

Measuring Integrated Marketing Communication by Taking a Broad Organisational Approach: the Firm-Wide IMC Scale

Structured Abstract:

Purpose– The purpose of this research is twofold: firstly, to conceptualise Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) by adopting a more inclusive and broader organisational perspective, and secondly, to empirically develop and validate a new measurement scale to assess firm-wide IMC.

Design/methodology/approach– This paper is based on a multistage research design adopting qualitative and quantitative approaches. First, a comprehensive literature review and a two-round Delphi study served as the primary basis for the development of the IMC theoretical framework, including generation of items, and content validation. Second, a pilot-study (n = 39) enabled us to purify the measurement tool. Third, the data gathered via an online survey conducted among CEOs and other senior managers (n = 180) led to empirical validation of the proposed firm-wide IMC scale applying second-order confirmatory factor and structural equation modelling analyses.

Findings- This research produced the firm-wide IMC scale, a 25-item Likert-format measure exhibiting adequate dimensionality, reliability and construct (convergent, discriminant and nomological) validity.

Originality/value– The need for a more holistic approach emerged from both the academic literature and the professional arena. However, even very recent attempts to measure integration have involved the adoption of a narrow marketing communications-centred approach. Thus, the value and uniqueness of this paper lies in its novel definition of IMC as a four-dimensional construct and the development of a theoretically-consistent, valid and reliable measurement tool for the assessment of integration based on a firm-wide organisational approach.

Keywords: Integrated Marketing Communication, Firm-wide IMC, Scale Development, Validation, Reliability, Measurement

Article Classification: Research paper

Since its inception in the early 1990s, Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) has gained popularity among both academics and practitioners (Taylor, 2010a; Laurie and Mortimer, 2011; ANA, 2011) and research in this area is *in crescendo* (Kliatchko, 2008; Schultz et al., 2014; Muñoz-Leiva et al., 2015). While this concept has been interpreted differently and its theoretical position is somewhat vague, Tafesse and Kitchen (2016) have pointed out that the majority of the extant literature has reached a consensus in its consideration of IMC as a valuable approach. Nevertheless, IMC is still under-researched (Ots and Nyilasy, 2015) and the limited empirical evidence supporting positive results derived from its implementation remains a barrier constraining practice and broader acceptance in boardrooms.

While research in the initial stages of IMC development focused on definitional issues (Kliatchko, 2008), Tafesse and Kitchen (2016, p. 14-15) have recently pointed out that currently, *“the first, and perhaps most important, research priority is measurement”*. More specifically, these authors have emphasised that efforts aimed at developing reliable and valid scales to measure IMC would be highly welcomed, and suggest that such efforts should follow the standard scale development procedures proposed by Gerbing and Anderson (1988). Undoubtedly, the measurement of this construct is *“not a journey for the faint-hearted”* (Ewing, 2009, p.103) and remains one of the most challenging and unresolved issues; the lack of robust scales is a Gordian Knot that prevents researchers from adequately testing the impact of integration on performance (Taylor, 2010; Kliatchko and Schultz, 2014). Several authors call for the development of measurements capable of capturing the essence of IMC at a firm-wide organisational level (Ewing, 2009; Zahay et al., 2014; Schultz et al., 2014; Kliatchko and Schultz, 2014). Yet, despite broad acknowledgement that IMC is evolving and expanding (Cook, 2004), even the most recent attempts to measure integration have adopted a narrow

marketing communications-centred approach (Lee and Park, 2007; Wang et al., 2009). For example, Lee and Park (2007)'s IMC scale was developed on the premise that a *“more practical approach is to confine the boundaries of IMC solely to the marketing communications mix and its components”* (p. 223). As a consequence, the extant empirical evidence of the effectiveness of IMC is limited to the demonstration of the effect of consistent messages delivered via different marketing communication tools, such as public relations and advertising (Delgado-Ballester, Navarro and Sicilia, 2012). Nevertheless, these authors recognised that the lack of a comprehensive definition of the concept is an important limitation. Similarly, most of the previous measurement tools (e.g. Duncan and Moriarty, 1997; Lee and Park, 2007) have been developed within the practitioners' arena, so a more robust academic approach is needed. Therefore, this paper attempts to fill such a research gap, by developing a measurement scale to assess IMC through the adoption of a firm-wide organisational perspective.

The challenges associated with measurement are closely linked to the theoretical challenges, and here two main research gaps may be identified: the lack of conceptual clarity and the need for a reliable and valid measurement scale to assess firm-wide IMC. The purpose of this paper is therefore two-fold. Firstly, on the premise that the organisation is a single unit in communication with its stakeholders, the primary aim is to clarify the theoretical background by conceptualising firm-wide IMC as a multidimensional concept. Secondly, this study aims to develop and validate a multi-item scale to measure IMC, thus providing a valid instrument for the assessment of the level of IMC achieved by organisations and paving the way for future empirical research to model the antecedents of IMC and its effects on performance.

Background

The debate on IMC remains open and there is a lack of consensus even on what the concept should be called. The conceptualisation of IMC has evolved from a narrower marketing communications- and marketing-centred approach to a much more recent organisational approach. The ‘marketing communications approach’ is reflected by the initial definitions of IMC proposed by several authors (*e.g.* Caywood, Schultz and Wang, 1991; Duncan and Everett, 1993; Kotler, 2000; Low, 2000) and conceives integration just as a tool for ensuring the coherence of marketing communications messages. On the other hand, the ‘marketing approach’ includes a set of conceptualisations showing the shift of the *locus* of integration from marketing communications to marketing (Schultz and Schultz, 1998; Schultz and Kitchen, 2000) that regards integration as a ‘strategic business process’ rather than simply as a marketing communications device. This, together with the communication-based relationship-marketing model (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998), has paved the way for the emergence of the firm-wide organisational approach. Duncan and Moriarty have defined IMC as “*a systemic process that requires certain organisational support elements*” (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998, p. 9) - whereby integration involves the corporate, marketing and communication levels - and highlighted the importance of stakeholder-orientation and not just that of customer-orientation. While they continue to use the original term ‘IMC’, their conceptualisation explicitly reflects the broadening reach of integration: they adopt a ‘firm-wide organisational approach’, in which integration is more than the mere juxtaposition of marketing communications and market research elements.

Although ‘IMC’ is still the most popular and widely implemented term, in the last decade several authors have opted for dropping the term ‘marketing’ from IMC

(Christensen *et al.*, 2008; Smith, 2012; Einwiller and Boenigk, 2012) to reflect that the *locus* of integration is not marketing but the whole organisation (e.g. Kitchen and Schultz, 2001; Christensen *et al.*, 2008; Christensen and Cornelissen, 2011; Einwiller and Boenigk, 2012; Smith, 2012). This broader approach also addresses the concerns raised by some corporate communications scholars. However, the IMC label has often been used for both conceptualisations based on marketing communications- or marketing-centred approaches and also those based on the organisational approach, thus increasing the level of confusion around a concept with “*a formal research agenda [that] did not [even] emerge until 2009*” (Schultz *et al.*, 2014, p. 459).

Nevertheless, the need for a more holistic approach also emerged from the professional arena and here both client and agency managers and practitioners were found to be unanimous in identifying “*the involvement of overall business process, not just marketing communications*” among the four top IMC notions (Kliatchko and Schultz, 2014, p. 382). Likewise, Christensen *et al.* (2008) suggest that this concept has developed from a specialised activity into both an organisation-wide issue and concern. On this basis, they have discussed the need for organisations to pursue Integrated Communication (IC) and they recognise the organisation as a complex phenomenon that requires flexibility in order to address changes in the environment.

