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The antecedent role of a collaborative vs. a controlling corporate culture on firm-wide integrated marketing communication and brand performance

Lucia Porcu[a,*], Salvador del Barrio-García[a], Philip J. Kitchen[b,c], Marwa Tourky[d,e]

[a] Department of Marketing and Market Research, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Universidad de Granada, s/n Campus de Cartuja, Granada 18071, Spain
[b] Department of Marketing, University of Salford, The Crescent, Salford M5 4WT, UK
[c] ICN Business School, Nancy, France
[d] University of Exeter Business School, Streatham Court, Rennes Drive, Exeter EX4 4PU, UK
[e] Tanta University, Faculty of Commerce, Egypt

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to (i) demonstrate the influence of two types of corporate culture (CC), namely collaborative and controlling, on firm-wide integrated marketing communication (IMC) implementation; and (ii) examine the mediating role of IMC on the relationship between CC and brand performance (BP). Data were gathered via a self-administered online survey among senior managers of service businesses (n = 180) and analyzed via path analysis. Findings show that the adoption of a collaborative culture positively affects IMC, and to a greater extent than a controlling culture. It is also found that IMC exerts a beneficial effect on brand competitive advantage. A key contribution of this study lies in providing empirical evidence of the mediation of IMC in the relationship between CC and BP, thus suggesting that, in terms of the resource-based view (RBV), IMC contributes to fostering organizational capability to translate organizational cultural values into competitive advantage.

1. Introduction

According to the extant resource-based view (RBV) literature, the performance of a firm depends to a large extent on its ability to convert its tangible and intangible resources into outcomes, via its capabilities (Barney, 1986; Molloy & Barney, 2015; Morris, Alvarez, Barney, & Molloy, 2017). In recent years, several studies have focused on the RBV approach to examine the value of marketing, in general, and of communication, in particular related to the capabilities of the firm (Luxton, Reid, & Mavondo, 2015). In this regard, Luxton et al. (2015) consider Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) to be a business capability that helps convert the firm's resources into business results and brand outcomes. One of the primary intangible resources that every firm has is corporate culture (CC), which can be a great source of competitive advantage (Gupta, Briscoe, & Hambrick, 2017; Kamasak, 2017). The present study is pioneering in examining the extent to which IMC is capable of transforming competitive advantages associated with different types of CC into improved brand performance.

Over two decades have passed since publication of the first special issue devoted to IMC in the *Journal of Business Research* (Bearden & Madden, 1996), which provided academia with a comprehensive discussion of the state-of-the-art at that time, and paved the way for new directions of research in this domain. The body of research in this field is now *in crescendo* (Kitchen, 2017; Muñoz-Leiva, Porcu, & del Barrio-García, 2015), and the conceptualization of IMC has evolved from a narrowly focused approach upon the simple coordination of marketing communications or promotional mix, to a broader organizational approach (Porcu, del Barrio-García, & Kitchen, 2017), where IMC embraces the whole organizational entity. Since most empirical research so far has been based upon the much narrower promotional approach (e.g. Lee & Park, 2007), this is very limiting and not responsive to the current communication environment. Thus, further empirical research is called-for to assess the wider role of IMC, taking a firm-wide perspective (Luxton, Reid, & Mavondo, 2017), which is the approach adopted here. Indeed, the importance of approaching the study of IMC from this whole-firm perspective is highlighted by the Marketing Science Institute itself; among its research priorities for 2014–2016 was the question: What organizational processes will help achieve maximum marketing integration? (MSI, 2014).

On this premise, we propose that to deliver integrated

* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: luciapor@ugr.es (L. Porcu), dbarrio@ugr.es (S. del Barrio-García), P.J.Kitchen@salford.ac.uk, philip.kitchen@icn-artem.com (P.J. Kitchen), M.E.A.Tourky@exeter.ac.uk (M. Tourky).

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communication requires, by definition, an organizational restructuring of the firm, to enable it to achieve a clear orientation toward all its stakeholders, both internal (employees) and external (shareholders, suppliers, customers, distributors, and so on). However, although many authors have theoretically emphasized the importance of CC in achieving IMC (Porcu, del Barrio-García, & Kitchen, 2012; Schultz, Kim, & Kang, 2014; Tafesse & Kitchen, 2017), there is scant *empirical* evidence showing how—and to what extent—CC affects IMC. Moreover, the limited evidence put forward so far has relied almost entirely upon qualitative studies (2017; Ots & Nyilasy, 2015).

The present study endeavors to address this lacuna in the literature by *quantitatively* analyzing the influence of the CC type of the firm on its implementation of IMC—particularly the effect of the collaborative (*clan*) vs. controlling (*hierarchy*) culture on IMC. The work seeks to shed light on the debate regarding whether a CC based on collaboration, teamwork and staff empowerment is more effective in achieving the sought-after integration of communications than a CC characterized by clear lines of authority in decision-making, rules, standardized procedures and control mechanisms.

Furthermore, Taylor (2010) emphasized the need for research focusing on IMC's impact on performance. Likewise, while positive brand effects of IMC are demonstrable via prior studies (e.g. Reid, 2005; Luxton et al., 2015; 2017), more evidence for the relationship between IMC and brand performance (BP) is needed to provide agencies and clients with a better understanding as to how IMC works (Kliatchko & Schultz, 2014; Luxton et al., 2017; Ots & Nyilasy, 2015). Unlike previous studies that have examined the effect of IMC on specific brand-related issues (Delgado-Ballester, Navarro, & Sicilia, 2012; Foroudi, Dinnie, Kitchen, Melewar, & Foroudi, 2017; Melewar, Foroudi, Gupta, Kitchen, & Foroudi, 2017), the present work contributes an original approach: as it focuses on an *overall* measure of brand performance, adopting a business perspective (in contrast to the consumer perspective adopted by earlier works); and also considers IMC by taking a holistic view of the firm that is not solely focused on how distinct elements of the promotion or communication mix are coordinated.

