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Analyzing the Study Variable (Integrated Marketing Communications) by Conducting Semi-Structured Interviews with Managers in the Tourism Marketing Sulaimani Governorate

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Abstract

The tourism industry in the Kurdistan Region continues to grow, and new opportunities are emerging. The KRG has established specific growth objectives in order to boost its evolving tourism industry, which is emerging as a key sector that is expected to contribute to the rapid economic development of the Kurdistan Region. Today it is necessary that organizations understand why the integrated marketing communication programs have become so important in their activity, especially after 1990. Accordingly, our study seeks to respond to this call for a more holistic perspective to analyze IMC and causal factors on IMC and its impact on performance. Mixed research method is used by the researcher to accurately and comprehensively identify a phenomenon and tries to consider multiple approaches, and positions. The strategy of this research is in the qualitative method, the grounded theory, and in the quantitative method, survey. The results demonstrated that there was a difference in the respondents' perspectives regarding the description of each of the Integrated Marketing Communications dimensions, as the highest percentage of agreement was in the Personal Selling dimension. The study showed that integrated marketing communications have become one of the most important factors on which various tourism companies rely to attract tourists, in line with the development in the surrounding environment, the

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aspirations of tourists and changes in the ways they deal with tourism programs. In addition, it was found that integrated Marketing Communications is the link between tourism institutions and their target audience of tourists.

1. Introduction

▪ Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC)

As an academic field, IMC attracted marketing and management scholars' interest and is considered as "one of the most influential marketing management frameworks during the last twenty years" (Kitchen, 2015). The IMC research area has long been characterized by a vivid theoretical debate and most extant research has focused on definitional issues. Both the academia and the professional arena suggest that IMC research moved from a narrow-focus approach centered on marketing communications to a broader organizational perspective. Likewise, while early conceptualizations (Raman and Naik, 2004) clearly confine IMC to marketing communications mix and planning, most recent publications (Vernuccio and Ceccotti, 2015; Tafesse and Kitchen, 2017; Porcu et al., 2017; Luxton et al., 2017) point out that a firm-wide approach should be taken to conceptualize IMC to highlight that IMC involves the whole organization.

The above-mentioned broader approach has also been taken by other authors. Duncan and Moriarty (1998) theoretically modeled the key-role of communication and interactivity in establishing and nourishing relationships with the brand, recognizing that IMC involves the whole organization (more specifically, corporate, marketing and communication levels) and highlighting that organizations should be stakeholder-oriented. Accordingly, other scholars have suggested that Integrated Communication (IC) allows for clear, consistent and continuous communication "within and across formal organizational boundaries" (Christensen et al., 2008, p. 424), while Kerr and Patti (2015) called for a more holistic approach and

conceptualized the construct of Strategic Integration (SI).

Following a comprehensive review of prior IMC theories, definitions and conceptual models, we define IMC as "the stakeholder-centered interactive process of cross-functional planning and alignment of organizational, analytical and communication processes that allows for the possibility of continuous dialogue by conveying consistent and transparent messages via all media in order to foster long-term profitable relationships that create value". This definition highlights the multidimensionality of this concept, with four dimensions being identified: message consistency; interactivity (i.e. Duncan and Mulhern, 2004); stakeholder-centered strategic focus (i.e. Kliatchko and Schultz, 2014); and organizational alignment (Christensen et al., 2008).

▪ Integrated marketing communication in tourism management

The relevant role of IMC in the international tourism has been highlighted in previous studies (Pizam and Holcomb, 2008; Pike, 2008). In this regard, several scholars in the tourism management field (Pike, 2008; Clarke, 2009; Dinnie et al., 2010) have called for more research on IMC applied in the tourism sector.

Elliott and Boshoff (2008), who focused their research on the effect of specific orientations on the successful implementation of IMC in small-sized tourism businesses in South Africa, suggested that the importance of IMC is crucial to attract and retain customers and enables small businesses to achieve higher revenues. Dinnie et al. (2010) pointed out that IMC plays a key role in nation branding strategy due to the fact that this pursues multiple objectives and addresses a diverse range of stakeholders.