Conceptualisation of Integrated Marketing Communication

Based on the comprehensive review of extant conceptualisations, definitions and theoretical models, we have explicitly embraced the more holistic organisational perspective expressing that the *locus* of integration is the entire organisational entity to define Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) as:

“The stakeholder-centred interactive process of cross-functional planning and

alignment of organisational, analytical and communication processes that allows for the possibility of continuous dialogue by conveying consistent and transparent messages via all media in order to foster long-term profitable relationships that create value”.

In addition, the authors of the current study have conducted a detailed analysis of the construct dimensions identified in prior literature, enabling them to conclude that IMC is indeed a multidimensional concept. The construct dimensions identified in prior literature are summarised in Table 1.

[PLACE TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

On the basis of this review, four dimensions of the IMC construct were identified: message consistency; interactivity; stakeholder-centred strategic focus; and organisational alignment. The proposed definition and dimensions will be the conceptual basis for the development of a scale for the measurement of IMC.

As mentioned earlier, in the early years of IMC “*most writings within the field focused primarily on the message or campaign side of integrated communications downplaying its organisational dimensions*” (Christensen *et al.*, 2008, p. 426). In the theoretical framework proposed by the current authors, while ‘message consistency’ and ‘interactivity’ have previously been included as dimensions of IMC (e.g. Duncan and Moriarty, 1997, 1998; Moriarty and Schultz, 2012; Porcu *et al.*, 2012), the remaining two dimensions better represent the effort to theoretically clarify IMC as a concept focused on stakeholders (not only customers), embracing also organisational dimensions, as suggested by extant literature (Kliatchko, 2008; Christensen *et al.*, 2008; Moriarty and Schultz, 2012; Luxton, Reid and Mavondo, 2015; Ots and Nyilasy, 2015; Tafesse and Kitchen, 2016).

The *message consistency* dimension deals with the most basic level of integration and refers to the communication of coherent and clear positioning (“*one sound, one sight*”,

Caywood, Schultz and Wang, 1991) via all the organisation's sources of communication. This dimension has been identified since the very inception of the IMC concept: Schultz and Schultz (1998) considered "*tactical coordination of marketing communications*" as the starting point of integration; Duncan and Moriarty (1998, p. 6) pointed out that "*the key to managing the point of perception is to deliver and receive messages on a platform of strategic consistency*" and conceptualised the "*strategic consistency*" dimension as the "*consistency in the way corporate values are presented, how products perform and how the brand is identified and positioned*" responding to "*the need for messages to be strategically consistent to positively influence the perception of these messages*". Similarly, Pickton and Hartley (1998) presented three dimensions (out of five) relating to the coherence of goals, planning and messages. The relevance of this dimension has achieved consensus among most authors, as suggested by Kliatchko (2005) in his comprehensive examination of prior research revealing that "*coordination and coherence of messages and channels*" was the major point of convergence of the conceptualisations analysed. More recently, Moriarty and Schultz (2012) have argued that IMC is not just one theory but rather a set of theories relating to different areas of knowledge contributing to the evolution of the concept, and that, among these theories, the "*theory of consistency*" (Thorson and Moore, 1996) is the most salient. With these premises, in the current research, the consistency of messages with strategic positioning, the consistency in the visual components of communication and the consistency between product and service messages are the three main elements captured by this dimension.

The *interactivity* dimension is the element *sine qua non* that establishes two-way symmetrical communication – an essential condition for dialogue between organisation/brand and all stakeholders. The evolution in information and

communication technologies (ICTs) – the Internet in particular – plays a crucial role, since they maximise every element of the interactivity dimension, for example by combining social media with the use of cutting-edge mobile devices, enabling an unprecedented level of ubiquitous communication. Schultz and Schultz (1998) and, more recently, Kliatchko and Schultz (2014) have underlined that digital technologies play a key role in the implementation of an integrated approach. Likewise, Duncan and Moriarty (1998) presented *interactivity* as the core element of integration and “*the hallmark of the paradigm shift in both marketing and communication*” (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998). In this paper, interactivity is intended to refer to the context of general human social experience (“*behavioural interactivity*”, Burgoon et al., 2002), reciprocity (that characterises the relationship between the interlocutors), speed of response (to received messages) and (interlocutors’) responsiveness being considered as the three principal aspects of this dimension (Johnson, Bruner and Kumar, 2006). This approach reflects the results of the analysis carried out by Moriarty and Schultz (2012) who considered the *theory of relationship* (Duncan, 1995) and the *theory of reciprocity* (Schultz, Cole and Bailey, 2004) as relating to IMC. In addition, Christensen *et al.* (2008) highlighted the importance of the role played by responsiveness and speed of response in integration processes, as when the organisational structures are sufficiently flexible they facilitate a continuous and fluid dialogue between the organisation and its environment.

The *stakeholder-centred strategic focus* dimension relates to the need for the whole organisation (including the human resources at all hierarchical levels within the organisational chart) to acknowledge that its main strategic goal should be to create added value for its stakeholders and establish and maintain long-term relations with them. A crucial prerequisite for implementing this approach is knowing the stakeholders

in depth. Hence, information must flow and be shared among all the agents engaged with the organisation (including employees, managers, partners, providers, agencies and customers) and go beyond departmental boundaries and even organisational frontiers (for example, between the organisation and communication agencies). Our literature review suggests that in its origins the concept was mainly based on a customer-centred orientation, while nowadays the majority of conceptualisations highlight the need to take into consideration all stakeholders. In fact, Duncan and Moriarty (1998) emphasised that managing the contact points with all the stakeholders is crucial, Kitchen and Schultz (2001) referred to IMC in terms of messages addressed to all stakeholders, and Pickton (2004) suggested that all of the organisation's stakeholders are its interlocutors. Moreover, the key role of stakeholders represents the most notable difference between the IMC definition offered by Kliatchko (2005) and its refinement proposed by the same author a few years later (Kliatchko, 2008). More specifically, while in the former the author included the stakeholder-centred orientation as one of the dimensions, in the latter the stakeholder orientation is presented as one of the four pillars of the IMC model, the corporate level being the *locus* of integration. With these premises, in the current research, the 'stakeholder-centred strategic focus' dimension is meant to capture the following three main elements: 1) promotion of organisational mission (among the stakeholders); 2) strategic assessment of all the contact points (with stakeholders); 3) stakeholder-centred goals and solutions.

The *organisational alignment* dimension refers to internal integration (vertical and horizontal) at the organisational level. The wide range of communication activities must take into account the company as a whole, hence aligning organisational processes, spanning departmental boundaries and eliminating functional silos are of paramount importance to achieving the highest level of integration. In fact, not only marketing or

communication but *all* the organisational functions (even when outsourced) must be involved in the integration processes (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998; Schultz and Schultz, 1998; Gulati, 2007; Kliatchko and Schultz, 2014; Ots and Nyilasy, 2015). For example, organisational infrastructure and cross-functional management (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998) and other organisational issues (Christensen *et al.*, 2008, Moriarty and Schultz, 2012; Porcu *et al.*, 2012) are key factors in IMC. Finally, in the management literature, *integral coordination* was defined as the highest level of the coordination process whereby all members of the organisation are connected with each other and managers in charge of cross-functional integration share the leadership with senior corporate management (Gulati and Oldroyd, 2009), while an organisational structure and a reward system geared to encourage cooperation and relationship-building are needed to connect the diverse organisational functions (Gulati, 2007). In the current research, the ‘organisational alignment’ dimension reflects three main aspects: 1) alignment of horizontal and vertical communication processes; 2) share of corporate values and goals (among managers and employees); 3) cross-functional coordination and collaboration.

