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Assessing Integrated Marketing Communication in Innovation-Oriented Organizations: A Diagnostic Approach for Strategic Alignment

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ASSESSING INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION IN INNOVATION-ORIENTED ORGANIZATIONS: A DIAGNOSTIC APPROACH FOR STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

¿CÓMO PUEDEN LAS ORGANIZACIONES ORIENTADAS A LA INNOVACIÓN BENEFICIARSE DE LA COMUNICACIÓN INTEGRADA DEL MARKETING?

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ABSTRACT

In the current context of digital transformation and innovation, service-oriented organizations face growing challenges in coordinating their communication strategies across multiple stakeholders and platforms. Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) has emerged as a strategic approach that goes beyond message alignment, fostering internal collaboration, organizational agility, and innovation. This article presents a diagnostic tool, the IMC Audit Tool (IMC-AT), designed to assess and enhance the implementation of IMC in innovation-driven environments.

Grounded in previously validated IMC models in different sectors, such as tourism or education, the framework incorporates four core dimensions: message consistency, interactivity, stakeholder-centered strategic focus, and organizational alignment. These dimensions are operationalized into a practical, scalable self-assessment instrument that allows organi-

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zations to identify strengths and areas for improvement in their communication practices. The tool supports evidence-based decision-making in campaign design, internal coordination, digital channel integration, and stakeholder engagement.

The article also explores key organizational enablers and barriers to IMC adoption, including leadership commitment, cultural openness, flexible structures, and digital readiness. By linking IMC with innovation capacity, this work positions communication not merely as an operational function, but as a strategic driver of business transformation. The contribution lies in offering theoretical insights, actionable tools, and a preliminary validation of the proposed tool for professionals seeking to integrate communication and innovation in service-based, agile environments.

Keywords: Integrated Marketing Communications, Innovation, Digital Transformation, Service Marketing, diagnostic tool

RESUMEN

En el actual contexto de transformación digital y la innovación, las organizaciones orientadas al servicio se enfrentan a crecientes desafíos para coordinar sus estrategias de comunicación entre plataformas y múltiples partes interesadas. La Comunicación Integrada de Marketing (IMC) ha surgido como un enfoque estratégico que va más allá de la coherencia del mensaje, promoviendo la colaboración interna, la agilidad organizacional y la capacidad de innovación. Este artículo presenta un marco conceptual y una herramienta de diagnóstico, IMC Audit Tool (IMC-AT), diseñados para evaluar y fortalecer la implementación de la IMC en entornos impulsados por la innovación.

Basado en modelos previos validados en diferentes sectores como el turismo o la educación, el marco incorpora cuatro dimensiones clave: coherencia del mensaje, interactividad, enfoque estratégico centrado en los *stakeholders* y alineación organizacional. Estas dimensiones se operacionalizan en un instrumento práctico y escalable de autoevaluación que permite a las organizaciones identificar fortalezas y áreas de mejora en sus prácticas comunicativas. La herramienta apoya la toma de decisiones basada en evidencias en el diseño de campañas, la coordinación interna, la integración de canales digitales y la gestión de las relaciones con *stakeholders*.

El artículo también analiza los principales facilitadores y barreras organizacionales para la adopción de la IMC, incluyendo el liderazgo, la cultura organizacional, las estructuras flexibles y la preparación digital. Al vincular la IMC con la innovación, este trabajo posiciona la comunicación no solo como una función operativa, sino como un motor estratégico de transformación empresarial. La contribución radica en ofrecer tanto fundamentos teóricos como herramientas aplicables para profesionales que buscan integrar comunicación e innovación en entornos organizacionales dinámicos y ágiles.

Palabras clave: Comunicación Integrada de Marketing, Innovación, Transformación Digital, Marketing de Servicios, herramienta de diagnóstico

1. Introduction

In service-oriented organizations undergoing digital transformation, innovation in marketing and communication has become a central requirement for maintaining competitiveness. These organizations increasingly operate within complex ecosystems that demand continuous and meaningful engagement with multiple stakeholders, customers, employ-

ees, partners, institutional bodies, etc. The increase in digital tools, the shift towards platform-based interactions, and the growing importance of personalization have challenged traditional communication approaches, making it necessary to adopt integrated, cross-functional strategies. In this context, Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) has emerged as a strategic process that facilitates not only message coherence but also organizational innovation, cultural alignment, and internal cooperation (Low, 2000; Beard, 1996; Kumar et al., 2022).

