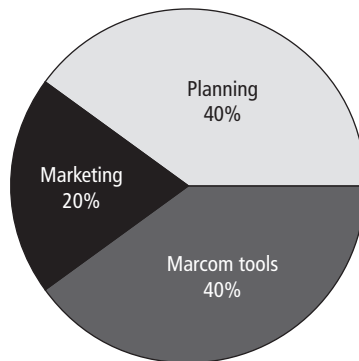
New Zealand



Taiwan



United Kingdom



United States



**Table 8: Modularising the content of IMC courses by country**

Module topic	Country					
	Australia	Korea	New Zealand	Taiwan	UK	US
Marketing	X	X	X			X
Communication	X	X	X	X	X	
Planning	X	X	X	X	X	X
Marcom tools	X	X	X	X		X

major content area. For the purpose of this study, a major content area was defined as being represented in more than 50% of the IMC courses in that country. Minor content, as indicated by the smaller block, was evident in between 25% and 50% of all IMC courses in that country. Missing modules indicate that the content area is taught in less than 25% of IMC courses in that country.

### *Research question 3: Are these true IMC courses?*

This module approach makes it easy to compare similarities and differences in IMC content in courses across the various countries. IMC content in Australia and New Zealand is very similar. If one were to add a communications module and IMC content to the courses in the US, it would also look the same. Neither Korea nor Taiwan has a major area of content, but each has similar minor content areas. The UK shows the greatest difference from the other five countries; here, the focus is on communication and planning.

It is important to note the complete absence of the IMC module in all courses studied. Australia was the only country to teach all content in the IMC module as outlined in Table 6, but the percentage of IMC courses taught in these areas was very low – from 3% on perceptions of IMC and how IMC works, to 31% on the organisation of IMC.

The content was also compared with the key constructs of IMC, as identified through the literature and the research streams. Table 9 begins the description, looking at key constructs as defined in the literature.

The key constructs of IMC are more often represented in the sampled syllabi as existing constructs from marketing, advertising and public relations theory. For example, creative development is a component of most

**Table 9: A comparison between the key constructs of IMC and what is being taught**

Key constructs of IMC	What is being taught
Strategic integration	Largely neglected, although some content in UK, US and Australia. Unclear whether planning component reflects strategic integration.
Message integration	Creative component generally strong in all countries except UK and Korea. Unclear whether messages are integrated.
Synergy	No evidence of this as content. May be incorporated in other content. For example, some UK and Australian courses look at how IMC works.
Brand equity	Branding is strong in US, Taiwan and NZ. Minor content area in Korea, UK and Australia.
Multiple audiences	No evidence of this as content. May be covered in media, creative or planning.
Managing contact points	Media planning taught in majority of courses in all countries except UK and Taiwan. Unclear whether this includes all contact points.
Relationship building	No evidence of this as content. May be part of PR or DM, which is widely taught in all countries except UK.
Continuous, circular, responsive	Database strong in Korea and Taiwan. May be taught in communication theory.

IMC courses, but whether this is taught in a similar way to advertising planning or whether it takes a message integration perspective is something that cannot be determined from an analysis of syllabi. Likewise, relationship building could be covered in content related to public relations or direct marketing, but relationship building as an IMC construct is not evident in the weekly outlines. Therefore, there is little evidence of the key constructs of IMC being taught in what are termed IMC courses. Clearly there is much borrowing of traditional marketing communication theory and practice, which one would assume has been recast as an integrated approach. This, however, is not known.

Similarly, current IMC research and key IMC writers do not appear on the syllabi of most courses. However, much of the curriculum design is devoted to the strategic and tactical decisions facing practitioners, which are a vital area of IMC research. Two courses in Taiwan and the UK also include the semiotics of IMC, and could possibly benefit from research on IMC as information. There are also two courses in the UK and Australia

that consider how IMC works. The syllabi analysis also revealed a number of books of readings, reference lists and literature reviews required by courses in Australia, the UK and the US. This suggests that research is being incorporated in the overall curriculum or through assignment work, although that is not featured in the syllabi.