The measurement issue

The extant literature has highlighted the need for further research efforts to develop and empirically validate new measurement tools to assess IMC, as even the most recent publications (Porcu *et al.*, 2012; Swerling, Thorson and Zerfass, 2014; Malthouse and Schultz, 2014; Schultz *et al.*, 2014; Kliatchko and Schultz, 2014; Zahay *et al.*, 2014) point out that the lack of valid and reliable scales is the barrier that has prevented – and continues to prevent – scholars from conducting more robust empirical research, in effect hindering the IMC theory-building process.

The review of the conceptual frameworks (e.g. Pickton and Hartley, 1998; Kitchen and Schultz, 2001; Pickton, 2004; Kliatchko, 2008; Moriarty and Schultz, 2012; Luxton *et*

al., 2015), models (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998; Porcu et al. 2012) and measurement scales (e.g. Duncan and Moriarty, 1997; Low, 2000; Reid, 2005; Lee and Park, 2007) developed over the last two decades leads us to conclude that the multidimensionality of the construct represents the feature that has generated the greatest consensus among both academics and practitioners. The conceptualisation of IMC is indeed complex; however, analysis of dimensions identified by previous research enabled a better understanding of the underlying dimensions of IMC. A detailed examination of the main characteristics of the existing measurement scales (see Table 2) provided valuable data to inform crucial decisions in our development of a measurement scale (number of items, characteristics of the sample, theoretical framework, etc.).

[PLACE TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

The main conclusion drawn from analysis is that there is a paucity of scales capable of assessing integration at a firm-wide organisational level, since most scales are based on narrowly focused upon marketing communications (Low, 2000; Lee and Park, 2007). We concluded that the firm-wide organisational approach should be adopted as the theoretical basis for the development of an IMC measurement tool. In fact, this perspective enjoys broad support in the literature, especially in more recent publications, suggesting that the concept is becoming increasingly more inclusive.

Method

This study was conducted to develop a reliable and valid measure of the IMC construct, executing a multistage research design modelled after Churchill (1979) and Gerbing and Anderson (1988). These widely accepted measurement development procedures (summarised in Figure 1) have been applied via adopting both qualitative and quantitative approaches. First, we carried out an extensive literature review to

develop the IMC theoretical framework and generate the items, together with a two-round Delphi study for content validation of the proposed scale. Second, a pilot-study and an online survey were conducted to purify and validate the scale, respectively. Each stage is described in more detail in the following sections.

[PLACE FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Scale Development: Identification Stage

The very basic requirement for a good measure is content validity, which implies that the instrument covers the major content of a construct (Churchill, 1979), being the property usually achieved through a comprehensive literature review and interviews with practitioners and/or academicians (Li *et al.*, 2005).

Therefore, in Step 1 the domain of the construct was specified through literature review as reported in previous sections of this paper covering the details of the IMC theoretical framework (definition and dimensions).

Next, in Step 2, an initial set of items designed to measure each dimension was generated. The primary basis for the item-generation procedure was the literature review, supplemented by a Delphi study. In writing the statements, the criteria of clarity and redundancy were applied to avoid any ambiguity (for example, double-barrelled items) and to ensure there were sufficient items encapsulating the same content expressed in several different ways to produce a scale containing the most suitable items (Netemeyer, Bearden and Sharma, 2003; Malhotra and Birks, 2007). Moreover, we opted to avoid using negative items, since they reduce clarity of the statements and present poorer reliability than positive items. This process resulted in 59 items being selected to measure each dimension: 11 for *message consistency*; 18 for *interactivity*; 14 for *stakeholder-centred strategic focus*; and 16 for *organisational alignment*.

The Delphi study was conducted by presenting the theoretical framework and the initial set of 59 items to an international expert panel composed of 10 senior academicians (affiliated to top universities in the USA, Canada, Germany, UK and Spain) for content evaluation and amendment, where appropriate. The most influential scholars in the field, including the authors of seminal publications on IMC participated. It must be noted that five experts have a relevant practitioner background (client and agency), thus both academic and professional views were covered.

The experts were provided with a detailed description of the proposed IMC definition, dimensions and items and asked to critically evaluate the theoretical framework and the dimensional structure of the IMC construct, and the adequacy and comprehensiveness of the proposed factors and the items designed to measure it. They also evaluated whether statements suitably captured the elements of each dimension and whether the four proposed measures were appropriate for assessing the IMC construct. This first round was designed to provide a qualitative assessment. To incorporate the experts' suggestions several items have been modified and rephrased. Moreover, the experts suggested deleting ten of the proposed items that were considered as redundant. On the basis of the experts' feedback and the conceptual background, the total number of items was reduced from 59 to 49, which went through to the second round of testing..

In addition to content evaluation, the second round aimed to reduce the items to a more manageable number, therefore the authors asked for a quantitative assessment of the adequacy of each item on a 7-point Likert scale (from 1, 'very inadequate', to 7, 'very adequate'). The experts were asked to pay special attention to content validity, representativeness, dimensionality, comprehensibility and unambiguousness. By way of a criterion to decide on the inclusion or elimination of an item, those items scored by all the experts as worthy of at least 4 points out of 7 were retained. Based on the experts

feedback and taking into account the conceptual framework, the content was further refined and redundant and ambiguous items were either modified or eliminated, the final number of items being brought down to 25. The resulting proposed firm-wide IMC measurement tool consists of 25 items scored on a 7-point Likert-format scale, from '1, strongly disagree' to '7, strongly agree': 4 items for 'message consistency', 7 items for 'interactivity', 7 items for 'stakeholder-centred strategic focus' and 7 items for 'organizational alignment' (see Appendix 1).

Empirical Scale Refinement and Validation

Sampling frame

The services sector was selected due to its substantial contribution to overall GDP and employment (over 70% in the case of Spanish economy according to INE, 2015). As a sampling frame, a commercial listing of 969 businesses was drawn from the Bureau van Dijk SABI database, based on international (for example, SIC, Standard Industrial Classification) classification systems. Four SIC codes were covered in the study (701 to 704). This study sought to select respondents expected to have the best knowledge about IMC in the organisation, namely senior managers (Kliatchko and Schultz, 2014). Therefore, the key informant method was used, with CEOs, senior marketing and communication managers and other senior managers targeted.

