

# An Integrated Marketing Communication of Sport Associations in the Professional Sport Development Plan in Thailand

■ Khanathip Jirasanyansagul

*Abstract: The purposes of this study are to find out the factors supporting integrated marketing communications (IMC) of sports associations in the professional sport development plan, and to create a framework of integrated marketing communications of sports associations in Thailand. The factors that supported IMC of sports associations were planning, tools, budget, timing and evaluating of processing. Second, factors that affect the decision making in participation include 6 factors: licensing and sponsorship, personal contact and incentive, mass media, social media, community relationship and atmospherics. Finally the model IMC of sports association presented is confirmed by experts who can be used efficiently.*

**Keywords:** Integrated Marketing Communication, Sport Association in Thailand

## Introduction

According to the National Sport Development Plan for becoming professional sport development, the goal is determined to develop the potential sport types to be the careers that are standard and widely popular enough to be firmly dependable as professional sport businesses. As the goal of the National Sport Development Plan volume 5 B.E. 2555-2559 (A.D. 2012-2016), (Sports Authority of Thailand, 2012), it is indicated that there are thirteen piloted sports falling into four groups i.e. 1) Professional Sport Group: soccer and golf, 2) Strong Professional Sport Group : tennis, motorcycle racing, car racing, bowling, snooker, and volleyball 3) Developing Professional Sport Group : table tennis, badminton, and basketball 4) Thai Identity Professional Sport Group: takraw, and Thai boxing. In order to develop all these to reach the international standard, the sport associations have to take the actions in supporting the sport types and establishing the organization for the preparation in achieving the goal of popularity and participation in the sport becoming a professional sport businesses. The important factor of professional sport development is to build up the popularity among the spectators, and to support from sponsors. All of these matters are essential to reach the achievement of the professional sport development. And the most important factor is to build up the basis of certain sports to be popularized among groups of athletes, spectators, and the related sectors.

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is the combination of the appropriate utilization of marketing communication tools to achieve the marketing goals set by the organization (Duncan, 2002). Each organization must have the clear objective that is to operate the marketing activities for customers' recognition in brands known as "Image". Therefore, IMC has become the basic communication tool which is useful in organizational

competition from A.D. 1990 until the 21st Century. (Schultz, Tannenbaum, and Lauterborn.,1993).

Therefore, when considering the importance of IMC, it is found that if the organizations use the strategy of IMC effectively, it can help them achieve their marketing objectives well. This is to allow both sport agencies and sponsors to get mutual benefits. To grow and to develop the sport societies, the sport associations have the responsibility to publicize, support, promote and provide the various sports activities in Thailand. This becomes an important concept in conducting this research in order to present the form of IMC for the sport association firmly stepping into becoming a professional sport in the near future.

## Objectives

1. To study the implementation of marketing communications of the sport association in the National Sport Development Plan at the present time.
2. To study the factors that support the effectiveness of integrated marketing communication for the sport association in the National Sport Development Plan.
3. To define the patterns of integrated marketing communication for the sport association the National Sport Development Plan.

## Delimitation

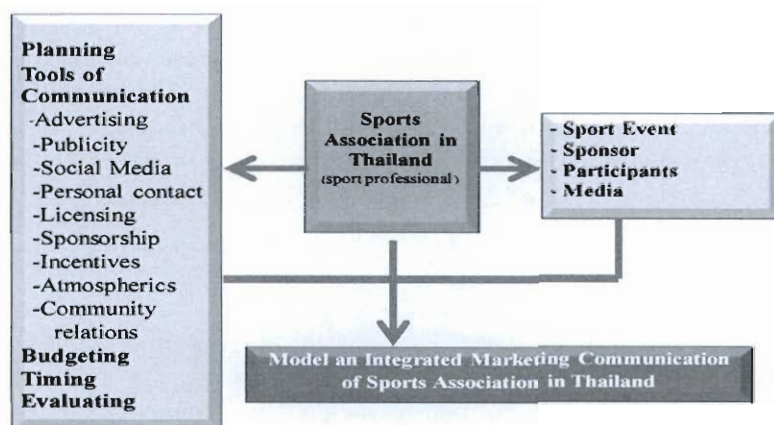
The research aims to study integrated marketing communication for supporting, publicizing, and public relation as the missions of the sport associations within the National Sport Development Plan for becoming sport development careers. The IMC Theory is utilized in the operation under the responsibilities of the sport associations in thirteen types of sport: soccer, golf, tennis, snooker, bowling, badminton, motorcycle racing, car racing, table tennis, basketball, takraw, and Thai boxing.