Although the literature acknowledges the strategic relevance of IMC, there is a lack of studies on its, particularly in innovation-driven organizations and non-English-speaking contexts. Empirical studies conducted in sectors such as tourism (Luxton et al., 2015), higher education (Gordon-Isasi et al., 2020), and hospitality (Šerić et al., 2017) confirm IMC's potential to improve communication outcomes. However, few studies have been published related to IMC applied in innovation ecosystems and digital transformation. In organizations where service offerings are intangible, non-standardized, and co-produced with the customer (Vargo & Lusch, 2008), the complexity of communication is higher. Therefore, a coherent and responsive IMC strategy becomes essential to managing the relational and dynamic nature of stakeholder interactions, while supporting innovation-oriented businesses (Navarro-Bailón et al., 2012; Chatterjee et al., 2021; Pearson & Malthouse, 2023).

This manuscript addresses the identified gap by conceptualizing IMC not purely as a coordination mechanism, but as an enabler of strategic innovation, particularly within service-based organizations that are adapting to digital change. The framework proposed in this article builds on validated IMC scales (Porcu et al., 2017; Gordon-Isasi et al., 2020), adapting them to environments characterized by agility, technological integration, and stakeholder collaboration. It incorporates four interrelated dimensions: message consistency, interactivity, stakeholder-centered strategic focus, and organizational alignment. Each of these has been shown to influence communication performance and innovation capacity (Reid, 2005; Tafesse & Kitchen, 2017; Kang, 2024).

The proposal is particularly aimed at communication professionals, marketing managers, and organizational leaders who are seeking actionable models to improve coordination and coherence across departments while embracing innovation in their strategic communications. Through the development of an IMC audit-diagnosis tool, practitioners are provided with a practical mechanism for evaluating their current level of inte-

gration and identifying key areas for improvement. This diagnostic approach supports decision-making in resource allocation, message design, and digital channel management, all of which are increasingly critical in customer-centric innovation models (Kumar et al., 2022).

The contribution of this work lies in offering a structured guide for measuring IMC and implementing it as a vehicle for innovation. By aligning communication strategy with digital tools, organizational values, and stakeholder expectations, organizations can foster more agile, inclusive, and sustainable practices, transforming IMC from a marketing function into a catalyst for change. Ultimately, this article offers actionable guidance for organizational leaders by providing a diagnostic tool (IMC Audit Tool, IMC-AT) and a strategic framework for IMC implementation. Its application is intended to support decision-making related to marketing and communication efforts, enabling organizations to improve their IMC level by gaining the benefits of applying this approach.

2. Research context

The research presented in this manuscript builds on the conceptual evolution of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) as a strategic approach within the field of marketing innovation. Over the past two decades, IMC has shifted from a tactical emphasis on message uniformity to a more integrative model that supports interdepartmental coordination, stakeholder relationship management, and strategic alignment with organizational objectives (Duncan & Mulhern, 2004; Kitchen & Burgmann, 2015; Kerr et al., 2023). This transition is particularly relevant in service-oriented sectors undergoing digital transformation, where communication strategies must adapt to a landscape defined by personalization, co-creation, and multichannel interactivity (Luxton et al., 2015; Chatterjee et al., 2021).

This study adopts the IMC framework developed by Porcu et al. (2017), which identified four dimensions that define the degree of IMC adoption within firms: 1) message consistency; 2) interactivity; 3) stakeholder-centered strategic focus; and 4) organizational alignment. These dimensions were adapted and validated by Gordon-Isasi et al. (2020) in the higher education context, revealing that effective IMC implementation depends not only on structural integration but also on cultural readiness and internal communication practices. The present study extends the analysis through alternative perspectives on IMC adoption and implementation. For instance, Beard (1996) emphasized the client-agency dynamic in implementing integrated communications, while Low (2000) explored correlates of IMC

in different organizational contexts. These foundational studies, combined with more recent research, contribute to a richer conceptual foundation for understanding IMC as both a practice and a strategic orientation.

