

IMC CUSTOMER-BASED PERCEPTION: STRATEGIC ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES ON POST-PURCHASE CUSTOMER BEHAVIOUR

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ABSTRACT

Last decades Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) have been mainly analysed from a managerial perspective, overlooking the customer opinion. Thus, this research studies IMC customer-based perception, its strategic antecedents and consequences on post-purchase customer behaviour (satisfaction, word-of-mouth recommendations, and repurchase intention), from a multi-country perspective. The structural equation modelling and multi-group analysis are based on the customers' survey data in Belarus and Spain. The results suggest that technology orientation positively affects IMC, and, customer orientation does not. IMC positively affects customer satisfaction, which in turn positively impacts on WOM and repurchase intention. WOM does not influence on repurchase intention. IMC directly affects WOM and repurchase intention in Spain and does not in Belarus, which is the significant country difference.

Keywords:

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC), customer-based perception, post-purchase customer behaviour.

1. Introduction

Over the past decades enhanced by new technologies and the growth of competition in the marketplace, the concept of IMC evolved from a simple instrument for tactical coordination of promotional tools to a complex strategic process (Mihart, 2012). And, it is still considered as a topic of research priority (Kumar *et al.*, 2016).

Under the conditions of global competition and deep uncertainty, the *dynamic capabilities theory* emphasises the need for sensing and recognising market and technology changes in business environments and using this knowledge as a capability for companies' asset transformation towards sustainable competitive advantage (Teece, 2007, 2014). Being customer oriented as a part of company's strategy transfers IMC into a dynamic marketing capability. And, IMC together with a good strategy can bring a competitive advantage to the company (Morgan *et al.*, 2009; Mulhern, 2009; Teece, 2014). The detailed information about customer needs, motivation, attitude is very relevant for companies' survival and development in a fast and competitive economic system (Kliatchko and Schultz, 2014). The evidence of new technologies and social networks bring an opportunity for making marketing communications interactive and the possibility to collect a large amount of customer information (Mulhern, 2009). IMC practices of interactive dialogue with prospects and understanding of customer needs give company additional opportunities to get information and to improve goods and services. Receiving a consistent message from different channels positively impacts on customer satisfaction, and, further on customer performance (Danaher and Rossiter, 2011; Low, 2000).

Being customer-centric (Kliatchko, 2008), IMC concept highlights the need for understanding its perception from the customer point of view (Peltier *et al.*, 2003). However, previous research was mainly focused on the managers' opinion, overlooking customer perspective, which creates the need for future studies in this direction (Peltier *et al.*, 2003; Šerić *et al.*, 2014).

New technologies and new practices in marketing have a big effect, not only on customer perception of marketing communications but also on consumer behaviour. They influences from how consumers communicate and learn about products and offerings in multichannel marketing and how they shop and buy, to their evaluation and post-purchase behaviour (Darley *et al.*, 2010; Mugge *et al.*, 2010; Prendergast *et al.*, 2010). As previous research on consumer behaviour has focused primarily on buying behaviour, less is understood about the consumer-product relationship during ownership, even though the post-purchase evaluation plays a significant role in customer retention (Mihart, 2012; Mugge *et al.*, 2010; Prendergast *et al.*, 2010). Thus, the changes in the environment in which companies communicate with their customers create the necessity to study interactions between customer-based IMC perception and consumer behaviour at all stages of the decision-making process and post-purchase behaviour (Mihart, 2012; Payne and Flow, 2005; Peltier *et al.*, 2013). It also highlights the need to study the relationships between the elements of the post-purchase behaviour (satisfaction, word-of-mouth (WOM) recommendations and repurchase intention) (Mihart, 2012; Peltier *et al.*, 2013).

However, as institutional theory states (Scott 1987, 2008), uncertainty has a significant influence on companies' market behaviour, which varies depending on the environmental conditions, such as the level of rivalry or the type of economy. It means that companies should build their marketing communications with stakeholders in a different way depending on external factors, what in turn can affect customer perception of IMC (Kim *et al.*, 2004). Additionally, *the Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory* suggests that scientific research on management and marketing should be undertaken with cross-cultural perspective, because cultural dimensions may influence both managerial decisions and customer behaviour. Thus, the further advancement of the academic disciplines and generalisation of the results requires that the validity of the theories and models be examined in cross-cultural settings, (Hofstede, 1993; Steenkamp, 2001). That is why we conduct our research in two different countries (Spain and Belarus).

Based on the above mentioned, the principal objective of this research is studying the main strategic antecedents of the customer based IMC and the key consequences on post-purchase behaviour in a multi-country context. We want to answer the following research questions: 1. What are the effects of a strategic orientation on customer-based IMC? 2. What are the consequences of the customer based IMC on post-purchase behaviour? 3. What are the relationships between the different elements of post-purchase customer behaviour (satisfaction, WOM recommendations and repurchase intention)? 4. If there are any country differences in the theoretical model?

