

Challenges in Building a Marketing Communication Platform within the Pharmaceutical Industry in Sweden - A Case Study

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Abstract

This thesis aims to investigate the main challenges and how they are overcome, when pharmaceutical companies based in Sweden go about in creating a marketing communications platform. By conducting interviews, and making observations, with a pharmaceutical company in Sweden and a marketing consulting company, hired by the pharmaceutical company, we find that there are internal and external challenges in this task. External challenges are e.g. regulations concerning the marketing of drugs and few meeting opportunities with physicians and internal challenges are e.g. departments not working as a united force and inefficiencies associated with creating a marketing communications platform. Thus, we conclude that to help overcome these issues, pharmaceutical companies need to create a communication system, which is more integrated and used in synergy by all departments within the company. Furthermore, it is important that the pharmaceutical company exploits all the tools in the Integrated Marketing Communications framework in order to create effectiveness, which will help working around regulations. The results add valuable insight to the limited literature within the framework and propose practical implications to the industry as a whole when creating a marketing communications platform.

Keywords

Communication model, Integrated marketing communications, Marketing communication, Marketing communications platform, Pharmaceutical industry

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1 Introduction

Pharmaceuticals have brought astounding benefits for public health and economic capacity, by dramatically changing the game rules for our lifespans, the way we live, shortening hospital stays, and by reducing mortality. However, there has been a major game changer within the industry in the past couple of years, with patents expiring and competition from generic drugs, putting pressure on the companies to invent new drugs to compensate for the old blockbusters (Arlington, 2016).

In many ways, the pharmaceutical industry is just like any other industry. But what separates the pharmaceutical industry in Sweden from every other industry is that marketing towards end users, i.e. the patients, is forbidden (lakemedelsverket.se. 2017). So, how does a pharmaceutical company go about in marketing their drugs in a society where regulations are so tough and where the target audience of marketing is not the same as the end user?

In this thesis we investigate what challenges are associated with creating a marketing communications (marcomm) platform by conducting interviews with a pharmaceutical company and a marketing consulting company, and observing how they work when creating the platform. Furthermore, we look at how to improve the building of a marcomm platform within the integrated marketing communications (IMC) network. The results will give an insight on what the challenges are and how to effectively work when creating a marcomm platform.

1.1 Background

In the following section background regarding marketing communications and the communications platform will be put forth. Furthermore, general information concerning the pharmaceutical industry and marketing within the pharmaceutical industry will be presented.

1.1.1 Marketing Communications and the Communications Platform

Marcomm is the collective term for all the communication functions used in marketing a product (Duncan. 2002). It is one of the most crucial aspects of positioning and establishing a company position in a constantly evolving marketing environment and the term “*marketing communication*” covers every kind of communication between a company and buyer about a company's offerings. Good brand and marketing communications is based on an alignment around a principal and coherent “brand idea” as a platform for creating, engaging, and maintaining customer interest (Dahlén, Lange & Terry, 2010).

According to Dahlén, Lange & Terry (2010, p.3) marcomm “*is the planned, integrated and controlled interactive dialogues with key target audiences to help achieve mutually beneficial objectives*”. Today, more than ever, customers have access to all kinds of information, media is saturated, and there are sometimes dozens of options to choose from when making a purchase decision. Marcomm developed by a company intends to help guide customers in this jungle of options. Technology impact has completely changed the way we see, read, and process different messages, which naturally has altered the manner in which companies communicate their messages in order to engage customers. A compelling message is absolutely critical to successful brand communication (Dahlén, Lange, & Terry, 2010).

When developing a marketing communications plan, i.e. building the marcomm platform, the various communicative, and promotional elements need to be built into the platform in order to construct a cohesive plan. The elements chosen need to be in a logical sequence, built upon previous decisions and structure because this way, the coming work with the communicative strategies will make more sense. The platform reflects the careful considerations made when choosing the elements to be included in the communication strategy. The platform provides a checklist for the chosen activities, which helps build efficiency in the execution phase (Fill, 2009).

To achieve and sustain customer engagement, the platform chosen has to communicate the same message on all levels of the platform. There has to be coherency and consistency in order for consumers to recognize, understand, and not get confused by the messages being sent (Dahlén, Lange, & Terry, 2010).

In today's society, one could argue that communication is the easiest, fastest, and most important way of influencing a company's profitability and organizational stability. This practically means that on the upside there are no limits to what an organization that succeeds with its communicative tools can accomplish. However, there is a potential devastating downside to this as well, for the companies that fail in their communication (Rawet, Dahl, & Flick, 2002).

In a way, all strategic decisions made by a company, comes down to communicative decisions. With all the information available to customers through technological advancement and the rivalry between companies, communication is not something that companies can choose to ignore. Decisions that previously were technical are today communicative. For instance, how does it affect a company's image if they decide to let a third part produce their goods? (Rawet, Dahl, & Flick, 2002).

As mentioned earlier, technological development has created both positive and negative aspects (when done wrong) for communicative messaging for companies. Many different factors have to be thought of in order to ride on this new technological wave. There has to be some type of coherence between the company's “reality” and how this is explained, with communication. So,

it is of utter importance for companies to learn how to tackle this new era of technology. A far greater understanding and knowledge is needed and there is no way of excluding your company from the technological evolution. Competitors all around will try to find new ways of communicating and establishing grounds by building new business models and finding niches to stand out on the market (Rawet, Dahl, & Flick, 2002).

1.1.2 Integrated Marketing Communication - IMC

For many years, the belief among marketing agencies and clients was that in order to deliver messages to a particular audience, it was necessary to use specific tools of the communications mix. The marketing communication mix is the selection of marcomm functions used at a given time as part of a marketing program and when building the marcomm platform (Duncan, 2002). The belief was that each tool had specific characteristics and distinct communication abilities. Because of this, clients had to deal with a variety of different agencies to build a communications mix that would communicate with their different audiences. IMC emerged partly as a reaction to this structural inefficiency. There was a realization by clients that their needs in terms of communication could be achieved more efficiently and effectively than before (Fill, 2009).

Duncan (2002, p.8) describes IMC as a *“process for managing the customer relationships that drive brand value. It is a cross-functional process for creating and nourishing profitable relationships with customers and other stakeholders by strategically controlling or influencing all messages sent to these groups and encouraging data-driven, purposeful dialogue with them.”*

Cross-functional refers to the company's different departments and outside communication agencies that is in contact with the customer in any way, working together in the planning and tracking of brand relationships. Customers will be affected by more than just the marketing communication messages, thus a cross-functional approach integrates different departments' managers who are working with the same brand. This way, the planning and managing of all messages a company sends and receives from customers and other stakeholders can be integrated (Duncan, 2002).

According to Duncan (2002) strategically controlling or influencing all messages coincides with recognizing that all marketing efforts a company undertakes, communicates. This means that all messages need to be strategically controlled and have consistent meanings (Duncan, 2002).

1.2 Pharmaceutical Industry - Background

The pharmaceutical industry is responsible for the upbringing, evolution, production, and marketing of medications. Thus, its boundless importance not only as a global sector, but more importantly as a crucial key to life for countless of individuals is immense. Many of the top brand patents that were created in the 80's and 90's are bringing in their last pennies and pharmaceutical companies are now facing more difficult times. Competition from the generic drug market is on the rise and traditional marketing models are having a hard time working on their own in this new media and technology landscape. This means that, in order for companies to stay alive and sustain in this increasingly competitive landscape, new marketing platforms that are concurrent with today's market climate and regulations has to be built (Arlington, 2016).

The pharmaceutical industry in Sweden is vast and in 2015 investments in research and development reached 9 billion SEK. In the same year, pharmaceutical exports accounted for 6 percent of total exports from Sweden, 70 billion SEK (lif.se, 2017).

1.2.1 Marketing within the Pharmaceutical Industry

According to chapter 12, paragraph 1 in the Swedish law (Läkemedelslagen) marketing efforts made to the public, concerned with prescription drugs, is not allowed. Marketing should not in any way lead the consumer astray, follow what is considered morale for this type of marketing activities and promote a suitable and purposeful use of the product. Marketing of non-prescription drugs is however allowed but the law regulates such activities in many ways, e.g. by adding restrictions and making sure that all information needed is clear to the consumer. When it comes to marketing to prescribers, all advertisement has to be thoroughly detailed in order for the prescriber to understand the use and depth of use of said medicine (lakemedelsverket.se, 2017).

The restricted use of media and regulatory control, poses a major challenge for pharmaceutical companies to create marketing methods that can be used effectively and in accordance with the Swedish legal system. For instance, advertising prescription drugs is not allowed in conventional and established media channels like newspapers, radio & television and magazines. Instead marketers have to rely on public relations (PR), direct marketing, personal selling, sponsorships, and medical journals to mention a few, which makes it not only more costly in a sense but also susceptible to the possibly negative effect of gatekeepers/influencers. Regulatory bodies leave little room for navigation and for natural reasons, even less for mistakes. Everything that is being communicated in a wrongful manner has the potential to affect the health of a consumer, which makes pharmaceutical marketing a tenacious, important, and demanding task (Ahmed et al. 2014).

