

## **USE OF INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS IN MANAGING AGRO PROCESSING COMPANIES IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

This paper evaluates use of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMCs) in managing agro processing companies in Benue State, Nigeria. AIDA model, which is the acronym for Attention, Interest, Desire and Action is used to explain the study's theoretical framework while survey design was adopted, using questionnaire and oral interview as data collection instruments. Findings show that agro processing companies in Benue State deploy sales promotion, advertising, direct marketing or personal selling, use of mass media, exhibitions/trade fairs and public relations as their IMC activities. It is also found that use of IMCs by agro processing companies in the state facilitates growth and development of the companies by facilitating high sales, effective managerial activities, staff performance, cordial relationship and successful general operations. The findings show that the IMCs influenced growth and development of the companies on a very large scale despite some challenges to effective use of IMCs. Consequently, it is recommended, among others, that integration of marketing communication by agro processing companies in the state should not only be limited to sales promotion, advertising, direct marketing/personal selling, use of mass media, exhibitions/trade fairs and public relations but expanded to cover other applicable marketing communication apparatuses.

**KeyWords:** Marketing, IMC, Management, Agro processing, Agro processing companies, Benue State

### **Introduction**

The varying communication landscape requires a reconsidering of media planning and synergy to be key in enhancing social endeavours including marketing. Marketing communication practices by companies is the use of relevant marketing promotion avenues. The collective combination of promotional avenues is denoted as integrated marketing communications (IMCs). IMCs can create the needed public awareness on products and services of businesses. One good reason for using IMCs is the key role it plays in sustainably developing efficient

means of production. IMCs are effective communication devices that can project the operations of agro processing firms. They can enhance good income generation for families and businesses and governments via unconventional means of revenue generation. IMCs could veritably facilitate consumer mobilization through spreading marketing promotion innovations or channels such as public media and personal communications. Integrating advertising, public relations, publicity, sales promotion, direct marketing and social media, messages on uses of agro-aligned services or products such as cassava,

yams, groundnuts, rice, etc. will be effectively disseminated to farmers, governments and her agencies, social development partners, investors and potential ones to invest extremely in agro processing for sustainable agricultural development.

The unifying factor of IMCs is a well-researched and planned marketing activity, which is practically the capacity of the marketing communication handler/manager to appropriately integrate different marketing promotions tools including advertising, public relations, sales promotion, direct marketing, trade fairs, personal selling and use of online/social media platforms, among others. To be fair enough, marketing promotions of agro processing companies could provide valuable competitive advantage over competitors (Reid, Johnson, Ratcliffe, Skrip & Wilson, 2015). For instance, public relations, as a marketing communication adjunct, could be used in persuasively 'challenging' governments, public and private agro processing companies or investors to provide incentives to agro farmers for efficiency in the agricultural production chain.

IMCs, in this instance, can build agro processing companies by establishing information resource avenues or channels thereby effectually creating the means of production and greater market scales. This further explains why use of IMCs may have considerable advantages in sustainably managing agro processing companies across societies. It is reasoned, therefore, that agro processing companies are leveraging on the benefits of the marketing communication approach—that is, IMC—for success in their operations. However, there is dearth of knowledge on the extent of use of Integrating Marketing Communications by agro processing companies in Benue State, Nigeria. This explains the reason for a study on how agro processing companies in Benue State make use of IMCs in their operations

and the influence of the marketing promotion approach. Accordingly, the study specifically investigates the use of IMC by Bushman Livestock Feeds & Millers, Mikap Nig. Ltd. and Kadel Agricultural Services Ltd. and its influence on their operations. The choice of selection of these agro processing companies is first due to their popularity and widespread in the state (Abah, 2020) and to ensure that the three major geographical zones – that is, Benue North East, Benue North West and Benue South – in the state are represented in the study. For instance, Bushman Livestock Feeds & Millers is located in Benue North East, Mikap Nig. Ltd. in Benue North West and Kadel Agricultural Services Ltd. in Benue North South.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Marketing communication, all over the globe, is considered an integral part of marketing. In our current social environment, marketing communication has evolved into a vital marketing promotion system for both consumers and businesspeople. The ability of promotional methods such as advertising, direct marketing or public relations, for example, to deliver marketing promotion messages to target audiences has given them a major role in the marketing activities of a good number of organizations. Business organizations, ranging from large multinational corporations to small retailers, increasingly deploy marketing communications to effectively market products and services. In market-based economics, consumers have come to rely on several marketing communication forms for information they will use in making purchase decisions. According to Hendrix (2004) in Segun, Loretta and Abiola (2021), IMCs could effectually facilitate valuable communications to propagate the gains of agro-processing thereby prompting efficiency in their operations.