From a theoretical perspective, this study adds value to the understanding of the IMC concept, its strategic antecedents, and its consequences from a customer point of view, and it also contributes to the consumer behaviour theory research (Darley *et al.*, 2010; Voss *et al.*, 2010). Also, the analyses of customer satisfaction, WOM recommendations and repurchase intention give a better understanding of the relationships between the different elements of post-purchase behaviour (Hellier *et al.*, 2003; Mittal and Kamakura, 2001). Furthermore, the multi-country approach is a significant contribution to generalising results under the requirements of a cross-cultural marketing and management study (Hofstede, 1993; Steenkamp, 2001).

From a managerial point of view, the study of IMC strategic antecedents can help managers to take better decisions and improve company's marketing communications strategies to achieve competitive advantages (Mihart, 2012). Moreover, understanding the relationships between IMC and post-purchase customer behaviour can help to know customers better and enable the development of a comprehensive theory of customer retention (Kumar and Venkatesan, 2005). As a result, it can be applied by managers to positively influence customer performance (Darley *et al.*, 2010).

Following the research objectives, the paper starts with a brief literature review of main IMC customer-based antecedents and consequences and a description of the main elements of customer post-purchase behaviour. Then, the process of data collection and analysis is presented. After, the main results are reported. The article finalises with a discussion, conclusions, and some recommendations for the future research.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. IMC as a dynamic marketing capability

During past decades IMC concept has been evaluated from a simple instrument of tactical coordination of promotional tools to a complex strategic business process (Muñoz-Leiva *et al.*, 2015; Schultz and Schultz, 1998). Nowadays it is well accepted by marketing scholars that the process of cross-functional integration of marketing communications, together with a good strategy, can bring the company a competitive advantage in the market (Morgan *et al.*, 2009; Teece, 2014; Vorhies and Morgan, 2005). In a fast-moving business environment, open to global competition and with deep uncertainty, IMC can be considered as a dynamic marketing capability (Morgan *et al.*, 2009; Teece, 2007). Dynamic capabilities are 'strategic', and distinct from ordinary capabilities, which are mostly related to performing current activities effectively (Teece, 2014). Three clusters of activities represent the strategic orientation of dynamic capabilities: (1) sensing (identification and assessment of an opportunity); (2) seizing (mobilization of resources to address an opportunity and to capture value from doing so); and (3) transforming (continued renewal) (Teece, 2007). Therefore, IMC enables companies to reflect the sensing of future changes in technologies and customer preferences by combining and transforming the available assets and knowledge in new and different ways (Teece, 2007, 2012; Vorhies *et al.*, 2009). Moreover, it may positively influence customer performance (Reid, 2005; Reinold and Tropp, 2012).

2.2. Consumer behaviour theory

There are three main perspectives in consumer behaviour studies: decision-making, experiential and behavioural (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Decision-making perspective measures steps in the decision-making process through which target markets move; experiential perspective measures customer's affective response to company's activities, and behavioural perspective measures the characteristics of the environment which can influence the target market (Mowen, 1988). Being interested in customer evaluation of company-transferred communications, we base our research on an experiential perspective, which measures post-purchase affective states, such as satisfaction, WOM recommendations, and repurchase intention.

3. Literature review and hypothesis

3.1. Strategic antecedents of IMC customer-based perception

One of the objectives of the IMC concept is to search for the most appropriate and efficient combination of channels through which persuasive programs can be used to build communications with customers and other stakeholders (Kliatchko, 2008). Customer orientation, as a part of market orientation, provides firms with up-to-date customer information which can be used to improve communications (Narver and Slater, 1990). Also, market-oriented firms constantly collect relevant market information, share the information with other departments and other decision makers throughout the organisation,

and quickly respond to the changes in the market (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990). It is also supported by the dynamic capabilities theory, which states that sensing of market changes and being customer oriented are the parts of company strategy which can transfer IMC into a competitive advantage (Teece 2007; 2014). From that, the following hypothesis is derived:

H1: Customer orientation has a positive influence on IMC customer-based perception.

The evidence of new technologies and social networks gave marketers new digital channels for communication with target customers. These channels bring an opportunity for making marketing communications interactive and give the possibility to collect a large amount of consumer information (Peltier *et al.*, 2003; Voss *et al.*, 2010). Considering that up-to-date information about customers and markets is critical for the implementation of IMC as a dynamic marketing capability, these changes have a great impact on marketing communications (Kitchen, 2016; Mulhern, 2009; Teece, 2007). Accordingly, we posit that:

H2: Technology orientation has a positive influence on IMC customer-based perception.