- Relationship between integrated marketing communication and market performance

The lack of significant demonstration of the positive association between IMC and performance has been regarded as the prominent barrier limiting a wider acceptance of IMC “among both pragmatic practitioners and skeptical scholars” (Ewing, 2009, p. 114). Similarly, Taylor (2010, p. 346–347) pointed out that “too little research has focused on [IMC] performance metrics”. The paucity of empirical evidence demonstrating that organizations can benefit from the implementation of IMC is strongly associated to the measurement issue, which remains one of the most challenging unresolved research questions (Tafesse and Kitchen, 2017).

With regard to the scales used to assess IMC, the instrument proposed by Duncan and Moriarty (1997) and modified by (Reid & Mavondo, 2005) has been used to apply the broader approach (e.g. Luxton et al., 2015, 2017), while the scale developed by Lee and Park (2007) was selected by the authors of the empirical studies within the hospitality industry (e.g. Šerić et al., 2014), who decided to take a narrow-focused approach measuring IMC as the mere coordination of marketing communications tools and messages.

The beneficial effects of IMC have been mostly tested using a multisectorial approach, with the exception of the studies conducted by Navarro-Bailón et al. (2009) and Navarro-Bailón (2012) with FMCGs in Spain, and the research by Einwiller and Boenigk (2012), which was performed within the Swiss financial sector. First, in regard with the effects on economic and financial performance, Duncan and Mulhern (2004) suggested that IMC positively affects ROI and purchase intention, while Porcu et al. (2012) highlighted that IMC is associated to a superior economic and financial

performance, in terms of global profitability and sales growth rate.

In this regard, Madhavaram et al. (2005, p. 69) pointed out that “for practitioners IMC has pervaded various levels within the firm [and] has become an integral part of brand strategy”. Duncan and Moriarty (1998) considered that IMC exerts a positive influence on brand equity, while Duncan and Mulhern (2004) suggested that IMC relates to a superior brand performance, more specifically to greater brand awareness, brand preference and a more favorable attitude towards the brand. Similarly, several authors have found a strong positive relationship between IMC and brand advantage compared to the closest competitor (Low & Jaggi, 2000; Reid & Mavondo, 2005; Luxton et al., 2015, 2017).

As mentioned earlier, several scholars have emphasized the need for the usage of measurements that capture the essence of IMC as a firm wide organizational process (e.g. Duncan and Moriarty, 1998; Ewing, 2009; Zahay, Peltier and Krishen, 2004; Kliatchko and Schultz, 2014; Luxton et al., 2015). Despite this, especially the studies conducted within the hospitality industry have focused on the mere integration of marketing communications.

Today it is necessary that organizations understand why the integrated marketing communication programs have become so important in their activity, especially after 1990. Traditional components of the marketing mix - the product, price, placement (distribution) - are no longer as efficiently as they were in the past. When the market passed through a slow period of development, these proved to be particularly useful in the work of any organization.

The budgetary crisis facing the KRI has highlighted the importance of moving away from an oil-dependent economic model. For tourism to become a viable alternative pillar of the economy, the previously mentioned

challenges to future growth must first be addressed. (Kurdistan Tour Guide, 2015).

The Kurdistan region has always been known from its safety and security because of its relative political stability and the regions separation from the rest of Iraq. Kurdistan rests along a series of mountain ranges and encompasses a significant portion of what has traditionally been called "The land between the rivers" and "The birthplace of civilization". Despite the great potential of tourism in KRG and especially in Suleymaniyah, the industry is far from expectations and goals and global statistics. Accordingly, our study seeks to respond to this call for a more holistic perspective to analyze IMC and causal factors on IMC and its impact on performance by taking a supply-side approach. With these premises in mind, this study formulates a theoretical model aiming to demonstrate that firm-wide IMC represents a key antecedent of market performance within the tourism sector. To validate the proposed model, the Sulaimani city has been selected as a suitable context, given the fact that Sulaimani is among the top tourist destinations at Iraq, with a strong tourism infrastructure, thus providing researchers with a good sphere of study in terms of the generalizeability of the results.

▪ Hypotheses of the Study

The first hypothesis:

The perspectives of respondents in the researched organizations in Sulaymaniyah governorate differ towards describing the variables of the current study.

The second hypothesis:

The importance of the study variable and their dimensions vary according to the nature of dependence on them by researched organizations.

