



Influence of Integrated Marketing Communication Strategies on Patronage of Hospitality Organisations in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) strategies on customer patronage in selected hospitality organisations in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Increasing competition within the hospitality sector has necessitated the adoption of coordinated communication strategies that ensure consistency and effectiveness in reaching target audiences. A quantitative survey research design was adopted, and data were collected from customers across the three senatorial districts of the state (Uyo, Eket, and Ikot Ekpene), with 128 questionnaires administered per district. Of the 384 questionnaires administered, 375 valid responses were retrieved, representing a 97.6% response rate. Instrument reliability was established using the split-half technique adjusted with the Spearman-Brown prophecy formula, yielding a coefficient of 0.72. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including regression analysis. Findings reveal that advertising, sales promotion, and public relations significantly influence customer patronage, with advertising emerging as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.05$). Sales promotion ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.05$) and public relations ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.05$). The regression model was statistically significant, $F(3,371) = 134.25$, $p < 0.001$, with the three IMC strategies jointly explaining 52.0% of the variance in customer patronage ($R^2 = 0.520$). The study concludes that IMC is a critical strategic tool for enhancing patronage in the hospitality industry and recommends a data-driven and integrated approach to communication management.

Keywords: integrated marketing communication, customer patronage, hospitality industry, advertising, sales promotion, public relations

Introduction

In today's competitive business environment, Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) has emerged as a key strategy, especially in service-oriented industries where customer perception can determine organisational success (Durelia, 2018; Gordon-Isasi et al., 2021). IMC involves aligning different communication tools such as advertising, sales promotion, and public relations so that organisations can present a unified and convincing message to their target audience (Duncan & Everett, 2020; Elrod & Fortenberry, 2020). Within the hospitality sector, where customer experience and brand image heavily influence decision-making, effective communication plays a vital role in attracting new customers and retaining existing ones (Ndizera, 2018; Ngan & Thanh, 2022).

In Nigeria, the hospitality industry has expanded considerably in recent years. This growth is largely driven by urban development, increased local tourism, and a rising demand for both leisure and business-related services (Fagbolu et al., 2022; Omodero, 2019). As a result, competition has become more intense, particularly in areas such as Akwa Ibom State, where the number of hotels, restaurants, and recreational centres continues to increase (Eneyo, 2018; Onyike



& Orga, 2022). To remain competitive, many of these organisations are turning to IMC strategies as a way to distinguish themselves and strengthen customer patronage (Adebiyi & Bello, 2018; Usani et al., 2021).

Even with this growing reliance on IMC, there is still no clear consensus on how effective these strategies are in influencing customer patronage. Much of the existing research tends to focus on individual elements of communication such as advertising or sales promotion rather than examining how they work together (Anyadighibe et al., 2021; Martey et al., 2022). Some studies highlight advertising as a strong driver of customer awareness and patronage (Aransyah et al., 2020), while others point to sales promotion as a tool for encouraging immediate purchases (Gardener, 2022). Public relations has also been recognised for its role in building lasting relationships with customers (Etuk, 2018). However, fewer studies have explored how these components interact within a fully integrated framework, particularly in the Nigerian hospitality context (Egwuenu & Aliku, 2018; Wantara & Prasetyo, 2023).

Another concern in the literature is the lack of strong theoretical foundations in many IMC studies. In several cases, researchers do not clearly explain how communication efforts influence customer attitudes and behaviour (Gordon-Isasi et al., 2021). The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) offers a useful explanation by showing how individuals process persuasive messages through either deep (central) or superficial (peripheral) routes (Sudarma et al., 2022). Despite its relevance, this model has not been widely applied in studies focusing on hospitality marketing in Nigeria (Egwuonwu, 2017; Oluwafemi & Adebiyi, 2018).