It, therefore, implies that IMCs can be applied in managing agro processing companies for success. Banmeke and Ajayi's (2008) study affirms that effective marketing communications can facilitate agricultural development using the right communication contents to sustainably develop agro processing activities and agricultural sector, in general. Not just that, Masuki's (2010) study found that agricultural messages via the instrumentality of proper IMCs can enhance small-scale or smallholder agricultural production. According to Masuki, linking increased production can remunerate markets, improved livelihoods, food security and economies, in general. That is, agro processing companies across societies such as Nigeria that use IMCs stand to gain much. There are, however, challenges, which Elijah (2021) notes, impede on effective integration of IMCs by firms including agro processing companies. According to Elijah, despite the drive for integrated communications in marketing, it is not easily achieved; even as the problems of integration are surmountable, they are prominent for a number of factors and offer possible barriers to IMC implementations.

Drawing from the preceding explanations, there is uncertainty or dearth of knowledge on the extent of use and benefits of IMCs by agro processing companies in Nigeria and other societies as well as the challenges to effective use of IMCs. In essence, there is lack of empirical knowledge on how agro processing companies use and benefit from IMCs and possible challenges to efficient deployment of IMCs by the companies. This paper cashes on the scenario and has investigated use of IMCs in managing agro processing companies in Benue State of Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this paper are to:

- i. Examine the extent to which IMCs is used in the management of agro processing businesses in Benue State.
- ii. Determine how use of IMCs by agro processing companies in Benue State influence growth and development of the sector.
- iii. Identify challenges faced by agro processing companies in the practice of the IMCs in Benue State.

### **Research Questions**

- i. To what extent is IMCs is used in the management of agro processing businesses in Benue State.
- ii. How has use of IMCs by agro processing companies in Benue State influence growth and development of the sector?
- iii. What are the challenges faced by agro processing companies in the practice of the IMCs in Benue State.

### **Literature Review**

#### ***Concept of Integrated Marketing Communications, IMCs***

Marketing communications, basically, concern sharing messages on products, prices, place and distribution to existing and potential consumers and other marketing stakeholders through the product, price, place and distribution. Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is the incorporation or combination of several marketing communication tools to achieve set market aims and objectives. Integrated Marketing Communications (IMCs) is not a cauldron of advertising with public relations, direct marketing and consumer insight that is thrown haphazardly. Rather, its major combination should be in the right or suitable promotional contexts to harmonize each other with other marketing communication elements. The unifying factor is a strategic vision which entails the ability of the communication handler to understand and maximize promotion opportunities.

The task of strategic vision in marketing communications is to confer advantageous competitive edge on an organization so it can be ahead of competitors. According to Clow, Kenneth, Back and Donald (2007) cited in Elijah (2021), Integrated Marketing Communications (IMCs) enhance the harmonization or integration of a considerable number of marketing communication devices/tools, avenues, principles, functions and services to a flawless programme that maximizes business impact on consumers and other end-users at a minimal cost. IMC is designed to make marketing communications such as advertising, sales promotion, public relations, personal selling, trade fairs and direct marketing work together as a unified force – rather than permitting each to work in isolation. IMCs basically seek to accomplish a synergy by bringing together communication messages and tools for efficiency in marketing promotion.

IMCs could be simplified to mean the deployment of several marketing promotion tools such as advertising, public relations, publicity, interpersonal, mass media use/relations, direct marketing/personal selling and others for success in marketing. In essence, IMCs is the principle or philosophy of deploying a number of communication approaches to effectively meet marketing promotion objectives. Businesses that integrate several marketing communications strategies stand the opportunity of having an edge on those that uses one or few strategies for marketing promotion.