## **Discussion**

### *How do educators define IMC?*

Critics who declare that IMC is not a new discipline could surely look to this syllabi analysis for support. Apart from some initial championing of the IMC discipline by key writers in the US, there is little evidence of academic leadership, or even acceptance, in the development of an IMC discipline. The weekly syllabi outlines show little coverage of definitional issues, discussion of key constructs, strategic and tactical issues surrounding practitioner implementation, or the embodiment of research. One can argue that educators should define IMC through their curriculum and what they teach. If the faculty cannot tell the difference between IMC and advertising management or promotional strategy, there is little hope that future practitioners will have much understanding of the IMC concepts, much less be able to advance the current state of knowledge.

### *Are educators taking an inside-out approach to IMC?*

The evidence from this study suggests that many IMC courses are simply reincarnations of previously existing promotional strategy or advertising management courses. In the US, it often appears that what is called IMC is simply a restructured advertising management course with a few terminology changes. Indeed, some IMC courses are still labelled as such, even though they claim to be a new view of the promotional topic. In Australia and New Zealand, some IMC courses are former promotion strategy or management courses, with the name often being the only change. Therefore, there is considerable evidence that many educators are building IMC courses from existing courses, and incorporating substantial amounts of traditional marketing communication content into these courses while proffering them as IMC in a bid to appear current and up to date.

This lack of dedicated IMC courses and programmes may be due to university policy, which makes it difficult to introduce new courses or even make major changes to existing courses. It is also perhaps due to faculty familiarity and comfort levels with the material in the existing course and a reluctance to change material that has taken years to develop and consolidate. The other challenge is the content and structure of current IMC texts. Many of these – for example, Belch and Belch – are former advertising principles or promotion management texts, which have simply been updated and enhanced to give them an IMC orientation and ‘look’. Since faculty often rely heavily on the text as the basis for the course outline and content, the lagging of IMC-specific texts continues to be a problem. Only Duncan, and Schultz and Schultz have offered totally dedicated texts in the US.

This inside-out approach is balanced by some innovative IMC courses and programme building. For example, the only course to be called IMC in the UK is offered by the University of Lancaster. Its syllabi show a new look at IMC and involve students with much of the research informing the discipline.

### *Do different countries define and teach IMC differently?*

An analysis of the syllabi suggests that countries that have a common education heritage, such as the UK, Australia and New Zealand, have greater similarities in IMC content – strong in communication theory and the ethical and social considerations of marketing and communication. A point to consider here is the content taught within the core course on which the IMC course builds. In the US, for example, ethics and communication are often taught in the business core as part of AACSB (The Association to Advance Collegiate School of Business) accreditation requirements, and thus are often not evident in IMC syllabi.

Korea and Taiwan, although very different Asian countries, share a strength in database and statistical analysis. It is a vital part of 57% of IMC courses in Korea and 50% of IMC courses in Taiwan, compared to just 6% of Australian and 5% of US courses. It is completely absent from syllabi in New Zealand and the UK. However, where Korea has more marketing content in IMC courses, Taiwan is stronger in communication theory.

In Korea, there is also evidence of new university-originated departments of advertising and public relations emerging to accommodate IMC. However, Korea's top schools of journalism and mass communications have shown little interest in IMC, although a number of conferences and seminars have been held in the country. This may well present a barrier to the credibility of the development of IMC in that country.

The UK – with a strong tradition in research, teaching and practice of corporate communication and corporate identity – seems to adopt more of a communication approach to IMC. Here, marketing communication is generally not a part of the core or even offered as an elective course in Masters or MBA programmes. It is embedded across other marketing courses, rather than presented as a stand-alone course. It is also interesting to note the absence of marketing communication tools – apart from advertising, which is taught in 75% of IMC courses. It is the only country not to include other marketing communication tools such as public relations, direct marketing and sales promotion. One could perhaps make the case that the courses being taught in the UK are essentially advertising courses, although they carry an IMC title. Courses such as public relations could, however, be taught from a management perspective as part of the strong corporate communication focus that is evident in the UK.

In Australia, like New Zealand, IMC courses appear to have developed or evolved primarily from a traditional promotion management course. They still bear a similar structure and content, and even prefer a former promotion management book as the key text. The content focuses on some marketing, communications, planning and marketing communications tools. However, there is evidence of the adoption of IMC theory and research into this curriculum with the inclusion of content such as how IMC works, perceptions of IMC, organisation of IMC and planning, developing and implementing IMC, and so on. Australia also offers the only IMC programme outside the US. Thus, development of a distinct IMC curriculum is evident in Australia, albeit in embryonic form.