Data collection procedure

The data for this phase were gathered via an online self-administered survey conducted among services businesses with at least 40 employees operating in Spain. The *modus operandi* for the data collection consisted of three steps. As a preliminary step, a set of 180 businesses were randomly extracted from the commercial listing to purify the proposed IMC measure via a pilot study conducted with the same procedures utilised

for the main survey. The 39 respondents of the pre-test were dropped from the sampling frame for the second study. Second, a telemarketing firm was employed to contact the sample by telephone to ascertain key informants' and firms' availability to participate in this study, verify the names, position and collect e-mail addresses (not included in the database due to privacy protection legal issues). This procedure resulted in the removal of 406 from the sampling framework. The most common reasons were firms' resistance to collaborating in external investigation and key informants' limited time or lack of interest in such studies. Third, a customised link to the online questionnaire was emailed to the individuals who had agreed to participate (n = 524). Following the initial e-mail, a follow-up e-mail was sent to encourage response. There were 180 fully completed valid responses for an effective response rate of 18.6% (of the total population of 969 CEOs and other senior managers) and of 34.4 % of the 524 who had agreed to participate.

The final version of the IMC measurement instrument and a scale to measure economic and financial performance (used to assess the nomological validity) were included in the questionnaire. The performance scale was drawn from Reid (2005), is widely used in previous research and acceptable levels of reliability and validity have been reported. In this study, we solely used the four items (overall profitability, market share, sales growth, and total sales income) assessing the 'sales-related performance' dimension, using a seven-point Likert scale ('1, much less' to '7, much more' compared with the closest competitor in the last three years). In addition, a set of measures was included to ascertain the characteristics of the respondents and companies for sample description purposes.

A significant problem with organisational-level research is that senior managers receive many requests to participate and have limited time (Li *et al.*, 2005). However, the sample obtained in this study is larger than samples used for the development of most

extant measures (see Table 2). In addition, the response rate is consistent with prior literature and the makeup of the respondent pool was considered excellent. In fact, almost 50% of the respondents were CEOs, and over 40% had been at their organisation for more than a decade; as such it was expected they should have a broad view of IMC practices in their organisation.

Another typical concern in such surveys is that information collected from respondents might have a non-response bias. Assessing non-response bias requires either population information or similar information on non-respondents (Stoop et al., 2010). Groves (2006) suggested addressing non-response bias as a deviation between sample and population distributions via the comparison of the distributions of some variables in the sample and distributions of these variables in the population. Thus, in order to ascertain the extent to which respondents are similar to non-respondents, a comparison (presented in Appendix 2) was made in this study between the organisational details of the companies included in the sample and the population from which the sample was drawn, enabling the current researchers to conclude that there were no significant differences between the two groups in terms of business size (number of employees), age and type (SIC code). Therefore, non-response bias cannot be considered a major concern in this study.

We also attempted to control for the problem of common method variance by means of procedural and statistical techniques. Following the recommendations provided by Podsakoff et al. (2003), we initially addressed the minimization of common method variance 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 emphasised that respondents should answer the

survey questions as honestly as possible. In terms of good statistical procedure, and in order to prevent any possible bias among the respondents due to their different profiles in the firm, the Harman's single factor test (McFarlin and Sweeny, 1992) was applied to all the relevant variables in the initial model, using the 'eigenvalue greater than one' criterion. This in fact revealed four factors as opposed to just one. To guarantee absence of bias, the results must show a low fit of the estimated factors. The results of this combination of procedures and statistical tests suggest that the common method bias in the data was relatively limited (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003).

Reliability Stage: Pilot-Study

As noted earlier, a pilot study was conducted with the aim of purifying the proposed IMC scale examining its reliability and dimensionality. The 25 items were included in an online survey resulting in a total of 39 complete and usable responses (21.6 % response rate). An Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was applied to the data obtained to initially determine the dimensionality of the IMC scale. The EFA revealed four factors explaining 78.4% of the total variance. All items loaded onto the previously identified factors. To check the reliability of the four factors, internal consistency coefficients were assessed. Here, the Cronbach's α scores ($\alpha_{\text{cons}} = .91$; $\alpha_{\text{inte}} = .94$; $\alpha_{\text{stak}} = .94$; $\alpha_{\text{alin}} = .90$) exceeded the recommended threshold of .8. Item-to-total correlations and the inter-item correlations of each dimension exceeded .5 and .3, respectively. The results of the pilot-study provided an initial evidence for the adequate dimensionality of the IMC scale and enabled to consider the 25 items as appropriate for the subsequent steps of scale validation to be performed through the main study.

Psychometrics Properties Stage: Main Study

With the aim of validating the proposed IMC scale, the researchers carried out an

analysis of the psychometric properties: dimensionality, reliability and construct validity (convergent, discriminant and nomological).

To test the *dimensionality* of the scale, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) adopting the competing models strategy was conducted using LISREL 8.8 and the Robust Maximum Likelihood (RML) estimation method. Two alternative models were estimated: M1 (via a first-order CFA), where IMC was a unidimensional construct, the 25 indicators loading onto one factor; and M2 (via second-order CFA), where IMC was a four-dimensional concept, the 25 indicators being loaded onto four factors (based on the theoretical background). The results indicated that M2 (S-B $\chi^2 = 470.81$, d.f. = 271, $p = .00$; RMSEA = .06; Normed $\chi^2 = 1.74$; TLI = .99; CFI = .99; RMR = .11; SRMR = .051) provided an acceptable overall goodness-of-fit, while the fit indices for M1 (S-B $\chi^2 = 1301.7$, d.f. = 275, $p = .00$; RMSEA = .14; Normed $\chi^2 = 4.73$; TLI = .93; CFI = .94; RMR = .19; SRMR = .082) suggested that this model was not acceptable. In addition, an S-B scaled chi-square difference test (Satorra and Bentler, 2001) was performed, the results showing that the difference between M1 and M2 was statistically significant [Δ S-B χ^2 (d.f.) = 254.48 (4), $p = .00$] and thus providing evidence of the multidimensionality of IMC and of the unidimensionality of the four IMC constructs. Thus, the next steps in the validation of the proposed scale would be based on the results of the assessment of M2 (Table 3).

[PLACE TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Following Hair et al. (2010), three diagnostic measures were implemented to estimate *construct reliability* – defined as an assessment of the degree of consistency between multiple measurements of a variable. First, the item-to-total correlation and the inter-item correlation were analysed and both exceeded the suggested cut-offs (.5 and .3,

respectively). Second, the reliability coefficients were assessed, the Cronbach's α scores exceeding the most conservative threshold of .8 recommended for purified scales. Third, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and the Composite Reliability (CR) were calculated (see Table 3) and were found to exceed the recommended thresholds of .5 and .7, respectively. Based on these findings, the IMC measurement scale showed adequate reliability.

Based on Hair *et al.* (2010), *convergent validity* was tested by checking that all standardised coefficients were statistically significant ($t > 2.58, p < .01$) and greater than .7, the ideal size recommended in the literature for items that are considered a good measure of their latent factor, except for the ALIN_3 indicator ($\beta = .55$, above the less conservative .5 cutoff). Moreover, all the R^2 values exceeded the suggested threshold of .5, except for ALIN_3 ($R^2 = .31$), which became a prime candidate for deletion. An S-B scaled chi-square difference test was performed, the results showing that the difference between the two alternative models (with and without ALIN_3) was not statistically significant [Δ S-B χ^2 (d.f.) = 33.20 (23), $p = .14$], and thus ALIN_3 was retained to support content validity. All these results provided evidence of convergent validity. In addition, all the standard second-order parameters were significant at a .01 level and ranged from .84 to .88, indicating that the proposed dimensions loaded very well onto the second-order IMC construct.