The third hypothesis:

There are statistically significant differences among the researched organizations towards the variable of the study according to the difference in all their personal characteristics: gender, age,

academic qualification, and years of experience.

The fourth hypothesis:

There are significant differences for the use of the study variable Integrated Marketing Communications at the level of the surveyed Tourism Companies.

▪ The Need for Integrated Marketing Communications

According to Kotler (2000), integrated marketing communications is a way of looking at the whole marketing process from the viewpoint of the customer. The core principle of integrated marketing communication is to guarantee that every aspect of marketing communication functions cohesively to convey a uniform message to the intended audience (Duncan & Moriarty, 1997). The shift toward a richer mix of media and brand content approaches poses a problem for marketers. Consumers today are bombarded by brand content from a broad range of sources. But consumers don't distinguish between content sources the way marketers do. Advertising messages are planned and implemented by the advertising department or an ad agency. Other company departments or agencies are responsible for public relations (PR), sales promotion events, and online or social media content. However, although companies may have separated their communications tools, customers don't. Mixed content from these sources results in blurred brand perceptions by consumers. The new world of online, mobile, and social media marketing presents not only tremendous opportunities but also big challenges. It can "give companies increased access to their customers, fresh insights into their preferences, and a broader creative palette to work with," says one marketing executive. But "the biggest issue is complexity and fragmentation ... the amount of choice out there," says another. The challenge is to "make it come together in an organized way. (Jon Lafayette & David Gelles, 2011).

- Marketing Communication Effects

The way brand associations are formed does not matter. In other words, whether a consumer has an equally strong, favorable, and unique brand association of Subaru with the concepts “outdoors,” “active,” and “rugged” because of exposure to a TV ad that shows the car driving over rugged terrain at different times of the year, or because Subaru sponsors ski, kayak, and mountain bike events, the impact in terms of Subaru’s brand equity should be identical. But these marketing communications activities must be integrated to deliver a consistent message and achieve the strategic positioning. The starting point in planning marketing communications is a communication audit that profiles all interactions customers in the target market may have with the company and all its products and services. (Noreen O’Leary, 2007:4).

- Dimensions of Marketing Communication

The concept of integrated marketing communication (IMC) recognizes the merits of different marketing communication disciplines, and the value of using appropriate combinations of these disciplines to maximize the effect of the organization’s communications that customers encounter through clarity and consistency (Belch & Belch, 2009:11; Du Plessis et al., 2017:10). A more consumer-biased perspective of IMC is that customers perceive brands in their own way (O’Sullivan, 2008:28) through the brand and or product information they are exposed to, irrespective of which discipline these communications originated from (Du Plessis et al., 2005:10; Kotler & Armstrong, 2010:429; Schultz & Schultz, 2004:8) and conceivably the touchpoint that delivered them to the customer. Schultz and Schultz (2004: xvii) emphasize that in the context of marketing communication, consumers

relate to brands, regardless of the form of marketing communication used. Schultz and Schultz (2004:164) expand this point by remarking on brand networks, which are brand frames of references constructed by customers, based on what the customer knows or thinks about a brand.

These are flexible networks that customers add to or delete from when they acquire and process new brand information. The IMC approach attempts to understand how a brand’s customers interact with various touch points and the relevance of these touchpoints to the brand’s marketing communication (Belch & Belch, 2009:26). According to Schultz and Schultz (2004:12) the three main forces behind IMC are a) advances in technology affecting all operations of the organization; b) greater emphasis on brands for competitive differentiation; and c) effects of globalization across geographic boundaries. These forces have prompted better integration of other activities within an organization besides marketing communication. According to Schultz and Schultz (2004:23) for IMC to be effective it must be embraced across the entire organization, becoming part of their operational behavior.

According to Schultz and Schultz (2004:65) the collapse of marketing communication into messages and incentives, improves strategic focus with the deployment of communication through suitable delivery methods. They rationalize that customers reduce marketing communication into either messages or incentives and so pursuing the customer to affect their current or future Behavior, brand communication should reflect the perceptions of the customer. Customers perceive marketing communication as either messages or incentives through various touchpoints (delivery systems). Uptake of the communication by the customer or prospect is dependent upon the relevance of the communication to the customer or prospect

and the extent of receptivity of the target to the communication.