### **Influence of Agricultural Marketing Communications on Agro Processing Companies**

Contemporary marketing evolved from a progression of exchange systems. Before now, people were concerned with production for consumption and inter-household

exchange. This approach to production was principally subsistence, providing little or no room for specialization in the marketing activity. It is stated by Olukosi (2013) that the existence of marketing is due to direct specialization of production in the economy. Before now, families were self-sufficient or produced solely to meet their subsistence needs. They produced food crops and livestock products needed on available land holdings. As the individual farmer specialized, it gave rise to the production of marketable surpluses which could not be exchanged easily for goods and services produced out of the farm.

In the early days, trade by barter was common. However, due to disadvantages such as the inevitability for double coincidence of wants, problem of unit of measure and the complexity of holding large stocks of goods in storage for future exchange, among others, money as a medium of exchange evolved. This can be said to be the commencement of developments in modern marketing. With efficiency in modern marketing, there is the potential for the publics of agro processing companies, for instance, to access what they cannot produce irrespective of cost and distance (Olukosi, 2013; Elijah, 2021).

Agricultural marketing especially as regards agro processing services and products, according to Kotler and Kotler (2006), can be segmented into two themes, which include (1) micro and (2) macro viewpoints. The micro perspective concerns individual participants in marketing – be it the farmer or agricultural processing firms. In this wise, Olukosi (2013) acknowledges that agricultural marketing concerns the performance of all business activities such as agro processing that aid the forward flow of goods and services to consumers. People consider marketing as equal to selling or transferring a product to another person for a price. Selling is fundamental to the micro

segment of marketing – though, it is only a part of it. Promotion, as one of the 4P's of the marketing activity, occupies a crucial role for success.

Regarding the macro viewpoints, marketing promotion in agro processing sector could cover packaging, storage, transportation, pricing, financing, risk bearing and even product design. These marketing activities play good roles in marketing. Promotion in marketing greatly inspires effective communication for products and services of business (Elijah & Aer, 2017) – including those of agro processing companies and their targets. This further explains the 'overlord' of marketing promotion or communications in the agro processing sector.

Marketing in agro processing, involves all legal, physical and economic activities which are essential for agricultural products or services to be readily available to consumers:

- i. In the form and amount desired by the consumers;
- ii. In consumers' desired place;
- iii. During the time desired by the consumers;
- iv. With a price consumers and middle men can pay for purchase (Elijah, 2021).

The promotional aspect of marketing makes the marketing communication strategy fundamental in managing agro processing companies because it prompts consumer attention and persuades them to reach out to companies' products or services. According to Chaudhry (2016), unswerving sales rarely occur in agro processing companies and others without a strong marketing communication strategy. The companies should build up long lasting relationships with the publics using marketing communications activities. They should keep mutual relationship going thereby making

individual customer wants and needs the cornerstone of marketing communication and operations. Marketers desire to maintain an approving relationship with target consumers. In reality, product or service patronage is just the beginning of the connection between the marketer and the consumer. Proper marketing communication could describe a concrete thinking of successfully operating agro processing businesses. Therefore, marketing communication in agro processing companies could considerably provide good marketing knowledge on the creation of form, place, time and possession utilities in the agricultural sector.

### Review of Empirical Studies

Empirical studies, related to this work are reviewed under this section. For example, Neema (2017) carried out a study on the "Effect of Marketing Communication Mix on Sales Performance of Soft Drink Companies in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania". The specific objectives of the study were to (i) establish the impact of advertising on the sales performance of soft drink companies in Tanzania; (ii) determine the influence of sales promotion on the sales performance of the soft drink companies in Tanzania and (iii) determine the significance of direct marketing on the sales performance of soft drink companies in Tanzani. The study adopted explanatory and descriptive research designs.