Against this background, the present study investigates how key IMC strategies such as advertising, sales promotion, and public relations affect customer patronage in selected hospitality organisations in Akwa Ibom State. By focusing on customers' perspectives and grounding the analysis in established theory, the study aims to provide clearer insights into how coordinated communication efforts influence consumer behaviour in a competitive service environment. It further evaluates the relative contributions of each IMC component and offers evidence-based recommendations to improve marketing practices in the hospitality sector. Ultimately, the findings are expected to contribute to both academic understanding and practical decision-making in emerging market settings (Knight & Fletcher, 2022; Cavusgil, 2021).

Statement of the Problem

Hospitality businesses in Akwa Ibom State are facing strong competition, so they must work hard to attract and keep customers if they want to stay in business (Eneyo, 2018; Onyike & Orga, 2022). Because of this, many of them spend money on different ways of communicating with customers, such as advertising, sales promotions, and public relations. These methods are used to inform customers about their services, create interest, and encourage them to choose one hotel or restaurant over another (Adebiyi & Bello, 2018; Usani et al., 2021). However, even though these communication methods are widely used, it is still not very clear which one actually influences customers the most in this area. Most past studies have looked at advertising, sales promotion, or public relations separately, instead of studying them together to see how they compare in real situations (Anyadighibe et al., 2021; Egwuenu & Aliku, 2018). This makes it harder for businesses to know which strategy is really working best. Also, there is not enough research that focuses specifically on Akwa Ibom State to show how these marketing methods actually lead to real customer decisions in hotels and other hospitality businesses (Aniebiet & Unyime, 2023; Ndizera, 2018). Because of this, managers often do not have clear, local evidence



to guide their marketing decisions. For this reason, this study looks at how advertising, sales promotion, and public relations affect customer patronage in selected hospitality organisations in Akwa Ibom State, using real local data to help explain what works best.

Objective of the Study

The main objective is to examine the influence of IMC strategies on customer patronage in hospitality organisations in Akwa Ibom State. The specific objectives are to:

1. Determine the influence of advertising on customer patronage.
2. Examine the influence of sales promotion on customer patronage.
3. Assess the influence of public relations on customer patronage.

Literature Review

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) and Customer Patronage

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) simply means using different ways of communicating with customers such as adverts, promotions, and public relations in a coordinated and consistent way so that customers receive one clear message about a business (Duncan & Everett, 2020; Elrod & Fortenberry, 2020). Over time, IMC has moved from being just a basic marketing activity to becoming a major strategy, especially in service industries where customers cannot physically touch the product before buying (Durelia, 2018; Gordon-Isasi et al., 2021). In the past, many studies looked at marketing tools like advertising or sales promotion separately, focusing on their individual effects. However, recent thinking shows that customers usually respond to a combination of messages from different sources, not just one (Ndizera, 2018; Ngan & Thanh, 2022). This is especially important in the hospitality industry, where what attracts customers is not a physical product but the experience and impression they get from the organisation.

In hotels and other hospitality businesses, customer patronage such as how often people return, their loyalty, and the choices they make is strongly influenced by how well and consistently a business communicates its value to them (Usani et al., 2021; Onyike & Orga, 2022). When messages from a hotel are clear and consistent across advertising, promotions, and public relations, customers are more likely to trust and choose that business again. However, research findings are still not completely consistent. Some studies suggest that using all marketing communication tools together leads to better customer patronage, while others find that one strong method alone, such as advertising or promotion, can also be very effective (Anyadighibe et al., 2021; Martey et al., 2022). Because of these mixed results, there is still a need to study this issue more closely in specific locations like Akwa Ibom State, where local business conditions may affect how customers respond to marketing communication.

Theoretical Framework: The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

The study adopts the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), originally conceptualised by Petty and Cacioppo. The ELM posits that persuasive messages are processed through two distinct routes: the central route, involving careful cognitive evaluation of message arguments, and the peripheral route, where consumers rely on superficial or emotional cues (Sudarma et al., 2022). In this study, advertising and sales promotion operate mainly through the peripheral route by attracting attention and stimulating immediate response. In the context of hospitality patronage, advertising displays and sales promotional incentives (such as discounts or eye-catching media) often act as peripheral cues. They capture attention quickly and trigger fast patronage decisions among consumers who may not engage in deep cognitive processing. While public relations



influences both trust and deeper cognitive evaluation through the central route. Public relations may shape perceptions of organisational image and credibility. By integrating the ELM, this study moves beyond descriptive variables, thereby providing a psychological explanation for how distinct IMC components influence consumer patronage behavior through combined cognitive and emotional processing mechanisms.

