FROM FRAGMENTATION TO COLLABORATION IN TOURISM PROMOTION: An analysis of the adoption of IMC in the Amalfi Coast.

Abstract

The fragmentation in decision-making among different stakeholders severely influences the effectiveness of tourism promotion, also in well-known destinations. Through the lens of collaboration theory, the paper empirically aims at exploring how an Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) approach may be preferred to traditional communication programs to boost collaboration of different players. Depth interviews from tourism body stakeholders, organisations and other local government associations from the Amalfi coast region of Italy are conducted to identify incentives and barriers to adopting an integrated approach of communication to tourism promotion. The findings underpin the development of an implementation model aimed at pushing local stakeholders to attain the main benefits of creating and maintaining a network of relationships, implemented as a way to overcome uncertainty in tourism. The paper thus advances IMC in a tourism context, supporting the need to help economic actors to overcome boundaries that hinder them from joining their forces.

Key words: collaboration theory, integrated marketing communication, tourism promotion, barriers and incentives, destination marketing, Amalfi coast

INTRODUCTION

The problems related to a lack of communication and limited shared objectives among groups of stakeholders involved in tourism have been frequently discussed in tourism literature (Croft, 2018; Duarte Alonso & Nyanjom, 2017), especially through the lens of collaborative theory (d'Angella & Go, 2009; Saraniemi & Komppula, 2017). Such an approach aims at creating a common 'language' able to connect private and public parties and seems to be an appropriate response to overcome the very well-known fragmentation issue in destination marketing (Adu-Ampong, 2017; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2007;). On similar lines, the problem of fragmentation in marketing communications has attracted attention since the early '90s when an integrated approach, namely integrated marketing communications (IMC), was conceptualised and rapidly emerged as one of the leading paradigms both in the theory and practice of marketing communications (Duncan & Moriarty 1998; Kitchen and Schultz, 1999; Reid, 2005). In the last decades, several studies have associated IMC with various positive effects in terms of stakeholder relations, communication effectiveness, brand performance and synergy of different channels (e.g. Holm, 2006; Kitchen, Kim, and Schultz, 2009; Luxton, Reid, and Mavondo, 2015). However, little is known about incentives and perceived barriers of such an integrated communication approach relative to tourist destinations (Dinnie, Melewar, Seidenfuss, and Musa, 2010; Skinner, 2005). This lacuna seems odd considering that tourism promotion has progressively emphasised the role of strong unique brands, at national or local destination levels (i.e. nation or place brands – Dinnie, 2004), and integration has proven to be crucial in many companies and related industries, including hospitality (Seric, Gil-Saura, and Ruiz-Molina, 2014).

Moreover, the few studies that have applied IMC to destination marketing have led to diverse outcomes. For example, Skinner (2005) found inconsistencies in 'official' messages and content promoting Wales and concluded that integration may not be possible to achieve in what was described generously as small nation branding. In a study of organisations engaged in place branding (investment agencies, national tourism organisations, and embassies) in the ASEAN region, Dinnie et al. (2010) found seven key dimensions (strategy formulation, mode, target audience, etc.) that needed to be incorporated in line with inter-organisational coordination. Indeed, all were perceived to be crucial vis-a-vis IMC in tourism, yet were not implemented. The above said, from a conceptual point of view, an integrated approach to marketing communications seems in line with the claims of studies on collaboration theory, as both aim towards building and sustaining a strong destination brand, fostering collaboration among local stakeholders and strengthening community identity, each positively impacting on overall economic and social development. Moreover, an IMC approach would also concretely benefit local stakeholders (governments, tourism managers, operators, communication agencies, etc.), each with their own perspective, as it offers meaningful guidelines for decision makers. The paper therefore explores the modes where IMC may be applied in a fragmented context of tourism with the aim of boosting collaboration of different players. An interpretivist study via depth interviews is undertaken with stakeholders in the Amalfi Coast region of Italy.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. An overview of the collaboration theory and the connection with an integrated approach to communication have been explored. Then, advantages and barriers of IMC in tourism promotion are presented via a conceptual review. The research methodology is outlined including procedures for data analysis. Research findings relative to application of IMC in the tourism area of Amalfi Coast are presented and

discussed. These allow development of a model examining current levels of IMC that reflect realities encountered in destination marketing and offer insights for decision makers and other stakeholders in terms of evolution from stakeholder cooperation, through coordination, to collaboration. Lastly, implications, limitations, and future research avenues are indicated.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Collaboration Theory in Tourism

Scholars and practitioners have substantially agreed on the need for applying coordination, cooperation and collaboration praxes in tourism (Ladkin & Bertramini, 2002; Wang, 2008). The fragmented intrinsic features of this sector are considered the main reason for turning to these approaches, as there are many stakeholders' groups who are influenced and are able to impact the tourism processes (Adu-Ampong, 2017; Plummer, Kulczycki, and Stacey, 2006). However, it is only through the development of shared information and common decision-making procedures involving all stakeholders that tourism can successfully advance, causing no negative effects to environments and societies engaged in this industry (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011; Sharpley, 2014).