However, there remains a significant research gap in applying and extending this framework to organizations in innovative environments. In such contexts, communication must not only deliver information but also enable strategic adaptation, cross-functional collaboration, and digital responsiveness (Tafesse & Kitchen, 2017; Šerić et al., 2017; Pearson & Malthouse, 2023). Service innovation often requires a deeper level of integration among marketing, technology, and operations, particularly in ecosystems where customer participation, personalization, and digital value delivery are key (Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Rabetino et al., 2021).

The theoretical foundation of this work is reinforced by organizational behaviour and strategic marketing literature, which underscores the role of IMC in breaking down internal silos and promoting a unified approach to external communication (Gulati, 2007; Cornelissen & Lock, 2000; Kang, 2024). In digitally enabled environments, these integrative practices are often mediated by artificial intelligence (AI) and data-driven platforms that facilitate real-time feedback, audience segmentation, and content customization (Kumar et al., 2022; Jarek & Mazurek, 2019). This manuscript therefore positions IMC not only as a communicative function, but also as a strategic enabler of innovation, particularly in organizations seeking to increase agility, responsiveness, and stakeholder value through coordinated communication efforts.

The study contributes to the ongoing academic discussion by proposing an IMC audit-diagnosis tool tailored for innovation-oriented organizations. By synthesizing previous empirical findings with emerging digital tools and strategic imperatives, this work provides a tool with which managers can assess, implement, and continuously improve their communication strategies in dynamic service contexts. Thus, the research context of this study reflects the merging of established IMC theory with contemporary challenges in service innovation, organizational transformation, and digital integration.

3. Integrated Marketing Communication in Innovation-Oriented Organizations

3.1. Benefits of adopting IMC

From a managerial and organizational perspective, the adoption of IMC offers a wide range of strategic and operational benefits that strength-

en not only communication performance but also the overall organizational efficiency and adaptability. As previous research has demonstrated within the context of the services sector, particularly in higher education institutions (Gordon-Isasi et al., 2020), IMC contributes to an aligned and coherent communication strategy, enhancing institutional reputation and stakeholder engagement. This benefit, however, extends beyond the education sector and holds significance for innovation-oriented organizations undergoing digital transformation.

IMC supports improved marketing communication performance through message consistency and cross-platform coherence, which are foundational to the IMC construct (Porcu et al., 2017). When communication across various channels is aligned and systematically managed, the effectiveness of promotional efforts increases, resulting in higher levels of audience recall, engagement, and lead conversion (Luxton et al., 2015; Šerić et al., 2017). These improvements are essential in both service-based sectors, such as tourism and education (Porcu et al., 2019; Gordon-Isasi et al., 2020), and industries with high digital interaction.

Additionally, IMC has a direct influence on brand performance and positioning. As noted in prior studies, a unified and coherent brand voice significantly contributes to building institutional trust and perceived value (Einwiller & Boenigk, 2012). Consistency across communication touchpoints helps organizations differentiate themselves in increasingly competitive environments and improves brand equity (Navarro-Bailón et al., 2012).

Moreover, stakeholder engagement is reinforced through IMC by fostering bidirectional interactions, rather than one-direction interactions. This strengthens organizational relationships with internal and external stakeholders, including customers, partners, investors, etc. By providing platforms for ongoing communication and feedback, IMC enhances stakeholder satisfaction and loyalty (Reid, 2005; Tafesse & Kitchen, 2017). These dynamics are particularly relevant in complex service ecosystems where stakeholders are active participants in value creation.

IMC also enhances internal collaboration and operational efficiency by reducing communication silos and fostering cross-functional teamwork. When departments align on shared messaging and goals, workflows become more efficient and conflicts decrease (Cornelissen & Lock, 2000; Gulati, 2007). This internal coherence is especially valuable for institutions undergoing organizational change or implementing innovation strategies.

The increasing role of digital integration, particularly through artificial intelligence (AI), customer relationship management (CRM) systems, and marketing automation tools, has further reinforced IMC's value. AI enables

the real-time analysis of customer behaviour, the generation of dynamic content, and personalized campaigns (Kumar et al., 2022; Jarek & Mazurek, 2019). As such, IMC becomes a strategic enabler of digital transformation, enhancing responsiveness and adaptability in dynamic market conditions.