Methods

Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative survey research design to examine the influence of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) strategies on customer patronage in selected hospitality organisations in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The survey design was considered appropriate because it allows for the systematic collection of data from a large number of respondents and facilitates the statistical analysis of relationships between variables.

Population of the Study

The target population comprised customers of selected hospitality organisations (including hotels, restaurants, and recreational centres) across the three senatorial districts of Akwa Ibom State: Uyo, Ikot Ekpene, and Eket. The selected hospitality organisations were: Vinpy Hotels, Macaire Hotels and Resort, and Eden Hotels. These customers were considered appropriate because they possess direct experience with hospitality services and are therefore capable of evaluating the communication strategies of such organisations.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A sample size of 384 was initially determined for the study. To ensure adequate geographical representation across Akwa Ibom State, the structured questionnaires were evenly distributed across the three senatorial districts (Uyo, Eket, and Ikot Ekpene), with 128 questionnaires administered in each district. Out of the total questionnaires administered, 375 valid copies were retrieved and used for the final analysis, representing a response rate of approximately 97.6%. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select respondents who had previously patronised hospitality organisations within the study area. This approach ensured that only informed participants with relevant experience were included in the study.

Instrumentation

Data for this study were collected using a structured questionnaire developed in line with the study objectives and relevant literature. To ensure the validity of the instrument, content validity was established through expert review by specialists in marketing and research methodology. The experts carefully assessed the clarity, relevance, and adequacy of the questionnaire items in measuring the study variables. Based on their feedback, necessary modifications were made to improve the overall quality of the instrument.

The reliability of the instrument was determined using the split-half technique to assess internal consistency. The resulting score was further adjusted using the Spearman-Brown prophecy formula. The analysis produced an overall reliability coefficient of 0.72. In social science research, a reliability coefficient of 0.70 is generally considered acceptable. Since the obtained value of 0.72 exceeds this threshold, the instrument was deemed reliable for the study.

For the data collection procedure, the questionnaire was administered directly to customers at selected hospitality organisations across the three senatorial districts. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of the confidentiality of their responses. Only properly completed and valid questionnaires were considered and used for the final analysis.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were used to summarise respondent characteristics and variable distributions. Inferential statistics, specifically multiple regression analysis, were used to examine the effect of IMC strategies on customer patronage.

Model Specification and Test of Significance

To examine the influence of integrated marketing communication variables on customer patronage, a multiple linear regression model was employed. The model expresses customer patronage as a function of advertising, sales promotion, and public relations activities, and is specified as follows: $[CP_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 ADV_i + \beta_2 SP_i + \beta_3 PR_i + \epsilon_i]$

Where (CP_i) represents the level of customer patronage for respondent i ; (ADV_i) , (SP_i) , and (PR_i) denote the respective measures of advertising, sales promotion, and public relations; (β_0) is the intercept of the model, indicating the expected level of customer patronage when all explanatory variables are held constant; $(\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3)$ are the coefficients estimating the marginal effects of each independent variable on customer patronage; (ϵ_i) is the stochastic error term capturing unobserved factors affecting customer patronage. The model was estimated using ordinary least squares (OLS) technique. Statistical significance of the estimated coefficients was evaluated at the 5% level ($p < 0.05$).