During the years, different definitions were proposed for the terms coordination, cooperation and collaboration (Hall, 1999; Jetter & Chen, 2012). Specifically, cooperation is informal, voluntary-based and generally refers to a short time perspective; coordination is more formal (not depending on a discretionary choice), leading to the creation of a more stable system of relationships between tourism stakeholders (Brown & Keast, 2003). Different from these two, collaboration includes composite interpretations and essential conditions for the implementation of a long-lasting 'partnership' (Jamal & Getz, 1995; Khalilzadeh & Wang, 2018). In line with this statement, the three items "can be (...) located along an integration continuum such that cooperation falls at the more fragmented end, collaboration at the more integrated end and coordination occupies a position in between" (Brown & Keast, 2003: 118).

According to Mulford and Rogers (1982) and Plummer et al. (2006): (a) cooperation and coordination are based on informal relationships and communications' flows that help to develop reciprocity without structured rules; (b) collaboration is a formal way of building relationships, raised thanks to institutionalised channels of communication, among relevant stakeholders considered as part of a network. Cooperation and coordination, thus, can be seen as necessary steps to achieve collaboration. In fact, even though there are many advantages linked with them, including economic benefits, they are not sufficient conditions to solve the problem of taking under control the fragmented essence of tourism (Beritelli, 2011; Czernek, 2013). The collaboration, instead, is an inter-organisational process, developed thanks to formal interaction among stakeholders interested in communicating, negotiating and creating proposals regarding tourism development, with the aim of facing conflicts and promoting shared visions (Bramwell & Lane, 2000; Gray, 1989; Waayers, Lee, and Newsome, 2012).

The problem of aggregating all stakeholders and their interests is often considered to be the first phase in building a successful collaboration (Arnaboldi & Spiller, 2011). Avoiding typical power struggles over limited resources and, thus, effectively aggregating stakeholders needs the creation of a shared communication environment. Models of IMC usually start with a similar prerequisite of creating some shared common elements in the communication system inside and outside an organisation.

Incentives and barriers of IMC application for tourism destinations

Several researchers highlight that integrated systems and collaboration are suitable approaches for developing destination management (Fyall & Leask, 2006; Fyall, Garrod, and Wang, 2012). Single stakeholders are not able to generate wide promotional impacts compared to communities of stakeholders who decide to collaborate (Khalilzadeh & Wang, 2018). This happens since collaborative players succeed in collecting more resources to attain economies of scale, build an efficient communication and marketing plan (Palmer & Bejou, 1995), and competently use available internal resources. In other words, stakeholders that collaborate and communicate with the public, and each other, enable destinations to generate considerable benefits for all parties (Zach, 2012).

As IMC has been associated with similar positive outcomes in terms of communications consistency (Schultz et al., 2004), brand performance (Luxton et al., 2015), and in establishing more constructive relations between organisations and customers (Kitchen et al., 2009), it can offer the potential to be a valued asset in tourism to boost collaboration between companies, consultants and agencies and their served markets (Wang, 2008).

With these considerations in mind, the paper identifies and adapts the main incentives toward IMC implementation for tourism destinations, aggregating them into three main areas (i) customers/tourists, (ii) brand, (iii) marketing communications (see Table 1).

Customers/Tourists - One of the principles of IMC, namely the development of sound long-lasting relationships has also been theorised in the context of tourism promotion (Alegre & Cladera, 2009). To this end, IMC is intended to support segmentation and aggregation of tourist preferences, enable development of tourist databases and computational resources, and eventually impact on tourism through directed communication (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2015). After attaining these goals, IMC allows communicators to influence tourists' conceptions of value and, via a relational approach, builds bonds with tourists in terms of shared commitment and trust (Alen, Rodriguez, and Fraiz, 2007).

Brand - In order to be effective in terms of branding, an integrated communication process should commence with customer/prospect/tourists and work backwards to destination brand marketers and their communication processes (Balakrishnan, 2009). This also sets the scene for needful IMC synergy (Pike, 2005; 2012) that helps to ultimately achieve a strong destination brand image and, at the same time, enables relationship building between the destination brand and tourists (Dinnie, 2004). In tourism, IMC can help clarifying the role of stakeholders and their participation in place brand co-creation (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). This means that an IMC approach can enhance brand management, as place brand emerges in the interactions between stakeholders and communication managers.

Marketing Communications – An integrated communication approach is likely to prove valuable in making creative ideas about tourism more effective (Eagle & Kitchen, 2000). This can be used by tourism operators and organisations to achieve communication consistency for the attraction, area or territory, and allocate budgets across all suitable communication modalities, in order to achieve integration (Eagle, Kitchen, and Bulmer, 2007; Kliatchko, 2008).

In identifying IMC incentives, researchers also discovered barriers to implementation (see Table 1). Empirical studies, in fact, demonstrate repeatedly that IMC – especially in its early and mid-development – was located at the tactical stage due to problems regarding client resources, applicable skills or understanding, compensation and control issues (see Chu, Hsu, and Li, 2009; Eagle et al., 2007).

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IMC implementation barriers to tourism destinations can be summarised into three areas: (i) resource issues, (ii) centralisation and identity issues, (iii) power and control issues.

Resource issues (money, time, and skills) – The first barriers to implementing IMC seem to relate to lack of resources, in terms of budgetary constraints that may restrain investment relative to destination branding (Hankinson, 2005; Pike, 2005), especially at a local level. Budgetary constraints, indeed, have the strength to push local stakeholders into fighting against each other, undermining every chance to overcome fragmentation (Ladkin & Bertramini, 2002).