In sum, organizations that adopt IMC gain not only in promotional performance, but also in agility, innovation capacity, and stakeholder responsiveness. These benefits highlight why IMC is a vital strategy for organizations seeking to stay agile, responsive to stakeholder needs, and innovation-driven in today's complex market environments.

3.2. *IMC implementation*

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) entails the comprehensive coordination of all communication activities within an organization. When such coordination is lacking, the adoption of IMC demands not only a strategic shift, but also organizational change supported by leadership commitment, managerial training, and tolerance for risk and uncertainty. In this sense, the effective implementation of IMC is closely tied to both internal organizational conditions and external environmental factors that shape how communication systems evolve within firms.

One of the most frequently cited enablers of IMC is top management support. Leadership plays a pivotal role in fostering a unified vision, aligning diverse departments, and allocating the resources required for integration (Luxton et al., 2015; Ahmad et al., 2025). Empirical evidence confirms that both transformational and transactional leadership styles positively influence IMC practices (Kang, 2024), particularly in contexts where inter-departmental collaboration and brand coherence are critical. Leaders who promote cross-functional teamwork and shared messaging frameworks help dismantle internal silos—one of the most common barriers to IMC adoption.

Organizational culture is another fundamental antecedent. Cultures characterized by collaboration, innovation, and openness to external feedback tend to be more conducive to IMC implementation. Adhocratic cultures—in which flexibility, creativity, and decentralization are prominent—have been shown to positively affect IMC maturity (Porcu et al., 2017). These cultures foster experimentation with new media, encourage co-creation with stakeholders, and allow for swift adaptation in turbulent environments. In contrast, hierarchical or siloed cultures can obstruct communication flow and lead to inconsistent messaging across departments.

The firm's organizational structure is equally important. IMC was originally conceived as a strategic response to the fragmentation caused

by traditional functional silos. Hence, successful IMC often requires structural adaptations, such as the creation of cross-functional communication teams, the appointment of integration coordinators, or the consolidation of communication functions within a single department. Firms with flexible, project-based structures are better positioned to coordinate their messaging and integrate emerging communication channels. Structural alignment—through shared goals, regular interdepartmental meetings and unified KPIs—is essential to sustain message consistency and avoid contradictory or redundant communication efforts.

Beyond structure and culture, strategic orientations also serve as powerful antecedents. Firms that exhibit strong customer orientation and innovation-driven strategies naturally prioritize message coherence across touchpoints. Organizations that embed technological advancement and customer experience at the core of their business models are more likely to perceive IMC not as an option, but as a strategic necessity. Furthermore, organizational commitment at all levels—beyond top-down leadership—is critical. IMC succeeds when all employees, regardless of function, understand and commit to delivering a consistent brand message.

Externally, changes in the communication environment have amplified the need for IMC. One of the most significant forces is media fragmentation. The proliferation of digital channels—ranging from social media and streaming platforms to niche blogs and mobile apps—has created a fragmented media ecosystem in which audiences are dispersed and harder to reach with traditional approaches. As a result, brands must coordinate their messages across a multitude of platforms to avoid sending conflicting signals. This fragmentation was one of the initial drivers of IMC and remains a key contextual factor to this day (Pearson & Malthouse, 2023).

Closely related is the impact of digital transformation. The rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI), marketing automation, big data analytics, and omnichannel platforms has transformed how organizations communicate with their audiences. While these technologies offer powerful tools for personalization and interactivity—both core principles of IMC—they also introduce complexity. Without a cohesive strategy, digital tools can contribute to message fragmentation rather than integration. Thus, firms that embrace digital transformation with an integrative mindset—consolidating systems, training staff, and aligning digital and traditional channels—are more likely to achieve effective IMC.

Consumer behavior has also evolved significantly. Modern consumers are no longer passive recipients of marketing messages; instead,

they actively shape brand narratives through reviews, social media, and word-of-mouth. They expect personalized, transparent, and consistent interactions across all touchpoints. The nonlinear and omnichannel nature of today's customer journey requires firms to deliver a seamless communication experience—from discovery to purchase, and to post-sale engagement. IMC provides the framework to achieve this by ensuring message coherence and responsiveness across every phase of the customer relationship.

