



**Electronic Assignment Cover Sheet**

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**– Pandemic retail boom**

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## INTRODUCTION

*“Integrated marketing communication”* or **IMC** is the planning procedure used to ensure that customers and brands are connected. To promote their goods and services in the market, organizations must, nevertheless, implement effective customer communication systems. Following the covid-19 pandemic, some businesses experienced an uncertain shutdown that hampered customer communication. Customers, on the other hand, have altered their communication style and behaviour in the post-pandemic era.

As a result, businesses altered their IMC approach to interact with customers. This essay focuses on the shifting of IMC strategy during this post-pandemic boom from the context of **Supervalu company**. Supervalu is a supermarket or retail chain that operates across Ireland and sells its own brand products. Supervalu is part of Musgrave group, which is one of the largest grocery and food distributors in Ireland (Supervalu.ie, 2023). Marketing communication strategies of Supervalu have also been analysed to understand IMC strategy in this post-pandemic era.

## THEORETICAL DEFINITION IMC STRATEGY

Integrated marketing is the coordinated process of controlling marketing elements including messaging, channels, and others to give customers a brand experience. IMC strategy's theoretical interpretation is a key factor in how buyers identify brands with products. As per the view of Wang *et al.* (2021), IMC's primary responsibility is to use advertising to market goods and services to consumers in order to boost sales. **Supervalu** uses a variety of media, including radio, digital platforms, and television, to advertise its organizational efforts.

Applying the **DAGMAR approach**, the communication stages of marketing include four stages such as “**awareness**”, “**comprehension**”, “**conviction**”, and “**action**”. As per the view of Makowski *et al.* (2022), **the Dagmar model** places a strong emphasis on increasing audience awareness in order to motivate large numbers of people and persuade them to modify their behaviour. Before making purchases, consumers evaluate the advertisement, take in the messages, and then decide what to buy. As a result, according to the Dagmar model, creating advertising goals for marketing and obtaining results through advertisement is a crucial step.

**D**efine  
**A**dvertising  
**G**oals for  
**M**easuring  
**A**dvertising  
**R**esults

### Figure 1: DAGMAR approach

(Source: Lecture 4 objectives of IMC plan - Slide 11)

It's crucial to raise brand awareness among consumers in order to draw them to Supervalu's products. In that situation, by providing good value and working with local producers, Supervalu uses a variety of marketing methods to promote fresh food. Supervalu's primary marketing goal is to increase consumer loyalty by increasing brand metrics toward important priority areas like **"value," "local,"** and **"quality"**. The AIDA model's incorporation emphasizes how clients are made aware of these areas that are given priority. The AIDA model focuses on consumers' awareness, interest, desire, and behaviour toward a brand's goods and services.

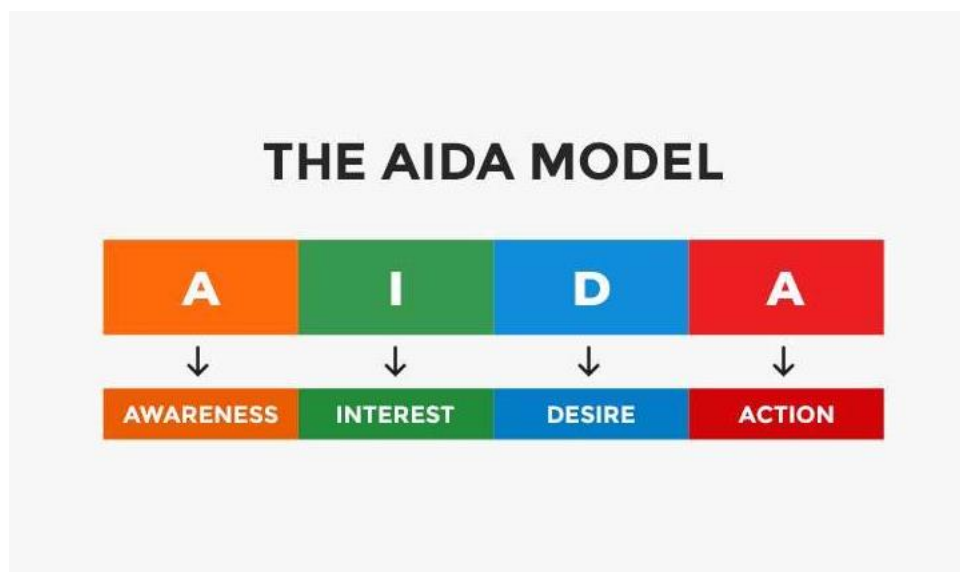


Figure 2: AIDA model

(Source: Wang *et al.* 2022)

