Towards strategic integration in marketing communications in a decentralised organisational structure

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Abstract

The concept of integrated marketing communications (IMC) was developed in the early 1990s and has gained significant interest from academics and practitioners alike. Although the concept is widely known for its theme of achieving consistency in messages sent, integration of marketing communications with corporate strategy is arguably the defining construct of IMC. In contrast to the attention the concept of IMC has achieved, integration of marketing communications with corporate strategy is rarely achieved. Correspondingly, there is a gap in understanding why such successful integration remains scarce. In order to support closure of this knowledge gap, the aim of this research is to support the successful implementation of IMC at a strategic level through the development of a conceptual model that is capable of helping to overcome barriers to successful integration. The objectives of the study are therefore to explore how decisions about marketing communication activities are taken and how customer knowledge generated through marketing communication activities is used to inform business strategy decisions. The knowledge needed to fulfil the research aim was generated from a case study setting of a global company, operating a decentralised organisational structure in the healthcare industry. The resulting research findings were grouped into three thematic areas which are termed efficiency, consistency, and relationship. These thematic areas, if unmanaged, may inhibit company-wide alignment of marketing communications activities with business strategy. This thesis contributes towards facilitating integration of marketing communications with strategy by providing a conceptual model which is termed 'integration areas'. This model is based on the idea of using guiding principles for aligning marketing communication activities throughout a company. The integration area concept helps in the development of these guiding principles by providing thematic areas which should be considered in the course of this development so that integration of marketing communication activities with business strategy is achieved. Such support for guiding principles development for the purpose of achieving strategic integration of marketing communication activities has not yet been provided.

Declaration

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

Signed …………………………………   Date: 08/06/2020

Enno Frehse

Dedication

To my father, Wolfgang Frehse.

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List of abbreviations

4Ps   product, price, place, and promotion

B2B   business-to-business

B2C   business-to-consumer

CRM   customer relationship management

IMC   integrated marketing communications

IT   information technology

SI   strategic integration

1 Introduction

The research presented in this thesis is intended to support the development and further understanding of the concept of integrated marketing communications (IMC) as a strategic process. This is achieved by studying the specific setting of a company operating a decentralised organisational structure in the healthcare industry. The intention is to understand how decisions on marketing communication activities are taken in such a setting, and how decisions are influenced. In addition, the study sheds light on how customer knowledge generated through marketing communication activities is used to inform strategic business decisions. The findings present a theoretical model which may support the future implementation of IMC at a strategic level in companies.

1.1 Background of the study

Marketing communications has a history of being influenced significantly by technological changes. Control over media and the consumer shifted from large manufacturers to retailers in the 1970s as a result of the introduction of barcode scanners and computer systems, which allowed the retailers to understand customer purchase behaviour (Achenbaum & Mitchel, 1987; Schultz, 1996). The ensuing major technological upheaval heralded the advent of the internet in the middle of the 1990s, which again shifted power and control over communications, this time from retailers to consumers (Kim, Han, & Schultz, 2004; Kliatchko, 2008; Schultz, 1996). The advent of the internet influenced marketing communications in several ways. On the one hand, the erstwhile existing model of one-way mass communication targeting an unidentified audience was replaced by an interactive communications model. Based on this model, the individual consumer had the ability to talk back (Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009; Schultz, Tannenbaum, & Lauterborn, 1993). This continues to pose problems for marketers, since communication is no longer about sending general messages to an unidentified mass of people. It is about managing the stream or 'flow' (Winer, 2009) of information continuously, while ensuring at the same time that interventions by marketers do not attract negative attention from targeted audiences (Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009). In addition, the advent of the internet increased the number of possible communications channels quite significantly. In the past, few

channels were available, including television, radio, print or trade fairs, whereas the technology of the internet opened a whole new world of social media connectivity. As internet technology gradually became central to most corporate activities, such activity became a means of communication in its own right, and a means of connecting specifically with customers and other stakeholders (Rowley, 2001). This change towards communication becoming omnipresent in most corporate activities generated a need to not only align marketing communications throughout all communications channels, but also across all visible and traceable activities the company performs (Kitchen, Schultz, Kim, Han, & Li, 2004). This was seen as necessary, since ultimately it is the customer who integrates all received messages, whether intended or not (Schultz, 1996). This development led to the need to integrate all communications activities at the strategic level of a company. The advent of the internet not only generated the possibility to align all communications activities within a business strategy, it also generated the very need for it.

The concept of IMC emerged in the early 1990s (Caywood, Schultz, & Wang, 1991), even before the aforementioned advent of the internet impacted marketing communications so significantly. In its early years, IMC was mainly about integrating messages to ensure consistent communication. It was also referred to as the 'one sight – one sound' idea (Schultz & Kitchen, 2000). While few people would doubt that consistent messaging is beneficial, there has never been any shared understanding of the concept of IMC (Kliatchko, 2005). A single, unified, and agreed definition remains elusive, despite developments towards such a universal definition (Kitchen, 2017). Kliatchko (2005), for example, in an attempt to provide a definition, identified two major similarities in relation to various academic streams that are concerned with IMC. He argued that IMC is about coordination and the consistency of messages and channels, and that IMC is a strategic approach to planning. As a consequence of the lack of an agreement on a definition, several conceptual models in relation to IMC have been proposed by a number of authors seeking to capture its essence. Schultz and Kitchen (2000), for example, outlined the four-stage process model. Kliatchko (2008) referred to the four pillars of IMC, which consist of stakeholders, content, channels, and results. Fill (2002) focused his establishment model of IMC on four levels which need to be reached in order to establish IMC. These are promotional coordination, functional coordination, cultural shift and, finally, IMC. Pickton and

Broderick (2005) developed the 'IMC RABOSTIC planning model', focusing company efforts on major planning steps that need to be taken. These steps are research and analysis, audiences, budget, objectives, strategy, tactics, implementation, and control. These planning steps form the acronym behind the name of the model. The underlying concept used for this study is the four-stage process model from Schultz and Kitchen (2000), simply because it is in widespread use and has been embraced by researchers (Edmiston-Strasser, 2009; Henninger, Alevizou, & Oates, 2017; Holm, 2006; Orazi, Spry, Theilacker, & Vredenburg, 2017).

The four-stage process model starts with the tactical coordination of messages at stage one. Stage two demands development of an 'outside-in' view. Stage three refers to building the necessary information technology (IT) databases, for example, with customer and market data, and stage four refers to the integration of all marketing communication activities into a business strategy (Schultz & Kitchen, 2000).

1.1.1 Background of the studied company

The company that is the focus of this case study is a multinational corporation which operates in several industries but has a strong focus in its portfolio on the healthcare industry. Sales to this customer segment regularly make up approximately almost two billion euros per year. Within this segment, the company provides hospitals, as the major customer, around the globe with medical devices, accessories, consumables and corresponding services, as well as maintenance. Major medical devices which are developed, produced, and sold by the company include anaesthesia machines, ventilators, monitoring equipment, incubators, and medical lights, to name just a few. The company itself operates its own decentralised and locally empowered sales and service structure in more than 50 countries around the globe. If the company's dealer network is included, then at least parts of its product and service portfolio are marketed in over 190 countries in total. The decentralised sales and service structure consists of more than 50 legal entities – also called subsidiaries – which are located in the most relevant and easily accessible markets for the company. These legal entities which are spread across the globe are all part of the multinational structure of the company, which has its headquarters in Germany. The subsidiaries sell the company's products and services mostly direct to hospitals in the countries in which

they are located. The company has a corporate marketing department located at German headquarters which has the responsibility for corporate marketing communications. Similarly, each of the company's subsidiaries has its own marketing team, which is responsible for local marketing and marketing communications. It should be noted that the number of marketing personnel per subsidiary roughly corresponds to the total size of each subsidiary. In the case of a very small subsidiary, a single employee may be solely responsible for everything concerning marketing. The data collection for the case study outlined in this thesis has been conducted with employees from six of the company's European subsidiaries.

1.2   Rationale for the study

Despite the fact that IMC's defining element is its strategic process (Kerr & Patti, 2015; Kliatchko, 2005), academic research on IMC integration with strategy is limited. A number of IMC-related studies dealt with tactical or operational issues like implementation (Ebren, Kitchen, Aksoy, & Kaynak, 2006; Gurau, 2008; Kitchen & Schultz, 1999; Kitchen, Schultz, et al., 2004) and general barriers to implementation (Duncan & Everett, 1993; Eagle & Kitchen, 2000; Schultz, Chu, & Zhao, 2016). Some looked at understanding and perceptions of IMC (Burgmann, 2007; Garber & Dotson, 2002; McArthur & Griffin, 1997). The need to integrate marketing communications with business strategy (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2015) has also been considered based on the argument that strategies consisting of a collaboration of several communication functions result in synergies which improve business results in the long term (Ewing, 2009; Kitchen & Burgmann, 2015; Schultz, 1996). Out of the 87 studies reviewed for this thesis, 13 generally touch upon issues of business strategy, and seven of these (Fischer, 2014; Fuchs, Mifflin, Miller, & Whitney, 2000; Holm, 2006; Kerr & Patti, 2015; Low, 2000; Mortimer & Laurie, 2017; Niemann-Struweg, 2014) have a dedicated focus on integrating marketing communications with strategy, which is generally referred to in this thesis as 'strategic integration' (SI) (Fuchs et al., 2000). These studies are limited in terms of generating a full understanding of integrating marketing communications into business strategies, either due to the research method employed, the viewpoint taken, or the focus of the study. The specific limitations of these studies are discussed in the following paragraph.

A quantitative study by Low (2000) attempted to measure the degree of integration and the consistency of communications efforts in the context of business strategy. Due to its quantitative nature, and its focus on issues like measurement, the study is limited in its ability to fully understand the organisations that are considered as regards SI. Another study on SI (Fuchs et al., 2000) collected practical evidence on SI via case studies of client firms. Fuchs et al.'s (2000) study developed an understanding of how companies successfully integrate market positioning with execution capabilities. SI, as discussed by Fuchs et al. (2000), therefore focuses less on integrating marketing communications with strategy, and more on integrating all business activities in general into a business strategy. A study by Holm (2006), which also focused on the issue of SI, is based on a thorough literature review and a review of case studies of four large Swedish companies. However, Holm's (2006) study is not based on an analysis of practical data taken from companies. The study focused on understanding barriers to developing IMC from the tactical to the strategic level as outlined by Schultz and Kitchen (2000) in their four-stage process model. Fischer (2014) looked at hospital positioning and IMC and specifically at how hospitals position themselves as healthcare providers. She sought to understand which channels and content they can use in their communications strategy to find a selection that fits their positioning most effectively. Fischer's study integrates company (hospital) strategy with marketing communications and is focused on achieving SI. The study has some similarity to Holm's (2006) research since it is based on a literature review and corresponding qualitative content analysis; however, it is not based on data collected directly from companies or hospitals. Niemann-Struweg (2014) focused on the implementation of strategic integrated communications and developed a corresponding conceptual model. The model seeks to ensure that the organisation's strategic intent drives all communication, and that alignment between communication and the company's activities is ensured. In this sense, the study supports the development and implementation of SI. The findings are based on in-depth interviews, but the viewpoint taken is limited to advertising agencies, since no client company representatives took part in interviews. Kerr and Patti (2015) extended the scope of SI by providing a working definition. Additionally, they operationalised SI by developing it into a management tool. To achieve this, they employed the Delphi study technique to develop a measurement tool for SI on the basis of the opinions of a group of experts, comprising both

academics and industry stakeholders. Mortimer and Laurie (2017) evaluated the barriers to IMC implementation and examined how, at a strategic level, these are perceived by companies. They collected data using an online questionnaire.

Other SI-related research has focused on strategy-related issues like planned brand identity (Melewar, Foroudi, Gupta, Kitchen, & Foroudi, 2017), fitting social media into marketing communications strategy (Killian & McManus, 2015), the influence of IMC as a strategic process based on traditional approaches (Kitchen, Kim, & Schultz, 2008), an assessment of IMC's strategic importance (Eagle, Kitchen, & Bulmer, 2007), how companies assign responsibility for developing their communications strategy (Phelps, Harris, & Johnson, 1996), and the value of IMC as a strategic process (Duncan & Everett, 1993). Despite the range of studies on SI in the context of IMC, there is a clear gap in academic research regarding an important aspect of IMC: there is a lack of focus on gathering practical, in-depth, and rich qualitative data directly from client firms to understand how decisions on marketing communications activities are taken. In this sense there has been no research to date which has looked at how decisions on marketing communications activities are influenced by business strategy in the specific setting of a decentralised organisational structure.

There are areas other than SI which have been the focus of IMC research. IMC has, for example, been extensively researched in the context of advertising agencies by several authors (Kitchen, Schultz, et al., 2004; Laurie & Mortimer, 2011; Schultz et al., 2016; Schultz & Kitchen, 1997). This is despite the fact that IMC programmes have to be implemented by clients (Mortimer & Laurie, 2017). The emergence of a growing trend suggests that in recent years less focus has been placed on the agency point of view and more focus has been placed on client perceptions (Henninger et al., 2017; Luxton, Reid, & Mavondo, 2017; Mortimer & Laurie, 2017). However, looking at the entire time period since IMC's founding in the early 1990s, the focus on agency perspectives remains salient, given that it is the company – and not the agency – which benefits most from successful IMC implementation. IMC has also been extensively researched by means of employing surveys or questionnaires as preferred research methods (Burgmann, 2007; Duncan & Everett, 1993; Gabrielli & Balboni, 2010; Low, 2000; Luxton et al., 2017; McArthur & Griffin, 1997; Reid, 2003; Reinold & Tropp, 2012; Schultz et al., 2016). Much of the existing research is

quantitative in nature and features surveys with open-ended questions, the results of these studies are limited in their ability to illuminate the complexities of IMC as a result of the chosen research methods. The identified geographical focus of IMC-related research and its contemplation of previous research is mainly on the USA (33 studies) and the UK (18 studies), followed by Australia (10 studies) and New Zealand (6 studies). Only four studies focused on companies residing in, or headquartered in, Germany (Burgmann, 2007; Caemmerer, 2009; Reinold & Tropp, 2012; Šerić, 2017).

Based on this variation in geographic focus, there is naturally a language focus on native English-speaking countries for IMC-related research (Burgmann, 2007). Apart from the research focus on advertising agencies, there is no specific focus on any single industry which can be observed from the literature review on IMC. Some examples that illustrate the variety of industries which have been researched in IMC-related case studies include: the packaged goods industry (Low & Mohr, 1999); paper, jet engine, photography, computer, retailing and health industries (Fuchs et al., 2000); the trucking industry (Garber & Dotson, 2002); the services industry (Grove, Carlson, & Dorsch, 2007); energy conservation (Peltier, Schibrowsky, & Schultz, 2003); software and insurance industries (Zahay, Peltier, Schultz, & Griffin, 2004); the tobacco industry (Dewhirst & Davis, 2005); the automotive industry (Sneath, Finney, & Close, 2005); shipbuilding (Hall & Wickham, 2008); education (Kerr, Schultz, Patti, & Kim, 2008); banking (Adesanoye, 2019; Reinold & Tropp, 2012); the hospitality sector (Porcu, del Barrio-García, Alcántara-Pilar, & Crespo-Almendros, 2019; Porcu, del Barrio-García, Kitchen, & Tourky, 2019; Šerić, 2017); and the healthcare industry including health services (Elrod & Fortenberry, 2020; Fischer, 2014). To the author's best knowledge, the healthcare industry has not yet been a significant focus of a detailed IMC study.

Social influence theory postulates that individuals within a social network are influenced by other actors from this very network with the intent that each individual conforms with the expectations of the community (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). Within a decentralised structure, power and control are given to the subsidiaries which are closer to the customer than a centralised headquarters (Mintzberg, 1979). The downside of such a structure is lost coordination across these subsidiaries (Rumelt, 2012). Implementing IMC in such a context can be assumed to be problematic,

because there are many types of communication that have to be made consistent (Schultz & Kitchen, 2000). This is particularly true of the initial stages of Schultz and Kitchen's (2000) four-stage process model, which deals with message consistency. However, even message consistency cannot be achieved if several subsidiaries send conflicting messages to the customer. In addition, a company's subsidiaries may operate in different countries and messages nowadays frequently cross national boundaries, so that consistency in addressing customers is of utmost priority. Similarly, non-consistency in business strategies can be considered problematic, since each subsidiary may decide individually which activities will be performed, and how. It seems unlikely that global alignment between social actors happens or is established naturally within a global company. It seems more likely that locally, in each country, headquarters-independent groups are established. According to social influence theory, the social actors of a local group influence each other so that individuals perform consistently in line with the behaviour of the local group (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). This can be seen as problematic where the aim is to ensure global consistency of a company's messages and activities. Making decisions on marketing activities is therefore likely to be influenced more by a local group of social actors than by a centrally headquartered marketing or strategy department, leading to inconsistency of activities across the group of subsidiaries. One possible way out of this dilemma is outlined by Challagalla, Murtha, and Jaworski (2014). They developed a concept called the 'marketing doctrine', which in essence is a heuristics-based or, more precisely, guiding principles-based approach to guide decision making.

The marketing doctrine concept and its underlying idea of using guiding principles in widespread organisational structures is capable of overcoming the consistency–flexibility conundrum described by Challagalla et al. (2014). Guiding principles are decision-making guides which possess an heuristic character but which carry, in addition, emotional content which is explicitly shared amongst a group of people (Oliver & Jacobs, 2007). Wise implementation of a guiding principles-based approach may retain the benefits of staying flexible in local decision making, while maintaining a core of consistency across several subsidiaries. Guiding decision making is therefore an important aspect in implementing an IMC approach successfully in a

global company which operates a decentralised sales and service subsidiary structure.

Organisational structure has been identified as one barrier to successful IMC implementation (Kerr & Patti, 2015). Despite this finding, relatively few IMC-related studies have been conducted with a dedicated focus to comprehensively understand the issues and barriers which such organisational structures pose for IMC implementation. The few examples of research on organisational structure that do exist include an investigation regarding the impact of IMC on organisational structures by exploring possible management structures for advertising agencies and their impact on enabling IMC (Gronstedt & Thorson, 1996). In a wider context that looks beyond organisational structure, Gronstedt (1996) examined how total quality management-based processes, such as teamwork and documentation, support the integration of several communication departments of large client companies. In another study on organisational issues regarding the international implementation of IMC through advertising agencies, Gould, Lerman, and Grein (2000) focused on the degree of centralised control by advertising agencies and they looked at the impact of implementing IMC. The resulting finding was that global IMC coordination may be applied to both centralised and decentralised organisational structures in advertising agencies. Kallmeyer and Abratt (2001) also focused on organisational impacts in advertising agencies looking specifically at South African agencies and organisational impacts due to a client requesting IMC-related activities. These studies tend to focus on the impacts of IMC on organisational structure and on the impact of organisational structure on IMC implementation. Most focus on the perspective of the advertising agency and they therefore overlook the client perspective.

A research gap regarding IMC implementation is therefore evident. No study to the author's best knowledge has yet focused on the practical issues regarding implementing IMC at a strategic level in a decentralised organisational structure. The specific issues caused by this setting have also yet to be examined. IMC-related studies widely fail to explore how decisions about marketing communications activities are taken, and how these influence companies operating a decentralised organisational structure. There is a lack of IMC-related studies of companies originating in Germany, and the healthcare industry has not yet been a significant

focus of IMC research. Regarding the typical research methods employed, the majority of studies have used surveys or questionnaires for data generation, while the specific circumstances outlined above call for a deeper understanding of the practical issues faced by actors through in-depth interviews. Finally, guiding principles have not yet been examined via IMC-related research as a means of overcoming the deficiencies of a decentralised organisational structure for IMC implementation at a strategic level. This study addresses precisely this gap in academic research on IMC. The gap in academic research that was outlined in this introduction is summarised in the table below. Table 1 summarises the research gap, the evidence sources for this gap, and the contribution of this thesis to close this gap.

Table 1 - Research problem, overview

	Research problem	**Evidence for research problem**	**Contribution of this thesis**
1	IMC research focused more on the agency perspective, whereas the client perspective has been focused upon much less	Burgmann (2007); Vernuccio and Ceccotti (2015). Call for more IMC-related studies from the client perspective (Eagle et al., 2007; Kitchen, 2017; Kitchen et al., 2008; Kitchen, Schultz, et al., 2004). It is the client organisation which has to drive integration (Schultz & Kitchen, 1997)	Thesis contributes towards the client perspective by providing deep and rich qualitative data obtained from companies
2	Surveys and questionnaire as quantitative research methods have a dominant role in IMC-related research	Burgmann (2007). Examples include: Duncan and Everett (1993); McArthur and Griffin (1997); Low (2000); Reid (2003); Gabrielli and Balboni (2010); Reinold and Tropp (2012); Schultz et al. (2016); Luxton et al. (2017)	Study provides deep and rich qualitative data resulting from semi-structured interviews
3	Organisational structure is a barrier to IMC implementation, yet the specific issues which a decentralised	Schultz and Kitchen (1997); Kim et al. (2004); Mortimer and Laurie (2017). Some IMC studies deal with	The company studied operates based on a decentralised organisational structure. The subsidiary

	Research problem	Evidence for research problem	Contribution of this thesis
	organisational structure poses for IMC implementation have not been the focus of IMC research	organisational structure (see e.g., Cornelissen, 2001; Eagle & Kitchen, 2000; Gronstedt, 1996; Vernuccio & Ceccotti, 2015) but the specific issues of a decentralised structure remain under researched	perspective from decentralised operating subsidiaries was obtained by interviewing employees from those subsidiaries
4	Strategic integration of marketing communication activities as part of strategy has rarely been examined via IMC-related research. Research tends to focus on strategic integration more generally, or on integration with marketing overall	Examples of general strategic integration focused studies: Fuchs et al. (2000); Low (2000); Holm (2006); Fischer (2014); Kerr and Patti (2015); Niemann-Struweg (2014); Mortimer and Laurie (2017)	This study is about integrating marketing communication activities with strategy. It provides deep insights into how decisions on marketing communication activities are made and by which means they are influenced
5	The healthcare industry and related services have not yet been a significant area of focus in terms of IMC-related research	Fischer (2014) aimed at developing a conceptual framework for a hospital's strategic positioning. Elrod and Fortenberry (2020) place an emphasis on the importance of sending the same messages across all available communication channels in the healthcare industry	The company in the case study operates in the healthcare industry, and more specifically sells medical devices and related consumables and services to hospitals
6	Germany has not yet been the focus of IMC-related research	Few studies were identified which have either included or mostly focused on Germany: Šerić (2017); Reinold and Tropp (2012); Caemmerer (2009); Burgmann (2007)	A German company is examined which operates a decentralised organisational structure with its headquarters based in Germany
7	Very rare examination of the use of guiding principles in the	Some examples of guiding principles in an IMC context are	This study extends the idea of using guiding principles for the purpose

	Research problem	Evidence for research problem	Contribution of this thesis
	context of IMC in academic studies	identified: Peltier et al. (2003); Schultz and Schultz (2004). Usage of guiding principles and marketing in general: Challagalla et al. (2014)	of aligning marketing communication activities with strategy
8	Few studies provide an operational view and support regarding how and by which means strategic integration with marketing communication activities can be achieved in practice	No research study was identified in the course of the literature review which has focused on the practical issues relating to the implementation of IMC at a strategic level of a decentralised organisation (Frehse & Ozuem, 2018)	Provides deep insights into how decisions on marketing communication activities are taken or influenced in a decentralised operating subsidiary. The study also provides a conceptual framework which helps to integrate marketing communications into strategy

IMC integrated marketing communications

1.3   Aims and objectives

1.3.1   Research aim

The underlying aim of this research is to support the practical implementation of IMC at a strategic level by developing a new conceptual model which explains the barriers to IMC implementation from the viewpoint of the company.

The study focuses on understanding and exploring those barriers to successful integration of communication activities at a strategic level within a specific organisational structure of a company operating in the healthcare industry.

The research aim is therefore as follows:

- to develop a conceptual model that could facilitate the implementation of an integrated approach to marketing communications at a strategic level in a decentralised organisational structure in the healthcare industry.

1.3.2 Research objectives

The empirical research that has been undertaken to understand the practical barriers to IMC implementation at a strategic level was operationally driven by the following research objectives.

1) To critically review the literature regarding IMC implementation at a strategic level in a decentralised organisational structure.

2) To explore how decisions about marketing communication activities are taken in a decentralised organisational structure in the healthcare industry.

3) To explore from a decentralised organisational context how customer knowledge generated through marketing communication activities is used to inform business strategy decisions in the healthcare industry.

4) To synthesise the findings into a conceptual model that supports the practical implementation of IMC at a strategic level in a decentralised organisational structure in the context of the healthcare industry.

1.4 Summary of chapter

The defining construct of the concept of IMC is that it is a strategic process (Kerr & Patti, 2015; Kliatchko, 2005). Nevertheless, such integration of marketing communications and strategy has only rarely been achieved successfully in practice (Kitchen, 2017). This research study supports the integration of marketing communication activities with corporate strategy by providing a conceptual model which facilitates such integration across company boundaries. In order to generate the necessary data to develop the conceptual model, this research explores how decisions about marketing communication activities are taken and it further explores how customer knowledge generated through marketing communication activities is used to inform strategy decisions.

Further, the research contributes towards closing several identified gaps in the academic literature on IMC, as summarised below and as already outlined in Table 1 above:

- Client perspective on IMC is so far still under researched.
- IMC research has, so far, focused on quantitative research methods, whereas this research provides deep and rich knowledge about the situation.
- IMC research has not focused on the specific barriers which a decentralised organisational structure poses for IMC implementation.
- There is scarce IMC research on the integration with business strategy of marketing communications.
- The healthcare industry has not yet been the focus of IMC-related research.
- Few German companies have been the focus of IMC research.
- Research has not given much consideration to guiding principles as a means for overcoming obstacles in aligning marketing communications and strategy.
- There is little focus in academic research on IMC which provides an operational view on issues when deciding upon marketing communication activities.

In summary, this chapter has provided an overview of the background and rationale for the study from a theoretical perspective. It provides an introduction for the reader to understand why the study is worth conducting. The following chapter is intended to provide an overview of existing literature on IMC. It sets out to further provide an introduction to the use of heuristics and guiding principles in the context of decision making.

2 Literature review

2.1 Introduction

As outlined in the introduction chapter, this thesis sets out to generate an understanding of how decisions about marketing communication activities are taken in the specific setup of a decentralised organisational structure. In addition, the study aims to explore how customer knowledge is used to inform strategic decisions. Both objectives will contribute to the development of a conceptual model which could support IMC implementation at a strategic level. In order to understand why the practical implementation of IMC at a strategic level is of such importance, the existing literature on IMC and SI needs to be reviewed. In order to achieve an integration with strategy successfully, decisions on marketing communications activities need to be made consistent with a company's strategy (Schultz & Kitchen, 2000). Guiding decision making in the context of marketing communications and strategy is therefore an important aspect in order to achieve the research objectives. Some decision-making concepts which are considered relevant in this context, such as heuristics and guiding principles, are therefore also reviewed for the purpose of this literature review. The aim of this chapter is to facilitate an understanding of the importance of the topic and to clearly identify existing gaps in the literature.

2.2 The marketing discipline

The marketing discipline and its academic and managerial focus on marketing themes have a history of continuous change (Kerin, 1996; Kumar, 2015). Kumar (2015) identified the main themes the marketing discipline has focused on in the past two decades. After a period, which ranged roughly from 1996 to 2004, where marketing was seen as rather an expensive and resource-consuming endeavour, perceptions shifted towards interpreting marketing as an investment in future profitability. Marketing became financially accountable for its activities (Kumar, 2015). A notable marketing paradigm shift took place around 2013 which prioritised the complete integration of marketing activities with other business functions. Marketing became an integral part of corporate decision-making frameworks (Kumar, 2015). This latest shift was triggered by the increasing diversity of media channels and the

corresponding interactivity of the internet. The focus was on the effectiveness and efficiency of marketing, and there was a drive to manage and affect customer behaviours and engagement with companies (Kumar, 2015).

Parallel to these developments, a decline was observable in many companies in terms of the influence of the corporate marketing department (Webster, Malter, & Ganesan, 2005). Mortimer and Laurie (2017) noted the limited influence of marketing departments, which was seen as a barrier to implementation. The decline of influence was partially due to "[…] marketing's inability to document its contribution to business results […]" (Webster et al., 2005, p. 35), and this inability resulted in reduced marketing budgets (Webster et al., 2005). Further reasons for the decline included a focus on short-term results and noticeable shifts in sales channel power (Webster et al., 2005). The trend to judge marketing as an expensive endeavour that lacked credibility meant that it was granted less resources (Webster et al., 2005). This fits well with the resource-conscious view of marketing in the period until 2004 (Kumar, 2015). The result of this development was a trend towards the dispersion of marketing competence away from a centralised marketing headquarters towards other functions (e.g., sales) and dispersed physical locations (Webster et al., 2005). Such development is not necessarily a disadvantage, but the dispersion of competencies posed new challenges for the marketing discipline, such as the need to build and sustain quality core marketing skills and capabilities (Webster et al., 2005).

A related challenge for the marketing function is the growing gap between the demands of the market and the available marketing capabilities a firm possesses (Day, 2011). This gap is driven by an accelerated rate of change in the market, higher levels of complexity, and organisational impediments to counteract this development (Day, 2011). One of these organisational impediments to capability building in marketing is perhaps the aforementioned integration and dispersion of the marketing function. Another factor is the hypothesis that organisations are not able to keep pace with the growing amount of data to which they have access, and the corresponding mismatch with people's limited ability to manage and use this information beneficially for decision making (Day, 2011). The notion that this development leads to a decrease in the quality of decision making is founded on the

concept of information overload as suggested by Eppler and Mengis (2004). This concept is based on the idea that the quality of decisions made by an individual improves with the amount of relevant information being supplied for that decision-making process. This is only true up to a peak point where additional information can no longer be included in the decision-making process. Making more information available beyond that point results in a steep decline of decision quality (Chewning & Harrell, 1990).

The outlined gap between market demand for marketing capability and the true extent of marketing capability needs to be seen in the light of a dispersed or integrated marketing function, together with the attendant problems of the coordination of activities and skills building. The integration of marketing with other functions and the corresponding scattering of skills may result in coordination problems across units of the company. This could consequently result in inconsistencies across activities (Challagalla et al., 2014; Day, 2011; Rumelt, 2012) while pressure to respond to market demands remains high. Another related challenge for marketing decision making is the management and beneficial usage of the vast amount of available data. This is problematic in a scattered structure defined by a diversity of skill levels (Day, 2011). One resulting challenge in such an environment for the organisation is therefore to ensure quality marketing decision making across the company.

2.3 Marketing communications

Marketing communications is defined by Keller (2001, p. 823) as representing "[…] the voice of a brand and the means by which companies can establish a dialogue with consumers concerning their product offerings".

The environment in which such dialogue with company-external stakeholders takes place nowadays is not as simple in structure as it used to be (Keller, 2001). So-called 'mass media' like television and radio have significantly lost their dominance (Gronstedt & Thorson, 1996; Nowak & Phelps, 1994). These are now just one communications channel amongst many others (Keller, 2001). The term 'marketing communications' has been used over several years as an umbrella term to refer to all communications functions which are used in the process of marketing (Duncan &

Everett, 1993). The advent of the internet caused changes which made it more difficult to draw a clear boundary around a communications function, and to separate it from other parts of the company (Rowley, 2001). However, before these boundaries started to blur, marketing communications was traditionally seen as "[…] the home territory of marketers" (Rowley, 2001, p. 203). In this context, marketing communications has historically been associated with the term promotion, which is a part of the well-known 4Ps (product, price, place, and promotion) model (Hartley & Pickton, 1999; Ozuem, Howell, & Lancaster, 2008; Rowley, 2001). In the past, marketing communications focused on mass communications via traditional media like newspapers, television, and radio. The advent of the internet impacted this approach significantly (Chandra & Kaiser, 2014). While traditional media channels still exist, the technology of the internet has created a variety of new communications channels. Unlike traditional one-way marketing communication, internet technology enables interactive communication with an identifiable audience; that is, two-way communication, instead of just sending messages to an undifferentiated mass of recipients (Arnott & Bridgewater, 2002). This wider array of communications options requires better alignment of communication activities. In other words, it requires better integration of all marketing communication activities as proposed in the concept of IMC (Schultz & Kitchen, 2000).

Historically, technological advances in the 1970s shifted superiority over the marketplace – and therefore also over communications – from large manufacturers to retailers (Achenbaum & Mitchel, 1987; Schultz, 1996). Through technology, retailers gained an understanding of what was bought by whom, for example by the introduction of barcode scanners and computer systems (Schultz, 1996). Retailers reduced their dependence on the manufacturers through these developments (Achenbaum & Mitchel, 1987; Schultz, 1996). The retailers took control over the media and the consumer because the retailer had the location and inventory that each potential customer had to physically visit in order to make a purchase (Schultz, 1996). Up to the middle of the 1990s, the standard communications mix the manufacturers and retailers employed included: television, print, radio, and outdoor advertising; sales promotion; direct marketing; public relations work; and personal selling (Winer, 2009).

Mulhern (2009, p. 86) summarised how such mass communication, as the predecessor to modern marketing communications, was characterised by a few key premises:

- "Audiences can be aggregated into monolithic entities with homogenous tastes (Napoli, 2003).
- Advertising can attach itself to media content and project itself onto audiences by interrupting the delivery of that content (Malthouse, Calder, & Tamhane, 2007).
- Consumers will [to some degree] accept the intrusive delivery of commercial messages in exchange for free, or nearly free, content (Moorman, Neijens, & Smit, 2005).
- Brand messages generate brand awareness and preferences that can translate, however loosely, [in the right surroundings], into consumer spending (Tellis, 2005).
- Brand communications can be bundled into media plans that span multiple vehicles which constitute a relevant array of exposures to target consumers (Lee & Park, 2007)".

In this setting, manufacturers and retailers controlled largely what information was being delivered to audiences. More recent technological advances again shifted power, this time from the retailers towards the consumer, who gained the ability to gather, create, and communicate information, and to conduct e-commerce, based on IT (Kim, Han, & Schultz, 2004; Kliatchko, 2008; Schultz, 1996).

This shift of power towards the consumer was largely caused by the advent of the internet and the changes associated with it (Schultz, 1996). The shift happened quickly, and technology was adapted by users faster than ever before. While it took 38 years for the radio to reach 50 million users, and 13 years for television, the internet achieved this number in five years (Ellsworth & Ellsworth, 1995; Lagrosen, 2005, p. 63). Naturally, the advent of the internet and its inherent shift of power towards the consumer also significantly influenced the approach towards marketing communications, as the internet began to be incorporated into the marketing mix by advertisers from the mid-1990s (Bush, Bush, & Harris, 1998). With the rising success

of internet-related marketing activities, a corresponding shift of budgets by major marketers into new media categories took place (Winer, 2009). Traditional communications channels and the corresponding marketing budgets allocated to them were therefore expected to decline in terms of overall advertising spending (Danaher & Rossiter, 2011).

However, it is useful to understand what is driving the movement of attention towards new media. Part of the answer lies in the interactivity and corresponding opportunity for two-way communication offered by the internet (Lagrosen, 2005; Rowley, 2001; Winer, 2009). Other beneficial characteristics of the internet which drive its success include its accessibility around the clock, its ubiquity, its global availability, its enabling of individual identification and corresponding segmentation, as well as the possibility of one-to-one communication (Rowley, 2001). Sharma (2002) acknowledged the benefits of not having to depend on preferred locations for corresponding with customers. This can erase competitive advantage for some established companies (e.g., for some high street retailers). Despite these benefits of the new medium, it is not expected that traditional media will disappear. Rather, it is likely that the number of communications options will be significantly enhanced by the internet, with traditional media continuously playing a role in advertising spending (Danaher & Rossiter, 2011; Winer, 2009). Analysis suggests that 2017 was the first year when global digital advertising spending was higher than television advertising spending, with the growth rate of digital advertising spending expected to remain high, while television advertising spending is expected to remain rather stable (Kafka & Molla, 2017).

One of the biggest impacts on marketing communication caused by the advent of the internet is two-way communication or interactivity (Lagrosen, 2005). The ability to communicate with and engage customers from targeted segments through interactive functionality, delivers benefits which traditional media cannot provide (Winer, 2009). As Winer (2009, p. 109) put it, "the classic communications model […] assumed that the marketer had control of the flow of communications from the company through the media to the consumers". This control over the brand was – at least partially – lost to the consumers, who now took control of their own information flow (Winer, 2009). Kliatchko (2008) referred to a paradigm shift which has taken place: away

from the traditional sender/receiver or 'linear' model, where the consumer merely receives information, towards the 'interactive' paradigm where the marketer and the audience can both be content creators and receivers. In the second part of the 1990s, it was assumed that internet technology would provide interactivity for marketing, and that this interactivity would be focused on direct marketing (Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009). Indeed, direct marketing via the internet was partially strengthened and made more seamless by new technology (Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009). What was less anticipated was that the interactivity of the internet did not empower the marketer as much as it did the consumer (Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009; Ewing, 2009). Audiences were able to not only react to marketing offers, but could talk back, and talk to each other (Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009; Schultz, Tannenbaum, & Lauterborn, 1993). The implication is that marketers have become interlopers who cannot control the customer, but who have to ensure they fit in; their activities may otherwise be talked about and broadcasted to their disadvantage (Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009). Nevertheless, marketers still lack a clear understanding of the interactive marketplace and its implications for marketing practice. Several marketers continue to deploy communications in a mechanistic way, using the internet as IT only (Ozuem et al., 2008). The internet replaced the model of one-way mass communication with a networked information system, which is rather "[…] an open, free marketplace than the centrally controlled, top-down rigid one of mass communications" (Mulhern, 2009, p. 87).

Another important change the advent of the internet brought to marketing communications is the wide variety of communications channels from which marketing communication managers can choose (Danaher & Rossiter, 2011). "The early part of the 21st century has witnessed an explosion in the number of media that marketers can employ to reach their customers" (Winer, 2009, p. 108).

Based on the classic definition of effective communication, the sender's message will be most effective when the sender anticipates the needs and preferences of the receiver correctly (Danaher & Rossiter, 2011, p. 9; Shannon & Weaver, 1949). So, if the marketer chooses the message, the medium, and the targeted audience based on their own preferences, and not based on the preferences of the customer, the sent message will likely be ineffective in achieving its goals (Danaher & Rossiter,

2011; Lasswell, 1948). This problem was already clear for traditional media choices, but the problem has increased with the growing number of channels to choose from. It also illustrates vividly why everything the marketer does has to start with the customer in order to achieve an integrated approach to marketing communication (Shimp, 2010). For traditional media, the main problem used to be the generation of the right message, and sending this to the right target audience through one of the available channels like television, radio, or print (Rowley, 2001).

Despite several coordination issues, the possible array of decisions and choices was more limited than it is nowadays. With the advent of the internet, and its corresponding mass of available channels, the decision to use a specific channel became significantly more complex, especially when trying to align all the messages a company sends across all channels. The problem becomes even bigger when consumers create messages about the brand as well (Winer, 2009). As Danaher and Rossiter (2011, p. 34) put it, "From a marketing channels perspective, no one is in any doubt that the internet will continue to change the way that marketing is conducted". They predicted the continuous further development of marketing communication channels, which they referred to as an ongoing state of flux (Danaher & Rossiter, 2011). Integrating this variety of old and new media channels into a consistent whole for communication campaigns is therefore a problem for marketing managers (Winer, 2009). Since customers use a range of channels to inform themselves and to communicate with suppliers before a purchase decision is made (Rowley, 2001), such an integrated approach to communications is necessary, since the integration of messages happens at the customer level (Schultz, 1996). Where conflicting messages are sent, this may result in an inconsistent brand image and company image (Lee & Park, 2007). Such inconsistency could influence upcoming purchasing decisions negatively for the brand in question.

Rowley (2001) extended and differentiated the issue of the need for integration into a tactical and a strategic dimension. At the strategic level for e-business applications, she argued, the boundaries between marketing communication and business operations are getting blurred, since the business operations themselves are also a means of customer communication (Rowley, 2001). The advent of the internet has blurred the former functional boundaries of marketing communications, and it seems

impossible to draw up new boundaries (Rowley, 2001). In other words, a significant number of the entirety of a company's activities throughout all functions are now a means of communication. Mulhern (2009, pp. 85–86) summarised the magnitude of the shift from traditional advertising towards digital communications as "[…] the fundamental difference between the idea of communications being about the delivery of messages through media channels versus communications being about an electronic world of networks, algorithms and automated systems for managing the connections between information and people".

Another aspect the internet has brought to marketing communications is the desire to measure the effects of investment on online activities (Bush et al., 1998; Lagrosen, 2005; Rowley, 2001). Internet technology provides the basis for enabling this very measurement, and has allowed researchers to capture large amounts of data, even on an individual customer level (Lee & Park, 2007). This has enabled the generation and analysis of metrics such as customer lifetime value (Kumar, 2015). However, despite the obvious desire to assess the return on an investment (Lehmann, 2004), measuring the effectiveness of internet-based communications activities in practice, and linking the marketing investments made to financial performance, proves to be problematic in some cases (Kumar, 2015), and the lack of this important ability has developed into a barrier to investments in those communication activities (Bush et al., 1998). Some companies are able to establish a direct connection between their communication activities and corresponding business performance developments, like increases in sales from certain activity. Typically, in business-to-consumer (B2C) markets, this connection is easier to establish than in business-to-business (B2B) markets, since for B2B markets, the relationship with the customer normally has a longer focus, and promotional activities do not initiate a spontaneous purchase decision right away (Webster et al., 2005). There is evidence that, in cases where marketing performance can be successfully measured, firm performance and marketing stature in the firm are rising (O'Sullivan & Abela, 2007). On the other hand, B2B organisations typically collect considerable amounts of internal data which could be used to develop customer behavioural databases.

However, such activity is often prevented by a lack of collaboration between marketing, sales, and research (Schultz & Kitchen, 1997, p. 9). Correspondingly, a

lack of financial accountability is perceived to threaten the credibility and even the existence of marketing as a distinct capability (Rust, Ambler, Carpenter, Kumar, & Srivastava, 2004). To develop this discussion, Lehmann (2004, p. 73) argued that it is not only non-financial marketing metrics like awareness and attitude which need to be measured, but also financial performance. This is particularly the case if marketing wants to be taken seriously. Clark (1999), in contrast, observed a trend away from financial towards non-financial output measures for marketing. Non-financials are necessary, he argued, since financials leave some important elements of marketing performance uncaptured (Clark, 1999). In addition to the financial versus non-financial discussion, there is a considerable development towards comprehensiveness or breadth in marketing performance management systems (Frösén, Tikkanen, Jaakkola, & Vassinen, 2013; Homburg, Artz, & Wieseke, 2012; O'Sullivan & Abela, 2007). This development counters the historic approach of measuring marketing communications results on a medium-by-medium basis (Ewing, 2009). Comprehensiveness in marketing performance management systems refers to establishing a system which measures performance across a range of marketing activities. It also refers to the provision of a comprehensive set of metrics, like combining financial and non-financial metrics (O'Sullivan & Abela, 2007).

The need for such comprehensive systems, instead of a medium-by-medium approach, is obvious, since it is the consumer who uses communication systems concurrently, simultaneously, and probably synergistically (Ewing, 2009). The benefits of synergy have the same argumentative basis as an integrated approach to marketing communications (Duncan & Everett, 1993; Ewing, 2009). Using a strategically selected combination of promotional tools should lead to a greater benefit than the sum of the single activities (Ewing, 2009). The results of the combination of these activities need to be made accessible in order to evaluate the benefits an IMC approach brings to marketing communications. Yet, there is a significant lack of empirical work in this area (Ewing, 2009). All these issues on measurement mean in essence that the importance of employing internet technology for a communications strategy is well understood, but its impact, especially on consumer behaviour, remains unclear to a degree (Bush et al., 1998; Winer, 2009). This is an important gap, since it is consumer behaviour in particular which is affected by integrated approaches to marketing communications (Holm, 2006; Shimp, 2010).

Apart from the impact on marketing communications, the internet has also had an impact on the deployment of business strategy, which also proves relevant for marketing communications – if one sees the necessity of the connection between the two disciplines. At the outset of the internet era, there was uncertainty as to whether the internet would provide any kind of competitive advantage (Bush et al., 1998). It soon became clear, though, that the consequences of the non-adoption of internet technologies would be dramatic (Sharma, 2002). Such impacts would be in the domain of value migration, with other companies capturing the value the company in question failed to capture by not adopting internet technologies (Sharma, 2002). Porter (2001, p. 64) argued that the internet "[…] tends to alter industry structures in ways that dampen overall profitability, and it has a levelling effect on business practices, reducing the ability of any company to establish an operational advantage that can be sustained". Profitability for industries was reduced because some companies used the internet to compete on price, instead of competing on traditional advantages such as quality, features, or service. These companies thereby reduced profitability for all or probably for most market actors in their industries (Porter, 2001). Nevertheless, when it comes to competitive advantage, it seems necessary to differentiate between the issues of operational effectiveness and strategy (Porter, 1996). Porter (1996, p. 62) argued that "a company can outperform rivals only if it can establish a difference that it can preserve". Operational effectiveness refers to performing similar activities better than rivals, while strategic positioning refers to performing activities that differ from rivals' activities (Porter, 1996). Internet technology is readily purchasable in the marketplace, and it therefore seems unlikely that such technology could be the basis of differentiating oneself from competition over the long term. Internet technology may have been a differentiator for some fast-moving companies for a while, but it does not seem to be a basis for sustainable strategic positioning versus competition.

Porter (2001) concluded, therefore, that the internet itself cannot be a source of competitive advantage since its usage can be purchased by any competitor in the market. Instead, internet technology needs to be integrated with traditional competitive advantages (Fuchs et al., 2000; Porter, 2001).

2.4 Integrated marketing communications (IMC)

2.4.1 Purpose and definition

Responses to business challenges nowadays often fail to consider the importance of matching a company's operating activities with its strategic direction (Fuchs et al., 2000). Integration of the company's operating activities into a cohesive strategy is a key capability necessary for achieving and sustaining competitive advantage, yet the importance of such integration remains widely neglected (Fuchs et al., 2000).

The idea of an integrated approach towards marketing communications gained momentum in the early 1990s (Holm, 2006; Schultz et al., 1993), and emerged as part of the natural evolution of marketing communications. This era heralded the need for integration driven mainly by advances in general technology development and specifically by advances in IT (Kliatchko, 2005; Schultz, 1996). The ability to achieve integration for marketing communications is founded on the opportunities which advances in technology have delivered; in this case the technology of the internet, so that even integration and coordination of all communication activities was enabled (Cook, 2004; Kliatchko, 2005). Initially, the idea of IMC was the 'one voice' phenomenon which refers essentially to bundling all promotional mix elements together to create consistency in all sent messages (Kitchen, 2017; Kitchen, Brignell, Li, & Jones, 2004). In other words, it referred mainly to the 'inside-out' stage, which is the initial stage of the four-stage process model by Schultz and Kitchen (2000), which will be discussed further later on. However, if IMC had remained merely a matter of consistency in sent messages, then the concept would not have provided so many new aspects for marketing management (Kitchen, Brignell, et al., 2004) and would not have "[…] become one the most influential marketing management frameworks over the past two decades" (Kitchen, 2017, p. 394). Accordingly, Kerr and Patti (2015) argued that integration of marketing communications with corporate strategy is the defining construct of IMC – and not merely 'message consistency'. However, even though SI, or in other words, implementing IMC as a strategic process, is perceived as the differentiating element of the IMC concept, the term itself needs to be clarified. The benefit that an integrated approach to communication offers and which drives integration is based on the recognition that a holistic and systemic approach to communication yields all types of synergies (Schultz, 1996). Integration

can therefore be referred to as "[…] the organizing ideal of communication and marketing" (Johansen & Andersen, 2012, p. 273). Taking the viewpoint of the company, "[…] integration is a task of coordination, the embodiment of the corporate mission, and a test of organisational structure, efficiency and accountability" (Kerr & Patti, 2015, p. 319). In order to become fully integrated, the company needs to coordinate its activities so that they become consistent with its strategy. In doing so, organisational structure is tested to see whether it is capable of achieving strategic consistency in an efficient way. Organisational structure is therefore an important enabler or inhibitor to SI.

The following benefits which a successfully implemented IMC programme may yield have been identified in prior studies on IMC:

- IMC can be a basis for developing competitive advantage (Duncan & Everett, 1993; Holm, 2006).
- IMC may deliver increases in perceived customer value (Holm, 2006).
- Creative ideas are more effective when an IMC approach is used (Kitchen & Schultz, 1999).
- Greater consistency in communications (Kitchen & Schultz, 1999).
- IMC provides the potential for long-term cost savings; efficiency (Eagle & Kitchen, 2000).
- A higher degree of integration increases business performance, for example sales, profit (Low, 2000).

Despite the lack of overall agreement on a single concept of IMC (Kitchen, 2017; Kitchen, Schultz, et al., 2004; Kliatchko, 2005; Nowak & Phelps, 1994), Shimp (2010) outlined the following five key characteristics which can be considered new:

- "The customer […] must represent the starting point for all marketing communications activities" (Shimp, 2010, p. 10).
- All appropriate marketing communications tools and touchpoints must be used (Shimp, 2010).

- "Marketing communications must […] speak with a single voice" (Shimp, 2010, p. 16).
- The need to build relationships (Shimp, 2010).
- The objective of IMC is to affect behaviour (Holm, 2006; Shimp, 2010).

Thinking further about the idea of the customer being the starting point of all marketing communication activities, it is clear that integration is not, and never has been, an activity which is carried out at the company level – even though it may be managed from there. Integration occurs at the consumer level since the consumer naturally integrates all available communication, whether the outcome is beneficial for the company in question or not (Schultz, 1996). So the best the marketer can do "[…] is to try to understand the integration process and modify their approaches and concepts to maximise the return on the integration which occurs naturally" (Schultz, 1996, pp. 139–140). Or, in other words, try to manage and beneficially influence the process of integration of all sources of information the consumer uses (Schultz, 1996).

