

# The Effect of Integrated Marketing Communication of Customer Relation Management on Loyalty through Experience and Engagement in Automotive Industry

**Sudaporn Kuntobutr**

*Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi, Thailand*

*Email: sudaporn\_k@rmutt.ac.th*

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## **Abstract:**

The Integrated Marketing Communication has been used to communicate with customers to increase customer loyalty. Currently, the development of digital technology has been progress and applied to marketing communication activities. This study purposes to investigate automotive firms that apply digital communication and traditional communication as integrated marketing communication to establish customer loyalty. The integrated marketing communication includes direct mail, leaflet, call center, customer relation activities such as card and gift, online brand community, online customer club, and email. In addition, the two variables perform as mediators are relationship quality and customer brand engagement. Subjects are post purchase of specific automotive brand that occupy high portion of market share in Thailand. In considering customer loyalty, the repurchase intention and word of mouth was measured. Subjects of this study are customers of the medium segment of passenger car in Thailand. The results indicate the effect of the integrated marketing communication of customer relation management on customer loyalty via two mediators in the model. This study contributes to fill research gap by clarify the result of combination between communication tools that create customer loyalty effectively.

**Keywords:** *Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), brand engagement, customer loyalty.*

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## **Introduction**

The Customer Relation Management (CRM) is crucial for marketing activities specifically to automotive industry. The reason is that each unit of product purchased by customers is expensive. Then, the products from automotive industry become high involvement. Therefore, every automotive firm has to compete with their competitors by not only creating new customers, but also preserving former customers. Consequently, the CRM programs have been

instructed by every firm to increase their customer engagement and loyalty. The implementation of CRM is a complex task, and 70% of CRM implementation projects fail to achieve expected objectives (Farhan, Abed, & Ellatif, 2018; Jermisittiparsert, Sutduean, & Sriyakul, 2018; Jermisittiparsert, 2020; Kortana & Jermisittiparsert, 2020). The prior CRM projects have send as analogue procedure such as mail, leaflet call center. However, the digital technology has been developed continuously and dramatically changing the

world. Currently, communication from firms to consumer around the world can be performed by using digital channel such as email, online, and social media. Even, those channels can reach consumer and customer with the same purposes, but digital tools can perform better performance from their speed and low cost. Thus, it support consumer engagement, marketing intelligence and customer loyalty (Meek, Ryan, Lambert, & Ogilvie, 2019). On the contrary, some customers may use traditional communication tools. Bridging the online and offline may have an impact on brands' social network quality, awareness and purchase intention (Dabbous & Barakat, 2020). Moreover, brand loyalty can be illustrated in its word of mount (Eelen, Özturan, & Verlegh, 2017). The question is that to communicate with customers via IMC is really effective in creating customer loyalty. Furthermore, the customer relation management should create positive customer experience and customer engagement prior to have customer loyalty. The purposes of this study are to observe how CRM perform through IMC can create experiences and engagement of customer according to particular automotive brand. In addition, relationship quality that affect to customer engagement is clarified. Finally, both customer experience and customer engagement are determined if they have significant affect to customer loyalty. This study is determined significance in term of its pioneering in discover how IMC affect to other marketing factors in automotive industry since the transformation of digital communication has been continuously expand into marketing activities. Moreover, it indicates how firms can create customers repurchasing the high involvement products.

### **Theoretical Overview and Prior Studies**

The highlight of this study concentrates on how firms can communicate effectively to create the loyalty of their customers. The communication tools

are combination between traditional media and digital media considered in term of integrated marketing communication (IMC). Thus, IMC was reviewed to determine its effect to relationship and customer engagement. In addition, the customer loyalty was studied by measuring procedure of repurchase and word of mouth. The customer experiences and engagement as mediators are also reviewed.