1.3 Problem Area

The development of an effective communication platform in pharmaceutical marketing is a difficult undertaking and, like in any other industry, the driving force in the industry is the use of marketing efforts (Duncan, 2002). However, regulations on how and whom to market to, and restrictions on media use will make it a lot more difficult for marketers to build a marcomm platform. Pharmaceutical product complexity, their distinctive nature, and possible effect will keep pharmaceutical marketing separated from general marketing (Kessel, 2011).

Different from many other industries, both the sector as a whole and the marketing of drugs are under constant government scrutiny. Coupled with the forbiddance on directing marketing efforts towards patients and the restricted media use, the challenges that pose pharmaceutical brands when building a marketing platform are more than a handful (Kessel, 2011).

All above stated facts are clear arguments/reasons for why it is interesting to look at, and further investigate what the challenges are and how marketing efforts and platforms are built within the pharmaceutical industry, which is why we have chosen to base our thesis on this subject.

1.4 Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this thesis is to provide knowledge about marcomm choices and tools used within the pharmaceutical industry in Sweden. Moreover, it aims to provide information on if and how different theories are used when implementing marcomm strategies for pharmaceutical companies. Marcomm strategies are crucial for any company and their success (Fill, 2009). The pharmaceutical industry is highly regulated and sees many challenges in marketing their different products (Raheem Ahmed et al., 2014). The complexity of the task when creating a marcomm platforms makes, as mentioned above, this area interesting to dig deeper into. The main research question of this thesis is therefore:

- What are the (main) challenges in building a marketing communication platform within the pharmaceutical industry?

Where the challenges refers to the current marcomm structure and how it is planned to change. To further develop an understanding of the challenges and the continuous work around the marcomm strategies, the sub research question is:

- How can a marcomm platform be improved within the IMC-framework?

1.5 Delimitations

In this study the communication choices and tools within the pharmaceutical industry in Sweden are explained. Due to high regulations within the field, this raises several challenges in the communication process (Raheem Ahmed et al., 2014). Therefore, this is the main area being investigated. In excess of this, we also look at how these challenges are tackled and how the marketing communication is improved within the pharmaceutical company.

The first limitation in this study is a geographical limitation. We do not focus on markets other than the Swedish market, mainly due to the fact that different countries have different laws regulating the pharmaceutical industry. Furthermore, the research is only focused on the communication process, the elements used in the communication process, and different factors - given by the companies this study is based on - which affect the communication process and decisions. Other general factors such as price, professional roles, certain campaigns/projects, and time of the year when the different communication processes take place are not included in the study. This is mainly because the general factors are factors that affect the process and choices within all industries; hence they are not specific to the pharmaceutical industry. Furthermore, the study is considering Swedish law, however, the Swedish legal system and the laws regulating the pharmaceutical industry is not the main focus of the study, but rather a factor contributing to the challenges in creating a marcomm platform in Sweden.

We collected data mainly by interviewing and observing one pharmaceutical company and one marketing consulting company. The qualitative data collection is therefore limited to a pharmaceutical company and a marketing consulting company both operating in Sweden. The marketing consulting company works with the type of question formulations that we studied. The study is also limited to certain departments within the pharmaceutical company such as marketing and sales, mainly due to the fact that the time restriction resulted in choosing the departments that were directly related to the study, thus all other departments' are left out of this thesis.

Focus is on two main theories/models: The Communication Model and the Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) Framework. The communication model was used to investigate the communication process, which is a common use of this model (Holm, 2002). The IMC Framework was used to investigate the different elements in the marketing communication process. Both the companies interviewed and observed used this framework in their marketing communication work. Additional articles and models within these two theories/models were also used to complement the communication model and the IMC Framework. The theories and models used were the most relevant in answering our research questions and when working with marketing communications platform-building within our chosen industry which is why we chose to limit the use of models to the above mentioned ones and no other models and theories.

The very narrow literature on the subject of pharmaceutical marketing is almost exclusively U.S.-centered. There is literature based in other geographical areas as well, though very limited and in many cases not applicable outside its specific geographic region. In the U.S. (and New Zealand) direct-to-consumer marketing is allowed, whereas in the rest of the world, it is strictly forbidden. Given the differences in regulations between geographical areas, a lot of the existing literature on the topic is not applicable to the Swedish market, hence limiting us from using it in this thesis (Baines, 2010).

1.6 Research Contribution

There are several theories and models connected to marketing communication and studies are constantly being carried out in different industrial areas. As mentioned above, existing research on the pharmaceutical industry are country specific thus making the results harder to apply to larger geographical areas (Raheem Ahmed et al. 2014), whereas studies made in the e.g. auto industry naturally applies to larger geographical areas. Therefore, this study aims to provide knowledge about how marketing communication works in the Swedish pharmaceutical industry. By establishing the challenges, how they are being tackled, and improved within the pharmaceutical industry, it will provide further in-depth knowledge for this industrial market. Due to the fact that the industry is highly regulated, the marcomm platform structure differs between countries, and therefore we will provide further knowledge of how marketing communications and marcomm platforms are developed within a Swedish market context.

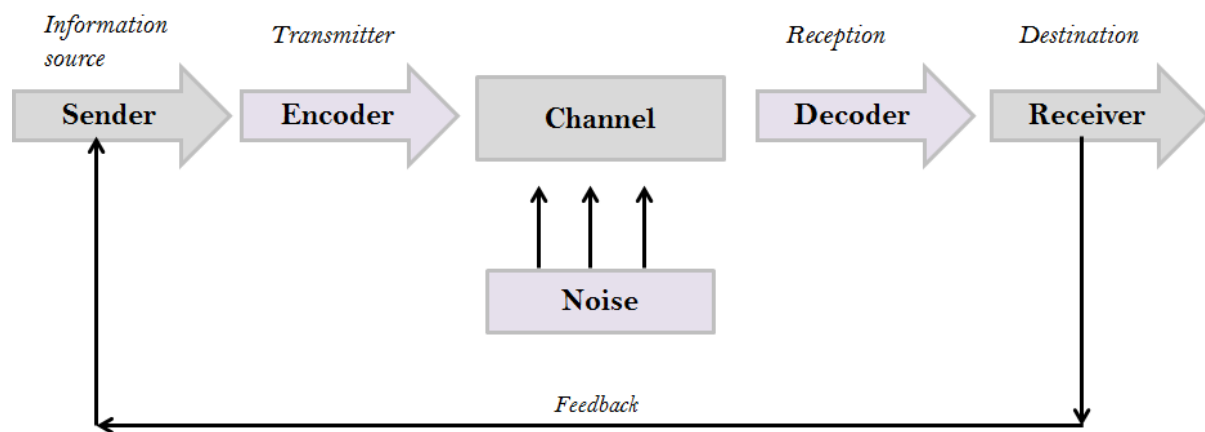
2 Theoretical Framework

In this section, essential theories and models used when creating a marcomm platform are presented. The theories and models presented are directly applicable to our research question and purpose as they explain and discuss the areas of interest in our research study. The first part (2.1) describes models and theories used, and the second part (2.2) will describe the implementation process in the pharmaceutical industry.

2.1 Communication Process - Shannon and Weaver Model

The communication model describes the communication process. It was originally developed by Shannon and Weaver in the 1940s and was first introduced to improve technical communication through telephone communication (Holm, 2002). Later, it was used by Weaver to explain effective communication in all communication processes and was described as the “mother of all models”. It has been cited and influential in describing communication processes. The Shannon-Weaver’s communication model is more information-centered and focuses on how a message is delivered to whom it is intended (Chandler & Munday, 2011).

Figure 2.1 Communication Model



SHANNON-WEAVER’S MODEL OF COMMUNICATION

Own work based on Holm (2002).

Figure 2.1 above presents the communication model. According to the model there are five elements to consider in the communication process: Information Source (sender), Transmitter (encoder), Noise Source (channel), Reception (decoder), and the Destination (receiver). The process of how communication flows in between these objectives starts with an information source (1) producing a message. It continues with the transmitter (2) using the message to produce signals over the channel (3), which transmits it to the reception (4). The reception

decodes the message and is received by the destination (5) to whom the message intended. During the communication process, a message is intended to reach the final destination. However, interference and disruption with the message travelling along the process is a possibility. Therefore, a sixth element is introduced; Noise, which is described as a dysfunctional factor and can disrupt the flow of communication and information between any of the five stages (Holm, 2002).

Shannon and Weaver discuss three levels of problem during the communication process; Technical, Semantic, and Effectiveness problem (Weaver, 1949). The technical problem refers to how the channel could cause problems and how accurately the message can be transmitted. The semantic problem is how the meaning of the message sent could be interpreted and received differently than what was intended. In other words, how correct is the meaning conveyed? Furthermore, the effectiveness problem looks at how effectively the message causes reaction and how the received meaning affects behavior (Weaver, 1949). These levels of problems refer to different type of noise that can interfere with the communication process, and needs to be adjusted for:

- *Environmental Noise*: Events of physical distractions that disrupt communication and are highly affected by where the communication takes place.
- *Physiological-Impairment Noise*: Physical conditions of the receiver can interfere with the message not being accurately and clearly received.
- *Semantic Noise*: When the sender and receiver have different interpretations of the communicated message, for example the meaning of certain words.
- *Syntactical Noise*: Grammatical mistakes can disrupt communication, in for example sentences that have an abrupt change in verb tense.
- *Organizational Noise*: The structure of the message can be a barrier in the communication process if the receiver does not clearly understand the message.
- *Cultural Noise*: The culture of the other party is not considered during the communication process.
- *Psychological Noise*: Attitudes that make communication difficult if it make either the sender or the receiver lose focus (Fill, 2009).

