

Revolutionizing Consumer Habits Through Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC): an Analysis of The Unique Selling Proposition of Enzyme Toothpaste

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Abstract

The toothpaste market in Indonesia is a highly competitive arena dominated by pioneer firms with massive production capacities and extensive distribution networks. This study aims to analyze the Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) strategy implemented by PT Enzym Bioteknologi Internusa in transforming consumer habits through its Unique Selling Proposition (USP), namely “Detergent-Free Toothpaste and the Dry Brushing Method.” Employing a constructivist paradigm and a single case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with key informants, observations, and document analysis. The findings indicate that the integration of the communication mix—comprising personal selling, advertising, public relations, and sales promotion—is crucial for penetrating market dominance and building brand equity amid consumer habits that have been entrenched for decades in relation to foaming toothpaste. This study contributes to the marketing communication literature by highlighting the effectiveness of educational strategies in altering consumer behavior that is strongly habituated to conventional product functions.

Keywords : Integrated Marketing Communication; Unique Selling Proposition; Brand Equity; Consumer Behavior; Enzyme Toothpaste.

Introduction

The fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry is one of the most competitive sectors in the modern economy, characterized by high product penetration, repetitive consumption cycles, and the dominance of long-established brands. Among FMCG categories, oral care products—particularly toothpaste—represent a relatively stable yet intensely competitive market, as they are directly linked to consumers’ daily habits (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

Indonesia constitutes a strategic market for the toothpaste industry due to its large population and the continuous growth of the middle class. Data from the Ministry of Industry indicate that the cosmetics and personal care subsector experienced positive growth in the post-pandemic period, driven by increasing public awareness of preventive health and hygienic lifestyles (Ministry of Industry, 2023). This condition has encouraged the entry of numerous new brands, both multinational and local, thereby intensifying industry competition.

Nevertheless, the structure of the Indonesian toothpaste market remains oligopolistic. Major brands with pioneer advantages exert strong control over distribution networks, advertising expenditure, and consumer perceptions of product quality. Aaker (1997) emphasizes that dominant

brands not only control market share but also shape consumers' cognitive frameworks regarding what is considered "normal" within a product category.

Such dominance creates significant entry barriers for late entrants. Sharp (2010) argues that in highly habitual product categories, consumer decisions are often not purely rational but are driven by routine, repetition, and brand salience in memory. Consequently, functional differentiation alone is frequently insufficient to disrupt loyalty toward established brands.

In this context, marketing communication strategy plays a critical role, not only in building brand awareness but also in influencing consumers' mindsets and consumption habits. Previous studies suggest that contemporary marketing communication no longer focuses solely on short-term persuasion but instead emphasizes the construction of brand meaning and symbolic relationships with consumers (Belch & Belch, 2020).

PT Enzym Bioteknologi Internusa presents an intriguing case by adopting an unconventional differentiation strategy in the toothpaste category. Through the proposition of "detergent-free toothpaste and the dry brushing method," the brand not only introduces a new product but also challenges long-standing paradigms regarding toothbrushing practices embedded in everyday life. This strategy may be categorized as a form of category disruption (Ries & Trout, 2001).

However, attempts to change consumer habits represent a complex communication challenge. Verplanken and Wood (2006) explain that habits are formed through prolonged processes involving behavioral repetition, social reinforcement, and sensory experience. Consequently, marketing messages that contradict dominant habits may generate resistance if not managed strategically and consistently.

Under such conditions, the Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) approach becomes increasingly relevant. IMC emphasizes the alignment of messages across communication channels—including advertising, digital media, consumer education, sales promotion, and interpersonal communication—to enable brands to construct a coherent, unified narrative (Belch & Belch, 2020). Without strong integration, differentiation strategies risk creating confusion rather than clarity among consumers.

Although IMC has been widely studied, most existing research focuses on campaign effectiveness, brand awareness, or consumer loyalty toward established brands. Studies specifically examining the role of IMC in facilitating habit change communication within the FMCG industry remain limited, particularly in emerging market contexts such as Indonesia.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze how PT Enzym Bioteknologi Internusa implements an integrated marketing communication strategy to establish product positioning amid the dominance of incumbent players. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to the development of strategic marketing communication studies and practically to firms seeking differentiation through consumer behavior change.