The theoretical basis of IMC still needs further development (Cook, 2004; Ewing, 2009). Kitchen, Schultz, et al. (2004) pointed to the lack of theoretical understanding regarding the perception, definition, and conceptualisation of IMC. Kitchen (2017) recently referred to IMC's weak theoretical foundations since IMC originated in and was developed based on practice. Therefore, its theoretical basis and understanding still need development, based on more evidence presented from companies (Mortimer & Laurie, 2017) and corresponding academic discourse (Kitchen, 2017). There is still no generally accepted definition of the term IMC available, despite movements in that direction (Kitchen, 2017; Kliatchko, 2005) and despite the need for an agreed definition (Lee & Park, 2007). Kliatchko (2005) tried to identify the similarities and differences amongst the different attempts made by several authors in his own attempt to provide a definition. Kliatchko (2005, p. 23) defined IMC as follows: "IMC is the concept and process of strategically managing audience-focused, channel-centred, and results-driven brand communication programmes over time". In a later paper, Kliatchko (2008, p. 140) revised this definition as follows: "IMC is an audience-driven business process of strategically managing stakeholders, content, channels, and results of brand communication programs". One interesting change in

the two definitions is the development towards IMC being a business process, that is, it is more than a communications or marketing process, it covers the entire company (Kliatchko, 2008).

In this sense, Kliatchko's recent definition supports the idea of SI as the differentiating factor for IMC. Despite the lack of academic agreement on a single definition, there are two main similarities accepted by virtually all IMC authors which Kliatchko (2005) identified. One is that IMC is generally considered to be a strategic approach towards the planning of marketing activities. The other is that IMC's core is the coordination of all marketing messages a company sends through all communication channels it uses, with the target of achieving consistency. Mere tactical consistency of sent messages can be perceived as an existing idea or concept even before IMC arrived (Kitchen, Brignell, et al., 2004; Kliatchko, 2005). Since IMC is a strategic approach, which possibly yields competitive benefits, this is part of the fundamental argument for the differentiating potential IMC is capable of delivering (Cook, 2004; Holm, 2006; Kerr & Patti, 2015). One resulting issue is that academic discourse is focusing on discovering what practical barriers there are to advancing to higher strategic levels of the integration of marketing communications; that is, beyond the consistency of sent messages, so that the full benefits of IMC can be harvested (Kitchen, 2017; Kitchen & Burgmann, 2015). A full understanding of these barriers has been limited so far since research on IMC has been widely approached using quantitative methodologies employing surveys and questionnaires (Burgmann, 2007). Despite some examples (Henninger et al., 2017; Killian & McManus, 2015; Schoonmaker, Carayannis, & Rau, 2013), qualitative interviews, producing deep rich knowledge, are still not the dominant focus of IMC research, considering the numerous quantitative studies (Foroudi, Dinnie, Kitchen, Melewar, & Foroudi, 2017; Luxton et al., 2017; Melewar et al., 2017; Šerić, 2017). Additionally, for a long time, the focus of research has been on advertising agencies (Eagle et al., 2007; Ewing, Bussy, & Caruana, 2000; Gronstedt & Thorson, 1996; Kitchen, Schultz, et al., 2004; Laurie & Mortimer, 2011; Niemann-Struweg, 2014), and less on client firms. This is despite the fact that it is the latter who are experiencing issues with implementing IMC directly. Client firms should be driving integration (Schultz & Kitchen, 1997). Finally, the issues which specific organisational structures pose to

IMC implementation as well as the specific hurdles which some industries provide, are far from being understood completely.

2.4.2 IMC as a four-stage process model

Schultz and Kitchen (2000) differentiated the level of 'integration' a company can achieve into a four-stage development model for marketing communications (see Figure 1). Kitchen (2017) argued that the idea of 'message integration' – which is the initial stage in this four-stage process model – is now a commonly accepted approach for academics and practitioners. However, even the next stage of 'consumer integration' is still far from being realised, and stages three and four in particular are rarely achieved in practice (Kitchen, 2017; Kitchen, Schultz, et al., 2004).

Message integration refers to the 'one voice phenomenon' (Kitchen, 2017) or an inside-out approach (Kerr et al., 2008; Kitchen, Brignell, et al., 2004) to communications, which is also referred to as the 'one sight, one sound' approach (Schultz & Kitchen, 2000). This, in essence, means managing outbound messaging in such a way that messages look and sound the same or similar across all media (Kitchen, 2017). Such message integration, once realised, provides the obvious benefit of sending consistent messaging across all channels (Kitchen, 2017). Consumer integration as the second stage refers to establishing an outside-in approach (Schultz, 1996; Schultz & Kitchen, 2000) to communications; that is, receivers' feedback, which is partially based on inside-out communication that gets integrated into the communications strategy (Kitchen, 2017). Companies at this level "[…] look at all potential contacts a customer or consumer may have with a product, service, brand, or company" (Schultz & Kitchen, 2000, p. 63). The focus at this level "[…] is on the consumer's perception" (Schultz & Kitchen, 2000, p. 63), and all ideas about activities should start with the consumer before working backwards into the company: "An outside-in approach should be used which starts with customers when developing and implementing communications" (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2015, p. 35). At the third stage, the results of a measurement of activities are in focus, so that the impact of all marketing activities can be monitored. Only by generating a closed loop feedback circle for strategic planning purposes, based on those measured results, can the fourth, SI, stage be achieved (Schultz & Kitchen, 2000, pp. 63–64).

4th ↑

3rd ↑

2nd ↑

1st

Financial and Strategic Integration

Firms constantly monitor marcoms performance from a ROI perspective. Information, knowledge linked to an ongoing evaluation of each served segment on a global basis

Application of Information Technology

Maintain accessible data sources and build to globally segmented databases. Effectively incorporate data in communication planning and implementation to turn customer data into customer knowledge

Redefining the Scope of Marketing Communications

Organisations gather extensive information about their customers and apply to deploying marcoms, and evaluating feedback. Also need to align with external agencies.

Tactical Coordination of Marketing Communications

Requires high degree of interpersonal and cross-functional communication within and without the business. Led by the business, not external agencies

Baseline

Figure 1 - Stages in IMC development, from Schultz and Kitchen (2000, p. 62)

IMC integrated marketing communications, *marcoms* marketing communications, *ROI* return on investment

Based on Kliatchko's (2008) definition, the general understanding is that the final stage of integration has to take place at the strategic level of an organisation (Mortimer & Laurie, 2017). This means in essence that the development of the entire organisation – and not only the marketing function – towards integration has to be supported by top-level management (Kliatchko, 2008; Mortimer & Laurie, 2017). The usage of customer feedback for strategic purposes based on measuring results can provide a competitive advantage for companies (Holm, 2006). The assumption is that such an approach is scarcely realised today (Kitchen, 2017). The argument for achieving such competitive advantage through better integration of communication is that "[…] a business that understands its customers and communicates to and with them, with the recognition that business is demand-driven, should be able to access and capitalise upon a continuous stream of ongoing information that leads to competitive advantage" (Kitchen, 2017, p. 395). In this sense, achieving a stage four integration level is an enabler for achieving competitive advantage, yet the stream of ongoing information still needs to be interpreted and put to good use. Indeed, Peltier

et al. (2003) found that marketplace information availability is less of a problem than using existing data.

The main focal point for achieving competitive advantage is therefore that the consumer is, and has to be, the starting point for integrating all communication activities (Schultz, 1996; Schultz & Schultz, 2004; Shimp, 2010). Kerr and Patti (2015) referred to the issue of SI, which shows similarities to stage four of the staged process model. SI refers to the necessity of integrating marketing communications with the company's strategy (Kerr & Patti, 2015; Rowley, 2001). SI "[…] directs the cooperative efforts of all marketing communication sub-disciplines (advertising, publicity and personal selling) to achieve a shared strategic outcome" (Kerr & Patti, 2015, p. 319). Fuchs et al. (2000) also use the term 'strategic integration' (SI) but refer to a broader issue. By SI they refer to a comprehensive picture of strategy, integrating the positioning school of strategy, the resource-based school, and the process school of strategy. They argued that most companies merely focus on one school, while it is important to address and align all three when formulating and implementing business strategy (Fuchs et al., 2000). For example, key resources are needed to develop products and services which match the chosen strategic position. To do this successfully, the organisation needs to support this development process by generating an appropriate collaborative environment, for example through the distribution of power for decision making and by setting up a corresponding organisational structure (Fuchs et al., 2000). To formulate and execute an integrated strategy, the following four elements need to be addressed: prioritisation, communication, collaboration, and boundary spanning (Fuchs et al., 2000). Prioritisation refers to the identification of strategic themes which help to prioritise and focus the efforts of the company on a few core objectives (Fuchs et al., 2000). This resembles the idea of a guiding policy as outlined by Rumelt (2012), which acts as an overarching storyline, helping to focus efforts. Communication, in this context refers not necessarily to communication with customers, but primarily to internal communication, aimed at supporting the implementation of strategy. For example, heuristics and, especially, guiding principles, which contain shared narratives, are tools which can be used for internal communication purposes, with the target of aligning and focusing the efforts of all involved employees on strategy (Challagalla et al., 2014). Both heuristics and guiding principles are discussed later in this literature

review. Collaboration refers to all issues which facilitate employee collaboration and organisational structure, which may act as a barrier or an enabler to collaboration (Fuchs et al., 2000). So even though SI as interpreted by Fuchs et al. (2000) does not explicitly refer to the concept of IMC, it shows clear parallels to the issues IMC faces when it comes to the highest stage of integration of communications with business strategy. Communication activities need to be consistent with business strategy. Communication support tools are needed to facilitate alignment between the organisation and the organisational structure. This can play a role in the successful implementation of IMC across the company.

Despite these appealing theoretical ideas in relation to SI, it is noteworthy that IMC is very rarely successfully implemented throughout all four integration levels in practice (Kitchen, 2017). Indeed, Low (2000) identified strategic consistency of communications elements in his study, on the degree of integration of marketing communications activities, as an area which is most in need of improvement. The outcome creates improvements in terms of total IMC implementation and the corresponding benefits are manifold. Some of the reasons why IMC is often poorly or incompletely implemented – at all integration levels – are discussed in several studies and papers and these are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2 - Reasons for incomplete IMC implementation

Reason for incomplete IMC implementation	Reference
Lack of understanding of the concept	Mortimer and Laurie (2017)
Lack of IMC skills of company staff	Eagle and Kitchen (2000); Schultz and Kitchen (1997); Schultz and Schultz (2004)
Lack of knowledge regarding implementation	Mortimer and Laurie (2017)
Lack of influence of marketing departments over other parts of the organisation	Mortimer and Laurie (2017)
Lack of support at board level or senior management level	Holm (2006); Kerr and Kelly (2017); Mortimer and Laurie (2017)
Organisational structure as a barrier	Schultz and Kitchen (1997); Schultz and Schultz (2004)
Fragmentation of marketing tasks within the marketing function	Hartley and Pickton (1999)
Turf wars of involved actors	Eagle and Kitchen (2000)
Short-term focus of decision makers	Eagle and Kitchen (2000)

Reason for incomplete IMC implementation	Reference
Decentralisation – balancing head office versus local branch priorities	Eagle and Kitchen (2000)
Resistance to change	Schultz and Schultz (2004)

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Conflict theory of decision making potentially provides an additional reason as to why IMC is not further implemented in companies. IMC implementation requires significant changes to the organisation (Schultz & Schultz, 2004) and there is a high level of risk that implementation will not be successful, as outlined in Table 2. Conflict theory postulates that managers, in situations where crucial decisions need to be made, tend to choose one of the three following options in terms of their response (Mortimer & Laurie, 2017; Wright, Bradfield, Cairns, Van Der Heijden, & Burt, 2004): 1) to defer the decision to later; 2) to pass on the decision to another person; or 3) to choose the least-worst option, which is often to do nothing and continue with business as usual. In all three cases, change is not directly implemented. The high level of risk associated with decisions about IMC implementation project features, combined with the issues listed above, provide a significant barrier to successful IMC adaptation.

A lack of trust in marketing (Webster et al., 2005) and having a focus on short-term results (Eagle & Kitchen, 2000) leads to reduced marketing budgets, at least for long-term marketing efforts such as IMC. These limited budgets further inhibit the ability of marketing to contribute to the corporate results. For example, building, maintaining, and continuously assessing the customer databases which are needed at stage three of the IMC process model (Schultz & Kitchen, 2000) for strategic purposes requires investment into these databases and corresponding processes. If these investments are not fully made and supported, achieving a full integration of marketing communication with strategy will not be successful. However, if these successes are not generated, marketing efforts will lack credibility and will attract fewer investments. Breaking this vicious cycle (see Figure 2) could provide a competitive advantage as several other companies probably remain locked in this paradox. The question that remains is, whether such competitive advantage based on achieving the highest level of integration would be sustainable over a longer term – because only then, can IMC truly become a strategic process.
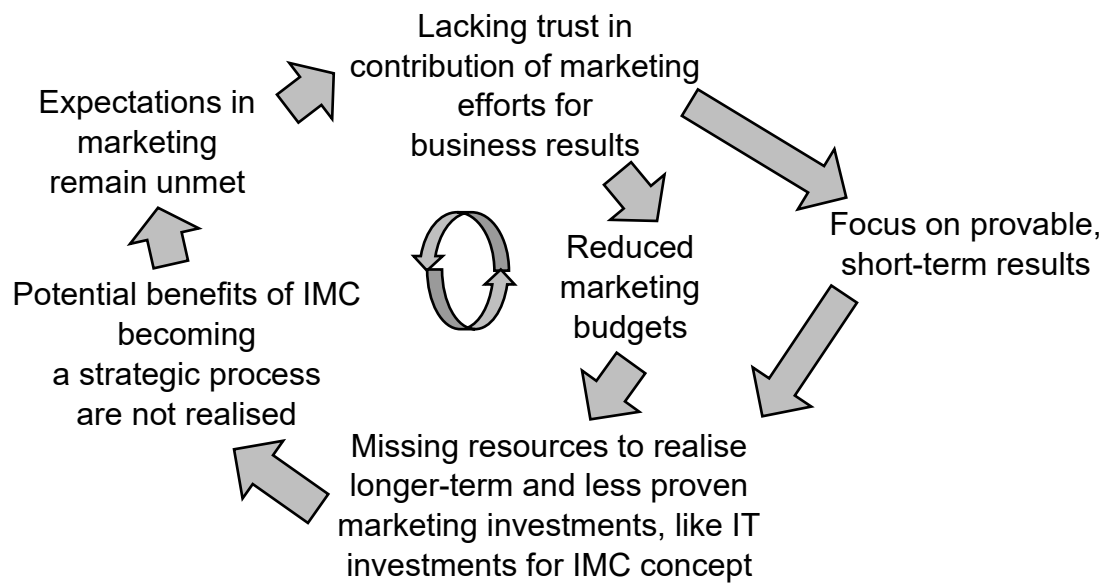
Figure 2 - Vicious cycle of underfunding marketing, based on Webster et al. (2005).
IMC integrated marketing communications, *IT* information technology

2.4.3 IMC and the concept of strategy

Strategy is "a pattern in a stream of decisions" (Mintzberg, 1978).

It is argued that operational effectiveness and strategy are both essential for superior performance (Porter, 1996, p. 61). While operational effectiveness refers to performing similar activities better than rivals, strategic positioning refers to performing different activities compared to rivals (Porter, 1996, p. 62). In this context, the extent to which IMC is a source of sustainable competitive advantage and therefore a strategic concept merits exploration. The answer depends on the approach towards implementing IMC. IMC is somewhat concerned with improving activities and performance based on better consistency (Schultz & Kitchen, 2000, p. 62). It is also about integrating customer feedback and the measurement of activities. Finally, it is concerned with using these measurements to improve strategic and operational activities (Schultz & Kitchen, 2000, p. 62). None of these individual stages are automatically intertwined with business strategy, and the improvement of integration by itself is not necessarily a strategy. However, each stage and each activity can be part of a company's strategy. Indeed, "[…] IMC has become a strategic issue and should, therefore, be treated in accordance with the nature of

strategy and strategic decisions" (Holm, 2006, p. 26). The improvement of the degree of integration may yield performance improvements for some activities, if the information generated from the customer is put to good use. However, such improvements to integration are not automatically linked with business strategy.

Any such improvements may generate customer insights and valuable market data which may be used to improve strategic planning (Schultz & Kitchen, 2000, p. 63), but the mere availability of such information is nothing more than an enabler for possible usage in building or improving business strategy. The desire to integrate marketing communications better is a matter of focus which the company sets; that is, it is a question of whether the company wants to achieve better integration of its marketing communications activities (Kitchen, 2017, p. 396) because it is a necessity or prerequisite to achieve strategic goals. It is therefore a path other companies can pursue independent of strategic positioning. This is particularly the case in terms of the lower stages of integration, as referred to in the four-stage process model by Schultz and Kitchen (2000), and is not simply a matter of improving operational effectiveness. As such, improving the integration of marketing communications activities is, by itself, not a route to sustainable competitive advantage; yet, it may indeed become a key means of establishing it. Porter (1996) argued that "a company can outperform rivals only if it can establish a difference that it can preserve". He further argued that "competitors can quickly imitate management techniques, new technologies, input improvements, and superior ways of meeting customers' needs" (Porter, 1996, p. 63).

Indeed, as mentioned before, integration and the need for integration of communication activities are driven by advances in IT development (Kliatchko, 2005, pp. 7–8; Schultz, 1996, p. 140). Technology and 'know-how' can generally be considered to be purchasable in the market (Porter, 1996). Consulting companies stand ready to support the diffusion of such developments for their client's industries (Porter, 1996). While few companies have achieved the highest level of integration (Kitchen, 2017; Kitchen, Schultz, et al., 2004; Low, 2000), the main barrier to such an approach to competitive advantage is a lack of belief, budget, and focus, and some scepticism about marketing investments (Webster et al., 2005). The lack of funding, focus, and belief or trust does not keep competitors from copying IMC approaches

(Kim, Koo, & Chang, 2009). It can be assumed that if enough practical proof is gathered which supports the idea that the highest stage of integration yields outstanding performance, then such proof could become a catalyst for making enough funding available within companies, possibly resulting in rapid concept implementation of the highest IMC stage. If a competitive advantage resulting from a higher level integration of communication activities is to be sustainable over the long term, an IMC programme would have to be a deliberately chosen part of the company's strategy and a necessary activity (Porter, 1996) resulting from strategic design (Rumelt, 2012).

Rumelt (2012) argued that effective strategies are designed rather than decided, since for strategic matters one is "[…] rarely handed a clear set of alternatives" (Rumelt, 2012, p. 129). Only if a stage four of the integrated marketing communication programme becomes an essential prerequisite for achieving strategic positioning and a part of its strategy design (Rumelt, 2012) can it provide support for achieving sustainable competitive advantage. This necessity to combine IMC and strategy is also acknowledged in the IMC four-stage process model by Schultz and Kitchen (2000). The contribution of IMC towards strategy is not merely about establishing a closed feedback loop for performance improvement. Strategy contribution is established if customer information and insight, generated from stages two and three, are effectively used in the planning of a business strategy (Schultz & Kitchen, 2000). Establishing a high level of integration may therefore be a strategic activity in itself. More customer information and insight are often needed as an input to strategy to improve strategic positioning. As a result, an IMC programme is initiated.

"So what?"

IMC has not yet been widely implemented at the strategic level of companies, and this issue has been known for some time (Kitchen, 2017; Low, 2000). However, if it is ever to become a strategic process in business practice, researchers may decide to split its focus. In general, both operational effectiveness and contribution towards strategy have to be considered. Kerr and Patti (2015) differentiated the concept of integration into message or tactical integration, and SI. Understanding how IMC is

established as a strategic tool is about appreciating how customer data and the information gained from communication activities can be used and integrated into the process of strategy development. It is also important to understand how this information can be used to improve the strategic consistency of sent messages (Schultz & Kitchen, 2000). It is important to understand how IMC is established as an operational tool rather than as a means to improve integration and consistency of sent messages. As a result, both areas contribute towards understanding and developing IMC as a total concept, which is consistent with the four-stage process model (Schultz and Kitchen, 2000). However, both areas pull in different directions and at different stages of the model. The implication is that both facets of IMC are important for understanding and implementing IMC successfully. The area of focus for this research is the practical, strategic side of the IMC concept, due to the lack of understanding as to why IMC is less successfully implemented in practice at the strategic level (Kitchen, 2017). By trying to understand how decisions on marketing communication activities are taken, the research focuses on exploring if and how a connection is made for those decisions with the company's strategy. In addition, the study explores how customer knowledge which is gained from marketing activities is used to inform strategy. Both objectives focus on understanding and exploring IMC as a strategic tool in the specific surroundings of the case study presented.

The concept of strategy as it is used for this research project refers on the one hand to strategy interpreted as positioning the company in its external environment, for example as outlined by Porter (1996). Another approach which is used in this research thesis is to perceive strategy as a design process, as described by Rumelt (2012). The concept of strategy is academically and managerially much more varied and richer in its characteristics than just the two approaches of positioning and designing. Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, and Lampel (2005) identified in total 10 different schools of strategy, amongst them the already mentioned design school and the positioning school.

It seems unreasonable to apply all 10 schools of strategy in the light of IMC for the purpose of this research project. The four-stage process model of IMC assumes that in order to achieve its final stage, strategy formulation needs to be supported by supplying the strategy process with customer knowledge, which results from

collecting customer information (Schultz & Kitchen, 2000). The idea of collecting customer information from the companies' external environment and using that information for the formulation of strategy fits well with the positioning school of strategy, because customer information is collected from the external environment to inform a strategy process which is intended to position the company within that very environment. Similarly, the idea of designing a strategy which features some kind of a guidance, which in turn is supposed to align all further activities, like communication activities, fits well with the discussed four-stage process model. The idea of using guiding principles for aligning decision making heuristically throughout a company (Challagalla et al., 2014) is also discussed in the further course of this literature review. Both the positioning school of strategy and the design school of strategy therefore seem to fit well with the ideas inherent in the four-stage process model, which serves as the basic conceptual framework for IMC throughout this thesis.

Certainly other schools of thought concerning strategy could have been used as well within this research project. The resource-based view of a firm, for example, assumes that resources and capabilities are the basis for the development of a strategy (Grant, 1991). The resource-based view of a firm is not explicitly referred to in this thesis, even though a link to the IMC four-stage process model can certainly be made. In the resource-based view, firms' capabilities are seen as the main source of competitive advantage (Grant, 1991). If collecting customer information and turning this information into valuable knowledge is interpreted as a differentiating capability from competition, then the resource-based view would also be a reasonable approach to interpreting strategy for the purpose of this thesis. My own perception is that the positioning school and the design school of strategy already provide a sufficient perspective on strategy in the context of IMC. A case can probably be made for using any school of strategy in the context of IMC, with a varying degree of fit, for the purpose of this research. Applying all major schools of strategy to the concept of IMC within this research project would not improve fulfilment of the research objectives significantly from my perspective. Adding further strategy perspectives, like the resource-based view, provides comparably little further added value towards fulfilling the research objectives, because the focus of this research is not on strategy itself, but on integrating marketing communications with strategy. Furthermore, exploring how other strategy schools of thought would impact the understanding of

the IMC four-stage process model would add little value to exploring how decisions are taken in a marketing communications context or to understanding how customer knowledge is used for strategic purposes, in addition to the two perspectives which are already taken. The idea that customer information is collected and then re-used in the company's external environment fits well with the positioning school of strategy, while the idea of seeing strategy as a design process is a beneficial match for using guiding principles to align decision making across a global company. Application of these two schools of thought for the purpose of this research project is therefore considered sufficient to meet the research objectives.

2.4.4 Consistency

This subsection outlines the interconnectedness of the concept of strategy and IMC. One connecting factor between the concepts of IMC and strategy is the characteristic of consistency, or the 'fit' of activities (Porter, 1996; Schultz & Kitchen, 2000). Since the connection between IMC and strategy is important in order to fully realise the potential of IMC (Kitchen, 2017), prerequisites for establishing this connection – such as consistency of activities – are significant in terms of how IMC implementation can be made successful. The basic unit of management for IMC is the message which has to be chosen and designed to fit into a coherent whole (Schultz & Kitchen, 2000). The idea of coordinating all messages towards a bigger picture resonates with the idea of choosing and coordinating specific activities which form a consistent design in terms of business strategy (Rumelt, 2012). Consistency of all activities and messages is relevant for IMC throughout all process stages, but especially in the initial stage of inside-out communication (Schultz & Kitchen, 2000). The basic unit of management with regards to strategy is strategic activity. Consistency amongst these activities is similarly relevant for strategy and the choice of strategic activities, because "[…] strategy is about combining activities" (Porter, 1996, p. 70). According to Rumelt (2012, p. 77), the kernel of strategy consists of:

- A diagnosis – which defines the challenge and simplifies complexity.
- A guiding policy – which is the overall storyline or instruction for how to deal with that identified challenge.
- A set of coherent actions which are designed to carry out the guiding policy.

The set of coherent actions needs to be consistent; that is, the activities need to be consistent both with one another and with the guiding policy (Rumelt, 2012). Within the realms of strategy, the concept called strategic fit is based on the quality and strength of the combination of strategic activities and the basic idea is to achieve consistency amongst all activities (Porter, 1996). In terms of the strategic fit concept, activities are the basic units of competitive advantage and competitive differentiation is based on the specific strategic activities (Porter, 1996).

Activities of marketing communication in effect have to generate a consistent overall image from the perception of the customer, but, at the same time, these activities also have to fit with the overall business strategy to create strategic fit. Consideration of both areas is needed to establish IMC as a strategic process. Marketing activities have to serve the purposes of IMC and business strategy at the same time, because IMC at higher levels is intertwined with business strategy. Strategy is about being different (i.e., the entirety of the choice of activities is directed at choosing a competitively differing set of activities) (Porter, 1996), while the initial stage of IMC aims to coordinate messages and communication activities so that they form a consistent whole. This consistent whole has to fit with the guiding policy of business strategy, but the focus is on an outside-directed consistency; that is, in IMC terms, the customer, who integrates all messages naturally, needs to perceive the entirety of messages as consistent (Schultz, 1996). For business strategy, the consistency of strategic activities is one factor, but strategy design also has to differ from competition so that a unique positioning can be created (Porter, 1996).

The two concepts therefore are interconnected but still vary in their focus and purpose. Nevertheless, to achieve uniqueness or difference in positioning, information is needed to determine which strategic positioning is viable, and how such positioning can be achieved. This information may well be accessed at the third stage of IMC development, generating customer information which may be used as input for the purpose of strategy building. This strategy building achieves consistency by using customer data in order to make the customer the starting point of all company activity (Schultz & Schultz, 2004). Strategy building must therefore be based on understanding the customer and defining a guiding policy which helps the company to solve customer problems. The connection between the two concepts is

not only inherent in the characteristic of consistency, but also in the bidirectional dependency regarding consistency of inside-out communication activities to achieve consistency in strategy, as illustrated in Figure 3 below. Consistency of business strategy is an enabler or prerequisite for achieving consistency in inside-out messaging (Porter, 1996).
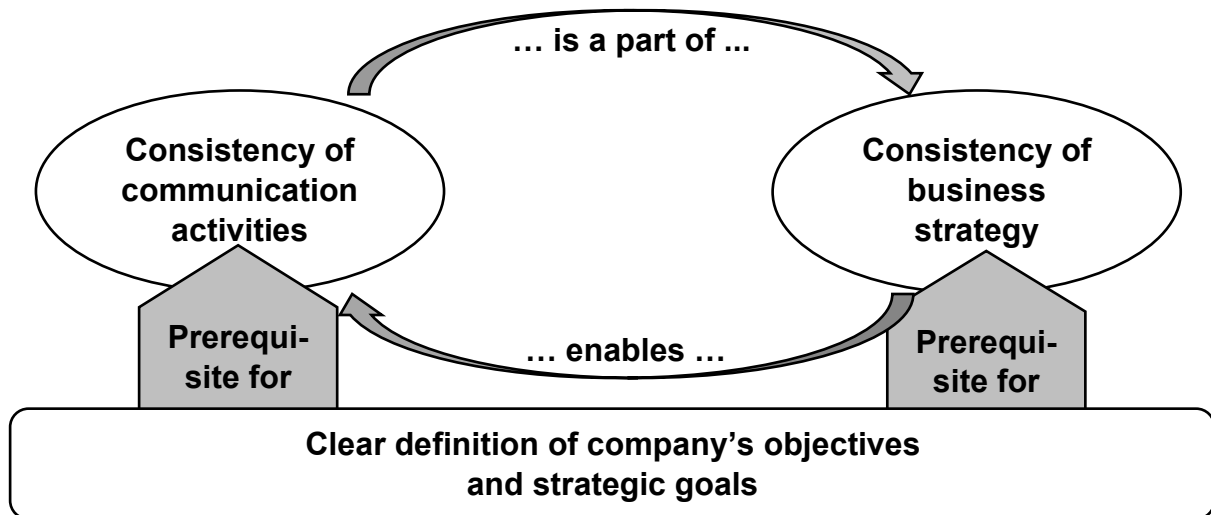
Figure 3 - Reinforcing connection between business strategy and IMC concept

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Consistency of messages and consistency of business strategy are interconnected preconditions for achieving each related target. "Consistency ensures that the competitive advantages of activities cumulate and do not erode or cancel themselves out. It makes the strategy easier to communicate to customers, employees and shareholders, and improves implementation through single-mindedness in the corporation" (Porter, 1996, p. 71).

2.4.5 Issues concerning IMC implementation

Apart from viewing IMC as a staged development process (Schultz & Kitchen, 2000), other perspectives of IMC interrelate with the process of IMC. Gabrielli and Balboni (2010) differentiated between the activity perspective and the process perspective in terms of IMC. Batra and Keller (2016) made a similar distinction in their review of academic research on IMC. They distinguished between a company's internal factors and external factors influencing an IMC programme. The internal factors refer to the influence regarding an optimal coordination of activities (Batra & Keller, 2016; Schultz

& Kitchen, 1997), and this construct provides similarities to the construct of process perspective outlined by Gabrielli and Balboni (2010). A company's external factors refer to the effects a marketing communication programme has on the consumer (Batra & Keller, 2016). A company's external factors therefore share parallels with the activities perspective, as outlined by Gabrielli and Balboni (2010). Regarding the process perspective, integration in this sense "[…] refers to the implementation of formal policies, decision procedure, formal responsibility, line of command, and organisational coordination mechanisms (Peltier et al., 2003)" (Gabrielli & Balboni, 2010, p. 277). This description bears similarities to the process perspective of strategy, which was referred to by Fuchs et al. (2000) as an important element of strategy formulation. Of relevance here are issues like organisational structure, power distribution, and the collaborative environment. While the activities perspective focuses on an understanding of the interaction effect of communication activities (Gabrielli & Balboni, 2010; Keller, 2001), the process perspective focuses on the necessary steps of how to build such an integrated communication system. Therefore, the process perspective can be interpreted as a significant design issue for building an integrated communication programme. Some of the key elements for achieving integration include formal policies, decision procedures, and organisation coordination mechanisms. These aspects are key focal areas for this research, since only through successful selection and design of these decision policies and coordination mechanisms can IMC be implemented successfully.

Schultz and Schultz (2004) argued that to improve integration, processes and systems are needed that are able to coordinate and align all the functional elements of the organisation; formal policies and decision procedures as referred to in the process perspective. These represent the means to support consistent decision making in relation to all stakeholders towards an integrated communication programme. The target of such supporting tools is to guide decision making in a way which generates a coordinated and coherent set of marketing activities, which is developed independent of the organisational structure and functional role of the decision maker. Examples of such supporting tools are heuristics, which are knowledge structures used to simplify a decision-making situation by helping to ignore part of the available information. They therefore provide guidance for decision making. This facet may be used to create consistency in decisions over time and

across organisational boundaries. Their use in the context of IMC implementation and the corresponding discussion of how to achieve consistency is addressed in Section 2.5 'Decision making'. The process perspective focuses additionally on the aspects of lines of command and organisational coordination mechanisms (Gabrielli & Balboni, 2010; Peltier et al., 2003). Managing activities towards an integrated whole can be considered problematic to coordinate in a decentralised company which is operating its sales division in several countries. As Rumelt (2012, p. 27) put it: "[…] the oft-forgotten cost of decentralisation is lost coordination across units". This is a very relevant facet, considering the latest paradigm shift in marketing towards having an integrated marketing function which is linked with other functional units. This is especially the case within a decentralised sales subsidiary structure. As a consequence of possible coordination issues, a decentralised organisational structure is an aspect which may significantly influence the successful implementation of an IMC approach in practice. Such a structure may therefore provide an interesting basis for understanding and overcoming the specific difficulties it provides. A process perspective of IMC helps focus attention on how to support strategy-consistent decision making. The specific difficulties organisational structures pose for implementing IMC are also relevant. Consistent strategic decision making in general and consistent decision making specifically across organisational structures are issues that are the object of focus in this thesis. Their influence on the design of the study are further discussed in the following chapters.

2.4.6 Research directions of IMC

An internet search for the term 'IMC' or 'integrated marketing communications' reveals significantly more articles and information than can reasonably be reviewed entirely, even for the purpose of an IMC thesis. A literature review for this thesis therefore needs to focus on selected articles which are best suited to fulfil the research aim and objectives. The intention is to identify and include the most influential authors and articles on the topic of IMC in the literature review. In addition, it is important to note that this thesis focuses on IMC implementation at a strategic level within companies running a decentralised organisational structure. Consequently, for the purpose of this literature review, articles were identified which also focus on the strategic side of IMC and on the topic of SI. In addition, articles

were selected which focus on how organisational issues influence IMC implementation.

Schultz and Kitchen (1997) conducted a significant study on the topic of IMC, which was based on an initial study by Caywood et al. (1991). The study is "[…] one of a series relating to a continuing, now becoming worldwide, investigation of the emergent concept and field of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC)" (Schultz & Kitchen, 1997, p. 7). Their USA-based study investigated the perception of IMC by advertising agency executives. The study employed a quantitative methodology, using an 89-item questionnaire to collect data from 126 respondents. The authors found that agency executives believe IMC to be an important concept, while measurement or proof of the perceived benefits remained a problem. They also found that "[…]integration must come from the client" (Schultz & Kitchen, 1997, p. 15). Similar findings were made in later studies which used a similar questionnaire but which were carried out in other countries. Kitchen and Schultz (1998) conducted a study in the UK and received 65 usable responses. They found that IMC is an area of interest for advertising agencies. The main benefit of IMC "[…] is the consistency, impact and continuity which an integrated program provides" (Kitchen & Schultz, 1998, p. 480). Similar to the USA study, measurement of IMC effects for client firms was noted as an area for improvement. Another finding similar to the USA study was that "[…] clients rather than agencies have control when it comes to designing, implementing and measuring IMC programmes" (Kitchen & Schultz, 1998, p. 476). The same questionnaire as outlined before was carried out again as a basis for a five-country comparison study on the topic of IMC by Kitchen and Schultz (1999). The countries in focus were the USA, the UK, New Zealand, Australia, and India. The authors also focused on a comparison of how the concept had developed in the different countries. They found that IMC was at different developmental stages across each country: the USA was the most developed, whilst the least developed were Australia and India (Kitchen & Schultz, 1999). IMC was perceived as a topic of high importance for both clients and agencies. The recurring topic of the lack of any ability to reliably measure IMC's effects was an important finding in this study (Kitchen & Schultz, 1999).

Duncan and Everett (1993) investigated the perception and organisation of IMC in order to understand why IMC receives so little attention. This included clarification as to how all communication functions a firm possesses are consolidated internally and externally. They also studied barriers to IMC implementation and how sales performance is linked to IMC usage and perception. Duncan and Everett (1993) collected 216 usable answers via questionnaires from client firms in the USA. The results showed that most advertising agencies were assigned at least two or more communication functions from clients. Internally, a few high-level job positions within client firms were assigned with multiple communication functions. This allowed stakeholders to align their efforts. Another finding was that internal turf battles within client firms are perceived as the biggest barrier to IMC implementation (Duncan & Everett, 1993). Duncan and Everett did not find a direct relationship between levels of sales performance and the degree of IMC implementation. While all these findings provide interesting statistics on predetermined questions, they have stopped short of providing the kind of in-depth knowledge which a qualitative study might reveal based on collecting data from client firms. Similar shortcomings are naturally applicable to the aforementioned series of IMC studies by Kitchen and Schultz and to several other quantitative studies on IMC.

Gabrielli and Balboni (2010) for example, focused on small and medium-sized enterprises in Italy to discover the gap between theory and practice in IMC implementation. They tried to establish whether small and medium-sized enterprises are able to implement an IMC programme by aligning goals, messages, activities, and organisational processes (Gabrielli & Balboni, 2010). In their study, 210 companies filled out a questionnaire. The findings suggested that several firms do not fully exploit the benefits an IMC programme can yield. This is assigned to a lack of awareness of the importance of communication and a short-sighted, rather unstructured, approach to planning communication, instead of a strategic approach to planning (Gabrielli & Balboni, 2010). The absence of a professional approach to planning communication is touched upon by the authors, but not in an exhaustive manner. A more qualitative, in-depth case study approach with a few selected firms could shed more light on the reasons underpinning the lack of professional planning when it comes to communication activities.

In another quantitative paper on the topic of how IMC, as a capability, is influenced by corporate learning orientation, market orientation, and brand orientation, Luxton et al. (2017) used the resource-based view of strategy to investigate Australian companies. In total, eight hypotheses were formulated, for example the hypothesis that market orientation has a significant and positive impact on IMC capability (Luxton et al., 2017). The authors used a questionnaire to gather data and received 187 usable responses. The results showed that neither a learning orientation nor a market orientation had a direct positive influence on IMC capability, while brand orientation had a direct and significant impact on IMC capability (Luxton et al., 2017). The questionnaire reveals agreements and disagreements amongst participants in relation to the predetermined questions which allowed the hypothesis to be tested. Additionally, the entire study was driven by the intention to measure. For example, a brand performance measure was used to evaluate the perceived performance of the brand (Luxton et al., 2017). Measurement and ratings on scales are capable of testing a hypothesis, but they naturally lack the ability to generate in-depth qualitative data to fully understand the situation faced by social actors. Understanding how and why market orientation does not directly influence IMC capability, even though this was hypothesised, was not explored in any depth with participants in this study.

Numerous survey-based or questionnaire-based quantitative studies were identified for this literature review regarding IMC-related research, for example, Duncan and Everett (1993); McArthur and Griffin (1997); Low (2000); Reid (2003); Gabrielli and Balboni (2010); Reinold and Tropp (2012); Schultz et al. (2016); Luxton et al. (2017); Porcu, del Barrio-García, Alcántara-Pilar, et al. (2019); and Šerić, Ozretić-Došen, and Škare (2020). The impression resulting from these and other studies is that surveys or questionnaires as quantitative research methods play a rather dominant role in IMC-related research (Burgmann, 2007).

Another topic in IMC-related research is the significant research focus on advertising agencies, for example, Gronstedt and Thorson (1996); Ewing et al. (2000); Kitchen, Schultz, et al. (2004); Eagle et al. (2007); Laurie and Mortimer (2011); Niemann-Struweg (2014); and Adebiyi and Bello (2018). Gronstedt and Thorson (1996) for example, focused on the issue of what an organisational structure of an advertising agency should look like, if all the communications functions worked together fluently.

They employed a qualitative approach for the study and interviewed 27 participants from advertising agencies in the USA. From the interviews, they developed five organisational models of integrated agencies, including one model which is a "[…] decentralised network of independent firms" (Gronstedt & Thorson, 1996, p. 51). The authors concluded that each integrated organisational model has its value, and the appropriateness of the model depends amongst other factors upon "[…] the desired balance of integration versus expertise in specialist disciplines" (Gronstedt & Thorson, 1996, p. 57). The developed organisational models and their characteristics in the light of an integrated approach to marketing communications are naturally limited to advertising agencies.

In a study by Kitchen, Schultz, et al. (2004) which also focused on advertising agencies, the researchers tried to understand the perception of IMC by advertising agency executives from the UK. Some additional objectives were to examine how agencies coordinate and evaluate IMC, and to examine barriers to coordination and evaluation (Kitchen, Schultz, et al., 2004). The method employed for this study was based on a quantitative approach via a mail survey which generated 107 usable responses from both advertising agencies and public relations executives. The authors concluded that "IMC or integrated approaches to marketing communications are frequently sought by client organisations" (Kitchen, Schultz, et al., 2004, p. 1431). Interestingly, the participants agreed that IMC was concerned with the coordination of communication disciplines and less concerned with strategic business processes (Kitchen, Schultz, et al., 2004). Kitchen, Schultz, et al. (2004) concluded that IMC in the UK is still in the early stages of its lifecycle, compared for example to the perceived status of USA-based companies. As noted before, the ability to measure IMC benefits remains an area which is a topic of high importance for both agencies and clients (Kitchen, Schultz, et al., 2004). Another barrier which was perceived by the participants was that client firms have not moved beyond level one or two in the four-stage process (Schultz and Kitchen, 2000). This means that IMC has not become a strategic process and it has therefore not yet reached its full potential (Kitchen, Schultz, et al., 2004). As a consequence of this barrier, the authors concluded that "[…] IMC development now needs to be researched in the domain of business practice" (Kitchen, Schultz, et al., 2004, p. 1417).

In another study which was conducted within advertising agencies in South Africa, Niemann-Struweg (2014) aimed at developing a conceptual implementation model for strategic integrated communication. For this development, 10 in-depth interviews were conducted with managers from South African advertising agencies. The objectives of the study were to explore perceptions of the concept of IMC, to understand how integrated communication was implemented by the agencies, and to understand which barriers exist to the implementation of integrated communication (Niemann-Struweg, 2014). The findings suggest that the three areas of organisational integration, stakeholder integration, and environmental integration all need to be addressed in order to successfully implement IMC (Niemann-Struweg, 2014). In addition, two underlying and fundamental principles were discovered, which formed the basis of the conceptual model developed. One is that the organisation's mission should drive all communication, business objectives, and operations in the company (Niemann-Struweg, 2014). The other is that the organisation must learn from the environmental context within which it operates to continuously reposition itself within it (Niemann-Struweg, 2014).

As indicated by the discussion of these selected studies, several IMC-related studies have a significant focus on advertising or public relations agency issues (Burgmann, 2007; Vernuccio & Ceccotti, 2015), especially if one considers that it is the client organisation which has to drive integration (Schultz & Kitchen, 1997). Consequently, there is a continuing call for more IMC-related studies to be undertaken from the client perspective (Eagle et al., 2007; Kitchen, 2017; Kitchen et al., 2008; Kitchen, Schultz, et al., 2004).

Probably the most differentiating factor of IMC is that it is a strategic process and that IMC is therefore not merely about the operational alignment of messages (Holm, 2006; Kitchen & Burgmann, 2015). Despite the fact that the majority of studies on IMC focus on the operational side (i.e., the lower stages of the IMC four-stage process model), some studies also focus on the strategy side of IMC. Marketing is also considered part of this; see for example, Barker (2013); Burgelman and Doz (2001); Caemmerer (2009); Fuchs et al. (2000); Holm (2006); Kerr and Patti (2015); and Reid (2003).

Fuchs et al. (2000) discussed the issue of how corporate capabilities need to fit together in order to generate value. They argued that companies need to integrate market positioning and execution capabilities at the same time (Fuchs et al., 2000). Research was conducted in the form of case studies of several companies from different industries. The companies which excelled most in performance were those which had a successfully integrated approach to all their activities, and which were able to address both positioning and execution at the same time. Based on the different schools of strategy, Fuchs et al. (2000) developed a model which is made up of five groups. Two of these groups, termed 'direction' and 'product/market focus', are linked to positioning whilst the other three, termed 'resources', 'operational capabilities', and 'organisation/culture', focus on execution. Fuchs et al. (2000) argued that such a model serves as a checklist for companies undergoing change if they want to align all necessary components for strategic fit at the same time. The study sheds light on the importance of orchestrating all activities of a company, so that these activities reinforce one another and thereby generate value rather than just loosely coupling them (Fuchs et al., 2000). However, the paper is not focused on marketing or IMC but on a company-wide perspective of the SI of all company activities. It therefore fails to generate an understanding of how companies make decisions in relation to marketing communication activities.

Another strategy-focused article (Holm, 2006) set out to understand what prevents companies from moving from an operational to a strategic level of integration. The research instrument was a deep review of relevant literature (not limited to IMC) during the 1990s. This included a study of four Swedish companies (Holm, 2006). The findings were interpreted using communication theory. The literature which was reviewed for the article was criticised by Holm who suggested it was dominated by a too simplistic model of communication. In this sense it was limited and lacked an overall picture of the issues (Holm, 2006). Further, educational cultures in different countries and a lack of time devoted to communication theory in educational programmes were assumed to play a part in the creation of what was seen as a simplistic picture of communication (Holm, 2006). Finally, this simplistic picture also impacts the concept of IMC, since IMC is handled typically by professionals with tactical communication skills. However, these professionals lack a strategic focus (Holm, 2006).

Kerr and Patti (2015) conducted a study on IMC with the target of defining the construct of SI and to develop this into a management tool for the measurement of SI. They employed a Delphi study with 17 experts from both academic and business practice backgrounds. The consensus of the group was then used to build a measurement tool for the SI of IMC (Kerr & Patti, 2015). The inductive, theory-building approach of the study led to the development of a theoretical model, which lacked validation in practice (Kerr & Patti, 2015). The intention to quantify the degree of SI that is achievable followed calls to deliver measurement tools for IMC (Duncan & Everett, 1993; Kitchen, 2017). Such measurement tools are helpful for determining the effectiveness of the current level of activities, yet they do not necessarily help explain the reasons for the success or failure in integrating all activities of the company. This is especially true if the reasons for an unsatisfactory integration are rooted in the interaction of the social actors involved.

Based on a discussion of these selected articles and considering the short list of identified articles which specifically deal with SI in the light of IMC, it is rather obvious that the topic of SI remains under researched in the domain of business practice. This is especially the case when it comes to the generation of deep, rich, qualitative data which is intended to shed light on all the factors which operationally influence decision making for marketing communications. Research, in this sense, is rather scarce so far.

Organisational structure is identified by many authors as a barrier to successful IMC implementation, for example, Mortimer and Laurie (2017); Schultz and Kitchen (1997); and Schultz and Schultz (2004). Consequently, several studies on IMC deal with the issue of organisational structure and its impact on IMC implementation, for example, Cornelissen (2001); Eagle and Kitchen (2000); Gronstedt (1996); and Vernuccio and Ceccotti (2015).

Gronstedt (1996) for example, studied how integration can be supported by several communication departments. He conducted a multi-case study with eight American corporations which have a strong total quality management approach. Gronstedt (1996) conducted 41 face-to-face, in-depth interviews with 41 communication managers. The findings suggest that in order to overcome strict segmentation and

separation in organisations, integration has to happen at three levels: the individual, the departmental, and the corporate level (Gronstedt, 1996). Gronstedt (1996) concluded that none of the studied companies were organisationally truly integrated. They were perceived to be integrated through several processes they established over time, which foster exchange and collaboration (Gronstedt, 1996). Gronstedt (1996, p. 40) concluded that "Integrated communication is not necessarily about putting public relations, marketing communications and other communications professionals into a single department, but about integrating their processes". The study deals mainly with the issue of improving collaboration across departmental boundaries, independent of the concrete organisational structure. There is no discussion of the specifics of a decentralised organisational structure, and how consistent decision making and SI are achieved.

In a study conducted by Cornelissen (2001), which touched on organisational structure in the light of IMC, the author reviewed empirical studies from the USA and the UK on communications organisation. The study was intended to emphasise the importance of IMC theory as having an ideological, rather than a descriptive, purpose for justifying practical changes in marketing communications (Cornelissen, 2001). As a result of the review, Cornelissen (2001) concluded that communication functions are mostly functionally organised as separate departments, such as in public relations and marketing departments, rather than being organised as an integrated unit (Cornelissen, 2001). Cornelissen saw this as proof of the assumption that the theorised tendency towards the integration of communications organisation in companies may not actually happen in practice (Cornelissen, 2001). The study therefore has a rather theoretical focus on the concept of IMC and its impact on business practice. It does not shed light on specific issues relating to organisational structure and the challenges these can pose for implementing IMC at a tactical or strategic level.

Vernuccio and Ceccotti (2015) interviewed 86 participants from Italian agencies in order to build a conceptual model which integrates the main variables and addressed challenges of a perceived paradigm shift in IMC. Amongst other variables, one large building block of the conceptual model is the managerial topic of organisational challenges, such as the need for new skills, online and offline integration, and

evolving communication roles (Vernuccio & Ceccotti, 2015). The findings relating to organisational challenges were that an ongoing approach to training efforts is required in order to meet the challenges of developing digital skills (Vernuccio & Ceccotti, 2015). With regards to organisational structure, Vernuccio and Ceccotti (2015) concluded that it is important to find an organisational setup which can break the departmental silos which may have developed within the agency, and which may be overcome, for example, by building a strong digital culture. Finally, they called for the establishment of an inter-professional dialogue in order to build a collaboration culture, because collaboration is a prerequisite for addressing the challenges resulting from the IMC paradigm shift (Vernuccio & Ceccotti, 2015). Generally, the study addresses organisational issues which need to be addressed in order to overcome the challenges posed by IMC for agencies. The study focuses on the Italian market. Despite the suggestion that it is necessary to build an organisational structure which is capable of overcoming organisational silo building, the study does not address the issues which a decentralised organisational structure poses for implementing IMC in client firms.

The specific circumstances which a decentralised organisational structure creates for IMC implementation (i.e., a headquarters, collaborating with worldwide subsidiaries) are not addressed in detail in these studies. This issue therefore remains an under addressed research topic in the context of IMC. It is therefore productive to explore how such organisational circumstances contribute towards, or hinder, IMC implementation in client firms.