3.2. IMC and consumer behaviour

Vorhies *et al.* (2009) specified that marketing communications, as a dynamic marketing capability, as well as their integration, can be a significant driver of market effectiveness and competitive advantages. This suggestion is also supported by others authors who base their research on the dynamic capabilities theory (Morgan *et al.*, 2009; Peltier *et al.*, 2013; Reinold and Tropp, 2012). The impact of marketing communications integration has resulted in the customer receiving a consistent message from a variety of communication channels that positively effects on customer evaluation of company-transferred communications (Danaher and Rossiter, 2011; Low, 2000). Based on the literature review, we can highlight the following concepts concerned with customer post-purchase evaluation of company communications: (1) satisfaction (Ha and Perk, 2005; Hellier *et al.*, 2003; Oliver, 1980; Yi and La, 2004), (2) word-of-mouth (WOM) (Prendergas *et al.*, 2010) and (3) repurchase intention (Hellier *et al.*, 2003; Mihart, 2012; Šerić *et al.*, 2014).

3.3. Satisfaction

Originally, satisfaction has been defined by Oliver (1980) as the contentment of customers on their prior purchasing experience with a product or service. In contemporary marketing, it is argued that customer satisfaction not only depends on the emotional component (such as happiness, surprise, and disappointment) but also includes a cognitive component (Ha and Perks, 2005; Oliver, 1993). A cognitive component refers to customer's evaluation of the information adequacy perceived from the complex of marketing communications in comparison to customer's expectations (Ha and Perks, 2005). In other words, if the information perceived from an advertising message is equal to their expectations, customers will perceive satisfaction on the post-purchase evaluation (Mihart, 2012). In this case, positive communication experience should improve customer satisfaction (Reid, 2005; Šerić *et al.*, 2014), thus:

H3: IMC customer-based perception has a positive influence on satisfaction.

3.4. WOM (word-of-mouth)

Initially, WOM was perceived as being even more reliable and trustworthy than firm-generated communications (Arndt, 1967). Nowadays, WOM can be communicated not only face-to-face, but consumers are also turning to the internet (Mulhern, 2009; Owen and Humphrey, 2009). As a result, the audience does not only receive but also creates content (Belch and Belch, 2014; Kliatchko, 2008). For marketers, WOM in the era of internet presents not only better opportunities for transferring messages using new channels, such as social networks, but also interactive communication with customers (Mulhern, 2009; Prendergast *et al.*, 2010). Transferring IMC practices towards digital media communications positively impacts on WOM company-customer communications (Mulhern, 2009; Owen and Humphrey, 2009). Thus, we hypothesise the following:

H4: IMC customer-based perception has a positive influence on WOM.

3.5. Repurchase intention

Since it is accepted in the literature that intention can predict behaviour (Chandon *et al.*, 2005), from a company point of view, customer retention (or repurchase) is an important part of customer performance analysis and behaviour research (Hellier *et al.*, 2003). Repurchase intention can be defined as the individual's judgment about buying a designated product/service again from the same company (returning buyers), considering his current situation, likely conditions and general assessment of previous communication and purchase experience (Hellier *et al.*, 2003; Mittal and Kamakura, 2001). That is why several studies consider the predictive validity of repurchase intention to analyse IMC impact on post-purchase behaviour from a customer point of view (Hellier *et al.*, 2003; Mittal and Kamakura, 2001). Based on the mentioned above, we propose that:

H5: IMC customer-based perception has a positive influence on repurchase intention.

3.6. Interactions between elements of post-purchase behaviour

Several studies mention that there are relationships between the different post-purchase behaviour elements (Mihart, 2012; Payne and Flow, 2005; Peltier *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, the concept of cumulative satisfaction recognises that customers rely on their entire experience of communication with the company when forming intentions and making repurchase decisions (Ha and Perks, 2005; Oliver, 1980). Thus, cumulative evaluations should better predict customers' intentions and behaviour, such as WOM recommendations behaviour (Spreng *et al.*, 1995) and repurchase intention (Voss *et al.*, 2010).

H6: Satisfaction has a positive influence on WOM.

H7: Satisfaction has a positive influence on repurchase intention.

Several studies have considered the relationship between WOM and customer behaviour (Prendergast *et al.*, 2010). Marketing researchers have shown that WOM may have an

impact on consumer decision-making process and behaviour (Ha and Perk, 2005; Prendergast *et al.*, 2010). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H8: WOM has a positive influence on repurchase intention.