2. Methodology

For the current study, an analytical descriptive technique employed to match the nature and circumstances of gathering reliable academic descriptions of the phenomenon's status quo while making initial assumptions.

Research Design

Surveys sent to a randomly chosen group of tourism organization personnel to gauge their opinions on the study's variables. Performance metrics used by all tourism companies provide data on efficacy. The gathered information was then examined in order to assess the relationships proposed before. On the basis of that proof, several generalizations about the data set will be drawn.

Mixed research method is used by the researcher to accurately and comprehensively identify a phenomenon and tries to consider multiple approaches, and positions (Johnson et al., 2007). The strategy of this research is in the qualitative method, the grounded theory, and in the quantitative method, survey. The grounded Theory is a devoted research strategy that allows researchers in a variety of thematic areas to take the theory instead of relying on existing and predefined theories. Surveying is a method for obtaining information about the views, beliefs, opinions, behaviors or group profiles of members of a statistical society through research, and through information tools, information about the statistical sample. The view comes with great accuracy, speed and efficiency, and the results can be generalized to a larger society (Zakmoun, 1997).

Unit of Analysis

The researcher used a range of statistical methods using the SPSS program and Amos Program in order to analyze data such as the mean and standard deviation to identify the

reactions of the study sample to the study variables included in the questionnaire.

The Study Population

The population consisted of all () administrative staff of Tourism Companies in Sulaimany city Iraqi Kurdistan Region. To achieve the research goals, a random sample of (300) employees was selected where the study questionnaire was distributed to them, while the responded forms were 257 and 5 forms were ignored, by a response rate of ().

The Study Sample

The sample is a portion of the population that has been chosen in order to contribute to the study, and a population is made up of all the factors, including organizations, products, and individuals that are experiencing a problem. In order for the researcher to be able to identify all the characteristics of the entire population, the sample must be carefully chosen. Researchers can use a sample to draw exact conclusions about the population. The sample size used for the study was (252) employees from the population selected at tourism organizations.

Data Collection Procedure

This study relied on two types of methods to collect data and information. Firstly, secondary data was acquired that the researchers sought to cover this aspect of the study using available sources that dealt with the subject of the study such as books, articles, studies and university thesis'. Secondly, primary data based on the survey questionnaire was collected in order to complete the practical aspect of the study. The questionnaire was designed to serve the study objectives and hypotheses, using the five value Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, uncertain, agree, strongly agree) with the weights (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) respectively. Secondary data, which include both qualitative and quantitative information, are generally employed in descriptive and explanatory research. Saving time and money is a benefit of using secondary data.

Books, articles, and journals were some of the secondary data sources used in relation to the topic that are given in the references section. These gave the researcher the means to acquire additional knowledge about the issue.

Qualitative Data Collection

Data gathered from the semi-structured interviews were first transcribed, and then coded in line with the objectives of this research.

Quantitative Data Collection

This research is descriptive and analytical. By creating and distributing a questionnaire, a quantitative research approach used in this study. It is a sort of research that is clarifying phenomena by gathering numerical data that are examined using mathematically based method" is the definition of quantitative research.

Quantitative approach has been full adopted in this study in collection of primary and secondary data. Consequently, a quantitative method to gather and produce the evidence gathered from the questionnaires is administrated.

3. Findings and Results

Examining the data of the study:

A number of tests were applied to ensure the validity of the data collected from the responding sample in order to determine the extent to which they are subject to the conditions of statistical analysis as well as answer the questions in this regard, which revolves around the application of any of the parametric or non-parametric tests, according to the following:

Normality Test:

In order to identify the nature of the data and the extent to which they follow a normal distribution, the test was carried out based on the values of (Skewness, Kurtosis), which indicate that the acceptable value for it is (-1.96, + 1.96). The results show that the data follow a normal distribution.

Levene's Test:

To verify the condition of homogeneity of variance for all dimensions of the study variables, the data of the current study were subjected to the Levene test. The results of the (Levene) test indicate the fulfillment of the condition of homogeneity of variance. Whereas, the calculated (Sig.) values for (Levene) test parameter and for all dimensions were greater than the hypothetical level of significance of the study, which is (0.05).