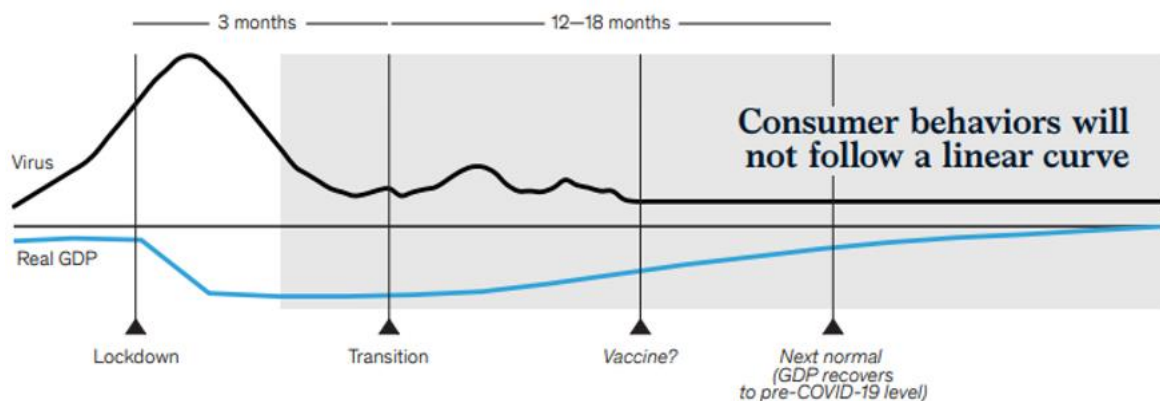
However, the clients become motivated or eager to act and buy things as a result of this awareness. Yet, marketing communication must pique consumers' interest in order to foster an emotional bond between them and the company. Depending on their emotional connection and interest, customers respond by making purchases and interacting with the brand across many platforms. According to Jakub Żurawski (2021), Setting the agenda is one of the crucial elements that affect how goods and services are presented in marketing. In this approach, marketing agenda-setting can serve to ingrain in customers' minds the idea that it

is a major issue. **Supervalu** has therefore adopted the central idea of **agenda setting theory** and put it into practice by creating commercials to draw customers and emotionally ingrain ideas in consumers.

Supervalu has started a Christmas campaign as part of its effort to engage with customers in these post-pandemic times. *Through direct marketing operations, IMC may assist in developing various marketing communication campaigns for various target audiences and influencing behavioural responses. (Chapter 9).* In order to boost sales in the wake of the pandemic's economic crisis, Supervalu's most recent **Christmas campaign, "Share this Magic,"** on television, developed a heart-warming tale (Supervalu.ie, 2023). This endearing campaign is an example of a fresh IMC tactic in the post-pandemic environment.

## TRANSITION OR SHIFTING OF IMC IN THE POST-PANDEMIC PERIOD

Social distancing norms in the pandemic period have influenced the behavioural changes among customers for purchasing products and services. Moreover, individual clients started to acquire things through digital platforms to maintain social separation and hygiene. According to Market Line Industry Profile: Apparel Retail in Ireland (2021), the increased demand for personalization and wider competition is a result of consumers' increasing expectations of digital platforms. During this new normal era, marketing communication has changed and holds a massive position in digital or social media platforms.