3.7. *The country difference effect*

The business environment in the conditions of the change and competition is producing a degree of uncertainty that cannot be ignored by companies in the application of dynamic capabilities (Teece, 2014; Theodosiou *et al.*, 2012). *Institutional theory* supports the relationships between dynamic external factors and processes inside the organisations and specifies that company behaviour may vary depending on the institutional environment in which it operates (Scott, 2008). It means that businesses build their communications with stakeholders in a different way under the environmental factors influence, which in turn may affect customer perception in IMC. Additionally, *the cultural dimensions theory* specifies the need to consider differences between countries (Hofstede, 1993). It states that managers' personal perception and previous cultural and economic background influences a lot on the decisions and type of management they perform. From another part, customer's communications also depend a lot on the cultural and economic background of customers. As a result, due to cultural and economic differences, the relationships previously proposed in this research may vary depending on the context. Thus, we hypothesise the following:

H9: The type of country moderates the different relationships proposed in our theoretical model.

Based on the assessment mentioned above we built a theoretical model of IMC customer-based antecedents and consequences on post-purchase behaviour (Figure 1).

4. Data collection and analysis

4.1. *Context: Belarus vs. Spain*

To obtain preliminary insights into the moderating effect of the country on the different relationships in the model we have collected data from two countries, namely Belarus and Spain. The selection of the countries followed what could be referred to as a convenience sampling procedure, with the aim of collecting data from countries of different types of cultural and economic backgrounds (Hofstede, 1984, 1993; Laukkanen *et al.*, 2013). Although the use of only two data points (i.e. countries) limits the possibilities of theory testing, at the same time it can enable new insights to be generated and guide theory development (Cadogan, 2010).

Belarus represents a post-soviet transition economy with a low market orientation. Both cultural and economic development of the country was influenced by former Soviet Union central planning system in part of which Belarus was before 1990 (Kuzio, 2001; Svejnar, 2002). The fall of the Soviet Union had influence both on economic and cultural life. The process of liberalisation, openness to the new markets, appearance competition and a wider variety of goods and services influenced on the country's society, making it move forward

to the market system of relationships (Svejnar, 2002). However, for the transition economy is typical a lower level of market-orientation and rivalry in the market (Svejnar, 2002).

Spain represents a not-in-transition capitalist economy for which a high degree of competition, market orientation and up-to-date technologies is typical (Svejnar, 2002). Spain has a developed economy, which is quite stable during recent years. From the International Monetary Fund report, it is the fourteenth-largest economy by nominal GDP in the world, the fifth-largest economy in the European Union, and the fourth-largest economy in the Eurozone. Also, it is the twelfth largest exporter and the sixteenth-largest importer in the world (World Economic Outlook Database, October 2016). Apart, Spain has a good level of living, what is supported by the information from Eurostat (report 2016).

Different studies suggest that cultural differences exist between Belarus and Spain (Buil *et al.*, 2008; Hofstede, 1984; Ksenzova and Ksenzov, 2015; Kustin, 2006; Rees and Miazhevich, 2009). According to Hofstede's cultural framework (Hofstede, 1984), because of the more stable recent economic situation, Spain should have a lower power distance and uncertainty avoidance than Belarus. Also, Spain is a little more individualistic and masculine than Belarus, although the differences between these countries in the last dimensions are small (Naumov and Puffer, 2000).

4.2. Data collection

Data for the model measurement and hypotheses testing was collected from the customer's survey (382 responses in Belarus and 369 in Spain). The questionnaire for the survey was previously adapted and pretested in each country.

To make the sample in each country representative and to fix parameters, which may influence the results, we have selected the population of different age, gender, and education, both employment and not at the moment of conducting the survey. In order to reduce the influence of the industry, the questionnaire was performed in 3 industry types: services, production and retail. At the beginning of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to choose the brand from a proposed industry which they were more familiar with, or they had purchased during the last 12 months. From that, all the remaining questions in the questionnaire were related to the brand initially chosen. The industry was suggested to the respondents randomly. The results of the industry effect analysis showed no significant differences in any of the two countries selected for the analysis.

4.3. Measurement

In order to measure the main components of the model we used existing and well-accepted scales from the literature, some of them were adapted to conduct the customer survey (Appendix A, Table A.1). We also tested their face validity with a variation of the Zaichkowsky (1985) method based on a panel of experts. Each of the relevant constructs in the model was measured with a 5-point Likert scale.

Based on the data collected from the customers' survey, we tested the casual hypothesis in the model using covariance-based SEM (Structural Equation Modelling) analysis. First, the assessment of the reliability and validity of the measurement model was applied. Second, we made the assessment of the structural model and hypothesis testing. Then, multigroup analysis of samples from the two different countries (Belarus and Spain) was held.