## Expected Benefits

1. The person involving in the integrated marketing communication development of the sport associations can apply the result to organize the activities' patterns, and select an effective marketing communication channel to build up the popularity in the piloted sports for careers.
2. The sport associations in Thailand can apply the patterns of the integrated marketing communication to plan the marketing strategy to achieve the mission of professional sport development that well responds to the needs of the sport associations' sponsors so as to build up the values in the Thai sport market.
3. The sponsors or the organizers dealing with the privileges in sport societies can apply the result to analyze in order to find out the estimated marketing **operation cost most suited** to sponsors of each type of sport.
4. The sport **organizations** can build up a good relationship toward the members or those who are interested in sports by launching an effective marketing **promotion** of the associations to generate popularity in the various types of professional **sports**.

## Conceptual and Theory

The paper studies the IMC evaluation mode in sport associations, and studies the literature which are the concepts framework of the research are shown as Figure 1



**Figure 1** Research Frame Work.

Shank (2009) mentioned to the world of Sports Marketing that the growth of the sports industry had spread to other countries, both of professionals and amateurs is growing in a positive direction.

The customer in sports consist of spectators, participants and sponsorship correlated with the study of Baylor Business (2003) that studied the marketing of sports business by focusing on the process or elements of sports business development consisting of S3 as Sports, Sponsorship and Sales.

1. Sports and Spectators are different. It is that the factors of the sport marketing start from the spectators. The spectators are different from the ordinary customers who consume goods and services. They will watch the seasonal sport competitions in the sport fields or via various media. They have their individual preferences in sport teams or sportsmen. It is noticeable that the spectators will express their cheering through dressing with the team cheering uniforms, or painting their faces with some designs or letters to show their preferences. Therefore, the sports have to be the kinds that are popular among the spectators so that the sports will have the potentials in business development.

2. Sponsorship or collaboration of sponsors is an important aspect of sustainable sports business development, sports team or the sports agencies will progress by a great sponsor and the outgrowth of the sports agency arise from the profits or a share of sale tickets. By the sponsors income or benefits of advertising and sponsors able to organize events that can communicate directly with potential customers of the product or organization, which cover a large part of the marketing in every aspect. The success of the sport or sports team comes up from the support of sponsors. Which competition or sports will need to be compiled to sports products, services and public relation to support the sponsors get in return is worth it.

3. Sales or distribution, the consumer who consumed the products of sponsor will decide to buy a brand of sports sponsorship that the process of market can be explained by deciding on a purchase.

Sports marketing is a specific application of marketing principles and processes to sport products and the use of marketing principles to sports products and non-sports products (Shank, 2009). The structure of the sports industry on the part of the consumer that has athletic, spectator, sports participation and cooperation of business sectors. The products and services in the event, whether in sport competitions program, goods and sports equipment, the athletic training staffs and sports information; the process and support the sports industry is a major contributor; the sponsors, the representatives and the various manufacturers linked to the sports business. Sports marketing elements consist of three reasons (Shank 2009).

- 1). Sports competition program
- 2). Sponsor
- 3). Spectator

The study of the relationship between sports organizations with the operation of sports marketing relationships include three elements comprising the spectators, sponsors and media in sport events by sports organizations participate with sponsors and gain common benefits by using media as an intermediary connection associated to the target group by the participant in sport (Mullin, Hardy and Sutton, 2007). The media is a two-way relationship; the relationship between sports organizations and spectator, and that connects between sponsors in a commercial relationship.

Current marketing communications operate in an environment of saturation byproduct messages and increasing inattentiveness on the part of consumers (Kitchen, Brignell, Li and Spickett, 2004). The most important changes is the dramatic increase in the variety of communication options available to advertisers. Within this context, keeping the strategic consistency of all messages among different elements of marketing communication is very important to ensure a consistent brand image that will appeal to consumers. This strategic consistency is suggested as the most recommended approach for developing IMC (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998).

The AAAA states, when referring to IMC, that all communication activities should act within the same plan with a unique voice, a single message, and one goal in order to offer consistency in communication (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998).

Keller (2001) states that communication tools are strategically consistent if the information they conveyed share meaning and content with the purpose of sending and reinforcing common brand associations.

In addition, literature has established that IMC is the application of consistent brand messaging across both traditional and non-traditional marketing channels and using different promotional methods to reinforce each other.