Literature Review

Marketing Communication Strategy

Marketing communication strategy constitutes a comprehensive plan designed to achieve organizational objectives through the determination of long-term directions and the systematic allocation of required resources. In modern marketing, strategy is no longer perceived merely as a set of tactical promotional decisions but rather as a conceptual framework that integrates brand vision, business objectives, and consumer needs into a unified communication direction (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Within communication studies, strategy functions to create message strength through continuity and consistency. Repeated, structured, and meaningful messages enable the formation of stable perceptions in audiences' minds. Without a clear strategy, communication activities tend to become fragmented and lose their persuasive power, as messages stand independently without reinforcing narratives (Belch & Belch, 2020).

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC)

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) refers to the process of coordinating the marketing communication mix to ensure alignment between customer information needs and company-delivered messages. The core essence of IMC lies in integrating all brand communication efforts to produce message consistency, often described as "speaking with one voice." Shimp (2003) argues that successful marketing in contemporary environments depends on the tight coordination of communication elements so that messages appear consistent and seamless across media. The IMC model integrates various promotional mix elements, including advertising, sales promotion, events and experiences, public relations and publicity, personal selling, and direct marketing. This integration is based on the assumption that no single element should operate independently in achieving effective marketing objectives. Reid et al. (2005) emphasize that the effectiveness of integrated communication strategies is essential for strengthening brand orientation. One fundamental objective of IMC implementation is to build and reinforce brand equity. Well-managed integrated communication can

generate greater sales impact and enhance brand asset value through the creation of positive brand awareness and image. Mongkol (2014) confirms a direct relationship between IMC activities and increased brand equity from the consumer perspective. Ultimately, IMC success is measured by its ability to foster positive perceptions and consumer trust, which facilitate broader sales impacts. Selecting appropriate communication forms, including adaptation to digital media channels, is critical. Schüller and Rašticová (2011) demonstrate that social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube are highly effective in promoting programs and engaging target audiences in competitive environments.

Brand Equity

Brand equity represents the added value endowed to products and services, reflecting how consumers think and behave toward a brand. According to Aaker, brand equity consists of four principal dimensions: (1) brand awareness, referring to consumers' ability to recognize or recall a brand within a product category; (2) perceived quality, denoting consumers' subjective evaluation of overall product excellence; (3) brand associations, encompassing all memories linked to the brand that facilitate information processing and purchase motivation; and (4) brand loyalty, the core of brand equity, reflecting consumers' commitment to continue purchasing despite competitive offerings.

Methods

This study adopts a constructivist paradigm that views reality as a socially constructed and relative phenomenon. Methodologically, a qualitative descriptive approach was employed, emphasizing dialectical interaction between the researcher and respondents to reconstruct the studied reality. A single case study method was used to examine intensively and comprehensively the unique communication strategy of PT Enzym Bioteknologi Internusa within its real-life context. Informants were selected purposively to ensure data relevance. Key informants included the product initiator of the detergent-free toothpaste concept, supported by Dr. Erna Novita (Brand Manager Marketing), who managed promotional programs, and Dendra, Marketing Supervisor. Primary data were collected through unstructured observation and in-depth interviews, while secondary data were obtained through literature review and company documentation. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation and methodological triangulation.

Results and Discussion

Product Philosophy and Habit Revolution Strategy

PT Enzym Bioteknologi Internusa adopts a highly distinctive competitive strategy in the Indonesian toothpaste market by not merely offering a product, but by promoting a broader mission aimed at revolutionizing consumer habits. Indonesia represents a highly promising market for toothpaste products due to intensive government campaigns encouraging toothbrushing three times a day. However, this market has long been dominated by major players such as Unilever, which possesses an annual production capacity of approximately 56,500 tons. Consequently, new entrants must demonstrate strong innovation in order to penetrate this formidable competitive barrier.