4.4. Assessment of the measurement model

After the first measures validation step of an exploratory *analysis of reliability and dimensionality*, three items (CO4, CO5 and IMC3) were eliminated to improve the scale. All other items were adjusted to the required levels, and, a single one factor was extracted from each scale.

In order to assess *measurement reliability and validity*, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) containing all multi-item constructs in our framework was estimated with EQS 6.1 (Bentler, 1995), using the robust maximum likelihood method. Because of the standardised coefficients of less than 0.5 (Hildebrandt, 1987) and low contribution to the model three items (TO3, CS4 and RPI3) were eliminated. The re-specified measurement model provides a good fit to the data based on a number of fit statistics in Spain and Belarus.

Construct validity was tested by assessing the convergent validity and discriminant validity of the scale (Vila *et al.*, 2000). Results were satisfactory for both countries.

Discriminant validity was confirmed in two ways. First, none of the 95 percent confidence intervals of the individual elements of the latent factor correlation matrix contained a value of 1.0 (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). Second, the shared variance between pairs of constructs was always less than the corresponding AVE (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Based on the criteria mentioned above we concluded that the measures in the study provided sufficient evidence of reliability, and convergent and discriminant validity. Thus, the revised measurement model was retained as the study's final measurement model (notes of Table A.1, Appendix).

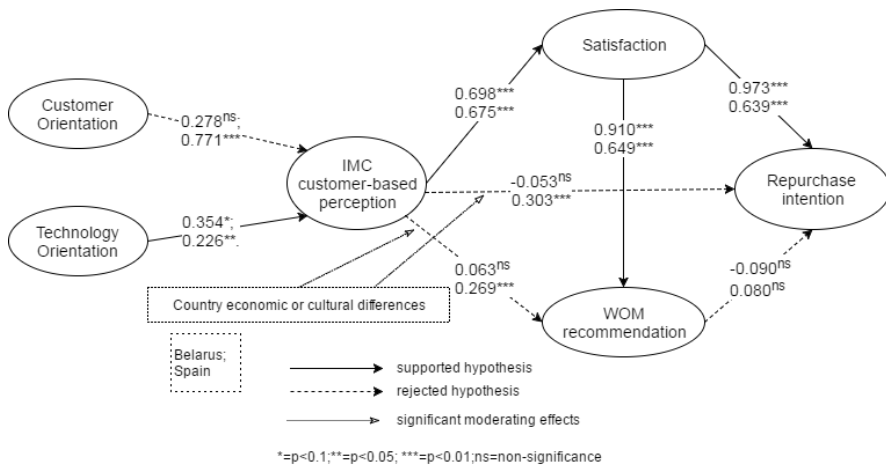
4.5. Structural model analysis

With the objective of testing the proposed hypotheses, we developed a structural equations model. The results are reported and depicted in Table 2 and Figure 1, respectively.

The results show that customer orientation has a positive influence on IMC perception in Spain, but not in Belarus. Thus, **H1** is rejected. However, **H2** is supported, as the positive impact of technology orientation on IMC is consistent in both Spain and Belarus with a significantly level 5% and 10% respectively. Regarding the effect of IMC on customer post-purchase behaviour, there is a positive effect of IMC on customer satisfaction in both countries, with a significantly high level (1%), so **H3** is supported. However, **H4** and **H5** are rejected, since a positive relationship was found between IMC and word-of-mouth and between IMC and repurchase intention in Spain, but not in Belarus.

Regarding the relationships among the different elements of post-purchase customer behaviour, there are strong positive influences of customer satisfaction on word-of-mouth recommendation and repurchase intention in the two countries, with a high level of significance (1%). So **H6** and **H7** are supported. However, there is not a significant positive effect of word-of-mouth on repurchase intention neither in Belarus not in Spain. Thus, **H8** is rejected.

FIGURE 1: Hypotheses Testing.



4.6. Multi-country analysis

A multigroup analysis between samples from two different countries (Belarus and Spain) was performed to check if there are any country's moderating effects. Once the validity and reliability of the scales were confirmed, we assure the *measurement invariance* of the measurement instrument using three steps analyses (Hair *et al.*, 2006). STEP 1: The **loose cross-validation** or **single group solution**, estimating the CFA in each one of the three samples, separately and checking the requirement of a good fit. STEP 2: The **equal form** or **factor structure** or **configurational invariance**, checking that the factorial structure (number of factors) is the same in the two samples. STEP 3: The **equal factor loadings** or **metric invariance**, checking the invariance of the factorial loadings. As our model is not distributed as a normal model, we use the Satorra-Bentler chi-squared ($S-B\chi^2$). To be able to compare the chi-squared of STEP 2 (*equal form*) and 3 (*equal factor loadings*), and to analyse if the fit of the new model is not significantly worse, we must make some corrections (Satorra and Bentler, 2001). For this, we these calculations done with SBDIFF software developed by Crawford and Henry. The results of measurement invariance test presented in Table 1 shows that there are no significant differences in the path relationships between Belarus and Spain. It means that the differences between the countries are not

related to the systematic errors produced by the way persons in different countries respond to certain items (Horn, 1991). So, we can move to STEP 4.