In a recent methodological study, Voorhees, Brady, Calantone and Ramírez (2016) showed that, despite the fact that demonstration of discriminant validity is a requirement for proper theory testing, the vast majority of marketing studies are failing to meet this condition. Likewise, the same authors found that the criterion suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981) and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio method with a cutoff of .85 should be the standard for discriminant validity testing in marketing. Thus, to test

discriminant validity, the criterion suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981) was first applied by calculating the square root of the AVE and the correlations between the constructs. To meet the requirement to prove discriminant validity, the AVE should be greater than the square of the correlation between the two constructs; or, in other words, the square root of the AVE should be greater than the correlation shared among the constructs. The results (see Table 4) demonstrated that the shared variance (correlation) between each pair of constructs was less than the AVE, providing evidence of discriminant validity. In addition, the HTMT ratio has been computed for each pair of constructs on the basis of the item correlations. The computation yielded values between .713 in respect with HTMT (stakeholder-centred strategic focus, organisational alignment) and .779 in respect with HTMT (organisational alignment, interactivity), thus satisfying the most conservative criterion ($HTMT < .85$) to provide further evidence for discriminant validity. Moreover, while the four factors were strongly related (as expected for measures of the same second-order construct), the correlations did not exceed .8, the recommended threshold suggested by Bagozzi (1980) and Bagozzi and Yi (2012) to consider two constructs as distinct.

[PLACE TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

To determine the *nomological validity* of the IMC scale, the current study needed to demonstrate that IMC correlated positively, in the theoretically predicted way, with measures of different but related constructs, as suggested by Malhotra (2004). The literature review suggests that the positive relationship between IMC and economic and financial performance has gained relatively broad support (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998; Reid, 2003, 2005; Moriarty and Schultz, 2012; Kliatchko and Schultz, 2014; Šerić, Gil-Saura, Ruiz-Molina, 2014; Luxton *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, to assess nomological validity, the current authors opted to test a model in which IMC was the independent

variable and the construct ‘economic and financial performance’ the dependent variable. A Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) analysis was conducted using the Robust Maximum Likelihood estimation method with LISREL 8.8 software. The findings (shown in Table 5 and Figure 2) indicated that the model showed an acceptable overall goodness-of-fit (S-B $\chi^2 = 593.18$, d.f. = 372, $p = .00$; Normed $\chi^2 = 1.59$; RMSEA = .058; TLI = .99; IFI = .99; CFI = .99; RMR = .13; SRMR = .065), and there was a strong, positive ($\beta_{\text{IMC} \rightarrow \text{EFP}} = .41$) and significant ($t = 4.29$; $p < .01$) effect of IMC on economic and financial performance. These results provided empirical support for the nomological validity of the proposed IMC scale.

[PLACE TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE]

Discussion

The current research has provided a novel conceptualisation of firm-wide IMC that takes a step toward the better understanding of IMC from an organisational perspective, and gives much-needed theoretical clarification regarding the name, definition, dimensions and measurement of IMC.

In an editorial entitled “*Integrated Marketing Communication in 2010 and beyond*”, Taylor (2010a) argues that IMC in the communication environment is more relevant than ever, highlighting that “*there is a clear need for more research on the return on investment from integrated programs*”. Elsewhere he points out that “*too little research has focused on IMC performance metrics*” (Taylor, 2010b, pp. 346–347). In addition, the lack of robust scales is still perceived as one of the greatest obstacles preventing scholars from assessing the impact of IMC on organisational performance.

The need to adopt a firm-wide organisational perspective to define and effectively assess integration has been underlined by many (e.g. Christensen et al., 2008; Porcu et

al., 2012; Kliatchko and Schultz, 2014). However, previous measurement efforts were mainly based on the early IMC definitions and conceptual frameworks thus adopting a narrow marketing communication approach. Therefore, this paper responds to many calls for more comprehensive scales capable of capturing the essence of IMC taking an organisational approach, providing academicians with a novel theoretically consistent, valid and reliable instrument to measure IMC: the firm-wide IMC scale. It must be noticed that the proposed measurement tool might also provide subscales that would be of practical use when using the full scale would be not necessary or inappropriate.

The findings show that the first-order constructs (the four dimensions) have equally high loadings to the second-order construct (IMC), thus enabling the authors to conclude that all the dimensions play a relevant role. Moreover, a comparison with the results found by Reid (2005) regarding ‘interactivity’ (a dimension considered in both Reid and the present studies), a more relevant role emerged from the current results and this can be due to the increasingly more important role of digital connectivity.

In addition, the estimation of the IMC-EFP (economic and financial performance) model resulted in corroborating the findings obtained by Reid (2005) and provide further empirical evidence for the positive impact of IMC in terms of performance, thus contributing to build a more robust and substantial IMC theoretical body of knowledge.

Taken as a whole, the contributions of the present paper provide valuable insights into what IMC is, how it can be effectively measured and why it is so relevant in terms of performance.

Managerial Implications

Several managerial implications can be derived from this study. As mentioned earlier, the findings suggest that a higher IMC level is positively associated with a

higher level of economic and financial performance. Thus, in line with most extant literature, the authors encourage managers and practitioners to consider firm-wide IMC as a key competitive advantage and a relevant way to improve performance. With this premise, relevant managerial implications can be derived from each of the four IMC constructs. With regard to ‘message consistency’, the findings suggest that senior managers must acknowledge the need for the organisation to adequately coordinate the messages generated at all levels, departments and even the outsourced functions of the organisation to achieve a high level of message consistency. ‘Interactivity’ implies that managers need to ensure that the voice of all stakeholders are listened-to and taken into consideration in decision-making processes, so as to enhance organisational responsiveness, speed of response and the reciprocity of the organisation–stakeholder relationship. To adopt a ‘stakeholder-centred strategic focus’ top managers should activate mechanisms that facilitate a meaningful dialogue with all stakeholders, while to achieve ‘organisational alignment’ managers have to be committed to ensuring that communication flows adequately – not only vertically and horizontally within the organisation but also between the organisation and external partners and agencies – to generate a healthy climate of collaboration.

In addition to the practical implications directly related to the IMC dimensions, further managerial implications can be identified. First, the IMC scale developed and validated in the current study can serve as an IMC audit tool for CEOs and other senior managers to assess the level of IMC achieved by their organisations and agencies taking a firm-wide organisational approach. That is, the firm-wide IMC scale provides a valuable instrument to help CEOs, CMOs and other senior managers in making crucial decisions on the organisation’s *modus operandi* for improving performance. On the one hand, the proposed measurement tool can be used to evaluate and monitor the overall level of

integration achieved by the whole organisation and, on the other, the four IMC measures can be utilised separately to capture the level of achievement of each IMC dimension. Accordingly, the firm-wide IMC scale is likely to provide organisations with relevant information for a better understanding of the current IMC situation and to prevent failures that might hinder the effectiveness of communication efforts. In other words, the firm-wide IMC audit can help management to get the feeling for how IMC is functioning. Previous communication research and practice have reported the use of audits for various purposes (e.g., to assess internal communication), while Duncan and Moriarty (1998) developed the very first and well-known IMC mini-audit that was later modified and empirically validated by Reid (2005). The main contribution of the current study lies in the development and robust validation of the firm-wide IMC scale, a valuable barometer that can assist marketers and practitioners in their decision-making processes via the assessment of the reach and effectiveness of their IMC strategy. Indeed, such a scale enables them to detect errors that might negatively affect overall performance. More specifically, the firm-wide IMC scale can be used by managers to evaluate the degree of implementation of each of the four IMC dimensions, and serve as a guide that provides a sense of direction and identifies any areas that require remedial attention. The practical use of this scale can be performed by surveying practitioners or managers using the 25 items (scored from 1 to 7) and summing the values obtained for each dimension and for the overall IMC construct, the minimum IMC level being 25 and the maximum 175. Thus, precise ranges can be established and IMC grades defined (for example, A, B, C and D), as occurs with other similar scales (such as the corporate credit ratings).