More generally, lack of resources concerns not only inherent limitations due to circumscribed internal assets (Adu-Ampong, 2017), but also unappealing intangible resources (e.g., inherited names, country of origin associations) and lack of time of local managers/operators in understanding, or managing communication well (Woodland & Acott, 2007). Lastly, IMC programs require human resources, and a lack of specific skill sets in planning and managing integrated campaigns may be an ongoing constraint (Chu et al., 2009; Skinner, 2005).

Centralisation and identity issues – In corporate contexts, lack of flexibility of extra-organisational structures can prevent adoption of an integrated approach (Eagle & Kitchen, 2000; Pettegrew, 2001). Similar problems may arise in tourism promotion in which organisations/stakeholders (destination marketing organisations - DMOs; hospitality industry; local/national government agencies; trade associations; etc.) need to participate in communication initiatives. Each of these may present reservations and inelasticities in adapting to communication dynamics relative to diverse targeted tourist groups. This makes centralisation of decision-making complex and difficult (Balakrishnan, 2009; Morgan, Pritchard, and Pride, 2001). Different studies have repeatedly highlighted the need for designating an IMC facilitator, champion or Czar who could manage the overall approach by promoting collaboration among stakeholders (Pettegrew, 2001). Yet, such figures are noticeable by their absence in destination marketing or in other tourist settings (Czernek, 2017; Hazra, Fletcher, and Wilkes, 2017). Lastly, barriers may also arise due to problems related to place identity in terms of not sharing information (Saraniemi & Komppula, 2017; Skinner, 2005), persistence of negative elements, or inability to derive a clear destination identity (Morgan et al., 2001). All these factors can create 'misperceptions and mind-set barriers' (Eagle & Kitchen, 2000) and other problems such as miscommunication, compartmentalisation, little trust, and de-contextualisation (Ots & Nyilasy, 2015) that negatively impact IMC application in tourism.

Power and control issues – In tourism, existing conflicts between stakeholders not only prevent any collaboration building process among local actors, but they can lead to 'turf wars' (Eagle et al., 2007; Hazra et al., 2017) which in effect impede or negate integrated destination communication strategy. Another important power issue is the lack of half-hearted support by national/local government offices (Pike, 2005; Pride, 2001). In addition,

distinguishing factors that determine the tourism/destination 'product' may limit management control over the different aspects that contribute to form place image (Morgan et al., 2001; Tasci, Khalilzadeh, and Uysal, 2017), thus generating a lack of top-down implementation control in IMC. Lastly, the need for appropriate measurement processes (Chu et al., 2009; Eagle & Kitchen, 2000) and the inefficient analytic tools can also hinder effective implementation and measurement of an integrated approach in communication.

RESEARCH DESIGN

As the research aim is to understand the main incentives and barriers to adopting IMC, considered as a way to foster collaboration in destination marketing, this paper employs a multi-disciplinary qualitative explorative research method. The qualitative explorative research method was preferred in order to generate insight into the nature of the phenomena under investigation (Neuman, 2006), to uncover patterns, themes, and categories in order to make judgments about "what is really significant and meaningful in the data" (Patton, 2002: 406). This also allows acknowledgement of different perspectives and contexts for individuals involved in tourism promotion in the Amalfi Coast. The area is one of Italy's most beautiful land and sea-scape destinations. It includes Positano, Amalfi, Sorrento, and the island of Capri. Just a short distance inland is found the smouldering volcano – Vesuvius, while Pompeii's ancient streets serve as a magnet to hardier tourists. Yet, however, the Amalfi region with its many diverse cities and coastal areas was selected for this research as tourist organisations do not work together to promote the region well. A series of semi-structured personal interviews with open-ended questions was undertaken. This choice is not only appropriate for exploratory research but likely to enhance response validity, and has been used successfully in previous studies in this domain (Dinnie et al., 2010). Interviewees were selected based on a snowball sampling criterion, as in other exploratory studies where the research aim was to increase understanding of the explored phenomenon rather than obtain a fully representative sample (Gopaldas, 2016). Thus, sample selection was completed to the point of redundancy - that is the point when no new information was forthcoming (Patton, 2002).

An interview protocol was designed and each interviewee was asked to discuss subjects along lines which covered the central research objectives (Gopaldas, 2016) in order to obtain insights into IMC practice. This guide helped interviewers ensure that all significant areas were covered, including general questions about their experience in terms of tourism promotion, their knowledge and awareness of IMC definitions[1] and their perceptions about incentives and barriers to IMC implementation, as described in Table 1. Respondents had freedom to express their views about IMC in a language used for their daily work tasks. They were also allowed to move from topic to topic without necessarily respecting the order indicated in the interview scheme. This approach followed that of Arnould & Wallendorf (1994: 492) which recommended a 'conversation-like dialogue' rather than asking questions that imposed categorical frameworks on informants.