TABLE 1: Measurement invariance test.

<i>Model</i>	<i>S-Bχ^2</i>	<i>χ^2/\dagger</i>	<i>g.l</i>	<i>Dif. S-Bχ^2/\ddagger</i>	<i>Δg.l</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>	<i>SRMR\dagger</i>	<i>CFI</i>	<i>NNFI</i>
Single group solution (Belarus n=382; Spain n=369)										
<i>Belarus</i>	229.24	340.38	120				0.056	0.048	0.909	0.913
<i>Spain</i>	209.06	288.63	120				0.054	0.051	0.905	0.925
Measurement invariance (n=751)										
Equal form	438.95	629.05	240				0.052	0.050	0.912	0.929
Equal factor loadings	454.73	655.51	258	17.03	18	0.52	0.051	0.073	0.917	0.934

Notes: \dagger - Robust statistics; \ddagger - calculations done with SBDIFF software developed by Crawford and Henry.

To reveal which path estimates vary between the two groups of countries and which do not, we calculate the statistical differences path by path (Table 2).

TABLE 2: Structural model results and hypotheses testing for the multi-group country analysis.

H	Path	Multigroup Model\ddagger									
		Belarus				Spain				Country moderator effect	
		β		Robust t value	β		Robust t value	$\Delta \Delta S-B\chi^2 (\Delta g.l.=2)$	<i>p</i>		
H1	CO→IMC	0.278	ns	1.468	0.771	***	5.363	2.570	0.109	ns	R
H2	TO→IMC	0.354	*	1.792	0.226	**	2.102	0.311	0.577	ns	S
H3	IMC→CS	0.698	***	7.492	0.675	***	5.888	0.008	0.930	ns	S
H4	IMC→WOM	-0.053	ns	-0.631	0.303	***	2.995	4.971	0.026	**	R
H5	IMC→RPI	0.063	ns	0.583	0.269	***	2.781	3.049	0.081	*	R
H6	CS→WOM	0.910	***	10.534	0.649	***	6.852	2.123	0.145	ns	S
H7	CS→RPI	0.973	***	11.256	0.639	***	4.549	0.406	0.524	ns	S
H8	WOM→RPI	-0.090	ns	-0.126	0.080	ns	0.564	0.189	0.664	ns	R

Notes: *= $p<0.1$; **= $p<0.05$; ***= $p<0.01$; ns=non-significant. S=supported; R=rejected; β = Standardised path coefficients.

CO=Customer Orientation; TO=Technological Orientation; IMC=Integrated Marketing Communications; CS=Customer Satisfaction; WOM=Word-of-Mouth; RPI=Repurchase Intention.

The results of the multigroup country analysis for Belarus and Spain in Table 2 show significant differences in the relationships between IMC and WOM ($H4_{\text{Belarus}}$: ns and $H4_{\text{Spain}}$ 0.303, $p < 0.01$), and, between IMC and PRI ($H5_{\text{Belarus}}$: ns and $H5_{\text{Spain}}$: 0.583, $p < 0.01$).

5. Conclusions, limitations and future research

Providing a better multidisciplinary understanding of the IMC concept in a multi-country context this research contributes to academic research and managerial practice.

From the *theoretical perspective*, first, the study of firm's strategic orientation (customer and technology) as an antecedent of IMC customer-based perception adds value to the research of the IMC concept from the customer point of view. In contrast to earlier findings made using the company perspective (Morgan et al., 2009; Theodosio et al., 2012), here, from a customer perspective, no direct effect of customer orientation on IMC was found. It means that knowing customers better and, based on it, the personalization of communicational message does not influence on how customers perceive this message through multiple communicational channels and on overall IMC perception. Regarding technological orientation, as is expected, its influence on IMC is supported in the multi-country context.