As mentioned above, IMC-related issues have attracted a great deal of interest from some of the most renowned professional associations, such as the APQC and the ANA.

This interest is reflected in several of the research surveys they have promoted in the past two decades, as well as more recent publications, that aim to examine their member organisations' concerns regarding IMC. Since the difficulties associated with measurement have been regarded to date as the greatest barriers to achieving a broader acceptance and full-scale implementation of the concept, the proposed IMC scale is likely to help managers and practitioners put integration processes into practice.

It should be noted that the above-described implications involve all organisational functions (and not simply the communication and marketing departments) at all hierarchical levels. For example, human resource managers should focus on reducing or eliminating the departmental 'silos' and 'turf battles' as these interfere with integration processes by preventing organisations from aligning themselves with and focusing on stakeholders. Corporate and marketing communications managers should ensure consistency between their communication messages and the brand and corporate positioning, promoting the interactivity of the organisation as a whole and senior management should have a profound understanding of the value of IMC thus facilitating its implementation through the fostering of both vertical and horizontal integration. In light of these results, business and agency managers are urged to motivate their organisation's members to enhance integration mechanisms and collectively reduce or even eliminate those barriers hindering the achievement of high levels of IMC.

Limitations and Future Research

As with any research study, this paper presents limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the generalizability of the results might be limited, as the results may have been affected by the characteristics of the sectorial and national contexts at play. Thus, the authors encourage other researchers to validate the proposed IMC scale

by replicating this study in other sectors and countries, with a view to improving the external validity of the results and contributing to the further development of IMC's theoretical background.

Second, despite the fact that the sample used in the present research is representative of the population examined and larger than most of the samples used to validate previous measures (e.g. Lee and Park, 2007), its relatively small size must be acknowledged as a limitation in terms of further segmentations to examine, for example, the role of respondents' characteristics (such as their experience in the same or a similar position) or the business characteristics (for example, the business age). Therefore, the authors suggest scholars conduct further research on IMC using larger samples to enhance and strengthen the IMC body of knowledge.

Finally, it is the researchers' hope that other scholars endeavour to further develop the proposed IMC measurement tool by bridging corporate and marketing research backgrounds and incorporating both views into the conceptualisation and operationalisation. Likewise, they might also put forward alternative measures via the application of other qualitative research techniques such as in depth interviews of both scholars and practitioners to fill the current gap between academic and professional perspectives (Laurie and Mortimer, 2011; Kliatchko and Schultz, 2014).

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[PLACE APPENDIX 1 ABOUT HERE]

[PLACE APPENDIX 2 ABOUT HERE]

TABLE 1

The dimensions of IMC in previous conceptualisations

Author/s (year)	Dimensions
Marketing Communications Approach	
Nowak & Phelps (1994) (IMC)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 'One voice' marketing communications; 2. Integrated Communications; 3. Coordinated marketing communications.
Phelps & Johnson (1996) (IMC)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Direct Marketing; 2. One voice; 3. Coordinated marketing communications campaigns; 4. Response goals.
Ewing, De Bussy & Ramaseshan (1998) (IMC)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. One voice (consistency, integration and synergy); 2. Direct marketing; 3. Increased responsibility (for below-the-line functions); 4. Response goals.
Low (2000) (IMC)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Planning and executing different communications tools as one integrated project; 2. Assigning responsibility for the overall communications effort to a single manager; 3. Ensuring that the various elements of the communications programme have a common strategic objective; 4. Focusing on a common communication message.
Lee & Park (2007) (IMC)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Unified communications for consistent message and image; 2. Differentiated communications to multiple customer groups; 3. Database-centred communications for tangible results; 4. Relationship fostering communications with existing customers.
Wang, Wu & Yuan (2009) (IMC)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Public Relations; 2. Advertising; 3. Direct sales and promotion.
Firm-wide Organisational Approach	
Gronstedt (1996) (IC)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Stakeholders; 2. Interactive tools; 3. Sending tools; 4. Receiving tools
Duncan & Moriarty (1997, 1998) (IMC)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Organisational infrastructure; 2. Interactivity; 3. Mission marketing; 4. Strategic consistency; 5. Planning and evaluation.
Pickton & Hartley (1998) (IMC)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consistency between corporate communication objectives and other organisational objectives; 2. Consistency and synergy of the corporate communication planning; 3. Coverage of all relevant stakeholders and publics; 4. Effective management of all forms of contact which may form the basis of corporate communication; 5. Effective management and integration of all communication activities and people involved; 6. Identification and recognition of the impact of all product/brand communication on corporate communication

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> efforts; 7. Exploitation of a range of promotional tools- all elements of the communication mix including personal and non-personal communication; 8. Use of a range of messages/brand (corporate and products) propositions derived from a single consistent strategy; 9. Use of a range of media – defined as any ‘vehicle’ able to transmit corporate communication messages.
Schultz & Schultz (1998) (IMC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tactical coordination of marketing communications; 2. Redefinition the scope of marketing communications; 3. Application of information technology; 4. Financial and strategic integration.
Kitchen & Schultz (2001) (ICC)	<p>Integration of communication with...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ... corporate mission/values; 2. ... different internal divisions/operations; 3. ... different target audiences; 4. ... different media; 5. ... overall financial goals.
Pickton (2004) (ICC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Communication mix integration; 2. Communication mix with marketing mix integration; 3. Creative integration; 4. Intra-organisation integration; 5. Inter-organisational integration; 6. Information and database systems; 7. Target-audience integration; 8. Corporate and ‘unitised’ integration; 9. Geographical integration.
Reid (2005) (IMC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Interactivity; 2. Mission marketing; 3. Planning and evaluation.
Kliatchko (2008) (IMC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Stakeholders (orientation); 2. Content; 3. Channel; 4. (Measurable) results.
Moriarty & Schultz (2012) (IMC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Interactive communication; 2. Message consistency; 3. Brand focus; 4. Synergy; 5. Customer focus; 6. Perceptual integration; 7. Stakeholders; 8. Relationships; 9. Reciprocity; 10. Contact points; 11. Cross-functional management; 12. Continuous planning and monitoring.
Porcu, Del Barrio-García & Kitchen (2012) (IMC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. One voice; 2. Interactivity; 3. Cross-functional planning; 4. Profitable long-term relationships.

Notes: IMC = The authors addressed the concept of Integrated Marketing Communication; ICC = The authors addressed the concept of Integrated Corporate Communication.