The healthcare industry or, more specifically, the part of the healthcare industry which consists of medical devices and related accessories and services, is an industry which has not yet been the significant focus of IMC-related research. Examples identified in the course of this literature review include studies by Fischer (2014) and Elrod and Fortenberry (2020). The study by Fischer (2014) deals with IMC and strategy theory in the context of the hospital industry. Fischer (2014) sought to develop a conceptual framework for strategic positioning and IMC which could be used to tailor hospital communications activities. She reviewed 62 articles which deal with the topic of hospital marketing communications. The study was conducted using qualitative content analysis. Based on the analysis, she developed a conceptual

framework that, in essence, revealed four archetypes for hospital strategic positioning (Fischer, 2014). The framework can be completed by embedding the four archetypes in IMC guidelines, which recommend integrated messaging across channels, establishing a mindset of multichannel management, and the segmentation of target groups for hospitals. The study focussed on how hospitals can position themselves strategically, whilst embedding results in an IMC framework. It therefore paid less attention to the issues which are seen as important when trying to integrate marketing activities as part of a strategy for hospitals. In addition, the study directly deals with hospitals and not their suppliers. The source of data for the study was existing studies, and not direct qualitative data generated from stakeholders.

The article by Elrod and Fortenberry (2020) is about the importance of integrating marketing communications in the healthcare industry. The article focuses mainly on the importance of sending the same messages across all available communication channels. It focuses therefore mostly on the first stage of the four-stage process model by Schultz and Kitchen (2000) and the benefits resulting from such a focus, which include financial benefits. The article does not discuss in detail the idea of aligning communications with a healthcare provider's strategy, but rather that an integrated approach to marketing communications should be a strategic priority for healthcare providers (Elrod & Fortenberry, 2020). The article is therefore limited to the inside-out stage of the four-stage process model of IMC, even though the framework is not directly mentioned. Additionally, the article is not based on any type of data generated from research participants; instead, the authors discuss the importance of aligning marketing communications in a healthcare context based on existing literature.

In terms of the geographic scope of IMC-related studies, Germany has not yet been examined much. The major focus has been the USA: Edmiston-Strasser (2009); Kerr and Patti (2015); Killian and McManus (2015); and Schoonmaker et al. (2013), to provide a few examples. Other countries which have been the focus of IMC research are the UK (see e.g., Henninger et al., 2017; Melewar et al., 2017; Mortimer & Laurie, 2017) and Australia (see e.g., Hall & Wickham, 2008; Luxton et al., 2017; Turner, 2017). Very few studies were identified which have either included or focused

specifically on Germany: Burgmann (2007); Caemmerer (2009); Reinold and Tropp (2012); and Šerić (2017).

In the course of my literature review, one doctoral thesis with a focus on IMC was reviewed (Burgmann, 2007). In her study on implementation and other issues relating to IMC, Burgmann (2007) sought to understand when, why, and how consumer-focused companies practice IMC. In addition, she identified, evaluated, and compared the perceived benefits of IMC (Burgmann, 2007). Another focus of the study was to compare similarities and differences in the perceptions and practice of IMC in selected companies (Burgmann, 2007). The study took a qualitative approach to the generation of data. To achieve this, Burgmann (2007) interviewed 25 participants working for companies operating in the fast-moving consumer goods industry from both the UK and Germany. She found that IMC was implemented later in the UK and Germany than in USA-based companies where IMC originated mainly in the late 1990s and early twenty-first century (Burgmann, 2007). The reasons for implementing IMC were classified into two categories, which were a gradual shift towards IMC, and a sudden emergence. The latter situation was, for example, caused by many corporate mergers (Burgmann, 2007). Another finding was that the support of senior executives for the implementation of an IMC programme is of utmost importance for its success (Burgmann, 2007). Further, in the companies studied, IMC was found to be entirely company-led, and not driven by advertising agencies (Burgmann, 2007). Additionally, Burgmann (2007) found that the realisation of an IMC programme supports teamwork and the breakdown of functional silos due to employees' understanding the benefits of an integrated approach. Burgmann also found that IMC was able to improve message consistency and "[…] preserve the image of the corporate and individual brands at a tactical level" (Burgmann, 2007, p. 421). The implications of the research for management are that IMC implementation is dependent upon company size (Burgmann, 2007). Burgmann found that with rising geographical reach and a growing number of employees, the successful implementation of IMC becomes harder (Burgmann, 2007). The study further revealed that, particularly in global companies with many subsidiaries, best practice cases, intranet usage, and the usage of toolboxes were found to be especially helpful for managing integration (Burgmann, 2007). Burgmann (2007) further found that global companies did not operate global databases for their customer data, which

may make it more difficult for them to integrate their marketing activities with business strategy. She suggested that a globally segmented customer database is a prerequisite for reaching that level according to the four-stage process model (Schultz & Kitchen, 2000). What also contributes to this lack of a globally segmented customer database is a lack of funding (Burgmann, 2007). Finally, most companies had not integrated their product brands with their corporate brands to create one overarching strategy (Burgmann, 2007).

Burgmann's thesis is relevant to this research project since it focuses on several aspects which are relevant to the current project. The finding that customer databases are seldom implemented at a global level in large companies operating several subsidiaries worldwide (Burgmann, 2007) is an aspect which is of relevance for the current case study in this research. As already outlined, the third research objective of this study sets out to discover how customer knowledge is used to inform business strategies, and how customer data is collected, stored, and used. This latter point plays a central role in the third objective. Another interesting aspect resulting from Burgmann's research is that bigger companies with a strong geographical reach face more problems in implementing IMC successfully across all parts of the company (Burgmann, 2007). This finding is of relevance to the current study because the company that is the focus of this research is large and has significant global reach through its subsidiary network. Since the company that is the focus of this study has a decentralised structure with many autonomous subsidiaries, the current research project may shed more light on Burgmann's findings regarding why such a structure is problematic for a successful IMC implementation. On the other hand, Burgmann's thesis does not generate a detailed understanding of how decisions regarding marketing communications are made, and how these decisions are possibly impacted by business strategy. The overall aim of this study, which is to develop a conceptual model which could facilitate the implementation of IMC at a strategic level, places a strong emphasis on the strategic aspect of IMC and what could enable companies to develop towards SI. Burgmann, on the other hand, focused on a general understanding of IMC based on operational tactics and their role in strategy. This is also apparent in the stated research problem, which is to understand when, why, and how companies practice IMC (Burgmann, 2007). The

current thesis may add to Burgmann's research findings; however, the aim of this thesis is geared more towards understanding IMC as a strategic process.

Based on the above discussion, a research gap is evident (Frehse & Ozuem, 2018). None of the studies identified in the course of the literature review focused on the practical challenges posed by the implementation of IMC at a strategic level of a decentralised organisation. There is no real understanding therefore about the specific issues caused by this setting, and the possible approaches to overcoming related barriers. In this context, there is a lack of IMC-related studies for companies originating in Germany. Further, a majority of studies used surveys or questionnaires to gather data, while the specific circumstances for closing the research gap call for a deeper understanding of the practical issues faced by all actors. This can be better achieved using qualitative methods. Addressing this research gap could develop an understanding of how IMC can be implemented successfully at a strategic level, and as a strategic process in companies (Frehse & Ozuem, 2018).

Table 3 shows an overview of all reviewed articles, providing details on the focus point of each study, the industry which was researched, the research perspective taken (i.e., client, agency, consumer, academic), the chosen research method (i.e., quantitative or qualitative and the research instrument), and the conceptual framework which underlies each study – where such information was provided.

Table 3 - Reviewed studies for literature review with defining elements of IMC research

	Author (year)	Focus of study	Industry, country	Research per-spective	Research method and sample	Conceptual framework
1	Caywood et al. (1991)	Perception of IMC in advertising agencies	Adverti-sing industry, USA	Agency	Quantitative: 132 participants via question-naire	

	Author (year)	Focus of study	Industry, country	Research per-spective	Research method and sample	Conceptual framework
2	Duncan and Everett (1993)	Attitude towards and usage of IMC; awareness, value of IMC as a strategic process, important elements, barriers, relation to sales	USA	Client	Quantitative: 216 participants via question-naire	
3	Gronstedt (1996)	Organisational integration of communi-cation based on TQM processes	USA	Client	Qualitative: 41 participants in multi-case study (8 companies) via in-depth, face-to-face interviews	Organisa-tional theory
4	Gronstedt and Thorson (1996)	Organisational structure of advertising agencies influenced by IMC	USA	Agency	Qualitative: 27 participants via focused, in-depth interviews; grounded theory method	Organisa-tional theory
5	Phelps et al. (1996)	Responsibility for communica-tions strategy; trends in assignment of planning responsibility	52 different industries, USA	Client	Quantitative: 101 participants via mail question-naire	Consensus decision making

	Author (year)	Focus of study	Industry, country	Research per-spective	Research method and sample	Conceptual framework
6	McArthur and Griffin (1997)	IMC perception, use of communi-cation alternatives, and organisation, coordination, and sourcing of activities	Several industries, USA	Client	Quantitative: 121 participants via question-naire	
7	Schultz and Kitchen (1997)	Perception of IMC in advertising agencies	Adver-tising industry, USA	Agency	Quantitative: 126 participants via question-naire	
8	Gunnigle, Turner, and Morley (1998)	Strategic integration of employee relations policies with business strategy	Several industries; greenfield sites; Ireland	Client	Qualitative and quantitative: interviews and survey	Management styles
9	Kitchen and Schultz (1998)	Perception of IMC in advertising agencies	Adver-tising industry, UK	Agency	Quantitative: 65 participants via question-naire	
10	Kitchen and Schultz (1999)	IMC: under-standing, imple-mentation, and usage across five countries	USA, UK, New Zealand, Australia, India	Agency	Quantitative: 243 participants via question-naire with closed- and open-ended questions	

	Author (year)	Focus of study	Industry, country	Research perspective	Research method and sample	Conceptual framework
11	Low and Mohr (1999)	Decision-making process for allocating advertising and promotion budgets	Packaged goods; USA	Client	Qualitative: 21 participants via in-depth interviews	Decision theory
12	Eagle and Kitchen (2000)	IMC concept development, extent of IMC practice, value of traditional advertising agencies, implementtation experience, barriers, speed of implementtation	New Zealand	Client and agency	Quantitative and qualitative: 43 participants via postal questionnaire; 10 participants via in-depth interviews	Organisational theory; organisational learning theory; organisational culture theory
13	Ewing et al. (2000)	Interagency politics and conflicts of interest as barriers to IMC implementatio n	Public companies, several industries, Australia	Client	Quantitative: 80 participants via questionnaire	Organisational politics; conflict of interest

	Author (year)	Focus of study	Industry, country	Research per-spective	Research method and sample	Conceptual framework
14	Fuchs et al. (2000)	Integration as a key capability for competitive advantage; integrating the dominant schools of strategy	Several examples: paper industry, jet engines, photo-graphy, computer industry, retailing, health industry	Client	Qualitative: several case studies of specific firms	Strategy theory; strategic fit concept
15	Low (2000)	Factors which are related to the degree of integration, measurement, enablers and barriers, performance implications	USA	Client	Quantitative: 421 participants via mail survey	
16	Gould et al. (2000)	International dimension of IMC; coordination across country offices, centralisation, inter-office commu-nication, use of IT	Adver-tising industry, USA-based agencies	Agency	Quantitative and qualitative: 14 participants via survey; closed-ended and open-ended questions; exploratory conclusions	Interfirm communi-cations theory; organisa-tional theory
17	Burgelman and Doz (2001)	Complex strategic integration; reach-driven and scope-driven strategic integration	Multi-business compa-nies; Hewlett-Packard; STMicro-elec-tronics	Client	Qualitative: interviews	Organisa-tional theory; control systems

	Author (year)	Focus of study	Industry, country	Research per-spective	Research method and sample	Conceptual framework
18	Cornelissen (2001)	Transfer of IMC theory prescriptions into actual practice	USA, Canada, UK	Client	Qualitative: review of research studies	Organisa-tional theory
19	Kallmeyer and Abratt (2001)	IMC development, organisational changes in agencies caused by IMC environment, extent of IMC demand by clients, added-value services of IMC through ease of IMC effectiveness measurement	Adverti-sing industry, South Africa	Agency	Qualitative: 20 participants via in-depth interviews using a structured question-naire, allowing for open questions	Organisa-tional theory
20	Sheehan and Doherty (2001)	Integration of print advertising and the internet	USA	Consumer	Quantitative: 186 advertisements via content analysis	Strategy theory (positioning school)
21	Garber and Dotson (2002)	Perceptions of IMC by marketing managers	Trucking industry, USA	Client	Quantitative: 192 participants via mail question-naire	Hierarchy of effects models; new product adoption model

	Author (year)	Focus of study	Industry, country	Research per-spective	Research method and sample	Conceptual framework
22	Grove, Carlson, and Dorsch (2002)	IMC in services advertising	Services, USA		Qualitative, exploratory: 168 service ads were analysed via content analysis method	Lovelock's typologies of services framework (Lovelock, 1983, 1994)
23	Kitchen and Eagle (2002)	Globalisation of commu-nication, impact of environ-mental issues on marketing communica-tion	New Zealand	Client	Qualitative: 21 participants via mail survey	Strategy theory (positioning school)
24	Peltier et al. (2003)	Interactivity of IMC, collecting and using consumer data to establish customer segments for prioritising IMC efforts	Energy conserva-tion, USA	Client	Qualitative: case study with one company, 1,297 participants via mail survey, additionally blended with customer database	Psycho-graphic marketing
25	Reid (2003)	Relationship of IMC and brand-related performance in SMEs	Consumer goods and services compa-nies, Australia	Client	Quantitative, exploratory: 169 participants via question-naire	Strategy theory; resource-based view

	Author (year)	Focus of study	Industry, country	Research per-spective	Research method and sample	Conceptual framework
26	Kim et al. (2004)	Perception of IMC in advertising agencies	Adverti-sing industry, South Korea	Agency and client	Quantitative: 218 participants via question-naire (50/50 split between agency and clients)	Inter-organi-sational collaboration
27	Kitchen, Schultz, et al. (2004)	Implemen-tation and perception of IMC, coordination and evaluation, barriers to coordination and evaluation	Adver-tising and PR agency industry, UK	Agency (adverti-sing and PR)	Quantitative: 107 participants from agencies via mail survey	Marketing measure-ment
28	Swain (2004)	Measurement of IMC success, compensation of agencies for IMC services	USA	Academic, agency, and client	Quantitative: 185 participants via internet question-naire	Marketing measure-ment
29	Zahay et al. (2004)	Relationship of collecting customer data and business performance	Software and insurance industry (B2B), USA	Client	Quantitative: 209 participants via telephone survey	Psycho-graphic marketing

	Author (year)	Focus of study	Industry, country	Research per-spective	Research method and sample	Conceptual framework
30	Beverland and Luxton (2005)	IMC degree of integration with a company's internal operations	Wine industry, France, New Zealand, Australia, Portugal, Lebanon	Client	Qualitative: case study with 26 firms, 53 participants via in-depth interviews, observation, secondary data for triangulation	Institutional theory; brand building; strategy theory
31	Dewhirst and Davis (2005)	Brand equity and shareholder value through IMC	Tobacco industry, Canada/ Global	Client	Qualitative: case study of Imperial Tobacco Limited through review of internal company and court documents made public and interviews with agency employees	Relationship building; brand building
32	Kitchen and Tao (2005)	Diffusion of IMC in China	China	Agency	Quantitative: 83 participants via question-naire with closed- and some open-ended questions	
33	McGrath (2005)	Validity of IMC, visual consistency of message across multiple media	USA	Consumer	Quantitative: 30 participants via experiment	Brand building

	Author (year)	Focus of study	Industry, country	Research perspective	Research method and sample	Conceptual framework
34	Sneath et al. (2005)	IMC and event marketing	Auto-motive, USA	Consumer	Quantitative: 565 participants via survey	Marketing measure-ment
35	Ebren et al. (2006)	IMC perception, implement-tation, coordination, evaluation, and barriers	Turkey	Agency	Quantitative: 43 participating firms via question-naire	Interorgani-sational collabora-tion; marketing measure-ment
36	Holm (2006)	Obstacles to further IMC development, from tactics to strategy	(Partially Sweden)	(Mainly) client	Qualitative: review of relevant literature during the 1990s	Communica-tion theory
37	Burgmann (2007)	Development, perception, and practice of IMC	Service, retail, durable consumer goods, and FMCG industry; Germany and UK	Client	Qualitative: 25 participants/ firms via interviews, three case studies on FMCG industry	Strategy theory; intra-organisation al collabora-tion; brand building
38	Eagle et al. (2007)	IMC perception regarding IMC concept; strategic importance and development of IMC	New Zealand, UK	Agency	Quantitative: 107 participants via question-naire, with some open-ended questions	Strategy theory

	Author (year)	Focus of study	Industry, country	Research per-spective	Research method and sample	Conceptual framework
39	Grove et al. (2007)	Comparison of advertise-ments (services and goods) on their degree of integration and integration trend over time	Different industries, services and goods, USA	Consumer	1473 print advertise-ments over 20 years via cluster sampling and content analysis	
40	Kitchen, Graham Spickett-Jones, and Grimes (2007)	IMC campaigns in the context of brands and branding	Adver-tising industry, UK	Agency	Qualitative: 6 in-depth interviews	Brand building; creativity
41	Lee and Park (2007)	Unified, differentiated, database-centred, and relationship-fostering communi-cations	Several industries, South Korea	Client	Quantitative: 155 participants via email survey	Strategy theory (positioning school); marketing measure-ment
42	Gurau (2008)	Online environment and IMC implement-tation	Retailing industry, UK	Client	Qualitative: 29 participants via interviews	
43	Hall and Wickham (2008)	Roles and functions of IMC in B2B markets	Ship-building, Australia	Agency and client	Qualitative: 25 participants via semi-structured interviews	Organi-sational theory; strategy theory

	Author (year)	Focus of study	Industry, country	Research perspective	Research method and sample	Conceptual framework
44	Kerr et al. (2008)	Teaching IMC	Higher education; Australia, Korea, New Zealand, Taiwan, UK, USA	Academic	Quantitative: analysis of 87-course syllabi, coding into category system	Rogers' diffusion theory (Rogers, 2003)
45	Kitchen et al. (2008)	Evaluation of IMC as a concept and strategy and of IMC-driven programmes	Advertising industry; South Korea, UK, USA	Agency	Quantitative: 274 participants via question-naire	
46	Caemmerer (2009)	Tasks in planning and implement-tation of IMC; comple-menting of media channels	Auto-motive, Germany	Client	Qualitative: case study with one company via interviews, organisational data analysis	Aspects of environ-mental analysis and SWOT; strategy theory (positioning school); marketing measure-ment
47	Edmiston-Strasser (2009)	IMC application in higher education	Education, USA	Client	Quantitative and qualitative: 42 participating colleges/ universities via quantitative question-naire, 9 follow-up interviews	IMC four-stage process model

	Author (year)	Focus of study	Industry, country	Research perspective	Research method and sample	Conceptual framework
48	Finne and Grönroos (2009)	Message integration by the consumer; relationship marketing	–	Consumer	–	Meaning
49	Winter and Sundqvist (2009)	IMC and new high technology product launches; impact of company type, size, and industry	ICT industry, Finland	Client	Qualitative: instrumental case study, 3 companies via in-depth interviews	Product launch and integration
50	Dinnie, Melewar, Seidenfuss, and Musa (2010)	IMC in a nation-branding context	5 countries from ASEAN region	Client	Qualitative: 10 participants via semi-structured interviews	Brand building; interorgani-sational coordination
51	Gabrielli and Balboni (2010)	Gap between IMC theory and practice in SMEs	Several industries, Italy	Client	Quantitative: 210 manu-facturing firms via question-naire	
52	Laurie and Mortimer (2011)	IMC perception by agency practitioners	UK	Agency	Qualitative: content analysis of 10 essays	Strategy theory

	Author (year)	Focus of study	Industry, country	Research perspective	Research method and sample	Conceptual framework
53	Delgado-Ballester, Navarro, and Sicilia (2012)	Effectiveness of message consistency relationship to brand familiarity, impact on brand knowledge structure	Beverage industry, Spain	Consumer	Quantitative: 194 participants via an experimental setup	Cognitive psychology; brand building
54	Johansen and Andersen (2012)	Stakeholder dialogue	Food industry (case study of Arla), Denmark	Consumer	Qualitative, case study: summative content analysis; empirical studies of consumer responses	
55	Reinold and Tropp (2012)	Measuring IMC effectiveness, development of model	Banking industry, Germany	Consumer	Quantitative: 368 participants via online survey	Theory of media richness; brand building
56	Barker (2013)	Evaluation of perspectives on the progression of IMC	–	–	Qualitative: literature review	Strategy theory

	Author (year)	Focus of study	Industry, country	Research per-spective	Research method and sample	Conceptual framework
57	Schoonmaker et al. (2013)	IMC and enabling survival of start-up companies	Biotech-nology industry, USA	Client	Qualitative: 25 participants via semi-structured interviews, 15 from biotech firms	Product lifecycle
58	Fischer (2014)	Hospital marketing communi-cation: effectiveness of channels and content	Health-care services, several countries	Client (hospital)	Qualitative: content analysis of 62 articles from medical and social sciences	Strategy theory (positioning school)
59	Kliatchko and Schultz (2014)	Senior management perspective; IMC understand-ding, and practice, differences between academics' and practitioners' practice	Asia-Pacific region/ Southeast Asia	Agency and client; academic and practi-tioner	Qualitative: 22 participants via personal in-depth semi-structured interviews; grounded theory approach	Organisa-tional theory
60	Niemann-Struweg (2014)	Implementa-tion of strategic integrated communi-cation	South Africa	Agency	Qualitative: 10 advertising agencies via in-depth interviews	Strategy theory

	Author (year)	Focus of study	Industry, country	Research perspective	Research method and sample	Conceptual framework
61	Kerr and Patti (2015)	Strategic integration, development into a management tool	Experts mostly from USA and UK	Client and academic	Qualitative: 17 participants via Delphi method	Strategy theory; organisational theory
62	Killian and McManus (2015)	Utilisation of social media platforms and incorporation of social media into existing communication strategy	Different industries, advertising industry, USA	Agency and client	Qualitative: 7 participants via in-depth interviews	Marketing communications strategy
63	Muñoz-Leiva, Porcu, and Barrio-García (2015)	Themes within IMC research	No specific focus	No specific focus	Quantitative: 1,475 documents from 1991 to 2012 via co-word analysis	
64	Vernuccio and Ceccotti (2015)	Remaining managerial challenges caused by the IMC paradigm shift	Italy	Agency	Qualitative: 86 participants via in-depth interviews, cognitive mapping technique for analysis	Strategy theory; organisational theory

	Author (year)	Focus of study	Industry, country	Research per-spective	Research method and sample	Conceptual framework
65	Gabrielli and Baghi (2016)	Brand communities as an IMC tool for brand management	Food industry	Consumer	Qualitative: 72 participants (12 for focus groups) via brand concept map methodology	Brand building; brand image framework (Aaker, 1995; Aaker, 1997); brand concept map (John, Loken, Kim, & Monga, 2006)
66	Schultz et al. (2016)	IMC diffusion, planning, implement-tation, barriers, and future development	China	Agency	Quantitative: 135 participants via questionnaire with 16 closed- and 5 open-ended questions; Rogers' diffusion theory	Rogers' diffusion theory (Rogers, 2003)
67	Foroudi et al. (2017)	Component elements of IMC, brand identity	Higher education, UK	University acade-mics	Quantitative: 666 participants from 2 UK universities via question-naire survey	Brand identity

	Author (year)	Focus of study	Industry, country	Research perspective	Research method and sample	Conceptual framework
68	Henninger et al. (2017)	IMC implement-tation in micro-organisations; social media integration	Fashion industry, micro-organisations, UK	Client	Qualitative: 25 participants from 5 micro-organi-sations via semi-structured interviews, semiotics, Facebook and Twitterfeed analysis	
69	Kerr and Kelly (2017)	IMC education issues: place in university, IMC brand, curriculum, impact on practice, role of digital, future of IMC education	Higher education, 5 USA, 5 EU/Africa, 5 Asia/ Pacific partici-pants	University acade-mics	Qualitative: 15 participants via Delphi technique (email)	Education (IMC)
70	Luxton et al. (2017)	Learning orientation, market orientation, brand orientation, brand performance	Different industries, Australia	Client	Quantitative: 187 participants via question-naire	Strategy theory (resource-based view)
71	Melewar et al. (2017)	Integration of identity, strategy, communi-cations to influence stakeholders' trust, loyalty, and commitment	Retailing industry, UK	Client and consumer	Quantitative: 347 participants via question-naire	Commitment-trust theory

	Author (year)	Focus of study	Industry, country	Research perspective	Research method and sample	Conceptual framework
72	Mortimer and Laurie (2017)	Under-standing, marketing influence, strategic tool, responsibility for implement-tation	Cross-section of UK industry, manu-facturing, service, B2B	Client	Qualitative: 23 participants via on-line question-naire, critical realism approach	Conflict theory of decision making; social exchange theory
73	Orazi et al. (2017)	Brand equity	–	Client	Literature review on past IMC frameworks	Stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1994)
74	Šerić (2017)	Social web and IMC relationship, brand equity and IMC relationship; national culture as a moderator	Hospitality industry, 24 Croatia hotels, respon-dents from Croatia, Italy, Germany, UK, USA, Australia	Consumer	Quantitative: 475 participants via question-naire	Brand equity concept (Yoo & Donthu, 2001); national culture
75	Turner (2017)	Stakeholders, content, channels, results	AFC Asian Cup 2015 football event, Australia	Client (Asian Cup was not a traditional company though)	Qualitative: 14 participants via semi-structured interviews	Four-pillars approach to IMC (Kliatchko, 2008)
76	Adebiyi and Bello (2018)	Stage of IMC implemented for clients; resulting benefits for clients; barriers; measurement of IMC	Marketing agencies, Nigeria	Agency	Qualitative: 5 in-depth interviews with Creative Directors	Mental models

	Author (year)	Focus of study	Industry, country	Research perspective	Research method and sample	Conceptual framework
77	Siano, Vollero, Della Volpe, Confetto, Foroudi, and Palazzo (2018)	Using metaphors (wheel, umbrella) as a tool for effective, sequential decision making	No specific focus	Client	Literature review on corporate communica-tion and stakeholder management	
78	Valos, Turner, Scheepers, and Stockdale (2018)	Marketers in the B2B environment which implement online communities	Financial services, media, IT, manu-facturing, Australia	Client	Qualitative: 7 in-depth interviews with marketing experts	
79	Adesanoye (2019)	IMC strategy for positioning and perception of customers	Banking industry, Nigeria	Client	Quantitative and qualitative: question-naire and in-depth interviews	Learning theory
80	Hewett and Lemon (2019)	IMC in a brand crisis	Different industries, USA	Client and agency	Qualitative: 13 in-depth interviews with executives	
81	Laurie and Mortimer (2019)	Challenges IMC poses on the client/agency relationship	Several industries and marketing agencies, UK	Client and agency	Qualitative: 17 participants via Delphi method	Agency theory

	Author (year)	Focus of study	Industry, country	Research perspective	Research method and sample	Conceptual framework
82	Porcu, del Barrio-García, Alcántara-Pilar, and Crespo-Almendros (2019)	Market performance impact of IMC	Hospitality industry, Spain	Client	Quantitative: 180 participants via online questionnaire	
83	Porcu, del Barrio-García, Kitchen, and Tourky (2019)	Influence of corporate culture on IMC; mediating role of IMC on the relationship between corporate culture and brand performance	Hospitality industry, Spain	Client	Quantitative: 180 participants via online questionnaire	Strategy theory (resource-based view); corporate culture
84	Albinsson, Burman, Shows, and Stoddard (2020)	Educating sustainability issues in an IMC course	Education, USA	University academics	Quantitative: 125 students via questionnaire	Fink's (2013) Taxonomy of significant learning
85	Elrod and Fortenberry (2020)	Reaching communication goals with patients for healthcare and medical providers by integrating marketing communications	Healthcare industry (USA)	Client	Literature review and discussion	

	Author (year)	Focus of study	Industry, country	Research per-spective	Research method and sample	Conceptual framework
86	Šerić, Ozretić-Došen, and Škare (2020)	Consistency in messaging's impact on the consumer–brand relationship (outcome: trust, commitment, and loyalty)	Fast-food industry (Croatia), Croatia-based students	Consumer /Client	Quantitative: 452 participants via question-naire	
87	Whitburn, Karg, and Turner (2020)	Relationship marketing for sport organisations	Not-for-profit sport organi-sations, USA	Client	Quantitative: 1,130 participants via question-naire	SERVQUAL (Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml, 1990)

AFC Asian Football Confederation, *ASEAN* Association of Southeast Asian Nations, *B2B* business-to-business, *FMCG* fast-moving consumer goods, *ICT* information and communications technology, *IMC* integrated marketing communications, *IT* information technology, *PR* public relations, *SMEs* small and medium-sized enterprises, *SWOT* strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, *TQM* total quality management

2.4.7 Summary of IMC

In summary, the concept of IMC and its ability to serve as a strategic business process to achieve consistency in messaging need to be seen in the light of the latest marketing paradigm. Integrating marketing activities with other business functions means spreading marketing resources, capabilities, and tasks across the company, which in turn poses an even greater challenge for achieving the desired level of consistency for marketing activities as part of a business strategy. Aside from interpreting IMC from a process or activity perspective, decisions need to be made by stakeholders which have an effect on the total level of integration which marketing activities can achieve to leverage strategy. Understanding and influencing this decision making is therefore a major issue when it comes to achieving a successful integrated approach towards marketing communications.

2.5 Decision making

A decision is a commitment to action (Langley, Mintzberg, Pitcher, Posada, & Saint-Macary, 1995).

Gilbert (2017) interviewed managers in various sectors including medicine, academia, and sports. All these managers had been involved in making significant decisions in their daily lives. One of the surgeons interviewed observed that fewer young people seem to be willing to strive for jobs with high responsibility where they face difficult decisions (Gilbert, 2017).

One other interviewee, Gerd Gigerenzer, who heads the Center for Adaptive Behavior and Cognition at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin, Germany, observed a trend towards taking rather defensive than active decisions (Gilbert, 2017). By that he refers to taking the most secure, risk-averse decisions, instead of taking proactive decisions which are riskier, but which are better suited for the situation in order to achieve a positive outcome (Gilbert, 2017). The consequence of this trend is general complacency about the situation, and a developing culture towards avoiding mistakes, due to fear of punishment (Gilbert, 2017).

Such behaviour may not lead to entrepreneurial decision making in the best interests of the company, and it is therefore a problematic development. This is also a relevant aspect for this study since it has implications for integrating marketing communications with business strategy. If people have a tendency to avoid risk, it is unclear how IMC can be successfully implemented at a strategic level in companies, since it is strategic decisions that tend to feature a high degree of uncertainty (Rumelt, 2012).

Decision making, within the realm of organisational theory, has been widely viewed in research as a rational, bounded, and staged process, which moves sequentially from the problem definition stage to the final choice stage (Langley et al., 1995). Yet many decisions cannot be pinned down easily (Langley et al., 1995). As a counterpart, another organisational decision-making model emerged, labelled 'organised anarchy' which accounts for social interaction in decision making, depicting organisational

decision making as a rather chaotic process (Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972; Langley et al., 1995). A decision, according to this so-called 'garbage can' model of organisational decision making, is an outcome or interpretation of four major, independent streams within the organisation. These are problems, solutions, participants, and choice opportunities (Cohen et al., 1972). The notion of a decision being based on an 'interpretation' of four streams, which are widely independent of each other, points to the socially constructed basis of this model for understanding decision making.

"[…] action can occur without commitment to act" (Langley et al., 1995, p. 265).

Crucially, decision making is unlikely to be an entirely rational, linear process, resulting in a decision at a single point in time. It is, rather, a socially influenced process, which is heavily dependent upon actors. It is not always the case that commitment to decide or act always precedes action (Langley et al., 1995). The mere existence of a concept labelled 'decision' may influence research; for example, a researcher might search for these possibly artificially constructed decision points and prior decision processes, thereby limiting the perspective of the researcher. Langley et al. (1995) also refer to a different model of organisational decision making which accounts for the ambiguity involved in decision making which is called 'organisational decision making as convergence'. Here, instead of working towards a decision point in time, decision making follows a course of gradual convergence towards an image of final action (Hage, 1980; Langley et al., 1995). "Instead of conceiving decision making as a series of steps […] it comes to be seen in a more integrative way as the construction of an issue" (Langley et al., 1995, p. 266). Based on the above discussion about rational and socially constructed decision making, the process of decision making can be differentiated into quantitative and qualitative types (Simon, 1965). Quantitative decision making is widely based on rational choice theory, which assumes that alternative choices are known, and quantifiable, and solutions are therefore calculable (Simon, 1965). Qualitative decision making differs from these assumptions in that it does not seek optimisation but seeks to produce satisfactory solutions. This does not guarantee the quality of the solution and it does not even guarantee that a solution can be found (Simon, 1965).

2.5.1 Consistency and decision making

Consistency in decision making within companies is an imperative (Brown, 2005) which is not limited to the marketing function, but is relevant to the entire company. This is especially the case if IMC is to become a strategic process. According to discussions from roundtable groups which Brown (2005) initiated with several executives, the imperative for consistency is driven by a preceding imperative which calls for excellent execution of strategy. However well formulated the strategy is, if it is not carried out in a satisfactory way, it will fail. Consistency of business decisions throughout the company, independent of the focus on an individual function, is therefore an important business imperative (Brown, 2005). Based on Brown's research, one participating executive saw the need for consistency founded in the "[…] firms' needs for standardization, economies of scale, and better and faster decision making" (Brown, 2005, p. 2). If there is a business need to make decisions both better and faster, consistency across all decisions within the company – at both operational and strategic levels – becomes an important factor for companies who want to implement their strategy successfully. This sheds light on the role of tools which are able to guide people in making better decisions faster. Guiding tools are therefore needed which help decision makers with their judgement so that decisions can be made which are still coherent and consistent with one another and which fit with the strategy.

2.5.2 Quantitative and qualitative decision making

Following the convergence model of decision making, action follows a gradual convergence period where an issue is constructed (Hage, 1980; Langley et al., 1995). For this timeframe of convergence and construction, several tools are available to support decision makers, and the requisite tools vary significantly by their very nature. At this point, a differentiation between quantitative and qualitative decision making (Simon, 1965) and between the quantitative and qualitative research paradigms is important. Such a differentiation sets out the contrast between understanding how the world works, and which tools are suitable to make good decisions in accordance with these paradigms (Crotty, 2014). King (2010) noted of quantitative research that, where it is applied to a marketing decision-making context, it can measure aspects of the social world. Rational decision making, in this context,

assumes that one optimal decision exists and can be calculated, and there is one universally valid, objective truth 'out there' that just needs to be uncovered (King, 2010). This resonates with the assumptions of rational choice theory, which "[…] assumes that individual action is instrumental, namely that it has to be explained by the actors' will to reach certain goals" (Boudon, 1998, p. 818). Such general theory about human behaviour, if universally valid, might explain all decisions that are made. To arrive at such an explanation might just be a matter of collecting all of the data to understand why a certain decision was taken. Qualitative research in contrast, "[…] has a unique ability to focus on how people construct their behaviour in naturally occurring situations (constructionism)" (Silverman, 2015, p. 27). This means that qualitative schools of thought assume there is no universally valid, generally optimal, decision, but the solution to the decision depends on the situation and the stakeholders.

Speaking in terms of rational choice theory, the action of individuals is not always instrumental (i.e., driven by reaching goals). Rather, action can be driven by the principles of social actors (Boudon, 1998). So, if decisions are not always taken based on a motive to reach a certain goal, rational choice theory is not universally valid from this perspective (Boudon, 1998), and research has to focus on individual social actors to fully understand why decisions are taken. This focus on individual social actors is an approach that has been taken in this research project. Heuristic- and principle-based decision making is not necessarily always goal driven. Some problems are too complex to gather and process all available data (Simon, 1965), and several decision-making problems may therefore rely rather on intuitive, heuristic decisions, which are, in some cases, not necessarily instrumental.

In this context, a connection can be made between a research paradigm and how decision making is perceived and supported by different supporting tools from an imaginary, so-called 'adaptive toolbox' (Gigerenzer, 2008). The quantitative research approach features similarities to the 'bottom-up' approach to decision making as referred to by Oliver and Roos (2005). Such a bottom-up technique refers to a data-driven approach to decision making which seeks to capture everything which is needed to come to a rational, logical or optimal decision (Oliver & Roos, 2005). In this sense, a bottom-up approach to decision making is founded on the idea that a single

'right' decision can be deduced by pure logic, and it is only a matter of gathering all the data. This resonates with the mechanistic view of an organisation as outlined by Homburg and Fürst (2005). Their thesis is based on the organisation-as-machine paradigm (March & Simon, 1993). This refers to the approach that, in certain situations, people are told what to do, without the need to think through and justify decisions and behaviour over and over again (Simon, 1997). Standard operating procedures and simple rules are examples of tools which are, to some degree, based on a mechanistic approach to decision making. In contrast, the 'top-down' approach refers to making decisions without having access to all the available information (Oliver & Roos, 2005). This is about relying on an approach which is adequate and is not an optimal approach to decision making (Gigerenzer, 2008; Simon, 1965).

Gigerenzer (2008, p. 20) contrasted both approaches: "Calculating the maximum of a function is a form of optimizing; choosing the first option that exceeds an aspiration level is a form of satisficing". The top-down approach to decision making is based on findings from studies in which "[…] systematic, rational analysis [is] insufficient to deal effectively with complexity" (Woiceshyn, 2009, p. 299). A related issue here is the shortage of available time until a decision must be made. Management decisions are often made under time pressure, which does not leave enough time to gather all possibly available information. This means that "In business environments characterised by rapidly and discontinuously changing demand, competitors, technology and regulation, management teams are frequently required to make decisions based on imperfect information (Eisenhardt, 1989b)." (Oliver & Jacobs, 2007, p. 813).

Reynolds and Lancaster (2007), for example, found in their study of small enterprises from the UK that most companies did not use quantitative tools or measures for sales forecasting, despite their awareness that they might benefit from following a more rational quantitative approach. Sales forecasting in these cases relied often on the subjective opinion of the company owner, instead of calculating the sales forecast using more quantitative measures, like Bayesian probability forecasting (Reynolds & Lancaster, 2007).

The top-down approach discussed here resonates with the organic view of an organisation as Homburg and Fürst (2005) put it. This refers to the notion that instead of strictly telling people what to do, an alternative approach of influencing decision making in a desired direction is to create an environment in which the behaviour of employees is influenced by training and motivation, and by providing them with shared values and norms (Homburg & Fürst, 2005). This influencing approach may then ultimately lead to better decision making, because employees are given more decision autonomy (Homburg & Fürst, 2005).

Woiceshyn (2009) referred to Klein (1998) when she outlined that intuition is another qualitative decision-support tool which can lead to more effective, faster, and more accurate decisions compared to using rational analysis: "Klein has described intuitive decision making as a pattern-recognition process: cues about the decision situation lead a decision maker to recognise a familiar pattern (based on prior experience) which then activates an action script, a routine way of responding that makes deliberate analysis unnecessary" (Woiceshyn, 2009, p. 299). The author also stated that "experienced decision makers in various fields - e.g., firefighters, chess masters, pilots, business executives - rely on intuition to supplement, or at times even to substitute for, rational analysis" Woiceshyn (2009, p. 299). Regarding the relationship between a rather quantitative and a more qualitative approach to decision making, the two approaches are not mutually exclusive but can be used together well (Woiceshyn, 2009). Woiceshyn (2009, p. 298) also proposed a model for "[…] how decision makers manage complex situations by combining rational analysis with intuition". Her study with CEOs revealed that, in terms of decision making, CEOs are more effective when they employ both intuition and rational analysis which interact constantly with one another (Woiceshyn, 2009). It is, for example, expected in the staged IMC process model by Schultz and Kitchen (2000) that to successfully implement IMC at a strategic level, customer databases and customer information should be used to support better decision making regarding business strategy and for operational purposes in marketing communications. For complex and abstract tasks like strategy building and deriving corresponding measures like marketing communication activities, it seems likely that decision making can be informed by databases. However, decisions still need to be made by human beings. The perceived complexity of the task along with time pressures prevent an accurate

calculation of all possible options. This generates the necessity to create shortcuts to decision making, which in turn creates the need to employ supporting tools like heuristics, guiding principles or similar tools in order to ensure quality decision making. Therefore, tools that support decision making, such as heuristics or guiding principles, are necessary for successful IMC implementation, especially at a strategic level.

2.5.3 Heuristics

Heuristics, scripts, schemas, and guiding principles are knowledge structures which become cognitive shortcuts for quick behavioural responses in familiar situations. They are based on scripts which are developed using prior experience (Woiceshyn, 2009). A "Knowledge structure is a mental template that individuals impose on an information environment to give it form and meaning" (Walsh, 1995, p. 281). Knowledge structures can help stakeholders make sense of situations which again supports taking decisions (Oliver & Roos, 2005). Gigerenzer (2008) referred to an imaginary, mental 'adaptive toolbox' from which proper tools for solving problem situations can be accessed, depending on the decision situation. Such a toolbox may make use of logic and probability in addition to heuristics, and it is a question of ecological rationality to select an appropriate strategy. The proper class of tools for each type of problem to be solved requires some thought (Gigerenzer, 2008). "The function of the adaptive toolbox is […] to provide strategies – cognitive, emotional, and social – that help to handle a multitude of goals by making decisions quickly, frugally, accurately, or, if possible, not at all" (Gigerenzer & Selten, 2001, p. 43).

An interesting area to explore therefore is how strategies get selected from this toolbox. Strategy selection learning theory is based on the assumption that "[…] people possess a repertoire of cognitive strategies to solve the inference problems they face" (Rieskamp & Otto, 2006, p. 208). People have expectations as to which strategy will best solve the problem they face, and these expectations develop after learning from the prior application of a strategy and its performance (Rieskamp & Otto, 2006). As such, over time, people evaluate the applicability of an heuristic to the environment, and this is described as ecological rationality (Gigerenzer, 2008). Heuristics, which can be chosen from the adaptive toolbox can be conscious or unconscious examples of efficient cognitive processes (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier,

2011). Such processes are part of a decision-making strategy which "[…] ignores part of the information, with the goal of making decisions more quickly, frugally, and/or accurately than more complex methods" (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011, p. 454). Quantitative decision models like probability and statistical reasoning are well researched in academic circles, but not in widespread use in managerial practice (Wübben & Wangenheim, 2008). One reason is that they are complex to understand and apply. They therefore exhibit high opportunity costs, which is not the case with heuristics (Wübben & Wangenheim, 2008).

"Studies have found systematic, rational analysis insufficient to deal effectively with complexity" (Woiceshyn, 2009, p. 299). Heuristics are considered to be a subset of strategies, which also include complex regression or Bayesian models (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011). This leaves the manager to decide which strategy from the adaptive toolbox best suits the decision situation. This is a task referred to as ecological rationality (Gigerenzer, 2008). Wübben and Wangenheim (2008) found no clear evidence for the superiority of quantitative decision models for managerial decision making in customer management compared with simple methods like heuristics. They concluded instead that "[…] the heuristics the firms used worked astonishingly well" (Wübben & Wangenheim, 2008, p. 92). The rationality of using heuristics is founded on the assumption that using heuristics means trading some loss in accuracy for faster, yet satisficing decisions (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011).

A general misunderstanding about heuristics is that people use them only because of human cognitive limitations (Gigerenzer, 2008). The argument is that because the mind is not capable of acquiring and processing all necessary information for optimisation, it generates shortcuts (Gigerenzer, 2008). If quantitative models could, in any situation, produce better results than heuristics, their only downside would be the effort required to apply them. In such cases it would merely be a matter of efficient data gathering and improved computation. It can be assumed that more powerful support tools might one day solve the high-opportunity cost situation of quantitative models; that is, more powerful data accessing and processing can calculate all possible outcomes to support better decision making than is possible using heuristics (Gigerenzer, 2008). However, the opportunity cost of searching all possible options in a decision situation to come to a completely calculated, rational

decision can indeed be infeasibly high, independent of calculation capacity. It seems that only a minor number of problem situations show perfect boundaries for even allowing completely rational decision making (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011). Savage (1972) differentiated between small and grand worlds. Only in small, isolated, and predictable worlds is it possible to have perfect knowledge of all relevant alternatives and probabilities (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011; Simon, 1979). In grand or large worlds, by contrast, parts of relevant information are unknown and cannot be calculated (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011). States of the small worlds are often part of the more grand world (Savage, 1972), which means that only very rarely can small, entirely isolated, decision situations exist. Typically, these are influenced by a larger surrounding world. This means that there are situations in which a perfect quantitative calculation about the optimal decision that considers every facet of the decision situation is not feasible.

Heuristics are a better fit in 'large worlds' which are defined by a high degree of uncertainty, since the balance between the cost of searching for solutions and accepting results is better than for mathematical models (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011). As Gigerenzer (2008, p. 26) put it, "The more unpredictable a situation, the more information needs to be ignored". Strategic decisions involving marketing communication activities can be considered unpredictable, especially due to all the already discussed changes and influences the advent of the internet has generated, including the opportunity for interactivity with the customer (Lagrosen, 2005; Rowley, 2001; Winer, 2009). Heuristics are devices which can overlook such information and come up with quick decisions, depending on the situation. Gigerenzer (2008) pointed to problems where information from the past is less relevant to the future and to the decision at hand. He defined such irrelevant information as noise that can be ignored in the course of searching for a solution. If such information has no relevance to future developments, computation of all available historic information will not help to produce a better decision (Gigerenzer, 2008). Heuristics which ignore part or all of such noise support decision making in a more efficient way (Gigerenzer, 2008). Wübben and Wangenheim (2008) concluded that academics are too often tied up with presenting a good statistical fit of decision models, and they tend to forget how they support managerial decision making in practice. As such, statistical decision models have not found their way into managerial practice in terms of decision making

to the same extent as heuristics. Clearly, this is due to the beneficial balance between results and effort, and because there are situations where quantitative models are not applicable in the sense that they provide no benefit to the situation. In summary, heuristics are easy to use and they often turn out comparable and sometimes even better results than quantitative decision models.

2.5.4 Studying heuristics

Gigerenzer (2008) outlined situations where heuristics are superior to logical or probabilistic approaches to decision making. It is those situations where one needs to act fast, where probabilities of decision possibilities are unknown, and where the problem is ill-defined so that there is no optimal solution calculable (Gigerenzer, 2008). In these situations, the mind searches the 'adaptive toolbox' for matching heuristics or other tools which provide a solution to the situation. "In business environments characterised by rapidly and discontinuously changing demand, competitors, technology and regulation, management teams are frequently required to make decisions based on imperfect information (Eisenhardt, 1989b)." (Oliver & Jacobs, 2007, p. 813). Organisations are perceived as an ideal place for applying heuristics due to "[…] the inherent uncertainty and the pressure to act quickly" (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011, p. 459). Research tends to focus on the adaptive toolbox, that is, on "[…] the selection and structure of heuristics in social and physical environments" (Gigerenzer, 2008, p. 20).

Such studies are termed descriptive, since they explore which heuristic is the most optimal for a specific given situation (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011). Prescriptive studies on the other hand deal with the question of which environment a specific heuristic is better suited to, and where heuristics will perform better than complex models of rationality or probability (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011). Gigerenzer (2008, p. 25) argued that "The rationality of the adaptive toolbox is not logical, but ecological […]". People evaluate the ecological rationality of various heuristics in different environments intuitively (Gigerenzer, 2008). Studying the ecological rationality of the adaptive toolbox involves analysing which heuristic matches which environment (Gigerenzer, 2008). Studying heuristics is useful in the sense that it helps improve decision-making strategies (i.e., the selection or design of heuristics) and it helps improve environments to support better decision making (Gigerenzer,

2008). Studying the ecological rationality of a heuristic is aimed at understanding this rationality, which in turn helps clarify and predict when and why it fails or succeeds (Gigerenzer, 2008). According to Gigerenzer (2008), a systematic study of the environment in which heuristics work has not yet been achieved.

Heuristics are relevant to this research project since they can be approached as a device for improving decision making which is consistent with strategy. The research seeks to supply a theoretical model which can facilitate the implementation of an IMC approach at a strategic level. To make this implementation successful, decisions in the context of marketing communications have to be consistent with each other and with business strategy. Heuristics are perceived as a candidate tool to support decision making which may help stakeholders make decisions that are consistent with strategy within the boundaries of a decentralised organisational structure. Heuristics may help embed a storyline into marketing communications decision making that is consistent with strategy. On the other hand, there is a possibility that heuristics may have a negative effect on the achievement of consistency. Indeed, Gigerenzer and Selten (2001) pointed out that the function of the adaptive toolbox is not to guarantee consistency in rational choice decisions over time, but it is to provide a strategy which helps handle a multitude of goals effectively and efficiently over time. Locke (2002, p. 203) also pointed out that principles do not automatically, by themselves, lead to consistency: "Furthermore, the principles must be orchestrated so that they function in concert rather than working at cross-purposes".

Organisations are perceived as an ideal place to apply heuristics due to "[…] the inherent uncertainty and the pressure to act quickly" (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011, p. 459). Nevertheless, there seems to be a lack of research on the issue of applying heuristics in organisational environments (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011; Hodgkinson & Healey, 2008). The business context of taking marketing communication decisions in a decentralised organisational structure with the target of implementing IMC strategically provides an example of a setting in which heuristics can improve decision making. The specifics of this environment are the focus of this research, since the decentralised organisational structure and the healthcare industry provide specific boundaries within which decisions have to be taken. Given this environment and the possible obstacles to decision making which result from it, there

may be a basis to suggest improvements to the usage of supporting tools for decision making. One outcome could be the suggestion that heuristics may be useful when it comes to improving strategic decision making.

2.5.5 Guiding principles

According to Oliver and Jacobs (2007, p. 813), "Guiding principles are knowledge structures that call to mind collective narratives with emotional content, and are articulated and used heuristically to guide decision making in organisations". The guiding principle is useful in critical situations, referring to environments where good decisions need to be made quickly. It "[…] provides fundamental level justifications that guide actions and decisions made by self-managed teams when responding to critical incidents (Oliver & Roos, 2003)" (Oliver & Jacobs, 2007, p. 813).