Second, the current study of the relationships between IMC and the stages of customer post-purchase evaluation adds new knowledge to the theory of customer behaviour (Darley et al., 2010; Voss et al., 2010). Primarily, the results obtained from the two countries support previous findings of a positive effect of IMC on customer satisfaction (Ha and Perks, 2005). It confirms the proposition that sending the common message through all communicational channels helps customers to understand it better. As a result, it avoids the situation when customer expectations about the satisfaction of purchasing a product (or service) exceed the reality (Reid, 2005; Šerić et al., 2014). However, the hypotheses proposed about IMC influence on WOM and repurchase intention interestingly were supported only in the country with the higher level of marketing development of the two analysed (Spain). Moreover, the multi-country analysis showed that this difference is statistically significant, which means that economic and/or cultural differences between countries moderate the IMC-WOM relationship, as well as the relationship between IMC and repurchase intention. Therefore, the results confirm the suggestion that the integration of company's communication with customers can improve their intention to recommend company's goods and/or services and make purchases again (Mulhern, 2009; Owen and Humphrey, 2009). The discovered discrepancy in the results between Spain and Belarus can be explained because transition economies tend to have a lower level of competition in the market and less market-orientation (Svejnar, 2002). Therefore, these differences in the external environment influence on company's behaviour and its strategic orientation (Scott, 2008; Shinkle et al., 2013). Also, a high competitive environment pushes companies to search for new ways for building long-term customer relationships. Improving these relationships results in a better customers' assessment of IMC (Ha and Perks, 2005; Oliver, 1980). Satisfied customers tend to be more loyal to the company, which in turn improves

their perception of IMC and. As a result, it affects the repurchase intention (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999). However, in transition economies as Belarus, where the rivalry level is clearly lower, there is no environmental push on companies, no need for firms to implement additional communicational activities towards customers, and, as a result, no positive effect of IMC on repurchase intention is found (Svejnar 2002).

Third, the study enables the development of a comprehensive theory of customer post-purchase behaviour and the relationship between its elements (satisfaction, WOM, and repurchase intention). As expected, the results support the strong relationships between customer satisfaction and WOM, as well as, between customer satisfaction and repurchase intention, which is also confirmed in a multi-country context. But, contrary to our expectations, the direct effect of WOM on repurchase intention was not confirmed in this study (Ha and Perk, 2005; Prendergast et al., 2010). It might be explained by the configuration of the theoretical model suggested for the analysis together with the concept of cumulative satisfaction. It means that intention tends to be better predicted by cumulative assessment of all elements of customer post-purchase evaluation together (satisfaction, WOM, and repurchase intention) than its individual elements (Ha and Perks, 2005; Voss et al., 2010).

Finally, the multi-country perspective analysis contributes to IMC concept research by generalising the results and getting deeper in understanding the differences in the theoretical model between the countries (Hofstede, 1993).

From *a managerial point of view*, the study of IMC strategic antecedents suggests that applying up-to-date technologies and interactive dialogue with customers can help to improve customer perception of company's communication activities, which in turn may positively influence on post-purchase evaluation processes and repurchase intention. Additionally, the results discussed may help a company to get closer to understanding how customers evaluate IMC and, how positive influence on the behaviour can be created and managed (Darley et al., 2010). The detected positive relationships between IMC and satisfaction in both countries highlight the importance of IMC practical implementations. It means that companies can apply IMC to a positive influence on the customer purchase evaluation and to improve customer satisfaction with ownership of goods or services. Also, the research results suggest that satisfied consumers are very likely to have higher intention to recommend Brand positively and to repurchase it again. In this case, application of integration in communication with the customer and its positive influence on customer satisfaction can help companies to improve customer relationships, and, positively influence on customer retention (Kumar and Venkatesan, 2005). However, it is important to highlight that, based on the research results, WOM itself does not influence on repurchase intention. In building long-term relationships with customers, companies should put attention on the customer's cumulative assessment of all elements of customer post-purchase evaluation together (satisfaction, WOM, and repurchase intention) than its individual elements (Ha and Perks, 2005; Voss et al., 2010). Thus, the study of the relationships between the elements of customer post-purchase evaluation sheds light on the customer post-purchase behaviour and may help managers to understand customers better,

and, as a result, positively influence on customer performance (McDonald et al., 2001). Regarding the discovered differences in the IMC-WOM relationships, and between IMC and repurchase intention, in the multi-country context, this knowledge may be useful for the companies applying international strategies within the framework of understanding intercultural and economic development differences between countries (Hofstede, 1984, 1993; Streenkamp, 2001).

This study has several limitations, which create possibilities for *future research*. First, the number and the scope of controlled parameters in the respondent's profile can be increased by adding information about: customer's current financial situation (the level of income, the average buying ability, and price sensibility), or, individual characteristics (motives, value, lifestyle, and personality) (Darley et al., 2010). Furthermore, the likely circumstances influence on the customer decision making processes like expected switching cost can be taken into consideration (Hellier et al., 2003). Second, for future research the future research, it can be interesting to analyse customer point of view regarding products or services from different categories as they may influence the customer choice (Phau and Meng Poon, 2000). Goods and/or service attributes can be grouped based on the frequency of use, a period of use, the cost, level of differentiation, or product type (tangible, physical or information). In addition, the future research can continue to discover the differences in customer-based IMC perception and its influence on the post-purchase behaviour under the cultural and economic influence in the multi-country environment. In this case, such social influences as a culture, reference group and family can be further considered (Darley et al., 2010).