### **Integrated Marketing Communication**

The development of digital technology in communication and the dynamic of consumer behavior have been guiding to a paradigm shift in IMC. Many customers of the automotive industry can communicate via digital channel and human relation. Then, company can provide customer access to all available channel of communication to initiate full integration of those communication channels to have the customers' capability to trigger interaction between channels (Xu & Jackson, 2019). Thus, current customers can study company product from diversify locations at unlimited time and having full interaction by multiple channel to create their relationship with the company (Verhoef, Kannan, & Inman, 2015). There is a significant effect of consumer positive responses to channel integration (Zhang, Ren, Wang, & He, 2018). To communicate effectively with customers by using multi-channel of communications, the company can enrich customer experience touch point from variety of unlimited communication tools appropriately to customer behaviors (Stein & Ramaseshan, 2016). Today, the social media marketing activities are available for company to use digital influencers to endorse their brand via direct communication with customers (Childers, Lemon, & Hoy, 2019). Consequently, the companies can incorporate influencers with electronic word-of-mouth to create sustainable relationship to beneficial that brand value (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2018). The paradigm of digital influencer

encompasses multi-platform that accumulate a following audience on their life style and beneficial to specific brand that success in the social media community (Abidin, 2015). However, few studies have clarify the effect of social media to the formation of individual attitudes and behaviors (Casaló et al., 2018; Magno, 2017). Even, the IMC refers to the applying of variety communication channel to interact with customers for increasing the sales. However, we consider using IMC to create customer experience and customer engagement which consequently support loyalty to brand of particular company. Therefore, this study posited the following hypotheses:

H<sub>1</sub>: IMC Touch Point has a significant effect on customer experience.

H<sub>2</sub>: IMC Touch Point has significant effect on customer brand engagement.

H<sub>3</sub>: IMC Touch Point has a significant effect on Customer Loyalty.

## **Customer Experience**

The company strategy concerning to marketing activities always use relationship with customer as their norm to create good customer experience. The positive customer relationship support their experiences and indicated high influenced organizational performance (Soltani, Zareie, Milani, & Navimipour, 2018). Positive customer experience come from relationship quality which is a crucial factor in marketing research and become marketing imperative since relationship is associated with customer loyalty (Rahman & Ramli, 2016). Managing the customer experience has become a crucial responsibility for management of marketing (Witell et al., 2019). Moreover, the competitive environment encourage company create innovation in responding to the differentiation strategy for company competitive advantage. In addition, customer experience can drive business model innovation for company (Keiningham et al., 2019). However, it is

complexity for company to manage relationship with customer, but Information Technology (IT) with extensive infrastructure can support its quality (Erdil & Öztürk, 2016). Moreover, some study indicated that positive customer experience from relationship has a significant influence to customer word of mouth via their commitment (Purnasari & Yuliando, 2015). The company that provide services can take a proactive approach to create relationships based upon mandatory customer participation (S. C. Chen, Raab, & Tanford, 2015). According to the rise of digital communication and social media, some study summarized the impact of social media on customer experience and perceive value (Shih-Chih Chen & Lin, 2015). Thus, the customer participation with company will create their engagement to company and their brands. The relationship quality can be determined as creating value to customer experience, and has a significant effect on their loyalty (Shu-Ching Chen, 2015).

## **Brand Engagement**

Currently, automotive companies expect their customer not only purchase their product offering, but also extend to customer engagement and loyalty to their brand. Research found theory of engagement have relationship quality as antecedents (Itani, Kassar, & Loureiro, 2019). The consumer engagement process includes a range of multi-level process of communication interaction between company and consumers and create interactive experience within online brand communities and co-creation among participant in a specific society group (Dessart, 2015). The online brand community can support customer experience which consequently drive their engagement to particular brand (Kumar & Kumar, 2019). The online consumer behaviors have extended from only email to social media and variety of interaction between audiences in the community. The active and normally use of social media and social