The term 'guiding principle' can be perceived in the context of the key strategic element called the guiding policy (Rumelt, 2012), which is part of what Rumelt termed the strategy kernel. This strategy-related guiding policy is a decision-support tool, which helps people take decisions that are in line with policy. It therefore facilitates decision making that is consistent with strategy. Guiding principles similarly guide actions and decision making which can be used to make consistent decisions over time. Using guiding principles as a tool for implementing a guiding strategic policy could therefore be a promising approach to implementing IMC at a strategic level in a decentralised organisational structure. Approaches like this are proposed in academic literature. For example, the concept of marketing doctrine is defined as "[…] a firm's unique principles, distilled from its experiences, which provide firm-wide guidance on market-facing choices" (Challagalla et al., 2014, p. 7). Generally, the principles associated with this doctrine are efficient and effective in supporting decision making, because they inductively generalise experiences about how a goal has been attained (Woiceshyn, 2009). These essentials about experiences are intuitively stored in and retrieved from the subconscious mind, allowing quick and accurate access. They need little storage space (Woiceshyn, 2009). When we experience how the business world works, such an experience is stored in our memory. To save scarce space, the brain identifies the essence of learning and integrates learning into concepts and eventually principles (Woiceshyn, 2009). Principles are therefore higher level or more abstract concepts, which store the

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essence of learning (Woiceshyn, 2009). When recalled, principles can be re-applied to new situations, helping make better decisions to respond to the situation at hand, based on past experiences (Woiceshyn, 2009). Since principles are abstracted forms of knowledge**,** they cannot be applied without further thinking (Locke, 2002). They are unlike concrete rules which are applied to a very specific situation. The stored experience still needs to be evaluated to understand whether it is useful to the new decision situation (Locke, 2002). The decision situations for employees involved in IMC implementation at a strategic level are examples of decision situations where something needs to be evaluated and cannot be decided based on simplistic decision rules. In this sense, evaluating stored principles for re-applicability in a given situation is like a pattern-recognition process (Klein, 1998; Woiceshyn, 2009). If familiar patterns are recognised, the re-usability of stored principles is evaluated and conducted (Klein, 1998; Woiceshyn, 2009).

The reason for the development and usage of principles is partially similar to that of heuristics. Woiceshyn (2009, p. 301) stated that "People need principles because our capacity to retain knowledge in conscious awareness is limited […]". The condensed storage of the essence of learning from prior experience also helps the decision maker to quickly recall information and apply it efficiently and effectively to a new situation (Woiceshyn, 2009). In addition, it seems unlikely that people in organisations would naturally tend towards making consistent decisions over time. Guiding principles are one possible way of directing decision making towards a common direction across the company. "When firms provide such guidance, employees tend to rely on it, rather than on their own personal ideologies or mental models, for decision making (Bailey and Maltzman 2008)" (Challagalla et al., 2014, p. 14). Principles provide guidance for decision makers through applying complex choices to long-term goals by helping to project the future and to choose between concrete alternatives (Woiceshyn, 2009). Principles help with the current decision at hand; deciding continuously on their basis provides consistency in the decisions that a company or team makes over time (Challagalla et al., 2014). This means that a long-term component can be achieved by actively applying the concept of guiding principles, and this is not necessarily the case for heuristics. This consistency component needs to be seen in the light of striving for an integrated approach to marketing communication which is to be established at the strategic level of the

company. Indeed, principles may serve to align marketing activities with business strategy (Challagalla et al., 2014).

Using principles such as those associated with the marketing doctrine approach "[…] enhances the likelihood that a firm will perform marketing activities that support organisational strategy" (Challagalla et al., 2014, p. 17). Principles are therefore a tool which may serve well in establishing IMC at a strategic level, since, when it comes to operational execution, principles can help to operationally align marketing activities with the company's broader strategy, and it can be assumed that this may also work well across organisational boundaries. Furthermore, searching for information to support decisions based on all the facts available can result in high opportunity cost, leading to lost time and lost opportunities. "While some studies suggest that management teams in such environments should conduct formal meetings and consider extensive evidence (Eisenhardt, 1999), others point out that too much information search can cause valuable opportunities to be lost (Klein, 1998)" (Oliver & Roos, 2005, p. 889). Woiceshyn (2009) found that principles may also act as a guard against bias. Woiceshyn (2009) identified that several principles keep decision makers focused on reality and protect them against bias.

In summary, the usage of guiding principles for decision making has the following benefits.

Guiding principles:

- are efficient, saving mental space by memorising the essence of learning;
- are effective;
- can be recalled and applied quickly to save search time and reduce opportunity cost;
- can provide a long-term component, and can help provide consistency in decisions over time;
- can protect against bias;
- include joint learning effect through narrative component;
- are memorised and recalled easily because of their emotional content;
- are active and consciously developed;

- need intelligent application, since the knowledge they contain is stored at a very abstract level.

2.5.6 The link to heuristics

Guiding principles possess three significant key characteristics (Oliver & Jacobs, 2007), which link them to, but also distinguish them from, heuristics.

- Guiding principles possess a **heuristic character**, i.e., they also serve as rules of thumb for making effective and efficient decisions, just like heuristics.
- In addition to heuristics, they are **narrative**, i.e., they are founded in **explicitly shared** narrative stories among people and
- their storylines possess **emotional** content, which supports memorising and connecting to the guiding principle.

Their narrative and shared foundation distinguishes guiding principles from heuristics, which are cognitive and possibly even unconscious processes in the individual (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011). Since they possess a narrative character, guiding principles are explicitly shared amongst a group of people who are involved in the decision situation at hand. Guiding principles are further developed by the members of an organisation through sharing and re-sharing, adding and deleting content, and allowing for team learning (Oliver & Jacobs, 2007). Oliver and Jacobs (2007) referred to this conjoint development of knowledge as the facilitation of the transition process from interpreting to integrating (Crossan, Lane, & White, 1999). Team members conjointly discuss and interpret experiences and narratives about what worked, and why, thereby creating shared learning which is integrated into shared guiding principles which can be re-used and further developed by the group over and over again (Oliver & Jacobs, 2007). Guiding principles are intentionally and actively developed, and are thus used as decision-support devices based on organisational learning (Oliver & Jacobs, 2007). Such active development can be initiated by a conversational process of dialogue (Crossan et al., 1999) based on inquiry, divergence, and convergence (Oliver & Jacobs, 2007).

Principles are shared and articulated by their nature (Oliver & Jacobs, 2007). Researching heuristics requires their formalisation, so heuristics can be made explicit as well (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011). However, they are not naturally given to being shared and conjointly developed. Due to their explicit, shared, and articulated nature, guiding principles may be useful for supporting the operational implementation of IMC at the strategic level of a company. Guiding principles have much in common with heuristics, such as their ability to simplify complex organisational environments by ignoring part of the information available (Oliver & Jacobs, 2007). What distinguishes them from heuristics is that guiding principles do not outline detailed decision criteria in the same way that heuristics do (Oliver & Jacobs, 2007). Guiding principles are not completely based on rational logic. Rather, they include emotional content in their narrative storyline (Oliver & Jacobs, 2007). Heuristic decision making cannot be deemed perfectly rational, and emotions are not necessarily part of the stored heuristic information. Other decision-support devices like simple rules or standard operating procedures are much clearer in their decision guidance, but they are only applicable to more narrowly defined situations (Woiceshyn, 2009).

2.5.7 Guiding principles in the context of IMC

Guiding principles are not in wide use within IMC-related studies and research. Nevertheless, a few examples have been identified. Schultz and Schultz (2004, pp. 49–50) referred to eight general guiding principles which "[…] are key to developing and executing an integrated program". They developed these from research within agencies and production companies, and they are based both on practice and research (Schultz & Schultz, 2004).

The guiding principles are termed as follows (Schultz & Schultz, 2004, pp. 50–67):
- Become a customer-centric organisation.
- Use outside-in planning.
- Focus on the total customer experience.
- Align consumer goals with corporate objectives.
- Set customer behaviour objectives.
- Treat customers as assets.

- Streamline functional activities.
- Converge marketing communications activities.

Since these guiding principles are general principles, they may serve as guidelines for implementing an IMC approach successfully in any company. They are distilled from experiences in other companies. They may, therefore, not necessarily be the complete set of specific guiding principles which could be used by any company without further detailing in order to implement IMC successfully at a strategic level. Applying these notions of strategy to decisions which must be made regarding marketing communications may need more specific guiding principles which fit the context of the company in question. Also, there may be other guiding principles currently in place which are based on company-specific narratives and storylines from a company's past which already guide current decision making. In this sense, the outlined guiding principles by Schultz and Schultz (2004) may be capable of guiding decision making when it comes to implementing an IMC approach successfully. However, the emotional content and the explicitly shared narratives, which are the individualised parts of the guiding principle concept and which are therefore emotionally linked to any specific company, are missing in these general guiding principles due to their general character.

In a similarly general approach, Peltier et al. (2003, p. 106) referred to the guiding principle of the 'interactive integrated marketing communication' model, which is aimed at taking advantage of the interactivity of current technology in-use. To realise this advantage, the guiding principle is that the "[…] organisation's marketing strategy must be data driven" (Peltier et al., 2003, p. 106). While this guiding principle is roughly in line with the third and partially in line with the fourth stage of the four-stage IMC process model (Schultz and Kitchen, 2000), it is similarly a general guiding principle, lacking company-specific emotional content and narratives.

Guiding principles are also used by Challagalla et al. (2014) in their concept of marketing doctrine which is aimed at guiding a company's marketing decision making. Challagalla et al. (2014) suggested the use of guiding principles for their concept of marketing doctrine by focusing on the unique experiences of a company; these are distilled into guiding principles. To generate these guiding principles,

shared narratives and emotional content are employed as intended by the guiding principles concept (Oliver & Jacobs, 2007). This is achieved through the involvement of employees in the generation of principles, and through the intended balance between supplying guidance. However, it leaves out execution details, and the concept is possibly able to address "[…] the seemingly at-odds imperatives of consistency and flexibility" (Challagalla et al., 2014, p. 4). Marketing doctrine is therefore possibly able to overcome issues in generating consistency across a decentralised organisational structure. "We argue that firms that pursue a diversification strategy or decentralise marketing are likely to experience differences in marketing decision making and, thus, would value a common marketing approach (i.e., marketing doctrine)" (Challagalla et al., 2014, p. 5). The concept does not therefore simply refer to marketing communications or to IMC in particular, it is aimed at all marketing activities throughout the company. Despite the fact that the concept is not explicitly linked to IMC, marketing doctrine seems well suited to support the achievement of consistency in marketing activities, ranging from tactics to strategy (Challagalla et al., 2014).

The focus of this thesis is not to establish a comparison of guiding principles across industries. The active development of guiding principles is one way to improve marketing decision-making consistency and business strategy for the company that is the focus of this research. In terms of heuristics, guiding principles are a supporting tool which can be used to guide decision making across the company in a way that crosses organisational boundaries. Guiding principles are even more relevant for the development of a conceptual model which shall facilitate IMC implementation at a strategic level, helping to overcome the organisational issues which decentralised organisation structures pose for consistent decision making. Their shared content and their narrative basis, which connects team members emotionally to their storyline, may be an effective tool to support consistent decision making over the long term to support the implementation of IMC at a strategic level. This can achieve much more than a mere heuristics approach. The initial discussion of heuristics in the light of decision making was nevertheless perceived to be necessary for the understanding of principles. Such principles have a heuristic character (Oliver & Jacobs, 2007). Guiding principles are especially helpful in complex, unforeseeable surroundings (Woiceshyn, 2009), such as in strategic decision making, since they

leave room for interpretation and the adaption of the principle to the local situation by the decision maker (Challagalla et al., 2014). They are therefore perceived to be well suited to address issues like the integration of marketing communications at a strategic level.

2.6   Decentralised organisation

A decentralised organisational structure, which is the organisational setup of the company that is the focus of this research, plays an important role in decision making. It is useful to explore what the issue of running a decentralised structure means for an organisation that is trying to achieve consistency in its decisions. Mintzberg (1979) referred to this issue by focusing on the power over decision making in an organisation. In this context, he defined a decentralised organisation as one where the power to make decisions is dispersed amongst many individuals across the organisation (Mintzberg, 1979). One reason Mintzberg supplied for operating a decentralised organisational structure is that when decision-making power is shared, "[…] the individuals who are able to understand the specifics can respond intelligently to them" (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 183). In short: "…power is placed where the knowledge is" (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 183). Another related reason is that decentralisation allows people to respond quickly to local conditions (Mintzberg, 1979). The downside of decentralisation is lost coordination across units of the company (Mintzberg, 1979; Rumelt, 2012). The company that is the focus of this study operates a decentralised organisational structure; that is, many decisions are made at a local subsidiary level, especially regarding marketing. Indeed, marketing is carried out by each of the larger subsidiaries. This means, in essence, that the coordination of all local decisions is problematic, since there are few centrally coordinated alignment mechanisms in place which work efficiently and effectively across all subsidiaries.

This is a barrier to implementing IMC, not only at the level of the message, but also at a strategic level. It is important to ensure that decisions in each sales subsidiary are consistent with an overarching strategy. It is also key to ensure that local marketing campaigns do not conflict with other subsidiaries' or headquarters' messages. Indeed, existing organisational structures and opposition to change are seen as the

greatest barriers to implementing integration (Mortimer & Laurie, 2017; Schultz & Kitchen, 1997; Schultz & Schultz, 2004). To implement IMC successfully at a strategic or message integration level, coordination is a major issue to be addressed, since SI (i.e., marketing decisions that are consistent with strategy) requires people to collaborate efficiently and effectively. As such, the resulting necessity from these issues is that processes need to be developed which are capable of aligning all the globally dispersed elements of marketing if one wants to implement IMC successfully (Schultz & Schultz, 2004). As a counter to this barrier, heuristic decision making using guiding principles to inform decision making is an approach which is capable of overcoming these barriers, by helping people take decisions which are consistent with business strategy. IMC needs to be explored as a complex organisational issue (Eagle & Kitchen, 2000; Johansen & Andersen, 2012) and research on its general organisational dimensions is rather scarce (identified studies are e.g., Cornelissen, 2001; Cornelissen & Thorpe, 2001; Kerr & Patti, 2015). This study addresses this need since it explores issues regarding IMC implementation within the boundaries of a decentralised organisation. Implementing IMC means implementing change in the organisation, and it is accepted that intended change often creates resistance. Mortimer and Laurie (2017) suggested that trust is extremely important in these change situations where the level of control over employee behaviour is low, since trust makes change easier to implement.

Trust, as a concept, is referred to in social exchange theory and is seen as a result of the exchange of benefits, since it is a sign of mutual support (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Mortimer & Laurie, 2017). Since trust amongst employees can be similarly considered important when it comes to IMC implementation, it is important to recognise that trust can be generated and managed in situations of change. It can be assumed that tightly controlled change will generate some degree of resistance. IMC implementation must therefore employ tools which are capable of achieving integration without generating major resistance. Guiding principles, which are based on heuristic decision making, can potentially facilitate trust whilst still supporting change. Indeed, guiding principles are conjointly developed (Oliver & Jacobs, 2007). This participative element may serve as a source for generating trust. Guiding principles have a narrative character, which means that their storyline is shared and co-developed over time by stakeholders (Oliver & Jacobs, 2007).

This involvement of actors in an embedded storyline with emotional content can generate trust amongst stakeholders. Indeed, it is ultimately stakeholders that are able to influence at least parts of the content of the guiding principles themselves. This forms the basis for the development of mutual support between subsidiaries and headquarters. Guiding principles are capable of achieving both consistency with strategy and allowing for local flexibility in decisions (Challagalla et al., 2014). This room for interpretation, which the guiding principle leaves to the local subsidiary, is possibly the basis for commitment and trust. It allows actors in the subsidiaries to make their own decisions according to local circumstances, valuing local knowledge, but keeping decisions within certain, strategy-relevant boundaries (Challagalla et al., 2014). Both headquarters and local subsidiaries can benefit from mutual support to build trust. This trust may be a solid basis for successful IMC implementation. Using guiding principles as a tool to support the implementation of an integrated approach to marketing communications may therefore be a way to improve successful implementation of IMC as a strategic process.

2.7   Summary of chapter

The literature review has revealed several gaps in academic literature and corresponding knowledge on IMC. These gaps in knowledge provide the research opportunity which is laid out in this thesis by the research aim and the research objectives.

IMC-related studies have had, so far, a focus on quantitative research methods, such as surveys. In addition, a significant share of research has so far been conducted with marketing agencies and not with client firms. Qualitative studies which provide deep and rich data directly from the involved actors of the client firms provide an opportunity to better understand how decisions on marketing communications are taken. These insights allow further exploration of what hinders an alignment of marketing communications with business strategy. However, even though one major defining element of IMC is its strategic focus (Holm, 2006; Kitchen & Burgmann, 2015), academic research on why IMC implementation at a strategic level is rarely successful remains scarce. Closing this research gap will help to improve understanding of what factors hinder decision making on marketing communications

that is consistent with strategy. This provides an opportunity to develop tools which contribute towards improving the implementation of IMC at a strategic level. Organisational structure is often mentioned in academic research as an inhibitor to successful IMC implementation (Mortimer & Laurie, 2017; Schultz & Kitchen, 1997; Schultz & Schultz, 2004). Despite this insight, academic research dedicated to investigating the impact of organisational structure on IMC remains scarce as well. In particular, there are few studies on the barriers to successful IMC implementation posed by a decentralised organisational structure, even though a decentralised structure has obvious downsides when it comes to alignment between operational units and consistency across a network of subsidiaries. Better understanding of the specific barriers that a decentralised organisational structure poses for IMC implementation is therefore a source for developing tools which help in overcoming these barriers.

Guiding principles are perceived to be helpful in supporting consistent yet flexible decision making in marketing, as outlined for the concept of marketing doctrine (Challagalla et al., 2014). The application of guiding principles in an IMC context is seldom studied and the dedicated application of guiding principles for improving SI of marketing communications with strategy in a decentralised organisational structure is, to date, not found in the academic literature, to the best of the author's knowledge. Providing a conceptual model which helps the development of guiding principles for improving alignment of marketing communication activities with business strategy is therefore an opportunity which may help to establish IMC implementation successfully at a strategic level. Such a supporting tool based on guiding principles has not yet been developed and it may therefore be of significant value for implementing IMC at its defining, strategic, level. In total, such a conceptual model may help in implementing IMC more successfully in companies.

This chapter provided a critical review of the relevant literature and it was guided by the aim and objectives outlined in Chapter one. It focused on providing a comprehensive overview of the existing literature on IMC, with an additional focus on that literature which deals with implementing IMC at the strategic level of organisations. In addition, an overview of literature which deals with heuristic decision making was provided, since heuristic decision making is perceived to be an approach

which might be capable of supporting decision making in a decentralised organisational context (Challagalla et al., 2014). The following chapter outlines how the research objectives will be addressed. This includes a discussion of the underlying research paradigm and the consistent choice of methods for data generation and analysis.

3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines how the research aims and objectives will be addressed using appropriate methods for data gathering and analysis. This includes a discussion of the underlying research paradigm for the research project. It is argued that a qualitative research approach must be taken in order to generate the deep and rich data which is necessary to fulfil the research aim. In accordance with a qualitative approach, the choice of consistent, corresponding research methods is discussed, which results in semi-structured interviews being identified as the central research instrument of choice. In terms of data analysis, thematic analysis is identified as an appropriate tool to fulfil the research aim which is to produce a conceptual model to support practical IMC implementation at a strategic level.

3.2 Research paradigm

A research paradigm can be perceived as a net or framework, which contains the researcher's ontological, epistemological, and methodological premises. It has been described as the "basic set of beliefs that guides action" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Guba, 1990, p. 17). Choosing a research paradigm is a fundamental decision, since the underlying set of beliefs will guide the researcher's actions. Defining the underlying methodology of a research process requires outlining the philosophical and theoretical positions which inform this process (King, 2010).

An interesting finding for IMC-related research which was identified in the literature review is that the major research method employed for data collection tends to be questionnaire-based surveys. A similar finding was made by Burgmann (2007) in her IMC-related research thesis. The ontological approach of these studies is positivistic and they seek out surface, rather general, commonalities for IMC. This direction and intention is apparent, for example, in the frequent re-use of one specific questionnaire in other IMC studies (Kitchen & Schultz, 1998; Kitchen & Schultz, 1999; Schultz & Kitchen, 1997) which was originally developed by Caywood et al. (1991). Such re-use allows the researcher to filter out the commonalities and differences between the different research settings, and reference is often made to

these commonalities and differences compared to prior findings. Indeed, as outlined before, IMC researchers do not agree on a common definition of IMC (Kitchen, 2017; Kitchen, Schultz, et al., 2004; Kliatchko, 2005; Nowak & Phelps, 1994), despite the time that has lapsed since it originally emerged as an academic research and practical management topic. It seems quite plausible that after the discovery of a new approach or concept, an initial drive exists to find commonalities with the target of filtering out the essence of the idea in order to arrive at a common concept. A tendency towards a positivistic research approach therefore seems plausible in the early phase of concept development. Indeed, looking at the articles reviewed on IMC as outlined before, the focus on quantitative research is highest in the first 10 years after IMC was identified.

Positivism "[…] when applied to human beings is to discover 'laws' of society that act in a similar manner to the laws of the natural sciences. It is a model of research that tends to treat social facts as existing independently of the activities of both research participants and researchers […]" (Keegan, 2009, p. 22). Following this argument, a positivistic approach to IMC research is likely to miss important elements of IMC, which are to be found in "[…] the messiness, contradiction and partial truths that are inherent in all human communication" (Keegan, 2009, p. 23). In other words, it is unlikely that IMC can be fully explored and understood following only a positivistic research paradigm. Indeed, IMC adoption is assumed to be "[…] both situation-specific and context-dependent […]" (Kitchen, 2017, p. 396). Whether IMC adoption is specific to the situation and dependent on the context needs further investigation to understand if there is indeed a 'universal truth' about IMC implementation as positivists would suggest. Speculatively, this is one part of the problem of conceptualising IMC – the very high dependence on the situation and context, which makes it hard to generalise IMC-related findings universally. Kitchen (2017, p. 396) stated that IMC is "[…] a widely accepted model and paradigm, and its use or implementation depends on what the company wishes to do within its own budgetary constraints or what senior managers proscribe […]".

Another discovery is therefore that IMC implementation and usage is unlikely to exist outside, and independent of, human interaction. Rather, it is significantly dependent upon the social context and the stakeholders. An exploration of whether IMC and its

implementation at a strategic level exist objectively, independent of human beings, their perception, and their interpretation of the phenomenon, is therefore merited based on these observations. It has already been acknowledged that everything regarding IMC starts with the customer (Shimp, 2010), and the overarching goal of IMC is to affect behaviour (Shimp, 2010). This is an important aspect of IMC, yet it seems implausible that something that depends so much upon and is aimed at affecting the behaviour of human beings could exist independent of the irrational, emotional, or unpredictable behaviour of human beings, which would be the case if an objective, positivistic worldview about research was adopted. Such an objective worldview would ultimately mean that the behaviour of the customer can be logically and rationally explained, and even somehow calculated for prediction purposes. Otherwise the customer, as a stakeholder, could influence the object of the study, which would not fit the positivistic perspective (Grix, 2004). In my worldview, the customer is impossible to predict precisely, and for every facet. In addition, the customer influences the object of the study. The interactivity, which is embedded in the concept of IMC, and enabled through the technology of the internet, allows customers to 'talk back' and talk to each other. Customers may therefore have a significant impact on the successful implementation of IMC.

The clear outcome of all efforts regarding IMC implementation so far is that IMC has only rarely been implemented successfully as a strategic process in companies (Kitchen, 2017). One way of interpreting this is to see it as a sign that an approach to SI does not seem to work based on universal implementation laws which are easily applied to any company and business situation. Clearly some differentiation needs to be made between an abstract generic concept of IMC and its application to the unique and specific situation of a company. In the former case, a positivistic ontological approach to research might be a good choice, since developing such an abstract concept is about filtering out the generic commonalities of the initial idea surrounding IMC, which is valid for all possible settings. In the latter case, the specific environment, including the stakeholders, needs to be considered and included in the research, and it can be assumed that social actors influence the situation significantly. This research acknowledges that the findings to be made in a specific situation may not be generalisable to a broader community. The findings regarding the implementation of strategic IMC may vary by case and by each individual

situation-specific result. This is dependent upon the social actors involved. Asking why IMC at a strategic level has so far not been widely and successfully implemented cannot be answered by a positivistic ontological approach to research, since the answer is embedded in the social structure and context of each individual research setting. Keeping this assumption in mind, an interpretivist ontological approach to research must be taken, if the project is to be successful.

I would like to assume for the moment that implementing IMC at the strategic level bears similarities to implementing a strategy. Indeed, the issues of implementing a strategy and implementing IMC at a strategic level are necessarily intertwined, since IMC-related activities need to be aligned with business strategy. An interesting additional similarity between the two concepts in the context of selecting a research paradigm is that just as few companies have succeeded in implementing IMC as a strategic process, similarly, relatively few companies have implemented successful strategies (Rumelt, 2012). As stated by Porter (1996, p. 64), "Competitive strategy is about being different. It means deliberately choosing a different set of activities to deliver a unique mix of value". Being different requires an understanding of the competitive landscape and one's own available resources. A unique combination of activities is therefore chosen, which – if successful – results in a similarly unique and viable competitive position. In contrast, solutions to issues of operational effectiveness can be purchased in the market (Porter, 1996). These solutions seem to feature more generic benefits which are beneficial to a much wider array of companies. This suggests that the implementation of these solutions is still company-specific, but such operationally effective concepts are still more generic than implementing a strategy or IMC at a strategic level. Implementing such concepts does not provide competitive advantage, since they do not allow for differentiation from competition.

Implementing a strategy or implementing IMC at a strategic level seems to be more tailored to, and dependent upon, the individual situation of the company. It depends more on an understanding of the company and on an understanding of the market and is therefore more dependent upon knowledgeable social actors. Choosing and implementing a strategy and IMC at a strategic level may, therefore, be understood better if they are researched directly within the social context of these very

companies. Speculatively, the very company-dependent, company-specific benefits IMC and strategy may provide may also be a reason why it is so hard to arrive at an agreed common concept for IMC. The generic, generalisable part valid for all companies may be very small, while the strategic benefit and essence of the concept lies in the company-specific and individual implementation part which is hard to capture. If the characterising and most benefitting feature of IMC is that it is a strategic process, then implementing IMC at a strategic level is a very situation-specific topic which calls for research within this very specific setting. Prescriptive concepts as to how this can be achieved may not reach the detailed level which is needed to implement IMC easily as a strategic process. If this were not so, then the required strategic know-how would be something that could be bought and would be interchangeable, thereby directly erasing the competitive benefits it promises. Choices regarding strategy do not take place in a vacuum, but are influenced and conducted by human beings.

In essence, choosing a strategy is a judgement call, because not all necessary information is available for an entirely rational decision. In addition, it may not even be possible for some time to determine whether such decisions were successful (Rumelt, 2012). In a perfectly rational world, with no time lags for information reception and perfect visibility of all consequences for everyone involved, strategy may not be a necessary or useful concept. However, strategy is rooted in differences (Rumelt, 2012). Differences between competitors and changes in a company's environment need to be perceived by the relevant stakeholders, while at the same time recognising the resources the company has at its disposal, and translating these external and internal differences and resources into a beneficial strategy which exploits them. Without the existing limitations of the human mind, a lot of those exploitable differences can be assumed to vanish. In other words, strategy is rooted in the limitations of the human mind and is shaped by features like information processing capability, speed, storage capacity, emotionality, and irrationality. Strategy is therefore heavily influenced or even rooted in these human limitations which are continuously impacted by surrounding social structures. The implementation of the concept of strategy is therefore dependent upon subjective judgements and similarly dependent upon stakeholders. Since IMC is intertwined with the concept of strategy, if IMC is to be implemented as a strategic process, the same

social influences are relevant for strategic IMC implementation as for designing and implementing a strategy. Implementing IMC at a strategic level is a highly socially influenced process; therefore, it needs to be researched accordingly. Research regarding the implementation of such socially rooted concepts should therefore be based on matching research assumptions and instruments, which is why an interpretivist assumption about the world in which this research takes place is necessary. Since both IMC implementation and strategy are activities significantly influenced and shaped by human social interaction, interpretivism is the appropriate view of the world for research seeking to develop a deeper understanding of implementing IMC as a strategic process.

"Qualitative research has a unique ability to focus on how people construct their behaviour in naturally occurring situations (constructionism)" (Silverman, 2015, p. 27).

Considering the ontologically chosen position of interpretivism, the epistemological position taken for this research project is social constructivism. The choice of epistemological position needs to "[…] consider the relationship between the knower and the known and how valid knowledge is created" (Pascale, 2010, p. 29). Epistemological and ontological choices need to be consistent, since their consistency further determines the plausibility of methodological choices (Pascale, 2010). Well-established epistemological positions include objectivism, subjectivism, and social constructivism. The following paragraphs discuss why objectivism and subjectivism were not chosen as viable epistemological positions. Objectivism means, in essence that "[…] things […] have truth and meaning residing in them as objects" (Crotty, 1998, p.5). This means that their truth and meaning are independent of human perception and interpretation. Their meaning and truth can be obtained by appropriate research methods, and any researcher or observer applying the appropriate research methods in the right way will arrive at the same conclusion about the object of study – namely at the 'truth'.

Based on this explanation of objectivism, it seems unlikely that understanding the implementation of IMC at a strategic level is achieved by application of an objective research epistemology. First of all, no single conceptual definition of IMC in general

has yet been agreed upon (Kitchen, 2017). It must be concluded, therefore, that a universal truth about the concept of IMC is hard to extract, despite several attempts (Kliatchko, 2005, 2008). If objectivism was chosen by researchers and corresponding methods were applied to deduct a generic concept of IMC, then the result would not be entirely satisfactory. One major reason is the significant influence of social actors over the implementation of IMC. After all, IMC is assumed to be "[…] situation-specific and context-dependent […]" (Kitchen, 2017, p. 396). If perceptions of IMC are altered by a specific context, every situation is unique. However, if meaning is to be found regarding IMC, and if meaning refers to finding out why people think and behave as they do (Keegan, 2009), then an objectivist position would assume that there is one correct way of behaving and thinking about IMC and its implementation. This putative 'truth' is unlikely to exist for a setting which is so context dependent and situation specific (Kitchen, 2017).

Choosing a typical objectivist research method like frequency-measuring surveys, which are intended to count the number of responses to a predetermined set of questions regarding IMC implementation, will therefore not automatically generate generalisable findings for other settings. Additionally, such surveys may not generate enough facets of information about the situation of IMC implementation, since they will not access the thoughts, motives, and rationalities behind some actors' activities. Another research method would be needed which involves talking to people. As Kvale and Brinkman (2009, p. xvii) put it, "If you want to know how people understand their world and their lives, why not talk with them?". Generating and using this data will undoubtedly include interpretation by the researcher, which again creates specific results, individual to the situation. In contrast, a universal truth about IMC could be very generic, so that everyone can agree upon it. An alternative to this idea is that such a universal truth may not exist. Indeed, it seems unlikely that an objectivist epistemological position would help to address the research objectives of this project, which are aimed at understanding IMC implementation.

Forming such an understanding involves interpreting the responses and activities of people. Whereas for objectivism, only the object itself carries meaning, for subjectivism, meaning "[…] is imposed on the object by the subject" (Crotty, 1998, p. 9) and the object itself does not directly influence this generation of meaning (Crotty,

1998). Similarly, as for objectivism, where the object of SI carries all meaning independent of social actors, subjectivism does not provide a viable epistemological position for this research project. Had subjectivism been chosen, which could be a viable option given the chosen interpretivist ontological position, it would mean that all meaning is imposed on the issue of implementing SI by stakeholders. This would mean that meaning, that is, understanding why people think and behave as they do (Keegan, 2009), is determined by stakeholders only, independent of the concept of IMC. However, the issue of SI carries some meaning already by itself, since SI and IMC have been researched for years and the concept is discussed by academics and marketers alike. The issue is therefore shaped in the mind of stakeholders, and there is already some general consensus in the community as to what SI and IMC are. Stakeholders therefore do not impose meaning upon IMC or SI by themselves, but they build on established knowledge. On the other hand, despite the assertion that IMC carries some meaning by itself, there is still no universal agreement as to its meaning, which fits with the understanding that it does not carry all meaning by itself, independent of human actors.

Both subjectivism and objectivism are not suitable for researching IMC and corresponding SI in the context of its organisational implementation. A third epistemological stance is social constructivism, which better matches the chosen ontological position of interpretivism, and which is better suited to addressing the research aims and objectives.

"Understanding is constructed through interpretations in the world" (Howell, 2013, p. 91).

An objective of this research is to explore and understand the decision-making process for marketing communication activities, and to understand how business strategy influences this process. Constructivists "[…] consider that the mind is active in the construction of knowledge, and knowing is interactive with data, rather than accepting simple abstractions reflected by the mind" (Howell, 2013, p. 91). For constructivists, meaning and knowledge are therefore constructed through interaction between the involved social actors and the object of study – instead of neither the object itself carrying all meaning as with objectivism nor the subject generating all

meaning as with subjectivism. For constructivism "[…] the core assumption is that realities are not objectively 'out there' but are constructed by people, often under the influence of a variety of social and cultural factors that lead to shared construction […]" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 12; Howell, 2013, p. 90). The knowledge and meaning generated will therefore be specific to the situation, and to the interaction between actors and the object of study. Such knowledge is not necessarily directly re-applicable to other settings. From a social constructivist perspective, IMC as a concept carries meaning which is imposed on it by other researchers and marketers, and which is spread in the academic and practitioner community.

Employees in the company studied for this research dealt with and deal with IMC and its inherent meaning by discussing and thinking about its implementation in their company. Through this interaction between stakeholders, and between social actors and their interpretation of IMC, a new adaptation of IMC has already been created and is continuously developing further. While IMC still contains core elements of its original concept, it gets adapted to the specific situation of the company and of stakeholders, who have already gathered and combined specific knowledge about the company and about IMC. Each employee deals differently with the idea of implementing IMC, dependent on several factors like personal knowledge, willingness to invest additional effort, personal motivation in the workplace, and the company's organisational context, such as its structure and its culture. This means that the existing meaning of IMC is reinterpreted by stakeholders. The overall situation that is created will either benefit or harm the successful implementation of IMC. Since exploration and understanding depends on both the existing concept of IMC and the specific context to which it was applied, neither pure subjectivism nor objectivism would be a fitting epistemological stance for this research. The perspective of social constructivism is a matching epistemological position for the research aims and objectives.

This epistemological position is therefore considered capable of further guiding methodological choices with the target of addressing the aim of the research and its objectives successfully. The limitation of this perspective is that truth can only be found for the given situation (Howell, 2013). Generalisability is not a predicted outcome of the outlined research, and the final conceptual model will therefore be

limited in its applicability to other situations. However, this is an issue that is embedded in the nature of this research. Table 4 highlights the impact that the chosen epistemological position has on the defining elements of IMC, and on the corresponding design of the research.

Table 4 - Epistemology and the defining elements of IMC-related research, based on Crotty (2014)

Defining elements of IMC	Objectivism	Subjectivism	Social constructivism
Focus	Universal, general	Several areas of focus	Several developing and constructed areas of focus
Industry	Observe different industries	Interact with involved social actors in different industries	Investigate the issue in different industries
Country	Observe issues in different countries	Interact with involved social actors in different countries	Investigate the issue in different countries
Perspective	Observe IMC implementation efforts from outside	Interact with involved social actors	Investigate perception of involved social actors to understand the explored phenomenon of IMC implementation
Research method	Quantitative measurement of the performance or success of IMC implementation	Discover issues of IMC implementation qualitatively	Generate interpretive understanding of IMC implementation through application of qualitative methods
Conceptual framework	IMC is objectively observed, measured, and steered	The company employees determine performance of IMC implementation entirely by their own perception and corresponding decisions	Understand the perception of company employees involved in IMC-related decisions

IMC integrated marketing communications

3.3   Methodological approach

The term methodology "[…] relates to a process where the design of the research and choice of particular methods, and their justification in relation to the research project, are made evident" (King, 2010, p. 6). Methodology is therefore about making explicit which research methods will best support the fulfilment of the research aims and objectives by collecting appropriate data and it is about how these methods will be used (Grix, 2004). Justifying the choice of methods is achieved by outlining a sound research strategy which provides a coherent storyline regarding how the research aims and objectives are best achieved. Applying the concept of strategy to a research context is therefore possible and feasible. After all, the core of strategy is about "[…] discovering the critical factors in a situation and designing a way of coordinating and focusing actions to deal with those factors" (Rumelt, 2012, p. 2). Rumelt (2012) continued by defining the kernel of good strategy as consisting of a diagnosis, a guiding policy, and a set of coherent actions. The diagnosis is expected to explain the nature of the challenge (Rumelt, 2012). In principle, the gap identified in the literature regarding IMC implementation at a strategic level may be perceived as an analytical phase and part of the diagnosis of the academic situation regarding IMC. This includes the identification of a critical area which needs further research. This leads to the research aims and objectives. The guiding policy is intended to be an approach which is appropriate for dealing successfully with the challenge and the research gap (Rumelt, 2012). Addressing the research gap successfully can only be achieved if the selection of the research paradigm and positions on ontology and epistemology are appropriately chosen to address the research aims and objectives. These choices further determine choices of methods for data collection. The guiding policy for addressing the research aims and objectives is therefore the adoption of an interpretivist ontological position and the adoption of social constructivism as an appropriate epistemological position. Following these ontological and epistemological choices the research can be guided towards the qualitative research paradigm, which is the basis for determining appropriate research methods for data collection to address the aims and objectives.

The consistent storyline of these choices can be interpreted as the guiding policy which helps ensure the aims are met. The final resulting coherent set of actions is a plan of activities which determines how and where the chosen methods for data

collection are applied, how the collected data will be analysed, and what will be done with the results. Once the ontological and epistemological positions are clarified, the next step is to determine the research approach and to choose appropriate research methods. As already outlined, this research is conducted within the realms of the qualitative research paradigm. According to Keegan (2009), qualitative research is mainly concerned with meaning rather than measuring. By meaning, Keegan refers to the understanding of why individuals and groups "[…] think and behave as they do[…]" (Keegan, 2009, p. 11). In contrast, a quantitative approach would deal with counting the frequency of phenomena, while a qualitative approach is used "[…] to gain deeper insights into the nature of the phenomena under investigation […]" (Dinnie et al., 2010, p. 392; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 1994).

Around half of the articles reviewed for the literature review regarding IMC were conducted within the quantitative research paradigm. No obvious imbalance to either quantitative or qualitative research can be identified from the total of the reviewed articles. The judgement made regarding research paradigm is based on explicit statements by the authors regarding the nature of their research and on personal judgements based on the aims, objectives, and the employed research methodology. Even though research methods are generally considered to be largely free of ontological and epistemological choices (Grix, 2004), their specific application can reveal the underlying assumptions of the researcher. The most typically applied research method for data collection is questionnaire-based surveys (Burgmann, 2007). These surveys are generally aimed at measuring the frequency of the participants' agreement and disagreement with certain statements, and most of the surveys also feature a few open-ended questions, for example, Kitchen et al. (2008); Kitchen and Schultz (1999); Kitchen, Schultz, et al. (2004); and Schultz et al. (2016). This research project seeks to gain a deeper insight into the nature of the phenomenon of IMC implementation at a strategic level (SI) for the company in focus. The research sets out to generate an understanding of the deeper meaning of actors' behaviour in the process of IMC implementation, and why this behaviour possibly leads to problems in implementing IMC as a strategic process.

This deep exploration of the issue is necessary in order to fully understand the barriers to and limitations regarding SI, and to grasp the meaning of these barriers within that context. The aim is to determine solutions which can deal with these

barriers successfully, in order to establish a conceptual model which shall help facilitate IMC implementation at a strategic level. These barriers are assumed to exist because of people building them both consciously and unconsciously in their daily work surroundings and in their interactions with others. An example for such socially created barriers is the assumed pressure of communities which is aimed at generating behaviour conformity for all members belonging to a social group as postulated by social influence theory (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). These barriers are a human-created social construct, which can only be understood fully if investigated within the very context in which they are established. In contrast, employing methods which are aimed at measuring the frequency of how many involved actors agree to predetermined statements about barriers towards implementing IMC will not generate the necessary level of deep and rich knowledge to illuminate the underlying barriers to further develop and implement IMC as a strategic process. A judgement on a scale does not provide much additional information regarding the deeper meaning of how and why that judgement is made. Since this research sets out to understand the meaning of the specific area of social interaction regarding IMC implementation, a qualitative approach has been chosen (Silverman, 2015). The underlying qualitative research paradigm will guide further choices regarding methodology and methods so that research consistency, validity, and, ultimately, success can be achieved.

Qualitative research is rather characterised by an inductive approach to research, while quantitative research prefers a deductive approach (Grix, 2010). The choice of social constructivism as the epistemological position regarding how knowledge is created, requires an inductive approach. "[…] constructivism means that human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as we construct or make it" (Schwandt & Gates, 2000, p. 197). This statement means that the researcher constructs knowledge from data analysis and uses this knowledge to create a conceptual model; the research project is not about testing a predetermined hypothesis or theory, but about using theory as a departing point which justifies choices on epistemology and ontology (Maxwell, 2013). Based on social influence theory, it is assumed that local social actors within subsidiaries are influenced more by their local peer groups when it comes to local decisions on IMC than by any approach from headquarters for IMC implementation (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). This assumption verifies the choice of social constructivism since it is the interaction

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between local social actors and the concept of IMC which creates meaning – and not merely the concept of IMC or the social actors alone. Social influence theory therefore guides the researcher towards employing methods which are capable of cumulating data which is capable of generating an understanding for the specific situation, without a fixed predetermined hypothesis which needs to be tested.

Howell (2013) assumed, regarding constructivism, that knowledge is based on politics and interests. Understanding these local interests requires interacting with people to observe the underlying patterns of motivation for local decision making. Social influence theory postulates that our behaviour is influenced by other people. Understanding this influence and subsequent behaviour requires interpretation, which again is not an objective but a highly subjective and involved process. Meaning and understanding are therefore constructed by the researcher through involvement with the relevant actors. Locke (2002, p. 199) defined the process of induction as "[…] the formulation of general truths from specific instances [which] requires that one observe a number of specific instances". The formulation of general truths from specific instances is indeed an aim of the research project, since the final objective is to develop a conceptual model which may help facilitate implementing IMC at a strategic level. This study builds a theory for strategic IMC implementation within a specific organisational setup instead of testing predefined hypotheses as is typical of a deductive research approach.

The reason for this approach is that existing theory does not offer a feasible answer for the research questions, as outlined in the literature review (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). In order to observe a number of specific instances, the choice of methodology for data collection is a case study approach; however, it is not only the requirement of observing a number of instances or cases which has directed the selection of a case study approach. Schramm (1971, p. 6) defined the essence of a case study as "[…] that it tries to illuminate a decision or a set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result". The research objectives seek to explore how decisions for marketing communication activities and business strategy are taken within the company that is the focus of this research project. Yin (2013, p. 14) stated more specifically that a case study approach has a distinct advantage over other methods when "[…] A 'how' or 'why' question is asked

about a contemporary set of events over which a researcher has little or no control". Indeed, the researcher for this project has little control over decision making for IMC-related marketing activities within the studied company, be this at its headquarters or within its subsidiaries. The data gathering process is not going to take place in an artificial setup as with an experiment. Rather, it takes place in mostly unaltered surroundings directly at the workplace, where the researcher became involved with stakeholders. It has no impact on the decision-making activities which are explored. The set of events of decisions taken are not a historic set of events, but indeed an ongoing, current, or recent set of activities, whereby marketing activities are continuously decided upon by marketing employees. Finally, the research objectives are of an investigative nature: they are intended to explore how decisions are taken, as opposed to answering 'yes or no' questions. All three areas – the type of question, the timeliness, and degree of control – for this research project seem appropriate for a case study setup according to the requirements as defined by Yin (2013).

"[…] a research design is a logical plan for getting from here to there, where here may be defined as the initial set of questions to be answered, and there is some set of conclusions (answers) about these questions" (Yin, 2013, p. 28). For case studies, five components of research design are important to be addressed by the researcher (Yin, 2013, p. 29):

- the questions, or objectives,
- the propositions,
- the unit(s) of analysis,
- the logic of linking the data to the propositions,
- the criteria for interpreting the findings.

The questions in the case study take orientation from the research objectives. Yin suggested that an exploratory case study may not have a theory-based proposition, but that exploration still has a purpose (Yin, 2013, p. 30). This purpose is similar to the proposition idea, and shall direct the exploratory efforts: A "[…] proposition directs attention to something that should be examined within the scope of study" (Yin, 2013, p. 30). In terms of the proposition, the case study needs to recognise that the inductive nature of the research speaks for the exploratory character of the case

study. This means that the case study is intended to explore an issue, rather than proving or falsifying a predetermined assumption. Nevertheless, pure inductive studies with absolutely no assumptions or propositions to start out with are rare. The proposition for this case study is that the decentralised organisational structure is a significant barrier to implementing an IMC approach in general, and, more specifically, it is problematic to integrate it with business strategy. The argument for the structure being a barrier is assumed to be founded in the idea that local groups within a company structure do not automatically follow any focused approach, for example from headquarters, and they are driven by their own local needs and wants.

Social influence theory, for example, postulates that local actors are influenced by their local peers to conform with local group behaviour rather than with any headquarters approach (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). Based on these assumptions, it is further assumed that a guiding principles-based approach may be capable of overcoming these barriers. The resulting consequence of these initial propositions is that the data gathering methods need to be designed in a way which ensures that the influence of local peer groups on marketing decision making is an issue which is addressed in the interviews. This justifies a semi-structured approach to the interviews which ensures flexibility and that certain topics are covered.

According to Yin (2013, p. 34), the case for investigation should be a real-life phenomenon with a concrete manifestation. Based on the research questions, the specific 'phenomenon' – the subject of the case study (Yin, 2013, p. 34) – to be explored and understood is the decision-making process for marketing activities. It is necessary to examine whether and how this is linked to business strategy within the company the researcher works within. A sensible timeframe for the investigation should reach back about one or two years. This corresponds to the company's annual planning and budgeting cycle (Yin, 2013, p. 33). The unit(s) of analysis are a subset of the organisation's subsidiaries which will be understood in more depth. The phenomena to be explored are outlined and defined by the second and third research objectives. The first phenomenon to be explored is the decision-making process for marketing communication activities in healthcare, and specifically within the subsidiaries of the organisation of focus. The second phenomenon to be explored as defined by the third objective is to understand how customer knowledge, which is

generated through marketing communication activities, is used to inform business strategy decisions.

Bounding the case refers to selecting the specific group of people which are the focus of the study (Yin, 2013). This group of people within the subsidiaries are mostly marketing employees, as well as the head of marketing and the general manager of the subsidiary. These are involved in planning and in conducting marketing communication activities for their respective countries.

The design of the case study must ensure that the data is linked to the propositions and to the purpose of the study. "The actual analyses will require that you combine or assemble your case study data as a direct reflection of your initial study propositions" (Yin, 2013, p. 36). "The main purpose of the design is to help to avoid the situation in which the evidence does not address the initial research questions. In this sense, a research design deals with a logical problem and not a logistical problem" (Yin, 2013, p. 29).

The general analytical strategy for this case study is inductive in nature. Data is therefore gathered from the ground up (Yin, 2013). Such an inductive strategy includes playing with the data to notice patterns which suggest a useful concept (Yin, 2013). Independent of such a theoretically pure inductive approach, the researcher is pre-equipped with key concepts and uses this knowledge to find those patterns (Grix, 2010). As Silverman (2015, p. 39) put it, "[…] the facts we find in 'the field' never speak for themselves but are impregnated by our assumptions". According to Layder (1998, pp. 110–111) "[…] there is a need to get the theoretical imagination started by trying out provisional conceptual schemes". Starting this theoretical imagining based on expanding the explanatory domain of existing concepts which touch on the issues this research is related to, should provide a creative basis for theory development (Layder, 1998). This perception of applicable concepts for explaining social behaviour is the basis for enabling creativity (Layder, 1998). It sensitises the researcher to certain aspects of the situation, and provides a basis for using intuition to creatively come up with extended or new theories which explain the situation at hand (Layder, 1998).

Ensuring that the data which is generated fits the research questions can be achieved by addressing several measures. In this research, interviews with the participants are semi-structured in order to ensure that all aspects which are intended to be covered are covered. The interview guide with all the areas to be covered was developed with the intention to generate all relevant data which is needed to address research objectives two and three. The link between the questions in the interview guide and the research objectives is shown in Table 5. The interview guide can also be found in Appendix A.