In addition, increased consumer expectations for interactivity and real-time communication, especially in service-oriented sectors, place additional demands on the organization's communication systems. This is particularly relevant in services such as tourism or education, where intangibility and the human component complicate message standardization (Gordon-Isasi et al., 2020; Porcu et al., 2019).

Organizations oriented toward innovation are often better equipped to implement IMC effectively. Their predisposition to experimentation, rapid learning, and technological adoption closely aligns with the demands of integrated communication. Flexibility in business processes, a collaborative culture, and strategic agility are all qualities that foster information flow and coordination required for IMC. These firms typically embrace risk and tolerate uncertainty—both conditions necessary for dismantling traditional boundaries between departments and adopting unified communication strategies.

AI, in particular, has intensified this dynamic. While AI impacts all elements of the marketing mix, its greatest influence lies in promotion. From content personalization to predictive analytics, and automated customer service, AI is reshaping how brands communicate. However, to harness its potential fully, these tools must be integrated into a broader IMC framework that ensures both message alignment and stakeholder coherence.

In sum, the implementation of IMC is shaped by a set of interrelated internal and external factors. Internally, visionary leadership, an innovation-friendly culture, flexible organizational structures, and strategic orientations toward customers and technology are critical enablers. Externally, media fragmentation, digital transformation, and changing consumer expectations simultaneously compel and complicate IMC efforts. Organizations that proactively address these antecedents—adapting their internal systems while responding strategically to their environment—are far more likely to achieve coherent, impactful, and innovation-driven communication strategies.

3.3. *Application and measurement of IMC*

Once the benefits and key aspects of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) have been examined, the next step involves establishing reliable mechanisms to assess the degree of integration and identify areas for strategic improvement. In innovation-oriented organizations, the ability to measure communication alignment becomes particularly relevant, given the rapid pace of change and the increasing need for coherence across platforms, departments, and stakeholder interactions.

To address this challenge, an audit-diagnosis instrument, namely the IMC Audit Tool (IMC-AT), has been proposed to support companies in the implementation and evaluation of IMC within their organizations (see Table 1).

The IMC-AT is a measurement instrument based on the multidimensional framework proposed by Porcu et al. (2017) and the adaptations proposed by Gordon-Isasi et al. (2020). According to this conceptual framework, IMC is defined as a multidimensional construct based on four key dimensions: message consistency, interactivity, stakeholder-centered strategic focus, and organizational alignment. These dimensions reflect the integrative nature of IMC and capture both external communication effectiveness and internal coordination processes.

Given the multidimensional nature of IMC, this diagnostic tool offers valuable insights into a company's current communication practices, helping to identify both strengths and areas for improvement. It supports informed decision-making by highlighting which aspects should be reinforced or maintained to achieve a more integrated and strategic communication approach.

In the IMC-AT, each dimension is operationalized through a set of 20 observable items, allowing for a granular diagnosis of communication performance. For example:

- Message consistency assesses whether messages are coherent across all platforms and aligned with the brand's strategic positioning.
- Interactivity evaluates the organization's capacity to promote dialogue with stakeholders, respond to feedback, and to use digital tools strategically.
- Stakeholder orientation measures how well the organization identifies, manages, and engages its stakeholder ecosystem through communication strategies.