network has increase sources of information for company to operate the communication program with their customers (Alalwan, Rana, Dwivedi, & Algharabat, 2017; Y. K. Dwivedi, Kapoor, & Chen, 2015). The increasing of marketers incorporate social media as integral part of the company promotional activities which high impact of consumers' engagement from social networking by using electronic word of mount (eWOM) has become critical for marketing strategy today (Chu & Kim, 2011). The social media channels that are used frequently update associate with customer engagement particularly to create customer experience, brand image, and some exclusive message (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Moreover, consumers who engage with brands tend to offer WOM for the brand while other who engage with socially self-expressive are likely to accept wrong doing by brand (Leventhal, Wallace, Buil, & de Chernatony, 2014). From this point, company can apply variety of channels both mass media as traditional and digital media as social media community to create relationship and engagement with consumers. Consumer involvement, participation and self-expressive brand have different effects on consumer brand engagement and brand loyalty (Leckie, Nyadzayo, & Johnson, 2016). This is the important reason of company to extend their communication program with their consumer and customer effectively to gain higher engagement. Furthermore, the impact of different social network advertising has a significant impact on various engagement metrics of the customer participation (Gavilanes, Flatten, & Brettel, 2018). Consumer engagement from customer relation via multi-channel of communication result in creation of mutual relationship more than business transaction of the marketing activities (Pilgrimienè, Dovalienè, & Virvilaitè, 2015). However, consumer today have used not only computer to interact with the social community, but also their mobile devices. The growing popularity of mobile technologies and

application can support company customer positive engagement even consumer interaction are not found to be positive related (Tarute, Nikou, & Gatautis, 2017). To understand consumer behavior on how they perceive and react on company's social media will help company success in situational online engagement between consumer and company (Reitz, 2012). On the contrary, customer disengagement on social tools such as application has a long term effect on purchase behavior (Viswanathan et al., 2017). The growing landscape of growing online consumer and company interaction has turn the content from traditional to digital content marketing that is necessary for company to foster consumers' brand engagement through digital communication tools (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). The social media can support consumer participation in term of prompt interactive communication with company brand. Social media increase opportunities for company to have active communication and attractive prompt update online information with consumers. The contribution can be determined in term of customer loyalty. Since to create customer loyalty companies should concentrate on creating social media experience and engagement to their customers (Kaur, Paruthi, Islam, & Hollebeek, 2020).

### **Customer Loyalty**

A holistic multi-dimensional measure of consumer engagement to particular brand can explain loyalty intentions that is useful to company for marketing management (A. Dwivedi, 2015). Currently, most company attempt to create customer brand loyalty for sustainable operation. Consumer brand loyalty can be derived from consumers' commitment to the community and affect by consumer engagement in the community of particular brand (Raies, Mühlbacher, & Gavard-Perret, 2015). Moreover, the rise of digital technology supports marketers in communication with their consumer and

customer effectively. Not only traditional media, but also digital media such as social media are widely used to create customer loyalty considered from repurchase and electronic word of mouth. There is a moderating effect of customer engagement behavior derived from social media leverage loyalty to the company brand (Greve, 2014). In addition, brand loyalty in some industry such as mass-market consumers may derived from positive attitudes towards brand from social media communities (Coelho, Rita, & Santos, 2018). Moreover, the moderating effect on the relationship between perceived values and brand loyalty is higher when consider higher luxury tier (Chung & Kim, 2019). The automobile products are considered high involvement from their prices and level of product positioning. Then, it is important for automotive company to used social media community characteristics to support their marketing activities in term of support community members concerning to loyalty creation. Brand community characteristics influence on brand community members attitude toward brand and subsequently has an impact on brand loyalty (Lin, Wang, Chang, & Lin, 2019). Some study found that the perception of consumer to brand will strongly result in customers' brand loyalty and purchase intention (Foroudi, Jin, Gupta, Foroudi, & Kitchen, 2018). Therefore, company should put their effort on perceive value of their target audiences which finally has an impact on engagement, loyalty and purchase intention. Currently, marketers create brand advocacy not only from traditional word of mouth in person, but engaging customers loyalty via online media (Eelen et al., 2017). The information from social media performs as prompt response and information sharing between company and customers. On the contrary, traditional media such as call center, leaflet, brochure will ensure traditional customer to have loyalty to company. Therefore, the bridging information from social medias were found significantly relate to commitment for brand