As such, three main contributions can be derived from this study. First, this paper presents one of very few empirical studies based on a broad conceptualization of firm-wide IMC and provides compelling evidence to demonstrate that IMC implementation is related to overall BP. Second, our research findings shed light on the effect of CC on IMC implementation and contribute to strengthen the extant body of knowledge. Finally, this study pioneers usage of the RBV this leading to insights into the role of IMC as a business capability for organizations and their brands due to its positive impact to translate an intangible resource, such as CC into competitive advantage through BP.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. RBV, CC and IMC

In recent decades, a large body of academic research has developed on the topic of strategic management based on the RBV, which has studied how the different resources and capacities of firms affect business performance (Barney, 1986; Molloy & Barney, 2015; Morris et al., 2017). RBV pays special attention to the intangible assets of the firm as a source of competitive advantage, especially the so-called VRIN (Valuable, Rare, Inimitable and Non-substitutable) (Wernerfelt, 1984), which cannot be readily obtained in the factor markets or copied by competitors. Among these, the firm's culture is of particular importance as an important source of competitive advantage, being socially complex and difficult for competitors to imitate (Gupta et al., 2017; Kamasak, 2017). The CC determines: how firms understand the relationships between its members; the organizational structure; the flexibility enjoyed by employees to discover new ideas and share them both vertically *and* horizontally; and the degree of agility with which a firm is able to adapt to changes in its operating environment (Christensen, Firat, & Torp, 2008; Kamasak, 2017).

But according to the RBV, if firms are to deliver a genuinely strong performance, having the right resources is not enough—they must also possess the appropriate capacities to transform those resources into competitive advantages that generate value and results (Kamasak, 2017). There are many capacities defined throughout the academic literature as fundamental, including customer relationships (Chari & David, 2012), supply chain management (Barney, 2012), managerial ability (Helfat & Peteraf, 2015), and IMC (Luxton et al., 2015, 2017). The latter authors propose that IMC in particular constitutes an extraordinary business capability, as it helps firms translate its resources and brand assets into business results.

There is now extensive academic literature about IMC; however, there are no studies to date that address the question of how a firm's organizational culture—supported by its ability to integrate its communication—facilitates business performance in brand terms. It is precisely this perspective that the present work adopts, under the joint umbrella of RBV, the Competing Values Framework (CVF) for CC evaluation, and IMC theory.

2.2. Conceptual definition of firm-wide IMC

Since its emergence, IMC has expanded from a tactical tool to a strategic business process (Kitchen, 2017; Kliatchko & Schultz, 2014; Schultz et al., 2014). Nevertheless, the need for a more holistic approach is evident from both the academic and practitioner domains. In this regard, Luxton et al. (2017, p. 422) position IMC as "a firm-wide market-relating deployment mechanism that enables the optimization of communication approaches to achieve superior communication effectiveness", while managers and practitioners suggest that IMC involves "the overall business process, not just marketing communications" (Kliatchko & Schultz, 2014, p.382).

Similarly, Luxton et al. (2017) highlight the need to move from definition to operationalization of the IMC construct and call for a more expansive empirical measure of IMC. Porcu et al. (2017) sought to respond to the call by developing a conceptual framework based on the broad organizational approach and operationalizing the IMC construct by elaborating and empirically validating the firm-wide IMC scale. In light of this background, this study embraces the broader firm-wide IMC approach and builds on Porcu et al. (2017, p. 694) earlier framework that defines IMC as a four-dimensional construct, namely message consistency, interactivity, stakeholder-centered strategic focus and organizational alignment.

- *Message consistency* is the first level of integration concerning the need to communicate a clear image and positioning via coherent messages through all communication sources; it represents the main focus of most IMC empirical research (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2012; Šerić, 2017).
- *Interactivity* is the core element of two-way communication that allows for a dialogue between organization and stakeholders (Porcu et al., 2017) and the "hallmark" of IMC (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998). This dimension is increasingly relevant given the key role of technological turbulence and, especially, the impact of the Internet on the current and indeed future communication environment (Taylor, 2010).
- *Stakeholder-centered strategic focus* relates to the need for organizational members to acknowledge that adding value for and building long-term relationships with all internal and external stakeholders is the main strategic goal. This dimension reflects the relevance of enabling information to flow and be shared across departmental boundaries and even organizational frontiers (including employees and between the organization and its advertising and other communication agencies).
- *Organizational alignment* refers to internal (vertical and horizontal) integration involving the whole organization, the alignment of

organizational processes and the elimination of functional silos as of paramount importance to achieving the highest level of integration (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998; Eagle & Kitchen, 2000; Gulati, 2007; Kliatchko & Schultz, 2014; Melewar et al., 2017).

2.3. Conceptual definition and assessment of CC

There are several definitions of CC—also known as organizational culture. This concept refers to "*a pattern of shared basic assumptions […] that have worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems*" (Schein, 1985, p. 4). Organizational culture is a reflection of the leadership styles that dominate an organization, its values, language and symbols, procedures and routines, and of how and in which ways teamwork and employee commitment are emphasized (Cameron & Quinn, 1999; Panayotopoulou, Bourantas, & Papalexandris, 2003).

The assessment of CC is performed via the CVF (Cameron & Quinn, 1999; Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983), based on the conceptualization of collaborative (clan) and controlling (hierarchy) as two culture types delineated by internal focus. According to the CVF, a collaborative culture is flexibility-oriented, while a controlling culture is focused on control and stability. Moreover, the former is a supportive culture archetype wherein employees are involved in decision-making processes and teamwork is relevant (Cameron & Quinn, 1999). In this type of CC, which is based on fostering effective relations among employees, the firm prioritizes active support for its personnel in both work and personal matters. Motivation is based on empowerment, development and communication, and success is defined in terms of concern for people (Panayotopoulou et al., 2003).