2.1.1 Communication Models in the Pharmaceutical Industry

The Shannon-Weaver's communication model has been used in explaining communication processes in marketing communications. This is true for the pharmaceutical industry as well (Smith, 1983). Below we discuss the communication model applied to the pharmaceutical industry.

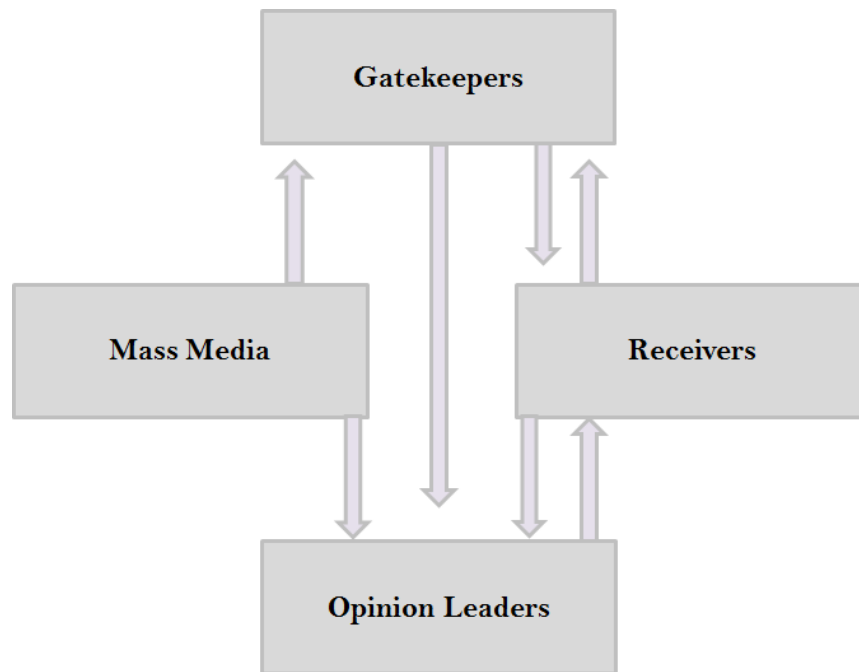
In the communication model, the sender and information source is a pharmaceutical company which encodes the message to the channel. The message in the channel can be personal, non-personal or a mix between. (Smith, 1983) The decoded message then reaches the end destination, the receiver, and according to Smith this can include patients, physicians and pharmacists. However, regulations can limit the pharmaceutical companies in the communication process, especially the recipient of the message and communication (Raheem Ahmed et al., 2014).

In the communication process, the pharmaceutical industry is affected by different factors. According to Smith et al. (2002), the most cited factors include:

- Type of drug/medicine
- Type of need
- Buyer preferences and behavior
- Regulations
- Globalization processes
- Competition
- Research development

Solomon (1999) introduces a so-called Updated Communication Model which, according to Solomon, is easier to implement on the pharmaceutical industry.

Figure 2.2 Updated Communication Model



UPDATED COMMUNICATION MODEL

Own work based on Solomon (1999).

Figure 2.2 is an updated communication model that consists of four elements; Gatekeepers, Receivers, Opinion Leaders, and Mass Media. The arrows explain how the communication flows in between the four elements. The gatekeepers, e.g. Ministry of Health and opinion leaders within the field, filter the information flow to the receivers, the patients. According to Solomon, the Updated Communication model enables researchers to easier analyze the pharmaceutical industry, as well as other industries (1999). Within the pharmaceutical industry, gatekeepers, and opinion leaders sometimes coincide (Singh, Sharma & Malviya, 2011).

2.2 Integrated Marketing Communication Framework

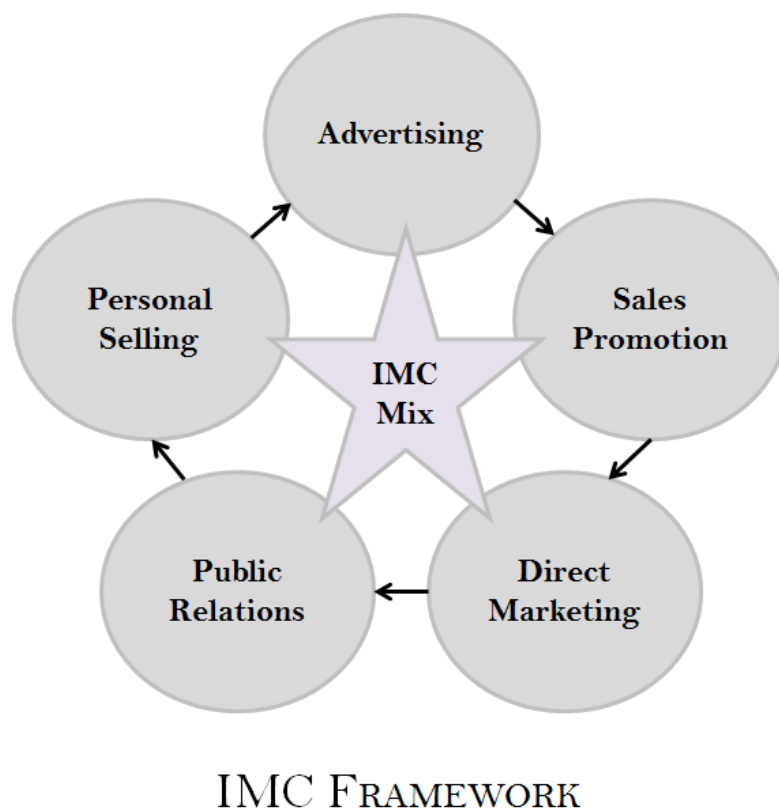
As mentioned earlier, the marketing communication mix is the selection of marcomm functions used at a given time as part of a marketing program and when building the marcomm platform (Duncan, 2002). The mix consists of five different tools a company can choose from when pursuing its advertising- and marketing objectives and is a part of the IMC-framework.

The IMC framework conveys a main idea of integrating all the promotional tools in order to build consistency. Message consistency is the major task in achieving a coherent voice and look

outwards. Integrated marcomm will more likely occur when organizations try to combine their different internal and external audiences. The communication mix chosen has to be internally consistent with the strategies and objectives that the organization has (Fill, 2009).

When building a marcomm platform, which integrates IMC, the marketing communications mix can be used. The marketing communications mix involves five main marketing communication tools: advertising, sales promotions, public relations, direct marketing, and personal selling. One tool to convey these different messages is the media (Fill, 2011).

Figure 2.3 IMC Framework



Own work based on Fill (2011).

Figure 2.3 above is the IMC Framework that consist of advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing, public relations, and personal selling.

Advertising: Richards et al. define advertising as “a paid non-personal communication from an identified sponsor, using mass media to persuade or influence an audience” (2002, p.2). In marcomm, marketers can use advertising as a way of communicating and advertising is a way to promote services or products (commercial) by communicating information about it. This form of communication is a non-personal form. The degree of control for those responsible for the design and delivery of the

messages is very high. It is however difficult to persuade target audience to behave in a specific manner. Not only is the effect on sales by advertising quite difficult to measure, but advertising messages might suffer from credibility issues. Audiences might be less likely to believe messages delivered through advertising compared to other ways of communication e.g. word-of-mouth messages. Positive aspects are flexibility in whom to communicate to and the number of people that can be reached through advertising (Fill, 2011).

Sales promotion: Is the process of boosting sales through marketing activities to persuade the target audience to buy a certain product or service. It consists of different methods, which can be tactically chosen how to add value to an offering. This is a non-personal form of communication but with a wider scope to target smaller customer audiences and with fewer costs compared to advertising. Credibility is not very high since the goals of a sales promotion are quite obvious. However, value is added to the customer and sales rise which is good not only for the company but for the overall economy (Fill, 2011).

Personal selling: Is an interpersonal communication tool with face-to-face interaction, made by representatives from the company/organization, in order to sell a product or service. Instant feedback is possible, added customer value has the potential to become high since focus lies on the customer alone. The costs associated with personal selling are very high. In contrast to sales promotion and advertising, a notable difference is that the degree of control will be lower in the personal selling situation. This is due to the fact that the salesperson can freely deliver any message they want, which might be other than the message intended. This naturally has the ability to halt processes intended by the company and end up costing the company money (Fill, 2011).

Direct marketing: Is according to Dahlén, Lange, & Terry (2010, p.281) “*accurately targeted direct and personalized communications attempting to create and sustain a relationship and ongoing dialogue*”. It is a new way of building more long-term relationships with customers, with the focus on a direct way of communicating with target audience via e.g. direct mail or telephone communication as opposed to using mass communication media channels. Direct marketing emerged in the 1990s. This is an effective way of freeing salespersons’ tasks and replacing it with more direct marketing efforts. With the conveying of more personalized messages, direct marketing seeks to build relationships based on how the customers respond to the personalized message. Direct marketing builds a kind of partnership with each customer by using customized and personal messages (Fill, 2011).