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The analysis of respondents' patronage behaviour indicates that a larger proportion engage with hospitality organisations on an occasional basis ($n = 115$). This is followed by those who patronise very often ($n = 102$), while fewer respondents reported rare patronage ($n = 97$) and once-only patronage ($n = 61$). The distribution yields a weighted mean score of 2.69, suggesting a moderate level of customer patronage across the sampled population, with a tendency toward intermittent rather than consistent engagement.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 1. presents the multiple regression results examining the predictive effect of advertising, sales promotion, and public relations on customer patronage among hospitality organisations in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 1: Effect of IMC Strategies on Customer Patronage

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Unstd. (B)	Std. Error	Beta (β)	p-value	t-value
Advertising	4.21	0.68	0.412	0.042	0.45	0.001	9.81
Sales Promotion	4.08	0.72	0.355	0.045	0.38	0.003	7.89
Public Relations	3.95	0.75	0.278	0.048	0.29	0.010	5.79

Note: $R=0.721$, $R^2=0.520$, Adjusted $R^2=0.516$, $F(3,371)=134.25$, $p < 0.001$, $N=375$.

The regression analysis in Table 1 presents the effect of IMC strategies on customer patronage. The model produced a multiple correlation coefficient (R) of 0.721 and an R^2 of 0.520, indicating that approximately 52% of the variance in customer patronage of hospitality



organisations in Akwa Ibom State is explained by the combined dimensions of advertising, sales promotion, and public relations. The overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(3,371)=134.25, p<0.001$). The results show that all examined IMC dimensions advertising, sales promotion, and public relations exert a positive and statistically significant influence on customer patronage at the 0.05 significance level. Advertising emerged as the strongest factor, ($\beta = 0.45, t = 9.81, p = 0.001$), followed by Sales promotion ($\beta = 0.38, p = 0.003, t = 7.89$), and public relations ($\beta = 0.29, p = 0.010, t = 5.79$),

Discussion

The study examined the influence of integrated marketing communication (IMC) strategies on customer patronage in hospitality organisations in Akwa Ibom State, focusing on advertising, sales promotion and public relations. The findings revealed that all three strategies had statistically significant positive effects on customer patronage, although their relative contributions differed. Advertising recorded the strongest effect, followed by sales promotion and public relations. This pattern suggests that although the three communication strategies contribute to customer patronage, they may perform different functions in influencing customers' decisions to patronise hospitality organisations.

Regarding advertising, the findings showed a significant positive effect on customer patronage ($\beta = .45, p = .001$), making advertising the strongest predictor among the three IMC components examined. This finding agrees with Abimbola et al. (2020), who reported that advertising significantly influenced customer patronage-related outcomes among telecommunications subscribers in Lagos and Ogun States. The convergence suggests that advertising can contribute to customer patronage across different service industries, including telecommunications and hospitality. However, the present study extends this evidence by demonstrating the relative strength of advertising compared with sales promotion and public relations within the hospitality context. This distinction is important because evidence that advertising has a significant effect does not necessarily establish that it is more influential than other promotional strategies. Furthermore, Aniebiet and Udonde (2023), in their study of indigenous hotels in Akwa Ibom State, identified internet and interactive marketing as particularly influential in marketing performance. Although their outcome differs from customer patronage, their findings suggest that the effectiveness of hospitality communication may also depend on the channels through which promotional messages reach customers. From the perspective of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), advertising may influence customers through central processing when they evaluate information about service offerings, prices and benefits, or through peripheral cues such as attractive imagery, repetition and brand familiarity. The practical implication is that hospitality organisations should combine informative advertising with appealing and appropriately targeted messages rather than relying solely on message frequency or visual presentation.

Concerning sales promotion, the findings established a significant positive effect on customer patronage ($\beta = .38, p = .003$). Although its effect was weaker than that of advertising, sales promotion remained an important predictor of patronage in the study. This result is consistent with Abimbola et al. (2020), whose findings indicated that sales promotion contributed significantly to customer patronage-related outcomes in the telecommunications sector. It also corresponds with Aransyah et al. (2020), who found that promotional activities collectively influenced room occupancy at Mesra Business and Resort Hotel in Samarinda, Indonesia. These



findings provide converging evidence that promotional activities are relevant to customer responses in service markets. Nevertheless, a distinction must be made between the studies: Aransyah et al. examined the combined effect of promotional activities on room occupancy, whereas the present study estimated the independent contribution of sales promotion to customer patronage. Consequently, their findings support the broader relevance of promotion in hospitality but do not establish that sales promotion alone was responsible for increased occupancy. The present result adds more specific evidence of the contribution of sales promotion within the model examined. Through the ELM, discounts, special packages and other incentives may function as peripheral cues that encourage customers to make relatively quick decisions. However, the findings do not establish whether such responses translate into sustained patronage. Hospitality organisations should therefore use sales promotion strategically, combining immediate incentives with satisfactory service delivery and customer relationship initiatives to encourage repeat patronage.