By contrast, a hierarchy-driven culture is fairly bureaucratic and focused on efficiency and a top-down approach to the levels of organizational hierarchy, wherein employees are focused on the rules and norms regarding how certain tasks should be undertaken (Cameron & Quinn, 1999). In short, this type of culture is characterized by close control of employees, compliance with established procedures, maintenance of stability and hierarchical relationships. Predictability and process efficiency are the criteria of success (Panayotopoulou et al., 2003).

Therefore, it is to be expected that working atmosphere and employee satisfaction will be better in a 'clan' culture, in which the organization emphasizes approaches such as mentoring, flexibility and spontaneity, than in firms where a hierarchical culture predominates, in which the organization places greater value on control, stability and order (Lund, 2003).

2.4. The link between CC and IMC

Various authors have emphasized the relevance of organizational culture in application of IMC, suggesting that CC is one of its most important organizational antecedents, and call for empirical research to determine the precise impact of CC on IMC (Ots & Nyilasy, 2015; Porcu et al., 2012). However, to date this relationship has only been discussed from a theoretical point of view, rather than analyzed empirically.

In this regard, extant research shows two main positions in the academic debate about the corporate culture type that is more likely to promote IMC implementation. On the one hand, early studies suggest that the responsibility of managing integration should be situated at the peak of the organizational pyramid, i.e. with senior management (Schultz, 1996), and emphasize the need to control the whole communication process from a central location, especially in the case of global companies (Schultz & Kitchen, 2000), thus indicating that controlling culture is positively linked to IMC.

On the other hand, more recent research (Christensen et al., 2008; Gulati, 2007; Luxton et al., 2017; Porcu et al., 2012; Reid, 2005) suggests that flexibility, reciprocal trust, mutual commitment and horizontal (cross-functional) and vertical (both top-down and bottom-up) cooperation are relevant IMC drivers, while high centralization, control, stability and rigid rules and structures are expected to hinder innovative management approaches, bottom-up communication and cooperation, thus preventing organizations from successfully implementing IMC. In a similar vein, Reed, Goolsby, and Johnson (2016, p. 3597) point out that "*a work environment in which listening to employees holds equal value to listening to customers can ignite a contagious need to satisfying customers that, in turn, creates a hunger for more listening*", thus collaborative culture is a more consistent predictor of business effectiveness (Hogan & Coote, 2014).

There seems to be consensus in the literature, then, that although a CC based on control enables a customer-focused approach to be maintained (Schultz & Kitchen, 2000), and a certain level of control can help managers monitor all the touch-points with the brand (Schultz, Tannenbaum, & Lauterborn, 1994), a culture based on organizational flexibility that favors interfunctional management and the resolution of internal and interdepartmental conflicts will favor the integration of communication to a greater extent (Duncan & Everett, 1993; Gulati, 2007; Christensen et al., 2008; Einwiller & Boenigk, 2012). On this point, Phelps, Johnson, and Harris (1996) argued over two decades ago that a leader should be capable of strengthening employee abilities, encouraging them to work in groups and teams and knowing how to delegate power. Duncan and Moriarty (1998) also point out that interfunctional management facilitated by more flexible cultures such as a clan culture enables barriers between departments and stakeholders to be removed and facilitates integration.

In sum, in light of this literature review and the CVF (Cameron & Quinn, 1999), it is expected that those firms in which a 'clan' culture prevails—characterized by a high degree of internal coordination, both horizontal and vertical, by the significant support and trust shown by senior management, and by a focus on relationships—will achieve a higher level of integration across their communications than those with a hierarchical culture characterized by inflexibility, horizontal divisions and command-and-control systems. On this basis, it is hypothesized that:

H1: A collaborative (clan) culture positively affects the implementation of IMC to a greater extent than a controlling (hierarchy) culture.

2.5. The link between IMC and BP

Several studies have examined (from both theoretical and practical viewpoints) the potential benefits of adopting an IMC strategy in terms of business results, in general, and the brand, in particular (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2012; Luxton et al., 2015, 2017; Melewar et al., 2017; Reid, 2005; Šerić, 2017). Nevertheless, the empirical evidence of the beneficial effects *ala* IMC is limited and remains a barrier constraining its broader acceptance in boardrooms, thus further research is mandated (Luxton et al., 2017; Porcu et al., 2012; Tafesse & Kitchen, 2017; Taylor, 2010).

Some studies have attempted to examine the relationship between IMC and various brand-related issues such as brand identity (Foroudi et al., 2017; Melewar et al., 2017), brand familiarity (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2012), brand image (Foroudi et al., 2017), brand awareness (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2012; Einwiller & Boenigk, 2012; Foroudi et al., 2017), and brand equity (Šerić, 2017). However, most of these works adopt a limited vision of IMC by focusing primarily on consumers' perception of "controlled communication and uncontrolled communication" (Melewar et al., 2017) or conceptualizing IMC simply as 'message consistency. Furthermore, most of these studies are based on a consumer perspective, which differs significantly from the company perspective used here. Elsewhere, Reid (2005) and Luxton et al. (2015; 2017) focused on the relationship between IMC and overall brand performance, and found positive effects. However, all these studies adopted a multi-industry approach rather than the single-

industry approach used in the present study.

In light of these findings, it is hypothesized that:

H2: IMC positively influences overall BP.

Several authors highlight the value of CC as a source of sustained competitive advantage and a key driver of business performance. However, this relationship is not direct but exerted by shaping the behavior of organizational members (Schein, 1985; Gregory, Harris, Amenakis, & Shook, 2009; Zheng, Yang, & McLean, 2010; Zvobgo & Melewar, 2011; Hogan & Coote, 2014; Lee, Raschke, & St. Louis, 2016). Likewise, scholars have recently called for research on the assessment of "changes in the nature of organizational antecedents and their indirect effects, particularly in terms of the building of brand equity over time" (Luxton et al., 2017, p. 443) and highlight that "future research is needed to identify other mediating variables in the culture–effectiveness relationship" (Gregory et al., 2009, p. 679).