Public relations (PR): The Public Relations Society of America defines PR as “*a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics*.” (Prsa.org, 2017). PR is a way to build and maintain relationships with different stakeholders and to make sure the company’s reputation stays intact and the best possible. This is a non-personal way for companies to communicate not only with target audience but with various stakeholders.

There is a high level credibility associated with the conveying/communication of messages through PR-efforts, which is a reason for PR as a form of communication is being used in greater extension. PR companies manage publicity by publishing messages through third-media parties, e.g. radio appearances, and newspapers. Not only this, PR-companies work with event management, public affairs, sponsorship, and lobbying. Once a communication message is placed in the chosen media channel it is very difficult to control, however, the affirmation created by a third party has the chance to have a great impact, and influence on the target audience, compared to any of the above mentioned tools in the marketing communication mix (Fill, 2011).

The development of an effective communication mix is done in several stages. The target audience needs to be identified. Furthermore, communication objectives have to be determined and the message and delivery method created. When this is done, feedback needs to be collected. Today, as opposed to only a decade ago, companies work in a more synergistic manner where activities are chosen in synergy and new steps of marketing efforts are built on the previous (Fill, 2011).

2.2.1 IMC Framework in the Pharmaceutical Industry

The IMC Framework has been used extensively in marketing research within several industries. Below we discuss how the IMC Framework is used in the pharmaceutical industry.

In the pharmaceutical industry there are several tools within the IMC Framework that are used by pharmaceutical companies in order to communicate to their target audience, physicians. These tools include activities like: seminars, sponsorships, in/out- of clinic communication, publishing journals, and corporate marketing. The continuous interaction and communication with the target audience usually takes place on a one-to-one basis. The challenge for pharmaceutical marketers is to be effective in getting their message through during the very restricted amount of time they have with the physicians (Pavlov, 2003). The IMC framework requires an integration of the different elements included, which necessitates the creation of an appropriate mix of communication mix tools in order to be informative, persuasive and to have a competitive advantage on the market. This will help in relationship building and hopefully result in becoming the target audience's number one choice (Dogramatzis, 2002).

During a clinical visit the marketers bring tools, such as promotional materials and computers during Power Point presentations, in order to discuss the products. The performance depends on how well planned the meeting is and how the promotional material is used (Aamir & Zaman, 2011). As there is a shortage of time, pharmaceutical companies perform outside activities, not only one-on-one meetings with physicians and clinics (Agarwal et al., 2001). An approach that is used by many pharmaceutical companies is to communicate to important so-called key opinion leaders in the industry. In turn, the opinion leaders will have the power to decide whether or not

to communicate the message to the target audience. This means that it is important that this person has excellent communication skills. The opinion leader is usually a highly respected physician that is considered renowned within their specific domain. The opinion leaders could also be a group of physicians that have the opportunity to gain information and to interact with each other, meaning they have the opportunity to influence, not only each other, but others within the field as well. This shows the importance of the opinion leaders since they can act as gatekeepers meaning they have the ability to hinder medicines from reaching the target audience (Singh, Sharma & Malviya, 2011).

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Approach

Based on the limited amount of studies within this area and the theories chosen, the main research approach is therefore a qualitative method (Holme & Solvang, 1997). A qualitative approach can give a more in-depth investigation, correct formulations and give answers to further questions. Even though existing data is more towards being country specific, there is enough on the subject to complement and support our qualitative approach, and therefore we chose to use existing data in our qualitative approach. The approach is based on established theories and methods within marketing research. Our qualitative approach is divided into two main parts, an interview-based approach and an observational approach. The interview part is focused on the interviewee's experience, knowledge, and opinion (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). We used an interview guide but left room for restructuring, and therefore the interviews were semi-structured so that we could ask more questions when needed (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014).

3.1.1 Data Collection

The research is constructed from primary and secondary data and the researcher chooses one or both of these data collection approaches to analyze the problem area (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). According to Yin (2003), there are six sources of evidence and data collection: physical artifacts, documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations and participatory observations. Our research approach can be simplified through primary data: interviews and observations, and secondary data: homepages and website comparison.

Table 3.1 Research Approach

Research Approach	
Primary Data	Secondary Data
Interviews	Homepage and Website comparison
Observations	

Interviews: Interviews were conducted with a pharmaceutical company and with a marketing consulting company, which has been hired by the pharmaceutical company to help build and develop their marcomm platform, both located in Sweden. *Observation:* Participatory and systematic observation of both the pharmaceutical company and the marketing consulting company will be conducted (Holme & Solvang, 1997).

3.2 Primary Data

Data collection through inquiries and interviews can be used to fulfill the research purpose. When using inquiries, the interviewer does not have to be present and can therefore reach a larger geographical sample. However, the data can be interpreted incorrectly due to misunderstandings in how to interpret the questions. Therefore, the questions need to be clearly structured and formulated (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009).

In our in depth study we wanted to understand rather complex structures within the marcomm platform construction, specifically related to the pharmaceutical industry, and therefore decided that inquiries would not be appropriate (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). Based on our theories and complex questions we primarily used interviews and observations for our data collection to get deeper and more thorough answers to our questions.

3.2.1 Qualitative Methodology; Interviews

The structure of the interview process, semi-structured, included several meetings and interview sessions with open questions asked in different ways and during several interview sessions to ensure unguided questions and to increase reliability. The interviews were focused on gaining information on the discussion areas included in the appendix. The meetings were mainly face-to-face but included telephone interviews for clarification or to add information.

Table 3.2 Interviews

Interviews		
Pharmaceutical Company	Integrated Interviews with both Subjects	Marketing Consulting Company

The interviews were divided into three parts; Interviews with the pharmaceutical company; Interviews with the marketing consulting company; Integrated interviews with both the pharmaceutical company and the marketing consulting company. The main focus was to analyze the pharmaceutical company, since the research question revolves around the pharmaceutical industry and marcomm platforms within said industry. The interviews with the marketing consulting company contributed to the task of answering the research questions.

3.2.2 Qualitative Methodology; Observations

We used both a participatory and direct observational approach. Observational participation includes participating in different activities, which enables the researcher to gain understanding of the subject's interactions (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). In our research this was conducted through different type of workshops, day-to-day operations, and meetings related to the research area: marketing communication strategies. It contributed in gaining knowledge of which key objectives were important and how the two companies worked with these objectives. The observations were focused on gaining information on the discussion areas included in the appendix and helped in interpreting the answers from the interviews, to complement the answers from these answers, and to increase the data collection (Yin, 2003).

3.3 Secondary Data

By gathering several sources of information it contributes to a “triangulation” effect, which makes the study more reliable. By using more than two sources of data collection the study becomes more reliable. In our research we primarily used data from interviews and observations to analyze our problem area. In addition, we used secondary data to complete a more reliable study, i.e. a triangulation approach (Yin, 2003).

Other sources of data, used mainly for other purposes, such as reports issued by trade associations and governments, statistics, research reports, homepages and so forth are called secondary data because it is collected by someone else (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). Our secondary data consist mainly of websites and homepages of the leading pharmaceutical companies in Sweden.

3.3.1 Websites and Homepages

By limiting our primary data and in-depth research to one main pharmaceutical company and one marketing consulting company, we needed to use secondary data in order to get an overview of the industry. We researched other reports and websites containing information about the industry to increase the reliability of our data and to confirm our findings and analysis. Website and homepage data collection was necessary to further research current communication strategies and to analyze if the data collected in the interviews and observations matched with what the pharmaceutical company actually did. Here we also compared other pharmaceutical companies' websites and homepages to analyze if the communications were similar.

3.4 Execution

Data was collected between February and April 2017. It was collected through primary- and secondary data. The collection of secondary data was collected throughout the research study to complement the process of primary data collection (Yin, 2003). The collection of primary data includes information from both the pharmaceutical company and the marketing consulting company.

3.4.1 Pharmaceutical Company

We interviewed ten people in the marketing and sales, with continuous interviews with executive management, a total of 15 interviews with the pharmaceutical company. It included both people in executive management and in junior/senior positions, however with main focus on the executive management positions because they provided us with information and answers to questions that were most relevant in answering our research question. The observations were made during workshops and executive management meetings, a total of ten observations.

3.4.2 Marketing Consulting Company

During some of the interviews with the pharmaceutical company, the marketing consultants were present and in addition to this integrated interviews were conducted, totaling in four interviews. We also conducted six interviews with two of the marketing consultants alone. Observations of the marketing consulting company were held during the sessions where they worked on the pharmaceutical marketing communication strategy, five observations in total. The integrated observations were a total of four.

Table 3.3 Total Amount of Interviews and Observations

Total Amount of Interviews and Observations		
Subjects	Interviews	Observations
Pharmaceutical Company	15	10
Marketing Consulting Company	6	5
Integrated with both Companies	4	4
Total	25	19

The table 3.3 presents a gathered and concluded table of total interviews and observations. Total amount of interviews held with both companies is 25 and total observations on both companies are 19.