**Figure 3: Consumers' behaviour**

(Source: DBS Elibrary: MarketLine Industry Profile: Apparel Retail in Ireland 2021)

Organizations are concentrating on increasing the GDP of the country and the corporation in the following regular period to lessen the financial problem. Consumers are turning to digital, and 34% of respondents highlighted that they shopped from Instagram based on recommendations of influencers (Mckinsey.com, 2023). This evidence also emphasizes the role that influencer communication plays in integrated marketing communication strategies, which help to strengthen brand connections on social media. Businesses can use influencer marketing to engage with customers since influencers have large fan bases and that their imitators try to live similar lifestyles and behaviours. The above-mentioned figure also highlights that consumer behaviour will not follow a linear curve in this post-pandemic era.

Organizations in this new digital edge are also gathering information about customer needs from various sources of customers. According to Lazi (2022), the digitization of the internet and media has increased the importance of social interaction on websites, via email, Chat boards, and on other platforms. However, in this era of rapid digitalization, marketers are also making investments in radio communication. Additionally, Irish businesses are emphasizing emotional connection in this post-pandemic era to influence customers' buying habits.

In order to maintain communication with customers, organisations utilise various digital marketing communication tools. Live chat, video, voice, in-app chat, email, in-app calling, social media, and websites became useful communication tools during this post-pandemic age. Retailers in Ireland market is also focused on digital platforms such as social media, internet and others.

One of the most important aspects of IMC is determining customer purchasing behaviour and defining information. In this context, advertising, direct marketing, and other methods increase the flexibility with which brand products and services can be communicated.

## **CHANGES IN COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVES, MESSAGE, MEDIUM AND STRATEGY**

Objectives, messages, mediums and strategies are the crucial factors of digital communication that influence the marketing of organisations to communicate with customers. Main objectives of communication need to be specific and need to create brand

awareness, attitude, intention and purchase facilitation. According to Wei (2022), the main marketing communication goal in the post-pandemic era is to motivate customers to buy products because sales have decreased due to the pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, organizations primarily focused on communicating, competing, and convincing. At present time, marketers are using storyboards, animated footage, video materials to express intend tone of marketing concept (Chapter 8). On the other hand, organisations are trying to raise awareness among customers about brand hygiene, the importance of products and other factors (Hipwell, 2020). Along with that, the message of marketing communication has also changed to connect customers emotionally.



**Figure 4: Christmas campaign of Supervalu**

(Source: Supervalu.ie, 2023)

In the current era, the primary medium of marketing communication is digital, whereas it was primarily offline prior to the pandemic. According to Hipwell (2021), retail marketing communication began to include tactics for enticing customers to select products and make purchases. If we compare *Supervalu's IMC campaigns* the pre-pandemic with the post-pandemic eras, it reveals a significant shift in objective, message, and strategy. Supervalu's "Good Food Karma" campaign in 2015 (pre-pandemic) highlighted the inspiration for nations to share good food ideas and encouragement for individual customers to bring them together (Supervalu.ie, 2023). This campaign's message emphasizes happiness, togetherness, and enticing activities for customers. The goal of this campaign was to bring customers together and spread the word to new potential customers.



In contrast, the post-pandemic Christmas campaign "**Share the Magic**" (**Campaign 1**) focused on emotional bonding by addressing customers' purchasing's from the previous Christmas. Supervalu delivered the **message of "recovery"** to customers from pandemic to post-pandemic in this IMC campaign (Supervalu.ie, 2023). The goal of this campaign is to increase sales by restoring customer trust in Supervalu. Aside from that, IMC's strategy has changed during this post-pandemic period since Supervalu began to focus on "**customers**". The "**YouTube**" advertisement campaign emphasizes social media utilization strategies for managing marketing communication. Furthermore, businesses have increased their use of digital media for marketing communication. As a result, in the post-pandemic boom, objectives, strategy, and message have shifted.

Following the recent uncertainty caused by the spread of the COVID19 virus across Ireland, SuperValu, Ireland's largest supermarket chain, and creative agency, TBWA Dublin, released a timely, reassuring message to thank staff and remind customers that **"we're here for you"** (**Campaign 2**).