Twenty-eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants between September 2016 and January 2017. The local key informants were officials from local government (municipalities) including mayors and council members (councillors for tourism): staff from local companies including hotels, restaurants, the Amalfi companies'

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[1] A basic and simplified version of the IMC definition was understandable to all individuals, including those who claimed little or no experience in marketing communications.

consortium, agri-food firms, from communication and travel agencies, from local organisations and associations such as EPT – Ente Provinciale per il Turismo (Provincial Tourist Board) Prolocos (associations for the development of tourism), and the Amalfi District. Each interview lasted about 90 minutes (see Appendix I).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data were analysed in line with Miles & Huberman's (1994) study, and this involved all collected information being compared with the theoretical background related to collaboration theory and IMC. Due to the semi-structured research design, constructs under investigation could be easily defined. However, the study protocol required that researchers evaluate the levels of each relevant dimension for each stakeholder group, both for incentives and barriers, using three categories (low, medium and high) to avoid over-specification[2].

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This approach allows mapping of the level of dimensions of IMC incentives and barriers and a systematic assessment of whether and how local stakeholders of the Amalfi coast are enacting this kind of communication approach in practice. The data are summarised in Figure 1 and illustrate different perceptions and viewpoints of interviewed stakeholders.

Incentives and barriers to IMC perceived by tourism stakeholders

According to Reid (2005: 49), IMC "provides a foundation for supporting, legitimising, and facilitating marketing communication activities, empowers individuals charged with the responsibility for bringing about improved integration in brand communication planning, and facilitates the implementation of business processes and human resource strategies that support brand communication". Starting from this reflection, stakeholders of the Amalfi coast were asked to express their point of view according to incentives and barriers described in Table 1.

Customers/tourists - It is interesting to note that many stakeholders in the area implement their own communication plans focused on their brand and company, moreover, they are also called upon, especially by municipalities, to sustain and promote cultural/folkloristic events typical of the coast, that are very much appreciated by tourists. This means that, in a certain way, they are aware that IMC enables organisational communicators to 'influence' tourists' conceptions of value and, via a relational approach, build bonds with tourists in terms of shared values, common objectives, and mutual commitment and trust (Duncan & Moriarty 1998; Schultz , Cole, and Bailey, 2004). Actually, one of the interviewees highlighted that:

> The main IMC objective of the Amalfi coast is to let tourism become sustainable, allowing other internal areas to consistently grow, and enhancing the value of typical

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[2] After comparing identified construct patterns, researchers gave their assessment for each interviewee (a total of 168 judgments per researcher, i.e. 6 judgements x 28 interviewees) based on a three-level category of each dimension (low, medium and high). Then, each researcher calculated her/his judgements on each group of stakeholders. A very satisfactory level of initial agreement between three coders (>85%) was reached. Disagreements on coding were settled through consultation between researchers.

characteristics such as local craftsmanship and products. The wine produced by local manufactures could be considered an important example in this sense, as it has synergistically taken advantage of the strength of the Amalfi coast's brand, especially in foreign countries. Moreover, at the same time, it reinforces the perception of authenticity and exclusivity of overseas consumers/tourists (President of Local Association).

They seem also aware of synergy between tourism and local productions (especially in the agri-food businesses). A manager of a 4* hotel, involved in the region stated,

> For tourists/customers - no matter the municipality where they are, they can live a 'holistic' experience, from Ravello to Amalfi passing through the smaller towns, visiting local farmers and eating their products, etc. (...). The Amalfi Coast is all these things for them, not each distinct administrative entity, and we have to put it in our minds!

Brand - The analysed circumstances underpin understanding that putting into place IMC means far-reaching benefits in terms of marketing communication but also in terms of brand performance (Kitchen & Uzunoglu, 2014). About branding, the President of a local association in Amalfi said,

> MC creates a holistic vision of the territory and of the offered experience, so, it can be used to enhance the value of specific features and authenticity (almost lost) of the Amalfi coast brand (President of Local Association).

In fact, many managers are aiming at creating 'communication consistency' for the territory and for its brand, spending their communication budget across a promotional mix (paying huge attention to social media and opinion platforms, e.g. Trip Advisor), but, at the same time, they are focused upon achieving synergy through collaboration to attain a strong destination brand image and building relations between the brand and tourist needs. To understand stakeholders' opinion, interviewees stated that,

> It is important to apply IMC: following an integrated perspective, the achieved communication budget is not spent only in buying mass media spaces where the Amalfi coast brand can be promoted but also on internet and social media advertising. (Town Councillor)

Marketing communications - In the Amalfi coast, local organisations involved in tourism promotion seemed to be paying attention to IMC incentives in terms of marketing communications, not only considering efficiency dimensions (financial integration and scale economies). As they are in touch with other associations in Italy and abroad, they see how integration of tourism promotion can create benefits not only for tourists, but also for citizens and for the whole territory (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011; Sharpley, 2014). The following statement summarises stakeholders' point of view:

> The touristic offer – communicated in an integrated way - is made by the whole Amalfi coast. The coast is a 'unicum' and it should be communicated as a 'unicum', taking into consideration the heritage and local traditions (such as the Grand Tour) and not only single events and cultural exhibitions. (Major)

What is esteemed by these respondents is how other EPTs and local associations, in other

regions of Italy and abroad, have developed strong relations with tourists and prospects, and how this has generated positive effects also for other local activities (especially typical food production). The following comment illustrates a Major's point of view about this IMC incentive related to an effective use of marketing communication tools:

> The IMC can help tourists to better understand the typical values of the territory, its past heritage, its people and its traditions including food traditions. (Major)

Moreover, stakeholders averred that IMC can present opportunities for developing off-peak tourism or/and selling of local products in smaller (and inner) towns making them more prone at least to start thinking about cooperating with bigger cities. Communication agencies (head of the agency) affirmed that IMC could have positive effects in generating more awareness of small municipalities and lesser known local attractions. In actual fact, nowadays, local managers (hotels, restaurants, agri-food companies) enjoy high levels of tourism with visitors staying in the Amalfi coast, not only during the summer season but also in low season. The following quotes reflect the state of the art:

> The level of harmonisation of communication tools used to implement an IMC approach allows us to strengthen the reputation of a touristic destination not only during the high season. (President of GustaMinori/Local Association).

> IMC can have a positive impact on de-seasonalisation, it can communicate information about internal areas, it can help to develop a more sustainable tourism in the Amalfi coast, which seems to be very well-known by tourists and by people living in the surrounding regions. (President of Local Association).

Resource issues (money, time, and skills) - Main barriers to IMC are perceived by stakeholders to be lack of political will or sharing of financial resources. For example: "it is a struggle just to print a brochure" affirmed an interviewed tourism town councillor, or "it is impossible to have a comprehensive map of attractions in Amalfi Coast" asserted the mayor of a small town in the district, coupled with a perceived lack of specialised skills to set up an IMC plan agreed by a majority of stakeholders. This can be further explained by the following comment,

> Due to cuts in communication budgets, it is difficult to work with other private and public partners (...), the communication is a marginal aspect (...)" (Major)

Centralisation and identity issues - Many respondents affirmed that centralisation and power issues were not the main problem, but then, on the contrary, they declared that each municipality has its own objectives and is focused on promoting exclusively their own territory with small and fragmented joint events (such as 'GustaMinori' or 'Corbara e il Corbarino', typical Amalfi events linked with specific cities), thus highlighting huge barriers on these dimensions.

A President of a local association explained that:

> Communicating in an integrated way allows one to follow the market trends, however, what we have is a different scenario, where every city organises its own event, without leveraging on harmonisation and without communicating it to other players present on the territory and to tourists too. This leads to a loss in terms of synergies. (President of local association).

Perceptions of barriers thus partly arise from different areas of the Amalfi Coast. In particular, larger municipalities (such as the renowned areas of Amalfi, Ravello, and Positano) highlighted the fact that – instead of investing in IMC for the territory - a de-marketing approach may be needed for their area, where the tourism is so intense due to increased tension caused by recent terrorist attacks in other destinations such as Paris, Tunisia, Turkey, Pakistan, Brussels and the Ivory Coast. In fact, the Amalfi Coast has seen an increase in Italian and foreign tourists, and the number of bed and breakfasts, agri-tourism businesses, and guesthouses has more than doubled in a short time period. This rapid growth is considered by some municipalities to be a problem (especially in terms of road infrastructure and health assistance). Once again, it is clear that the way to face and overtake barriers – about identity and how to develop tourism - is different and changes from stakeholder to stakeholder.

Power and control issues - Local organisations/associations face problems linked with lack of centralisation of decision-making processes, divisions of power, and with control fragmented among many local decision makers (Beritelli, 2011; Czernek, 2013). A town councillor said:

> The main barrier is the lack of synergy among territories of the Amalfi Coast, (...) the limited resources that we have should be shared in a systematic way. (…) The difficulties we have in terms of working together are also due to bureaucratic problems such as: slow institutional communication channels, limited use of online tools, etc. (Town councillor).

Moreover, the issue was raised as to the improbability of an appointment of a clear 'champion' to plan and implement IMC. This matter is explained as follows:

> The problem is not only the lack of competencies that are needed to implement IMC. There is no guide, a chief, a promoter part of the public administration. We live off single events and off communication linked to the single event: this trend is completely opposite to what is requested by tourists. None of them wants to see overcrowded squares; they want to live everyday life. (President of the Consortium 'Amalfi di Qualità').

This is probably intertwined with lack of a 'shared' identity that could aim to revive authentic traditions and local culture ("as has happened in other parts of Italy and Europe, in Tuscany for example", suggested the president of a local promotion consortium) rather than crowded places (Müller, 2017). Many respondents affirmed, however, that these specific local issues could be resolved, in the future, if the newly born touristic District of Amalfi Coast could be recognised by other stakeholders as the overall 'facilitator' for implementing an integrated approach and for measuring and controlling its results.

Several comments explored these issues,

> I don't have access to any tool to measure communication effects. I collect some feedback published online and from traditional journals who are happy to receive our press release. (Town councillor)

> No-one spends time to monitor communication effects, due to the fact that communication is developed mainly during the high season, (…) if we will invest in communication in low season maybe we will get different results. (Travel agent/consultant)

> In order to improve IMC results, it is necessary to share data among different stakeholders. However, if databases are created, they belong to private industries and are not shared with other players of the sector. (…) Everyone has his own database and doesn't want others to use it. (Travel agent/consultant)

Besides, communication agencies' interviewees underlined that communication initiatives requested by municipalities had limited impact because they were not connected and thus not integrated with each other. This signals a problem in terms of 'internal' identity. In fact, one interviewee affirmed that,

> (…) the Amalfi Coast is a place with many different facets. It seems like the main character of 'One, No One, and One Hundred Thousand' [a renowned novel by the Nobel Prize winner Luigi Pirandello], but in the eyes of both Italian and foreign tourists is perceived as a single entity (…) paradoxically, it is not the same in our local public administrators' eyes.