3.5 Sample Selection

We used three methods to collect data, each of which views the research area from a different perspective. This required different sampling strategies. Selection of sample for a qualitative study consists of three general approaches: Convenience, Judgment, and Theoretical sample. Convenience sample implicates to use the most accessible subjects. Judgment sample is the most common technique, which indicates that sample is chosen based on research and expert knowledge. Theoretical sample builds interpretive theories from emerging data and develops a new sample with further examination (Marshall, 1996).

The interview phase is based on a technique utilizing so-called rich sources, subjects that have and give the most relevant information, which defines the sample selection criteria (Burgess, 1982). Due to this, we mainly interviewed subjects with executive positions in the pharmaceutical company. Within the pharmaceutical company and the marketing consulting company the total population of key subjects/informants is small which concludes a convenience sample approach. Moreover, we also used a judgment approach, which means choosing the most productive sample, where the different respondents had different managerial and academic backgrounds. The approach chosen helped fulfill our research purpose with the advantage of being simplistic. Moreover, our aim was also to get a deeper understanding, with the help of in depth interviews, of the process behind the key objectives concerning marcomm strategy selection within the industry and we therefore created an interpretive framework. This led to our approach also being theoretical. The observations we made, both with the pharmaceutical company and the marketing consulting company, were important to our study due to that the participants could interact in their normal professional setting with a combined approach of convenience and judgment sample (Marshall, 1996).

3.6 Validity and Reliability

To ensure and increase validity and reliability we structured and analyzed our study based on three perspectives: Researcher, Subject Participation and Social Context & Data Collection.

3.6.1 Researcher

The researcher perspective is an analysis of our role during the research study. Before and during the research study we:

- Studied literature on interview and observational methods to structure a study guide, which increased the validity of our research by ensuring that we measured what we aimed to measure.
- Studied stranger to friend model as a reflection guide to be aware of our responses during interviews and observations, which increased both validity and reliability by measuring the research purpose.
- Declared our underlying assumptions and values to decrease bias, which increased validity by connecting our measures to reality.
- Had several meetings during the whole research period to ensure the credibility of the answers and to decrease the threat of losing our own perspective which increased reliability by ensuring that the results, of the interviews and observations, were consistent during the entire study period (Brink, 1993).

3.6.2 Subject Participation

By subject participation we refer to the subjects being interviewed and observed. The key issues with subject participants is that some information is being held and distorted and the subjects may answer in a positive manner to please the researcher and to make things seem better than they actually are. In our approach we wanted to prevent this from happening by not including company names and by interviewing and observing different subjects within the same departments. We also implemented four strategies to prevent distortion or any form of biasedness to increase validity and reliability (Brink, 1993). Firstly, we continuously built upon the relationships during the entire research period and conducted interviews and observations during several occasions. This helps prevent getting answers based on a certain temporary mood the subject may have (Brink, 1993). Secondly, the informants were aware of the purpose and data collection that would be used. Furthermore, we took detailed field-notes from the different meetings to analyze the variations in responses during the research period. Lastly, a confidentiality agreement between both companies and us was signed.

3.6.3 Social Context and Data Collection

During the collection of data, the subjects could answer differently depending on the environment or social context (Brink, 1993). Our research study aims to study a professional, work-based setting, which is where we collected data. However, we collected data through interviews, observations and homepages, which increased the reliability since data was collected from different sources and methods. Moreover, by collecting data through different methods we applied the triangulation approach, which increased the validity of our study (Yin 2003). The data collection process went on until we did not get any new information from the informants (Brink, 1993).

4 Results - Data Presentation

In the following section, we present empirical data collected from interviews and observations as well as secondary data collection. We interviewed and observed representatives from both the pharmaceutical and marketing company including both individual and combined interviews and observations. As the interviews and the observations were confidential, the different subjects and representatives will be referred to either as the pharmaceutical company or the marketing consulting company. Furthermore, the interviews and observations were made in Swedish and for the data presentation to be clear it will therefore be more explanatory, in terms of explaining what they said/answered, rather than a direct translation of what they said/answered. The secondary data collected consist mainly of website and homepage data collection. This section will start with the data collected from interviews followed by observations and end with data collected from websites and homepages within the Swedish pharmaceutical industry.

4.1 Primary Data Presentation: Interviews

4.1.1 Pharmaceutical Company

Our interview process started with investigating how they currently work with marcomm and what their key IMC focus areas are. During the interviews we also investigated which approaches have worked successfully in the past and why. Furthermore, we had more in depth interviews to understand what their challenges and problem areas are within the different communication approaches today and going forward.

Interview subjects state that their main target audience in their communication process is physicians even though the end user is the patient. They state that this is due to the level of regulations within the industry, when marketing different medicines, and therefore they communicate to physicians, who in turn recommend a certain medicine to the end user, the patient. In their communication process with the physicians they use different approaches within the IMC framework. Two of their current most important tools in promoting their medicines are personal selling and direct marketing. The subjects state that due to the fact that the physicians usually have a very busy schedule, they arrange lunch events. During these events they use Power Points to present information about the different medicines they offer, and for the most part they present new medicines. Furthermore, they communicate through email, telephone, and smaller meetings with individual clinics to build and strengthen relationships.

Another approach they also continuously work with is sales promotion. Within sales promotion they do a variety of activities to promote their overall company brand name. The company participates in relevant medical congresses, to collect information, to strengthen their position on

the market and to create new contacts. Furthermore, they engage in a variety of partnerships and sponsor different events with the aim to build upon their credibility in the industry. The subjects interviewed within sales and marketing state that sponsorships are not useful to their core focus, which is to promote different medicines, and therefore in the future, they will focus less on this tool.

The pharmaceutical company engages in partnerships with physicians in different research projects. Two other promotional tools that they have started with and will work with more in the future is educational meetings and the arrangement of events for physicians, where what is considered credible and famous physicians and medicals in the industry will be attending. The educational meetings will not include promotion of their medicines, but be more of an interactive process with physicians, providing information about different clinics and how specific clinics work. They wish to arrange events where famous and well-renowned medical speakers hold presentations and workshops to engage and spark an interest in the attending physicians. They believe that these events will give them an opportunity to get the physicians interested in meeting with them more often and at the same time add another dimension of credibility.

Due to laws regulating the industry, the company's marketing options are limited which is why they focus on physicians and key opinion leaders. Their approach today is more towards digitalization; this area is continuously changing and evolving, which naturally puts pressure on the company to be on the forefront of the digital evolution. They advertise by participating in podcasts and by providing medical information and facts about the drugs on their LinkedIn and homepage/website. The subjects want to improve their homepage and website so to make it more user friendly and more clear in the communication towards medical professionals.

Furthermore, they also send information about medicines and news regarding new discoveries to physicians via email. However, the pharmaceutical company states that they are not working with public relations today.

The pharmaceutical company express that they are successful in providing information about the drugs they offer in their personal selling and direct marketing approach. In their sales promotional approach they express that sponsorship does not work effectively and that an overall improvement needs to be done by focusing more on educational meetings and speaker events. Moreover, they are satisfied with the continuous work with digital advertising. In their communication process, they focus on different medical areas for which they use in-house specialists, which are specialists on a certain medical area.

During the interviews with the departments within the pharmaceutical company, different challenges in their communication process and the consequences of those challenges were put

forth. Table 4.1 below states the main challenges and the consequences when creating a marcomm process and platform.

Table 4.1 - Challenges in the Marcomm Process

Challenge	Consequence
Regulations	Limits the ways to communicate
Few key opinion leaders that have the most power in deciding if a certain medicine will be used	Limits the target audience
Physicians that do not see pharmaceutical companies at the same level as themselves	Makes it difficult to make the physicians consider meeting with the pharmaceutical company and consider a new medicine
Physicians treat pharmaceutical companies like they were one; see the pharmaceutical industry as a whole	Makes it difficult to distinguish from its competitors; Makes it difficult to have competitive advantage
Few meeting opportunities	Limits the opportunity to inform and promote new and old medicines

Table 4.1 presents a concluded table of the challenges gathered from interviews and observations from both companies. Firstly, regulations challenge the communicators in the ways they are allowed to communicate as well as the communication content, since they are not allowed to communicate freely. They also express that there are few key opinion leaders within a medical field that obtain a lot of power for example in what medicines will be used, which might limit the target audience even further within some medical fields. Furthermore, physicians see pharmaceutical companies as one large company as well as seeing themselves higher ranked than the pharmaceutical companies. The consequences expressed by the pharmaceutical company are that it is hard to distinguish themselves from competitors as well as scheduling meetings with physicians. This is also why there are few meeting opportunities coupled with the fact that physicians, unfortunately, are very busy. This limits the opportunity to inform about and promote new and old medicines.

4.1.2 Marketing Consulting Company

The marketing consulting company is currently working with the pharmaceutical company to tackle their issues in their marcomm strategies and what to do to improve and create new strategies. The one-on-one interviews with the marketing consulting company included what the key objectives are when creating a marcomm platform. We also investigated what they believe the challenges are and what the pharmaceutical company should do in order to tackle these challenges going forward. Furthermore, the interviews also included information about measures that the pharmaceutical company has taken successfully so far and what needs to be done in the future to make further improvements.