community and can be applied for developing customer loyalty strategies (Cheng, Wu, & Chen, 2018), while the information from traditional media will support customers who participate face to face at the customer touch points. The cognitive aspects of brand relationships are the major supporter of behavioral intentions to purchase by the customers (Giovanis & Athanasopoulou, 2018). The marketing application to achieve action of customer loyalty can be considered from repurchasing (Vera & Trujillo, 2017). In addition, the customer behaviors of both word of mouth and electronic word of mouth are also widely used today. From the above literature, this study posited the following hypotheses:

H<sub>4</sub>: There is a significant effect of customer experience on customer brand engagement.

H<sub>5</sub>: There is a significant effect of customer experience on customer loyalty.

H<sub>6</sub>: There is a significant effect of customer brand engagement on customer loyalty.

## Research Design

The population of this study is current owners of automobile products. Furthermore, the target population was narrow down the scope of study to the medium segment Japanese automobile were selected to study. This segment has presents high proportion in the market. Moreover, this segment has the potential to growth from the consumer who already own the eco car and small car segment.

## Data Collection and Sample

The population is owners of automobile from the two brands, then, probability sampling technique was applied with the multi-stages in selecting subjects. First, the data was determined from the proportion of demographics determination in term of gender and occupation. Then, the target population were randomly selected from the cooperation with the

companies. The questionnaires were instrument used for data collection with total number of subjects are 580.

**Research Instrument and Variables Measurement**

The framework for this study was constructed base upon a reviewing of the literature concerning the

following variables: 1) IMC Touchpoint; 2) Customer Experience; 3) Customer Brand Engagement; and 4) Customer Loyalty. The instrument used for data collection was developed from literature review and adapt appropriately to fit customer in the Thai market. Consequently, its validity was proved through Item objective congruence, and was tested for its reliability.