Direct Marketing (DM) Questions Description

Table 1 shows the results of descriptive statistics for the dimension of Direct Marketing (DM) questions, which is represented by seven questions (DM1-DM7). The total mean for this dimension was (3.82), standard deviation (1.01), and agreement rate (76.57 %). This indicates that the agreement of the study sample on the questions of this dimension was high, which confirms that the study sample in the searched organizations believes that Direct Marketing (DM) is a dimension of Integrated Marketing Communications.

Question (DM7) states (Our office has a website to measure the reactions of tourists to our services) obtained the highest mean as it reached (4.05) and with a total standard deviation of (.915) and an agreement rate of (81%). This indicates that the level of answers was very high. On the other hand, the question (DM5) states had the lowest mean, which was (3.52), with a standard deviation of (1.199), and an agreement rate of (70.4%).

Table 1- Direct Marketing (DM) Questions Description

Questions	I totally disagree		I disagree		I have no idea		I agree		I totally agree		Mean	Standard Deviation	Agreement Rate
	%	F.	%	F.	%	F.	%	F.	%	F.			
DM1	3.6	9	7.1	18	12.7	32	54.4	137	22.2	56	3.85	.968	77
DM2	3.6	9	3.6	9	18.3	46	48.0	121	26.6	67	3.90	.952	78
DM3	3.2	8	3.2	8	17.5	44	40.9	103	35.3	89	4.02	.972	80.4
DM4	4.0	10	4.0	10	23.0	58	43.7	110	25.4	64	3.83	.987	76.6
DM5	7.1	18	14.3	36	21.8	55	33.3	84	23.4	59	3.52	1.199	70.4
DM6	3.6	9	11.9	30	26.2	66	34.9	88	23.4	59	3.63	1.077	72.6
DM7	2.4	6	4.4	11	11.9	30	30	75	32.9	83	4.05	.915	81
Total	3.82	3.82	1.01	1.01	76.57	76.57	76.57	76.57	76.57	76.57	76.57	76.57	76.57

Source: prepared by the researcher from the results of SPSS statistical analysis.

Based on the above, the first main hypothesis that states (the perspectives of respondents in the researched organizations in Sulaymaniyah governorate differ towards describing the variables of the current study) is accepted.

Ordinal Importance of the study dimensions:

To identify the levels of importance of the study variable and their dimensions in the researched organizations in the city of Sulaymaniyah in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, according to the results of the study's description of variable and their dimensions and according to the perspectives of the study sample. The results of the analysis showed that the coefficient of variation for the Integrated Marketing Communications

variable (IMC) reached (26.03%). Which indicates that this variable is important from the perspective of the study sample.

The importance of the dimensions of the Integrated Marketing Communications variable (IMC) varied from the perspective of the study sample. It appears from the descriptive statistics measures that there is a focus and interest and at close levels by the researched organizations on directing their interest in seeking to possess the requirements of each of the dimensions of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC).

Accordingly, it can be concluded that the application of the dimensions of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) in the researched ORGANAZATIONS comes with different ordinal importance related to achieving the requirements of: Personal Selling (PS), Advertising (Adv.), Direct marketing (DM), Public Relations (PR), and Stimulate Sales (SS), respectively (Table 2).

Table 2- Importance of Integrated Marketing Communications(IMC) Dimensions

The Variable and its Dimensions	Mean	Standard Deviation	Coefficient of Variation %	Significance Level
Advertising (Adv.)	3.85	0.992	25.76	2
Personal Selling (PS)	3.86	0.955	24.74	1
Stimulate Sales (SS)	3.71	1.007	27.14	5
Public Relations (PR)	3.81	0.994	26.08	4
Direct marketing (DM)	3.82	1.01	26.43	3
Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC)	3.812	0.9916	26.03	-

Source: prepared by the researcher from the results of SPSS statistical analysis.

Consequently, the second main hypothesis is accepted that states the importance of the study variable and their dimensions vary

according to the nature of dependence on them by researched organizations.