In the process of creating a successful marcomm platform, the marketing consulting company believes that one should use the IMC framework. They state that the importance of this framework lies in making all aspects of marketing communication work together as one united force instead of them working individually.

Table 4.1 also represents what the marketing consulting company thinks the challenges are going forward. However, they believe that these are the pharmaceutical company's external challenges, challenges in communication between the, and target audience. In addition, they also introduce some internal process challenges going forward, challenges internally that affect the communication externally. Internal issues refer mainly to that different departments working with marketing communications at the pharmaceutical company do not completely work as a united force. It is difficult to continuously integrate the different components of the IMC framework and to create a 360-degree communication in order to increase brand experience and the use of communicative resources. According to the marketing consulting company, the pharmaceutical company needs to improve their internal processes with, for example, a customer relationship management (CRM) system so that the communication in their IMC components work together in a planned approach, so departments can work in synergy, and to maximize consistency of all brand messages.

In their comments about the current marcomm strategies, there are some additional improvements that should be made. In the personal selling and direct marketing approach they need to become briefer when creating and structuring the presentations they use when seeing clients. Also, due to the fact that there are regulatory challenges, the sales representatives are not allowed to answer advanced medical related questions during the presentations. The marketing consulting company means that a solution to this problem could be to arrange internal education so that the sales representatives are able to answer questions and/or to have digital contact with personnel from the medical division so that the questions can be answered directly, thus working around regulations without breaking them. Another suggestion is to use key opinion leaders in educational approaches. The challenge in having few opportunities to meet with the physicians

makes the consulting company believe that the educational one-on-one meetings and speaker events is a good solution.

The marketing consulting company's opinion is that, since the pharmaceutical company is not using PR in their marketing communication platform, they do not fully exploit the IMC framework and what it offers. They therefore advise the pharmaceutical company to start using PR in their communication process. Furthermore, they believe that PR is an effective tool for educating physicians and coming in contact with key opinion leaders, which are a very valuable and important factor in the pharmaceutical companies marketing efforts. Examples given on how this could be done would be with press publications addressed to physicians and key opinion leaders and PR-events focused on education. Trying to identify new key opinion leaders will give the pharmaceutical a future advantage since finding good- and new leaders is a key requirement. Furthermore, the marketing consulting company believes that PR has the ability to deliver quite balanced and objective information in a cost-effective way.

From the marketing consulting company's perspective, one major challenging aspect is learning about, and adapting their work to all regulations concerned with marketing within this industry. Since marketing in practically all other industries work in a similar manner, marketing within the pharmaceutical industry will pose a different playground. Ultimately, this results in the marketing consulting company having to in a sense specialize in this industrial area to be able to help consulting.

Furthermore, the marketing consulting company believes that it is important to use a legal expert to make sure that the created platform complies with regulations concerning the matter.

4.2 Primary Data Presentation: Observations

During the observations we used both a participatory and a direct observational approach. We observed how the pharmaceutical company and the marketing consulting company worked with each other and how to create a marketing communication platform, in day-to-day operations, meetings and in workshops. We compared to see if the data collected from interviews were consistent with our observations.

From the observations we could see that in the day-to-day operations, the different departments within the pharmaceutical company had challenges in working united with their IMC approach. The main issue was informational transparency between the different departments, where they were dependent on obtaining information from each other in their day-to-day operations. The key elements described in their IMC approach during the interviews were overall consistent with the data collected from the observations. However, the IMC approach was focused on the

various activities within the elements rather than being structured by the elements. For instance, during the observations in their workshops they worked with various activities such as sponsorships, physical meetings, and digital communication but they did not have any structure or follow-up between them, and they did not discuss how the different activities within the elements were interconnected.

In the participatory observations during the workshops we obtained even deeper knowledge of challenges. When they developed the marcomm platform, it was necessary to both have a general strategy within the different elements as well as an adaptive strategy towards the various medical areas. The main challenges and the communication targets presented in the interviews, both with the pharmaceutical company and the marketing consulting company, were consistent with our observations in how they worked in the workshops as well as their day-to-day operations. For instance, table 4.1 presents the challenges that were discussed during one-on-one interviews and during observations, in how they worked and what the companies discussed. The internal challenges, mentioned above, were presented during interviews with the marketing consulting company, and also during the observations.

4.3 Secondary Data Presentation: Homepages and Website Data Collection

In our research study we used secondary data to create a triangulation-effect in order to increase our knowledge and compare data in the research area. We collected data from websites and homepages within the pharmaceutical industry in Sweden. In the homepage and website data collection the main focus was to see if it was consistent with the data collected from interviews and observations and to see if the tool - advertising in marketing communications - was similar within the industry.

During the interviews, the pharmaceutical company stated that their target audiences are clinics and physicians. They clearly target medical professionals on their website, since the information provided is medically complex.

The primarily communicated element within the IMC framework, when investigating homepages and websites within the industry, is advertising. The different pharmaceutical companies we looked at all provided information on areas of expertise and medicines. The interviewed pharmaceutical company said that they used the advertising tool to provide information about medicines on their homepage, which was consistent with the investigation of their homepage and website. They also wanted to make their website more user friendly, as it is rather complex and not too easy to use today. However, when investigating their homepage and website it was structured like their competitors. All the homepages and websites provided information that was

aimed at physicians, which was also consistent with information gathered from interviews and observations. In the process of targeting physicians, the websites and homepages provided complex medical information, which is explained by the industry regulations, which state that advertisement is not allowed in order to target patients.

5 Analysis - Data Analysis

In the following section we uncover the general picture of the study by using theories and models presented in the theoretical framework section to interpret and analyze the results/data presentation. The data analysis will be structured based on each research question.

5.1 Challenges in Creating a Marcomm Platform; Data Analysis

The challenges in creating a marcomm platform in the pharmaceutical industry are presented in section 4 - Data Presentation. In this section, the main challenges are analyzed. From the data presentation of both interviews and observations it can be concluded that there are two perspectives from which the challenges can be analyzed, the pharmaceutical perspective, and the marketing consulting company perspective. From the pharmaceutical perspective external challenges are presented, whereas from the marketing consulting company both external and internal challenges are presented. Furthermore, the challenges will be analyzed with grounds in the communication process and the IMC framework.

Table 5.1 - Internal and External Challenges in the Marcomm Process

External Challenges	Internal Challenges
Regulations	Departments not working in a united force
Few opinion leaders that have the most power in deciding if a certain medicine will be used	Brand messages are not completely consistent
Physicians that do not see pharmaceutical companies at the same level as themselves	No working CRM system in place
Physicians treat pharmaceutical companies like they were one; see the pharmaceutical industry as a whole	
Few meeting opportunities	

The table 5.1, presents the external as well as the internal factors that contribute to challenges in creating a marcomm platform within the pharmaceutical industry. The content in the table is gathered from the results/data presentation section from both the pharmaceutical and marketing consulting company perspective.

5.1.1 Challenges in the Communication Process and IMC

There are several problems in the communication process from the pharmaceutical company to the physicians that can occur, based on the challenges presented above. Smith (1983) states that regulations are one of the main reasons for why there are challenges in the communication process within the pharmaceutical industry. Pavlou (2003) discuss how pharmaceutical companies' limited time with the physician lead to effectiveness problems in the communication process. Limited time with physicians could be due to them having a busy schedule. However, it can also be because of the fact that physicians do not consider pharmaceutical companies to be at the same level as they consider themselves. A combination of the pharmaceutical companies' limited time with physicians and the high regulations are therefore two critical problems in the communication process. This can also be described through the communication model's concept of Noise, which leads to technical, semantic, and effectiveness problems (Weaver, 1949).

The internal challenge, inconsistency of messages, can be a victim of accuracy, and interpretation problems, where accuracy is a technical problem and interpretations of messages are a semantic problem. This can be an effect of noise, in the channel in the communication model. Semantic problems refer to that the receiver can interpret messages in different ways (Weaver, 1949). The messages that are communicated to physicians can be interpreted differently due to: regulations limiting the content in communication which therefore might results in information that can clarify the communication being left out and the way physicians see pharmaceutical companies, as one general company/industry and therefore messages communicated from one company is interpreted as one by the physicians (Raheem Ahmed et al., 2014). Moreover, Weaver (1949) describes the effectiveness problem as a problem to create a reaction and behavior from communicated messages. By having limited time and few meeting with physicians it limits the opportunities to affect the target audience, physicians. Due to the shortage of time with physicians and clinics, pharmaceutical companies perform outside activities as a complement to one-on-one meetings (Agarwal et al., 2001).

The IMC framework requires an integration of the different elements, which requires creating an appropriate combination of communication mix tools in order to be informative, persuasive and to have a competitive advantage on the market (Dogramatzis, 2002).

From both interviews and observations it was gathered that different departments have problems in working with the different areas of IMC in an integrated manner. This can be due to office

politics and structures. However, this was not a main factor, but rather a problem in the complex industry structure. From the secondary data presentation it can be interpreted that several companies have problems in getting their message communicated in a clear manner due to the regulations limiting the communication, where the messages are only allowed to be targeted towards medical professionals. Furthermore, the fact that they do not work with a CRM system makes it more difficult to integrate the different departments.