Own source

TABLE 2

Extant IMC Measurement Scales and Their Main Characteristics

Author/s (year)	Theoretical framework	Items	Type of scale
Phelps & Johnson (1996)	Nowak & Phelps (1994)	15 (initially 20, five being eliminated after the validation process) + 1 multiple-choice question	7-point Likert-type scale (from ‘-3, strongly disagree’ to ‘+3, strongly agree’) 5 alternative choices for the multiple-choice question
Duncan & Moriarty (1997)	Duncan & Moriarty (1997)	20	5-point Likert-type scale (from ‘1, never’ to ‘5, always’)
Ewing, De Bussy & Ramaseshan (1998)	Phelps & Johnson (1996)	14	7-point Likert-type scale (from ‘1, strongly disagree’ to ‘7, strongly agree’)
Low (2000)	Phelps & Johnson (1996)	3 items (initially 4, 1 being eliminated after the validation process)	9-point Likert-type scale (from ‘1, strongly disagree’ to ‘7, strongly agree’ and the mid-point was labelled ‘neither agree nor disagree’). The first item was reverse-scored (and eliminated after the validation)
Reid (2005)	Duncan & Moriarty (1997, 1998)	15 (initially 20, five being eliminated after the validation process)	7-point Likert-type scale (from ‘1, not at all’ to ‘7, to a great extent’)
Lee & Park (2007)	Phelps & Johnson (1996)	18 (initially 27, nine being eliminated after the validation process)	5-point Likert type scale (from ‘1, strongly disagree’ to ‘5, strongly agree’)
Wang, Wu & Yuan (2009)	Wang, Wu & Yuan (2009)	21	5-point Likert-type scale (from ‘1, no influence’ to ‘5, very high influence’)
Empirical study for the validation			
Author/s (year)	Sample/national and sectorial context	Method of data-collection	
Phelps & Johnson (1996)	178 randomly selected publicly traded corporations. Informants: marketing communications practitioners/USA* 101 valid responses (response rate= 56.7 %)*	Secondary data from a previous study attempting to measure the extent to which IMC was being implemented in marketing communication practices.	
Duncan & Moriarty (1997)	N/A		
Ewing, De Bussy &	270 of Australia’s top 400 public companies ranked by turnover, as published by <i>Business</i>	First contact by telephone to identify the respondent (the	

Ramaseshan (1998)	<p><i>Review Weekly</i> magazine (130 heavy industrial, mining and/or agricultural firms with no consumer marketing were excluded from the sample). Key informants: marketing communications managers and the respondents best placed to comment on agency–client and interagency interactions/ Australia</p> <p>80 valid responses (response rate: 29.6%)</p>	<p>organisations were asked to identify the respondent best placed to comment on agency–client and interagency interactions)</p> <p>+</p> <p>self-administered questionnaire by fax</p>
Low (2000)	<p>75 marketing managers randomly selected from the AMA’s annual directory of members (pre-test).</p> <p>1,400 senior marketing managers randomly selected by computer from <i>Dun & Bradstreet’s</i> database of US companies. After adjusting, the total sample was reduced to 1,162/USA</p> <p>421 valid responses (response rate: 36%)</p>	<p>In-depth interviews with 15 managers</p> <p>+</p> <p>self-administered questionnaire by traditional mail (pre-test)</p> <p>+</p> <p>self-administered questionnaire by traditional mail (main study)</p>
Reid (2005)	<p>A sample of 1,000 companies was drawn from a commercially available <i>Dun & Bradstreet</i> listing of Australian companies</p> <p>Key-informants: brand communication managers (if recipients believed they were poorly targeted, they were requested to pass the questionnaire on to the most appropriate person in the organisation)</p> <p>After adjusting for returns-to-sender, the total sample was reduced to 904 companies.</p> <p>169 fully completed and valid responses (response rate: 18.7%)</p>	<p>Self-administered questionnaire by traditional mail</p> <p>+</p> <p>a follow-up letter was sent to encourage responses</p>
Lee & Park (2007)	<p>1) Pre-test: 10 marketing practitioners + 5 (2 advertising practitioners and 3 academics) experts in the IMC field</p> <p>2) Main empirical study: 160 companies/320 managers selected randomly from the <i>Korean Business Directory</i>, published by the Korean Chamber of Commerce and Industry/ South Korea. 181 managers agreed to participate.</p> <p>Key-informants: marketing managers in charge of the main brands (no more than two managers from the same company)</p> <p>155 valid and complete responses (response rate: 48.3% of the sample reached by telephone)</p>	<p>First contact by telephone to identify the marketing managers in charge of the main brands</p> <p>+</p> <p>Second contact by telephone to solicit their participation in the study</p> <p>+</p> <p>self-administered questionnaire by e-mail</p>

Wang, Wu & Yuan (2009)	College students (pre-test) and Lukang visitors/ Taiwan-Tourism 197 valid responses (response rate: 90%)	Self-administered questionnaire
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Note: * description of the previous study from which data were obtained; N/A: not available due to the lack of empirical validation.

Own source

TABLE 3

Results of the Second-Order Confirmatory Factor Analysis (M2)

Items	Constructs	Non-Standardised coefficients	Standardised coefficients	t-value	R ²	M	SD	α	AVE	CR
Measurement model										
STAK_1	Stakeholder-centred strategic focus (stak)	*	.79	*	.62	5.18	1.42	.94	.68	.94
STAK_2		1.08	.79	14.46	.62	5.80	1.30			
STAK_3		1.17	.90	16.74	.81	5.45	1.43			
STAK_4		1.04	.78	13.17	.60	5.47	1.35			
STAK_5		1.14	.85	13.66	.71	4.92	1.58			
STAK_6		1.11	.85	13.57	.72	5.01	1.61			
STAK_7		1.05	.83	13.20	.69	5.56	1.43			
CONS_1	Message consistency (cons)	*	.85	*	.72	5.67	1.32	.92	.76	.92
CONS_2		.85	.79	10.94	.63	5.33	1.51			
CONS_3		1.07	.91	14.61	.82	5.37	1.43			
CONS_4		1.03	.92	15.86	.85	5.28	1.53			
ALIN_1	Organisational alignment (alin)	*	.82	*	.68	4.92	1.53	.93	.68	.94
ALIN_2		1.04	.90	21.18	.81	4.89	1.64			
ALIN_3		.73	.55	9.60	.31	4.83	1.56			
ALIN_4		1.03	.85	13.14	.73	4.97	1.61			
ALIN_5		1.04	.86	11.96	.73	4.53	1.62			
ALIN_6		1.09	.87	14.40	.76	4.70	1.57			
ALIN_7		1.07	.86	14.98	.74	4.78	1.52			
INTE_1	Interactivity (inte)	*	.78	*	.61	5.13	1.50	.94	.70	.94
INTE_2		1.01	.77	14.86	.59	5.09	1.43			
INTE_3		.98	.84	16.59	.71	4.23	1.64			
INTE_4		.90	.84	15.11	.71	5.30	1.50			
INTE_5		1.07	.88	15.17	.77	5.32	1.51			
INTE_6		1.06	.92	16.70	.84	5.14	1.55			
INTE_7		1.03	.83	16.54	.69	4.98	1.54			
Estimation model										
IMC (second-order)	IMC → stak	1.01	.84	9.86	.71				.74	.92
	IMC → cons	1.06	.88	9.93	.77					

construct)	IMC → alin	1.06	.85	12.14	.73				
	IMC → inte	1.09	.88	10.73	.77				

Note: M = means, SD = standard deviations, α = Cronbach's alpha, AVE = average variance extracted, CR = composite reliability; *Parameter fixed at 1 to fix the scale of the latent construct t-value cut-offs (level of significance): 1.64 (p < .10); 1.98 (p < .05); 2.58 (p < .01)

TABLE 4

Square root of AVE and correlations between constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981)

	stak	cons	alin	inte
stak	.83			
cons	.74	.87		
alin	.72	.75	.82	
inte	.74	.77	.75	.84

Note: The diagonal entries (in **bold**) represent the square root of AVE estimates; the off-diagonal entries represent the correlations between constructs.