Table 1

IMC AUDIT TOOL

IMC AUDIT TOOL	
IMC DIMENSIONS	IMC MEASUREMENT ITEMS
	Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements (from 1, totally disagree, to 5, totally agree). My company....
MESSAGE CONSISTENCY	MC_1. ... coordinates the messages delivered by all departments and functions.
	MC_2. ... ensures consistency across all visual communication elements.
	MC_3. ... periodically assesses the alignment of all planned messages with strategic positioning.
	MC_4. ... ensures consistency between product-related messages (derived from the experiences with the organization's products, services, staff, and agents).
INTERACTIVITY	IN_1. ... promotes programs to facilitate stakeholder inquiries and complaints regarding our brands, products, and the company.
	IN_2. ... collects stakeholder information from various departments into a database to be used across organizational levels.
	IN_3. ... expects all employees to respond promptly to messages received from stakeholders.
	IN_4. ... strategically uses ICTs (i.e. digital media and AI) to improve the responsiveness of the entire organization.
	IN_5. ... shapes communication strategies by listening to stakeholder-generated content—such as word-of-mouth and online discussions.
	IN_6. ... establishes a dialogue based on reciprocal trust with the stakeholders.
STAKEHOLDER-ORIENTATION	SO_1. ...consistently communicates its mission to stakeholders.
	SO_2. ... identifies and manages stakeholder touchpoints.
	SO_3. ... promotes collaboration among employees from all departments to strengthen stakeholder relationships.
	SO_4. ... develops partnerships with external agents to co-create high-value solutions for stakeholders.

ORGANIZATIONAL ALIGNMENT	OA_1. ...ensures that all departments acknowledge the organizational goals through effective horizontal internal communication.
	OA_2. ...ensures that information flows efficiently across all hierarchical levels via vertical internal communication.
	OA_3. ... ensures regular interactions with external agents and partners to strengthen alignment.
	OA_4. ... promotes vertical cooperation among departments to maintain corporate reputation.
	OA_5. ... promotes horizontal cooperation among departments to maintain corporate reputation.
	OA_6. ... fosters a collaborative organizational culture to promote cross-functional coordination.

Source: own elaboration

- Organizational alignment focuses on internal communication flows, cross-functional collaboration, and cultural coherence in relation to communication objectives.

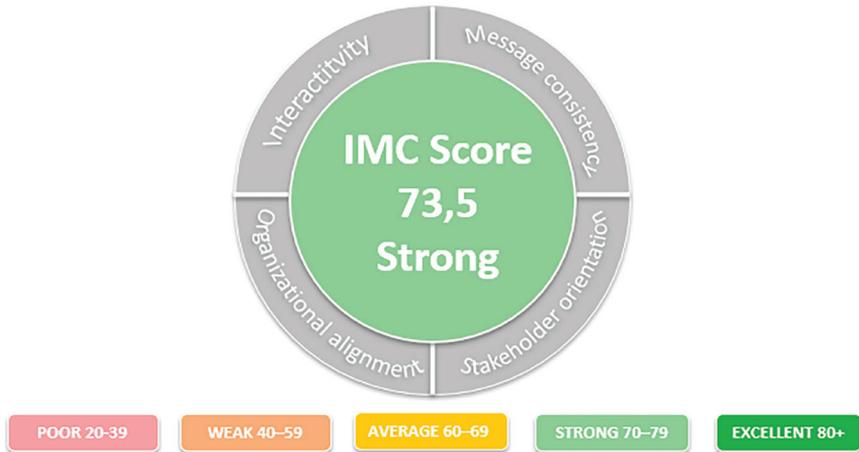
Each item is measured on a Likert-type scale (1–5), enabling organizations to assess their maturity level and compare results across departments or business units.

This audit tool provides organizations with a structured, evidence-based instrument to diagnose their current IMC practices. Unlike traditional communication KPIs, which often focus narrowly on campaign performance, this diagnostic framework encourages a holistic evaluation of the organization’s communication system, enabling managers to:

- Detect inconsistencies or redundancies across communication channels.
- Identify structural or cultural barriers to integration.
- Benchmark IMC practices over time or against industry standards.
- Prioritize interventions that enhance coherence and collaboration.

To facilitate implementation, the audit tool includes the IMC Score (see Figure 1), a composite indicator that synthesizes an organization’s level of integration across the four core dimensions. This score is calculated by summing the responses to the 20 items in the IMC Audit Tool, each rated on a five-point Likert scale (from 1 – “Totally Disagree” to 5 –

Figure 1

IMC Score

“Totally Agree”). The resulting score ranges from 20 to 100 and enables a comprehensive, standardized assessment of IMC maturity.