In light of this comprehensive review of extant research, it may be argued that mechanisms and processes concerning IMC facilitate the translation of cultural values into value for the organization, positively affecting BP. This leads to the following research question:

RQ1: Does IMC mediate the relationship between CC and BP?

Fig. 1 provides an illustration of the conceptual framework showing the key research constructs.

3. Method

3.1. Data collection and sample

The sample frame consisted of a commercial listing of 969 businesses operating in Spain and with 40 and over employees, to guarantee a certain complexity level in terms of organizational structure. This commercial listing was drawn from the Bureau van Dijk SABI database, which is the most comprehensive set of data on companies in Spain and Portugal and is based on the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) system. In this regard, our study focuses on one single sector: hotels and tourist accommodation (SIC codes 701, 702, 703, 704), and applies the key-informant method. Senior corporate managers were expected to have the most reliable and comprehensive knowledge about the CC, IMC and BP of the company and were targeted as respondents and specifically, CEOs, senior marketing and communication managers and other senior managers, respectively, served as key-informants.

Data were gathered via an online self-administered survey and procedures for data collection were two-phase in nature. First, a telemarketing firm was employed to contact the sample by telephone to ascertain informant and business availability to participate in the research, verify names and positions and collect e-mail addresses. Second, a customized link to the online questionnaire was emailed to individuals who had agreed to participate (n = 524), resulting overall in 180 valid responses and 18.6% response rate (of the population of 969 managers) and 34.4% (of the 524 managers successfully contacted and who agreed to participate). Given that senior managers receive many requests to participate in research and have limited time (Li, Rao, Ragu-Nathan, & Ragu-Nathan, 2005), the sample size and the response rate are in line with prior literature (Reid, 2005). Table 1 includes detailed information on the final composition of the sample. In light of the sample characteristics, the quality of the respondent pool was deemed satisfactory.

3.2. Measures

A multi-item online questionnaire was designed for this research and hosted on a web-platform. Measurement scales utilized to assess the variables were derived from prior studies. The IMC construct is

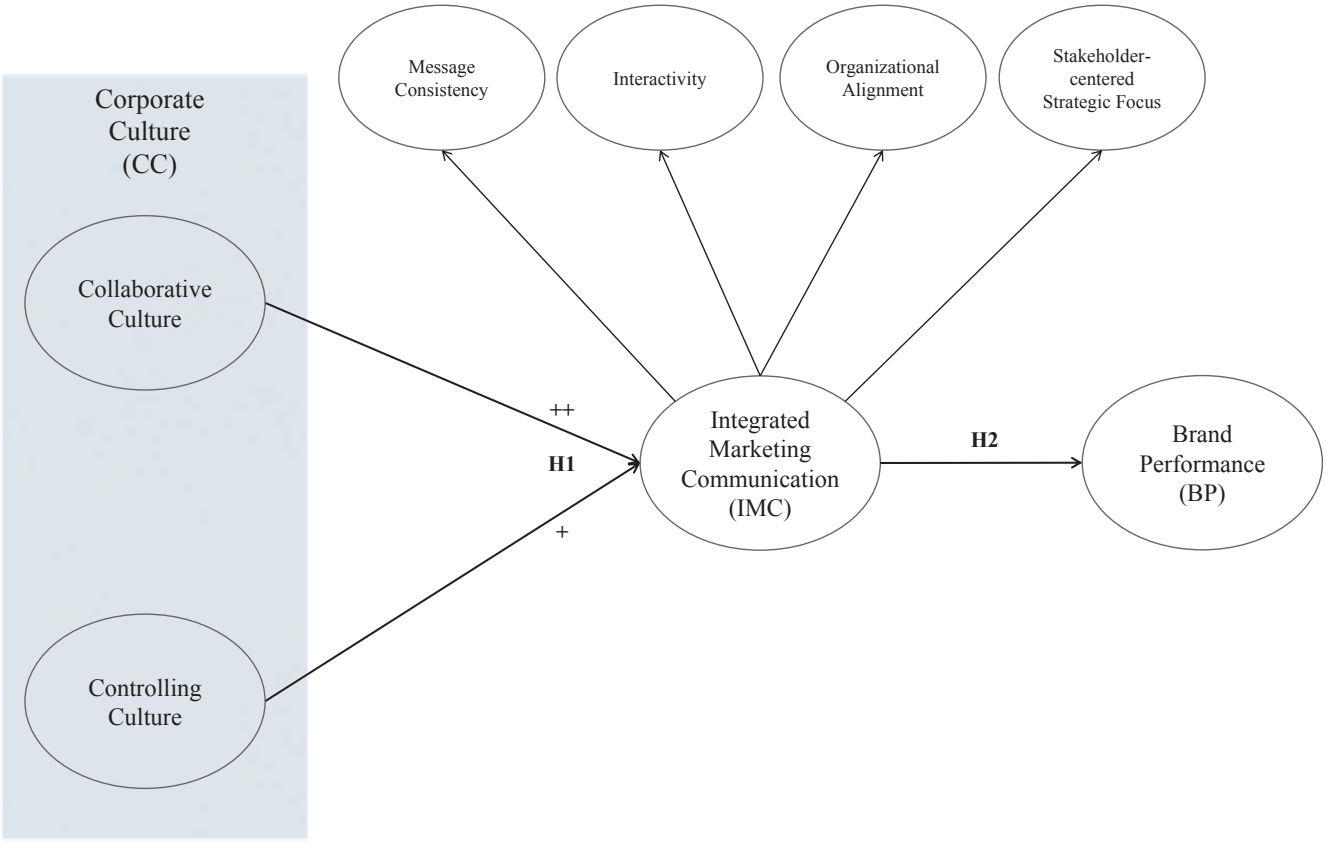

Fig. 1. The conceptual model.

Table 1
Characteristics of the sample.