TABLE 5

IMC-Economic and Financial Performance Model (Nomological Validity)

Items	Construct	Non-Standardised coefficients	Standardised coefficients	t-value	M	SD	α	R ²	AVE	CR
Measurement model										
EFP_1	Economic and Financial performance (EFP)	*	.82	*	5.24	1.13	.72	.67	.71	.91
EFP_2		1.13	.88	12.95	4.98	1.15		.78		
EFP_3		1.20	.88	14.03	5.05	1.26		.78		
EFP_4		1.06	.79	9.62	4.71	1.27		.62		
Structural model										
IMC → EFP		.38	.41	4.29				.17		
Note: M = means, SD = standard deviations, α = Cronbach's alpha; t-value cut-offs (level of significance): 1.64 (p < .10); 1.98 (p < .05); 2.58 (p < .01)										

APPENDIX 1

The firm-wide IMC Scale

Please indicate your level of agreement on the following statements*:
Message consistency
CONS_1. My company carefully coordinates all the messages originated by all departments and functions with the aim of maintaining the consistency of its strategic positioning.
CONS_2. My company maintains consistency in all the visual components of communication.
CONS_3. My company periodically reviews all its planned messages to determine its level of strategic positioning consistency.
CONS_4. In my company it is paramount to maintain the consistency between product messages, that are inferred from, and comprise everything embedded in the organisation's product and service messages, deriving from the experience of dealing with the organisation, its staff, agents and products.
Interactivity
INTE_1. My company promotes the creation of special programs to facilitate stakeholders' inquiries and complaints about our brands, products and the company itself.
INTE_2. My company gathers stakeholders' information that is collected or generated via different sources from all divisions or departments into a unified database that is configured to be useful and easily accessible to all the organisational levels.
INTE_3. In my company it is crucial for the organisation as a whole and for all its human resources to have a responsive attitude towards the messages received from its stakeholders.
INTE_4. In my company, strategic use of the ICTs enhances the speed of response of the organisation as a whole.
INTE_5. In my company actively listening to stakeholder-generated messages, for instance via word of mouth (WOM and e-WOM) is of vital importance in setting its communication strategies.
INTE_6. My company considers that the relationship between the company and its stakeholders must be reciprocal in order to establish a trust-based and on-going dialogue.
INTE_7. My company proactively implements social media by listening to the existing conversations to promote a dialogue with its stakeholders.
Stakeholder-centred strategic focus
STAK_1. The company's mission is a key consideration in its communications planning and it is promoted among stakeholders.
STAK_2. My company develops and implements systematic studies to assess the efficacy and consistency of its corporate communications in order to build and maintain sound relationships with all its stakeholders.
STAK_3. In my company, acknowledgement of the main touch-points between the company and its stakeholders is paramount to strengthen for more effective communication.
STAK_4. In my company social media are an alternative way for stakeholders to contact the company.
STAK_5. In working towards the goal of establishing and maintaining stakeholder relationships, in my company human resources in all organisational areas must collaborate as needed.
STAK_6. In my company, human resources in all organisational areas pursue the objective of providing stakeholder-centred solutions.
STAK_7. My company establishes and nourishes relationships with external agents/partners in order to achieve high-value solutions for stakeholders.
Organisational alignment
ALIN_1. My company carefully manages horizontal internal communication by ensuring that all organisational areas acknowledge the goals pursued by the organisation.
ALIN_2. My company carefully manages vertical internal communication by ensuring that the information flows through all the hierarchical levels of the organisation.
ALIN_3. My company ensures that its external agents and partners have at least several contacts per month with each other.
ALIN_4. In my company horizontal and vertical cooperation are crucial because all departments affect the corporate reputation.
ALIN_5. In my company employees and managers share the corporate values and the main goals of the company that guide them in carrying out their specific tasks and functions.
ALIN_6. In my company encouraging and promoting a collaborative culture and climate is highly relevant in order to activate cross-functional coordination mechanisms.
ALIN_7. My company trains all human resources to enable them to develop cooperation and coordination skills.
* A 7-point scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) and "Strongly Agree" (7) with no verbal labels for the intermediate scale points accompanied each statement. Also, the statement labels were not shown and the statements were in random order in the questionnaire.

APPENDIX 2

Profile of Respondents and Characteristics of the Population

	Sample		Population	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Organisation				
<i>Business size (number of employees)</i>				
40-50	45	25.00	270	27.86
51-249	114	63.33	590	60.89
250 +	21	11.67	109	11.25
Total	180	100	969	100
<i>Business type (SIC code)</i>				
701	153	85.0	883	91.12
702	17	9.4	45	4.64
703	3	1.7	17	1.75
704	7	3.9	24	2.48
Total	180	100	969	100
<i>Business age</i>				
Fewer than 10 years	30	16.67	135	13.93
10-20 years	44	24.44	303	31.27
21-30 years	30	16.67	205	21.16
30 + years	76	42.22	326	33.64
Total	180	100	969	100
Key-informant				
<i>Gender</i>				
Male	113	62.78	n.a.	n.a.
Female	67	37.22		
Total	180	100		
<i>Age</i>				
Under 25	6	3.33	n.a.	n.a.
25-35	53	29.44		
36-45	67	37.22		
46-55	35	19.44		
55+	19	10.56		
Total	180	100.0		
<i>Education</i>				
Primary School	1	0.56	n.a.	n.a.
High school graduate	12	6.67		
Professional training	13	7.22		
University Undergraduate	62	34.44		
University Graduate	52	28.89		
Master's level graduate/Ph. D.	40	22.22		
Total	180	100		
<i>Experience</i>				
Fewer than 5 years	55	30.56	n.a.	n.a.
5-10 years	50	27.78		
11-20 years	42	23.33		
Over 20 years	33	18.33		
Total	180	100		
<i>Position</i>				
CEO	85	47.22	n.a.	n.a.
Senior marketing and communication managers	72	40.00		
Other senior managers	23	12.78		
Total	180	100		
Note: n.a. = not available.				

FIGURE 1

Measurement Development and Validation Process

IDENTIFICATION STAGE

First step: Specify Domain of construct (conceptualisation)

- Literature review

Second step: Generate sample of items (content validity)

- Literature review
- Delphi study (international expert panel)



RELIABILITY STAGE

Third step: Collect data

- Pilot study (39 managers)

Fourth step: Purify the measure

- Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)
- Reliability assessment (Cronbach's alpha, inter-item and item-to-total correlations)



VALIDATION STAGE

Fifth step: Collect data

- Self-administered online survey (180 managers)

Sixth step: Assess dimensionality and reliability

- Exploratory Factor Analysis
- Confirmatory Factor Analysis using the competing models strategy: M1 (IMC as unidimensional construct) vs M2 (IMC as a four-dimensional construct)
- Cronbach's alpha, Average Variance Extracted and Composite Reliability

Seventh step: Assess construct validity

- Second-order Confirmatory Factor Analysis
- Assessment of convergent validity
- Assessment of discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981)
- Assessment of nomological validity (test hypothesis driven from theory)



firm-wide IMC Scale