Philosophy of Enzyme Toothpaste

The philosophy of Enzyme toothpaste is grounded in extensive research on the modern human oral ecosystem, which is considered to have been compromised by excessive exposure to chemical substances. PT Enzym identifies detergents commonly used in conventional toothpaste as a primary factor disrupting the natural balance of the oral environment. This condition stands in stark contrast to archaeological findings indicating that ancient human fossils exhibited intact dental structures despite the absence of modern oral care practices, largely because their oral ecosystems remained naturally preserved without interference from chemical agents such as detergents found in contemporary products.

Detergents, or foaming agents, are believed to eliminate beneficial bacteria present in saliva. In fact, saliva plays a crucial role as a natural defense mechanism by preventing oral ulcers, neutralizing acids, and reducing bad breath. Guided by the philosophy of “returning to nature through science,” PT Enzym developed a detergent-free toothpaste to ensure that enzymatic active ingredients function optimally in maintaining the mouth’s natural defense system.

The company’s communication strategy is centered on a highly specific and controversial Unique Selling Proposition (USP) within the industry, namely “Detergent-Free Toothpaste and the Dry Brushing Method.” This strategy serves two fundamental purposes: introducing product superiority while simultaneously delivering large-scale consumer education aimed at reshaping

entrenched perceptions. The company recognizes that without an appropriate communication strategy, the product's advantages would not be properly understood by a market accustomed to conventional toothpaste usage.

The Proposed Habit Revolution

The "Dry Brushing Method" requires consumers not to wet the toothbrush before use and discourages immediate rinsing after brushing. Consumers are advised to leave the toothpaste in the mouth for approximately five minutes to allow the active enzymes to penetrate and function effectively. This new habit directly contradicts decades-old consumer behavior that assumes toothbrushes must be moistened to generate foam quickly.

The greatest challenge of this strategy lies in confronting the widespread perception that abundant foam is the sole indicator of dental cleanliness. For most consumers, the rough or squeaky sensation after brushing with foaming toothpaste is perceived as evidence of thorough cleaning. PT Enzym must therefore dismantle this paradigm through communication messages emphasizing that oral health is determined not by foam volume, but by the preservation of a balanced oral ecosystem.

In an interview, Dr. Erna Novita, Brand Manager Marketing at PT Enzym Internusa, reaffirmed the foundational thinking of Mr. Lie, the company's CEO and founder, who initiated the concept of detergent-free enzyme toothpaste. He believed that the product must deliver tangible added value to compete in the highly saturated consumer goods market.

Dr. Erna Novita further elaborated on the promotional strategies employed to communicate this habit revolution, highlighting her comprehensive understanding of the steps involved in building the Enzyme toothpaste brand. This includes positioning the product within a society that remains highly loyal to pioneer brands.

From an analytical perspective, this habit revolution is inherently high-risk, as nearly all competing manufacturers reinforce consumers' preference for foamy toothpaste. Most competitors focus on developing flavor variants or additional features without fundamentally altering product usage. In contrast, PT Enzym boldly positions itself as the only company attempting to revolutionize both product type and usage method.

The linkage between the product and the habit revolution is evident in how Enzyme compels consumers to modify their daily bathroom routines. Dry brushing without water directly challenges habits that have been deeply ingrained for decades. This transformation aims to shift consumer focus away from the superficial sensations of freshness and roughness produced by detergents, toward long-term functional oral health.

Field data illustrate the difficulty of implementing this revolution. Interviews with 20 respondents revealed that although 18 were aware of the Enzyme brand, only one truly understood the correct dry brushing method. This finding indicates that while brand awareness strategies have been successful, behavior-change education requires significantly greater intensity.

To penetrate a market dominated by pioneer brands, the company employs an Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) approach. Through IMC, PT Enzym seeks to coordinate multiple promotional channels so that the brand can “speak with one voice” regarding the benefits of dry brushing. Without such integration, the revolutionary message of waterless brushing risks being misunderstood or dismissed by target audiences.