The results of the study showed that only direct marketing had a statistically positive significant effect on sales performance. Sales promotion and publicity had a positive statistical insignificant impact on sales performance. However, the study found that there was a statistically negative insignificant impact of advertising on sales. The moderating variable, macro environment, had a positive moderating control on the relationship between the

independent and dependent variables. The study concluded that macro environmental factors positively influence the connection linking marketing promotion mix and sales performance of soft drink businesses in Dar es Salaam. It, accordingly, recommended that future research should analyse specifically, the impact of integrated market communication mix or direct marketing technique in the soft drink industry.

The above reviewed study is relevant in that it examines the efficacy of marketing communication strategies; considering that the present study is on establishing the relationship between IMCs and managing agro processing companies. That is, both studies are hinged on studying the use and efficacy of marketing communication. Not just that, there is similarity in both the study under review with the present research since both have utilized adopted explanatory and descriptive research methods. However, while the present study focuses on IMC use in agro processing companies in Benue State, the reviewed study studied the correlation between IMC use by soft drinks companies in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania.

Another related study is by Adegbuyi (2011) titled, *“Contemporary Marketing Strategies and Performance of Agricultural Marketing Firms in South-West Nigeria”*. The broad objective of the study was to examine the application of Contemporary Marketing Strategies and their impact on agricultural marketing firms’ performance in South-West Nigeria. The research design used was survey. Findings revealed that there was a significant difference in engendering retainership ability as well as better market share between agricultural marketing firms with tall use of marketing database and those with low database marketing. The study also revealed that agricultural firms with high and low use of face-to-face and dyadic relationship marketing have significant difference in sales value and volume. The

study showed that agricultural marketing firms with high and low penetration of network marketing have significant difference in market share. Based on the findings, it recommended that if agricultural growth is to be stimulated and market created for products, attaining higher productivity, enhanced preservation, packaging, packing and labelling techniques should be encouraged. This will engender maximum benefits especially as regards the modern era of electronically-interactive relationships.

The reviewed study affords us the opportunity to understand the relationship between contemporary marketing strategies and performance of agricultural marketing firms in South-West Nigeria, thereby enabling us to investigate how agro processing companies in Benue State also make use of the integrated marketing communication in their marketing process to fill up the knowledge gap the reviewed study has did not fill.

The study by Kehinde (2019) on *“Integrated Marketing Communications and Consumers Patronage of Nigerian Beverage Products”* is also of relevance to this present study. The broad objective of the study was to examine the impact of integrated marketing communication on consumers’ patronage of Nigerian beverage products and to establish the level of understanding and the use of IMC by Nigerian beverage communications institutions. The design used in the study was survey method with structured questionnaires as data collection instrument. Findings revealed that respondents appreciate the inherent benefits that the use of IMC brings over its non-use (the traditional approach). Such benefits, according to the findings, included cost savings, effective and efficient marketing communication messages, sustained long term client-customer relationships, better consumer patronage, amongst others. The study, however, concluded that mere

implementation of different combination of marketing communication tools together cannot guarantee better results; it is the strategic coordination of marketing communication tools and the media that will facilitate efficient results and help the company influence its brand value among customers and other stakeholders.

The study is relevant to the present study based on the fact that it also examines the efficacy of Integrated Marketing Communication channels/media and tools on its audience, which is related to one of the this present study. The reviewed study's findings have provided a good base for the findings of the current study for comparative analysis.

In a related development, Damjana and Bruno (2012) conducted a study on "*The Model of Marketing Communications Effectiveness: Empirical Evidence from Slovenian Business-to-Business Practice*". The general objective was to evaluate marketing communication effectiveness by developing and testing the model of marketing communication effectiveness in the business-to-business markets. Survey method using questionnaire was utilized. The study found that a central concept of marketing communication effectiveness is influenced by different variables. The study showed a positive impact of marketing communication effectiveness on organizational performance in Slovenian companies.

The study concluded that for marketing communication to be effective, other marketing communication variables should also be considered. It recommended, among other things, that demographic and psychographic variables of target audience members and media should also be accordingly considered for the message for more efficiency. The study is relevant because many researches assume that marketing communication is 'all powerful' hence the current study has leveraged on the

perceived 'powerfulness' by investigating the efficacy of integrating marketing communications.