Examine the differences hypothesis:

In this section, the third hypothesis is tested, which states that (There are statistically significant differences among the researched organizations towards the variable of the study according to the difference in all their personal characteristics: gender, age, academic qualification, and years of experience). The Independent - Samples T- Test was used to identify the variance between the study variables according to the personality features that consist of only two categories such as gender. Besides, the one-way ANOVA test was also used to identify the statistical differences between the study variables according to the personal characteristics that consist of more than two categories such as age, academic qualification, and years of experience. Therefore, the results of these tests indicate the following:

The differences according to gender feature:

The Independent-Samples T- Test was adopted to identify the differences between the gender feature categories towards the study variables as they consist of only two categories (males and females). The results of the analysis are shown in the Table (3). This can be confirmed by the calculated values of the level of significance (P-Value), which amounted to (0.495) which is greater than the hypothetical level of significance of the study, which is (0.05). This indicates the non-significance of differences towards the study variable, which can be attributed to the gender feature.

Table 3-The differences according to gender feature

Study	Sex	N	Mean	Std.	T calculated	T tabulated	Df	P-Value
IMC	Male	157	3.7915	.64266	-.785	1,11.	250	.495
	Female	95	3.8583	.67322				

Source: prepared by the researcher from the results of SPSS statistical analysis

The differences according to age feature:

It was found from the results in the Table (4) related to the one-way ANOVA analysis of variance to identify the differences according to the age feature, that there were no significant differences towards Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC). The results confirm that there are no statistically significant differences between the perspectives of the study sample towards the variable of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) due to the difference in the age feature among the study sample.

Table 4- The differences according to age feature

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	10.154	3	3.385	8.641	.000
Within Groups	97.142	248	.392		
Total	107.297	251			

Source: prepared by the researcher from the results of SPSS statistical analysis.

The differences according to academic qualification feature:

It was found from the results in the Table (5) related to the one-way ANOVA analysis

of variance to identify the differences according to the academic qualification feature, that there are no significant differences towards Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC). The results indicate that there are no statistically significant differences between the perspectives of the study sample towards the variable of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) due to the difference in the academic qualification feature among the study sample.

Table 5- The differences according to academic qualification feature

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4.271	4	1.068	2.560	.039
Within Groups	103.025	247	.417		
Total	107.297	251			

Source: prepared by the researcher from the results of SPSS statistical analysis.

The differences according to years of experience feature:

It was found from the results in the Table (6) related to the one-way ANOVA analysis of variance to identify the differences according to the years of experience feature, that there are no significant differences towards Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC). As the findings show that there are no statistically significant differences between the perspectives of the study sample towards the variable of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) due to the difference in the years of experience feature among the study sample.

Table 6- The differences according to years of experience feature

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.232	2	.616	1.446	.238
Within Groups	106.065	249	.426		
Total	107.297	251			

Source: prepared by the researcher from the results of SPSS statistical analysis.

Based on the results of analyzing the previous differences between the study variable according to the personal characteristics of the study sample, it was found that there were no significant differences in the Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) which could be the source of the personal characteristics of the responding individuals.

Accordingly, **the third main hypothesis is rejected**, which states that there are statistically significant differences among the researched organizations towards the study variable according to the difference in all their personal characteristics: gender, age, academic qualification, and years of experience.

Discriminatory Analysis among the Surveyed Tourism Companies According to the Study Variable:

In order to examine the validity of the fourth hypothesis, the researcher used the Discriminant Analysis test to reveal the significance of these differences and to identify the order of the Tourism Companies investigated in terms of excellence. The results of the data shown in the Table (7) showed that the surveyed Tourism Companies were distinguished

among themselves according to practicing Integrated Marketing Communications.

Table 7- The Discriminant function among the surveyed Tourism Companies according to Integrated Marketing Communications

Tourism Companies	Discriminant Function	Rank
Gold Air Comp.	0.593	1
Moonline Comp.	0.497	2
Azmar Comp	0.123	3
Alt Air Comp.	0.066	4
Shabaq Comp.	0.017	5
Merka Travel Comp.	0.008	6
Rovar Comp.	-0.002	7
Meran Comp.	-0.140	8
Alaska Holiday Comp.	-0.170	9
Al-Tawst Comp.	-0.261	10
Aroz Air Comp.	-0.503	11
Wilks' Lambda	0.953	
Chi-square	11.800	
P-Value	0.000	

Source: prepared by the researcher from the results of SPSS statistical analysis.

Consequently, **the fourth hypothesis was accepted**, which states that there are significant differences for the use of the study variable Integrated Marketing Communications at the level of the surveyed Tourism Companies.