This habit revolution is also closely linked to efforts to build brand equity. By offering a fundamentally different proposition, Enzyme establishes brand associations as a prestigious, science-based oral health product. Consumers who successfully adopt the new brushing habit tend to become highly loyal, as they perceive tangible benefits unavailable in conventional products.

Moreover, the habit revolution creates a new identity for Enzyme users as individuals who “deeply care about oral health.” The company does not merely sell toothpaste, but promotes a healthy lifestyle that respects the body’s biological functions, particularly saliva. Consequently, Enzyme toothpaste is no longer perceived solely as a cleaning agent, but rather as a supplement to the mouth’s natural defense system.

Analytically, the oral ecosystem philosophy and dry brushing revolution provide PT Enzym with a strategic pathway to avoid price wars and flavor-based competition common in the toothpaste industry. By educating consumers and generating demand based on specific health needs, Enzyme is able to withstand the dominance of pioneer brands with far greater economies of scale. Ultimately, the

success of this revolution depends on the effectiveness of marketing communication strategies in dismantling the long-standing stigma that “clean means foamy.”

Implementation of the IMC Mix for Enzyme Toothpaste

The company implements various integrated communication strategies to address intense market competition, including:

a. Personal Selling

Sales Promotion Girls (SPGs) are selectively deployed in major supermarkets such as Giant and Carrefour. Their role extends beyond product promotion to include oral health education and ensuring proper product placement. The Enzyme Dispensing Program involves dentists as key stakeholders, who provide medical recommendations regarding the benefits of detergent-free toothpaste, significantly enhancing brand credibility.

b. Advertising

In 2015, advertising budgets were concentrated on television media, particularly Metro TV, targeting educated upper-middle-class audiences aligned with Enzyme’s market segment. The company carefully selected brand ambassadors, such as Rhenald Kasali, who embody the “message of change” and align with the company’s mission to correct misconceptions about toothbrushing practices.

c. Public Relations

The Industrial Visit program, initiated in 2006, invites the public to tour the factory free of charge, observe production processes, and receive oral health education. With over 50,000 participants, this initiative has successfully built deep trust and brand awareness.

d. Sales Promotion

Rather than offering direct price discounts that could undermine the brand’s premium image, the company provides attractive merchandise—such as high-quality toothbrushes or drinking glasses—with certain purchases.

Consumer Behavior Analysis and Strategic Constraints

The Indonesian toothpaste industry is highly competitive, particularly following economic reform that led to the emergence of brands targeting segments ranging from class A to C. Market growth has been driven by population increases, rising purchasing power, and heightened awareness of oral hygiene. However, the market remains oligopolistic, dominated by pioneer firms such as PT Unilever Tbk, whose production capacity of 56,500 tons annually far exceeds that of competitors.

As a concept-driven entrant, PT Enzym Bioteknologi Internusa faces substantial challenges in penetrating this dominance. Its strategy relies on a radical USP—“Detergent-Free Toothpaste and the Dry Brushing Method”—which necessitates extensive consumer education to dismantle habits formed over decades.

Consumer behavior analysis indicates that marketing communication efforts have been effective at the initial awareness stage. Interviews with upper-middle-class respondents (A–B) reveal high brand awareness, with 18 out of 20 respondents recognizing the Enzyme brand.

Despite this, a significant gap exists between awareness and actual usage. Of the 18 respondents aware of the brand, only six reported using it, indicating barriers in converting awareness into purchase behavior. More critically, functional understanding of the product remains extremely low: among the six users, only one correctly understood the dry brushing method, which is central to the product’s added value.

This phenomenon can be explained using the AISAS consumer behavior model (Attention, Interest, Search, Action, Share). While PT Enzym’s IMC strategy has succeeded in generating attention and interest, it has underperformed in educating consumers at the action stage, where correct usage is essential to product effectiveness.

Low comprehension is largely attributable to entrenched habits favoring foamy toothpaste and immediate rinsing. Changing these behaviors—such as avoiding water and delaying rinsing for five minutes—represents a profound behavioral shift that requires repetitive and intensive communication reinforcement.