In another related study, Obikeze and Eze (2013) researched on "*An Empirical Assessment of the Relationship of Marketing Communication Mix and Performance of Business Organizations*". The study's broad objective was to examine the correlation between communication activities and the business performance of companies. Results revealed several correlations between the numbers of marketing communication activities the company uses, the frequency of their use and the business performance of companies offering goods and services in Nigeria. The connection between the number of marketing communication activities the company uses and business performance showed no significant correlation between the number of marketing communication activities and aggregate business performance. However, there was correlation between the number of marketing communication activities and two business performance variables – net sales and customer loyalty.

The study is relevant to the present study because both studies have evaluated the effectiveness or otherwise of marketing communication activities among organisations; they both use the same method. However, the study (i.e. the reviewed one) has a relatively larger scope than the present study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

AIDA Model is discussed to provide this paper's theoretical framework. The model was an early effort to explain how advertising's potential audience might go through a number of steps, with attention being the first and most important one. It was developed by Elias St. Elmo Lewis in 1925. Palmer (2005) in Elijah (2021) hypothesizes that the message is offered according to an

easy model that encourages the attention of market prospect; interest prospects of products or services; prompt prospect to desire the product/service and entail action from the prospects. AIDA model can be applied in the theoretical framework of this paper whereby for any integration of advertising, sales promotion and personal selling strategies by agro processing companies in Benue State to be effectual, they have to possess the four qualities of the model – that is Attention, Interest, Desire and Action.

Successfully grasping the attention of the audience, then creating an interest to gather more information about the product and the information obtained should be able to generate some desire to buy the product hence appropriate actions favourable to agro processing companies' products/services should be response from the audience (Baran & Davies, 2009; Elijah, 2021). In essence, the AIDA model serves as a good guide for agro processing companies and others alike to design Integrated Marketing Communications messages that are appealing and interesting (attracting attention) to the public or customers. Not just that, the message contents should create desire for existing customers and prospective ones to patronize (i.e. action) of the products and services of agro processing companies.

### **Research Methodology**

Survey research design was used for this research. Survey researches may adopt interviews, observations, questionnaire, etc. in gathering appropriate data. The reason for using of the survey design is based on the fact that it is easier to elicit different categories of information that complement each other. The survey enabled the collection of primary data using questionnaire and interview on the influence of the use of IMCs by Bushman Livestock Feeds & Millers, Katsina-Ala, Mikap Nig. Ltd. Makurdi and Kadel

Agricultural Services Ltd. Otukpo on their operational activities. The choice of use of agro processing companies was first due to their popularity and widespread in the state and to ensure that the three major geographical zones – that is, Benue North East, Benue North West and Benue South – in the state are represented in the study. For instance, Bushman Livestock Feeds & Millers is located in Benue North East, Mikap Nig. Ltd. in Benue North West and Kadel Agricultural Services Ltd. in Benue North South. To successfully utilize the mixed research method, therefore, questionnaire and oral interview were used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data respectively. For the fact that the staff population of the companies was only 244, census technique was used to consider the entire population as sample size. In essence, all staff of the companies were sampled and administered questionnaire. The choice of use of this technique was because the population/sample size of the studied agro processing companies was not too much only 244 and posed very minimal challenge to the researcher, especially as regards the efficient handling of this research work.

Regarding the interview instrument for the collection of qualitative data, the researcher adopted the purposive sampling technique to study two respondents each from the studied agro processing companies using the purposive sampling technique. The use of the purposive sampling technique finds justification as explained by Creswell and Clark (2007) in Aer (2015). According to the authors, a researcher uses the purposive sampling technique to select individuals and sites that the required information can be obtained from. Not just that, the use of the purposive sampling method in the sampling activity was to ensure that the researcher selects respondents who are capable of providing the needed data for the study. It should be noted that the interviewee



respondents were also respondents to the questionnaire.