In addition, the same interviewee highlighted the negative effects of 'turf battles' among local public stakeholders (synergy issues). As regards other obstacles to IMC, interviewees shared common views about barriers and lack of centralisation in decision making. Some, while complaining about the absence of an IMC 'champion', hoped that the president of the new main association of Amalfi Coast (the District) would act in this direction.

Toward a model of IMC for tourism: a collaboration theory perspective

The achieved results allow mapping of the level of dimensions of IMC incentives and barriers and a systematic assessment of whether and how local stakeholders of the Amalfi Coast are enacting this kind of communication approach in practice with the aim of building collaboration. In general, it seems that local communities of stakeholders are aware of the main incentives achievable by practicing IMC, and are [apparently] unafraid of perceived barriers, which appear manageable if a proper implementation takes place.

Moreover, the research data, while non-generalisable, do indicate a willingness to consider or signal a different way to practice tourism promotion for a well-known destination. In addition, it can be used to present, elaborate and discuss an implementation model that allows adoption of the IMC for tourism.

Figure 2 summarises specific steps identified to reach basic conditions for IMC application to tourism promotion according to a collaboration theory perspective, thus including: shared power, centralisation aptitude, collective resources and participatory identity.

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As in other IMC models, each stage offers its own issues in terms of cooperation/coordination/collaboration propensity, stakeholders' involvement and management of specific activities, communication incentives that could be reached, barriers that could be overcome, and benefits to be derived for destination marketing.

The first stage ('shared power') includes a clear division of competencies among stakeholders instigated by a central entity (i.e. the organisation in charge of promoting a specific destination), that leverages tourist information points and Prolocos (associations for the

development of tourism) in each municipality to convey a consistent image for the territory and similar services, in terms of quality, for tourists. The orientation would need to be 'outside-in' (Kitchen & Schultz, 1999): that is, starting from tourists' perceived needs and attitudes, 'essential' communications on destination could then be planned, budgeted for and implemented in an integrated manner, while simultaneously encouraging purposeful dialogue with tourists (Line & Wang, 2017). A customer-driven approach acts in fact as a catalyst to greater cooperation among local actors (Fyall et al., 2012; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2007). This means that these players, in this first stage, decide in an informal way and following a voluntary-based approach to join their forces to attain a specific aim (e.g. to provide basic and updated information to Amalfi area tourists).

In this particular case, as mentioned by several respondents, the new District seems to be in the best position to act as a cooperation's facilitator with an outside-in orientation and a strong focus on tourist-driven communication. In order to attain this first level, mayors and council members of different cities could meet and enable some union of purpose. To a degree this would mean overcoming myopia and local rivalry to the extent of allocating a small part of their power to this central entity and enhancing overall cooperation propensity (Kitchen & Uzunoglu, 2014). Building on subsequent synergies, these benefits would be bigger than those obtained by a single small town focused on building tourists' relationships with its own fragmented and limited strengths (d'Angella & Go, 2009).

The first step could be seen as essential support for the second stage ('centralisation aptitude'). Development of cooperation propensity helps local actors to accept to some degree some centralisation and coordination, in order to allow the process to be guided effectively (Cai, 2002). It involves that local players start considering the possibility to work together, not as a simple way to achieve definite touristic goals based on the good will of the different stakeholders and to behave following the same rules, but as a more effective and efficient strategy, a kind of inner 'mandate', that allows them to act as a member of a larger system and become part of a durable system of relations (Wang & Krakover, 2008).

In fact, this stage allows increasing coordination by recognising more extensively the central organisation's ability to implement an integrated communication process addressed to satisfy tourist preferences and needs together with regional requirements (McCartney, Butler, and Bennett, 2008). A high level of cross-functional communication between different stakeholders is mandated (Hankinson, 2005). This means that a designated entity has reached a high level of legitimacy and acceptance extended by all local members involved in tourism and tourism promotion. This way to work and promote together the overarching destination will facilitate local stakeholders to build and sustain a consistent destination brand considered as a major integrating factor to communicate all facets of Costa d'Amalfi (Campelo, Aitken, Thyne, and Gnoth, 2014). Thus, the central entity will be in charge of highlighting potential incentives that can be achieved thanks to application of a win-win logic facilitating politicians, municipalities and communication managers to understand that working and promoting the destination together leads to maximisation of benefits not only for the whole Amalfi Coast but also for each area involved in the integrated communication plan (Blain, Levy, and Ritchie, 2005).

The 'collective resources' phase represents a logical continuation of the centralisation aptitude step. This stage involves that stakeholders centralise budgetary arrangements for marketing communications, for example sharing resources from the 'tourist city tax' and investing these in IMC initiatives that could be used at all contact points to convey a consistent image. Shared knowledge and larger budgets will allow stakeholders to spread

expenditure across different promotional tools, integrating several channels and reaching a high level of communication mix integration (Kliatchko, 2008). All communication tools could be, then, used to create tourists' engagement and increase community support, and to portray a consistent message about destination. The marketing communications' synergy further increases brand consistency (Pike, 2005). At this stage of development of IMC, local stakeholders need to be more aware of their common strengths and to be consciously involved in joint development of the integrated approach.