The US also appears to draw upon its strengths in education when formulating the IMC approach. Looking at the IMC content modules in Table 6, one could easily mistake the courses offered for those fitting into an advertising management or marketing communication curriculum. With major content areas in marketing, planning and marketing communication tools, the syllabi reflects the historical position of the US as the

world's leading advertising and marketing communication educator. Anecdotal evidence from educators also reinforces this position of building IMC from advertising courses. This is also reflective of IMC industry practice, where IMC agencies generally developed or evolved from former advertising agencies.

### *Is there a sharing of syllabi ideas?*

The syllabi of Australia and New Zealand reflect the greatest similarities in discipline home, level, delivery, assessment and content. As mentioned earlier, there is a shared educational tradition from the UK. However, the greater similarity between these two countries in particular may be also a function of their geography, the movement of faculty between the two countries and the sharing of academic ideas through regional conferences such as the Australia and New Zealand Marketing Academy Conference and those run by the Australia and New Zealand Communication Association.

Other conferences, such as the Asia-Pacific special meeting of the American Academy of Advertising Conference held in Hong Kong in 2005, have had special sessions on IMC education to encourage the interchange of ideas. Likewise, a special IMC edition of the *Journal of Advertising*, focused on integrated marketing communications, was published in 2006 (Duncan *et al.* 2006). That publication has provided much-needed dissemination of leading IMC research from a global perspective. The interest appears to be there from academics and the willingness from academic journals and conferences to support IMC collaboration, even though results have been patchy.

The sharing of curriculum and teaching ideas can also be facilitated through the use of staff and student exchange programmes. Northwestern University in the US and the Queensland University of Technology in Australia have an active programme in which faculty from both universities spend time teaching and learning about IMC from the other university's perspective. Students are also being enriched through the educational exchange.

A further point of discussion is the large number of IMC courses currently being offered and taught in international settings. With such a new discipline, it is unlikely that many educators offering these courses have

been formally trained in IMC and even fewer are actively researching in the area. Where, then, is the knowledge coming from? Who has the responsibility to evaluate and accredit IMC programmes in the various countries? Answers to these questions remain unknown.

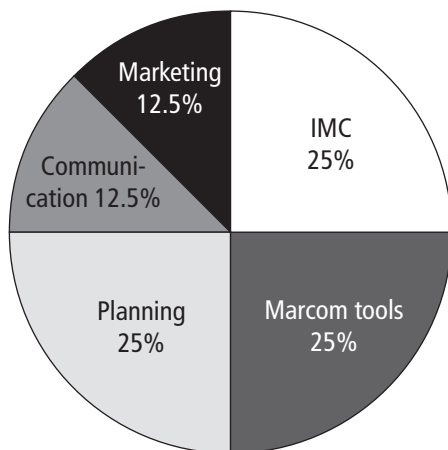
### *What should be taught in the ideal IMC course?*

While this section of the discussion may be speculative, it draws from the syllabi analysis, and a comparison of the inherent strengths and weaknesses of the identified IMC courses. However, it seems that a critical look at IMC curriculum development and diffusion also warrants speculation of what might be considered ideal. This would seem important in aligning current curricula more closely with the research, thinking and the direction of IMC found in the literature.

In doing so, it should be noted that each course is different and what goes into each course is a product of what has previously been taught, as well as the content that follows. It also indicates how the instructors believe the discipline will develop in the future. In this sense, all the modules identified in this analysis should be taught at some stage in the student's learning. Whether basic marketing theory – such as consumer behaviour or segmentation, targeting and positioning – is part of the IMC course clearly depends on what has been taught in previous courses. While the researchers often noted the presence of prerequisite courses, such as an introductory marketing course on IMC syllabi, in other cases there were no prerequisite courses. This raises the question of what background students and faculty bring to the classroom on which IMC can or should be built.

It seems clear that a vital element in IMC development and instruction requires that IMC students proceed from a basic knowledge of marketing, consumer behaviour and communication. It is important they understand the planning process, which is similar in marketing, advertising, public relations and IMC. Some fundamental understanding of the different marketing communications tools is also desirable. Unfortunately, it appears that these tool and tactic elements often dominate the overall IMC curriculum.

To distinguish the course as an IMC course, there needs to be unique IMC content; yet Figure 2 shows this to be almost completely absent.