**Results and Discussion**

**Table 1 IMC Activities of Agro Processing Companies in Benue State use `**

<b>Option</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Sales Promotion	6	3
Advertising	10	4
Direct Marketing/Personal Selling	22	9
Mass media use	36	15
Exhibitions/trade fairs	6	3
Public relations activities	34	13
All of the above	130	53
<b>Total</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1 presents data on the IMC activities of agro processing companies in Benue State. The table implies that sales promotion, advertising, direct marketing/personal selling, use of mass media, exhibitions/trade fairs and public relations are the IMC activities of agro processing companies in Benue State.

In the same vein, responses from the interviewees indicate that agro processing companies in Benue State deploy advertising, public relations, direct marketing, sales promotion, personal selling, media relations/use (including social media). This according to the interviewees is aimed at attaining their marketing goals successfully. The interviewees' information shows that the IMC approaches are used at appropriate times – as the situation demands. That is, the use of IMC by agro processing companies in Benue State is done in several different ways. The interviewees agreed that there is high level use of IMC by their agro processing companies in their managerial activities.

The preceding results are supported by Kotler and Kotler (2006) that integrated marketing communication tools of firms could cover advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, public relations, direct marketing and trade fairs. This entails that marketers that wish to operate successfully need integrate appropriate communications tactics. Not just that, Kehinde (2019) explains that it is how innovative and creative marketing communications practitioners of companies are appropriately combining, coordinating and efficiently using marketing communication tools that there will be great impact on their products/services and by extension, on market share. Obikeze and Eze (2013) corroborate that several connections exist between the integration of marketing communication activities a company uses, the regularity of their use and the performance of the company. This is an indication that there is correlation between the extent of integrating marketing communications strategies by companies including agro processing firms and successful operations in the marketing activity.

**Table 2 Influence of IMC on Growth of Agro Processing Companies in Benue State**

<b>Option</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Facilitated high sales	40	16
Enabled effective managerial activities	23	9
Enhanced staff performance	28	11
Created cordial relationship with the company and the public	15	6
Facilitated the general operations of the company	20	8
All of the above	144	59
<b>Total</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2 has to do with data on the areas IMC influence growth of agro processing companies in Benue State. In this wise, the data in the table signifies that use of IMC by agro processing companies in Benue State facilitates growth and development of agro processing of the companies by facilitating high sales, enhanced effective managerial activities, enhanced staff performance, created cordial relationship and facilitated the general operations of the companies. This is respectively and collectively agreed by a majority of 244 respondents representing (100%).

The information presented above agrees with data from one of the interview respondent, Simon Mailumo of Mikap Nig. Ltd. who stated that:

Many agro processing companies in the state have begun using Integrated Marketing Communications (IMCs) to achieve success in their companies, many of them have been using the online platforms through social media platforms to promote their company and drive an online presence where they

advertise freely as against using the traditional media of radio, television and newspapers. Because the use of the new media is not limited but rather advantageous, it makes it even more easy to companies to product contents and share as much as they want and modify such contents periodically, to showcase many of their brands. Since marketing relies greatly on advertising, the competition has become the other of the day as every company want to heard and seen by both its existing and new customers in Benue State.

On a whole, information from the interview show that Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) has become a backbone for agro processing companies to leverage on in promoting their marketing activities and improve sales through

advertisement and other promotional campaigns on numerous communication channels.

The above findings can be likened to the position that Integrated Marketing Communication is sufficient to show that there are financial, competitive and effective benefits to be achieved through the link offered by the process of integrating the marketing communication integration process. It is hoped, therefore, that agro processing companies will leverage on the influence of integrating their marketing communication practices to gain the benefits accruable therefrom. According to (Elijah, 2021), the use of IMC by companies is motivated by the desire for efficiency in company operations. For instance, an Integrated Marketing Communication strategy would, therefore, aid an agro processing company to choose marketing communication options that reinforce and complement each other. How innovative and creative marketing communications are appropriately combined, coordinated and efficiently deployed will have great impact on products/services.

The reason for integrating different marketing communication tools is to deliver suitable messages about products or services of organizations, including agro processing firms. As noted earlier, studies affirm that through IMCs, consumers receive the needed

information from marketers – this is because consumers now ‘filter’ or screen out a good portion of the informative messages targeted at them. This explains the imperativeness of agro processing companies to devise the right communication messages and strategies that offer consistent messages about their products or services using the right media that the target markets use or are likely to use. It also affirms that the aim of marketing communications is to inform, persuade, and remind consumers directly or indirectly about goods and services. This clearly explains why organizations such as agro processing firms increase their number of marketing communications programmes.