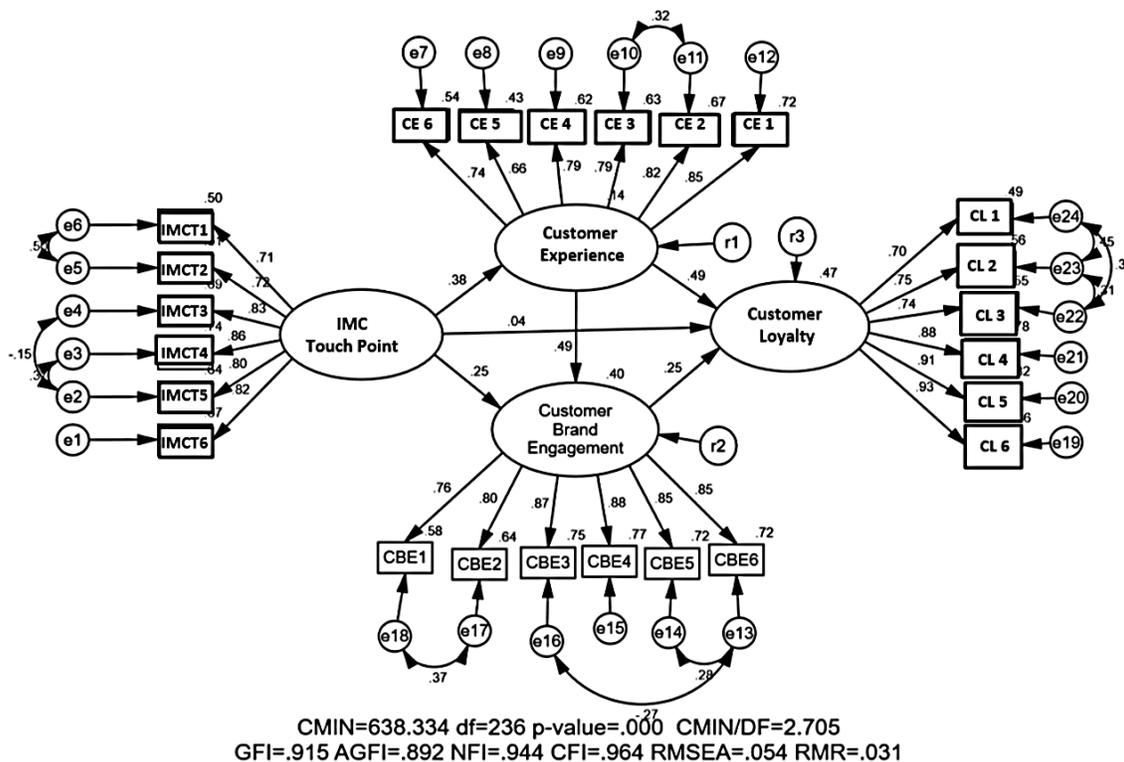


Figure 1 Adjusted Statistical Model

**Measurement**

Measurement models for IMC Touchpoint, Customer Experience, Customer Brand Engagement and Customer Loyalty were tested in the process of Following this, the composite measures were tested. First, IMC Touchpoint was measure by using six items. The subsequent mean score was 3.24 and the conducted to evaluate internal consistency ( $\alpha=0.915$ ).

structural equation modeling. There are 24 items applied for measuring the relationship between each variable. The instrument uses a 5-point scale ranging from 1 to 5 and summarizes the relationship of the variables shown in the model.

Standard Deviation was 1.106. A Cronbach’s alpha test was

Customer Experience was measured by using six items and the mean score was 4.19 while the Standard Deviation was .707. Then, Cronbach’s alpha test was conducted to evaluate internal consistency ( $\alpha=0.902$ ). Second, Customer Brand Engagement was by measured using six items and the mean score was 4.02 while the Standard Deviation was .731. Cronbach’s alpha test was conducted to evaluate internal consistency ( $\alpha=0.934$ ). Third, Customer Loyalty was measured by using six items. The mean score was 4.18 and the Standard Deviation was .718. Finally,

Cronbach’s alpha test was conducted to evaluate internal consistency ( $\alpha=0.934$ ).

**Reliability testing**

According to the reliability results, this study applied the Cronbach’s alpha to overall items, specifically to investigate the variables. The results documented in Table 2 indicate Cronbach’s alpha was between 0.902 and 0.934, confirming that they had reliability.

Table 1 Reliability Statistics

Variable	Cronbach’s Alpha
Measurement models for Digital Post	0.915
Purchase Brand Touchpoint	0.902
Relationship Quality, Customer Brand	0.934
Engagement and Repurchase Intention	0.934

**Multicollinearity Testing**

To ensure that the model will complete the requirements of the structural equation modeling, which is based on regression analysis, the multicollinearity between independent variables has to be tested. The tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) are measurements for testing. The tolerance should be more than 0.1 while VIF should be less than 10 ( $VIF = 1 / \text{tolerance}$ ). Results indicated that all tested variables have tolerance and VIF within the appropriate ranges and consequently no multicollinearity was found.

**Construct Validity**

To ensure the instrument was completed the construct validity and discriminant validity were tested. The construct validity was measured by the value of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and the factor loading should be greater than 0.6. The average variance extracted (AVE) of all variables was above .5. Moreover, the discriminant validity was tested by examining the correlation between construct and the observed variables which should be less than 0.85. Results for AVE are presented in the following tables.