Profile of respondents	n	%
Number of employees		
40–50	45	25.00
51–249	114	63.33
250+	21	11.67
Business age		
Fewer than 10 years	30	16.67
10–20 years	44	24.44
21–30 years	30	16.67
30+ years	76	42.22
Management experience		
Fewer than 5 years	55	30.56
5–10 years	50	27.78
Over 10 years	75	41.66
Position		
CEO	85	47.22
Senior marketing and communication managers	72	40.00
Other senior managers	23	12.78

measured, consistently with the theoretical definition presented in Section 2, using the 'firm-wide IMC scale' (Porcu et al., 2017) based on the broader organizational approach. This scale is composed of 25 items scored on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from "1 = strongly disagree" to "7 = strongly agree".

Similarly, CC constructs are measured using the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI), developed by Cameron and Quinn (1999) within the Competing Values Framework (Cameron & Quinn, 1999; Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983). The OCAI scale has been widely validated in previous research and utilized in almost 10,000 organizations worldwide (Gregory et al., 2009; Richard, McMillan-Capehart, Bhuian, & Taylor, 2009; Shih & Huang, 2010). For the purposes of this study the slightly modified version of the OCAI proposed by Shih and Huang (2010) was used, more specifically the clan (collaborative) culture (6) and hierarchy (controlling) culture (6) items, scored on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from "1 = strongly disagree" to '7 = strongly agree'.

BP is assessed in terms of brand advantage, the measurement scale drawn from the research by Reid (2005). The three items included were measured using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from "1 = much less" to "7 = much more" compared with the closest competitor in the last three years. Following Reid (2005), respondents were asked to focus on their principal brand. Finally, a set of measures was included to ascertain the characteristics of respondents and companies for sample description purposes.

3.3. Evaluation of non-response and common method biases

Following Groves (2006), non-response bias has been addressed as a deviation between sample and population distributions through comparison between distributions of organizational variables (namely, business size, age and SIC code) in the sample and the population. In addition, non-response bias was tested by comparing the responses of early with late respondents (Armstrong & Overton, 1977; Richard et al., 2009), yielding no evidence of significant difference. These tests demonstrate that non-response bias is not a major concern in this study.

The construct measures utilized were included in a single questionnaire, thus it is necessary to control for the problem of common method variance by means of procedural and statistical techniques. Following recommendations provided by Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003), the minimization of common method variance was initially addressed via research design. First, the survey began with a brief introduction explaining the main variables used in the questionnaire without suggesting any relationship between these variables. Second, the survey indicated that all responses were anonymous and confidential. Third, we emphasized that respondents should answer the survey questions as honestly as possible. According to Podsakoff et al. (2003), a dominant single factor would appear from the exploratory factor analysis if common method bias were present. In this regard, in terms of good statistical procedure and in order to prevent any possible bias among respondents due to their different profiles in the firm, the Harman's single factor test (McFarlin & Sweeney, 1992) was applied to all relevant variables in the initial model applying the 'eigenvalue greater than one' criterion. The results revealed four factors with eigenvalues above 1.0. To guarantee absence of bias, the results must show a low fit of the estimated factors. Therefore the results of this combination of procedures and statistical tests suggest there is no serious common method bias problem (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

4. Data analysis and results

4.1. Pilot study

To check the suitability of the 25 items on the firm-wide IMC scale, a pre-test was performed on a sub-sample of 180 companies from the total of 969 included in the database. A brief online questionnaire was designed, featuring these 25 items, and an invitation to participate was emailed to each of the firms, resulting in a total of 39 valid questionnaires. An Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted, showing that four factors explained 78.4% of the total variance, and that all the items loaded cleanly on each of the factors as expected. In addition, the Cronbach's alpha values of the four factors presented adequate internal consistency (α_{cons}: 0.91; α_{inte}: 0.94; α_{stak}: 0.94; α_{align}: 0.90).

4.2. Analysis of psychometric properties of scales

The scales utilized in this study to measure IMC, CC and BP were validated via confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using the Robust Maximum Likelihood (RML) estimation method with LISREL 8.8 Software.

First, the psychometric properties of the BP, clan culture and hierarchy culture constructs were analyzed via the assessment of a first-order CFA model (see Table 2), the results showing that the goodness of fit of the model is acceptable (Satorra-Bentler $\chi^2 = 157.33$ $p = .000$, *df*: 87, Normed $\chi^2 = 1.81$, RMSEA = 0.067). Following Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2010), we applied three diagnostic measures to assess construct reliability: (1) the item-to-total correlations and the inter-item correlations exceed the suggested 0.3 and 0.5 thresholds, respectively;

Table 2
First-order CFA results (BP, clan culture and hierarchy culture).

Items	Constructs	Standardized coefficients	*t*-Value	R^2	AVE	CR
CLAN_1	Clan culture	0.68	*	0.47	0.71	0.94
CLAN_2		0.83	12.22	0.69		
CLAN_3		0.86	11.11	0.74		
CLAN_4		0.86	11.11	0.73		
CLAN_5		0.92	12.60	0.85		
CLAN_6		0.88	11.37	0.78		
HIER_1	Hierarchy culture	0.69	*	0.47	0.63	0.91
HIER_2		0.83	13.20	0.69		
HIER_3		0.71	10.76	0.50		
HIER_4		0.82	12.51	0.67		
HIER_5		0.88	13.04	0.78		
HIER_6		0.81	11.30	0.66		
BP_1	Brand	0.83	*	0.68	0.58	0.81
BP_2	performance	0.74	8.08	0.54		
BP_3		0.72	7.34	0.52		

Note:
* Parameter fixed at 1 to provide scale to the model.

Table 3
Second-order CFA results (IMC).