There are few key opinion leaders e.g. highly respected physicians, independent experts, and researchers, within the industry and because of this, some elements in the IMC does not improve the communication work (Singh, Sharma & Malviya, 2011). For example, the pharmaceutical company does not want to work as much with sponsorships due to this fact. Furthermore, opinion leaders could be included in the work around IMC process by for example collaborative projects.

5.2 Improving the Marcomm Platform: Data Analysis

From the different challenges and current structure of the marcomm platform several improvements are suggested in the result/data presentation.

In order to create a successful marcomm platform, IMC elements need to be used and interconnected (Dogramatzis, 2002). The marketing consulting company describes different internal problems that need to be improved. The main problem is the departments' way of working together, the need to become more united in their communication and working efforts. In working with IMC activities, they need to be connected in order to maximize influence. This will be analyzed with the IMC Framework structure below.

5.2.1 External Communication

- Personal Selling

Currently the pharmaceutical company allocates a lot of time to personal selling. They arrange meetings and presentations, where they use Power Point to present information. However, the marketing consulting company believes that the way they provide their information needs to be improved. During their PowerPoint presentations, the information given needs to be limited to only a few slides, conveying the most important messages. In being more selective in what to communicate the target audience can clearly remember the information provided. This can increase effectiveness in creating a reaction and behavior by the physicians and clinics (Weaver, 1949). This also applies to clinical visits where according to Aamir & Zaman (2011) marketers bring tools as in promotional material, in order to discuss the products, and the performance

depends on how well planned the meeting is and how the promotional material is used. The marketing consulting company also suggests implementing a CRM system so that there can be information transparency and to increase the communication tools between departments, in order to improve personal selling. Furthermore, external activities need to be continuously improved.

- Direct Marketing

In their direct marketing approach they are limited in what they are allowed to communicate and to whom. Currently they communicate mainly through email and telephone. Dahlén, Lange & Terry, (2011) believe that this is an effective way of freeing a salesperson's tasks and replacing it with more direct marketing efforts. With the conveyance of more personalized messages, direct marketing seeks to build relationships based on how the customers respond to the personalized message. Direct marketing builds a kind of partnership with each customer by using customized and personal messages (Dahlén, Lange, & Terry, 2010). For pharmaceutical companies this approach is very important due since there are few opinion leaders within the different medical fields. It is important to communicate to these leaders often and to get them on “their side”. From the observations of the pharmaceutical company and interviews with the marketing consulting company, the integration of the different IMC elements are not working well. According Fill, (2011), direct marketing communication needs to be incorporated in the company's marketing plan because of its complexity and intricacy. Therefore, internal collaboration between different departments needs to be improved in order to make sure that all messages communicated are consistent.

- Advertising

Today, the pharmaceutical company is mainly using digital advertising as a source of communication with the target audience. They advertise by participating in podcasts and by providing medical information and facts about drugs on their LinkedIn and homepage/website. They send information about medicines and news about new discoveries to physicians via email. According to Dahlén, Lange & Terry (2010) the degree of control for those responsible for the design and delivery of the advertising messages is very high. The pharmaceutical company want to improve their website and homepage by making it more user friendly in order for the information to be clear and straightforward which will help in influencing the target audience. However, in advertising Fill, (2011) believe that it is difficult to persuade the target audience to behave in a specific manner and that it is difficult to measure how the target audience uses the information given by the company which can lead to credibility issues. Audiences might be less likely to believe messages delivered through advertising compared to other ways of communication e.g. word-of-mouth messages (Fill, 2011). However, advertising is an important tool for pharmaceutical companies because of its flexibility in whom to communicate to and the vast number of people that can be reached.

- Sales Promotion

The pharmaceutical company participates in medical conferences, have a variety of partnerships and sponsor different events with the aim to build upon their credibility in the industry and to further establish their brand on the market. They express that sponsorships, however, are not as effective on the target audience, as other activities used, and will thus henceforth not put too much effort on sales promotion going forward. Fill, (2011) believe that sales promotion entails several methods that should be tactically chosen in order to add value to an offering. If sponsorship does not influence the target audience, then the resources can be put to other activities instead. Two other promotional tools that they have started with and will use more in the future are educational meetings and the arrangement of events for physicians, where what are considered credible and famous physicians and medicals in the industry will be attending. Educational and interactive meetings may result in physicians feeling heard by the pharmaceutical company which in turn might increase the company's influence. Moreover, this also gives the pharmaceutical company a chance to get instant feedback. Feedback is of great value because it is a great tool to use when trying to create more spot-on and efficient communication tools (Fill, 2011). Both companies suggest that arranging famous speakers in the medical industry will add value to the target audience, which is an effective way of using sales promotion (Dahlén, Lange, & Terry, 2010). As mentioned before, a CRM system could also improve information transparency and to increase the communication tools between departments, in order to improve the sales promotion

- Public Relations

Fill, (2011) believe that there is a high level of credibility associated with the conveying of messages through PR-efforts. Hence, PR as a source of communication should be used in greater extent. The pharmaceutical company does not work with PR today and the marketing consulting company's opinion is that the pharmaceutical company does not fully exploit the IMC framework and what it offers by not using PR, which be an invaluable communications tool in this special marketing environment. They therefore advise the pharmaceutical company to start using PR in their communication process. An example given on how this could be done would be for example with specialist press publications addressed to physicians. PR is important in making sure the company's reputation stays intact (Dahlén, Lange, & Terry, 2010). Once a communication message is placed in the chosen media channel it is very difficult to control, however, the affirmation created by a third party has the chance to have a great impact and influence on the target audience, compared to any of the above mentioned tools in the marketing communication mix (Fill, 2011). According to the marketing consulting company, PR can help face the challenge of educating physicians about marketed products by securing key opinion leaders who can help with these educational efforts.

6 Discussion

The following section lays out a discussion based on our results, analysis and research questions posed. This will be followed by conclusions, implications, limitations, and proposed future research.

6.1 What are the (main) challenges when building a marketing communication platform within the pharmaceutical industry?

In previous sections we have concluded what the main challenges for a pharmaceutical company are when building a marcomm platform. There is complexity to the task which is driven by the regulatory control associated with marketing effort within the industry. Pharmaceutical companies, like most other companies, are not allowed to freely communicate to whomever and how they want since everything they communicate is subject to regulatory scrutiny. This complexity is not only driven by regulations but also by the fact that the target audience, the physicians, and key opinion leaders hold a lot of power and control in whom to meet and who to recommend the drugs to.

In an industry like the pharmaceutical industry, which is quite similar to other industries except from the high levels of regulation, it is understandable that companies will be subject to control and high regulation in order to make sure that they are in compliance with laws. For obvious reasons consumers will benefit from having access to the safest and most reliable drugs on the market. However, with the digital revolution that has taken place during the last decade, patients have access to websites/homepages and information to a greater extent, which puts even more regulatory pressure on companies and at the same time poses new challenges when creating a marcomm platform. Medical drugs possess a complexity, which is far from any other product on the consumer market. This complexity in itself makes marketing efforts more challenging (Kessel, 2011).

The pharmaceutical industry will be subject to even greater scrutiny and rigorous regulatory pathway in terms of marketing, both new and old drugs, which is why learning to work effectively and accurately with marcomm processes is very important (Kessel, 2011). Regulations will pose challenges affecting the whole industry. Everyone working with communications internally must have great knowledge about the regulations. This applies to the external consultant as well, which is presented in the results. This challenge creates both internal and external limitations. The marketing consulting company's biggest challenge is learning about all the regulations concerned with the pharmaceutical industry. This type of expertise takes time to obtain. At the end of the platform building process, one needs to make sure that what is being

communicated is correctively in accordance with laws and regulations. This can be done by conferring with a legal consultant or the pharmaceutical company's legal department.

Another challenge when creating a marcomm platform is that the end consumers are not the same as the target audience, in terms of marketing efforts, as mentioned. This naturally poses some obstacles for the company since physicians and key opinion leaders, hence in this sense influential individuals, will act like gatekeepers since they are in control of whom to recommend the drugs to (Solomon, 1999). In this environment, PR will be a very important communications tool since it can deliver information and enhance scientific exchange.

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, the pharmaceutical company has both internal and external mismatches which contributes to challenges when planning and creating a marcomm platform. The use of a CRM-system is crucial when trying to coordinate different departments, where people have different responsibilities and tasks, and where it is important to communicate one coherent message, which is discussed within the terms of Shannon and Weaver's communications model (Weaver, 1949). A CRM-system would also help in working with a cross-functional approach where different inside departments and outsider partners work closely together, as vowed for by Duncan (2002). If not, it becomes harder than it already is to create a consistent communication and brand message (Duncan, 2002). Using a CRM-system could help in mitigating the sources of noise. Furthermore, not using a CRM-system is concerned with inefficient and ineffective sales efforts. Consistency in brand- and communication messaging is of utter importance for all companies especially in an industry like the pharmaceutical industry, since many see the different companies as one large company (Weaver, 1949). This is not in the benefit of the individual company and consistency in brand- and communication messages can help in standing out against other companies, which in turn could help in creating a competitive advantage.