Table 5 – Connection between interview questions and research objectives

	Interview question	Link to research objective 2 or 3	Remark
1	Please outline how your job is related to communication activities.		General introduction
2	Think about communication activities you were involved in for your country for the hospital segment. Can you tell me more about these activities? (i.e., what/when/where)	Objective 2 – decision making	Focus respondent on specific communication activities
3	Please think about one specific, locally conducted communication activity. Can you tell me how the decisions for this activity were taken? (i.e., who/why and how)?	Objective 2 – decision making	Explore how decisions were actually taken
4	Were there any criteria involved which you or your colleagues used when deciding upon this activity or the activity's characteristics?	Objective 2 – decision making	Explore how decisions were actually taken
5	Looking at the total activity in retrospect, what do you think most influenced decisions regarding the activity from your perspective?	Objective 2 – decision making	Explore how decisions were actually taken
6	How do you feel about the decisions taken regarding this or other communication activities?	Objective 2 – decision making	Explore how decisions were actually taken
7	Can you think of situations where there was disagreement regarding a communication activity? How was the conflict resolved?	Objective 2 – decision making	Explore how decisions were actually taken

	Interview question	Link to research objective 2 or 3	Remark
8	Think about the yearly planning cycle. How are communication activities for the hospital segment handled and decided upon in this planning activity?	Objective 2 – decision making	Focus exploration on planning
9	Think about the entire portfolio of communication activities which the subsidary manages. In your opinion, how should this portfolio be determined?	Objective 2 – decision making	Focus exploration on planning
10	Please think about the hospital business strategy as provided by headquarters. Can you outline it roughly?	Objective 2 – decision making	Focus exploration on the influence of strategy
11	How does this strategy influence choices regarding communication activities?	Objective 2 – decision making	Focus exploration on the influence of strategy
12	Apart from business strategy, how does headquarters influence your choices for local communication activities?	Objective 2 – decision making	Focus exploration on general influence from headquarters
13	Please think about customer information which you gather through communication activities. Can you elaborate on how this information is collected?	Objective 3 – usage of customer knowledge	Explore collection of customer information
14	Can you elaborate further regarding how this information is made available to and used by the company?	Objective 3 – usage of customer knowledge	Focus on availability of customer information for employees
15	How is this information used regarding setting up and refining your own local selling strategy?	Objective 3 – usage of customer knowledge	Explore usage of customer information for strategy purposes
16	How is this information fed-back to and re-used by headquarters for (hospital) strategy design?	Objective 3 – usage of customer knowledge	Explore usage of customer information for strategy purposes
17	How should the customer information you gather be used by the company in your opinion?	Objective 3 – usage of	Explore usage of customer information

	Interview question	Link to research objective 2 or 3	Remark
		customer knowledge	
18	Is there anything else important in this context of communication and strategy which you would like to add?		Open question at the end to ensure nothing important is left out

A pilot study was conducted with three participants from the German subsidiary. This pilot study was used as a test for the interview structure in order to ensure that the interview guide was properly structured to generate satisfactory coverage of data to address the research objectives. The German subsidiary was chosen for this pilot study because access to participants was easiest for the researcher. On the one hand, the German subsidiary is the largest subsidiary worldwide, so a significant number of marketing employees were contactable. On the other hand, the researcher is physically located there. Negotiating access to participants was therefore easy. The pilot study was conducted in the same way as all the interviews were conducted.

The pilot study revealed that the semi-structured nature of the interview guide was suitable for all ensuing interviews. One minor change was made to the interview guide. The initial interview guide which was used in the three pilot studies referred to marketing communication activities. This was perceived to be confusing for one of the participants. The interview guide was therefore changed and the term 'communication' was used instead of 'marketing communication'. This approach is in line with the idea that most corporate activities become a means of communication (Rowley, 2001). The remaining structure and wording of 18 predetermined questions were left mostly unaltered because it seemed to support the generation of the required data as intended. Since the change to the interview guide was minor, and the data generated seemed satisfactory, the data from the pilot study was also deemed feasible for use.

Since it was unclear upfront whether the pilot study could be used, there were six additional interviews scheduled for Germany; this meant that Germany provided data for nine cases out of a total of 30 interviews. Germany is considered to be one of the

most advanced subsidiaries within the company structure because it trades in its 'home market' where the company has its origins, and because of its significant size in terms of revenue and number of employees. Having a higher number of participants from this subsidiary is therefore deemed feasible, considering the perceived importance of Germany to the company, and considering the subsidiaries' perceived level of marketing maturity. In total, 30 interviews were conducted with participants from Germany (9), France (6), the UK (5), the Netherlands (4), Italy (5), and Belgium (1). The varying number of participants per country resulted from access negotiation discussions with each local general manager and head of marketing. Both roles were interview partners for the main five countries, apart from Belgium where only the general manager was interviewed. The Netherlands was the exception, since no dedicated head of marketing was present due to its different local organisational structure. After negotiating access, the general manager or the marketing head, depending on the subsidiary, then suggested interview partners which were subsequently contacted to take part in interviews. This approach to sample selection can therefore be termed purposive sampling. Potential participants for interviews were asked to participate based on the personal judgement of the researcher and according to their perceived fit for the study. Inclusion criteria, including that the general manager and the head of marketing were supposed to be interviewed due to their position in the company, are outlined in the following Table 6. The quotes from respondents which are presented in Chapter four are marked with the letter 'A' for marketing employees which provided the respective evidence and accordingly with the letter 'B' for managers. The columns in Table 6 are therefore also labeled with these letters for the same reason.

Table 6 - Characteristics of the respondents

Characteristic	Marketing employees (A)	Management (B)
Workplace	Works or recently worked for one of the following subsidiaries: Germany, United Kingdom, France, Italy, Netherlands, Belgium	Works or recently worked for one of the following subsidiaries: Germany, United Kingdom, France, Italy, Netherlands, Belgium
Experience	At least one year's work experience in the marketing/marketing communications context job	At least one year's work experience in the management job

Characteristic	Marketing employees (A)	Management (B)
Work context	Works or recently worked in a marketing context, ideally a marketing communications context	Works or recently worked as the general manager or as a manager in a marketing context for the subsidiary
Customer context	Job is or was focused or at least partially focused on the hospital segment	Job is or was focused or at least partially focused on the hospital segment
Language skills	Speaks and understands English	Speaks and understands English
Age	At least 18 years of age	At least 18 years of age

In some cases, the participants were personally known to the researcher, especially in the German subsidiary. As regards the other subsidiaries, some general managers and marketing managers were personally known to the researcher from prior collaborative activities, but several were also entirely unknown to the researcher.

Participation was therefore based on personal judgement and on whether the potential participants' roles fitted well with the purpose of the study and provided an opportunity to learn (Stake, 2000). Some 30 interviews in total were undertaken and this accords with other qualitative, interview-based IMC-related studies. For comparison purposes, Gronstedt (1996) conducted 41 interviews, Gronstedt and Thorson (1996) interviewed 27 participants, Low and Mohr (1999) interviewed 21 participants, Kallmeyer and Abratt (2001) carried out 20 interviews, Beverland and Luxton (2005) interviewed 53 participants, Burgmann (2007) carried out 25 interviews, Kitchen et al. (2007) interviewed 6 participants, Gurau (2008) carried out 29 interviews, Hall and Wickham (2008) carried out 25 interviews, Schoonmaker et al. (2013) completed 25 interviews, Kliatchko and Schultz (2014) carried out 22 interviews, and Niemann-Struweg (2014) carried out 10 interviews.

How many interviews are needed is determined by the obvious idea that one needs to interview as many individuals as necessary to find what one needs and wants to know (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). This idea, which is similar to the idea of the law of diminishing returns, assumes that a saturation point is reached, where additional interviews do not produce significant new insights (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In addition, the purpose of the research is not to create statistical, universal

generalisability, but analytical generalisability (Yin, 2013). After an analysis of the interviews, it was felt that after around 15 to 20 of the 30 interviews, no significant new insights relevant for the research objectives were produced after listening to and transcribing additional interviews. This further supports the assumption that the total number of conducted interviews was sufficient to address the research objectives.

Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton (2013, p. 17) saw people in organisations as "[…] knowledgeable agents […]". By this, they indicated "[…] that people in organisations know what they are trying to do and can explain their thoughts, intentions, and actions" (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 17). The role of researchers is therefore that of "[…] 'glorified reporters' whose main role is to give an adequate account of the informants' experience. We do not presume to impose prior constructs or theories on the informants as some sort of preferred a priori explanation for understanding or explaining their experience" (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 17). Semi-structured interviews were chosen for data collection purposes because they allow some flexibility for the interviewer to follow interesting facets which may come up in the interviews, while a certain structure is maintained across all interviews (Grix, 2010). Since the research is of a qualitative, interpretative nature, it is not necessary to count the number of instances found, which allows for such flexibility. On the other hand, it was ensured that certain aspects were covered in all interviews, ensuring research quality and that the generated data was linked to the research objectives (Yin, 2013). The duration of the interviews was initially planned for 45 minutes, but they ranged in reality from roughly 30 minutes up to almost 90 minutes. On average, each interview lasted around one hour. In the case of the German subsidiary, the interviews were conducted face to face in meeting rooms or offices in the headquarters facilities.

Two further interviews with participants from France were also conducted face to face because the participants were on a business visit to headquarters, and the interviews could be combined with their travel plans. All other interviews were conducted via an internet-based Skype meeting because it was not possible to visit the participants in person. All interviews were recorded, either with a recording device in the case of the face-to-face meetings, or with the built-in recording functionality of the Skype internet-based meeting software. Participants who met the participation criteria and who wanted to participate received an invitation letter (Appendix B) via email and a

consent form (Appendix C) which all of them signed so that the data from the interviews could be used in the study. In addition, they received a research privacy notice (Appendix D) which was provided by the University of Gloucestershire. Participants also received a participant information sheet (Appendix E) regarding the research project, which outlined roughly the intended scope of the research, how participants were selected, how the data would be handled, and what possible advantages and disadvantages might result from participation.

3.4   Data analysis

Interpretation of the findings was enabled through application of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a flexible and useful method for qualitative research, and it is compatible with the constructionist research paradigm adopted for this research project (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is useful for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Identifying patterns in the data can help to form the building blocks for developing a theoretical model; this is one of the major objectives of this thesis. As Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 10) put it, "A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research questions, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set". Thematic analysis is therefore also helpful for ensuring that data is linked to the research objectives (Yin, 2013). The identification of themes within the data does not depend upon a significant number of instances in which certain information is repeatedly identified (Braun & Clarke, 2006) as would be typical for quantitative research. Rather, themes depend upon the personal judgement of the researcher as to whether the information is helpful and meaningful when it comes to answering the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The interpretation of the findings (Yin, 2013) can therefore be considered to be a judgement issue rather than a logical, calculable function. The approach taken for this research was inductive thematic analysis. This means the data was coded without trying to fit the data into a preconceived coding frame, even though the researcher could never be considered to be entirely free of theoretical preconceptions (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Braun & Clarke, 2006). In line with the social constructivist paradigm of this research, the analysis was latent or interpretative as opposed to descriptive (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In terms of the interpretative analytical approach, "[…] the development of the themes themselves involves interpretative work, and the analysis that is produced is not just description, but is already theorised" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 14). The themes developed were therefore not merely reproduced from the words of the participants but consisted of interpretations of what the participants provided. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested six steps when conducting a thematic analysis. In the first phase they suggest it is necessary to familiarise oneself with the available data. For this purpose, all 30 recorded interviews were reviewed after the interviews were conducted. Based on this initial analysis, the most interesting interviews in the light of the research objectives were transcribed. This resulting transcription was then read several times to identify early patterns which matched the research objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The remaining interviews were then listened to again and further interviews were transcribed and further analysed. This process resulted in 21 interviews which were transcribed, while nine interviews were not transcribed, since they did not address the research questions sufficiently. The available data from the transcribed interviews generated a saturation point whereby additional transcription would not have provided significant further insights (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

During the next stage, initial codes were developed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These codes were identified by trying to find pieces of information which help to answer the research questions (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). During the next phase, these initial codes were sorted into more general, overarching themes. This means that initial codes were further analysed to see how they could contribute to an overarching theme to address the research objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The overarching themes that resulted from this phase were then further analysed and reviewed with the aim of creating both internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guba, 1978; Patton, 1990). The target was to create themes that fit coherently based on the initial codes, and that were also clearly distinguishable from other themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Finally, the resulting themes were defined and named. This definition included filtering out "[…] the 'essence' of what each theme is about […]" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 22). The resulting themes were finally labelled 'efficiency', 'consistency', and 'relationship'. A

detailed analysis for each theme is produced and provided in Chapter four, where the empirical evidence is presented.

3.5 Research quality

3.5.1 Reflexibility

Coghlan (2001) stated it is becoming more common for employees to conduct research within the organisations they work. Indeed, the topic of better understanding how decisions on marketing communication activities can be taken in accordance with business strategy in a decentralised organisational structure is an issue which came across my desk at the workplace. I used to be responsible for the financial control of global marketing within the company I work for. This included coming up with an approach to align marketing processes and activities across sales and service subsidiaries around the globe. It proved to be problematic in several cases to initiate activities from headquarters which were supposed to be rolled out globally. My colleagues and I felt that there was a high level of resistance in many subsidiary organisations against headquarters-based approaches, often with the argument that global initiatives do not properly take account of the local market situation. I thought that these subsidiaries were failing in their approach, acting independently of headquarters' initiatives. While this approach had worked for years or even decades, I felt that such independence lacked coordination across the subsidiaries (Rumelt, 2012). The result was compromised efficiency and less effectiveness for the company as a whole. Addressing this issue simply as a workplace task seemed inappropriate, because it seemed likely that the underlying mechanisms had been in place for years and would not be identified or addressed easily by improving collaboration, conducting workshops, or by hierarchical power. I felt that a research case study project would be the right way to shed more light on the underlying mechanisms that caused a perceived lack of global coordination across units (Unluer, 2012). A research project might generate more insights from participants into those causes, because participants might be willing to provide deeper, richer information in a research setting than in a business setting.

A qualitative approach to this research project was also deemed to be better suited to the task than a quantitative approach. To contrast both approaches, using a

questionnaire and sending it to several marketing employees in subsidiaries might have been divisive and controversial. The provision of some qualitative text passages might have shed light on some selected topics. However, it seems unlikely that such an approach would reveal the underlying causes for this lack of collaboration and alignment. It seemed unlikely that people would provide interesting and detailed thoughts on the matter if they were asked to fill in a questionnaire, whereas it seemed more likely that such details could be revealed through personal exchanges, for example in an interview.

As Unluer (2012, p. 1) put it, "It is crucial for social researchers to clarify their researchers' roles especially for those utilising qualitative methodology to make their research credible". Such research within an organisation is termed insider research. Insider research is defined by Breen (2007, p. 163) as follows: "Generally, insider-researchers are those who chose to study a group to which they belong, while outsider researchers do not belong to the group under study". Brannick and Coghlan (2007, p. 72) came to the following conclusion on insider research: "In our view, insider research is not problematic in itself and is respectable research in whatever paradigm it is undertaken".

Insider research features potential downsides and challenges for the researcher, including loss of objectivity (Unluer, 2012), issues of access, preunderstanding, role duality, and issues of organisational politics (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). One of the main questions that went through my mind when considering this research project was whether I could be scientific or objective with a topic I am very familiar with through my daily work (Mitchell, 2008). **"Like all insider research, also as in insider case studies, it is crucial to discuss the experienced advantages and attempts to address the disadvantages of being in an insider position, in order to collect valid data"** (Unluer, 2012, p. 10). Explicitly addressing issues which I, as an insider researcher, have experienced with this research project is one way of scientifically addressing the disadvantages an insider status may impose on a research project. In this sense, the readers of this thesis can form a judgement as to how the research may have been influenced by this status (Unluer, 2012).

Regarding objectivity, the discussion in this chapter on social constructivism and how the researcher is part of the research project is part of the answer. Based on social constructivism, objectivity and human interference are not a target of the research. Rather the information that is captured is dependent on the involved actors and the perspectives taken (Rooney, 2005). As Rooney (2005, p. 7) put it: "From an anti-positivist perspective therefore, insider research has the potential to increase validity due to the added richness, honesty, fidelity and authenticity of the information acquired". One potential disadvantage of insider research is that participants in the interviews may assume that the researcher already knows things which they know, and therefore the information is not referred to in the interviews (Unluer, 2012). I tried to address this issue by carrying out semi-structured interviews and by trying to use all predetermined questions in the interviews where feasible. In addition, I often tried to repeat what the participants said in my own words in the interviews, asking them explicitly whether I had correctly understood the issue they had explained. Further, I addressed this topic of participants leaving out likely known information with the participants explicitly, asking them to explain those rather 'obvious' issues. Nevertheless, it still seems likely that several participants will have left out information which they may have told an outsider, and the research data is therefore influenced by this to some degree.

Another disadvantage, and at the same time a key advantage, of being an insider researcher is that participants may provide information which can be considered sensitive, yet rather unproblematic, which they may not have provided to an outsider (Unluer, 2012). This is part of the benefit of a qualitative research approach since the insights generated are invaluable and may not have been gained by other research instruments like questionnaires. Issues like personal feelings about situations and people, approaches taken, emotions, and insights about politics are all topics which the participants covered, and which may not otherwise have been part of the data generated. On the other hand, in some cases, participants provided sensitive information, which, if publicised in the company, may hurt their reputation or professional relationship with other colleagues (Unluer, 2012). These issues were addressed by trying to ensure the highest level of anonymity possible. This is also referred to in the section on research ethics. In addition, in very rare cases, problematic passages were erased from the interview transcription, thereby ensuring

that information could not be spread further. This also means that such information cannot become part of the final conceptual model. Balancing the information gained with the potential damage done to reputation means that the highest priority has to be given to protecting participants.

Bias is considered another issue linked to insider research (Unluer, 2012). Since I have been working with the company for several years, it is likely that I am not capable of seeing or perceiving certain activities or behaviour anymore. This may influence the research process, because I might fail to judge certain behaviours or activities as critical or problematic, while possibly overrating others. In essence, an outsider may perceive the situation which the participants outline to me differently and this is inherent to the specific research setup. What partially counters this bias is that not all participants and subsidiary settings are known to me. While I specifically know the German organisation quite well, all other organisations are, at best, acquaintances. Several participants I met for the first time in my life during Skype meetings. This diversity across subsidiaries and participants may not protect me entirely against bias, but it causes me to reflect more on what is being told to me, and how to make sense of it. It makes me step back more from my current position and understand and think about what the participants have provided whilst I continuously question whether my own assumptions about the situation are fair. In contrast to the downsides of the insider research discussed above, insider research also has several advantages from which I have benefited. Access to participants was easy, because I could approach several superiors within the relevant subsidiaries directly, and they were all very helpful (Unluer, 2012). In addition, most participants showed a high level of trust in my project because I was either known to them, or because their organisation showed support for my research. Some were assured because I was part of the same wider company-community (Unluer, 2012).

3.5.2 Validity

Research validity is an issue of concern for any researcher, since it determines whether the research meets the high expectations expected by various fixed and local (university) conventions: "Without rigor, research is worthless, becomes fiction, and loses its utility. Hence, a great deal of attention is applied to reliability and validity in all research methods" (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002, p. 14).

Validity refers to the issue of correctness and credibility of the research results (Maxwell, 2013). If a research result is not perceived as credible and correct, then there is no sense in undertaking the research in the first place. The researcher therefore needs to ensure that the results become credible and are correct. Validity is therefore important to the research project and should be addressed explicitly (Maxwell, 2013). Morse et al. (2002) see the basis for good research in the investigator: "It is the researcher's creativity, sensitivity, flexibility and skill in using the verification strategies that determines the reliability and validity of the evolving study" (Morse et al., 2002, p. 17).

Lincoln and Guba (1986) pointed to the dependence on judging the validity of research as something linked to the underlying research paradigm. The interpretative nature of this work suggests "[…] that there is no single reality on which inquiry may converge, but rather there are multiple realities that are socially constructed, and that, when known more fully, tend to produce diverging inquiry" (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p. 75). In terms of the interpretative research paradigm, there is no single truth which can be found from research. As Lincoln and Guba (1986) put it, generalisations, or context-free truth statements, cannot be found in such research settings. Such research may produce working hypotheses about what works and what stems from a given context. The re-applicability of the work needs to be tested for each context where such knowledge is supposed to be re-applied (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). The re-application of the research findings in another context therefore depends upon a 'thick description' of the context which the researcher has studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p. 75). Through the provision of this thick description, a comparison between the researched context and any new situation is enabled, and the comparing person shall be empowered to make a judgement as to whether the outcome of the research is applicable to the new context (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Such a thick description is provided for this research setting. In total 30 interviews of roughly one hour in length on average were conducted. Participants were based in six different countries: Germany, France, the UK, the Netherlands, Italy, and Belgium. Some 21 out of these 30 interviews were fully transcribed word-by-word, resulting in over 200,000 transcribed words on a total of 692 pages. The company itself operates with its own subsidiaries in more than 50 countries and sells its products in more than 190 countries. Since the underlying research paradigm of this research is interpretivist in

nature, it can be concluded that there is also no single truth to ensure or assess the validity of this research: "Validity is also relative: It has to be assessed in relationship to the purposes and circumstances of the research, rather than being a context-independent property of methods or conclusions" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 121). As Maxwell further put it in simpler words: "The validity of your results is not guaranteed by following some standard, accepted procedure" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 121). A key idea for ensuring validity is therefore checking how validity might be threatened by any inappropriate behaviour on the part of the researcher (Maxwell, 2013; Morse et al., 2002).

Checking for validity may be done concurrently, or post-hoc, when the research results are assessed. Lincoln and Guba (1986) defined the criteria for post-hoc checking of the trustworthiness of research; they included credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). The issue of credibility is ensured by a prolonged engagement of the researcher in the field or by lengthy and intensive contact with respondents (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). As stated above, the number and length of the interviews conducted for this research ensured such a process of prolonged engagement to gather data for the research project. In addition, persistent observation of salient elements is another criterion to ensure the trustworthiness of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). The chosen research method, a semi-structured interview, ensured that individual points of interest, where a specific participant had deeper knowledge to provide, could be explored in deeper detail, despite generally following a standard agenda in each interview. In one case, for example, the participant had specific knowledge about the lack of training which marketing employees seemingly had in the specific setting and on the reasons behind this. This facet was therefore explored in some depth during that interview, resulting in a set of unique research findings which helped in understanding the situation within the subsidiary better. In addition, the triangulation of data was ensured by using different sources to obtain interview data (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). It could have been easier for me to access only the German subsidiary for interviews, yet, in total, 30 interviews were conducted with participants from six different countries. Regarding transferability, thick descriptive data were produced from the research, as outlined by the number and volume of interviews and transcriptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). This thick and deep data is provided in this thesis by using a

significant amount of rich quotes from interviews in the empirical evidence chapter. This rich, descriptive section ensures that a judgement about the 'fit' of the research results for other settings can be made by any reader (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

Instead of a post-hoc evaluation of validity, Morse et al. (2002) focussed on the importance of a continuous and iterative process of ensuring validity throughout the entire research endeavour. They stated that "Contrary to current practices, rigor does not rely on special procedures external to the research process itself" (Morse et al., 2002, p. 16). They explained the difference between evaluation and the assurance of rigor in academic research: "While strategies of trustworthiness may be useful in attempting to evaluate rigor, they do not in themselves ensure rigor. While standards are useful for evaluating relevance and utility, they do not in themselves ensure that the research will be relevant and useful" (Morse et al., 2002, p. 17). It is therefore of vital importance for validity purposes that the researcher has in place verification strategies which continuously ensure the reliability and validity of the data (Morse et al., 2002).

In Morse et al.'s (Morse et al., 2002, p. 17) view, "[…] qualitative research is iterative rather than linear, so that a good qualitative researcher moves back and forth between design and implementation to ensure congruence among question formulation, literature, recruitment, data collection strategies, and analysis". One of the verification strategies they suggested is that of methodological coherence, which is about ensuring congruence between the research questions and the chosen methodology and methods (Morse et al., 2002). Such congruence is ensured by aligning the research paradigm, the epistemological and ontological stances of the research, and the corresponding methodology and research methods as outlined in this chapter. Indeed, the choices in relation to methodology and method were taken as a result of the chosen research paradigm, and they were finetuned during the entire course of the research process. An example of this finetuning is that a pilot study was conducted to assess whether the semi-structured nature of the interviews produced the required data. A further verification strategy was to ensure that the chosen sample was appropriate, or, in other words, that the interview participants best represented the research topic or had a significant level of knowledge on the topic (Morse et al., 2002). This strategy was carried out using a purposive approach

to selecting participants. Some of the participants were selected partially because they were personally known to me and some participants and the general managers of the subsidiaries were selected when negotiating access with the general managers of the subsidiaries. The judgement criteria were whether their knowledge was a good 'fit' for the purpose of the study and the research questions. Sampling adequacy is evidenced by saturation and replication and it means that sufficient data was obtained to account for all aspects of the phenomenon (Morse, 1991; Morse et al., 2002, p. 18). Saturation of data ensures replication in categories and replication verifies and ensures comprehension and the completeness of data (Morse et al., 2002, p. 18). The saturation of data was reached after listening to roughly 15 to 20 interviews, where no further interesting aspects were revealed by adding further interviews and findings. At this point, no more interesting aspects were found by listening to the remaining nine untranscribed interviews.

A further verification strategy as outlined by Morse et al. (2002) is to collect and analyse data concurrently, which "[…] forms a mutual interaction between what is known and what one needs to know" (Morse et al., 2002, p. 18). In fact, the interviews conducted were listened to while new ones were recorded, so that learning from previous interviews could be referred to in subsequent interviews. This ensured that all aspects of the research questions could be addressed and it seemed to be a valid reason why several of the latter interviews did not produce significant new insights.

Maxwell (2013) suggested a checklist for validity. Among this checklist is the suggestion of intensive and long-term involvement with the research, as well as the importance of collecting detailed and rich data (Maxwell, 2013). Finally, Maxwell (2013) suggested respondent validation can be ensured by member checks. Even though the resulting conceptual framework was not validated by members of the interviews, all participants were provided with the transcribed interviews afterwards – where transcriptions were made – to check for the accuracy of transcriptions.

The measures outlined for this research project, which are mainly founded in ensuring the wide variety and detailed thickness of the obtained data, provide enough support to judge the validity of the research data with confidence.

3.5.3 Generalisability

Based on a positivistic research approach, generalisability is part of that research approach. Such research intends to find out a – more or less – universal truth based on a statistically relevant research sample. In the case of interpretivism, the question arises whether it is possible to generalise from a small sample like a case study (Gioia et al., 2013). As discussed in terms of the issue of validity, there is no single truth which can be found using interpretivist research. Generalisations and context-free truth statements cannot be found using such research (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). As Eisenhardt (1989a, p. 534) put it: "The case study is a research strategy which focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings". In addition, interpretivists might argue that studying unique settings might only produce knowledge about the phenomenon studied: "[…] pure interpretivists, who tend to maintain a stance that when one is studying the socially constructed structures and processes of others, those structures and processes are necessarily idiosyncratic because they are fashioned and performed by unique individuals acting within unique contexts" (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 24). The theory resulting from a theory-building, inductive case study carries the risk that this theory describes only a very specific phenomenon and therefore lacks the ability to increase the level of generality (Eisenhardt, 1989a). The goal of this case study is therefore to expand and generalise the generated theory and not to extrapolate probabilities (Yin, 2013).

This can be achieved by choosing a case which has the capability of generating a concept which has obvious relevance to another domain (Gioia et al., 2013). Gioia et al. (2013) made a comparison to a good teaching case. If the case is chosen well, it is perfectly usable for classroom learning, allowing the students to transfer their learning to other instances. If the case was chosen badly, learning cannot be re-applied to other settings. The case chosen here, which is about analysing how marketing communication activities can be better aligned with strategy, is a case which is relevant to other companies and settings. The literature review chapter outlined that there is a lack of understanding as to why IMC is not implemented widely as a strategic process, and the theory generated from this research project is intended to help understand this gap better. The re-application of the findings from this research depends upon the new context within which it is re-applied, and re-applicability therefore needs to be tested in every such case (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

The re-application of the findings from this research therefore depends upon the provision of a thick description of the context which has been studied, which is provided in the empirical evidence chapter (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). With this thick description, as also already outlined above, any reader of this study can compare and judge whether the research results are applicable to a new context (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

3.5.4 Ethical considerations

This research was conducted in accordance with a handbook of the University of Gloucestershire on research ethics (University of Gloucestershire, 2020a). I understand that the primary responsibility for acting ethically within my research project lies with me. My responsibility towards the research participants is that their participation will not negatively impact them or the company they represent. I have tried to ensure protection of the participants by the following measures.

All participants were provided with the following information:
- invitation letter, via Outlook invitation;
- informed consent form for sign-off;
- general research participants privacy notice, as provided by University of Gloucestershire;
- participant information sheet, with details on the actual research project and data protection;
- transcribed interviews were sent to participants for validation (only for those interviews that were actually transcribed, in total, 21 out of 30).

All participants were personally contacted and asked whether they wanted to participate in the study. I tried to give all participants a verbal overview of what the study is about, what the benefits of it might be, and about the potential downsides that participation might include. I informed all potential participants that participation would be entirely voluntary, and that they were given the option to withdraw from the study. I also informed them that their identities would be kept anonymous. The topic of recording the interviews was discussed with each potential participant and all of them agreed to have their interviews recorded. In addition, I shared my thoughts with

them on my dual role as an employee and as a researcher and talked about the potential consequences of this setup. All participants agreed to take part in the study. I also asked them to sign the informed consent form, so I managed to collect documentation of the participants' willingness to participate. The document itself was also checked by the company's legal department for validation. In terms of the interviews that were transcribed, I sent the transcribed document to each participant for validation to ensure each was a reflection of what was discussed in the interview.

3.6   Summary of chapter

This chapter outlined the research methodology, including the research paradigm chosen and the research methods undertaken to ensure research consistency and successful data generation and analysis. It provided a justification for social constructivism as the underlying epistemological research position. Correspondingly, the research project is not focused on generating a conceptual model for universal applicability, but a conceptual model which may be applied in several settings. Its application will therefore depend on the judgement of the involved actors for the specific organisational settings. The next chapter is intended "[…] to give an adequate account of the informants' experience" (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 17). It shall provide a deep and rich overview of the data generated by participants.

4   Empirical evidence

4.1   Introduction

This chapter presents the empirical evidence that was collected from the semi-structured interviews as outlined in the methodology chapter. The presentation of the evidence addresses research objectives two and three as follows:

- To explore how decisions about marketing communication activities are taken in a decentralised organisational structure in the healthcare industry.

- To explore from within a decentralised organisational context how customer knowledge generated through marketing communication activities is used to inform business strategy decisions in the healthcare industry.

As outlined in the methodology chapter, the study follows the epistemological position of social constructivism. As such, knowledge is constructed and interacts with the data generated (Howell, 2013). Both transcription and analysis started during the data collection phase, and analysis of prior interviews prepared and influenced the interviewer for subsequent interviews. The analysis is therefore an iterative process. As discussed before, the epistemological choice of social constructivism further implies that knowledge is not discovered but rather constructed (Schwandt & Gates, 2000), which leads to an inductive approach to addressing the research objectives. Since knowledge is intended to be constructed, the researcher searches for patterns in the data in order to develop a useful concept (Yin, 2013). Since patterning is characterised by reducing complexity caused by all the possibilities which are offered by the data (Stenner, 2012), interpretation is carried out by the researcher during the analysis to reduce this complexity. This interpretation and reduction of complexity led to the emergence of three major themes. The themes are summary labels for evidence which addresses the second and third research objectives. These three themes are labelled efficiency, consistency, and relationship. They are discussed in this chapter in further detail. They are explained by providing quotes taken from the interviews. As outlined by Gioia et al. (2013, p. 17), this research similarly tries "[…] to give voice to the informants in the early stages of data gathering and analysis and also to represent their voices prominently in the reporting

of the research, which creates rich opportunities for discovery of new concepts rather than affirmation of existing concepts". Interviews were all conducted in English language, yet participants were mostly not from a native English-speaking background. Quotes from participants were proof-read several times and amended by the researcher in order to tidy up the language and to create a better understanding for the reader, as opposed to citing them word for word. In this process, highest priority was given to ensuring that the original meaning of all quotes was kept unchanged.

4.2 Analytical overview

Analysing the interviews revealed that decision making on marketing communication activities and the usage of customer knowledge for informing strategic decisions are influenced by factors which were categorised by the researcher into three major themes. Those three major themes are termed efficiency, consistency, and relationship. The table below (Table 7) provides an overview of these themes, including the corresponding codes and key words which emerged from the interview data.

The first theme termed 'efficiency' refers to a rational approach to decision making and to the collection and strategic usage of customer data. Evidence suggests that decision making is often rationalised using financial information to influence decisions. The desire to increase or defend business volume or the necessity to contain cost at a certain level are significant factors from the perception of respondents when deciding upon marketing activities. Guidance provided by internal processes, like the process of budget planning, as well as logic-based arguments are further aspects which are encapsulated by this theme. Additionally, the collection and usage of customer data to inform strategic decisions is also part of this theme, and this includes the topic of how marketing performance is measured. Finally, factors residing in the company's external environment, like the behaviour of competitors, customers and the development of legal boundaries, influence marketing decision making.

The second theme termed 'consistency' refers to the desire to act in accordance with guidance. Such guidance is provided by an implicit or explicit strategy, by the company's brand values, or by historic decisions that were taken, which are reconsidered in current decision making. In this context, respondents made reference to both local and global strategies. The term local strategy which is used here refers to a strategy developed by a sales and service subsidiary which is valid for a specific country only, and which may have been entirely or in part developed independent of a headquarters-developed strategy. The term global strategy as it is used here refers to a strategy developed by headquarters. The hospital strategy is an example of such a global, centrally developed strategy which is supposed to be used by all subsidiaries selling hospital products and services. Both local and global strategies were referred to by respondents as guidelines which could be used as reference points when it comes to making decisions in a marketing context. In addition, current decisions are also influenced by past decisions. There is evidence that hospital customers probably value reliability and consistency in the behaviour of organisations over time. Acting in accordance with past decisions is therefore another factor which impacts marketing decision making. Finally, marketing decisions are also impacted by the desire to positively impact the company's brand, and act in accordance with the company's brand values.

The third theme that emerged from the interview data is termed 'relationship'. The factors influencing decision making as regards this theme are inherent in people themselves. Alternatively, they are based in people's interactions with other people, or in their relationship to other people. The theme is generally characterised by influences on decision making which are not merely rational or logical. A large part of this theme is characterised by influences on decision making which are rooted in the collaboration of people. Such collaboration refers to people collaborating both within a subsidiary and collaboration that occurs between subsidiaries and headquarters. In addition, collaboration also refers to how customer data is used by people who are collaborating with one another in order to put that data to strategic use. Conversely, this also takes account of how insufficient collaboration inhibits data usage for strategic decisions. Culture is another factor which influences marketing decision making. Culture is defined by Deshpande and Webster Jr (1989, p. 4) as "[…] the pattern of shared values and beliefs that help members of an organisation

understand why things happen and thus teach them the behavioural norms in the organisation". Culture, in this context, refers to company culture or subsidiary culture which has developed over time. Section 4.3.3 outlines the shared values and beliefs of the marketing function in the subsidiaries, which refers to how and why the marketing function in the subsidiaries behaves as it does, and how that perception influences marketing decision making. Knowledge of people plays another significant role in decision making in a marketing context. Knowledge and experience are gained by stakeholders over time, and they are consciously or unconsciously used in group discussions to influence decisions. In addition, knowledge and experience of people represents uncoded information that is neither stored nor directly accessible to other employees. This may be a limiting factor when it comes to using that knowledge for strategic purposes. Emotions are another decisive factor when it comes to decision making. There is evidence that decisions are often taken subjectively, not based on facts or logical arguments, but rather on feelings and subjective perceptions. Finally, internal communication within the company plays a role in marketing decision making. Some respondents perceived targets, strategies, and knowledge to be important and suggested these should be spread across the company, so that all employees share a common level of knowledge.

The three themes of efficiency, consistency, and relationship represent the general pattern that emerged from analysing the interview data. This pattern forms the basic structure for addressing research objectives two and three. In the following sections, each of the three major themes will be elaborated on and analysed in more detail. Table 7 provides an overview of the three themes along with their corresponding codes and selected key words.

Table 7 - Overview of generated themes, codes, and selected key words

Theme	Definition of theme	Code	Key words
Efficiency	Decisions are influenced by financials, processes, and logical arguments	Market share	business
			sales
		Resources	capacity
			business case
			marketing budget
		Structure	marketing planning
			objective decision criteria
			voting system

Theme	Definition of theme	Code	Key words
		Data collection and usage	measurement not possible
			difficult to keep this budget
			saved in larger system
			systems are not communicating
			story behind the sales
		External environment	strongly regulated market
			safety of the patient
			call for slowness
			customers have no time
			legal obligation
Consistency	Decisions are influenced by an existing strategy or the desire to act consistently with prior activities	Local approach	do what we want
			customise strategy to country needs
			we have to localise
		Global approach	product launch
			accounting for strategy
			global market trends
		Consistency	consistency of all communication
			marketing as quality police
			we've done this in the past
			stability requirement
		Brand	longevity of the brand messaging
			the brand comes first
			long-term sustainability
Relationship	Decisions are influenced by the behaviour of people and their interaction with one another	Collaboration	hidden hierarchy
			influence the group
			group decision
			share information by talking
			campaign elevated to global level

Theme	Definition of theme	Code	Key words
		Culture	marketing is a sales function
			communications don't bring any money
			did it in the past
			planning includes mainly events and customer visits
		Knowledge	not communication-driven
			to develop people
			information in the head
		Emotions	gut feeling
			emotional debate
			belief
			subjective decision
		Internal communication	communicate well with employees
			blue blood
			communicate better to the whole organisation what our plans are

An overview of themes, codes, and possible questions for evaluating the relevance of each code for a general company setting is provided in the table below (Table 8). Questions that sought to evaluate the relevance of each code are provided to support an evaluation of the extent to which a specific code may be a thematic basis for the development of a guiding principle. Such a principle can shape the integration of marketing communications with strategy. Each code needs to be evaluated to understand the extent to which addressing it would be of significant use to support the achievement of a strategy. The questions provided are initial questions per code, but they are far from being a complete set of questions from which a fitting guiding principle for any company could be developed. Each code may, by itself, provide overall structural support for the thought process in terms of identifying issues which fall into each integration area.

Table 8 - Overview codes, themes, and questions for relevance

Theme	Code	Questions for relevance
Efficiency	Market share	How do market share targets influence marketing communication activities?
Efficiency	Resources	What part do company resources play in fulfilling the company's strategy? How are they managed and handled?
Efficiency	Structure	What role do processes and legal or internal standards play in fulfilling the company's strategy? How should these structural factors influence marketing communication activities?
Efficiency	External environment	How do specialities of the company's external environment influence marketing communication activities?
Efficiency	Data collection and usage	How are customer data and market data collected, stored, and made available in the company?
Consistency	Consistency	How are communication activities made consistent over time and to one another? What level of stability in communication consistency is required? How important is the level of communication quality?
Consistency	Local approach	How is it ensured that local market needs are reflected in local marketing communication activities? How are global activities localised?
Consistency	Global approach	How are global market trends addressed throughout the company? How is the company's strategy reflected in marketing communication activities? How do

Theme	Code	Questions for relevance
		globally relevant product launches influence local marketing communication decision making?
Consistency	Brand	What level of priority is given to the brand or brand messaging? How consistent does the brand messaging have to be over time?
Relationship	Collaboration	How do people work together? What needs to be improved? How do people influence one another? How are decisions reached in a group?
Relationship	Culture	How does company culture influence decision making? How is marketing as a function positioned and perceived in the company? How are activities handled which are repetitive over time? Which focus areas for activities have developed over time?
Relationship	Knowledge	How are people trained and developed? Is enough knowledge about marketing communication available? How is vital information stored and shared?
Relationship	Emotions	How is decision making influenced by emotions, beliefs, and gut feeling? How does the company handle mistakes?
Relationship	Internal communication	How is vital company information like strategy, brand targets, plans, etc. communicated internally? Does this information reach all relevant employees?

4.3   Themes that emerged

In this part of Chapter four, quotations from respondents are presented and arranged in an order which follows the thematic structure of the developed conceptual model, as later presented in detail in Chapter five. In order to show the link between the presented data and the 18 questions asked in the interview guide as they are shown in Table 5 and in Appendix A, and in order to also show the link between the presented data and the research objectives, each quotation is followed by information regarding which interview guide question was asked prior to the generation of this data, and by information which clarifies which research objective is addressed by the data. In addition, information for each quote is provided, whether the corresponding respondent belongs to the group of marketing employees or to the group of managers. Quotes from marketing employees are labeled with the letter 'A', quotes from managers are labeled with the letter 'B'.

4.3.1   Efficiency

Market share

Respondents provided evidence that a significant factor for deciding which and how marketing activities are carried out, is the capability of the activity to support market share improvements or, in other words, to generate net sales. One respondent from a country outlined how marketing activities are decided:

"So, my perspective is how we can raise up our net sales".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 3 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. The major decision criterion for this respondent is that any marketing activity has to support improvement of the sales volume. There is no differentiation between short- and long-term improvements of sales levels. Referring to the literature on why IMC is poorly implemented, the short-term focus of decision makers is one such issue (Eagle & Kitchen, 2000). If decision makers have net sales impact as a major decision criterion, this can be considered a short-term focus. Such a short-term focus may inhibit decisions and can be influenced by other

factors like consistency with the company's strategy. Another respondent outlined the decision process as follows:

"It starts with the marketing team, but it also continues with the ability of the sales teams outside to really convert those activities into real business".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 8 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. This statement supports the notion that decisions on marketing activities are influenced by the potential of those marketing activities to support the sales function operationally in its quest to generate net sales. The respondent refers here not only to the additional sales provided through the activity, but also to the requisite resources from both marketing and sales teams to support the activity to shape business volume. In addition, the topic of marketing and sales teams working together in local subsidiaries seem to be important when it comes to how decisions are taken. It can be assumed that a marketing activity which does not find enough sales support is less likely to be conducted. The topic of sales and marketing working together is a recurring issue in other themes, especially as regards the relationship theme. Marketing as a part of the sales function (Webster et al., 2005) is also an issue which may impact on successful IMC implementation.

Resources

The availability of resources is a factor which limits the ability of the local marketing team in conducting activities. The selection of activities therefore depends on whether the resources required, like people or money, are available at the required point in time. One respondent outlined how both factors play a role in marketing:

"Most times, if you now look back retrospectively, money was often the limiting factor when we developed our ideas and, at the end, often capacity was the limiting factor in real life, when we were working on this marketing plan".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 8 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. By capacity as a limiting factor, the respondent refers to how a lack of people meant that not all activities which were planned were

ultimately carried out. Indeed, the availability of people is perceived by another participant to be the most crucial factor for deciding upon marketing activities:

"Budget is oftentimes not the major problem, it's more having the capacity from a staff point of view to really bring topics down to the road".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 8 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Cost is another limiting factor when ideas are developed or planned in the annual planning cycle. If the plan for marketing activities overshoots the allocated expense budget, activities are cancelled from the marketing plan to make the sum of planned activities fit the budget target. Cost budgets and budget cuts are a limiting factor for the marketing department when it comes to implementing ideas for communication activities. As outlined by Webster et al. (2005), marketing budgets are often reduced because marketing makes a dubious contribution to performance. While the reasons for the cuts are not fully explained, these budget cuts may culminate in a significant loss, as one respondent outlined:

"I mean, over the last few years, we have actually cut the marketing budget quite considerably, by about a third. If not a bit more".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 8 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. The combination of both expected net sales and planned cost is used in business cases to evaluate the projected profit activities that can be generated. These business cases are the basis for deciding whether an activity will be conducted. When elaborating on how an activity is decided upon in a local cross-functional team, the respondent replied:

"[…] that is where we validated it, made a business case, checked about the efforts of the implementation and so on […]"

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 3 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Validation occurs in a cross-functional team, involving both marketing and sales team members. This team developed the business case for the activity, which was then the basis for deciding on the activity.

This building of marketing business cases for decision making is in line with the marketing development which started roughly in 2005. At this time, marketing was beginning to be perceived as an investment item, becoming more accountable for its activities (Kumar, 2015).

Structure

Related to the topic of cost and budget cuts is the processual topic of planning. Planning marketing activities is a processual activity which is formally conducted once a year, and which is intertwined with the overall planning calendar of the company. In this process, marketing activities for the upcoming calendar year are planned, mainly in the third quarter of each year. This planning process is not standardised throughout all subsidiaries, and only the output of the process is important for global planning results. The output generated is the overall spending level the company plans to meet in the upcoming calendar year, and this spending level is also based on planned marketing activities. Some countries have a local planning process and tool for this planning in place, and this is called the marketing plan or the operational marketing plan. This plan is in essence a list of all locally planned activities with a corresponding estimate for expenses. Marketing planning can therefore be considered to be an important aspect when it comes to how activities in marketing are decided, because the plan is the basis for carrying out activities. To understand how decisions in marketing are taken, the marketing planning process needs to be understood. One respondent outlined how marketing planning is carried out, referring to the start of planning in the third quarter of a year:

"That's where we start the marketing planning and also budget allocations. So, you see, if we develop our marketing plan with all the items on it and we allocate a budget, then this also has to go to controlling. Whether we have the money or not, the marketing plan may be cut or not. And now we have no planning within the year, so we have this one-year plan".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 8 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Budget cuts are a factor which impact marketing decision making in the course of the planning process. In cases in which the overall

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expense level of the company is too high, budget cut targets are given to subsidiaries from headquarters. These budget cuts are broken down to each local team, including marketing. The team is then required to determine how those budget cuts impact on planned marketing activities. One respondent described how decisions are made within the marketing team:

"[…] we discuss together what will be out. So, we agree with the marketing team on what we are doing and what we are not doing".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 4 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. The size of the subsidiary organisation in relation to the perceived requirement regarding communication activities seems to be a limiting factor for subsidiaries. The efforts that are needed to just maintain the website, including translations using the English master-website provided by headquarters, seem to create a significant amount of work for a subsidiary. This additional work keeps resources busy with tasks, which create expenses and bind resources to such tasks:

"Because of the size of my organisation and the amount of effort that we have to put into marketing communication, it would be interesting for us to know what the difference would be, if we don't go into a [local language] website but, for example, use an English one".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 18 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. The respondent outlined the perceived gap between the size of the local organisation and the task which maintaining a web presence means for such an organisation:

"I'm saying, with the size of the organisation as well as the things that we have to do for influencing the web, it is a lot of effort for a small country like the [a country]. We don't have the capacity to make that happen".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 2 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Content and information that are shown on the

website are mainly created by headquarters, and the countries may use this content for their own local websites. The effort to maintain the local website is perceived to be quite high for subsidiaries:

Interviewer: "So, you're saying the main storyline, or the main structure of your website, is determined or at least significantly influenced by headquarters, and not necessarily by you, is that right?" Participant: "It is mainly done by headquarters and we have our hands full just on translating".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 2 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Communication activities are generally planned on an annual basis for the upcoming year. The existing, annually produced marketing plan may serve as an input basis for the upcoming planning cycle, as outlined by one respondent:

"We have a marketing plan. So, most of the time we take the marketing plan from the previous year to be honest, because we are not a new company. So, we take the one from the previous year. And we just review all activities one by one, saying, okay, is it relevant, redo this one or not?"

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 8 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Another respondent described the planning process as similarly influenced by past decisions:

"A lot of the time in [country] we do repeat activity quite a lot, em, because it does seem to work and we do get some results from it".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 8 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Decisions on marketing activities can therefore be considered to be influenced by past decisions. This finding is in line with evidence which suggests that the continuity of activities is rewarded by the market; this is outlined in this theme whereby the influence of the external environment on marketing decision making is discussed. The desire to act in accordance with past decisions is also discussed under the 'consistency' theme. Planning involves creating

a list of activities which are supposed to be carried out within the next year. Activities are put on that list in part based on financial aspects, like for example business cases. In general, the decision to put activities on the planning list are made by objective decision criteria. This rationalisation is deemed necessary by one respondent, since the discussion about which project to include can be an emotional debate:

"Because everybody who is involved, typically our segment managers, are of course keen to get support for their projects. So, therefore, it's quite an emotional debate and negotiation process that happens every year, right? And we are trying to get a mix of the most objective decision criteria".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 8 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. The structure of the process in terms of how to decide what activities are to be planned for next year is provided by one country through a voting system that informs marketing activities. One respondent outlined how that voting system works:

"Every person who is responsible for a certain topic in our marketing team has prepared topic sketches, including some key arguments. What the target groups are, how much volume is linked to it, and how much budget or resources are needed for these topics. And this year we have used the whole marketing group in a kind of voting system. […] It was like an online voting where everybody had an apparatus in their hand and directly after the introduction to a certain marketing topic we made a ranking so that we weren't influenced by other means during the day. We excluded the person who was actually responsible for the business topic because, of course, he or she would always vote the highest points to their topic. And it actually worked quite well because we have, I would say, marketing experts in different ways in our team. And I think their spontaneous feeling is, this is something that is important, this is something that is worth investing in and all this was used in rankings. And this ranking was astonishingly good".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 8 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. This description of a voting process shows two

main facets. On the one hand, the activities are supposed to be voted upon based on rational factors, for example targeting, sales volume, budget, and resources. On the other hand, it can be assumed that team members include not only rational arguments in their vote, but also spontaneous feelings and personal judgements about each activity. The process of how to come up with a list of activities itself is structured. The outcome, which is a ranking of all planned activities, is not an objective list of rationally evaluated activities, but a ranked list which was generated based on both rational and subjective factors.

Data collection and usage

Collecting customer data from marketing activities and using that data for strategic purposes is another area which influences marketing decision making (Holm, 2006). This strategic usage of customer data has the potential to provide the company with a competitive advantage, if the company is able to beneficially capitalise upon that ongoing stream of information (Kitchen, 2017). One issue that was brought up in this context is the problem of measuring the performance of a marketing campaign:

"So, you can't make a campaign and say […] this was the net sales out of this campaign. It's not possible. But in the end, we need ideas to measure something, or to have a view how this campaign, how this congress, how this customer event helps us to improve our business".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 18 and the presented data contributes to research objective 3. The measurement of marketing activity results is a focal point at stage three of the IMC four-stage process model (Schultz & Kitchen, 2000). The measurement is also a prerequisite for achieving stage four of that model. If customer data from marketing activities cannot be used to inform business strategy, then integration of all marketing activities with the company's strategy is inhibited. Another respondent outlined that the problem is a perceived general issue when it comes to evaluating marketing activities:

"[...] this is always with marketing communication activities, to get the really interesting numbers. This would be, how has it strengthened or saved our net sales, our business [...] and this is not possible right now".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 4 and the presented data contributes to research objective 3. The missing possibility to evaluate marketing measures leads to the problem that any evaluation of an activity is not possible. This limits improvement opportunities in terms of decision making in subsequent decision cycles. One respondent outlined how the problem of having little proof of marketing effectiveness leads to a lack of credibility when it comes to fighting for marketing budgets:

"But it's very difficult to convince sales without any proof. And sometimes marketing is not so easy to measure. And this is the main issue. Because, for example, congresses, it is very difficult to see if you are successful or not during a congress. And it's very difficult to show that you are doing some ground exposure. And you have no result to give, because it is just exposure. And for that it is very difficult to say, okay, we have to keep this budget, because it is important, yes?"