The marketing mix of sports marketing promotion that has the way to be used and the tools that are used to promote marketing as follows (Irwin, Sutton, and MaCarthy, 2008);

1. Advertising
2. Publicity
3. Personal contact
4. Incentives
5. Atmospherics

6. Licensing
7. Sponsorship
8. Community relations

In the operation of sport organizations, the IMC tools are very important in the operation to create popularity in the sports category that is the mission of the association directly. Planning and coordination of the tools need to be planned by the process of IMC as follows:

## Research Methodology

The research methodology used survey questionnaire and in-depth interviews of twenty-six CEOs in thirteen sports associations for professional sports in Thailand who are responsible for administration of the professional sports development plan or the secretary general or executive director who is responsible for the marketing or public relations of the sports association in development the professional sports development plan for operated and factors supported marketing communication.

Four hundred participants who were spectators, athletics and staff sport team answered the survey questionnaire of marketing communication relating behaviors. The statistics used in data analysis were mean, standard deviation and factor analysis.

And focus group interviewed by five IMCs experts in Thailand with a doctoral degree in related fields. Three of them were the assistant professors and the others are the managers working in the fields of marketing and public relations in the business organizations that sponsored of sport associations. All of the interviewers concluded about the factors supported IMC and the confirmation IMC model of Sport Association in Thailand.

## Analysis

Quantitative data analyzed the statistic of Frequency, Percentage, Mean, Standard Deviation and Data Transformation and Factor analysis. Qualitative data was analyzed by interview, the researcher grouped the issues of implementation of marketing communication and presented in the form of an essay.

## Result

Sports associations in Thailand serve the marketing communication most, only the budget that was at a high level. From the interviews, it was found that Budget is a major problem in the field of sports in the country. In the field of marketing communication tools was found. Sports are also using marketing communications by tapping stimulation rights, support and social media. The results of this study, is also supported by the Executive Board and experts indicated that there should be a focus on all aspects at the highest level, see details in table 1.

**Table 1** Quantitative data analyzed the statistic of Frequency, Percentage, Mean, Standard Deviation and Data Transformation

Description	Operation		Significance	
	$\bar{X}$	Interpretation	$\bar{X}$	Interpretation
Planning Operation	4.39	Most	4.68	Most
Marketing Communication Tools Operation				
- Advertising	4.34	Most	3.96	More
- Publicity	4.48	Most	4.51	Most
- Personal Contact	3.98	More	4.41	Most
- Incentive	4.11	More	4.12	More
- Atmosphere	4.50	Most	4.30	Most
- Licensing	4.02	More	4.71	Most
- Sponsorship	3.87	More	4.27	Most
- Community Relations	4.41	Most	4.48	Most
- Social Media Network	3.81	More	4.34	Most
Budget Operation of Marketing Communication	3.69	More	4.83	Most
Time Operation of Marketing Communication	4.43	Most	4.81	Most
Evaluating Operation of Marketing Communication	4.41	Most	4.88	Most

The factor analysis of effectiveness of marketing communication tools as recognition of spectators, athletes, teams and participants in which the researcher was conducted in the following;

**Table 2** Variables Test Result

Variable	KMO		Bartlett's test	
	Mean	Observe Value	Mean	Observe Value
44 variables	0.6 – 1.00	.96	$P \leq 0.05$	.00

Chi-Square = 9098.94

The first results examining the relationship between variables were analyzed by Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO) and Bartlett's test of sphericity is used to measure the suitability of the information correlated statistically significantly to conclude that the collection of this information is appropriate to use technical analysis.

The second step was factor extraction by using principal component analysis and finding the percentage of variance by Eigen show there are 6 factors that over 1. The elements weight result from 1 – 6 were shown as percentage as follow 11.22, 10.82, 10.49, 8.14, 7.86 and 7.29 that means sum of 6 elements will be 55.85 percentage.

1. Benefits factors comprise the licensing and sponsorship
2. Personnel contact and incentives.
3. Mass communication includes advertising and publicity.
4. Social media network.
5. Building community relationship
6. Creating an atmosphere of activities.