Items	Constructs	Standardized coefficients	*t*-Value	R^2	AVE	CR
CONS_1	Message consistency	0.85	*	0.72	0.76	0.92
CONS_2	(cons)	0.79	10.94	0.63		
CONS_3		0.91	14.61	0.82		
CONS_4		0.92	15.86	0.85		
INTE_1	Interactivity (inte)	0.78	*	0.61	0.70	0.94
INTE_2		0.77	14.86	0.59		
INTE_3		0.84	16.59	0.71		
INTE_4		0.84	15.11	0.71		
INTE_5		0.88	15.17	0.77		
INTE_6		0.92	16.70	0.84		
INTE_7		0.83	16.54	0.69		
STAK_1	Stakeholder-centered	0.79	*	0.62	0.68	0.94
STAK_2	Strategic Focus (stak)	0.79	14.46	0.62		
STAK_3		0.90	16.74	0.81		
STAK_4		0.78	13.17	0.60		
STAK_5		0.85	13.66	0.72		
STAK_6		0.85	13.57	0.72		
STAK_7		0.83	13.20	0.69		
ALIGN_1	Organizational	0.82	*	0.68	0.68	0.94
ALIGN_2	Alignment (alin)	0.90	21.18	0.81		
ALIGN_3		0.55	9.60	0.31		
ALIGN_4		0.85	13.14	0.73		
ALIGN_5		0.86	11.96	0.73		
ALIGN_6		0.87	14.40	0.76		
ALIGN_7		0.86	14.98	0.74		
imc → cons		0.88	9.93	0.77	0.74	0.92
imc → inte		0.88	10.73	0.77		
imc → stak		0.84	9.86	0.71		
imc → align		0.85	12.14	0.73		

Note:
* Parameter fixed at 1 to provide scale to the model.

(2) the Cronbach's α scores exceed the most conservative threshold of 0.8 recommended for purified scales ($\alpha_{clan} = 0.93$; $\alpha_{hier} = 0.91$; $\alpha_{bp} = .81$); (3) the average variance extracted (AVE) and the composite reliability (CR) were calculated and found to exceed the recommended thresholds of 0.5 and 0.7, respectively. Therefore, the three measures show adequate construct reliability.

To test convergent validity, we check that all standardized coefficients are statistically significant ($p < .01$) and greater than 0.7, the ideal size recommended by Hair et al. (2010) for items that are considered a good measure of their latent factor. Moreover, all the R^2 values exceed the suggested threshold of 0.5. Taken together these findings provide evidence of convergent validity.

To test discriminant validity, the criterion suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981) was applied by calculating the square root of the AVE and the correlations between the constructs. The results demonstrated that the shared variance (correlation) between each pair of constructs was less than the AVE, providing evidence of discriminant validity.

Second, the IMC measurement was validated via a second-order CFA model (see Table 3). The results suggest that the model has an acceptable goodness of fit (Satorra-Bentler $\chi^2 = 470.81$ $p = .000$, *df*: 271, Normed $\chi^2 = 1.73$, RMSEA = 0.06). The item-to-total correlations and the inter-item correlations exceed the suggested 0.3 and 0.5 thresholds, respectively. In addition, the Cronbach's α scores exceed the most conservative threshold of 0.8 ($\alpha_{stak} = 0.94$; $\alpha_{cons} = 0.93$; $\alpha_{align} = 0.93$; $\alpha_{inte} = 0.94$) and the AVE and the CR were always greater than 0.5 and 0.7, respectively. These findings are indicative of adequate construct reliability.

All the standardized coefficients were checked to test convergent validity and were found to be statistically significant ($p < .01$) and greater than 0.7, the ideal size recommended by Hair et al. (2010) for items that are considered a good measure of their latent factor, except for the ALIGN_3 indicator (β = 0.55, above the less conservative 0.5 cut-off). Moreover, all the R^2 values exceed the suggested threshold of 0.5, except for ALIGN_3 ($R^2 = 0.31$), which became a prime candidate for deletion. The S-B scaled chi-square difference test indicates that the difference between the two alternative models (with and without ALIGN_3) was not statistically significant [ΔS-B $\chi 2$ (d.f.) = 33.20 (23), $p = .14$], thus ALIGN_3 was retained to support content validity. Taken together these findings provide evidence of convergent validity. Discriminant validity is assessed via the procedures suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981), the results confirming adequate discriminant validity.

Table 4
Descriptive statistics and inter-construct correlations.

Construct	Mean	SD	stak	cons	align	inte	clan	hier	bp
stak	4.73	1.34	1.00						
cons	5.47	1.24	0.72*	1.00					
align	5.03	1.28	0.67*	0.69*	1.00				
inte	5.31	1.28	0.69*	0.71*	0.73*	1.00			
clan	5.28	1.20	0.64*	0.66*	0.71*	0.54	1.00		
hier	5.26	1.13	0.59*	0.65*	0.68*	0.54	0.69*	1.00	
bp	5.16	1.07	0.50*	0.61*	0.43*	0.47*	0.46*	0.44*	1.00

Notes: SD = standard deviation.
* Correlations are significant at $p < .05$.

4.3. Assessment of the conceptual model and hypothesis-testing

Following Hair et al. (2010) recommendations, the conceptual model developed in this study (see Fig. 1) was assessed via Path Analysis with RML estimation method, using LISREL 8.8 Software. As a preliminary step, following Hair et al. (2010), the summary variables were generated for each first-order construct (collaborative and hierarchy culture, BP and the four IMC dimensions). Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics and inter-construct correlations.

The findings (see Table 5) indicate that the model shows an acceptable overall goodness of fit (Satorra-Bentler $\chi^2 = 27.47$ $p = .01$, *df*: 13, Normed $\chi^2 = 2.11$, RMSEA = 0.078, CFI = 0.9910). A positive and significant relationship was found between collaborative culture and IMC ($\beta_{clan \rightarrow imc} = 0.52$; $p < .01$). In addition, the results indicate that the effect of hierarchy culture on IMC is positive and significant ($\beta_{hier \rightarrow imc} = 0.32$; $p < .05$), but of smaller size than the effect of collaborative culture on IMC. To test the significance of such difference, a more constrained model (where $\beta_{clan \rightarrow imc}$ was set as equal to $\beta_{hier \rightarrow imc}$) is estimated (Satorra-Bentler $\chi^2 = 26.73p = .02$, *df*: 14, Normed $\chi^2 = 1.90$, RMSEA = 0.071, CFI = 0.9970) and a chi-square difference test is performed. The results suggesting that the difference between the two alternative models is not statistically significant [$\Delta\chi 2$ (d.f.) = 2.64 (1), $p = .10$]. Based on these findings, H1 is only partially supported.