With respect to public relations, the findings revealed a significant positive effect on customer patronage ($\beta = .29$, $p = .010$), although its contribution was smaller than those of advertising and sales promotion. This result is consistent with Abimbola et al. (2020), who reported a significant contribution of public relations to customer patronage-related outcomes among telecommunications subscribers. However, it contrasts with Anyadighibe et al. (2021), who found that public relations had a negative and statistically non-significant effect on the marketing of insurance services. This contrast demonstrates that the contribution of public relations should not be assumed to be uniform across service industries. Differences in the nature of the services, the outcome variables and the specific public relations activities measured may help explain the divergent findings, although these possibilities require further investigation. In hospitality, public relations may support patronage by strengthening organisational reputation, communicating credible information and fostering favourable relationships with customers and relevant communities. Nevertheless, the present study did not establish which particular public relations activities accounted for the observed effect. The ELM provides a useful explanation because credible organisational communication may encourage customers to evaluate information carefully, while a favourable reputation may also serve as a heuristic cue when they have limited information or involvement. The relatively smaller coefficient does not make public relations unimportant; rather, it indicates that its estimated contribution was lower than those of advertising and sales promotion within the present model. Hospitality managers should consequently incorporate public relations into their communication programmes while evaluating its effectiveness against clearly defined customer-related outcomes.

The combined findings showed that advertising, sales promotion and public relations explained 52% of the variation in customer patronage. This indicates that the three IMC components collectively accounted for a substantial proportion of the observed differences in patronage among the respondents. The finding is broadly consistent with Abimbola et al. (2020), who identified significant contributions of promotional strategies to customer patronage-related outcomes, and Aransyah et al. (2020), who established the collective relevance of promotional activities to hotel room occupancy. It also complements Aniebiet and Udonde's (2023) evidence on the relationship between service promotion mix strategies and marketing performance among indigenous hotels in Akwa Ibom State. However, these studies examined different outcome variables and should not be treated as statistically equivalent. The present study contributes by



showing the combined explanatory value of the three specified IMC components in relation to customer patronage in the hospitality organisations examined. The remaining 48% of unexplained variation suggests that other factors may also be relevant, including service quality, pricing, location, customer experience and online reviews. These factors were not established by the current model and should therefore be investigated rather than presented as confirmed explanations.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study established that integrated Marketing Communication strategies significantly enhance customer patronage in selected hospitality organisations in Akwa Ibom State. The finding shows that advertising, sales promotion, and public relations each contribute positively to customer patronage, with advertising having the strongest impact, followed by sales promotion and public relations. The results show that the model used in the study worked very well and is reliable. The three factors advertising, sales promotion, and public relations together explain about 52% of the changes in customer patronage. This means that more than half of the reasons why customers choose these hospitality organisations can be linked to these marketing strategies. In simple terms, the findings suggest that integrated marketing communication plays a major role in influencing customers' decisions. It shows that when organisations effectively use advertising, promotions, and public relations, they are more likely to attract and retain customers.

The study recommends that hospitality organisations should strengthen their advertising activities to help attract and retain customers, given that advertising is the strongest standardised coefficient among the three factors examined. Sales promotion should be used strategically through appropriate incentives that are relevant to customers. Public relations demonstrates a positive relationship with customer patronage; hospitality organisations should maintain and promote effective public relations activities. Managers of hospitality organisations should evaluate individual IMC strategies regularly, rather than assuming that all communication channels produce the same result. Furthermore, future research should examine additional factors that may explain customers' patronage, given that the current model explains 52.0% of the variance, leaving other factors outside the model.

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AI Use Disclosure:

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