The new television commercial assured customers that even in the most difficult of times, SuperValu shelves remains stocked, and the stores will remain open due to the dedication of their employees. The advertisement also reflects current expert advice and encourages shoppers to maintain a safe distance when visiting their local SuperValu Store. The message is also being broadcast on radio, in print, and on social media.



**Figure 5: Covid 19 campaign of Supervalu "we're here for you"**

(Source: Supervalu.ie, 2023)

Biodiversity initiative - Every primary school in the Republic of Ireland is involved in the SuperValu **'Save the Bees' (Campaign 3)** program. Chambers Ireland recognized this campaign by awarding it the best sustainability campaign. (SuperValu, 2021). SuperValu has created a variety of activities that challenge children to learn about bees and pollination as well as recall what they have learned. These enjoyable activities have been designed to supplement various aspects of the primary school curriculum. (SuperValu, 2021)



**Figure 6: SuperValu 'Save the Bees' campaign**

(Source: Supervalu.ie, 2023)

The internet users are engaging in e-commerce activities to manage various operations. 52.9% of people buy products and services online, while 14.1% order groceries online. Several organizations in the Irish market rely on AI-based technologies to communicate with customers. Organizations focused on the digital or e-commerce sector, on the other hand, to promote products. Supervalu, for example, has prioritized social media platforms over traditional offline advertising. As a result, the retail environment has changed during this time period.

## CHANGES IN THE RETAIL ENVIRONMENT TO MAINTAIN IMC

During the post-pandemic era, retailers began to use digital inventory to reduce human intervention in product delivery and management. According to Spais and Paul (2021), global lockdown has changed the retail environment by embracing digital activities and platforms for managing social distancing. To ensure the safety and hygiene of customers and employees, businesses began to implement advanced digital technologies in retail stores.

Retail stores limited face-to-face intervention to ensure customer safety and purchase of company products. While communicating with customers, marketers are also focusing on originality, flexibility, elaboration, and artistic value (Chapter 8). Furthermore, an increase in online retail operations resulted in a high rate of physical store closures in the retail industry in 2020. As a result of social distancing, organizations began to increase their e-commerce intervention in the retail industry.

SuperValu comes under the umbrella of Musgrave and they think - A post-Covid world entails learning from the positives and rebuilding better and "greener," with the environment in mind. (SuperValu Musgrave, 2021)

## CHALLENGES OF IMC IN THE POST-PANDEMIC ERA

In this post-pandemic era, integrated marketing communication faces numerous challenges in connecting with customers. With the passage of time, the trend of database marketing has grown in order to collect data on customers perspectives, demand, and unmet needs. According to Moustakas et al. (2020), the use of advanced digital technology and data results in data-driven marketing practice and broadens the scope of responsible marketing. During this pandemic period, marketers gain the ability to use customer data in marketing or advertising activities. However, budgeting for marketing communication has created significant challenges as communication expenditure has risen over time (Chapter 7). The value of shareholders has also increased over time. This vast amount of data put enormous strain on marketers during the post-pandemic period, causing disorientation in marketing activities. As a result of the rapid growth of database marketing, organizations are under enormous pressure to maintain integrated marketing communication.

In this post-pandemic era, **omni-channel communication** has become an essential component of marketing. Since the government and international organizations declared a new normal era following the pandemic, marketers have begun both online and offline communication at the same time. According to Simon Stephens and Christopher McLaughlin (2020), Omni Channel Marketing has created new challenges as well as opportunities due to consumer data privacy protection, data access, and integration. Customers provide various types of data about their product needs and demands through various channels or platforms.

In that context, ***the lack of attribution in information*** has harmed consumer visibility while managing communication through marketing. Supervalu, for example, has communicated with customers via Facebook, Instagram, Email, and other traditional communication channels, increasing the amount of data. Because of the use of Omni channel communication, Stephens and McLaughlin believe that a lack of data integration and different types of data can have a negative impact (2020). Thus, in the post-pandemic era, trends in Omni-channel communication have created challenges in IMC.