However, the drawbacks of this test in terms of the sample size and model complexity of the model are well known. Hence the final

Table 5
Results of the path analysis.

Relationships	Non-standardized coefficients	Standardized coefficients	*t*-Value	R^2
IMC → stak	*	0.84	*	0.71
IMC → cons	1.07	0.89	15.76	0.79
IMC → align	1.07	0.86	17.12	0.75
IMC → inte	1.04	0.85	17.90	0.72
clan → IMC	0.54	0.52	4.23	0.65
hier → IMC	0.34	0.32	2.49	0.65
IMC → BP	0.61	0.62	9.31	0.38

Notes:
* Parameter fixed at 1 to fix the scale of the latent construct; clan = collaborative (clan) culture; hier = controlling (hierarchy) culture; IMC = integrated marketing communication; BP = brand performance.

Table 6
Mediation analysis.

M1. Full mediation model		
Relationships	Coefficients	*t*-Value
clan → IMC	0.52	4.23
hier → IMC	0.32	2.49
IMC → BP	0.62	9.31
S-B Chi-Square (d.f.): 27.47 (13), p-value: .001, RMSEA: 0.08		
M2. Partial mediation model		
Relationships	Coefficients	*t*-Value
clan → BP	0.03	0.21
hier → BP	0.03	0.22
clan → IMC	0.52	4.13
hier → IMC	0.32	2.40
IMC → BP	0.57	3.61
S-B Chi-Square (d.f.): 27.84 (11), p-value: .003, RMSEA: 0.09		

decision as to whether both parameters are sufficiently different should be informed by the variation produced in other goodness-of-fit indicators, such as the comparative fix index (ΔCFI), which is particularly well-suited to comparing nested models, as it is highly robust and independent of the sample size and model complexity (Chen, 2007; Cheung & Rensvold, 2002). In the present case, the difference in the CFI indicator between the unrestricted (CFI: 0.9910) and restricted (CFI: 0.9970) model was ΔCFI = 0.006, which is slightly above the 0.005 threshold proposed by Chen (2007) and just on the 0.002 cut-off proposed by Meade et al. (2008). Therefore, H1 is confirmed.

The results also show that IMC exerts a positive and significant effect on BP ($\beta_{imc\rightarrow bp}$ = .62; p < .01), thus H2 receives empirical support.

To examine the mediation effect of IMC on the relationship between CC and BP and respond to RQ1, an alternative model was estimated (M2), where IMC partially mediated this relationship and all paths relating to the constructs were to be estimated (see Table 6). The results show that the direct paths between collaborative culture and BP ($\beta_{clan\rightarrow bp}$ = .03; $p > .05$) and between controlling culture and BP ($\beta_{hier\rightarrow bp}$ = .03; $p > .05$) are close to zero and not significant, while the direct effects of both collaborative culture and controlling culture on IMC ($\beta_{clan\rightarrow imc}$ = 0.52; $p < .05$; $\beta_{hier\rightarrow imc}$ = 0.32; $p < .05$), and of IMC on BP ($\beta_{imc\rightarrow bp}$ = .57; $p < .05$) were significant. These results are in line with the recommendations of Baron and Kenny (1986) and other more recent publications (Alcántara-Pilar, Del Barrio-García, & Rodríguez-López, 2018; Carlson, Thompson, Crawford, & Kacmar, 2019; Manzi, Paderi, Benet-Martínez, & Coen, 2019; Shrout & Bolger, 2002); and thus full mediation is deemed to exist.

A further condition (Shrout & Bolger, 2002) to be fulfilled, if full mediation is to be confirmed, is that the indirect effects of a clan culture on BP, and of hierarchy on BP, are significant. The results confirmed that this was the case ($EF_{clan\rightarrow bp}$ = .33, *t*-value = 4.24; $EF_{hier\rightarrow bp}$ = .21, *t*-value = 2.32).

5. Conclusions

This paper responds to several calls for further empirical studies in the IMC field to contribute in developing a robust body of empirical knowledge. More specifically, this work is framed within the RBV, which provides a valuable framework for analyzing the extent to which IMC, as a business capability, facilitates the conversion of CC—an intangible resource of great value to the firm—into BP. The main contribution of this study lies in its empirical analysis of a pivotal organizational antecedent: CC type (clan vs. hierarchy), its influence on IMC, and its subsequent impact on brand outcomes. CC is found to be a key driver of IMC; and the collaborative culture type, characterized by supportive leadership and strong focus on collaborative behaviors among employees and between departments, is found to enable the company to build an IMC-friendly environment. The findings suggest that both culture types contribute to the implementation of IMC, however with the collaborative culture facilitating IMC to a greater extent than a controlling culture.

Moreover, this study pioneers empirical research on firm-wide IMC implementation, providing the first solid empirical proof of the positive effects of firm-wide IMC in terms of brand advantage. This research differs from previous studies that endeavored to examine the benefits of IMC implementation on brand performance (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2012; Foroudi et al., 2017; Luxton et al., 2015, 2017; Melewar et al., 2017; Reid, 2005; Šerić, 2017) in the following regard: (1) it takes a holistic approach to the measurement of IMC, as opposed to the narrower approach of earlier studies, i.e. the conceptualization that holds IMC to merely constitute the coordination of communication tools; (2) most previous studies have adopted a consumer perspective, which differs greatly from the company perspective on which the present work is based; (3) this study centers on an *overall* BP measure, unlike the majority of previous studies, which have focused on very partial aspects of the brand, such as brand identity, familiarity, image, and awareness; (4) and previous studies, such as those of Reid (2005) or Luxton et al. (2015, 2017) focus on a wide range of industries, rather than on a specific sector, as the present research does. As Luxton et al. (2017) themselves affirm, "narrowing the focus to a single industry may also be beneficial in understanding the influence of IMC capability on brand performance and would enable researchers to better define and account for other marketplace and firm-level factors that influence performance".