Table 2 Assessing the model fit indicators

Chi-square/Degree of freedom (CMIN/df)	2.705
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	.915
Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)	.892

The Root Means Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	.054
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	.944
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	.964

Table 3 Hypothesis Testing

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	p-value
Customer Experience	<---	IMC Touchpoint	0.38	0.028	8.07	***
Customer Brand Engagement	<---	IMC Touchpoint	0.25	0.029	5.92	***
Customer Loyalty	<---	IMC Touchpoint	0.04	0.030	1.074	.283
Customer Brand Engagement	<---	Customer Experience	0.49	0.054	10.65	***
Customer Loyalty	<---	Customer Experience	0.49	0.062	9.926	
Customer Loyalty	<---	Customer Brand Engagement	0.25	0.051	5.43	***

\*\*\* p-value < .001

### Findings

The adjusted statistic model results reveal the following: IMC Touchpoint has a significant effect on Customer Experience ( $\beta=.38$  with p-value < .001); IMC Touchpoint has a significant effect on Customer Brand Engagement ( $\beta=.25$  with p-value < .001). Then, the first and second hypotheses are accepted. However, IMC Touchpoint has no a significant impact on Customer Loyalty ( $\beta=.04$  with p-value = .283).

This indicates that the third hypothesis is rejected. While the Customer Experience has a significant effect on Customer Brand Engagement ( $\beta=.49$  with p-value < .001) and on Customer Loyalty ( $\beta=.49$  with p-value < .001). Therefore, the forth and fifth hypotheses are accepted. Finally, Customer Brand Engagement has a significant effect on Customer Loyalty ( $\beta=.25$  with p-value < .001). Therefore, the sixth hypothesis is accepted.

Table 4 Standardized direct and indirect effect

	Direct Effect			Indirect Effect			Total Effect		
	CE	CBE	CL	CE	CBE	CL	CE	CBE	CL
IMCT	.378	.245	.042	.187	.293		.378	.432	.335
CE		.494	.489			.124		.494	.613
CBE			.251						.251

According to Table 5, the indirect effect of Customer Loyalty come from Customer Experience with  $\beta=.124$  and from IMC Touchpoint .293. It indicates that IMC Touchpoint has an impact on Customer Loyalty through Customer Experience and Customer Brand Engagement.

## Discussion

### Implications for Practice

The empirical result of this study indicates the effect of IMC Touchpoint has a direct effect on Customer Experience and Customer Brand Engagement. The IMC includes direct mail, leaflet, call center, customer relation management, online brand community, online car club and email. The combination between traditional and digital media has made positive experience. This can support former study concerning to digital engagement and firms' promotional effort such as email marketing to create customer positive experience (Wang, 2020). The findings of this study extend from email to the impact of social network on creation of customer experiences and engagements. The customers have trusted and believed the target brand and express positive feeling in the relationship with the company. This positive experience encourages customers to maintain long term relationship with company brand. In addition, the customers also engage in high quality of post purchase services derived from the brand. IMC Touchpoint also creates customer engagement determined in term of customer positive feeling of post purchase services from the company. Customers would like to keep good relationship continuously and trust with company brand. Moreover, the IMC also creates customer engagement determined in term of favorable experience of post purchase services from the brand. The customer experiences are higher than their expectation. Consequently, both the Customer Experience and Customer Brand Engagement have a direct effect on Customer Loyalty considered from repurchase intention and word of mouth behaviors. The repurchase is considered from customer expectation to the company products as first choice for next purchase. This finding supports the former research that explained the role of brand community, consumer brand engagement, and brand loyalty in

virtual brand communities (Kaur et al., 2020). The company can consider IMC as major tool for having customer to be continuously regular customer for their products. Furthermore, the customers can support company in term of positive recommend the company brand to other consumer that will become customers in the future. In term of academic contribution, the knowledge in IMC which include some digital communication technology was considered in relation with other marketing factors. It is crucial for the academic area from the transformation of former marketing tools to new coming digital communication tools that must be continuously investigated.

### Limitations and Future Research

This study focuses on the result of customers' own company product, other researchers should extend the result to buying behaviors. Moreover, the data concentrates on specific sub-brand only. Then, other studies may focus on the moving from one sub-brand to others determined in term of product positioning and other factors that may change customer decision making such as income, age, marital status and utilization necessary.

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