IMC can aid in the collection of data on customer behaviour in competitive market environments. Customer behaviour is an important factor in an organization's product and service development. On the other hand, a lack of sufficient data about customer behaviour can limit the development of products and services while increasing sales. Customer behaviour has changed as a result of health and economic crises following the pandemic period, which disrupted organizations' marketing activities (**Consumer Attitudes towards Natural and Organic Food, 2021**). For example, prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, a customer used to maintain Facebook, whereas after the pandemic, specific customers became addicted to Instagram, and changes in channels caused disruption. As a result of a lack of data integration for changing customer behaviour, organizations such as Supervalu had difficulty managing marketing communication.

The main challenge for IMC in communicating with customers during this post-pandemic boom is the ***financial crisis***. It is necessary to invest a significant amount of money in order to manage marketing channels and platforms such as social media, websites, and other online and offline channels. According to Emer Smyth and Aisling Murray (2022), the economic crisis caused by the pandemic's sudden lockdown had a long-term impact on organizational budgets, posing challenges for marketing. Thus, in the post-pandemic boom, IMC faces challenges due to a lack of proper financing.

## CONCLUSION

According to the preceding discussion, the process of Integrated Marketing Communication has changed with the passage of time in this post-pandemic era. Adoption of the DAGMAR approach emphasizes the importance of proper goal definition and establishment in communication for marketers. Additionally, raising customer awareness about the brand's activities in this post-pandemic period can engage customers. A key concept of agenda setting theory was also examined in the context of *Supervalu's* "Christmas campaign." It can be stated that the IMC process is changing on a daily basis due to changing customer behaviour. As a result of these facts, marketers have shifted their strategies and channels from traditional to digital. Furthermore, marketers are currently facing a slew of challenges as a result of the financial crisis, a lack of information attribution, massive data pressure, and Omni channel communication. Thus, changing digital strategies can aid in the improvement of marketing activities.

## REFLECTIVE LEARNING

The completion of this module provided extensive in-depth knowledge and understanding of the significance of "integrated communication" in marketing practice. According to KALLEVIG et al. (2022), IMC is essentially the process of managing marketing communication, messages, channels, and practices in order to attract the target audience to the brands. This IMC module covered marketing communication, communication planning, campaigns, budgeting, costing, marketing objectives, situational analysis, and other topics. This module has provided me with in-depth knowledge and understanding of the marketing communication process. In addition, an Integrated Marketing Communication campaign was established in the project with the goal of increasing sales by 500,000 Euros. While planning the IMC campaign, I conducted research on previous campaigns in Ireland that helped to increase a large number of sales.

Setting a proper campaign goal and selecting appropriate channels to deliver the message to the target audience are critical when establishing an IMC campaign. Furthermore, properly establishing leads and managing channels is critical in an IMC campaign for a company. Individual review papers, on the other hand, focused on the IMC strategy in the post-

pandemic retail boom. According to McGann et al. (2020), the pandemic crisis has embraced the digital platform and digital marketing strategy in the market during the post-lockdown situation. Following the pandemic period, most marketers implemented digital marketing strategies to implement customer communication. This digital marketing strategy, in my opinion, aids in communicating with a broad range of customers in the international market, whereas traditional IMC strategies aid in communicating with local customers.

While establishing the IMC campaign in this project, I mentioned the use of Facebook and Instagram as digital channels of communication in marketing. Due to the increasing popularity of these channels over time, social media has a significant impact on customers. In addition, various theories and models have been included to help understand IMC strategy. The AIDA model has given me the knowledge to raise customer awareness, which is the primary reason for marketing communication.

While researching the Supervalu company's IMC strategy, I learned about retail marketing. This module also provided perspectives on marketing management and the consumer attraction process in retail organizations in Ireland. I've also learned about the competition, current situation, and practices in Ireland's retail market.

This valuable information will assist me in the future in managing communication with target customers. In addition, this module has taught me about the challenges that have arisen as a result of the post-pandemic error in marketing. I believe that changing customer behaviour, the financial crisis, social distance, and hygiene maintenance all had a significant impact on communication activities, causing companies to change their Marketing Communication strategy. Understanding and applying what I've learned in this module will help me in my future career.

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