Additionally, it must be noted that this research facilitates the first evidence for the mediation of IMC on the relationship between CC and BP, thus providing the extant literature with a unique and relevant contribution. The results suggest that how well communication is integrated is associated with how well cultural elements are translated into value.

These contributions are highly relevant for both academics and practitioners, as they enhance the IMC body of knowledge and provide insight into how IMC works, thus illuminating the role of organizational factors in the promotion of IMC and the beneficial effects of integration in terms of brand advantage.

6. Implications and limitations

This study has a number of managerial implications. Senior managers are encouraged to pay more attention to the role of CC as a key antecedent of IMC. Thus, they are encouraged to carefully monitor the adequacy of CC and develop effective procedures to identify areas of improvement to build IMC-friendly CC. Our findings show that a collaborative culture based on flexibility, which fosters interfunctional management and collaboration among employees, is much more effective at creating IMC and, as a result, promoting brand performance, than a more hierarchical culture focused on employee control and procedural compliance. Therefore, it is recommended that senior managers examine whether the CC of their firm is compatible with the characteristics required by the 'clan' culture, and take necessary steps to work toward this. Employees are unquestionably a key element in this process; hence managers should encourage teamwork and interfunctional management, rewards based on meritocracy and equal opportunities, and employee involvement in decision-making. (Panayotopoulou et al., 2003). Such actions will help facilitate integration of communication at all organizational levels, which, in turn, will generate important benefits relative to brand performance.

The findings suggest that senior management needs to acknowledge the positive effects of implementation of firm-wide IMC in terms of brand competitive advantage. Thus, we strongly recommend that managers periodically audit IMC implementation by adopting a broad

perspective and taking into account all possible sources of communication from an entire organizational perspective. The objective of a communication audit is to evaluate all communication actions, both internal and external, carried out by an organization to identify issues for improvement, and thus build communicative effectiveness. Other previous studies dealing with IMC have proposed methods for evaluating firms' efforts to integrate their communication processes, such as the IMC mini-audit proposed by Duncan and Moriarty (1998), later modified by Reid (2005). These authors emphasize the need for managers to use such tools to evaluate their communication programs and propose actions for improvement. In this regard, the firm-wide IMC scale serves as an audit tool and provides a valuable instrument for marketers and practitioners to evaluate the overall level of IMC, enabling them to detect weaknesses that might hinder organizational communications performance. In other words, this scale can act as a barometer to assess the degree of overall integration achieved by an organization in each of the four dimensions, flagging up those areas that require remedial attention.

As with any study, these findings should be interpreted in light of certain limitations. The first limitation regards the generalizability of the results, due to the specific national and sectorial contexts of the empirical study. Thus, future research is needed to replicate this study in other geographic areas and sectors to enhance the external validity of the findings and contribute to build a more solid firm-wide IMC conceptual background. Second, while the sample size is in line with extant studies based on managers' participation, this is an issue that needs to be acknowledged as a potential limitation. Further studies are called for to refine the proposed model utilizing larger samples in order to achieve higher statistical power, which would enable detection of differences in the effects of collaborative and controlling culture on IMC. Third, this research is limited by the use of self-reported data to assess BP. To address this limitation, future research is encouraged to implement objective measures of performance to further demonstrate that IMC implementation is positively related to the 'actual' business BP.

Finally, we believe future research should take into account the budget that firms ring-fence for communication, as a moderating variable that may affect how they integrate their communication efforts. In this regard, some researchers (i.e. Low, 2000; Reid, 2005) suggest that company size and, therefore, the scale of resources allocated to communication can influence the capacity to implement IMC. More interestingly, the findings obtained in previous studies are not aligned, thus future research is called for to shed light on the role of organizational size on IMC development and performance.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declared that there is no Conflict of Interest.

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Lucia Porcu, Ph. D. is Assistant Professor of Marketing and Market Research at the University of Granada (Spain). She has previous experiences as visiting scholar at Brock University (Canada), Northwestern University (USA) and University of Bologna (Italy). Her research interests are Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), Cross-cultural Marketing and Tourism Marketing. She has participated to several international conferences and has published in prestigious journals, such as *International Journal of Advertising, European Journal of Marketing, International Journal of Hospitality Management, Computers in Human Behavior*, among others.

Salvador Del Barrio-García, Ph. D. is Associate Professor of Marketing and Market Research Department at the University of Granada. He has previous experiences as visiting scholar at University of Texas at Austin (USA). His research is focused in areas such as Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), Online Consumer Behaviour, Tourism Marketing and Cross-cultural Marketing. He has published various peer-reviewed papers in prestigious journals such as *Journal of Interactive Marketing, Journal of Business Research, European Journal of Marketing, Cornell Hospitality Quarterly, Journal of Advertising Research, International Journal of Advertising*, among others.

Philip J. Kitchen, Ph. D. is Professor of Marketing at Salford University, UK; Affiliated Research Professor in Marketing at ICN Business School, Nancy, France, and Emeritus Professor at Brock University, Canada. His research is focused in areas such as marketing communications, corporate communications, branding, global marketing issues and marketing theory. He has published 20 books and over 200 journal articles in these and related fields. He is also the Editor of the *Journal of Marketing Communications*.

Marwa Tourky, PhD. is Senior lecturer of Marketing at Exeter University Business School, UK and Vice-Chair of South West Federation of Museums and Art galleries, UK. Her main research interests lie in the area of corporate marketing and include corporate identity and reputation, communications and CSR. Marwa is also interested in relationship marketing and networks, both in a B2B and B2C context. Her research has appeared in leading scientific journals such as *Journal of Business Research, European Journal of Marketing, Corporate Reputation Review and Qualitative Market Research*.