Reaching the final stage means identification of leadership of the IMC process. Indeed attaining 'participatory identity' involves the ability to effectively implement IMC programs enabled by a facilitator, who could manage the overall approach. This role should be played by the collaboration body (i.e. the District in the Amalfi Coast case) that could serve as the 'communication champion'. This communication 'czar' will be also called to develop profitable long-term sustainable relationships thus further increasing the likelihood of collaboration between different actors for a participatory and shared identity. This formal collaboration will be based on (*suprapartes*) networking procedures, developed thanks to official relations among local stakeholders involved in creating and promoting long term plans regarding tourism development, with the main aim of solving existing conflicts and communicating shared viewpoints (Gursoy, Saayman, and Sotiriadis, 2015; Waayers et al., 2012).

In this perspective, the shared identity can then be constantly monitored on the basis of engagement of all stakeholders, both internal (including community actors) and external (tourists, tourism operators) (Soica, 2016; Vollero, Conte, Bottoni, and Siano, 2018). Such a 'place identity' would then be more likely to be aligned with changes in tourist tastes and behaviour, but also could modify communications as needed. Thus, at this level, putting IMC into practice serves to strengthen community identity and positively impact the whole area via social interaction and simultaneously to promote economic, commercial and political regional interests, if adopted.

The four above stages would seem mandatory for reaching collaboration propensity and integration of tourism promotion, and even if they offer different objectives (increasing tourist satisfaction, building a unique brand, reaching marketing communication synergy, etc.) each can positively impact both effectiveness of tourism promotion and the area's economic development. The model can help economic actors, in the analysed area of Italy, to overcome boundaries that impede them to join their forces. This issue relating to fragmentation in decision-making has been addressed by studies on local districts and business networks (Raco, 1999). Following each stage with references to managerial suggestions in terms of collaboration propensity, stakeholders' involvement, communication incentives, barriers overcome and achievable benefits for destination marketing, the model offers useful insights to Italian entrepreneurs who are characterised by high level of individualism, innate lack of collaboration propensity and that are not able to deal with the collaboration/competition dynamic (Bougrain & Haudeville, 2002, Economia Affari e Finanza, 2018). Moreover, the model shows how they can attain the main benefits of creating and maintaining a network of relationships with key actors, implemented as a way to 'fight' the effect of uncertainty in tourism (Mistilis, Buhalis, and Gretzel, 2014). In this field, the absorption of uncertainty, achieved following the four stages of the framework, should also encourage all local stakeholders in increasing trust and reliance on each other (Lorenzoni & Lipparini, 1999).

The selected communities of stakeholders can follow the steps to gradually solve their

problems in accepting the authority exerted by a central unity (IMC facilitator) or by a guiding organisation (Lomi & Lorenzoni, 1992). Nowadays, they act, in fact, as players that are more interested in protecting the achieved level of power and their freedom of decision making, instead of enhancing these skills, merging their strengths and working together in order to reach much higher scopes in tourism promotion, as regularly happen in other countries where DMO are successfully developed (Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014).

As is usual in this type of research, an exploratory study is influenced by reduced ability to generalise the results. That said, the model does seem to fit well for integration purposes in highly fragmented areas (such as the Amalfi Coast) and may offer opportunities in terms of area development. However, further qualitative and quantitative research is required in different contexts to evaluate the viability of the proposed model. With this in mind, the model may be useful in further theoretical and empirical research on integrated destination marketing communication.

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Table 1: IMC for Tourism Destination: Incentives and Barriers

MAIN INCENTIVES		MAIN REFERENCES
Marketing communication		
	Making creative ideas about tourism more effective	Eagle & Kitchen, 2000
	Creating communication consistency for territory	Eagle et al., 2007
	Allocating budgets away from mass media advertising	Kliatchko, 2008
	Spreading expenditure across promotional mix	Kliatchko, 2008
	Portraying consistent messages about destination	Kim, Han, and Schultz, 2004
Brand		
	Starting with tourist needs' analysis and working backwards to destination brand and its communication	Balakrishnan, 2009; Kitchen & Uzunoglu, 2014
	Achieving synergy to attain strong destination brand image	Pike, 2005; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013
	Building relationship between destination brand and tourists	Dinnie, 2004; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013
Customers/tourists		
	Increasing segmentation of tourist tastes/preferences and developing accessible /usable tourist databases	Alen et al., 2007; Alegre & Cladera, 2009
	Reinforcing tourist loyalty via relationship marketing	Duncan & Moriarty 1998; Kitchen et al., 2009; Kitchen & Burgmann, 2015
	Affecting tourists' behaviour and conception of value	Duncan & Moriarty 1998; Kitchen & Burgmann, 2015
MAIN BARRIERS		
Resource issues (money, time, skills)		
	Difficulties in accessing sufficient integrated budgets	Hankinson, 2005; Pike, 2005; Adu-Ampong, 2017
	Lack of time	Woodland & Acott, 2007
	Lack of skills including IMC understanding	Skinner, 2005; Chu et al., 2009
Centralization and identity issues		
	Lack of flexibility among different peoples and organisations	Eagle & Kitchen, 2000; Pettegrew, 2001
	Avoiding failure due to a plurality of decision-makers	Morgan et al. 2001; Balakrishnan, 2009; Hazra et al., 2017
	Absence of an IMC facilitator ('champion')	Pettegrew, 2001
	Lack of a proper place identity or having an image badly affected by persistent (negative) elements	Eagle & Kitchen, 2000; Morgan et al., 2001; Skinner, 2005; Ots & Nyilasy, 2015
Power and control issues		
	Extant conflicts/tensions between different persons in charge of communication activities	Eagle et al., 2007
	Lack of support of policy makers	Pride, 2001; Pike, 2005
	Not achieving control of integration of communication due to multiple factors forming destination 'product'	Morgan et al., 2001
	Lack of adequate measurement tools	Eagle & Kitchen, 2000; Chu et al., 2009