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 4 and the presented data contributes to research objective 3. Keeping up activities and spending levels despite the lack of proof of associated benefits may indeed result in reduced marketing budgets (Webster et al., 2005). Proving the effectiveness of marketing activities is normally more difficult in B2B settings than for B2C settings (Webster et al., 2005). This is the case because in B2B markets, the relationship with the customer has a longer focus than for B2C markets, which means that promotional activities do not initiate a spontaneous purchase decision (Webster et al., 2005). This is also an issue for the above outlined topic of participating in a congress, since customers will only very seldom be convinced to purchase hospital equipment just because of a visit to such an event. In addition, the lack of financial accountability is perceived to threaten the credibility and existence of marketing as a distinct capability (Rust et al., 2004). This may be one of the reasons why marketing partially perceives itself as a sales support function, as discussed later under the relationship theme. However, it is not only the evaluation of marketing activities that is an issue when it comes to improving

decision making. As outlined in the literature review on the IMC four-stage process model by Schultz and Kitchen (2000), marketing activities can be a basis for collecting customer data and then using that data beneficially to inform strategy. Collecting data from such marketing activities can be a means of informing business strategy development with valuable information. The interviews provided evidence that customer data generated from marketing activities is in fact collected by the subsidiaries. One respondent explained how data storage from the corporate website is handled:

"So, just from my discipline, digital marketing speaking, all the information from the website is saved in a larger system".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 14 and the presented data contributes to research objective 3. Several respondents explained that customer data is stored in a customer relationship management (CRM) system, as outlined in one interview:

"So, the CRM system clearly is one of the key systems that is of importance for us to collect and consolidate information with the customer".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 13 and the presented data contributes to research objective 3. The same respondent outlined how customer information generated through direct customer contact is stored in the local CRM system:

"The second very important source, when it comes to touchpoints, is in all the congresses, symposiums, events that we are getting in touch with customers. We typically collect feedback from discussions or meetings that we have with customers. It is turned into kinds of leads and also then typically injected into our customer relationship management database. So, this is always where we are kind of trying to see everything end up in order to collect data in a consistent way".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 13 and the presented data contributes to research objective 3. The local CRM system is seen as sub-

optimal by another respondent, who perceives the system as a mere database, which collects names and addresses, but which is not properly used for strategic purposes:

"Okay, I think we should have a better CRM system. I think our CRM system should not just be about gathering names and addresses and contact details. We should be able to build profiles of our customers. I think we should have better campaign reporting".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 17 and the presented data contributes to research objective 3. In several countries, customer information, including from marketing activities, is stored in one or more central databases. The system most referred to was the local CRM system. However, not all respondents were as positive about collecting and then using data as in the example provided further above. One respondent from another country outlined how customer data is collected in different local systems. The communication between those systems is not working well, which causes significant problems for using and collaborating locally based on the data collected:

"So, we have a list of participants. We use this list and send an email to most participants: Do you want to receive a newsletter from us. And then, in this way, we have another list; so, the people who accept, we put them also in [name of system]. Then we compare this database to the sales database in SAP. No it's not in SAP, in the CRM, to see if Doctor X is still in the same hospital, or did he or she change his or her workplace completely, or is it still the right email address, or not the right email address. So, you have to check. And we want to make a special campaign for this guy. So, we put them in a lead-nurturing thing for example. But then we want to put the information in the CRM, that they are in this lead programme, to be sure that the sales guy is informed that we are doing some action on this with the marketing. So, it's really a nightmare. Because the systems are not communicating".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 13 and the presented data contributes to research objective 3. Since the systems which store and use customer data are not communicating well with one another, the use of customer data for operational and, as a consequence, for strategic purposes can be

considered to be inhibited. Another respondent outlined how difficult it is to use qualitative data to inform strategy at headquarters. The respondent outlined that it is qualitative data rather than quantitative data which would be needed to understand why the company is winning and losing in various deals around the globe. Efficiently collecting the storyline of winning and losing from the data collected in several countries and then using that information for informing strategy on a global level, is a challenge for the company.

"Of all of our sales tools, whenever we sell anything, it gets fed back up into a corporate. So, they have data on how much we're selling where, of different devices, what's the pricing structure. So, there's mathematical data, statistical data on what we're actually selling. But I'm not sure there's as rigorous a process in understanding the story behind the sales".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 17 and the presented data contributes to research objective 3. The efficient local collection of that data in an easily usable structure that may then be used by headquarters for strategic purposes is outlined as a major problem by one respondent:

"If there was a way of regularly collecting that data to see the stories, if analysis could be done across the globe to see if there's any different reasons, that probably would be a better use of information, but the problem is, you might need 20 people to be able to do the analysis. But I don't know how many you would need; but, I meant you need to have it collected in a way that makes it easier to analyse".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 17 and the presented data contributes to research objective 3. So, there is evidence that using data locally for strategic purposes is enabled through the collection of customer data in local systems. Proper usage of the data collected for strategic purposes may lead to competitive advantage as outlined by Holm (2006). The use of data for strategic purposes at headquarters seems to be limited due to missing processes that support the structured collection and handling of large volumes of data at a global level. There is some similarity to the findings provided by Eagle and Kitchen (2000) who stated that a decentralised organisational approach may be a barrier to IMC

implementation, based on the need to balance the priorities of the head office with the priorities of the local branches. It can be assumed that in cases in which headquarters are not able to impose a structured approach to data collection across all subsidiaries, strategic usage of that data is inhibited due to significant inefficiencies in data collection and corresponding analysis. Peltier et al. (2003) found that the underuse of consumer data is often due to an inability to accumulate and integrate existing data, while the availability of data is often assured.

Similarly, Day (2011) pointed out that organisations are often unable to keep pace with the growing amount of data they have access to, and that there is a mismatch between the amount of data and the ability to manage it. The evidence presented here corresponds with these findings.

External environment

The final code within the 'efficiency' theme is the external environment as a factor which influences marketing decision making at a local level. One notable characteristic of the hospital market within which healthcare products are sold is that it is a market which is significantly impacted by legal boundaries. These boundaries seem to impact decision making on marketing activities, as one respondent outlined:

"The hospital activities are very much dominated by things that we have also done in the past, right? So, there is a lot of recurrent activities that we are driving more in an evolutionary style, rather than in a revolutionary style. Which means, the question would be of course, where is this coming from? Is this just because we do not have enough new ideas or are there other factors?"

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 2 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. The reason for having a lot of recurrent activities in marketing according to this respondent is rooted in the specific legal boundaries that define the market of the healthcare industry:

"I mean, there is clearly one factor that is very clear. That's a very strongly regulated market that has the tendency not to accept innovation overnight, right? There is a lot of adaption and validation required in order to accept innovation".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 2 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Strong legal regulations are perceived to be caused by the fact that healthcare businesses operating in this industry monitor life functions or support life functions for patients, which means the reliability of these devices may impact the well-being of patients. Compliance with legal requirements and providing reliable products at all costs is interpreted by the respondent to have an impact on marketing activities. According to this respondent, signalling to the market the stability in what the company does shows compliance with market requirements:

"[...] on the contrary they are also limited by regulations that are clearly more related to protecting the stability of the system, protecting also of course in the first level the safety of the patient and the outcome that is delivered from the activities. So, therefore, to just describe the environment that we are working in, there is a lot of stability that is required. And, therefore, the priorities that we have, is to also comply to that requirement, right? To provide this general, let's say, adaption to the speed requirements that we have in the market".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 2 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. The respondent sees this requirement as a 'call for slowness' by the market. This so-termed 'call for slowness', from the respondent's perspective, limits the range of useable marketing activities at any given time for the company:

"Therefore, whatever we're introducing into the market, it takes some time to really take grip in the market, to become an accepted and fully integrated part of the customer equation of developing outcome. It requires a lot of investment also on the customer side in terms of training, knowledge transfer, and change of processes around it. Therefore, we also have the requirement to work on having a proper adopting curve that needs to be supported by communication as well, rather than

trying to turn, do 180 degree turns on technology or support of outcome every other day, right. So, again, almost, you know, a call for slowness to some extent. Which is a dilemma from a marketing perspective, right? Because, of course, when it comes to human behaviour then our experience, of course, is that you can catch people's attention by doing something new, different, and ideally outstanding, maybe unknown so far, innovative, different, right? And here we're talking about doing something that in principle you could translate into, makes you tired, because there is no change, or makes you maybe even not very aware, because it just reconfirms what everybody knows, right?"

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 2 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. The respondent interprets the call for slowness by the market as a problem for marketing, since it limits the choice of activities and communication channels because it calls for efficient continuity and repetition. This may be interpreted as a less attractive job for the marketer concerned, since current decisions as to what activity to conduct are impacted by what has been decided and done before, and by the market's requirement for continuity. The respondent outlined and explained further these perceived requirements by customers:

"[...] what we are not expecting from customers is that they believe that we are hopping from one hype-topic to another. It's more like that they really buy into our messaging in terms of they are stable, they deliver things with a high reliability, because that's what it's about when it comes to hospitals. Then you need to have a credible, sustainable partnership, rather than surprises every other day".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 2 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Another respondent evaluated the specific characteristics of the market while referring to the planning approach of marketing activities for the upcoming year:

"Obviously, the first thing we do is, you know, are there going to be huge changes? Because, as you know, this isn't a massively dynamic market, it's not like IT, where you release a product, and three months later you need a new product, you know, [...]"

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The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 8 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. This perceived requirement for continuity, reliability, and the desire to have a lasting partnership could be seen as a specific characteristic of the healthcare market, which has an impact on the choices available to marketers when it comes to selecting the right marketing activities. In this case it is the indirect influence on marketing communication activities, such as adjusting the usage of marketing activities to the perceived speed requirements of the market, which are seen as important. Another respondent pointed to a different local legislative boundary which partially inhibits the usage of social media:

"Yes, what is not allowed for instance is to directly promote a product on social media".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 3 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. The legislative boundary directly forbids the use of a communications channel for some defined activities like the direct promotion of products on social media. What is allowed, instead, is, for example, to promote the company in general. As such, social media usage is not entirely forbidden. The local marketing team therefore has to work with these boundaries when planning and conducting marketing activities. Also relevant for this country's market is the fact that it is a legal requirement to provide all marketing material in the local language. Without translation, headquarters campaigns and other activities would therefore not be usable.

"So, we need absolutely to translate it in [this country's] market, because it's a legal obligation to give documents for customers translated in [the local language]".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 1 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Another respondent outlined how the specific characteristics of the [another country's] healthcare market influenced the use of some communications channels for marketing purposes:

"If a doctor or a nurse leaves the hospital, they are more than happy to leave. And then they are off. They are not like, 'ah, I am sitting on a couch, and, ah, this is the

new anaesthesia device from [name of company], wow, I have to go to the internet and have to learn more about it'. They just don't care. Not because of [name of company], not because of whatever, just because of the pressure within their job, within the [country's] healthcare system".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 2 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. It is therefore assumed by the respondent that specific communications channels, like brochures, and some social media channels are not working well within the healthcare industry, because employees working within the healthcare system are less likely to use social media in their scarce leisure time compared to employees in other industries:

"And I mean, it's, not like an on/off switch if you want to change something in the market. It took maybe months to years, from [name of product operating mode] and [name of product operating mode] and all that stuff, it took really years. It's not like doing an ad in a print media, or a Facebook channel or whatever. I mean, customers in the hospital, they don't even read brochures, because they have no time, and they are more or less frustrated due to the healthcare system, [...]"

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 2 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Such customer behaviour needs to be considered by companies operating in this industry when marketing activities are planned. A major emphasis in marketing is still placed on activities which generate direct, personal contact with customers, potentially because of these very market specifics.

4.3.2 Consistency

The second theme identified in the analysis of interview data is 'consistency'. This theme is characterised by the intention of stakeholders to make decisions that are consistent with the storyline provided by a strategy or consistent with brand values. It also refers to decisions that are made which are consistent with prior decisions that have been made. The storyline provided by a strategy is either generated locally or it is provided by headquarters. The former is referred to as the local strategy, while the latter is referred to as the global strategy. Consistency is a connecting factor between the concepts of IMC and the four-stage process model for IMC (Schultz & Kitchen,

2000); it is about message integration or message consistency at the lower stages, and about consistency of marketing activities with strategy at the higher stages (Schultz & Kitchen, 2000). Establishing IMC as a strategic tool refers to using customer data gained from marketing activities in the process of strategy development (Schultz & Kitchen, 2000).

Local approach

Adhering to a local approach to strategy means that countries develop their own approach regarding how to address the market. This approach may be linked to a global strategy which is provided by headquarters, but it is not necessarily linked to it. A local strategy may have been developed under the influence of global strategy, but it may also have developed independent of it. This local strategy is then used as a guideline when deciding upon marketing activities in the local subsidiary. Such guidelines are comparable to the idea of having a guiding policy to illuminate the concept of strategy (Rumelt, 2012). Similarly, guiding principles are knowledge structures which are used for guiding decision making in organisations (Oliver & Jacobs, 2007). The local or global strategies referred to in this section were not deliberately developed as guiding principles, but they are, of course, in place to influence local or global decision making. One respondent provided evidence as to how local decision making on marketing activities is not deliberately linked to guidance from headquarters. The local planning process, which is referred to here, is initially conducted from a country perspective:

"Because you asked in the beginning whether we are doing marketing independently from headquarters. In that case, the task that was given to my team members was completely decoupled from headquarters. But, of course, my team members are also influenced by their marketing committees and meetings and so on. Their ideas are typically quite close to the [name of company] strategy".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 11 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. The respondent outlined that the task of local planning did not require local marketing team members to align their activity choices with global strategy. The respondent also concluded that the local marketing

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team is nevertheless influenced continuously by global direction, since team members regularly communicate with colleagues from headquarters. These exchanges influence local marketing employees, and this influence is likely to inform their decisions when it comes to planning local marketing activities. Another respondent outlined how much freedom the local subsidiaries have regarding their marketing activities:

"If I want to decide a campaign regarding some products, or some new topics, I'm totally free to invent something".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 4 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. There seems to be little influence or pressure from headquarters to act consistently with global guidance. One respondent outlined that some countries seemingly use this freedom to act independently from headquarters:

"[…], I know that there are organisations that are simply doing their own stories".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 11 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. The lack of influence from headquarters in terms of local decision making may be perceived as one reason why an integrated approach to marketing communications could be problematic. The decentralised organisational structure which is currently in place with its corresponding decision freedom for subsidiaries may be an issue when it comes to implementing a global IMC approach, and may therefore be a barrier to IMC implementation. Organisational structure was also identified by Schultz and Schultz (2004) and by Schultz and Kitchen (1997) to be a potential barrier to IMC implementation. Having a decentralised organisational structure in place means that power over decision making is dispersed amongst many individuals across the organisation (Mintzberg, 1979). Overcoming the downsides that such an approach creates in terms of implementing a coordinated global approach will be a challenge when it comes to implementing IMC.

In terms of subsidiaries acting autonomously, another respondent noted:

"And when he said I want the countries to have autonomy and get on and do their own thing, you feel like, that's exactly what people are doing. So, some countries just go off and find their own solutions for things, and even all the printed materials, if you want them, you pay for them in the country, and it's almost like you feel more divorced from headquarters".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 14 and the presented data contributes to research objective 3. This statement implies that the autonomy countries have is also perceived as a downside by some employees, since it is seen as a rejection of the values of headquarters. The perception in the interviews was that more guidance from headquarters was called for by several interviewees. Indeed, the company had not provided a completely documented and well-communicated global strategy for the hospital segment for several years. In the absence of such guidance, customers still ask their sales representative about the vision of the company, since customers are interested in the longevity of their spending. The sales representative may then communicate their own perception of what that vision is since there is no globally communicated vision. This creates the problem that this self-created vision is certainly not entirely consistent with what other sales employees communicate to their customers. The respondent also noted:

"Most times they develop their own vision. And sometimes they are struggling, if this does not become true in the future".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 7 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Given that customers value the long-term plans of organisations, and considering the importance of signalling continuity to the customer, the importance of strategy can be better understood. Despite the fact that some countries and employees make decisions about their marketing activities independently of headquarters, there is evidence that the global strategy has a significant impact on local strategy. One respondent described how the local strategy is developed in the country:

"We have a global strategy we have to localise […]"

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 8 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. In this sense, the local strategy that the country has developed seems to be based on the global strategy. The global strategy is altered so that it fits the local requirements. This kind of flexibility bears similarities to the concept of guiding principles, since they are capable of addressing both consistency with global strategy and yet they allow local flexibility in decision making (Challagalla et al., 2014). Another respondent outlined how the headquarters' strategy is adapted to local requirements:

"And then we had the different driver, and I think it was a good approach, because we can really customise this strategy to our needs in the country".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 10 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. The country judges which aspects of the global strategy are important to them in order to tailor the strategy to local needs. The country then uses the local strategy when deciding upon which marketing activities to conduct. The local strategy is therefore used as a guideline when deciding upon marketing activities. Looking at another example, marketing campaigns can be initiated by headquarters and the subsidiary countries may or may not introduce them locally. One respondent outlined how these marketing campaigns are handled locally:

"Although we try to use the global activities as much as we can, we very often have to adapt them. We very often have to give a little different tone. It's not only translation, it's also individualisation. And sometimes we really have to completely rewrite them".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 11 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. The strategy not only supports the local team in deciding which activity to conduct, but it also supports them in deciding how each activity has to be designed to fit the local approach to the market. The respondent in this example referred to this as individualisation. Such individualisation is based on the local focus the country has set. Another respondent described a

concrete example in which global marketing activities are individualised or adapted to local needs:

"The first, or the ideal, way is that we can use or recycle a global communication path that is active. In the [country] anaesthesia congress, the last one we used, a campaign that is also globally used, that's the lung protection campaign. We used that topic along the congress. We adapted some of the messages to the [country] market. We used global picture material, but we included it in some activities which are typical [country] activities, which are not used in other countries, but only by us. But that's a classic example, that we recycle global campaigns, and either we can use material one by one by translation, but very often we also have to adapt it, as [country] customers might perceive certain messages differently from international ones. Sometimes we have other products that are launched, or we have other focuses by our users".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 4 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. The respondent outlined the reason for localisation of global marketing campaigns to be a country-specific focus of the local customers and a country-unique product portfolio. As such, the local specifics of the market are used to decide if and how to individualise global activities so that they are usable locally. The degree of this localisation varies from a few changes which are necessary, to decisions where global activities are not implemented at all locally, because they do not fit the local market. One respondent outlined:

"Occasionally we do localise it, but actually not that often".

"I mean, occasionally, you know, we have said no to certain campaigns, because we just think they're inappropriate for our market".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 4 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Looking at how the local strategy process is informed by customer data generated out of marketing activities, one respondent suggested that customer information is mainly gathered from direct customer contact by the sales and service employees. This direct contact may have been generated

out of a marketing activity such as a congress, but it may also simply involve a regular sales visit to a customer. The qualitative information the sales agent gathers is then exchanged in meetings with the marketing team:

"The qualitative part typically is done together with our sales teams and service teams. So, this is where our sales team and service team leaders are typically the consolidation points. And those are the people that our team people are talking to. That's one source of information. The second source of information is a kind of cross-functional teams, where we do have specific people in the field, these are typically either service people or pre-salespeople or salespeople, typically those who have a very in-depth knowledge of the customer requirements of the technology that is in place at customer sites. And those people come together with our marketing product managers here on a continuous basis; the frequency differs by product and business category. But this is the kind of environment where we continually exchange information about what our customers are looking for, where questions are also injected for research, where this qualitative type of synchronisation is taking place".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 14 and the presented data contributes to research objective 3. According to this respondent, customer information is seldom generated through digital marketing activities. Rather, it is generated through direct customer contact by the local sales and service team. The respondent went on to outline that such customer information is then used in the local annual strategy consolidation process:

"Well, ideally, we inject this into this yearly strategy consolidation process, right? So, that would be a process that typically starts in the middle of the year and gets finished sometime in the early Q4 timeframe. And then we kind of set the plan for the following year, right? Oftentimes, there's stuff in that the results are not just pointing at the next year but also at the years after. Because we noticed that we have to prepare for a bit longer or the market might not be ready for that specific activity. There are always of course, topics coming up during the year where we have to, I would call it, improvise, right? So, we are not stubbornly just looking at a single time of the year to build our strategy. Of course, there are a lot of discussions happening during the year where we have to set specific focal areas".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 15 and the presented data contributes to research objective 3. The respondent provided evidence that customer information is in fact used to inform at least the local strategy development process. In this case, customer information is generated continuously through company employees who meet customers directly. It remains unclear whether this direct contact is induced by marketing activities or through regular sales activities. It seems likely that both marketing and sales activities contribute. The evidence provided here shows that some qualitative customer information informs the annual strategy development process of the local subsidiary. It also remains unclear whether this information is shared with headquarters as well. In another specific case, the respondent described that part of the local strategy developed by one country contained an element that influenced the local market where the local organisation became a perceived expert in the topic of hospital hygiene:

"And, of course, we could jump on market developments and just follow. But we have now started to become a market influencer in hygiene topic, and I would say that this is a quite nice marketing story. If you look from the beginning, we have detected there is a topic that is very relevant in the market because infection was a topic already twenty years ago".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 15 and the presented data contributes to research objective 3. The topic of hygiene was also taken to a global level and was passed on from there to other countries. It is not only the one-directional influence of the global strategy on decision making at the level of the subsidiary; it is also possible that topics from one country are taken to the global level, influencing the global strategy, and thereby creating relevance for other countries.

Global approach

There is a global strategy for the hospital segment that is in place, which is often referred to tacitly as the 'hospital strategy'. This strategy was developed by headquarters and was rolled out globally to all subsidiaries. Usage and the application of the strategy depends very much on each subsidiary and each

employee, since there are no strict rules as to its application. Evidence was found that this strategy plays a role in local decision making on marketing communication activities. In addition, evidence was provided by some participants that there is a desire to have global guidance on the general direction of the company through a global strategy. When asked whether the global strategy has an influence on local activities, one participant replied:

"Yes, of course, because, if I don't have this strategy, I can make everything on my market".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 11 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. The company has never recorded a formal global strategy, and this perceived lack of guidance was referred to by one participant in the context of customers asking about the vision of the company:

"And we didn't answer these questions the past 10 years. Because there was no vision".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 7 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. The desire to receive corporate guidance is an important prerequisite that guides decision making, since, if there is too much resistance locally against headquarters' influence, global initiatives will not receive enough local support. Additionally, there is evidence that the global strategy is perceived as sufficient for addressing local needs, which means the strategy is used locally. This can be considered another important aspect that guides decision making. One respondent from a country outlined the fit of the global strategy for the country's market:

"When you talk about the market trends which [name of company] globally sees worldwide, meaning, increase of cost of care, meaning more difficult patients, meaning lack of medical staff, and digitalisation and all these kinds of things, it fits 100 per cent to [our] market".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 11 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Another participant from a different country was more careful in discussing the degree of fit, but generally stated that the strategy can work locally:

"Yes, it does, I mean, sometimes it, I shouldn't say sometimes, almost all of them can work to varying degrees, sometimes you could, I would never say you could 100 per cent […]"

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 11 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. This respondent perceived the global strategy as global guidance, needing local adaptation so that local changes and details can be applied, while sticking to the overall storyline the strategy supplies:

"[…] so it's a combination of understanding the global approach and how we're going to implement it in our local areas based on nuances of our markets".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 17 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. As to whether or not the global strategy influences local decision making on marketing activities, one participant from a country noted how the local planning process for marketing is carried out. The participant stated that global strategy and global product launches are an important input when the local marketing team is conducting their planning process:

"So, of course we have a team which is responsible for the hospital segment and they are asked to plan their activities at least one year in advance. Partially, if you have fairs with a sequence of every two years or every five years, but in hospitals their horizon is one year. Taking also the launches into account and the strategy".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 8 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Apart from the direct influence which the global strategy intends to provide, local decision making on marketing activities is similarly influenced by global communication campaigns and product launches, which are often also implemented by the subsidiaries:

"[…] I think, yes, we are influenced, but, not directly, but we are influenced indirectly, thanks to all the communication campaigns which are developed centrally".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 11 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. There is no control mechanism in place which forces the subsidiaries to locally take on all global campaigns, but there is evidence that there is seemingly a desire to try to implement as much as possible from headquarters. In the following case the respondent refers to the city where the headquarters is located, [name of city] in Germany:

"First of all, I understand what [name of city] can send me, my first goal is to transfer all elements from [name of city] […]"

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 3 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. One respondent noted that most global campaigns are conducted locally:

"It's really dependent on whether the product is sold or not, and most of the time they take everything from central".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 3 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Apart from the direct influences on local communication activities, some indirect influences were anticipated by one participant. The participant stated that global strategy should not just influence local decision making, but should influence decisions at the level of headquarters. One example provided was new product development. New products developed at headquarters have to fit the strategy, which in turn influence local marketing activities surrounding these launches.

"And our development team have to take this as Bible and develop the products that fit strategy, […]"

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 10 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Globally initiated product launches influence

local decision making on marketing activities significantly by triggering local marketing activities. One respondent reflected on the importance of new products for local marketing:

"Now, products are typically the trigger point for a go-to-market activity".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 12 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Product launches are initiated by headquarters, where new products are developed. They are therefore assumed to be part of the global strategy, since it must be assumed that the roadmap of future products is aligned with the hospital strategy. In the case of a key product development, the development process may well take several years. Since key products are replaced by successors, typically only after a very long time horizon, the individual local launch is a very dominant activity in terms of local resource consumption. The impact of a major launch on the local marketing resources was explained by one respondent:

"So, if we do have significant launches, we spend a significant share into this launch, pre-launch activities […]"

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 8 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Local marketing activities are perceived to be influenced significantly by headquarters' activities, such as product launches. One respondent explained:

"I mean, our activities are very much guided by what's happening on a corporate level. For example, in [name of product area], next year, we will have, hopefully, [name of new product] at the end of the year".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 7 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. In some cases, it seems the launch is so dominant that it leaves little room for other activities in the country. Another respondent outlined a discussion with a colleague on which activities to conduct:

"But then he said, okay, what do you think about skipping all other activities except the [name of new product] launch and except making this presentation also available down to product level?"

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 7 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. The product launch event itself is not the only marketing activity that takes place, but the launch causes many related activities, which is a reason why it is (in terms of resource consumption) so dominant within the local marketing plan. One respondent explained:

"So, once a product is launched into the market, I set up campaigns and also graphics, texts. That is channelled into different media types. Plus, trade show communication".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 2 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Overall, product launches are headquarters-initiated activities, which, in the case of key product launches, take a dominant position in the local marketing plan in terms of resource consumption. There is little alternative for the countries other than to plan all marketing activities around that launch, since it is in their own best interests to successfully launch such revenue-important products. This mechanism reduces the ability of the country to conduct other marketing activities in the same year or in the following year. Taking into account that the customer values continuity, such dominant launches may generate two potential problems. Activities like campaigns initiated in the past can be continued alongside the launch but, together with the launch, they leave no room for any other activities. Alternatively, the launch is so dominant in the local marketing budget that long-term activities cannot be fully funded in the year of the launch, leaving customers puzzled due to lost continuity.

Consistency

Aside from the topics of local and global approaches to strategy which contribute to aligning activities in a common direction, there is evidence that the desire to act consistently in terms of organisational activities is a criterion for making decisions.

Evidence for this influence regarding the desire to provide consistency in what is communicated to the customer was provided by one respondent as follows:

"Anyway, when you tell this story to the customer, you have to give details on some point, and the customer should be able to find this point on the website".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 4 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. This means that if communication with a customer has taken place, this communication or the storyline used should fit with what the customer might later on access on the company's website, so that the initial story remains credible and is further strengthened. Another respondent outlined that marketing activities for the hospital segment are perceived to be influenced by decisions and activities from the past.

"The hospital activities are very much dominated by things that we have also done in the past, right? So, there is a lot of recurrent activities that we are driving more in an evolutionary style, rather than in a revolutionary style. Which means, the question would be of course, where is this coming from? Is this just because we do not have enough new ideas or are there other factors?"

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 2 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. This respondent perceives the outlined development of recurrent activities as more of a market requirement, which is beneficial if followed, rather than an example of corporate inertia. The customer, in the respondent's view, requires and values stability in what the company does, given the context of the industry:

"So, therefore, to just describe the environment that we are working in, there is a lot of stability that is required. And, therefore, the priorities that we have, is to also comply to that requirement, right?"

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 2 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. That same respondent also provided a summary of the customer requirements as perceived by employees of the company:

"[…] I would summarise this as a call for please don't change the running system".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 7 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. This means that current decisions have to consider what has been decided in the past. If this is indeed valued by the customer, then consistency with prior activities provides a benefit for companies acting in the healthcare industry. Therefore, the desire to provide this consistency influences local and global marketing communication decisions. A concrete example of consistent decision making in terms of marketing activities is congresses. Deciding to visit one congress in a specific year may be a decision not just for one year, but for many years to come, if the decision is to create value:

"So, if we come back to the congresses. The congresses are, more or less, that we've done this in the past, so we will do it right now".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 4 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Local consistency with global messages is sought for local communications activities, so efforts are taken in the subsidiaries to ensure local messages are consistent with what is provided by headquarters. One respondent described how a globally initiated product launch is handled locally:

"And the colleagues there, they combine let's say the central activities which we, I mean for example the [name of new product], launch. I mean there is no discussion that we have to launch it and that we have to be consistent with the central messages".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 8 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Consistency is not only a topic for individual countries. There is evidence in the interview data that, for several European countries, consistency across countries is perceived to be a major factor in terms of ensuring that communication activities are beneficial for the company:

"And locally, we do things, but even if we don't do any things, we don't manage all communication. Because some communication can come from [other European

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countries], and this will reach our [country's] customers, as well. So that's why we need to be consistent, globally as well. Because when you launch a product in Europe, [snips with finger], this will be known almost in a minute".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 18 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. In this context, as outlined by the above response, it is not only consistency across sales subsidiaries and service subsidiaries which is an important aspect, it is also global consistency. If headquarters conducts communication activities, these have to be aligned with subsidiaries. Organising such alignment in a decentralised structure seems to be problematic, since every subsidiary not only has to be informed by headquarters, but alignment has to also take place regarding the activity. The effort per subsidiary can be considered relatively high in a decentralised structure, which is in line with the finding that organisational structure can be a barrier to IMC implementation (Schultz & Kitchen, 1997; Schultz & Schultz, 2004). If alignment and understanding are not managed by headquarters, employees in the subsidiaries may not be able to create consistency through global activities:

"[…] whereby [name of company] group will send out product announcements, product information to the wider global world and our customers in [our country] hear it first from [name of company] group, even before some of our salespeople and marketing people hear it here".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 9 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. There is evidence that the very job of marketing employees in the subsidiaries is perceived to be the guiding institution for ensuring consistency across all communication activities:

"Marketing here in [name of region], they are more or less the, let's say, the quality police".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 7 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. In the same interview the respondent also

referred to how critical information, like the release of a new product, is supposed to be handled in the subsidiary:

"[…] and the marketing colleagues just to have the, let's say, the control about this critical information".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 7 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Similar evidence was provided by another respondent from a different country, who referred to a colleague from the marketing team:

"And she is in charge of the consistency of all our communication, to be sure that the planning, for example of communication, is well done, and we are not sending all the communication to the same target group on one day […]"

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 1 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2.

Brand

Another topic that influences decision making in terms of marketing activities amongst subsidiaries is the brand image which the company tries to create or maintain. Indeed, making the brand visible was seen by one respondent as one of the major priorities when it comes to deciding upon marketing activities:

"[…] at the end of the day, it's about making the [name of company] brand visible. In one way or another. But the brand comes first".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 4 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. The targeted brand image influences decisions when it comes to marketing activities. It influences decision making in a similar way as outlined in the context of consistency. According to one respondent, the company works towards a brand image of sustainability and delivering high quality. This necessitates activities that are consistent over time. This, in turn, means that the

company is not just following all of the latest trends in its marketing activities, because that would probably require it to ignore historic decisions which may consequently hurt the brand image:

"One of our clear values is to achieve an extreme utmost level of quality that also includes a high level of credibility, long-term sustainability. So, what we are not expecting from customers is that they believe that we are hopping from one hype-topic to another".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 2 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. According to this respondent, supporting the targeted brand image with marketing activities means developing an image of stability and long-term consistency throughout the decision-making process in terms of marketing activities. The following two excerpts from the same respondent illustrate this point:

"Therefore, there is no need to completely change your positioning every other day in order to provide something new".

"Therefore, of course, again, this is one of the factors that kind of sets the boundaries for us to be quite stable in the way we present our brand".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 2 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Building the brand, according to this respondent, is more about reconfirmation of what has already been told to customers in the past, and this continues to be true. This reconfirmation over a long time is what helps build a sustainable, valuable brand in the healthcare industry. The respondent noted:

"Here it's more about just always reconfirming what people know from [name of company] continues to be true. And therefore, there is the need to provide this longevity of the brand messaging".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 2 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Another respondent suggested why the focus

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should be so much on the brand and not just on individual products when it comes to communication activities:

"Because customers don't buy a product, customers buy a company".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 12 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. The targeted brand image of both sustainability and longevity which were both perceived to provide value in this industry create the need to act consistently with historic decisions in marketing. Topics chosen in the past for communication activities need to be evaluated for future re-use, because building on former activities provides an image of consistency to the customer. However, this mechanism also limits the choices available when it comes to marketing activities.

4.3.3 Relationship

Social and cultural factors influence the construction of realities (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Howell, 2013). As such, social and cultural factors similarly influence marketing decision making, since this activity involves people interacting with one another, who all have their own perceptions of how the world works. Based on these various viewpoints they have to make joint decisions about marketing. It is obvious that the relationships between all those involved in these decisions play a significant role in how decisions are made. As such, the third theme which emerged from the interview data is termed 'relationship'. This theme is characterised by issues influencing marketing decision making, which are rooted within people and in their interactions with others. These issues can be categorised into those which are rooted in the collaboration of people, and those issues which are created by corporate culture. Further, the emotional aspects of stakeholders play a significant role in this context, as well as the knowledge people have gained over time. Finally, issues which are related to the company's internal communication activities also influence marketing decision making in the subsidiaries.

Collaboration

At the outset, it is important to note that choices concerning marketing communication activities are perceived to be significantly dominated by those activities where people are interacting directly with one another and with the customer. As one respondent noted:

"And so, this is like, I don't know, 90, 80 per cent of all our communication activities is related through people. Our people towards the customer side. And, in addition, of course we have congresses, mainly scientific congresses".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 1 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Collaboration refers on the one hand to collaboration between employees working in the subsidiary and to employees working at headquarters. If collaboration is not effective, it can be assumed that decisions in the subsidiary are taken from the subsidiary perspective, rather than from a globally aligned perspective. One respondent described how suggestions around one communication activity were rejected by headquarters for reasons which were not clear. The importance of the request was not understood by headquarters:

"So, for me it was all like, we don't want to, there is no resources, it's just nothing that we are believed".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 3 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. As a result, the respondent concluded that for further topics one should keep trying to initiate activities in alignment with headquarters. Yet, if there is resistance, activities should just be carried out locally, without headquarters' support:

"That's how I would always initiate a discussion. So always try globally, and if it does not work, do it locally".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 3 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Experiences like this increase the likelihood that

subsidiaries act without alignment with headquarters. The decentralised organisational structure may be a key factor here, since subsidiaries act independently from headquarters in such structures, and headquarters similarly act independent of the subsidiaries. The decentralised structure may therefore act as a barrier to IMC implementation (Schultz & Kitchen, 1997; Schultz & Schultz, 2004). Another barrier to IMC implementation that was identified is the balancing of head office versus local branch priorities (Eagle & Kitchen, 2000). The evidence provided here can be viewed in the light of this barrier. The respondent perceived that headquarters do not take requests seriously, because their resources are already planned for other activities, and the issue at hand is not therefore prioritised over existing issues. The finding is similar to a finding in another study (Lancaster & Van Der Velden, 2004) which noted that internal communications between the departments of a Dutch bank were limited. Seemingly, a culture of standard communication developed and people got used to the status quo. This recalled how attempts were made to shift discussions to headquarters level. In reality, this was often unsuccessful, resulting in a perceived culture of getting used to doing things locally. Some came to expect that discussions with headquarters would often be unsuccessful. Communications between departments was therefore limited and misunderstood (Lancaster & Van Der Velden, 2004). In another interview, one participant outlined how headquarters and local marketing were not aligned in their activities. A global marketing tool, on which the global marketing team had worked for years, was presented to local marketing employees, and the ideas were deemed unusable in the local market. The respondent felt their efforts had therefore been in vain:

"And they did present some topics, and we were really struggling what to say to these colleagues because they were completely not aligned with our market".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 18 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. The perceived degree of decoupling between local and headquarters marketing in this case was further outlined by that respondent:

"But on the communication part, I have the impression that they work far more in their own sphere".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 18 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. A respondent from another country formed a similar impression regarding the connection between headquarters and subsidiaries:

"I sometimes feel like headquarters are working in this little bubble and they come up with all those thoughts of wonderful things".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 10 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Headquarters working in its own sphere may also be perceived in light of the decentralised organisational structure, which acts as a barrier to IMC implementation (Schultz & Kitchen, 1997; Schultz & Schultz, 2004). Balancing headquarters versus branch office priorities is also an issue for IMC implementation in a decentralised structure as identified by Eagle and Kitchen (2000). In such cases, both headquarters and the subsidiaries are working independently, since the subsidiaries have a large degree of autonomy in terms of making decisions. When headquarters acts independent of subsidiaries, this results in unaligned and, as indicated by the respondents above, locally unusable activities. Collaboration in the context of deciding upon marketing activities is also concerned with the question of who makes decisions. There is evidence provided by several respondents that decisions are often made within the team and not by a single person. One respondent outlined how decisions are made:

"It was a group decision, because we are always deciding together with the marketing team and, at the end, we all agree on what we are doing".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 4 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. One respondent working in a management position similarly pointed out that it is not the decision of the manager, but of the team:

"So, first of all, it's never my decision, it's a team decision […]"

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 5 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Autonomous, devolved decision making amongst teams can positively influence decision making amongst employees through motivation as outlined by Homburg and Fürst (2005). What they also outlined in this context was that employees should be supplied with shared values and norms for such decision situations in order to achieve better decision making. Evidence for the provision of values and norms in this situation were not provided by the respondent. Decision autonomy, as a prerequisite, was taken for granted by this participant. Analysis suggests that decisions made by teams are not straightforward, and need some time and discussion within the team:

"Just discussion, we say okay this activity and everybody says one or two or three. If someone says one and the other says three, we say why, and we start the discussion […]"

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 8 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. These discussions are probably influenced by the existing and developing relationships amongst team members. Team decisions are therefore probably dependent upon how well the team members work together and interact. In the case of one respondent, the hospital marketing team knew each other for a long time, and worked well together often reaching agreement:

"[…] but also the fact, that the team, especially in Hospital, they're quite well established, they work together a long time".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 7 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Decisions may be taken by people who are assigned to make decisions through their hierarchical position within the company. This describes a formal process of decision making. Alternatively, people may have a certain degree of influence over decision-making processes, without being formally assigned a level of decision-making power. One respondent described this informal type of power as he observed it in practice in terms of marketing as a kind of hidden hierarchy – one that is not formalised or written down, but which is still there:

"So, we have junior staff, but we also have some very senior managers or at least people who are a long time with [name of company] and they have quite some say. So, and they for sure are higher in the hierarchy. Sometimes, also, they are not really on a management level but are, at least, on a, let's say, a felt or a hidden hierarchy. Because they have so much wisdom and knowledge, and they represent more or less the market within [name of company]".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 5 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Hidden hierarchy, according to this respondent, refers to the credibility and trustworthiness of some people, and the perceived importance of certain topics. This credibility or perceived importance gives their words more weight than the words of other participants in discussions. The local sales function seems to possess such a hidden hierarchical position for the marketing function. The sales function is, at least not generally on organisational charts, higher up in the hierarchy than marketing. Nevertheless, as one respondent described, without the agreement of sales, deciding upon marketing activities is not worth the effort, since such lack of involvement seems to lead to a lack of results in terms of those activities:

"[…] but the worst that could happen is that the local marketing is doing a kind of marketing campaign, without involving sales prior to the marketing, because this is a really a waste of time".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 8 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Collaboration, with the intention to decide upon marketing activities happens, not only within marketing teams or between marketing teams, but also between local marketing and local sales teams. There is evidence that marketing activities cannot simply be planned within marketing teams, but have to be aligned with the sales team as well:

"And we adapt our marketing plan with sales".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 3 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. The sales function, locally, seems to have a stake

in decision making for marketing activities, and collaboration between marketing and sales teams therefore has an impact on which marketing activities are finally conducted locally. The decision-making criteria that are relevant here in order to come to an agreement between both teams is influenced by the extent to which marketing activities chime with sales planning. One respondent explained:

"So, it's really a close relationship between sales and marketing to make sure that the activities which are planned for next year are supporting first, the planning, and the corporate launches, and it is done in a pragmatic way".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 8 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Based on this statement, it seems possible that decisions on marketing activities are influenced by sales in a direction that is favourable to the sales function. It could be further interpreted that marketing activities may therefore have a rather operative or tactical sales focus than a strategic focus, because of the focus on generating net sales and the influence sales have over marketing decisions locally. Such an operative focus on net sales generation resonates with one of the key barriers to IMC implementation, which is the short-term focus of decision makers as outlined by Eagle and Kitchen (2000). Such a short-term focus on sales generation for marketing decisions may compromise long-term decisions which seek to achieve a higher degree of integration with corporate strategy (Schultz and Kitchen, 2000; Sneath et al., 2005). The partial dependency of marketing on the sales function at a local level creates a need to seek approval from sales for marketing activities. It seems that marketing employees are not taken as seriously as sales employees, which is why one respondent tried to have a sales colleague explain successful marketing activities to other sales employees. This makes it easier for the respondent to seek support for their own activities:

"So, we won these two tenders, and I asked the sales to explain it to the other sales. And so, it's not me speaking from the marketing part and explaining how nice the device is".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 7 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Apart from an informal or hidden hierarchy, there

is also a formal hierarchy in place which grants some managers or decision makers a certain degree of power, which may be used in decision-making situations. There is not a lot of evidence for situations where existing formal hierarchies are used to make decisions, only a few cases were mentioned. In one case, a manager stated that the management position would be to exercise a veto in cases where it is felt that this would be necessary. This could be the case, for example, if the team comes up with a decision, which the manager might not approve of because the team does not have access to the same information as the manager:

"There are some exceptions, and that was also interesting. I previously already said that in the worst case I want to have the possibility to intervene. Exactly. A right to veto, basically. Because sometimes, colleagues don't have the full picture. Sometimes they don't know that a certain topic is a strategic key direction of [name of company], because they are only focusing on their certain business area".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 8 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Another respondent outlined how marketing activities are initially aligned with sales, and then with the manager of the team. So, the team leader in this case reserved the right to have a final say on major activities:

"And we discuss it with sales for that. And, at the end, I asked my boss, she agrees with this decision and she supports me".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 3 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. One manager indicated that they were not involved in which specific activities are conducted or not conducted. However, in cases where budget cuts are needed, the manager provides the boundaries regarding how much has to be cut. The team then works out which activities will therefore be cancelled. In this case, the manager sets the decision-making boundaries, but does not make decisions on individual activities:

"[…] I would just give them the guidelines about what they need to take out, and then they would make the decisions about what they want to take out".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 8 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Collaboration not only takes place within the company, there is also a direct, personal collaboration with the customer, which may result over the years in relationships being built with the customer. These relationships between sales teams and customers are an important topic for sales. As discussed, investments into marketing communication activities are decided upon in agreement between marketing and sales. Sales is perceived to have an interest in maintaining this direct relationship. Marketing communication activities will therefore be evaluated by sales teams to assess whether the activity is capable of maintaining or improving customer relationships. This means that digital activities are possibly harder to agree upon than face-to-face activities. One respondent described this relationship as follows:

"We have a very, very strong connection between direct sales and customers".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 2 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. The relationship lasts in many cases for a very long time, as the respondent explained:

"So, they really visit their customers on a very regular basis, and often they have known the customers for more than 10 or 20 years. Because we are very stable in our sales force".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 2 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Building this relationship is even referred to by one respondent as a tradition:

"This tradition of going somewhere, making this part of your business process, to get in touch with customers, build or maintain your relationship".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 7 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Selecting activities in marketing therefore may necessitate a sales evaluation whether the activity features direct contact with customers or not:

"So, we are always focusing on direct contact. Direct contact, direct contact and then direct contact".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 8 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. As a decision criterion, customer intimacy seems to be important, and this criterion shifts the focus away from large events, like trade fairs, towards smaller events, where customer intimacy is key:

"But, we get, I would say, the same amount of benefit out of these, if not more, out of these little events, smaller events, and have a quite large customer intimacy".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 3 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. On the other hand, events provide an opportunity for personal interactions with products (Sneath et al., 2005). Heuristics, as outlined in the literature review, are cognitive shortcuts for quick behavioural responses in familiar situations, based on scripts which are developed based on prior experience (Woiceshyn, 2009). The focus on direct contact or customer intimacy when selecting marketing activities seems to have a heuristic character. Although decisions do not have to be made quickly, the decision situation is familiar to the decision makers. In some cases, the decision situation is familiar to the decision maker who has decades of experience. Decisions are made based on prior experience, which is, in essence, a form of direct contact with customers which is rewarded with additional net sales. The repeated response regarding which marketing activities are carried out seems to be that the activities that are favoured feature direct customer contact. While this may have worked in the past, it seems questionable whether this automatism will continue to work with so many changes going on in the external environment, especially in the area of digital marketing. As also outlined in the literature review, channel selection is a complex and pressing issue for marketing managers (Danaher & Rossiter, 2011; Foley, Engelberts, & Wicken, 2005). As outlined in IMC theory, everything the marketer does has to start with the customer (Shimp, 2010).

If marketers decide to prioritise direct contact as a communications channel, based on a conscious or unconscious heuristic approach informed by previous experience, then changes in customer expectations or preferences may go unnoticed and

decisions will be made in the same way they have always been made. Customer expectations change though, and some customers may prefer to be addressed through digital channels. The advent of the internet has enabled interactive exchanges with customers of the kind which traditional media cannot provide (Lagrosen, 2005; Winer, 2009). This interactivity is of course also provided in the case of direct contact with customers. The need to use digital communications may therefore not have been seen as important in industries where the sales representative is in direct contact with the individual customer. Nevertheless, given the time pressures of the healthcare industry, as outlined by one respondent, digital media can be a better way of communicating with the customer. Digital media can indeed be more effective for meeting the needs of customers to support an efficient exchange with suppliers. Fulfilling the approach of focusing on direct contact may further inhibit the usage of digital communications means, since budgetary resources are limited. Once direct contact activities, like congresses or trade fairs, are planned, the remaining financial and personnel resources may not be sufficient to achieve significant successes with digital activities, causing a cycle of underfunding of digital channels. An example mentioned by one respondent outlines how customer behaviour results from the relationship between customer and sales. This relationship also limits digital channel usage, indicating that there are still many customers who value direct contact. Instead of starting an internet search, some customers seem to simply call their sales representative:

"So, they are not Google-ing '[name of company]', and '[name of product]', and [name of option], they are phoning a sales rep […]"

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 7 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. In terms of decision making for marketing activities, the relationship between the sales force and the customer is also used to evaluate and decide upon marketing measures. Sales representatives call their customers and ask them whether they perceive an activity as adding value:

"We built the page, asked colleagues from the salesforce: 'Hey, in your in-service, discuss it with the customer, is it of value or not'".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 4 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Changing the focus of direct customer contact for marketing activities is perceived to be difficult due to the worries which one respondent explained in discussion. This interview dealt with ideas around changing the existing business model away from direct contact to direct customer engagement:

"[…] but in this case we will be a different company, because we lose contact or process intimacy to our end customer".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 12 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Losing customer contact is perceived as losing any effort to understand the customer, and this could mean that a source of competitive advantage is lost. Such consequences are possibly feared by employees. Whether these fears are justified or not, they can impinge upon changes to the status quo, resulting in continued decisions focusing on direct customer contact. One respondent outlined how decision making in terms of marketing activities does not follow a simple rational process; rather, it is influenced by participants in the discussion who are able to influence a decision-making group with their arguments and eloquence:

"It sounds of course not professional, but I think, if you really look at it, it's probably the person with the best way of argumentation who is able to influence such a group. And whether the argumentation is academically correct, or maybe just because of eloquence, depends very much on the personality. So, it's the strong persons who have the tendency to win such discussions".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 7 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Another participant compared the decision-making process where marketing activities are discussed within teams to a game, which is about winning and losing some activities. This game-playing metaphor indicates the influence that some interpersonal and emotional factors have on the decision-making process, compared to a rational approach:

"So, it's like a play, it's like a game. So, you win some activities and you lose some of them".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 3 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Collaboration between people and within the organisation is a major factor when it comes to using customer knowledge to inform business strategy decisions. This means that information is not only shared through computer systems and databases, but also there is evidence to suggest that collaboration between people directly plays a major role in strategy based on customer information. One respondent outlined how much information sharing is based on people talking to one another, since customer information is not stored in a database:

"And so, we try to share that information by talking to each other basically. But we have no second database, we don't even force the salespeople to write reports on customer visits, which is common to all other companies basically".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 14 and the presented data contributes to research objective 3. Another respondent outlined the extent to which relationships between people matter, when it comes to sharing important information:

"[…] but sometimes, you know, when you've got a good relationship with somebody, you pick up the phone, which is the way it should be".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 16 and the presented data contributes to research objective 3. Collaboration between people seems to be of high importance when it comes to the exchange of information between countries and headquarters, as one respondent outlined:

"It depends on human beings very much, unfortunately also in [name of company]. That means there are certain business areas where the feedback to the central organisation is functioning well and some areas where it does not function".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 16 and the presented data contributes to research objective 3. Customer information is generated by people collaborating with one another and by exchanging information in meetings. One respondent outlined an example of how those meetings are set up and how information is exchanged:

"The second source of information is a kind of cross-functional teams, where we do have specific people in the field, these are typically either service people or pre-salespeople or salespeople, typically those who have a very in-depth knowledge of the customer requirements of the technology that is in place at customer sites. And those people come together with our marketing product managers here on a continuous basis; the frequency differs by product and business category. But this is the kind of environment where we continually exchange information about what our customers are looking for, where questions are also injected for research, where this qualitative type of synchronisation is taking place".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 14 and the presented data contributes to research objective 3. In terms of the collection of customer information, one respondent outlined why customer information is not entirely available in databases but is instead shared informally, between people. Customer visits are not documented in a written report, but valuable information gained from customer visits is shared directly between people:

"When I started in [name of company], I always wrote a report, and, at the end, I think few people read it. So, I stopped in [name of country] doing that. I just share with people by talk or directly on email, when I have some interesting information for them".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 14 and the presented data contributes to research objective 3. Generating and sharing information depends very much on people knowing each other and exchanging customer information which is gained in the course of their work. Another important question pertains to whether or not information is also used to inform strategy. One

respondent provided evidence that marketing activities were developed locally and then shared with headquarters before being disseminated to other countries:

"But there are a couple of activities that were developed here on our level and then cascaded up into global and then kind of spread over the world".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 16 and the presented data contributes to research objective 3. The respondent suggested that one of these activities, which began locally, became part of the global hospital strategy and was therefore also transferred to other countries as part of that strategy:

"So, this really created an overall umbrella, and this, once we had developed it to a certain level, was recognised as being really helpful. It was then elevated to the global level and then kind of translated into a more global approach and offered to other regions as well".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 16 and the presented data contributes to research objective 3. One issue relating to the transfer of relevant information through the organisation seems to be that information is lost or altered as it is exchanged between people. Collaboration between countries and headquarters suffers from this assumed loss of information as it is transferred:

"And then it's always difficult, because, you know, I'm giving the information to the region, the region is giving the information to [name of city], and [name of city] is cascading to all other countries, but we are losing a little bit of the information in between".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 17 and the presented data contributes to research objective 3. Another perceived challenge for a headquartered team which seeks to use customer information for strategic purposes is the different demands resulting from the large number of countries potentially providing information to headquarters. Managing this information effectively is a perceived issue for headquarters from the view of one respondent:

"[…] so the challenge for the global team is that the countries and the demands are so uneven, you could not talk about one strategy, you have to cluster this […]"

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 16 and the presented data contributes to research objective 3. Apart from uneven demands, which need to be considered effectively for a strategy, another perceived issue is efficiency. This refers to the lack of capacity or resources at headquarters to beneficially use all the information:

"More or less, to be fair, I think they use most of the feedback we provide. Then, do they have the capacity to materialise the feedback, it's another point".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 17 and the presented data contributes to research objective 3. Finally, as information is provided to headquarters, there is also evidence for a lack of communication flowing back to the countries regarding what is done with the information. One respondent suggested that a good quality level of collaboration between countries and headquarters depends not only on a one-way customer information transfer towards headquarters. It similarly depends on having information flow back to these countries, initiated by headquarters.