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Appendix A

TABLE A.1: **Items of the different measurement scales included in the model.**

<i>Items</i>	<i>Variables</i>	<i>Reference</i>
<p>Please indicate from 1 to 5 your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements related to the company's Brand chosen in the previous question (from 1 "Totally disagree" to 5 "Totally agree"):</p>		
<p>Customer orientation (customer-based) =CO (α; CR; AVE: Belarus 0.814; 0.890; 0.858, and, Spain 0.825; 0.750; 0.505)</p>		
	<p>CO1. (Brand) is strongly committed to your needs. CO2. (Brand) products/services create value for you. CO3. (Brand) is interested in what products/services you will need in the future. CO4. (Brand) satisfy your needs. CO5. (Brand) sends you surveys to assess the quality of their products and services. CO6. (Brand) supports you with after-sales service.</p>	<p>Adapted from Narver and Slater (1990)</p>
<p>Technology orientation (customer-based)=TO (α; CR; AVE: Belarus 0.806; 0.768; 0.525, and, Spain 0.824; 0.787; 0.552)</p>		
	<p>TO1. (Brand) new products are always at the state of the art of the technology. TO2. Relative to other brands, (Brand) new products are more ambitious. TO3. (Brand) is very proactive in the construction of new technical solutions to answer my needs. TO4. (Brand) is always the first one to use a new technology for its new product development.</p>	<p>Adapted from Gatignon and Xuereb (1997)</p>
<p>Integrated Marketing Communications (customer-based perception)= IMC (α; CR; AVE: Belarus 0.807; 0.795; 0.500, and, Spain 0.803; 0.798; 0.500)</p>		
<i>Consistency through the Communication Tools and Channels</i>	<p>IMC1. (Brand)'s intended message is consistently delivered through all communications channels (e.g., advertising, packaging, direct mail, banner and website)</p>	<p>Šerić, Gil-Saura and Ruiz-Molina (2014) (a scale based on Lee and Park 2007)</p>
<i>Visual consistency of the message</i>	<p>IMC2. (Brand) maintains consistency in all visual components of its communication (e.g., trademarks, logos, models and color)</p>	
<i>Linguistic Consistency of the message</i>	<p>IMC3. (Brand) maintains consistency in all linguistic components (e.g., slogans) of communication in all media.</p>	
<i>Brand image Consistency</i>	<p>IMC4. (Brand) has a consistent brand image.</p>	

Long-term Consistency	IMC5. (Brand) does not alter the brand image, even as its context changes, but maintains its consistency from the long-term perspective.	
Customer satisfaction = CS <i>(α; CR; AVE: Belarus 0.870; 0.848; 0.651; Spain 0.905; 0.896; 0.741)</i>		
	CS1. My decision to purchase product/service from (Brand) was a wise one. CS2. I feel good about my decision to purchase (Brand)'s product/service. CS3. I am pleased that I purchased product/service exactly from the (Brand). CS4. If someone asks me, I would positive response about the (Brand).	Hellier, Geursen, Carr and Rickard (2003)
Word-of-mouth = WOM <i>(α; CR; AVE: Belarus 0.810; 0.806; 0.581, and, Spain 0.902; 0.905; 0.760)</i>		
	WOM1. I say positive things about (Brand). WOM2. I recommend (Brand) to someone who seeks my advice. WOM3. I recommend (Brand) to my friends and relatives.	Bush, Martin and Bush (2004)
Repurchase intention =RPI <i>(α; CR; AVE: Belarus 0.817; 0.790; 0.653; Spain 0.886; 0.822; 0.698)</i>		
Repeat Purchase Intention	RPI1. I will purchase the (Brand) again.	Hellier, Geursen, Carr and Rickard (2003)
Repurchase Probability	RPI2. It is high probability that I will purchase exactly the (Brand).	
Repurchase Intention	RPI3. I intent to purchase more of the (Brand).	
<p>Notes: α - Cronbach's Alpha; CR - Composite Reliability; AVE - Average Variance Extracted.</p> <p>Robust goodness of fit index:</p> <p>Belarus: Satorra-Bentler χ^2 (120 degree of freedom, df) = 229.2350; $\chi^2/df=1.910$; NFI= 0.879; NNFI= 0.913; CFI=0.932; RMSEA=0.050.</p> <p>Spain: Satorra-Bentler χ^2 (120 degree of freedom, df) = 209.0553; $\chi^2/df=1.742$; NFI= 0.885; NNFI= 0.925; CFI=0.941; RMSEA=0.050.</p>		