In the views of Kotler and Armstrong (2010), marketing communications is establishing dialogue and creating sustainably relationships with customers using communications such as advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, public relations, direct marketing, etc. This is also in tandem with the provisions or the AIDA model that encourage companies to carry out their IMC activities in a way that propels existing and prospective customers to patronize their products and/or services. In essence, with appropriate IMC message contents the people are susceptible to take actions that are favourable to agro processing companies in Benue State.

**Table 3 Challenges Agro Processing Companies in Benue State encounter in the Use of IMC**

<b>Option</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Problem of finance	4	1
Lack of IMC equipment such as vehicles, digital communication devices, stationaries, etc.	28	11
Inadequate IMC professionals	38	15
Managements’ low commitment to IMC	6	3
All of the above	168	61
None of the above	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>100</b>

Data found in Table 4.3 is a distribution of respondents according to challenges agro processing companies in Benue State encounter in the use of IMC. From the table, the data imply that the biggest challenges agro processing companies face are lack of IMC trained staff, lack of strategic IMC planning strategies, problem of message cohesion and clarity of the different IMC activities due to inconsistency in IMC message content about their products/services, inaccessibility and ambiguity of the IMC message contents. Paucity of funds is found to be the greatest challenge in the use of IMC.

Similarly, the study's interviewees noted that the budget by organisation for IMC is mostly not enough and causes problem of well-coordinated IMC activities. In this wise, challenges agro processing companies in Benue State encounter in the use of IMC include problem of finance, lack of IMC professionals and managements' low commitment to IMC.

The above findings entail a barrier to contemporary marketing strategy implementation may possibly arise from managers' lack of knowledge about the marketing strategy. This can greatly make many marketing communications programmes to have little or no strategic content. Likewise, the findings show that lack of marketing skill also inhibits effective marketing promotion strategy implementation. Agro processing companies and others without proper planning and research on the proper marketing communication strategy rarely succeed in their public communication endeavours (Elijah, 2021). Thus, overcoming the challenges to effective integration of marketing communications could aid agro processing companies to send the right marketing messages to the right customers

through the right medium, at the right time and for attainment of high volume of sales.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the findings, it is concluded that agro processing companies in Benue State should use IMC in their operational activities and that sales promotion, advertising, direct marketing/personal selling, use of mass media, exhibitions/trade fairs and public relations are the IMC strategies of agro processing companies in Benue State. The desire to enhance sales, the need for effective internal and external communication, the perceived gains of IMC and the desire for success in general operations are the factors that motivate the use of IMC in Benue State. Again, the extent to which use of IMC influences growth and development of agro processing companies in the state is on a very large scale and that agro processing companies in Benue State encounter challenges to effective use of IMC on an average level. Consequently, it is recommended that with the findings and the conclusion reached the study recommended that

- i. Integration of marketing communication by the selected agro processing companies in Benue State should not only be limited to sales promotion, advertising, direct marketing/personal selling, use of mass media, exhibitions/trade fairs and public relations but expanded to cover other applicable marketing communication apparatuses for sustainable efficiency in management.
- ii. The studied agro processing companies in using IMC should carefully analyse and understand the strength and weakness of each

of the IMC tools and adopt most suitable ones that complement each other; that can better facilitate their effective repositioning for success. In essence, there should be a 'more' mix in marketing communications to complement the tools used for sustained growth and development of agro processing companies and the agricultural sector, in general.

- iii. Generally, agro processing companies in Benue State should try to overcome challenges identified, which include lack of

IMC trained staff, lack of strategic IMC, lack of message cohesion and clarity of the different communication source of products or services, inconsistency in the marketing messages, inaccessibility and vagueness of the messages, problem of funds, ignorance on the importance of IMCs and difficulty in message crafting and understanding, to enable agro processing companies achieve better results from their marketing communication campaigns.

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