"And, in the mind of the people, if they say that for one, two, three, four years, and nothing changes, they think that people in [name of city] do not listen to what they say".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 17 and the presented data contributes to research objective 3. Interpreting this finding, this perceived lack of information 'flowing back' may then possibly result in less motivation to continue to provide headquarters with relevant customer information. This could inhibit the continuous flow of customer information to headquarters, resulting finally in a lack of quality of the company's strategy.

Culture

Organisational culture plays a significant role for decision making in subsidiaries in a marketing context. Deshpande and Webster Jr (1989, p. 4) "[…] define organisational culture as the pattern of shared values and beliefs that help members of an organisation understand why things happen and which teach them the behavioural norms in the organisation". One aspect of the healthcare industry important for understanding organisational culture which emerged from the interviews is that relationships and job assignments both commonly last for a particularly long time. And this long time on the same job inhibits innovation in marketing as one respondent outlined.

Participant: "You can win this game only if you have a different team from the one they started with and a different marketing concept".
Interviewer: "Okay".
P: "You just need one who is happy to test something, to create a new atmosphere of marketing in hospital".
I: "And you're talking about the local team from the region?"
P: "Yes".
I: "Or headquarters?"
P: "Yes".
I: "Okay, so."
P: "Yes".
I: "I'm interpreting, that means somehow there is a 'we have always done it like that and we have to continue?' mindset?"
P: "Yes. Some people are 30 years in this job".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 7 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Shared values and beliefs may have developed for a very long time in this case. If culture is not only about understanding why things happen but also about teaching members of the organisation the norms of the organisation in order to influence behaviour, it can be concluded that the behavioural influence may be quite strong in such contexts. This is especially the case amongst service technicians from [name of company] who are perceived to be very close to

the customer. They might have worked in the hospital with customers for some time, as one respondent stated:

"They are spending their whole working life at a customer site".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 7 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Service technicians can therefore be considered to have a particularly strong relationship with customers. Their long-term assignments can be assumed to have an impact on deciding upon marketing activities in those cases where service technicians are involved in decision making. Their long-term assignment fits with the perception that B2B markets normally require longer lasting relationships between customers and company than is necessary to trigger purchases in B2C markets (Webster et al., 2005). Service technicians' understanding of customers and the work experience they have gained can be considered to be at an extremely high level.

On the other hand, it also seems possible that prolonged job affiliation – in some cases – creates resistance to change and long service employees prefer to do what has 'always been done'. Behavioural norms, as part of organisational culture, which have developed over such long timeframes as outlined above may be especially hard to overcome. This resonates with the findings of Schultz and Schultz (2004) who found that resistance to change is a major reason why IMC is often poorly implemented in companies. Other cultural aspects influencing marketing decisions include the fact that communications as a function is still perceived by some as a low value-adding function. In other words, employees are sceptical as to whether it is worthwhile investing in communication activities. In the following example, one respondent referred to colleagues from the local marketing team. The marketing colleagues who are referred to within the quote seem to be sceptical about the value of communication activities:

"Communications. They don't generate any money for us. We are the colleagues who generate money".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 18 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. It seems that colleagues are sceptical about communication activities because these were not perceived to be necessary for some time:

"They feel that only the work they did in the last 20 years is the real work. That is the work one can see, where you, whatever. And the rest, you don't need it. Put communications away, you don't need it".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 18 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Further analysis suggests that it is difficult to invest in communications within the company. Another respondent explained that obtaining approval to hire new communication employees is not easy:

"Oh, it's difficult at [name of company] to invest in communication people to be honest".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 9 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Following the evidence provided here, communication, as a function is not valued in some parts of the company, and this seems to be the case with some marketing employees. If communication has such a negative reputation, at least in parts, it seems likely that marketing decisions are also impacted by this image. For example, if marketing activities have so far largely focused on meeting customers directly, and on building relationships, it is hard to overcome this habit and invest in digital communication activities.

The perceived low importance of the marketing function by some employees is a factor which may inhibit IMC implementation in this context. As Lancaster and Brierley (2000, p. 169) put it: "In coping with organisational change, people have to change too: they must acquire new knowledge, absorb more information, tackle new tasks, upgrade their skills and very often modify their work habits, values and attitudes to the way of doing things within the organisation". If IMC is to be implemented successfully, such resistance to change must be addressed by any concept which is intended to improve IMC implementation. Resistance to change was

also identified by Schultz and Schultz (2004) as one reason for poor IMC implementation. In this context, one respondent explained that:

"[…] communication has not the most glorious aspect of the marketing job".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 8 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Looking beyond how communications as a function is perceived, there is evidence provided by respondents that some employees perceive marketing in total as a sales support function:

"[…] so, in our words a marketing function, in these countries it's a sales function".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 3 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. One respondent clearly distinguished what the marketing function does locally in daily business. It seems to be rather a sales function or a sales support function than a communication function:

"[…] because most of them, marketing, are doing sales, they are not doing communications".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 17 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. In line with that evidence, one respondent, working within the local marketing organisation, clearly stated that the job target in marketing is to support the sales:

"So, my daily work consists of being a support for the sales team. If you consider that the marketing department is a support team to develop sales and to help them to increase sales".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 1 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. The integration of marketing with other business functions, such as sales, resonates with findings presented by Kumar (2015) who found that the latest paradigm shift is characterised by marketing becoming an integral part of the decision-making framework in business. According to Kumar

(2015), this paradigm shift was triggered by the increasing diversity of media channels and the corresponding interactivity of the internet. There is more of a focus now on the effectiveness of marketing, on its efficiency, and on an increasing need and desire to manage and affect customer behaviour and engagement. It remains questionable though, whether it is indeed a paradigm shift that we have witnessed in this case. It seems rather that marketing is now perceived as a sales support function and that this is an assumption that has been carried for years or even decades. This gives clues to the perceived status and function of marketing within the company. This status may also be perceived in the light of the decline of the influence of marketing within companies since the contribution of marketing to business results is not properly documented (Webster et al., 2005). In addition, Webster et al. (2005) observed a trend in companies that focus on short-term results, which fits the evidence presented here: that marketing is perceived as a sales support function.

Such an understanding of marketing within marketing teams is likely to impact the choice of marketing activities. It can be assumed that, based on this understanding, activities are chosen that have a direct sales impact over those which are less directly relevant to sales, like communications activities across social media. The status of marketing within the company also has to be perceived in the light of a possible IMC implementation approach, which seems problematic under these circumstances. The lack of influence marketing has over other parts of the organisation is another factor which inhibits successful IMC implementation, as found by Mortimer and Laurie (2017). Another cultural aspect that was mentioned in the interviews is that [name of company] is perceived to be a very German-focused organisation. A lot of management functions are perceived to be occupied mostly by Germans. One respondent explained that:

"[…] we are not a particularly diverse organisation with respect to our corporate headquarters in [name of company]".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 11 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Because of this perceived lack of diversity, the respondent concluded:

"So, there's not a particularly strong global approach".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 11 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Another respondent argued:

"I understand why in a way Germany is a massive marketplace for [name of company] and its home market. But I sometimes feel like we're not really a global company, we're a German company".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 17 and the presented data contributes to research objective 3. This perceived lack of cultural diversity at headquarters may have an impact on global marketing initiatives and collaboration with subsidiaries. The respondent implies that headquarters are driven by a strong German cultural background. As a result of this perceived monoculturalism, headquarters might not appreciate local requirements in other parts of the world. On the other hand, the same respondent explained that headquarters has understood how to deal with this potential disadvantage. Subsidiaries are given large degrees of freedom in terms of local decision making:

"And so, although the initial approach might be very dramatic, there's, at least in my opinion, an awful lot of willingness to acknowledge that and to allow the regions or countries to adapt accordingly".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 11 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. One further cultural aspect which was mentioned by the same respondent is that [name of company] is perceived to run a very complicated type of business:

"[…] that we, that, when I first came into here, is that [name of company] is an exceptionally complicated business".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 13 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Another respondent similarly observed a high level of complexity within the company:

"[…] and then of course we are that complicated as a company […]"

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 3 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. The perceived problem with this complexity is that it creates problems in focusing on all business areas at the same time. This could lead to sub-optimal decision making in terms of marketing, particularly considering that it is difficult to focus on each aspect of the entire complex product portfolio at the same time:

"And we have a product portfolio and segmentation that [name of large competitor], you know, would have a hard time focusing on, I think, or supporting".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 13 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Another cultural aspect which impacts decision making was outlined by another respondent. The respondent described how seemingly endless discussions with numerous people paralyses decision making:

"[…] and then we have to ask this person and this person, and then we have to do meetings, and then we have ten people in meetings, and [breathes out air]".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 3 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. It seems from this description that a culture of discussing and aligning with lots of people has developed, slowing the company down in terms of its decisions and reaction times. Another respondent perceived the culture of the company as too consensus oriented. He suggested it needs to be more tenacious to foster better decision making:

"And these battles do not happen, because we think a battle is something awful. And my opinion is that we need these kinds of battles".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 9 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. In the context of culture, marketing decisions may be impacted by historic decisions since historic behaviour may have developed into a kind of norm or automatism for current decision making. The reliability of market

actors like [name of company] over time is valued by customers in the healthcare industry. Consistency over time in a company's marketing decisions carries a certain value. Trying to benefit from this mechanism means limiting the choices available for marketing activities. The downside of this continuity in activities may lead to some inertia within the company. In a lot of situations, it may indeed be wiser in such a context to continue making decisions in line with prior decisions. For example, the benefit of participating in a specific congress may not be felt in the first year but may be more apparent in following years of participation. On the downside, this might lead to strategic inertia. Stakeholders may have worked within the company for a long time. This could lead to the formation of habits which impinge upon creativity. Gigerenzer (2008) outlined that there are decision situations where information from the past is less relevant for the future, and for the current decision-making situation. Therefore, such historic information might need to be ignored. Ignoring what has worked in the past may be a good way forward, given all the changes in the external environment. Such impulses ignore the positive experiences from the past, in order to drive better decision making in the future. On the issue of developing local marketing teams towards digital communication activities, one respondent stated that the perceived automatism of business developing positively over years led to the perception that no changes to the current situation are merited:

"They didn't have to do anything, because the numbers came automatically. It seemed to be automatically".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 18 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Another respondent outlined how changes in the external environment which impact on communication have been neglected by local marketing or sales employees within the subsidiary for a long time:

"My understanding is that they are really routine people who did not see that the market is changing. The position on the market is changing, the size of the market is reducing. But they don't really believe this will happen to [name of company]. And they feel confident in the way they are doing their selling today and they consider it's enough. So, they overestimate, like, you know those guys, when you're trying to sell something, and you say, it is going to be tricky in the upcoming years. And people

say, no, it's fine, we're still good, we're still good, everything is fine, you know. So, they don't see the future in the same way we see how the future has changed and has reshaped the marketing with the digital".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 8 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. One respondent suggested that resistance to change had developed over time in the local marketing team and it had become difficult to overcome this resistance:

"And they told us we do it this way every time. Why should we change everything? So, and then you have to argue why we should do this".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 7 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Another respondent from the same country noted:

"The first argument was, we did it in the past. Hey, we want to do it also in the future".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 3 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. This resistance to change leads to limited variety when it comes to communication activities, as one respondent observed:

"[…] but in the operational marketing plan for hospital we have mainly events and customer visits […]"

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 8 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. The outlined impact of decision making on marketing seems to be important to point out. First, the industry seemingly rewards a certain degree of consistency in behaviour over time. Second, the corresponding development of some internal inertia in the company regarding the status quo is evidence. Both facets mean some decisions are not questioned and this inhibits change. It should be noted that the two facets may be interrelated. Inertia regarding some activities may have developed because of specific market mechanics which value consistency. As indicated in the literature review on conflict theory, in situations

where managers are faced with crucial decisions, they often either defer the decision, pass it on, or do nothing and continue with business-as-usual, which is the least-worst option (Mortimer & Laurie, 2017; Wright et al., 2004). Indeed, marketing activities in some countries occur more or less automatically, without much questioning as to whether they are still worthwhile. One respondent provided an example:

"We have, for two of them, [name of congress] and [name of other congress], more or less, we do not decide anymore. They are big congresses, and I think in the mind of everybody, it's impossible to not go to these two congresses".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 3 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. In effect, this automatism can inhibit the use of other communications activities like digital channels. Marketing budgets are tight, and events block large portions of the available marketing budget, leaving less budget for other communications activities.

Knowledge

The knowledge and experience which [name of company] employees have built up over time is another important aspect when it comes to decision making for marketing. The experience of some senior staff seems to be valued significantly in discussions. When it comes to making decisions, it can be assumed that these senior staff are very respected amongst colleagues and influence marketing decisions made by senior staff. When asked about how decisions are made on marketing activities in the local marketing team, one respondent replied:

Participant: "From my point of view it is a bit of everything apart from the mathematical model. For sure decisions are also based on figures. As I said, marketing, market size, and expected share in the market. But as you mentioned, there's a lot of politics involved. In terms of the seniority level of the people making the decisions. So, we have junior staff, but we also have some very senior managers or at least people who are a long time with [name of company] and they have quite some say. So, and they for sure are higher in the hierarchy. Sometimes, also, they

are not really on a management level but are, at least, on a, let's say, a felt or a hidden hierarchy. Because they have so much wisdom and knowledge, and they represent more or less the market within [name of company]".

Interviewer: "So, that is an influential factor I understand?"

Participant: "See, you can also describe it as trust. Trust in the knowledge of the people".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 5 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Trust in the knowledge of people seems to be valued by employees and this knowledge therefore carries some weight in discussions, giving someone with status an advantage in discussions with others. It can be assumed that the advantage is only valid for those topics where the person is accepted as an expert. Another respondent outlined that direct contact with customers seems to be valued by team members:

"We have experts in our team that are long term in the business. They have had contacts with customers, typically in various positions".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 4 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. One respondent stated that marketing decisions are made mostly based on knowledge and experience which are acquired over time:

"So, it's based on market knowledge, experience, best practice and all these kinds of things".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 5 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Regarding the type of knowledge that is important for decision making, one respondent pointed out that marketing employees need to have both market knowledge and communications knowledge:

"We have it set up so that communication specialists are also a specialist in their own segment".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 3 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. This combination of knowledge may help organisations to capitalise on opportunities and new channels of communication which may otherwise be neglected. One respondent mentioned that in another part of the company, which serves a different industry, capitalising on opportunities for new communication channels is common:

"[…] they know that digital is an opportunity".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 8 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. As outlined by Ozuem et al. (2008), several marketers fail to understand the interactive marketplace and use the internet purely as IT. Evidence provided by one respondent suggested that the company website is perceived as a product catalogue:

"Website is something special, you know. The website is a catalogue of [name of company]".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 4 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. In line with this finding, another respondent explained that the hospital segment lacks communication know-how locally, and this seems to be a common issue for the hospital segment. The local marketing product managers are very experienced with their products and customers, but have little knowledge about communication:

"And from the product managers, it is more content-driven, but not communication-driven".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 9 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. The reason for this lack of communications knowledge seems to be caused by the length of time people stay within their jobs in the healthcare industry. When most of the marketing team members were hired, marketing was simply not a key area of focus for their jobs:

"But most of them do not come from marketing studies, they come from sales studies, […]"

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 9 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Another respondent outlined that communication, as a functional discipline, was not a priority when current members of the marketing team were hired:

"It's historical. It's from the past. All those people are in the team for years. And they were not doing any kind of communication before. They were not even recruited for that".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 8 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. The long timeframes people stay within their jobs within the hospital segment of [name of company] therefore seem to influence knowledge levels in terms of communication. The lack of this specific knowledge can be considered to influence decision making. Webster et al. (2005) identified that the dispersion of marketing competence away from a centralised headquarters towards other functions, like sales, may result in problems for building and sustaining quality marketing skills and capabilities. As the respondent further outlined, this lack of communications knowledge has not been focused on sufficiently in studies of prior organisational change, where training in communication skills was not a priority:

"[…] what we really have to do, is to develop people. To develop people. […] We missed this idea of training people. We consider that everyone with a title of communication was enough".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 18 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Assuming that communications knowledge is not sufficiently developed amongst marketing employees, current developments caused by the advent of the internet (Lagrosen, 2005) may worsen the situation, making it more difficult for unskilled marketing employees to close the knowledge gap. In this context, the lack of IMC skills amongst employees is one obvious key reason why IMC is poorly implemented (Eagle & Kitchen, 2000; Schultz & Kitchen,

1997; Schultz & Schultz, 2004). Another respondent made an interesting point regarding the effects of the long-term building of knowledge in the healthcare sector. The respondent pointed out that work experience which is established over time creates some sort of a decision-support process which supports decision making based on prior experiences under similar circumstances. This respondent also pointed out that it is important to make decisions as a team:

"I guess we all have a kind of algorithm in our mind, which helps us to take a decision. The key is to not take the decision alone".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 15 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. This algorithm, as it was termed by this respondent, may well be comparable to the idea of heuristics, as outlined in the literature review. People develop an understanding of which strategy solves problems best, based on learning from prior application of this strategy (Rieskamp & Otto, 2006). People evaluate the applicability of a heuristic to the environment until it is eventually applied routinely (Gigerenzer, 2008). The algorithm the respondent refers to seems to be a decision-supporting device which has been developed over time. This algorithm may well provide the benefits of heuristic decision making so that less relevant information can be overlooked and decisions made more quickly (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011). On the other hand, it may be an algorithm that was developed a long time ago, which has ceased to provide the same benefits due to hitherto unperceived changes in the external environment. Regarding the usage of customer information for strategic purposes, one respondent noted that this knowledge is stored uncoded in the heads of managers, and not in IT systems. It is therefore important that the individual passes this information on to the appropriate department at headquarters level so that it can be used in strategy development.

"If there is a discussion between the responsible marketing manager for ventilation, for example, and a key opinion leader, then the information is in the head of the marketing manager. And hopefully in the next expert meeting or whatever they have with the global team, this information will spread out to the product management […]. Or maybe sometimes he writes an email. But there is no process or no official way, like, if you heard something, bring it to the global team".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 14 and the presented data contributes to research objective 3. It can be deduced from this statement that successfully passing on information depends on individual relationships with headquarters amongst managers. Since the information remains uncoded, part of it may be lost or may be added to as it is passed on. This process of informing strategy with customer information can be considered to lack structure and, as a consequence, it may not be of a high quality.

Emotions

Another code which emerged regarding how marketing decisions are influenced is emotional aspects, like feelings or judgements which people make. One respondent reflected on their own decision-making behaviour in the context of having to decide between two alternatives, and concluded that decisions on marketing activities are indeed subjective:

"I typically try to listen to both arguments, but I cannot definitely say that I'm making an objective decision, I'm making a subjective decision".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 7 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Another respondent came to a similar conclusion, stating that the decision processes for marketing activities do not follow strict, rational rules:

"Yes, rather a rough estimation or feeling. […] it's not that scientific".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 4 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. In the context of marketing decision making being influenced by emotions, the term 'gut feeling' came up in several interviews. The term was also used by the interviewer in some cases, so this may have influenced the observation. Three selected examples from the interviews are highlighted below, they provide an impression of how respondents perceived the use of 'gut feelings'. One respondent outlined how marketing decisions are made:

"We use marketing data plus a little bit of gut feeling".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 5 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Another respondent referred to the evaluation of marketing activities, in this case the evaluation of a trade show by employees of the local subsidiary:

"So, they have a very good, let's say gut feeling, regarding was it good or not good".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 8 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. When asked about where ideas for new marketing activities originate from, one manager replied:

"So, it's a mix between gut feeling, own analysis, and research at some of the available resources […]"

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 11 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Upon investigating the topic further, one participant stated that decisions based on gut feelings produce good results. An evaluation of decisions taken shows that most decisions seem to have been made appropriately:

"And I would say, in such cases we have like a 90 per cent hit quote, that our gut feeling is very often in the right direction".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 4 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Developing a gut feeling for a situation may well be comparable to heuristic decision making. Heuristics are knowledge structures which become cognitive shortcuts for quick behavioural responses in familiar situations, using a script that was developed based on prior experience (Woiceshyn, 2009). Such a script seems to feature some similarities to the idea of developing a gut feeling about how to handle decision situations. Similar to the evidence provided by the respondent, Wübben and Wangenheim (2008) also found heuristic decision making to be a good guide for decision-making situations. Related to the idea of

decisions based on gut feelings, one respondent outlined that decisions are made based on the belief that value is being provided for the customer:

"To be honest, I think it's a belief that what we are doing is valuable for the customer".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 5 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Another respondent stated that there is no rational decision process behind marketing decision making, but it is rather about trying things out to see what happens:

"Let me put it this way. A whole lot of trial and error is involved".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 5 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. During the annual planning process, discussions take place regarding which activities shall be carried out in the upcoming year and which will not. These can be very emotional debates. It can be assumed that subjective factors as opposed to rational arguments play a role in the decision-making process in such a context:

"Because everybody who is involved, typically our segment managers, are of course keen to get support for their projects. So, therefore, it's quite an emotional debate and negotiation process that happens every year, right?".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 8 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Finally, the local application of the globally developed hospital strategy may also be impacted by personal judgements. In one case, a respondent challenged the idea that the strategy is the right one for the company:

"No, for hospital it didn't change my way because I do not stand behind this strategy".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 11 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Since there is freedom and autonomy when

it comes to decision making in local subsidiaries, there is a subsequent impact on local decision making for marketing activities. These decisions are probably not in line with global strategy. This does not mean that the local decisions are wrong for the subsidiary. It just means that consistency with global strategy is unlikely to happen if acceptance of that strategy is not widespread.

Internal communication

The final code for the theme relationship is termed internal communication. This refers to issues influencing marketing decision making which are caused by the company communicating internally to its employees. When asked, for example, about local communication activities, one respondent explained that the difference between customer communication and internal communication has to be made clear:

"So, I have the internal communication part and the external part with the customer".

The respondent from group 'A' replied to interview question 1 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. The reason for the perceived importance of effective internal communications for external customer communication is provided by one manager. The perception is that if employees are well informed, this may lead to better performance in customer communication.

"This is very important, because, if you communicate well with your employees, they will communicate better outside in the daily job".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 1 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. What is meant by 'better outside communication' is: if people share a common level of knowledge about organisational targets, they can communicate more consistently based on that knowledge across the company. Since consistency in communication may be valued by the customer, company performance might consequently be improved. In cases in which communication does not work well internally, people will communicate conflicting storylines to the customer. In this context, the term 'blue blood' came up in one interview. The respondent used this term with reference to the company colours of [name of

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company], which feature a blue tone. Blue blood is interpreted here as a synonym for employees identifying with the company and acting consistently with targets.

"And, that way, they have really blue blood, and so, all kinds of this communication help people to feel engaged in the company […]"

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 12 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. Another, more concrete example where internal communication is important, is that if a new product is not well communicated internally, for example to service technicians, sales numbers might suffer:

"And if our service technician does not like a new product and does not understand it, we won't sell it".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 8 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. The reason for such an impact on sales is that service technicians spend a lot of their working life at customer sites in hospitals. Over time they often develop strong relationships with customers. If a service technician is not convinced about a new product this will impact negatively on sales. Similarly, one manager recognised the importance of generating alignment internally to corporate plans and wanted to improve internal communications with employees:

"Well the one thing I'm working on this year and I will do it this year, is to communicate better to the whole organisation what our plans are".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 9 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. This respondent thought that global hospital strategies were not effectively communicated throughout the company:

"So, I'm not sure that we have communicated it very well, generally".

The respondent from group 'B' replied to interview question 10 and the presented data contributes to research objective 2. If the strategy is not well communicated, achieving a high level of consistency across all marketing activities is unlikely to be

achieved. Internal communication and the acceptance of the validity of global strategy seem to be decisive factors when it comes to implementing global strategy successfully across the company in all its subsidiaries.

4.4 Summary of chapter

This chapter provided a comprehensive insight into the qualitative data captured from interviews. The data were analysed and structured using a thematic analytical approach. From the analysis, three major themes emerged, which were labelled efficiency, consistency, and relationship. Efficiency refers to a rational approach to decision making, and to the collection and strategic usage of customer data. Very often, rationalised decisions are based on financial information, such as expense budgets or the desire to increase net sales. In other cases, the desire to minimise efforts or limit the usage of own resources plays a significant role in how and which communication activities are conducted. The usage of customer data for strategic purposes is not structurally organised and therefore not efficiently employed. And, finally, marketing communication activities are not always measurable, thereby limiting their proof of value and further investments into communications. The availability of customer data is a prerequisite for using that data for strategic purposes and achieving a full SI of marketing communication activities with strategy according to the four-stage process model as outlined by Schultz and Kitchen (2000). Managing for providing that data with a structured approach is one way to enable SI. In addition, rational arguments, mostly based on financials, seemingly play a role in deciding upon communication activities. Making communication activities measurable in terms of their outcome and linking that outcome to company strategy would therefore provide a connection to how decisions on marketing communication activities can be influenced by and linked to business strategy. Finding ways to establish that link between outcome and strategy would therefore help in achieving SI.

The theme consistency refers to how decisions on communication activities are influenced by the desire to act in accordance with guidance. This guidance takes the form of a local or company-wide strategy, the company's brand values, or historic decisions which have to be reconsidered when current decisions arise. In the

decentralised organisational structure in which the company operates, decisions on marketing communication activities are taken locally and the country subsidiaries have a high degree of decision autonomy. This ranges from completely decoupled decision making locally, via the localisation of global activities to local demands, all the way towards trying to comply with a company-wide strategy in the local subsidiary. In addition, historic decisions on communication activities have relevance for current decisions, such as the participation in a recurring annual congress, because benefits from these congresses are mostly harvested after several years of attendance; attempts to achieve company-wide consistency with company strategy have to consider such a desire to act consistently. Obviously, local market needs cannot be ignored when it comes to communication activities. Attempts to achieve SI in marketing communications need to ensure that in addition to trying to achieve consistency with strategy across a set of subsidiaries, local decision flexibility is granted to subsidiaries otherwise acceptance of such an approach will be lost. The concept of marketing doctrine and the underlying idea of guiding principles are capable of achieving both consistency with global guidance and local flexibility (Challagalla et al., 2014). Guiding principles therefore seem to be a good approach to support achievement of SI of marketing communications. Guiding principles development needs to consider subsidiaries' desire to act according to local market needs, and such development also needs to evaluate and properly address the consequences of trying to act consistently with historic decisions.

The final theme, relationship, gathers all those factors which influence communication decision making which are inherent in people themselves or which are rooted in people's interaction with other people. This means that the theme points out that social processes underly decisions on marketing communication activities; therefore, decisions are not always logical or rational. In developing tools that support decision making in accordance with company strategy, one needs to consider that influencing decision processes cannot be based on mere logical processes and arguments. People influence one another by the way they collaborate, either within the local subsidiary or across company boundaries between subsidiaries and headquarters. A lack of communication may lead to globally initiated activities which cannot be implemented locally. Guiding principles may have to support collaboration across boundaries if the essence of lacking strategic consistency is rooted in a lack

of collaboration between a subsidiary and headquarters. Even though decisions are often taken in teams, strong individuals are capable of taking the lead in discussions and turning decisions in their favour. Cultural topics play a role: marketing does not have a strong history as a function in the company and direct customer contact with the sales force is valued. Developing marketing skills and using them for communication activities is, therefore, still seen by several employees as unnecessary, doubting the added value marketing may provide. Cultural aspects also touch issues of inertia and satisfaction with the status quo, posing a challenge of how to break up routines. Routines and decisions caused by inertia do not result in a consistent global decision making for any company. Breaking up these routines and the inertia will need to be addressed by a concept that supports SI on a company-wide scale. Guiding principles development should consider the existence of such routines and, where needed, principles should be developed that are capable of breaking up the existing inertia. Emotional aspects such as the acceptance of listening to one's gut feeling when it comes to decision making play a significant role in marketing communication decision making. Several employees have developed a good gut feeling for their markets. By that measure, they are not able to rationalise a decision, but to take good decisions based on emotions and unconscious knowledge. Such gut feeling is not aligned across national boundaries and will therefore not automatically generate strategy-consistent decision making for the entire company. In developing tools that support SI, one needs to consider that gut feeling is used by local actors for taking decisions, and any type of concept which is aimed at supporting strategic consistency needs to consider that people want to decide according to their gut feeling. Any global approach neglecting such tendencies is likely to fail. Finally, internal communication is decisive for aligning knowledge and strategic direction amongst all company employees. If internal communication mainly happens within the subsidiary or does not happen at all, then consistency with any strategy, be it local or global, will not be realised. In cases where internal communication is inadequate, guiding principles should be aimed at improving the internal communication and exchange of information among employees.

All these three themes and their discussed building blocks are areas of interest when it comes to developing guiding principles. Considering all these mentioned areas for applicability when developing guiding principles may therefore facilitate the

development of efficient guiding principles which are capable of achieving SI between marketing communication activities and company strategy.

In the next chapter, the presented data is used to generate a conceptual model to fulfil the fourth research objective and the research aim.

5 Research framework and conceptual model

5.1 Introduction

The last chapter dealt with the presentation of empirical evidence which was generated for the purposes of this research project. This chapter addresses the fourth research objective, which is to synthesise the information gained into a conceptual model that supports the practical implementation of IMC at a strategic level in a decentralised organisational structure for the healthcare industry.

5.2 Development of the conceptual model from the initial framework

This section is intended to establish an understanding of the connection between the initial framework which was used to explain SI in the context of IMC and the developed conceptual model which results from this research as outlined in the fourth research objective. The initial framework, the IMC four-stage process model as developed by Schultz and Kitchen (2000), which was outlined in Chapter two, helps to understand the steps and building blocks which are necessary to achieve integration of marketing communications with the company's strategy. In particular, the requirement of establishing a customer database, which is used to further inform strategy development as outlined in the third and fourth steps of the four-stage process model framework, is an important factor for achieving integration of marketing communications with strategy. The building blocks of that framework are essential for understanding how SI can be achieved. Ensuring in practice that each step of that framework is successfully built would lead a company towards SI. Exploring what helps and hinders the successful building of these steps therefore helps in generating an understanding of how achievement of SI of marketing communication activities with strategy can be supported. The research objectives are influenced by the initial framework as they guide the research towards exploring the usage of customer data for strategy decisions. They also guide the research towards generally exploring decision making in a marketing communications context. In accordance with the research objectives, the data collection phase is therefore also similarly influenced by that framework. The semi-structured interview questions as shown in the interview guide in Appendix A were designed to ensure that the already mentioned strategic building blocks of the four-stage process model are addressed in

the interviews. For example, Questions 13 to 17 of the interview guide are intended to explore how customer information is collected and put to strategic usage. Question 10 is intended to explore the respondents' exposure to and understanding of the company's current strategy for the hospital segment. Question 11 is intended to allow the generation of an understanding of how that strategy impacts decision making for marketing communications. On the other hand, the intention of the research is not to support successful building of each single step from that framework. The first two steps are not the specific focus of the research. The intention of the research is to understand decision making in a marketing communications context with a focus on how this decision making is, and can be, aligned with strategy. The research therefore considers the important building blocks for achieving SI which stem from the four-stage process model, like the building of a customer database. It therefore explicitly directs the data collection towards this issue. In contrast, for example, the data is not designed for exploring in detail what hinders achievement of message integration as outlined in the first step of the four-stage process model, even though some collected data may be useable to analyse this facet as well. The data collection focused on collecting data which supports understanding of what helps and hinders aligning marketing communications with strategy and used some – but not all – aspects of the four-stage process model to ensure that data relevant for this purpose was collected. Due to the focus on the mere strategic side of that framework, the framework's full structure is not replicated in the developed conceptual model. But the conceptual model is indeed influenced by the framework, for example, it is visible in facets which address the issue of building a customer database. This aspect can be found in the integration area termed 'efficiency' of the conceptual model which features the issue of 'data collection and usage' as shown in Figure 4. The structure of the developed conceptual model of integration areas results from thematic analysis and the major themes and codes which emerged during the analysis phase. Since the four-stage process model is a framework which was reviewed for understanding how SI can be achieved, and since some building blocks from that framework were explicitly addressed in the data gathering phase, that framework had an impact on the generated data. As already mentioned in Chapter three, thematic analysis looks for data which helps to answer the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Since the research questions are partially influenced by the four-stage process model, the resulting codes and themes are therefore influenced by this framework as well. From

the outlined influence of the four-stage process model on the emergence of codes and themes, and its initial influence on the research objectives, it can be concluded that the framework had an impact on the structure and content of the conceptual model which was developed. The general structure of that initial framework was not replicated in the developed conceptual model, yet single aspects can be found like the building and usage of a customer database and corresponding aspects which influence such database building.

5.3   Existing theory and the research gap

A recent shift in the perception of marketing has moved the focus to the integration of marketing activities with other business functions, often the sales function (Batra & Keller, 2016; Kumar, 2015; Sleep, Lam, & Hulland, 2018). This shift in focus was partially triggered by the diversity of media channels and the corresponding interactivity of the internet. In parallel, the influence of the corporate marketing department within firms has decreased (Homburg, Vomberg, Enke, & Grimm, 2015; Krush, Sohi, & Saini, 2015; Verhoef & Leeflang, 2009; Webster et al., 2005). The result of this loss of influence and power is a trend towards the dispersion of marketing competence away from centralised marketing headquarters to other functions, such as sales, and to dispersed physical locations (Webster et al., 2005).

The advent of the internet caused changes which make it difficult to draw a clear boundary around a marketing communications function which separates it from other parts of the company (Rowley, 2001). Marketing communications has historically been associated with the term promotion, as part of the well-known 4Ps model (Hartley & Pickton, 1999; Ozuem et al., 2008; Rowley, 2001). Marketing communications tend to focus on mass communication via traditional media such as newspapers, television, and radio. This approach was significantly impacted by the advent of the internet (Chandra & Kaiser, 2014); however, traditional media channels continue to be used. The technology of the internet has created a variety of new communications channels. Unlike traditional one-way marketing communications, internet technology enables interactive communication with an identifiable audience (i.e., two-way communication, instead of just sending messages to an undifferentiated mass of recipients) (Arnott & Bridgewater, 2002). This wider array of

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communication options requires, in consequence, better alignment of communication activities in order to be efficient and effective. It requires better integration of all marketing communication activities as proposed in the concept of IMC (Caywood et al., 1991; Schultz & Kitchen, 2000).

One significant strand of literature on the topic of IMC has dealt with the perception of IMC in advertising agencies in several countries, for example, Caywood et al. (1991), Schultz and Kitchen (1997), and Kitchen and Schultz (1998). These studies explored how IMC is perceived and how it developed from the advertising agency side, but they failed to explore decision making for marketing communication activities in further detail based on client perceptions. Another significant strand of literature which sought to explore IMC, employed surveys and questionnaires to achieve its research goals, for example: Duncan and Everett (1993); McArthur and Griffin (1997); Low (2000); Reid (2003); Gabrielli and Balboni (2010); Reinold and Tropp (2012); Schultz et al. (2016); Luxton et al. (2017); and Porcu, del Barrio-García, Kitchen, et al. (2019). These studies failed to generate a deeper understanding of the variety and breadth of all the practical issues that actors in client firms face when trying to implement an integrated approach to marketing communications. Another stream of literature dealt with the integration of marketing and marketing communications activities within a company's strategy. These studies tended to employ strategic theory for their research purposes, for example, Fuchs et al. (2000), Burgelman and Doz (2001), Reid (2003), Holm (2006), Caemmerer (2009), Barker (2013), and Kerr and Patti (2015). They largely failed to focus on the practical issues which companies face when trying to implement a connection between the choices that are made in marketing communications activities and in corporate strategy. Only a few studies provided an operational view and shed light on how and by which means the SI of marketing communication activities can be achieved in practice. Organisational structure is identified in IMC-related literature as one significant potential barrier to successful IMC implementation, for example, Schultz and Kitchen (1997), Schultz and Schultz (2004), and Mortimer and Laurie (2017).

As a consequence, another significant stream of literature employed organisational theory as a basis for research, for example, Gronstedt (1996), Eagle and Kitchen (2000), Cornelissen (2001), and Vernuccio and Ceccotti (2015). These studies

largely failed to shed light on the specific difficulties a decentralised organisational structure poses for implementing IMC. Consequently, they also failed to provide operationally usable support in terms of how to overcome the barriers to IMC implementation caused by a decentralised structure.

Challagalla et al. (2014) developed a concept called marketing doctrine. Their study promoted the idea of employing guiding principles for decision making in a marketing context, because guiding principles or marketing doctrine "[…] helps a firm address the classic consistency–flexibility conundrum by providing high-level guidance to all decision makers in the firm (thus ensuring consistency) but not specifying execution details (thus allowing for local flexibility)" (Challagalla et al., 2014, p. 4). Guiding principles "[…] are knowledge structures that call to mind collective narratives with emotional content, and are articulated and used heuristically to guide decision making in organisations" (Oliver & Jacobs, 2007, p. 813). Heuristics, scripts, schemas, and guiding principles are all knowledge structures which become cognitive shortcuts for quick behavioural responses in familiar situations, and they are based on scripts which are developed using prior experience (Woiceshyn, 2009). Heuristics are conscious or unconscious efficient cognitive processes (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011). They are a decision-making strategy which "[…] ignores part of the information, with the goal of making decisions more quickly, frugally, and/or accurately than more complex methods" (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011, p. 454). Indeed, Woiceshyn (2009, p. 299) concluded that "studies have found systematic, rational analysis insufficient to deal effectively with complexity".

Wübben and Wangenheim (2008) found no clear evidence for the superiority of quantitative decision models for managerial decision making in customer management when compared with simple methods, like heuristics. They concluded "[…] that the heuristics the firms used worked astonishingly well" (Wübben & Wangenheim, 2008, p. 92). The rationality of using heuristics is founded on the assumption that using heuristics means trading some loss in accuracy for faster, yet satisficing, decisions (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011).

Guiding principles possess three significant key characteristics (Oliver & Jacobs, 2007), which link them to, but also distinguish them from, heuristics. First, guiding

principles possess a heuristic character (i.e., they also serve as rules of thumb for making effective and efficient decisions, just like heuristics). Second, and unlike heuristics, they are narrative; so, they are based on explicitly shared narrative stories amongst people and third, also unlike heuristics, their storylines possess emotional content, which supports memorising and connections to the guiding principle. Generally, guiding principles are efficient and effective in supporting decision making, because they inductively generalise experiences about how a goal was attained (Woiceshyn, 2009). When we experience how the world works, such experiences are stored in our memory. To save scarce space, the brain identifies the essence of the learning and integrates these memories into concepts and, eventually, principles (Woiceshyn, 2009). Principles are therefore higher level or more abstract concepts, which store the essence of learning (Woiceshyn, 2009). When recalled, principles can be re-used and applied to new situations, helping to make better decisions in the situation at hand, based on past experiences (Woiceshyn, 2009). Since principles are abstracted forms of knowledge, they cannot be applied without further thinking (Locke, 2002). Developing scripts for guiding principles makes it necessary for stakeholders to have experience. It seems possible that generic experiences from one company could be transferred to another. In such cases the experience should be evaluated for applicability to new surroundings.

Employing guiding principles to support consistent decision making across a company is therefore an operationally relevant approach, which may help companies to align their operational activities with their strategy in a consistent way.

A study by Challagalla et al. (2014) explored the concept of marketing doctrines, whereas this research thesis, in contrast, aims to explore in detail how decisions on marketing communication activities are made. The connection between Challagalla et al.'s (2014) study on marketing doctrine and this research thesis is that the general idea of marketing doctrine or guiding principles might be one solution to improving strategic consistency in a marketing communications decision-making context. The Challagalla et al. (2014) study is about decision making in marketing in general and is therefore not focused on marketing communications alone. Marketing doctrine explicitly addresses the alignment of marketing activities with a firm's strategy. The usage of marketing doctrine or guiding principles may therefore be one feasible

approach to creating consistency between marketing activities and strategy. Challagalla et al. (2014) provided perspectives of high-level executives from several companies to illuminate the meaning of the marketing doctrine and the reasons for developing it. They studied the consequences of its usage on the process for developing the marketing doctrine or guiding principles. Their study therefore failed to provide a practical perspective on general marketing communications decision making by operational marketing employees and managers working directly in a marketing context in a decentralised operating unit. It consequently failed to explore how decisions are generally taken in a company's marketing communications context.

This thesis explores how decisions on marketing communication activities are taken in a decentralised organisational structure, largely from the point of view of the operational marketing employees. It provides deep insights into how decisions on marketing communication activities are influenced and taken from an operational business point of view. Marketing doctrine is perceived to be useful in a decentralised organisational structure because it provides firm-wide guidance on marketing decision making (Challagalla et al., 2014). It helps by providing guidance for local marketing decision makers within which they can decide for themselves, thus allowing for local flexibility within these boundaries. Marketing doctrine may therefore be one useful approach to address the issue of creating consistency with strategy when decisions have to be made on marketing activities within a decentralised organisational structure. Challagalla et al. (2014) further suggested that marketing doctrine is identified and developed based on experiences by means of retrospective reviewing of marketing decisions. The study also focused in part on understanding how the guiding principles or marketing doctrine were developed. In contrast to this approach, this thesis focused on exploring how decisions on marketing communication activities were taken. More specifically, it did not focus on one specific means, such as guiding principles, which may have influenced the decision-making process. Experiences in terms of how decisions on marketing communications activities are taken are the focus of this research thesis. Participants provided their experiences on this matter. The results from the corresponding thematic analysis on the data provided by those experiences are intended to form the

basis of a theoretical model which guides and structures the forming of guiding principles in a marketing communications decision-making context.

5.4   Conceptual model

Guiding principles are developed based on experiences (Challagalla et al., 2014). In this context it also needs to be considered that Challagalla et al.'s (2014, p. 9) study of marketing doctrine stated that "[…] marketing doctrine must focus on its most critical marketing choices rather than be comprehensive". The development of marketing doctrine or guiding principles within a firm should be conducted with all relevant parties, since "[…] principles must display firm-wide relevance" (Challagalla et al., 2014, p. 12). It seems unlikely that relevant principles can be achieved across the firm without involving both subsidiaries and headquarters within a company operating a decentralised organisational structure. Headquarters that influence their subsidiaries to achieve a positive attitude towards marketing have demonstrated efficiency (Lancaster & Brierley, 2001). An initiative to improve the alignment of marketing communication activities with strategy may therefore be initiated by headquarters, such initiatives need to gain firm-wide acceptance by all subsidiaries.

The development of guiding principles may be perceived as a challenge for companies "[…] because previous research has provided little guidance on developing it" (Challagalla et al., 2014, p. 11). Challagalla et al. (2014) also suggested that three steps are necessary for the development of guiding principles: the identification, the articulation, and the sustaining of principles or marketing doctrine. The study suggested that the identification of repeated experiences is a strong basis for developing generalisations and corresponding principles. External sources as an input for developing principles were, however, critically perceived: "Furthermore, although firms actively examined external sources (e.g., best practices from other firms, advice from consulting firms, theory) for exemplars, they were cautious in adopting lessons that did not have clear parallels within the firm, mainly because external lessons may seem to be sound but may not apply easily to a firm's unique context" (Challagalla et al., 2014, p. 12); these perceptions seem plausible if viewed in the light of the concept of strategy. Porter (1996) argued there is a need for differentiation between operational effectiveness and strategic positioning. The

former requires improving performance, while the latter requires the selection of a unique set of activities. Based on this argument, the achievement of uniqueness may be less likely if a company bases its own guiding principles on existing principles in other firms. Purchasing knowledge by hiring consultants or by re-using external and existing knowledge may be perceived as less company-specific and, therefore, might not satisfy the needs to develop company-unique and strategic principles (Porter, 1996). Any business strategy should be reflected in the principles it seeks to develop (Challagalla et al., 2014). Uniqueness and conformity with company strategy is therefore achieved by incorporating strategy when developing guiding principles. This is acknowledged by Challagalla et al. (2014) who argued that guiding principles should be evaluated for their applicability by checking their conformity with strategy. By considering and incorporating company strategy when developing guiding principles, the company-uniqueness of those principles can be achieved. Incorporating knowledge from other companies does not automatically create significant similarities in guiding principles across a range of companies that are developing guiding principles using the same information base. The development of guiding principles should always consider the company's unique context, which can lead to unique principles.

Knowledge developed from this thesis could create additional value for operationally involved actors by providing integration areas which should be checked and considered when developing guiding principles for marketing communication purposes. Integration areas which should be considered in such a scenario are summarised in terms of efficiency, consistency, and relationship. These might be of interest to those who are developing guiding principles in the specific setting of a company operating a decentralised organisational structure. The integration areas may generate value by providing experiences in a roughly structured way. These could be used to check whether issues concerned with relationship, consistency, and efficiency are properly addressed through such principles. These integration areas have been developed via the application of a thematic analysis of data generated for this research. Considering integration areas when developing guiding principles may help ensure that areas which are important for creating consistency with company strategy are covered.

As discussed above, guiding principles do not need to be comprehensive (i.e., not all integration areas need to be covered in the guiding principles). They can serve as a guide or checklist in settings where guiding principles are developed to ensure that relevant areas are considered when principles are under development. The selection of a relevant set of principles is, nevertheless, a requirement to ensure some limitation to the number of principles developed, so that the overall number of principles remains practically usable (Challagalla et al., 2014; Oliver & Roos, 2005). Guiding principles developed in any setting will always need to be individualised to each company by considering the specific circumstances of that company. This includes consideration of corporate strategy, the selection and application of relevant integration areas and sub-areas for each company, and consideration of the individual knowledge of stakeholders from several relevant central and decentralised areas of the company.

Examples of the application of integration areas in the development of guiding principles are outlined later in this paragraph. The three major integration areas are efficiency, consistency, and relationship. These major areas are further detailed into sub-areas. For example, when developing guiding principles, stakeholders should consider issues of efficiency which might need to be reflected in the principles to be developed. When considering issues of efficiency, the conceptual model developed here suggests that the following sub-areas should be covered: market share, resources, structure, data collection and usage, and the external environment. This means that a guiding principle which is to be developed may need to be evaluated by checking whether it properly reflects market share or sales targets in case these targets play a vital role in achieving company goals, such as fulfilling the company's strategy. Consideration of the availability of company resources is also key. If these resources are key to achieving company strategy, then their handling, usage, or management may need to be considered in the formulation of guiding principles. Structural topics such as processes and internal or legal standards may also need to be considered in the process of generating guiding principles, in case they are of vital importance to fulfil company targets. Specialities of the external environment, as in the healthcare industry, which is a strongly regulated market, may also need consideration so that they can be properly and consistently addressed by marketing communication activities throughout the company. Finally, it would be interesting to

make data collection and its usage a guiding principle. Maintaining and building accessible data sources is a building block towards SI in Schultz and Kitchen's (2000) four-stage process model. Therefore, it would make sense to ensure data availability by incorporating the idea in a guiding principle. The full scope of the integration area of efficiency is illustrated in the figure below (Figure 4).
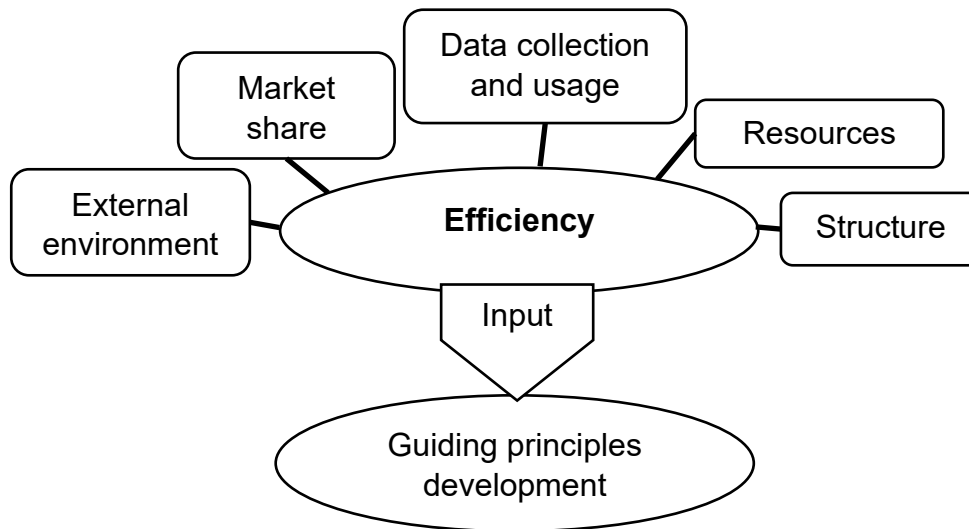

Figure 4 - Integration area of efficiency (own figure)

To address the integration area of consistency, the following sub-areas should be covered:

- the general desire to act with consistency itself,
- the local approach of local companies operating in a decentralised organisational structure,
- the global approach initiated by headquarters, which is operating in a decentralised organisational structure,
- and issues concerning the company's brand.