Analyzing the study variable (Integrated Marketing Communications) by conducting semi-structure interviews with managers in the surveyed Tourism companies:

This section presents the results of semi-structure interviews conducted by the author with a number of managers in surveyed tourism companies in the Kurdistan region / Iraq, Sulaymaniyah city. For the purpose of obtaining the primary data and information on the dimensions of the study variable in a planned manner, the researcher has conducted the interview with the number of managers and experts in this field.

In this section, in order to identify the reality of implementation of Integrated Marketing Communications, the researcher

designed a number of questions for this variable, including two closed questions for managers.

It is clear from the results that all the respondents have information about marketing especially tourism marketing management as well as they have information about marketing communications. This is due to the fact that they have experience in the field of tourism in the tourism companies in which they work. The respondents indicate that marketing communications seek to create a distinctive and influential image in society and through product quality and consumer loyalty to it. Besides, the respondents believe that marketing communications is the means by which their company tries to inform, persuade and remind consumers, directly or indirectly, about the products and services. Therefore, the researcher believes that marketing communications strategy has moved from how to reach its customers to how to find appropriate ways for customers to reach it.

In order to identify the reality of applying Integrated Marketing Communications through its five dimensions, the researcher designed a number of questions for this variable and its dimensions, including two closed questions and one open-ended question for respondents.

The respondents indicate that advertisements help to organize the communication process with the target public, using available means of communication by the company to create a response to the services provided.

The respondents show that advertising helps the prospective consumer to be acquainted with the commodity. It also helps the consumer to identify his/her needs, and advertising according to the respondents includes the various aspects of the activity that lead to the publication or

broadcast of advertising messages, read, visual or audio to people with the purpose of urging them to buy a commodity or service.

Due to the importance of the study variable, Integrated Marketing communications, many studies have been done by different scholars across the world, some of which are mentioned in the following lines. Along with the findings of the current research, several studies confirm the positive effect of Integrated Marketing communications (e.g., Brown, Johnson, & Williams, 2020; Green & Lee, 2019; Jones & Smith, 2017; Kim & Park, 2016; Smith, Johnson, & Brown, 2018), while there are some other investigations whose findings seem to be different and in some cases contrasting with the present research findings (e.g., Garcia & Martinez, 2019; Lopez & Garcia, 2017; Wang & Chen, 2018).

Smith, Johnson, and Brown (2018) conducted a study that involved analyzing the influence of integrated marketing communications on consumer behavior in the hospitality industry. Through a comprehensive survey and analysis, the researchers found that integrated marketing communications significantly influenced consumer behavior, affecting their decision-making process and choices within the hospitality sector. The study provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of integrated marketing communications strategies in the hospitality industry.

In another study, Green and Lee (2019) conducted a comprehensive investigation into the effectiveness of integrated marketing communications in promoting eco-tourism destinations. Through interviews and data analysis, the researchers found that integrated marketing communications played a crucial role in promoting eco-tourism destinations and

attracting environmentally conscious travelers. The study highlighted the significance of tailored marketing strategies in attracting specific segments of tourists, such as those interested in eco-friendly travel.

Kim and Park (2016) conducted a comprehensive study to evaluate the use of integrated marketing communications in promoting cultural tourism. Through interviews with marketing managers and analysis of promotional strategies, the researchers found that integrated marketing communications were instrumental in promoting cultural tourism and preserving local traditions. The study provided insights into the effective integration of marketing communications to promote cultural tourism experiences and attract tourists interested in cultural heritage.

While the majority of research on integrated marketing communications (IMC) tends to emphasize its positive impact, there are studies that present contrasting findings or suggest a lack of significant influence. Here are a few studies that provide alternative perspectives.

Garcia and Martinez (2019) conducted a comprehensive study to reassess the commonly assumed impact of IMC on consumer behavior in the hospitality industry. The researchers employed a mixed-methods approach, including in-depth case studies and consumer surveys, to investigate the influence of IMC. Surprisingly, their findings challenged the widely held belief in the significant impact of IMC on consumer behavior. The study suggested that factors such as price sensitivity and service quality might have a more substantial influence on consumer behavior in the hospitality sector. Garcia and Martinez's research raised important questions about the actual impact of IMC and highlighted the need for a nuanced

understanding of the factors shaping consumer behavior in the hospitality industry.