From the focus group interview the IMCs experts applied and adapted the conclusion by mental models guide and propose a framework for IMC of the Sports Association of Thailand. See figure 2:

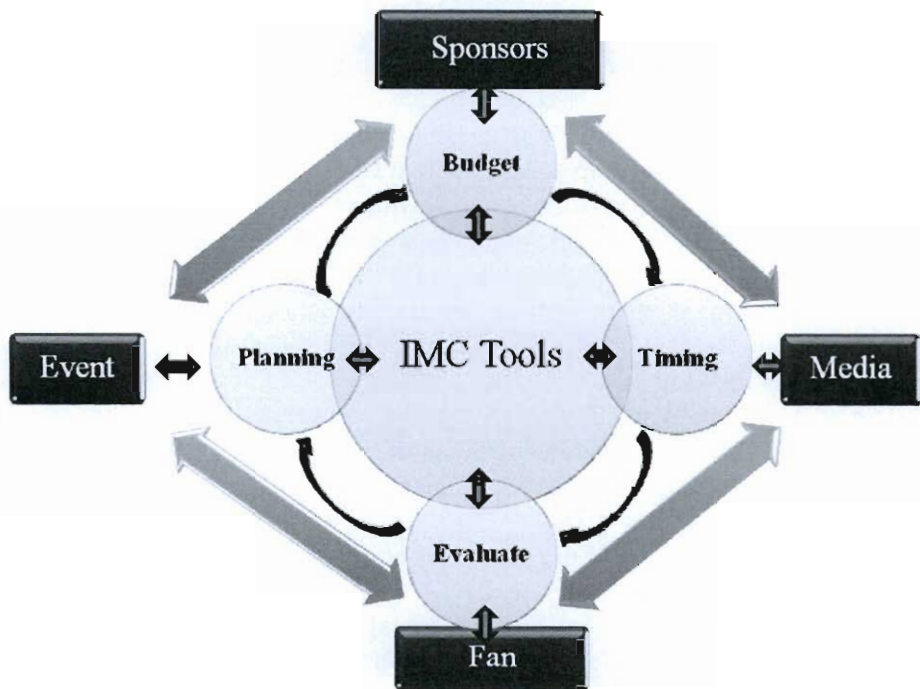
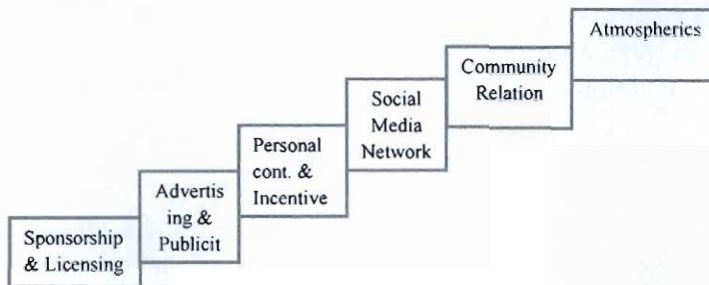


Figure 2 IMC Model for Sports Association

The IMCs experts explain that research procedure of the IMC framework by the sports association considered the sports event program that is promoted the sport association consistent with the plans and policies. Then reach to the process of implementing an IMC as following;

1. Creating the marketing communication plan is the first step, planning in marketing communications and the corresponding steps. Determination of target group by analyzing the current situation, reviewing the plans, plan to use a variety of marketing communications tools. This requires a consistent and continuous tools usage, plan budget in accordance with the operational plan by considering additional sources of external funding. It is planned to evaluate the results of the process every step carefully.

2. Selection the effective and various marketing tools, the marketing communication tools are important.



**Figure 3** Steps of IMC Tools Usage of Sports Association

Sorting the usage of marketing communication tools to related with the period of implementation should consider the beginning by providing sponsorship and licensing to contribute the funds and consideration to use mass communication such as advertising and news to focus on the target group acknowledge then continuing to reinforce the stimulation by using the stimulated activity merge with personnel communication to alert the participants. The next step is consideration to use social network spread in the widest connection because it is the most influential nowadays and lower-cost media, then creating the best atmosphere among the period of activity to create an impression. Lastly, building community relationship by creating the activities with help and cooperation with the society to distribute to the target widely.

3. Budget implementation should be allocated by actual costs and sufficient budgets. In the case of a limited budget should be implemented to raise funds by marketing communication events and should be the provision of budget support with continuity and stability.

4. The timing implementation of the plan for continuity shall have tracking or sequence of marketing communication matched.

5. Evaluation all process of implementation should measure and evaluate completely by measurement template to be the information for planning in the future.

## Discussion

Model of IMC for Sports Association in sports development plan for professional of researcher is related with many specialists. Prasongsukarn (Business Thai, 2011) referred to that the model activities in sports marketing is the connection of consumer life style with sports that cause of centrifugal from reinvigorating the brand with customers in event marketing.