Beyond consumer behavior barriers, the company also faces macroeconomic constraints. In 2015, currency depreciation and economic slowdown increased production costs, reducing profit margins. These conditions forced adjustments to promotional strategies, resulting in fluctuating and reduced marketing budgets that disrupted long-term communication planning.

Additional IMC challenges arise from coordination issues with external service providers such as advertising agencies and public relations firms. When these entities operate independently without strong managerial oversight, message integration becomes fragmented, preventing the brand from communicating consistently.

Although PT Enzym has utilized multiple channels—including television advertising, radio, and social media influencers—limitations such as short advertising durations hinder comprehensive explanation of enzyme benefits and dry brushing procedures. Similarly, personal selling through SPGs is constrained by limited interaction time and staffing levels.

In conclusion, PT Enzym Bioteknologi Internusa must strengthen IMC integration to bridge the gap between brand awareness and correct product usage. Synchronizing advertising messages, salesforce education, and coordination with external communication partners is essential to dismantle entrenched consumer habits and build long-term loyalty grounded in oral ecosystem health.

Conclusion

PT Enzym Bioteknologi Internusa has successfully positioned itself as a highly distinctive brand within the oligopolistic structure of the Indonesian toothpaste market, which is dominated by pioneer firms such as PT Unilever Tbk with a massive annual production capacity of approximately 56,500 tons. Despite operating under the shadow of market leaders that possess strong distribution networks and well-established brand loyalty, the company has managed to penetrate this competitive barrier by advancing a major mission aimed at revolutionizing toothbrushing habits among consumers who have long been accustomed to highly foaming toothpaste. This distinctive brand positioning is founded on a functional health education strategy that emphasizes the importance of preserving the natural oral ecosystem from damage caused by chemical substances such as detergents.

The Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) strategy implemented by the company has proven effective in building brand equity through the tight and consistent coordination of the promotional mix. Key pillars supporting this success include targeted television advertising on Metro

TV, aimed at educated upper-middle-class segments (A–B), and enhanced credibility through the Enzyme Dispensing Program, which involves dentists providing medical recommendations directly to patients. In addition, the Industrial Visit program—joined by more than 50,000 participants since 2006—has served as a powerful public relations instrument in fostering trust and deep brand awareness through direct educational experiences at the production facility.

The core strength of this communication strategy lies in management’s commitment to consistently maintaining its Unique Selling Proposition (USP)—namely “Detergent-Free” toothpaste and the “Dry Brushing Method”—across all communication channels. The sustained use of coherent messaging through corporate taglines, combined with the selection of credible public figures such as Rhenald Kasali as a Brand Ambassador representing a “message of change,” has significantly reinforced the brand image in the public mind. Such consistency is critical, as Enzym bears a dual responsibility: introducing product superiority while simultaneously dismantling the long-standing societal paradigm that dental cleanliness must be indicated by abundant foam and a rough post-brushing sensation.

Although the IMC strategy has succeeded in achieving a high level of brand awareness—evidenced by research data showing that 18 out of 20 respondents (90%) recognized the Enzym brand—a substantial gap remains in consumers’ technical understanding of proper product usage. Interview findings reveal that among six identified users, only one correctly understood the dry brushing method. Based on the AISAS consumer behavior model, the communication integration has been effective at the Attention and Interest stages, but requires significantly stronger educational reinforcement at the Action stage to ensure consumers correctly apply the usage procedures necessary to obtain optimal enzymatic benefits.

This study therefore recommends that PT Enzym Bioteknologi Internusa further optimize digital and social media channels to strengthen technical education regarding the dry brushing method. The use of social media influencers and interactive engagement is considered particularly effective for reaching audiences that are difficult to access through conventional mass media, while also enabling more organic brand publicity. With improved synchronization between educational campaigns and interactive media, consumer loyalty is expected to continue progressing toward a high-commitment stage, in which customers develop brand pride and are willing to actively recommend the product to others.

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