**Figure 3: Ideal IMC curriculum**

Even a well-researched area of IMC – such as perceptions of IMC – is being taught as content in only 11% of courses in the UK and 3% in Australia. As the syllabi analysis so clearly shows, IMC is not even a minor content area in the syllabi of any of the six countries. To address this balance, Figure 3 shows the importance of fundamentals such as marketing and communication theory, practical applications such as planning and marketing communication tools, as well as the vitality of unique IMC content to define the discipline.

### Limitations

A limitation of this study is that the syllabi might not accurately represent what is actually being taught on the course. One would hope this is not true but it sometimes may be the case. The researchers were, in some cases, refused syllabi for analysis for this reason. It was pointed out that many lecturers include additional content or content that is spontaneously inserted, often because the process of changing the syllabi is a long and complicated one, or because new ideas have just been discovered. In addition, minor content may not be included in the syllabus. However as Parkes and Harris (2002) point out, the syllabus is a contract with students and a permanent record of what is supposedly being taught on the course.



This makes it still the best instrument for analysis of the structure, content and procedure of IMC course development.

A second limitation is the fact that not all syllabi requested were made available for analysis. There are likely exceptions to the examples presented in this analysis based on all courses and programmes being taught across the world and even in the six countries on which this report is based. While some universities make syllabi freely available over internet sites, others regard them as proprietary information. Thus, this study is limited to the syllabi that could be obtained with a concerted effort, but it must be understood that it is not complete.

Language also posed a problem in collecting syllabi from Korea and Taiwan. Although the researchers were enthusiastically assisted by the graduate students (many of whom were from the represented countries), only English-language versions of the syllabi were considered for this analysis. Thus, the syllabi developed in these two countries are likely to be biased towards the more sophisticated faculty and courses.

### **Further research**

This is the start of a longitudinal study to plot the shift towards a more IMC-focused curriculum (or not). As researchers and educators, we have a responsibility to compare what is being taught with what is being researched and established as IMC theory, and with what is being practised by industry. Our goal is alignment and enlightenment, both of which seem to be in short supply given the findings of this study.

A more in-depth analysis of commonly used textbooks would also be useful. That would help in understanding how IMC theory and research is being delivered by textbook authors, as these are often the drivers of curriculum content. Indeed, in many cases, the content of the syllabus reflects the outline of the text being used.

While the syllabi analysis shows what is being taught, it is also important to understand the intentions of those who teach it. It could be that there is no real intention by educators to move towards an integrated approach and that IMC is simply being added as a 'current interest' based on developments in the field and among practitioners. This cannot be known from our analysis but is an eminently researchable area.

## Conclusion

What is being taught internationally in IMC is generally not what the authors would consider to be the real crux of the concept. It commonly appears to be a promotions strategy or advertising management or marketing communication course or curriculum under the guise of an IMC approach. For the most part, the syllabi we evaluated neither draw from the key constructs of IMC, nor are the key writers and disciplinary research considered or found in them.

It seems evident that many current IMC courses are primarily reworks of an existing course. Therefore, they frequently reflect what has always been taught in the area of marketing communication management. This aligns with many textbook perspectives of the new discipline, which are inherently advertising texts with IMC subtitles. It is obvious that the course must also fit in with established programmes and university policy, and is shaped by the quality of faculty available to teach it. And although we find similarities that appear to come as a result of an inherited educational tradition or geographic proximity or staff and student exchange, each country is different in the way it has embraced and taught IMC. In an obvious comparison with IMC planning theory, one could describe this as an inside-out approach, something that has been extensively discussed in the IMC literature.

There are moves towards implementing more theory and research into the curriculum, as well as evidence of the development of some exemplary IMC programmes. While the US appears to have been the innovator and IMC champion because many of the key writers in the discipline are American, other countries, such as the UK and Australia, are building strong IMC courses and curricula as well.

A number of obstacles have been identified, such as the need to include prerequisite marketing and communication material, the lack of authentic IMC texts and the shortage of appropriately qualified faculty to teach the courses. All these obstacles appear to be hindering the development of the IMC concept at the university level. Certainly, it appears that little meaningful IMC research will flow from these types of curricula.

If IMC is to mature as a discipline, educators need to define it as such through the syllabi and content of the courses they deliver. Faculty need to look outside the way marketing communications concepts and

approaches have always been taught. It would seem important to grow and develop IMC as a unique and important discipline through academic consensus. The academic community needs to practise what it has long preached, and hopefully taught: an outside-in approach to IMC education.

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