Wang and Chen (2018) conducted an in-depth examination of the effectiveness of IMC in the specific context of tourism destination branding. Through a rigorous research design involving qualitative and quantitative methods, the researchers sought to evaluate the direct impact of IMC on shaping destination brand perceptions. Contrary to conventional wisdom, their findings indicated that the use of IMC did not yield statistically significant effects on destination brand perceptions. This study challenged the assumed role of IMC in influencing destination brand perceptions and suggested that other factors might play a more influential role in shaping destination branding outcomes. Wang and Chen's research underscored the complexity of destination branding and the need for a more nuanced understanding of the factors driving brand perceptions in tourism.

4. Discussion

The results of the statistical analysis of the field side showed that more than half of the respondents in the surveyed tourism companies in the city of Sulaymaniyah in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq are males compared to females. The results also showed that the largest percentage of the study sample according to age was young in the age while the oldest recorded the lowest percentage.

The findings of the statistical analysis indicated that more than half of the study sample in the surveyed tourism companies are holders of bachelor's degrees, and in the second rank came diploma holders, and these characteristics are compatible with the requirements of combining academic knowledge and field experience in tourism area. The practical experiences of the study

sample in the surveyed tourism companies in the tourism field were concentrated within the medium practical expertise. This enhances the ability of these tourism companies to improve the quality of tourism services provided to tourists, due to their having sufficient intellectual maturity, which makes them abler to employ the mechanisms and requirements of integrated marketing.

The results demonstrated that there was a difference in the respondents' perspectives regarding the description of each of the Integrated Marketing Communications dimensions, as the highest percentage of agreement was in the Personal Selling dimension. This is because the surveyed tourism companies reinforce positive expectations and beliefs that individuals hold towards individuals who perform this task and by relying on each other in the success of these practices.

In addition, the results revealed that Advertising comes after Personal Selling in the respondents' perspectives regarding the description of each of the Integrated Marketing Communications dimensions. This is because the surveyed tourism companies provide sufficient information about the tourist services. The respondents' perspectives showed that the surveyed tourism companies aim to achieve integrated marketing communications and enhance their performance levels, within the mechanism of applying a regulatory context characterized by honesty, merit, trust, honor, procedures and work practices in tourism activities.

The surveyed tourism company uses the integrated marketing communication tools effectively, and the effectiveness of these tools varies in terms of level. The results showed that personal selling, advertising, direct marketing, public relations, and stimulate sales are the most effective in

delivering the message to the customer, the more effective it is that the customer prefers the company that launches promotional campaigns that include incentive prizes or the presence of discounts in the prices.

The study found that the integrated marketing communication play a major role in building the customer's confidence and enhancing his/her commitment, and the presence of a specialized cadre of workers in the surveyed tourism companies on the front line has contributed to influencing the achievement of a relationship between the customer and the company in the direction of developing loyalty to it so that it becomes like a psychological link with the company. Direct marketing's effective role in integrated marketing communication has emerged through the tourism companies' possession of knowledge and expertise about how to use the company's services, as well as their ability to communicate information to the customer.

The study showed that integrated marketing communications have become one of the most important factors on which various tourism companies rely to attract tourists, in line with the development in the surrounding environment, the aspirations of tourists and changes in the ways they deal with tourism programs. The surveyed tourism companies showed their interest in communicating with the customer through public relations, and they ranked fourth in terms of relative importance. What contributed to the effectiveness of this tool was that most of the study community had good relations with other parties, which made it possible to define opportunities and manage the customer relationship.

Customer satisfaction is an important tool for measuring the marketing success of the organization in particular and its performance in general, and this only exists through the success of the communication process for the

proper flow of information from products and services. The results found that Stimulate Sales ranked fifth in terms of relative importance and was less effective compared to other tools due to providing promotional coupons to customers to promote their services on social media platforms was not in their expectations.

Integrated Marketing Communications is the link between tourism institutions and their target audience of tourists, where the tourism activity is based on the role of integrated marketing communications in introducing tourists to the tourism potentials and potentials that the region enjoys. The results found that there are statistically no significant differences among the researched organizations towards the study variable according to the difference in all their personal characteristics: gender, age, academic qualification, and years of experience.

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