The target audience is a very time constrained profession; hence getting the opportunity to have meetings with them is not the easiest task. On top of this, if physicians see themselves as superior, they might be less likely to allocate time to see company representatives. This is an obstacle that needs to be overcome and using PR as a method to reach target audience will most likely be helpful since PR is a credible and effective source of communication (Dahlén, Lange & Terry, 2010).

6.2 How can a marcomm platform be improved within the IMC-Framework?

The main finding from the study is that the marketing consulting company recommends that the pharmaceutical company should start using PR as an important tool for their communication towards the target audience. Furthermore, they should integrate all the elements in the IMC-framework in order to be successful in their communication strategies. One way of helping with the integration would be the use of a CRM-system.

The marketing consulting company highly recommends the use of a CRM-system, which will help in integrating the elements in the IMC-framework. By not using one, the pharmaceutical company is missing the advantage of the positive effects that the implementation of such a system would bring. The internal challenges that the company is facing could be mitigated since a CRM-system could help improve in communication between departments, greater efficiency, and organizational matters. It can also help in improving customer service and make sure that messages communicated externally are consistent (Weaver, 1949).

The marketing consulting company is used to working with theories and models and when consulting the pharmaceutical company, theories and models are their starting point. The pharmaceutical company on the other hand, is not using theories and models when building their marcomm platform, which is one of the reasons why they have hired the marketing consulting company. This action implies that they have an ambition to start working more theoretical which will be to their benefit.

Creating more user-friendly websites, which is something the pharmaceutical company plans on doing, will make the website easier to navigate and more accessible for physicians. This will make finding information about different drugs easier, hence communicating messages in a manner, which applies to the IMC-framework. Information available on a website is for everyone to read, which might help in overcoming the gatekeeper-issue.

For pharmaceutical companies, PR is a valuable tool in the marketing mix. It can be used cost-effectively during a product's life cycle. By including information about drugs in press releases, the pharmaceutical companies can convey information about their products while still in accordance with regulations, in a cost effective manner. Furthermore, PR can help in driving interactions like educational information packs and personal meetings (Dahlén, Lange & Terry, 2010).

Key opinion leaders are a valuable resource, when used right and when they convey information in the favor of the pharmaceutical company. Drug company marketing staff is used to working

with key opinion leaders and are aware of their importance (Moynihan, 2008). Key opinion leaders can help provide companies with strategic feedback as well as help with educating physicians about the drugs. Identifying up-and-coming leaders is crucial not only for PR practitioners but also to secure their use and expertise in the future.

6.3 Conclusion

To summarize, continuous work with the IMC elements is crucial in order to create a successful communications strategy. When using the IMC as a base for developing a marcomm platform, the results show that there are several problems encountered when building a platform within the pharmaceutical industry. The problems are both internal, a result of departments not working as a united force, and external, regulations and limited time with target audience to mention a few.

Regulatory scrutiny and regulations concerning the pharmaceutical industry is a challenge. This poses problems for all parties involved since the level of expertise concerning regulations needs to be high.

Not using a CRM-system in order to improve the marketing communications efforts, create efficiency and effectiveness, poses challenges. Using a CRM-system can help integrate work within and between departments. Furthermore, a CRM-system will help the pharmaceutical company in building coherent communication messages. This will help overcome challenges associated with inefficiency and difficulties in working between departments and also help improving the building of a marcomm platform.

The pharmaceutical company needs to deepen their use of the IMC-framework, mainly by using PR. Not taking advantage of the offerings of the framework will pose challenges since e.g. PR is a very effective and important tool (Duncan, 2002). Furthermore, working with physicians and key opinion leaders is not the easiest task because of their shortage of time.

On a concluding remark, this study only observes one pharmaceutical company, which suggests that there might be differences between how different companies tackle the work in creating a marcomm platform. However, we believe that companies working in a manner, which complies to the improvements concluded in this thesis, will be able to create a competitive advantage compared to the companies not working in this manner.

6.4 Implications

As mentioned in other sections in this thesis, marcomm platforms are essential for a successful communication strategy (Fill, 2009). However there are many challenges in this process within the pharmaceutical industry. From the results, the target audience, physicians, contribute to many of their communication challenges. It is important to acknowledge that the physician's perspective is not included in this study, which is also an important perspective to consider in marcomm, whereas communication is not an one way street.

It seems that in general marcomm is very complex and challenging, especially within the pharmaceutical industry. The main challenges affect the entire process and its integrated elements. Integration of the IMC elements is therefore affected both through external and internal challenges. However, from the result, one can argue that the pharmaceutical company continuously tries to improve the integration in-between the elements, for instance by implementing a CRM system.

Furthermore, the results show that there are regulatory implications associated with creating a marcomm platform within studied industry. Regulations make it a lot more difficult in general, both internally for the company, and also externally for a marketing company hired to help in the process. The company chosen to help in building the platform needs to learn and understand the regulatory hinders before anything and there will be both theoretical and practical challenges associated with the task. Studies carried out on this subject will be helpful for future references when carrying on a project similar to the above studied one. The regulative implications imply that it is not as easy as in other industries to just fire and hire someone.

On a practical note, both internal and external practitioners when working with marcomm within the pharmaceutical industry so that they better understand the challenges in marketing can use our study.

6.5 Limitations

Even though this work included several interviews, observations and collection of secondary data, there are several limitations to this study.

We only investigate one pharmaceutical company, thus we are generalizing and drawing conclusions on how the marcomm platform building process is carried out on the Swedish market based on one observation and therefore this affects the external validity. This might create inaccurate conclusions, which might have been overcome and more nuanced if we would have interviewed and investigated several pharmaceutical companies as well as the target

audience, the physicians. The target audience would not have been able to deliver information answering the research question, but they might have been able to provide answers on challenges posed by pharmaceutical company, regarding them. However, the resources and time constraint of four months conducting the study have made it impossible to include such objectives in the study. We had from February to April 2017 to collect data, and therefore, due to the limited time, we chose a limited amount of companies to conduct an in depth study on. The time and resource constraints also limited the amount of interviews held with both the pharmaceutical and marketing consulting company which could also result in researcher bias.

The relationship between the pharmaceutical company and the marketing consulting company is not investigated further in any deeper sense and the information collected could therefore be affected, in terms of what information the subjects chose to give. However, the data collected, from interviews and observations, was collected during the entire research period hence several occasions, which also prevented getting answers based on a certain/temporary mood the subject may had.

Moreover, due to that there was a confidentiality agreement; the subjects and participants could describe their experiences more detailed. However, some data collection could not be used due to this fact, which can also affect the study. It can be affected by not providing the whole picture of the study and by not including enough information and data collected from subjects participating. Furthermore, it would be preferable to analyze secondary data such as previous studies within the Swedish pharmaceutical industry, which would have strengthened the results of the study. However, the limited amount of studies within the industry and within this study's delimitation prevailed the comparison.

The results could also be affected by wording of questions and formulations. The interviews were conducted in the subjects first language, Swedish, and possible misunderstandings in questions asked, were questioned again in different ways during several occasions to hinder faulty results from misunderstandings or wrongful interpretations.

6.6 Future Research

Above all, future research should further examine other industries in marcomm platforms, whereas this study only emphasizes the pharmaceutical industry.

Further studies should examine other pharmaceutical companies, in order to provide more data as the study clearly presents several challenges in creating a marcomm platform within this industry. As the study only focuses on one geographical area, further research should include examination of several geographical areas as well as a comparison of them, mainly because regulations make the structure of the marcomm platform different between countries.

The study presents physicians as the core target audience for pharmaceutical companies, and therefore it would be interesting to examine the perspective of the physicians'. By examining this perspective it could provide a more nuanced study and analysis on the marketing communication process and platform within the industry. Moreover, further research should also include an extensive examination in creating a successful marcomm platform within the pharmaceutical industry as well as other industries, whereas in this study the main examination is on the challenges and how they are tackled within marcomm platforms.

In examining other industries as well as the pharmaceutical industry, other external factors such as price, professional roles, certain campaigns/projects and time and place where the communications take place could be included in order to provide additional factors that affect marcomm platforms. Factors affecting marcomm platforms can have consequences in both short and long term, which invites future researchers to investigate for the long term, as this study is only during the course of four months.

7 References

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8 Appendix

Subjects: Key Areas of Discussion; Interview Guide	
Area	Discussion
Rules and Regulations	How regulations affect communication strategies for the pharmaceutical Company
IMC Tools	How IMC tools are used within different departments and the main challenges for the pharmaceutical company
Physicians	Key challenges in communication with the target audience, physicians
Communication Process	Current and future communication process, plans and strategies
Collaboration	How they believe collaboration and information transparency works today
Opinion Leaders	Challenges in current and future communication towards opinion leaders

Subjects: Key Observation of Discussion Areas; Observations Guide

Area	Discussion
Rules and Regulations	How the pharmaceutical work with regulations in their communication process
IMC tools	How the pharmaceutical company work with the different elements in the IMC Framework
Communication Process	How both; pharmaceutical and marketing consulting company work with marcomm strategies towards physicians
Collaboration	How collaboration works between the two companies as well as within departments within the pharmaceutical company
Opinion Leaders	How they work in their communication process to affect opinion leaders