To enhance interpretability and assist in the managers’ decision-making process, the IMC Score is classified into five levels, each reflecting a distinct stage in the organization’s IMC achievement:

- Level 1 – Poor (20–39 points): Communication is highly uncoordinated, with siloed efforts and low internal or external alignment.
- Level 2 – Weak (40–59 points): Some integration efforts are present, but inconsistencies and gaps remain across departments or channels.
- Level 3 – Average (60–69 points): A moderate level of integration has been achieved, though further improvements are needed to ensure consistency and collaboration.
- Level 4 – Strong (70–79 points): Communication is strategically coordinated, and cross-functional collaboration is strong, though there may still be room for refinement.
- Level 5 – Excellent (80+ points): The organization demonstrates full IMC maturity, with consistent communication, stakeholder engagement, and internal alignment across all functions.

By categorizing organizations into these levels, the IMC Score allows managers to clearly identify their current stage and define strategic priorities for improvement. Moreover, disaggregated scores by dimension offer actionable insights into which specific areas—message consistency, interactivity, stakeholder orientation, or internal alignment—require improvement. This structured assessment enables continuous benchmarking and supports the long-term integration of communication as a strategic asset.

In innovation-driven environments, such insights are especially valuable. A dynamic audit process enables continuous improvement and fosters a learning-oriented approach to communication management, aligned with agile and iterative organizational models. To be effective, the assessment of IMC should be accompanied by broader performance management and strategic planning processes. Organizations are encouraged to implement the audit periodically—e.g., quarterly or biannually—and to involve multiple stakeholders in the evaluation process of horizontal communication (for example, marketing, operations, IT, and human resources) as well as vertical communication (CEOs, CMOs, etc.).

This cross-functional approach reinforces the collaborative logic of IMC and promotes organizational learning. Moreover, aligning audit results with business outcomes—such as brand equity, stakeholder engagement, or innovation performance—can demonstrate the strategic impact of IMC and justify resource allocation.

The flexibility of the tool also allows for customization: while the core dimensions remain consistent, specific items can be adapted to reflect the particularities of each industry or organizational model (e.g., B2B vs. B2C, public vs private sector, service vs product-based firms). This adaptability enhances the relevance and applicability of this tool across diverse contexts.

3.4. Application of the IMC-AT Tool in the innovation-oriented sectors

While the IMC Audit Tool (IMC-AT) is designed to be broadly applicable across organizational types, it can be further tailored to meet the unique demands of specific innovation-oriented sectors. For example, technology startups, creative industries, and service-based firms operating in volatile or high-uncertainty environments often face distinct communication challenges. These include rapid scaling, evolving stakeholder ecosystems, and limited internal communication infrastructures (Blank & Dorf, 2020; Ries, 2011).

In these contexts, IMC implementation must be agile and iterative. For instance, startups may benefit from a simplified version of the tool that focuses on core dimensions such as message consistency and internal alignment, while more established organizations might emphasize strategic stakeholder engagement and cross-platform integration (Troise & Tani, 2020).

Moreover, context-specific variables—such as the degree of digital maturity, organizational size, market orientation, and internal structure—can influence how IMC strategies are operationalized. A highly digital firm may prioritize AI-enabled interactivity and data-driven stakeholder engagement, whereas a smaller, less digitally mature firm may emphasize internal communication and brand consistency (Spence & Crick, 2006; Christensen & Raynor, 2013).

To accommodate these nuances, the IMC-AT allows for modular customization, where organizations can adjust the weight or focus of each dimension based on their specific context and strategic priorities. This flexibility enhances the tool's relevance and usefulness in diverse organizational environments, ensuring that IMC adoption is both practical and strategically aligned with each firm's innovation goals (Cillo et al., 2021).

To illustrate its application, this study evaluated three innovation-driven companies headquartered in Spain, all undergoing digital transformation. The first company belongs to the renewable energy sector and employs approximately 1,000 people. The second firm is a consulting firm composed of 18 experts in business, technology, and operations. The third business operates in the automotive industry with a workforce of 5,000 employees.

Regarding company 1 (Energy sector), the total IMC Score reached was 79-Strong (Table 2). While the overall integration level is strong, there is still room for improvement in stakeholder orientation and organizational alignment. Within the latter dimension, items related to interdepartmental cooperation showed weaker performance.

Table 3 presents the application of the tool in company 2 (Consulting/Technology sector). The IMC Score was 89-Excellent (Table 3), indicating a very high level of integration. However, the assessment revealed relatively lower performance in interactivity and organizational alignment.