The desire to act with consistency in general refers to the consideration of whether activities conducted by the company are consistent over time and with one another. A guiding principle may incorporate this sub-area in those cases where marketing communication plays a decisive role in the company's success. This is reflected in Schultz and Kitchen's (2000) four-stage process model in which tactical coordination

of all communications is the basis for all further stages in that model. Following a local approach within the local, decentralised operating subsidiaries of a multinational corporation could be another important issue which should be considered when developing guiding principles. On the one hand, this may already be incorporated in the guiding principle itself, which is intended to provide global guidance yet leave room for local adaptations (Challagalla et al., 2014). On the other hand, paying attention to local market needs may be a decisive factor in the company's success, and should be reflected in a guiding principle shared across the company. Another aspect which could be reflected in a guiding principle is the idea of having a global approach to acting consistently throughout the company. This sub-area incorporates, for example, the need for important global market trends to be reflected in the actions and behaviour of each subsidiary. Another aspect that may be of interest is product launches that are driven by headquarters and which need to be properly adopted by the local subsidiaries in each country. These issues could be relevant in any company that follows strong global market trends or where new product launches play a major role in the company's success. Finally, companies that have a strong brand approach may be interested in employing guiding principles that inspire marketing communication activities. Companies that apply brand messaging consistently throughout the company may be interested in this prospect. Such initiatives might include giving the brand a priority level in comparison to other factors, or providing a time horizon within which brand messaging should be consistently conducted. The full scope of the integration area of consistency is illustrated in the figure below (Figure 5).
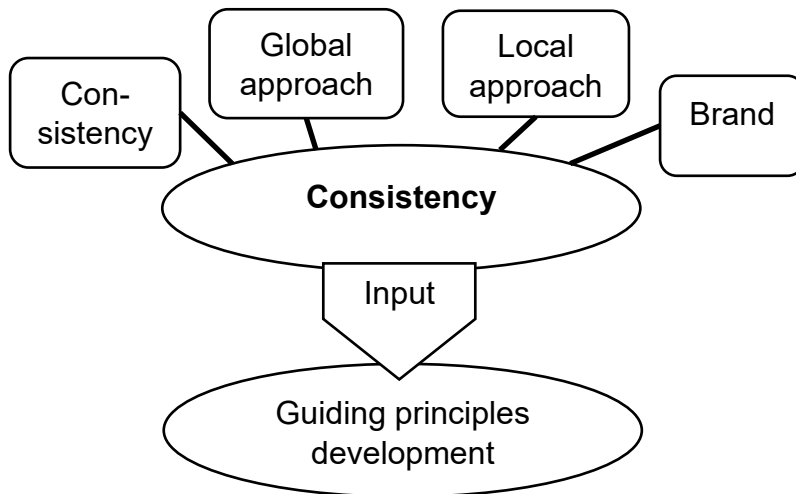
Figure 5 - Integration area of consistency (own figure)

The final integration area, and possibly the most interesting one, is relationship. This is an area of significant interest because it is founded on issues that result from people working together, and not on the logical arguments that are linked to the other two integration areas. The sub-areas identified for this integration area are collaboration, culture, knowledge, emotions, and internal communication. Collaboration refers, in general, to the need for people to work together effectively so that company goals can be achieved. Going into more detail, this may refer to how decisions are reached within a group of people working together, and to how people influence one another when decisions on marketing communication activities are taken. How collaboration issues should be addressed by employees in a company may well be the basis of a guiding principle shared in a corporation. The sub-area termed culture refers to how the culture of a company, which has developed over time, influences marketing decision making. The cultural aspects of a company may need to be considered when developing guiding principles because there may be behavioural aspects that have developed over time which inhibit or foster specific behaviour. Such behaviour may or may not be of benefit to decision making in terms of marketing communication activities throughout the company. For example, understanding the value of the marketing function within the company may be decisive for its influence within the company (Webster et al., 2005). If marketing is perceived to be nothing more than a sales support function, then the decision power of marketing may be limited. Addressing such shortcomings using a guiding principle may help to overcome such issues.

The sub-area termed knowledge is intended to guide attention towards issues which deal with how people are trained and developed, and how information is shared across the company. A company's success may depend to a significant degree on the management of such knowledge, and a corresponding guiding principle may be helpful for addressing a consistent approach towards knowledge management. Emotions may be another area which should be addressed when developing guiding principles. Emotions play a role in debates; they are the basis of gut feelings upon which decisions are taken by people. Finally, internal communication issues play a role when it comes to decisions on marketing communication activities. If company strategy, brand positioning, or other relevant issues are not well communicated, then employees may not feel empowered to make decisions in line with company strategy or brand targets. Guiding information flows in a structured way by providing guidance on how internal communication should be handled can ensure effective information flow across an entire company. The full scope of the integration area termed relationship is illustrated in the figure below (Figure 6).
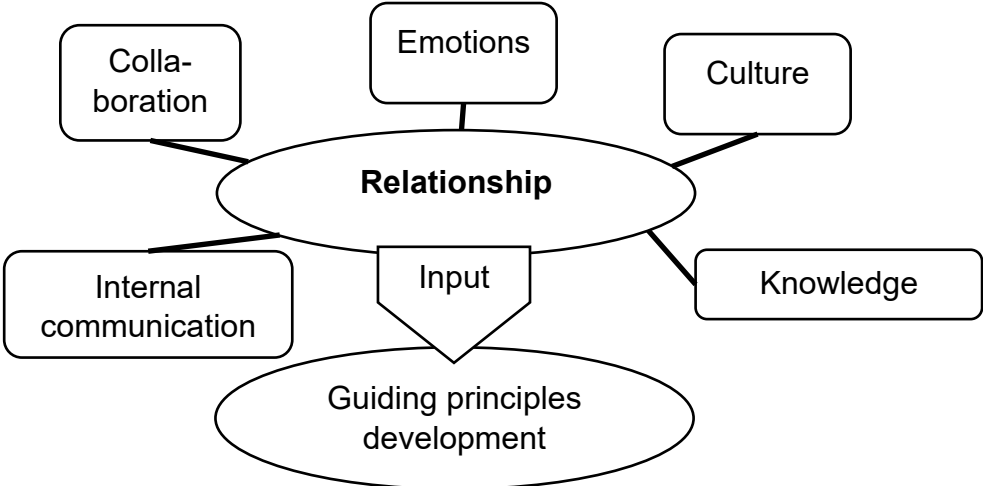

Figure 6 - Integration area of relationship (own figure)

A company's performance depends significantly upon having and implementing a successful strategy (Porter, 1996). The marketing discipline and therefore also marketing communications lack credibility, at least in part, for their contribution to company performance (Kumar, 2015; Webster et al., 2005). The concept of IMC is

about successfully connecting marketing communications with a company's strategy; communication activities should be aligned with that strategy throughout the company. The concept itself has only rarely been implemented at a strategic level successfully (Kitchen, 2017; Kitchen, Schultz, et al., 2004). One barrier to successful implementation is organisational structure (Mortimer & Laurie, 2017; Schultz & Kitchen, 1997; Schultz & Schultz, 2004). It is hard to align all communication activities in a decentralised global organisation with one global company strategy, because people do not automatically take the best decisions for fulfilling that strategy consistently. There is probably more of an operational focus on acute local market needs when deciding upon communication activities, thereby, in consequence, communication activities might not be consistent with the company's strategy and blur the company's global positioning in local markets over time. The concept of integration areas may help in overcoming this obstacle. It supports successful alignment of marketing communications with a company's strategy. Alignment of a company's activities with strategy, not only communications, but for marketing in general, can be achieved by developing and applying guiding principles, which possess a heuristic character (Oliver & Jacobs, 2007), as shown by Challagalla et al. (2014) for the concept of marketing doctrine. The development of guiding principles for aligning communication activities with company strategy is supported by the concept of integration areas, since it provides areas to consider for guiding principles development, which have proven relevance for achieving SI with communications.

The overall concept of integration areas which is relevant for the effective development of guiding principles is illustrated in the figure shown below (Figure 7). The conceptual framework consists of a combination of the three integration areas. Input to the development of guiding principles is delivered by checking the applicability of each of the integration areas (efficiency, consistency, and relationship) to a company's unique strategic context. The integration area of efficiency consists of five sub-areas: data collection and usage, market share, resources, structure, and external environment. The integration area of consistency is shaped by four sub-areas: brand, consistency, global approach, and local approach. Finally, the integration area of relationship consists of five sub-areas: knowledge, culture, emotions, collaboration, and internal communication. To evaluate the applicability of the integration area, each sub-area should be assessed for its relevance, and for the

role it plays in the achievement of a company's strategy. All three main integration areas of efficiency, consistency, and relationship, as well as their respective sub-areas, should be checked for applicability when developing guiding principles to achieve or support integration between company strategy and marketing communication activities. The general question in the development of principles is to evaluate whether each sub-area plays a relevant role in achieving or supporting a specific company's strategy. In such cases, the sub-area may be further considered for the development of a guiding principle. The development of a guiding principle should incorporate the general context of the relevant sub-area and reflect the company's strategy and other relevant company specifics, making the final formulated principle uniquely represent the company's situation.
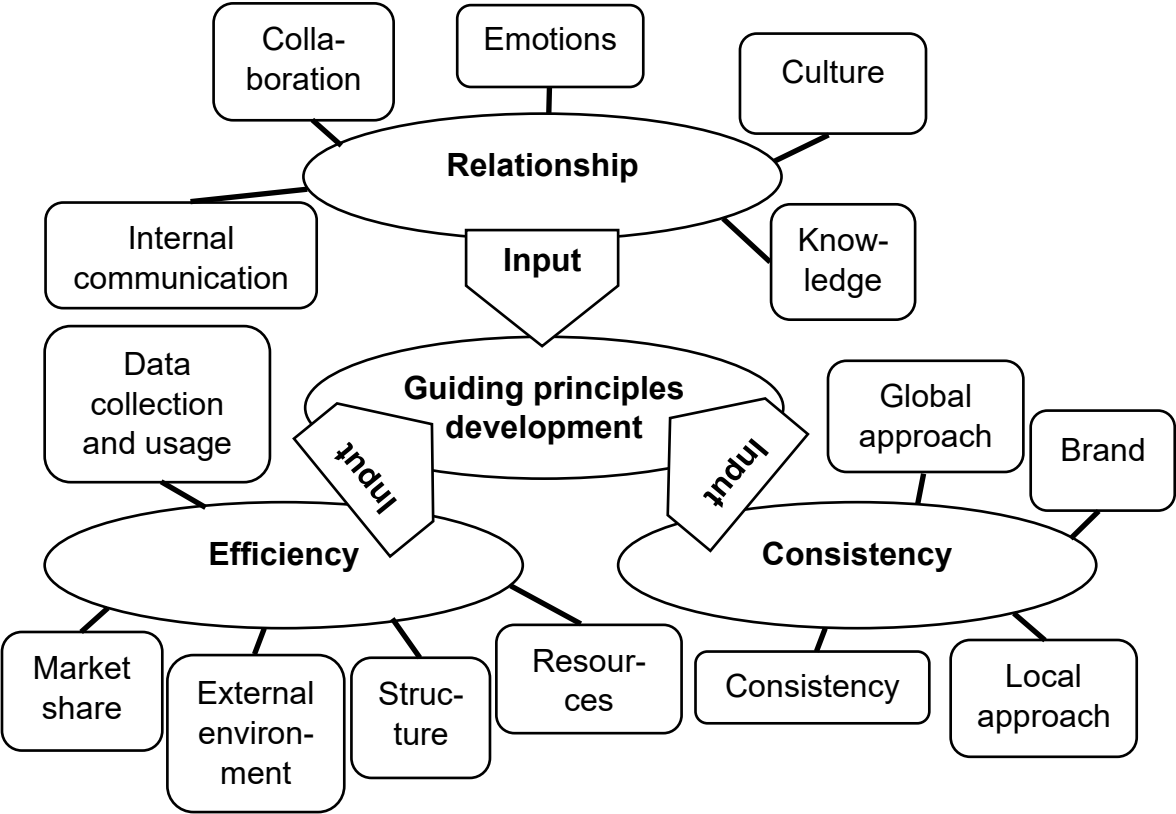

Figure 7 - Integration area concept (own figure)

5.5 Summary of chapter

This chapter provides an overview of the concept of integration areas which emerged from the research outlined in this thesis. IMC is rarely implemented successfully at a strategic level (Kitchen, 2017). This lack of successful implementation may be attributed to an inadequate addressing of the issues which are inherent in the thematic areas which result from this research. These issues include rational decision making with the intention to act efficiently, consistent decision making with the intention to act consistent with some sort of guidance, and rather non-logical decision making which is rooted in the social interaction of people or which is rooted in people themselves. Not addressing these issues that may counteract any effort to achieve consistency with strategy in decision making is likely to result in a lack of consistency in marketing communication decision making. These issues may be addressed by using guiding principles for achieving consistency in decision making. Integration areas can be used when developing guiding principles to ensure that all potentially important areas are covered in that development so that marketing communication activities can be successfully integrated with a company's strategy.

6 Conclusion and recommendation

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided an overview of the conceptual model, termed the integration area model, which resulted from addressing the fourth research objective. This chapter, the final chapter of this thesis, provides an overall conclusion on the research. It provides an overview on the contributions the study provides for academic theory and for managerial practice. The chapter closes with an overview of the limitations of the study and an outlook on related potential future research settings.

6.2 Conclusion

The integration area model contributes towards theory on IMC and SI in marketing communications for companies operating a decentralised organisational structure. It does so by further developing the idea put forward by Challagalla et al. (2014) who employed guiding principles for a firm-wide approach to common decision making by adding integration areas to this process. Integration areas are an informative support structure for developing guiding principles which are based on experiences, and which support the integration of marketing communications with strategy. Organisational structure is identified in IMC literature as a barrier to implementing IMC successfully, for example, Mortimer and Laurie (2017), Schultz and Kitchen (1997), and Schultz and Schultz (2004). The findings in this study support this view. There is evidence in this study that local subsidiaries act independently of headquarters and vice versa. Such independent acting causes inconsistencies in activities across the corporation, and probably creates a non-consistent image with the consumer, who integrates all recognised messages automatically (Schultz, 1996). Integrating marketing communication activities with strategy has also been identified as problematic or, at best, rarely achieved in practice by several IMC studies (Kitchen, 2017; Kitchen, Schultz, et al., 2004). This view is supported by the findings in this study.

Consistency with corporate strategy is seldom a decision factor for marketing employees in local subsidiaries when it comes to deciding upon local marketing

communication activities. Many other factors play a role, including, for example, consistency with prior local decisions, issues rooted in people influencing one another when it comes to deciding upon activities, and local economic factors. To be consistent with a company-wide existing strategy is rarely mentioned in the interviews. Based on the four-stage process model by Schultz and Kitchen (2000), it is argued that consistency of messages is often achieved in practice, while consistency with strategy is not (Kitchen, 2017; Kitchen, Schultz, et al., 2004). Even though the intention of this study was not to determine whether message consistency is achieved in the case study company, it should be noted that message consistency is not fully achieved in this company. While there is evidence that consistency with prior marketing communication activities is a focus when it comes to deciding upon new activities, there is also significant evidence for other decision criteria which do not necessarily create message consistency across the company. Local subsidiaries seem to act independently from headquarters, and from one another. This is unlikely to create message consistency on a global scale, despite the fact that customers are likely to consume marketing messages across national borders. Data collection and usage, as the third stage of the four-stage process model (Schultz & Kitchen, 2000), is a prerequisite for achieving consistency with strategy in marketing communication. Data from customers and the measuring of the success of activities are assumed to be useful for determining what customers want. Such data collection and usage is therefore a prerequisite for determining which activities would benefit the company's strategy the most (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2015). Missing such customer databases means missing a prerequisite for integrating marketing communication activities with strategy. The findings from this study support this assessment and structure, which is based on the four-stage process model. Data collection and usage as well as the measurement of activities seems to play only a minor role in making decisions about marketing communication activities. Data is rarely taken into account in reaching such decisions. In addition, qualitative customer data, which determines which activities should be conducted, is rarely collected in a structured way or made accessible. A lot of information is still stored informally in the minds of employees and exchanged in meetings, instead of being codified and made accessible to all marketing employees. Consequently, since these prerequisites for integrating marketing communications with strategy are only partially fulfilled, it cannot be concluded that the case study company has yet integrated its marketing

communication activities successfully with its business strategy. The findings from this study are used to develop a conceptual model, which may facilitate this SI. The findings suggest that three specific themes or integration areas should be considered when developing guiding principles in order to ensure integration of marketing communication activities with strategy. These integration areas are termed efficiency, consistency, and relationship.

6.3   Contribution to knowledge

The research has revealed several issues which are of importance and relevance for the studied company when it comes to improving SI with marketing communications. The major issues which were found to influence integration of marketing communications with strategy are summarised in this section. These issues can be addressed through application of the integration area concept, which resulted from fulfilling the fourth research objective.

Financial and resource considerations seem to play a role when it comes to deciding upon marketing communication measures. Activities are evaluated based on their potential to improve the company's net sales. Combining this finding with the issue that marketing in the sales subsidiaries is considered to be a sales support function sheds light on why this topic may be problematic when it comes to aligning communications with strategy. Marketing aligns its decisions on communication activities often with sales, since a lack of support by sales for communication activities may render those activities useless. It seems questionable, whether a short-term focus on direct sales impact may be the best choice for improving alignment of marketing activities with the company's strategy at the same time. Mid- and long-term goals as part of a company's strategy are probably less considered in such a context, resulting in less effective SI. A related issue is that budget cuts, or budget limitations, focus the subsidiaries on the most important marketing communications activities. This budget is sometimes already largely blocked by major activities which cannot be neglected, like global product launches, major trade shows, or other important activities released by headquarters. Even just mere translation of global activities into local language on the local website already consumes a significant amount of local resources, thereby limiting choices for other activities. In total, the local marketing

resources seem to be often largely blocked by some major activities, leaving little room for active decision making on further communication activities. Such lack of alternatives may in effect support integration with strategy from headquarters though, since it is often the headquarter-initiated activities which block local resources, but this issue inhibits further local communication activities.

The healthcare industry seems to provide some specific challenges for aligning marketing communications with strategy. The industry and its customers seem to value some level of consistency over time, which is supported by strong regulatory and other legal boundaries. Implicitly, that may be caused by the rather conservative attitude towards change and innovation within the industry, since human lives depend upon the functioning of the products and services provided to the industry's customers. Since customers seem to value consistency over time to some degree, choices on further communication activities are limited by activities which have already been conducted in the past and need to be continued. The benefits resulting from trade shows may for example only materialise after several appearances in those trade shows year after year, thereby locking-in choices on communication activities and corresponding budgets for upcoming years. Similarly, strategic positioning of the company as providing specific benefits to the healthcare industry may only be successful if such positioning is communicated consistently and repeatedly over long timespans. The targeted brand image seems to play a role here for communicating consistently as well. It seemingly acts as a guidepost for influencing choices made locally on communication activities. Therefore, the brand image is an important factor which may be useful in helping to align marketing communications with strategy. Another factor which was uncovered is that the rather conservative characteristics of the healthcare industry seem to cause problems for measuring the performance of communication activities. Benefits resulting from strategic communication activities become harder to measure since it takes a long time until they can be considered successful. This may also limit the willingness of employees to invest resources into such strategic communication activities, since the benefits are much harder to grasp over time. This again makes integration of marketing communications with the company's strategy more difficult to achieve. A related topic is that working in such a communication context may be less attractive for marketing employees, since choices for activities are largely made for years in

advance and opportunities for change are limited. As noted by one respondent, it seems hard to improve the image of working in a subsidiary's marketing context amongst company employees. Measurement of the benefits which a communication activity provides is problematic and often not possible, since the B2B selling structure of the industry only seldomly creates instant purchases resulting directly from communication activities. Lacking the ability to prove financial impact makes it more difficult though for starting and maintaining communication activities.

Collecting customer data for strategic usage proves similarly difficult. Data is mainly, but not exclusively, collected in the local CRM systems. Those systems are criticised for their setup as a mere database of customer names and addresses, yet partially lack usage for strategic purposes like customer profiling. In addition, one respondent pointed to the lack of collecting qualitative information on customers and markets; the failure to supply such qualitative market information to headquarters inhibits strategy development.

Regarding the local autonomy of subsidiaries in making decisions on marketing communication measures, there is evidence that the subsidiaries have a large degree of freedom to decide. This freedom may contribute to a lack of alignment of marketing communications activities with the company's strategy, since there is seemingly no policy in place which requires the subsidiaries to consider the company's strategic direction when taking decisions locally. On the other hand, there is also considerable evidence that the strategy for the hospital segment is considered when local marketing communication activities are conducted or decided. Globally initiated communication activities from headquarters are often localised for the countries' local purposes. Such an approach of using and localising headquarter-initiated activities probably creates some consistency with global guidance. In total, it can be concluded that, on this matter, the decentralised organisational structure indeed creates problems for ensuring a good level of consistency with a company's strategy throughout all the company's worldwide subsidiaries. One major issue for countries trying to manage for consistency in marketing communication activities is that exchange of information with headquarters seems to be largely not facilitated in a structured way. There is evidence that collaboration on such strategy-relevant topics happens in those cases where employees from the subsidiary know

colleagues at headquarters personally. If such a network is not present, exchange between subsidiary and headquarters is probably limited. Subsidiary employees also feel that they are often not listened to by headquarters. There is evidence that headquarters is often perceived as having little knowledge of the major issues which the subsidiaries face. In addition, some activities which are developed at headquarters are considered to lack local relevance. On the other hand, there is evidence that some marketing campaigns were developed at local level and were then transferred to headquarters which in turn made those campaigns successfully available for other subsidiaries.

In terms of decision making, there is evidence that decisions are often taken by teams, and not by single employees. Within teams, senior team members may enjoy a certain status due to their acquired knowledge over time which lends more weight to their opinion. Decisions are therefore influenced by the impact those employees with higher seniority have on discussions. Another finding is that the main focus in marketing communication activities is set on activities which feature the opportunity for the sales force to gain direct contact with customers and to improve customer intimacy. This focus is set by the sales force and has been continuously supported for decades. Due to the perception by some employees that the marketing function is considered a sales support function, it can be assumed that the marketing communication focus is therefore also influenced by this desired sales force focus. Another related finding is that there is some perceived degree of lethargy when it comes to questioning historic decisions. Marketing communication activities such as events are often decided at some point in time, but they are less often questioned again. One reason is the already discussed topic that the market seemingly values some degree of consistency over time. Another factor is certainly that it is seemingly easier to maintain activities from the past than question them and shift budgets to other areas. It was also stated that there seems to be a lack of marketing knowledge in the local marketing team and that it would be important to invest more into the development of people. The resulting lack of marketing knowledge within local teams may, as a consequence, inhibit the alignment of activities with strategy. One further finding is that decisions on marketing communication activities are very often made subjectively based on gut feeling, and based less on rational factors, because several employees seemingly have a good feeling for what works in the market. This

is a factor which may positively impact alignment of communication activities with strategy, if that gut feeling works in line with the strategic direction of the company. Otherwise, it needs to be clarified how such decision-impacting factors can be influenced towards the company's strategic direction. One respondent outlined that a strategy from headquarters that does not align with local marketing communication activities, and is not approved of, is therefore inhibited. This issue may be addressed by an improvement in internal communication within the company, since respondents addressed the issue that internal communication, also the communication of the company's strategy, indeed needs improvement. Another issue which was found relates to the specific setup of the studied company and the way it does business. It was stated that the company seemingly runs a very complicated business, while some competitors supposedly manage this aspect better. Following this line of argument, a lack of alignment between marketing communication activities and the company's strategy is therefore seemingly rooted in the company's complex way of conducting business which makes it harder to align activities throughout that company.

Finally, one finding related to the construction of customer knowledge in a database is that customer information is currently still stored largely only in an informal way in the minds of employees. The sharing of customer knowledge therefore happens largely on a personal basis only and is influenced by the personal networks of those people. The fact that the sharing of customer information is limited to the individual personal networks of the company's employees means that incomplete customer information is used to inform strategy building.

All these issues outlined here are summarised in three major themes termed efficiency, consistency, and relationship, which are combined in the integration area concept as detailed in Chapter five. The suggestion is to use the integration area model as a guide when trying to improve SI by addressing the identified important issues using guiding principles in order to align future decision making and corresponding activities throughout the company.

6.4   Contribution to theory

The topic of IMC has been extensively researched in academic literature (e.g., Burgmann, 2007; Kitchen & Burgmann, 2015; Schultz et al., 2016; Schultz & Schultz, 2004). However, as already outlined in the literature review, research in client firms was slightly less an area of focus in studies, but this is especially the case in terms of marketing agencies; for example, Gronstedt and Thorson (1996); Ewing et al. (2000); Kitchen, Schultz, et al. (2004); Eagle et al. (2007); Laurie and Mortimer (2011); and Niemann-Struweg (2014). This study contributes towards a client perspective by providing deep and rich data from the company which is the focus of this study. Similarly, qualitative research which generates such deep and rich data, for example directly from interviews, has been overlooked in previous quantitative IMC-related research, for example, Duncan and Everett (1993), McArthur and Griffin (1997), Low (2000), Reid (2003), Gabrielli and Balboni (2010), Reinold and Tropp (2012), Schultz et al. (2016), and Luxton et al. (2017). This study contributes towards closing this gap by providing deep and rich qualitative data resulting from semi-structured interviews with marketing employees working in several local subsidiaries. Re-application of the research findings to other contexts depends upon testing the research findings for re-applicability to new settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). To enable such testing, a 'thick description' of the findings and context of the original research setting is needed, so that a comparison of the new setting with the original research setting is made possible (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). The re-applicability of the research findings to other contexts is part of the research objectives, since the development of a theoretical model from the research findings is beneficial if the model can be re-applied to several other settings. Therefore, significant focus was placed on providing a 'thick description' of the research context so that any reader can judge the re-applicability potential of the research findings to another context.

Organisational structure has been identified as a barrier to IMC implementation, for example, Mortimer and Laurie (2017), Schultz and Kitchen (1997), and Schultz and Schultz (2004). Despite this finding, the specific issues which a decentralised organisational structure poses for achieving the benefits of a successful IMC implementation have not been the significant focus of IMC research. This study closes that gap, since the case study company operates such a decentralised

organisational structure, and the data provides significant insights into the issues which such a decentralised organisational structure poses when it comes to integrating marketing communications with strategy. Similarly, the SI of marketing communication activities has not been the focus of academic research so far. There are some studies which deal with marketing and strategy, but they do not all focus on the specifics of IMC. These often have a wider focus on marketing in general, for example, Barker (2013), Burgelman and Doz (2001), Caemmerer (2009); Fuchs et al. (2000), Holm (2006), Kerr and Patti (2015), and Reid (2003). As outlined before, only a few studies provide an operational view regarding how, and by which means, SI with marketing communication activities can be achieved in practice. This study provides deep insights into how decisions on marketing communication activities are influenced from the point of view of operational marketing employees and local management. It further provides a thematic structure which clarifies which factors influence marketing communication decision making.

One interesting finding from the research is that decision making on marketing communication activities is not simply a logical task. Decisions are widely influenced by: interpersonal or socially rooted topics, such as collaboration within teams and across company borders; cultural factors, such as the established significance of the marketing function and knowledge factors; and the training of employees. A logical consequence of these findings is that a possible solution to improving decision making and its consistency with strategy has to consider such socially rooted factors. The concept of integration areas is therefore based upon the idea of employing guiding principles to support decision making in a company operating a decentralised organisational structure. The use of guiding principles in the context of IMC and marketing is only very rarely the focus of academic studies (the few identified studies are: Challagalla et al., 2014; Peltier et al., 2003; Schultz & Schultz, 2004). For a wider focus of marketing in general, guiding principles are suggested as a means to provide both global guidance and local flexibility as outlined for the concept of marketing doctrine (Challagalla et al., 2014). Marketing doctrine refers to marketing in general and has no dedicated focus on marketing communications or IMC. The marketing doctrine concept is limited as far as the development of guiding principles is concerned, based upon employee experiences of the same company. Company-external information is perceived to be problematic in application to the very specific

strategy-related setting which each guiding principle effort represents (Challagalla et al., 2014). In essence, strategy is about being different (Porter, 1996). Re-using knowledge gained from other company contexts may, therefore, at first glance not be a wise approach in order to achieve uniqueness in strategy.

The difference that needs to be clarified here is that the knowledge derived from this research should not be re-used to develop a strategy for any given company. This research is about supporting the development of the right guiding principles for each unique context which may support aligning communication activities with existing company strategy. Re-usage of the knowledge gained in this research setting supports such alignment by providing areas which may need to be covered when guiding principles are developed. Using this approach, the application of the theoretical model avoids providing information on developing a strategy which would render this information useless, if provided to several companies in the same industry. It merely provides information which may be re-used to more successfully align communication activities with strategy. This study therefore extends the view that guiding principles should be unique to each company setting by providing integration areas which are developed.

These integration areas are considered usable beyond the boundaries of the specific company from which they originated. As outlined, the concept does not provide specifics, but it provides themes which support the selection of appropriate principles which need to be tailored further and made specific to the individual company. The generalisability of the generated theoretical concept is not universal, since the intention of the research was not to generate universal knowledge, but to create deep and rich knowledge from the individual company setting. The re-applicability of that generated knowledge therefore always depends upon a judgement about whether the theoretical framework is usable in any new context (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). The individualisation of the concept to any new context is therefore an inherent part of the concept and needs to be considered by anyone working with the concept. The theoretical concept provides rough thematic ideas for determining the development of guiding principles, yet it is flexible in application.

Following the idea of comparing operational effectiveness and strategy (Porter (1996), the integration area concept provides support for implementing strategy throughout a company effectively. The company-unique part which – in the end – supports differentiating a company from competition is provided only by applying the concept to each individual context. Such a supporting structure for developing guiding principles, with the intention of facilitating SI with marketing communications, is new in the context of academic research on IMC and SI, to the author's best knowledge.

6.5 Implications for management

Achieving integration of marketing communication activities with company strategy is an issue for managers, since integration is rarely achieved in practice (Kitchen, 2017). Such integration is especially an issue in companies operating a decentralised organisational structure, because the decentralised structure supports independent development of all involved subsidiaries (Challagalla et al., 2014). Consistency of marketing communication activities and business strategy is potentially achieved by the application of guiding principles (Challagalla et al., 2014). There is little operational support available for managers in terms of how such principles are to be developed (Challagalla et al., 2014). The integration area concept developed in this study provides practical support for managers who are developing guiding principles which are intended to address the issue of SI. The concept postulates that three thematic areas should be checked for relevance when developing guiding principles. These areas are termed efficiency, consistency, and relationship.

One implication resulting from this study is that the importance of building a common database with customer data should be considered, potentially in the form of a guiding principle which supports this data collection. This idea is not new however, as it is included in the four-stage process model by Schultz and Kitchen (2000). Further, social and interpersonal factors need significant attention when it comes to managing the SI of marketing communication activities. Examples of such socially influenced topics are historic decisions and the consequence of continuing them because of commitments made to customers and inertia in questioning the status quo. Further, the development of marketing employees plays a role, since the knowledge of

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marketing employees should be actively managed due to the widening gap between marketing capability and market demand (Day, 2011). Cultural aspects such as marketing perceived as a sales function (Webster et al., 2005), and addressing the consequences of such a culture, is an issue which could be of interest when it comes to developing guiding principles. The question that is inherent in this cultural aspect is that it should be clarified whether such a short-term focus of marketing employees working for sales is a good basis for integrating marketing activities with a long-term topic like strategy. Further, the amount of effort some centrally initiated marketing activities require from the local subsidiaries seems to be underestimated, at least in the case of the studied company, as does the effect of these activities (i.e., blocking resources) which further limit local decision making. In the case of this study, an example of such an activity is a globally relevant key product launch, which requires and blocks virtually all marketing resources in a country in the year of launch, leaving almost no space for other local activities. Guiding principles development should consider whether the consequences of such mechanisms support SI throughout the company. To provide one final example, local market requirements need to be considered more in headquarters. Their importance seems to be underestimated; they could be addressed better by specifying guiding principles that specifically address this issue in cases in which it is perceived to limit the integration of marketing communication activities with strategy.

6.6 Research limitations and future research

This study employed a qualitative approach to research, using an inductive strategy to theory development. Further, a case study approach was used, limiting data generation to data acquired from the company that was the focus of this research. The social constructivism position which was chosen by the researcher justifies these choices for the purposes outlined in this study. The outcome is therefore generally usable within the boundaries set for the study (Eisenhardt, 1989a; Gioia et al., 2013). The results from the study may be usable in other contexts, depending on corresponding judgements regarding applicability (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). The limitations which are inherent in the case study approach are that the data that was used to generate the conceptual model was based on one corporation only. The company itself operates in several industries, but the industry in focus was only the

healthcare industry. The findings result from a single corporation operating in a single industry. In addition, participants from six European subsidiaries were interviewed for the purposes of data generation. It is possible that interviews with participants from other countries could have revealed further integration areas. Similarly, extending the study to other companies and industries could have revealed further integration areas. In addition, the use and application of integration areas in practice has not yet been tested, so it remains to be seen how much benefit integration areas can provide for managerial practice. The degree of applicability of these areas to other companies and industries is another issue which could be of interest for further studies, in order to verify the assumption of the re-usability of the findings resulting from this study. Finally, integration areas were developed purely to integrate marketing communication activities with strategy, but not for marketing in general. Extending the idea of integration areas to marketing in general could therefore be another area of interest for future research settings.

6.7   Summary of chapter

This is the final chapter of this thesis. It therefore concludes the thesis by setting out prior findings in research and by identifying which outcomes the study has generated in light of the research aim. The chapter further outlines the contribution the study has generated to advancing academic theory on IMC and SI. The implications for managerial practice are also summarised. It concludes with an overview of the limitations of the research and offers ideas for future research.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview guide

Pre-interview

- Explain aims and objectives of study.
- Mention the focus for all questions on the hospital segment.
- Address informed consent form.
- Address issue of confidentiality and voluntary participation.
- Point out that participants can refuse to answer any question.

Interview guide – subsidiaries

1   Please outline how your job is related to communication activities.

2   Think about communication activities you were involved in for your country for the hospital segment. Can you tell me more about these activities? (i.e., what/when/where)

3   Please think about one specific, locally conducted communication activity. Can you tell me how the decisions for this activity were taken? (i.e., who/why and how)

4   Were there any criteria involved which you or your colleagues used when deciding upon this activity or the activity's characteristics?

5   Looking at the total activity in retrospect, what do you think most influenced decisions regarding the activity from your perspective?

6   How do you feel about the decisions taken regarding this or other communication activities?

7   Can you think of situations where there was disagreement regarding a communication activity? How was the conflict resolved?

8   Think about the yearly planning cycle. How are communication activities for the hospital segment handled and decided upon in this planning activity?

9	Think about the entire portfolio of communication activities which the subsidiary manages. In your opinion, how should this portfolio be determined?

10	Please think about the hospital business strategy as provided by headquarters. Can you outline it roughly?

11	How does this strategy influence choices regarding communication activities?

12	Apart from business strategy, how does headquarters influence your choices for local communication activities?

13	Please think about customer information which you gather through communication activities. Can you elaborate on how this information is collected?

14	Can you elaborate further regarding how this information is made available to and used by the company?

15	How is this information used regarding setting up and refining your own local selling strategy?

16	How is this information fed-back to and re-used by headquarters for (hospital) strategy design?

17	How should the customer information you gather be used by the company in your opinion?

18	Is there anything else important in this context of communication and strategy which you would like to add?

Appendix B: Invitation letter

Dear interviewee xyz,

I would like to thank you for your willingness to participate as an interviewee in my study.

The overall aim of my study is to investigate the issue of integrating marketing communications at a strategic level within the special boundaries of a decentralised organisational structure.

To achieve this aim, I need to understand better, how decisions about marketing communications activities are taken within [name of company] subsidiaries. Additionally, I intend to explore how information about [name of company]'s customers, which is generated by marketing communications activities in the subsidiaries, is used for informing business strategy decisions.

The interviews which you are part of are targeted to generate this very understanding related to the topic of marketing communications. Your daily work and experience contains information which is valuable for understanding this situation better, and I am happy that you are willing to share your knowledge with me.

Let me point out explicitly that your participation in the study is entirely voluntary. The information you provide is treated confidentially. By agreeing to the informed consent form which you also receive, you allow me to use the information for the purpose of my study. With your permission, the interviews will be recorded and later on transcribed. The transcribed interviews will also be sent to you afterwards. I would also be happy to provide you with a copy of my doctoral thesis after completion. Please inform me if you are interested in receiving it.

Regarding the interview schedule, please let me know if the proposed time and date suits your schedule. The interview is planned to take around 45 minutes.

I am looking very much forward to our exchange and I would like to take the opportunity to thank you again for your time and active support for my study which you are providing.

Best regards

Enno Frehse

Appendix C: Consent form

I understand that Enno Frehse asked me to participate in his study
I have received and read the invitation letter (email/calendar invitation)
I understand that my data will be kept confidential and I understand how confidentiality will be ensured
I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time before a part of the study is publicised, respectively before the thesis is completed
I am informed about the dual role of the researcher as both a researcher and as an employee of the company
I understand that the transcribed interview will be sent to me after transcription and that I can gain access to the thes
I agree to take part in the study
I agree that my data and information provided and generated in the interview is used in the study and thesis
I give permission to be voice recorded during the study

Name of participant in capital letters	Date

Appendix D: Privacy notice

PRIVACY NOTICE
Research Participants

In order to undertake academic research and to train students in research methods, staff and students at the University of Gloucestershire collect and process various types of personal data. The University is committed to being transparent about how it collects and uses that data and to meeting its data protection obligations.

1. Identity and contact details of the Data Controller

The Data Controller (the organisation responsible for how your data is processed) is the University of Gloucestershire. The University is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office and it is committed to protecting the rights of individuals in line with Data Protection legislation.

A copy of this registration can be found here.

2. Contact details of the Data Protection Officer

The Data Protection Officer is responsible for advising the University on compliance with Data Protection legislation and monitoring its performance against it. If you have any concerns regarding the way in which the University is processing your personal data, please contact the Data Protection Officer at:

Sue MacGregor, Data Protection Officer
University of Gloucestershire
Registrar's Directorate
Fullwood House
The Park
Cheltenham, GL50 2RH

Email: dpo@glos.ac.uk

3. What information does the University collect?

The University collects a range of information in order to carry out its research activities. This may include personal data such as name and address, date of birth, or information on your views on specific research topics. The University may also collect special category (sensitive) personal data as defined under Data Protection legislation such as information about racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or similar beliefs, health, genetic or biometric data (where used for ID purposes).

The University collects this information in a variety of ways. For example, it might be collected via surveys or questionnaires, through interviews of focus groups, or by taking photographs, audio or video recordings.

For each individual research project you will be provided with a Participant Information Sheet, which explains in more detail the kind of information that will be collected, and how this will be done.

4. What is the purpose and lawful basis of collecting my data?

Undertaking research, publishing research and training students to undertaking are tasks that are in the public interest. Universities undertake these activities so that they can fulfil their function as a Higher

Education institution. Some types of research will require the collection of personal data including, where appropriate, special category personal data, in order that the aims of the research can be achieved. The University will only collect the information that is necessary to undertake each specific research project. If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this, and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible.

Where we rely on a different lawful basis such as consent or legitimate interest we will inform you of this in the Participant Information Sheet provided to you.

There is no statutory or contractual requirement to provide your personal data to us through participating in a research project.

The University will not use your personal data for automated decision making or profiling about you as an individual.

5. How and where your data are held

All research projects involving the collection of personal data are subject to an ethics review, to ensure that appropriate arrangements are made for the secure storage of your data. If you take part in a research project, you will be provided with a Participant Information Sheet that will outline in more detail how and where your data are stored.

6. Who has access to the data?

Your data will be accessed by members of the research team (including Supervisors of student research projects), however, most personal information used in research will be de-identified where-ever possible before sharing more widely or publishing the research outcomes. If it is not possible to de-identify your information, we may ask for your consent to share or otherwise make your personal information available to others. Information shared will be on a need to know basis, not excessive and with all appropriate safeguards in place to ensure the security of your information. It may sometimes be necessary to share your personal information with other researchers for the purpose of achieving the research outcomes. Where researchers wish to use any information that would identify you, specific consent will be sought from you.

If it is necessary for anyone else to have access to the data, or for the data to be shared more widely (including any transfers outside the European Economic Area), this will be made clear in the Participant Information Sheet that will be provided to you before you agree to participate in the research.

7. How does the University protect the data?

In order to protect your rights and freedoms when using your personal information for research and to process special category (sensitive) information, the University must have safeguards in place to help protect that data. The University takes the security of your personal data very seriously and it has policies, procedures, training, technical and organisational measures in place to ensure that your information is protected. All research projects or studies involving personal data that has been identified/deemed higher risk are scrutinised and approved by a research ethics panel or committee.

8. How long is my data kept?

If you take part in a research project, you will be provided with a Participant Information Sheet that will outline in more detail how long the data will be held for and, where applicable, the re-use of the data.

9. Data Subject's Rights

Under Data Protection legislation you have the following rights:

- to request access to, and copies of, the personal data that we hold about you;
- to request that we cease processing your personal data;
- to request that we do not send you any marketing communications;
- to request us to correct the personal data we hold about you if it is incorrect;
- to request that we erase your personal data;
- to request that we restrict our data processing activities (and, where our processing is based on your consent, you may withdraw that consent, without affecting the lawfulness of our processing based on consent before its withdrawal);
- to receive from us the personal data you have provided to us, in a reasonable format specified by you, to another data controller;
- to object, on grounds relating to your particular situation, to any of our particular processing activities where you feel this has a disproportionate impact on your rights and freedoms.

It is important to understand that the extent to which these rights apply to research will vary and that in some circumstances a right may be limited when the data is being used for research purposes. It should also be noted that we can only implement your rights during the period upon which we hold personal identifiable information about you. Once the information has been irreversibly de-identified or anonymised and becomes part of the research data set, it will not be possible to access your personal information.

If you would like to exercise any of these rights or have any questions regarding your rights, please contact the University's Data Protection Officer, using the contact details under Section 10 below.

10. How to raise a query, concern or complaint

If you have questions about the particular research study you are participating in, please use any contact details you have already been supplied with regarding the research study or project.

If you have general queries, concerns or wish to raise a complaint about how your personal data is used by the University, or if you wish to exercise any of your rights, you should contact the Data Protection Officer in the first instance, using the contact details under Section 2 above.

If you remain dissatisfied, then you have the right to refer the matter to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). The ICO can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office,
Wycliffe House,
Water Lane,
Wilmslow,
Cheshire,
SK9 5AF

Telephone: 0303 123 1113

Website: www.ico.org.uk

The privacy notice for research participants as shown here was provided by University of Gloucestershire in 2018. Current document is accessible via University of Gloucestershire (2020b).

Appendix E: Participant information sheet

Dear potential participant,

you are invited to take part in my research project which is further outlined in the following paragraphs. Please take time to read through this participant information sheet and feel free to ask me any questions which help you to further understand this invitation and the corresponding research project.

Research project title

The title of the research project is 'Towards strategic integration in marketing communications in a decentralised organisational structure'.

Aims and objectives of this research project

The overall aim of my study is to investigate the issue of integrating marketing communications at a strategic level within the special boundaries of a decentralised organisational structure.

To achieve this aim, I need to understand better, how decisions about communications activities are taken within [name of company] subsidiaries. Additionally, I intend to explore how information about [name of company]'s customers, which is generated by marketing communications activities in [name of company]'s subsidiaries, is used for informing business strategy decisions.

The interviews which you may be part of, are targeted to generate this very understanding related to the topic of marketing communications. Your daily work and experience contains information which is valuable for understanding this situation better.

The research study has an educational purpose towards achieving a PhD qualification.

Selection of participants

You have been chosen as an interviewee, because you work within a [name of company] sales- and service subsidiary within a marketing or communications context, and you are involved or have been involved with the hospital side of the business. In total I am aiming for around 30 participants from five to six countries, respectively subsidiaries.

Voluntary participation

Let me point out explicitly that your participation in the study is entirely voluntary and non-participation has no negative consequences for you. If you take part in the study,

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the information you provide is treated confidentially. By signing the informed consent form which you also receive, you allow me to use the information for the purpose of my study. With your permission, the interviews will be recorded and transcribed and those transcriptions will also be sent to you.

You can withdraw from the study at any time before any part of the study is publicised, respectively before the thesis is completed. You do not have to provide a reason for withdrawal and withdrawal has no negative consequences for you. After publication of any part of the study or after thesis completion, whichever occurs first, withdrawal is not possible anymore. This point is likely to be reached within a timeframe of six months after our interview. If you wish to withdraw from the study, please contact me via enno.frehse@t-online.de or via enno.frehse@[name of company].com.

The interview

If you decide to take part, an interview will be scheduled and conducted between the two of us. In most cases, this will happen online (e.g. via Skype). In some cases, where no significant efforts or expenses are caused, a face-to-face interview will be conducted. The interview is likely to take around one hour, and it is a one-time event. That means, no follow-up interviews are planned. Nevertheless, if issues arise which are unclear to me during transcription and/or analysis of the data, I would be happy if I can contact you for clarification questions. If you do not want to be contacted after the interview, please inform me about this, and I will refrain from doing so.

Through the interviews I want to gain an in-depth understanding of how decisions on communication activities are made in your daily work and how they are influenced by existing work routines, processes, habits, or any other interpersonal or structural issues. Understanding these influences better may help in developing a theoretical model which may aid in overcoming deficiencies in aligning communication with a companies' strategy.

The questions asked will be open questions, for example asking you to outline the context of communication activities you were involved in and how these activities were decided upon. Another related topic will be questions regarding how business strategy possibly influences these decisions in your daily work.

Possible disadvantages of participation

No likely, significant risks or disadvantages are foreseeable for the participants. I have a dual role in this research project as both a researcher and an employee of the company under study. This study may therefore not interfere with my company job. That means, neither advantages nor disadvantages to those participating in the interviews may be expected by them because of my dual role. To ensure this, measures to ensure confidentiality for all participants are in place and outlined further below.

Possible benefits of participation

There are no immediate benefits expected for the interviewed participants. In the longer term, the hope is that the study may be used by the studied company and other companies to improve the consistency of decision making of their communication activities with their business strategy.

Confidentiality

The information that is collected through the qualitative interviews will be kept confidential and will be kept only accessible to me and the research team (e.g. my research supervisors). Your name will not be used in the final thesis or in any publication thereof. More specifically, citations, in case any are used from your interview, will only be made without referring to your name. The interview will not be made available to other [name of company] employees. For the recording of Skype interviews, and for sending the transcribed interview afterwards to you, IT resources of the company are used (e.g. sending the transcribed interview to your company email address).

Legal basis

The legal basis for the processing of your personal data is that such processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest - Article 6(1)(e) GDPR.

For further issues regarding data privacy, please also refer to the research participants privacy notice document (Appendix D), as provided by the University of Gloucestershire, which has also been sent to you.

Recording of interviews

It is planned to record the interviews, either via Skype recording functionality, or via a separate recording device such as a Smart Phone app in face-to-face meetings. These recordings are used for later transcription of the interviews and analysis of the data. Your consent to be recorded during the interviews is specifically asked for in the informed consent form.

Data usage and study results

The data collected will be accessible to me and the research team. It is currently not planned to use any translation or transcription services, but the use of a transcription service is not entirely ruled out at this stage. In case a transcription service would be used, data would be transferred anonymously. The final thesis and/or any publication thereof are expected to be available earliest in 2019/2020 and your name will not be published in any of these documents.

Identifiable personal data will be deleted as soon as possible. Latest, this will be after thesis completion. De-identified data will be kept for justification purposes of the study and for potential re-use in future studies.

Additional or subsequent research projects may be interested in re-using the de-identified data for future studies. In such case only a de-identified version of the data provided would be considered for future research. Please let me know, if you do not want your data to be used in this way.

Research funding

The research is organised and funded by myself. Some relevant [name of company] company managers (e.g. my superior) are informed about the research study.

Data controller

The Data Controller (the organisation responsible for how your data is processed) is the University of Gloucestershire. The University is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office and it is committed to protecting the rights of individuals in line with Data Protection legislation.

Complaints

If something is not handled to your satisfaction, please contact me directly via the stated email addresses, and I will take all possible measures to sort out the problem at hand.

In case there is a complaint about data privacy regarding my research which you feel cannot be handled by me, please refer to the Universities' data protection officer. Contact details are also provided in the research participant's privacy notice (Appendix D) as provided to you. The current email address is: dpo@glos.ac.uk.

I would like to thank you explicitly at this point for considering participating and for participation in my research project. Please feel free to contact me with any questions regarding the project and any issues relating to data privacy.

Enno Frehse