The elements of marketing communication model correlates with the model of the customers in sports in Shank (2009). The researcher found that the sports marketing business recognizes the process or the element of sports business development that consist of S3 as sports, sponsorship and sales (Baylor Business, 2003).

In the process of IMC correlates with Thirasorn (2008) explained the process of IMC taking the first step on customer by outside - in approach that shall have a plan by analysis of situation and role of sports association and use contact point to convey or exposure to achieve a better sense of kind of sports and brand of sports association and available to use to



approach the target group without adhere to only one medium but use any media to take the target group reach the information that is the process of consideration of the marketing tools and the synergies use to induce more effective than using only one medium.

Meanwhile the tools of marketing communication correlates with Irwin (2008) who summarized the 8 of the marketing mix of sports marketing promotion comprises 1. Advertising 2. Publicity 3. Personal contact 4. Incentives 5. Atmospherics 6. Licensing 7. Sponsorship and 8. Community relations (Irwin, 2008) and using social network that is popularity now. (O'Reilly, Berger, Hernandez, Paren. and Seguin, 2012.)

The effectiveness of the marketing communication that is consistent with research shows the effectiveness of the communication tools especially social media with widespread popularity which influences consumer behavior. Rattamani, Klomdee, Tongkam and Tongdhamachat (2012) found that the basis of the operation is the rearrangement of the marketing communication format as advertising, publicity, broadcasting, building social relationships, creating an atmosphere, licensing, social media and multimedia and exhibition that relates with Ditsawattana (2012) who found that discussion factors are many spectators, promotion, sport fans, good management, care of benefits, creating profitable demand response to consumers, ticket system, revenue from souvenirs, protection competition to customers by using IMC process.

While the analysis of marketing communications of sponsorship found that were satisfy to support due to promotion, sales, live, marketing opportunity, new experimental, sales staff, utilities support as budget and equipment. It also conforms to the concept of the effectiveness of IMC provided by Navarro, Sicilia and Ballester (2009). It is found that marketing communication strategy that integrated between the varieties of tools has more positive influence than a group of receiving message without integrated communication media.

The selection of the 'advertising' and the 'being a sponsor' methods is the key strategy to reach the achievement of the consumers' perceptions. Additionally, it is found that advertising has the positive relationship conforming to the result of the research conducted by Micu and Thorson (2010) showing that advertising before news broadcasting has the positive effects on the customers' perceptions and attitudes toward brands. Broadcasting news after advertising helps emphasize the reliability of the commercial brands. This strategy uses the communication tools to activate the customers' perceptions in the brands repeatedly and continually.

Besides, the impacts from media on the customers' perceptions can conformably be pointed out through the researches of Hajli and Hajli (2013), Vel and Sharma (2010) and Buchanan (2007) that the online social media have the strong influences to the customers' way of life.

Budget implementation shall be allocated by actual costs and sufficient budgets. In the case of a limited budget shall implement to raise funds by marketing. It is consistent with Pumwudthisarn (2000) mentioned the essence of IMC usage that the media has caused prices to rise and direction of advertising price is higher. So the sectors accelerate plan to expand marketing activities and in the budget process requires the monitoring and supervision to ensure compliance with the plan of operation is essential.

In order to keep the continuity on the project, setting the period of time of operations is necessary. Also, it is important to follow up or manage the sequences of the methods of marketing communication that work clearly and conformably to generate the impact most

(Kotler and Keller, 2006). In the similar way, Boone and Kurtz (1995) explained that all of the activities used for marketing promotion needed to be merged properly to emphasize on customers. In addition, Duncan (2002), Shimp (2003), Kotler and Armstrong. (1999), and Lohthongkam (2001) indicated in the same direction that the IMC was to employ the varieties of marketing promotion activities compatibly to suit each group of customers.

## Recommendations

1. In this research, the researcher has suggested the findings to adapt to sports organizations such as the sports association in a sports excellence promotion plan or other sports association with a mission to promote and encourage the sports widely to apply to find sponsors and build up the sports industry components to grow in the line of IMC.

2. For business sectors, the researcher suggests that the effective format of integrated marketing communication for the business organizations is to co-operate with the sport associations by investing or sponsoring in sport market. This can help the business organizations create the positive images for themselves and access to their target customers more easily.

3. As IMC format is a key factor that can create an overview of sports popularity trends, thus, it is important that the future study will need to investigate in marketing communication of various sports since each sport is different in contexts.

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