The IMC Score in company 3 (Automotive sector) was 65 (Table 4), categorized as average. The analysis revealed significant weaknesses in stakeholder orientation, suggesting the need for greater focus on identifying, managing, and strengthening stakeholder relationships.

Table 2

Application of the IMC-AT Tool in company 1 (energy)

Energy	Total IMC Score	Dimension 1-Message Consistency	Dimension 2-Ineractivity	Dimension 3-Stakeholder Orientation	Dimension 4-Organizational alignment
	79 Strong	90%	83,33%	80%	66,67%

Table 3

Application of the IMC-AT Tool in company 1 (technology)

Technology	Total IMC Score	Dimension 1-Message Consistency	Dimension 2-Ineractivity	Dimension 3-Stakeholder Orientation	Dimension 4-Organizational alignment
	89 Excellent	90%	86,67%	95%	86,67%

Table 4

Application of the IMC-AT Tool in company 1 (automotive)

Automotive	Total IMC Score	Dimension 1-Message Consistency	Dimension 2-Ineractivity	Dimension 3-Stakeholder Orientation	Dimension 4-Organizational alignment
	65 Average	70%	63,33%	60%	66,67%

Collectively, these results demonstrate both the versatility and the diagnostic power of the IMC-AT. The tool enables organizations to pinpoint strengths, identify areas for improvement, and monitor coherence across all communication dimensions. Importantly, the scores across items were relatively balanced, suggesting internal consistency and confirming the instrument's validity as a mechanism for measuring IMC maturity in innovation-oriented organizations.

4. Discussion

This study underscores the strategic role of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) in innovation-oriented organizations, particularly those undergoing digital transformation and complex stakeholder ecosys-

tems. Conceptually, the proposal is built on established academic foundations while responding to emerging organizational demands for agility, coherence, and stakeholder engagement. The IMC Audit Tool (IMC-AT) is based on proposals previously validated by Porcu et al. (2017) and Gordon-Isasi et al. (2020), aiming to provide organizations with a practical self-assessment mechanism.

The four dimensions operationalized in this tool (message consistency, interactivity, stakeholder-centered strategic focus, and organizational alignment) reflect the multidimensional nature of IMC and its contribution to both external communication performance and internal organizational coherence. These elements are particularly relevant in today's service-driven economy, where value co-creation, personalization, and digital responsiveness are essential to competitiveness.

In digitally enabled environments, IMC becomes more than a communication technique; it acts as a strategic infrastructure that connects traditional communication practices with innovative, data-driven approaches. Technologies such as AI, CRM systems, and marketing automation enable real-time, personalized, and interactive communication, which directly enhances the implementation of IMC strategies. As a result, IMC is increasingly recognized as a critical component of digital transformation, enabling organizations to remain agile, customer-centric, and innovation-driven.

The advantages of IMC in this regard are well documented in academic research, particularly in high-impact journals such as the *Journal of Marketing Communications*, *International Journal of Advertising*, and *Journal of Business Research*. These studies emphasize the essential role of integrated communication in improving brand positioning, fostering stakeholder trust, and enhancing organizational effectiveness. In dynamic and competitive environments, the integration of these practices is increasingly seen as fundamental to achieving long-term business success.

For practitioners, the IMC Audit Tool (IMC-AT), developed in this study, serves as a strategic compass, guiding the implementation of IMC across key decision-making areas such as campaign design, team coordination, technology adoption, and performance monitoring. Its flexible design allows for application across departments and industries, as well as benchmarking over time, facilitating continuous learning and iterative improvement. For researchers, the tool provides a standardized framework to explore the relationship between IMC practices and outcomes such as innovation performance, brand equity, or organizational agility, enabling cross-sectional and longitudinal studies.

Ultimately, by providing a robust, multidimensional, and scalable framework, this study strengthens the strategic role of communication in service-oriented, innovation-driven organizations. It empowers firms not only to coordinate their messages but also to embed communication into their organizational DNA as a catalyst for agility, cultural alignment, and long-term value creation. In doing so, IMC is positioned as a key enabler of strategic transformation, bridging the gap between marketing communication and innovation capability in today's complex business ecosystems.

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