Figure 1: Incentives and Barriers to IMC – Amalfi Coast Stakeholder Perceptions

Local stakeholders: local governments (municipalities) – N. 9 interviews		Level of dimension		
		Low	Medium	High
Incentives	Customers/tourists			
	Brand			
	Marketing communications			
Barriers	Resource issues			
	Centralisation and identity issues			
	Power and control issues			

Local stakeholders: local organisations/associations – N. 6 interviews		Level of dimension		
		Low	Medium	High
Incentives	Customers/tourists			
	Brand			
	Marketing communications			
Barriers	Resource issues			
	Centralisation and identity issues			
	Power and control issues			

Local stakeholders: communication agencies – N. 7 interviews		Level of dimension		
		Low	Medium	High
Incentives	Customers/tourists			
	Brand			
	Marketing communications			
Barriers	Resource issues			
	Centralisation and identity issues			
	Power and control issues			

Local stakeholders: local companies (other stakeholders) – N. 5 interviews		Level of dimension		
		Low	Medium	High
Incentives	Customers/tourists			
	Brand			
	Marketing communications			
Barriers	Resource issues			
	Centralisation and identity issues			
	Power and control issues			

Figure 2: An IMC Model for Tourism Collaboration
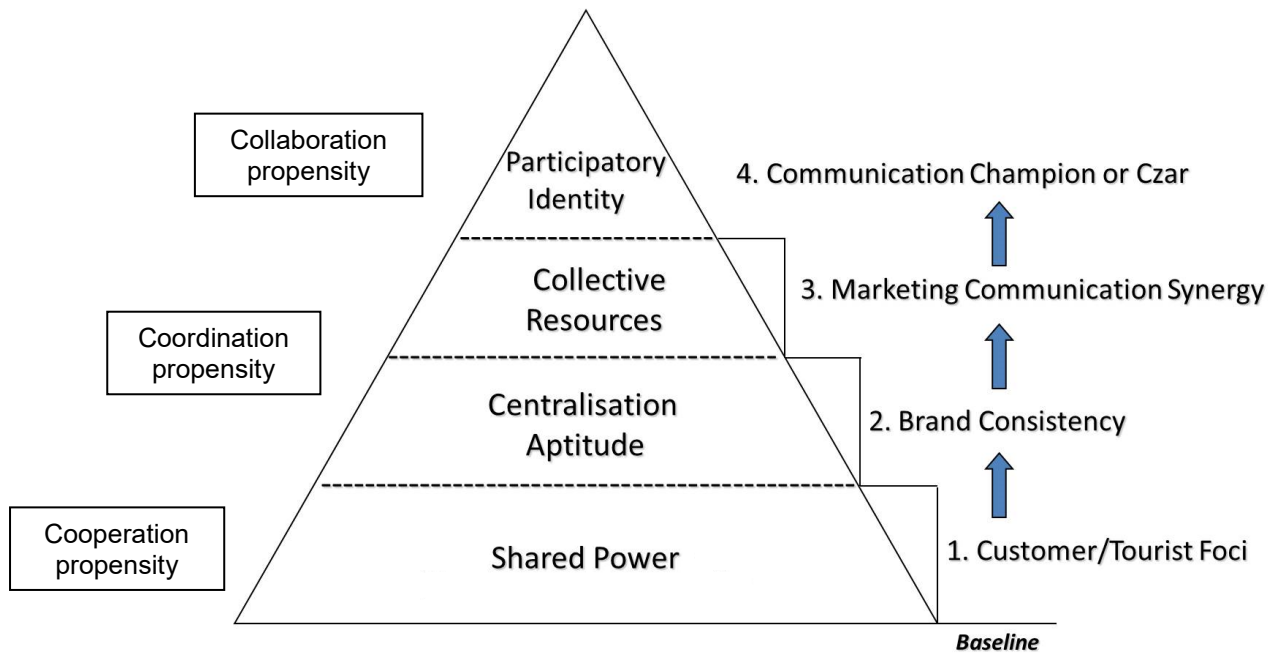
Appendix I: In-depth interviews with stakeholders

Interview date	Interview position (type of respondent)	Interview approx. length
27.09.2016	Major (local governments - municipalities)	80 min
28.09.2016	Agri-food firm manager (local companies)	125 min
17.10.2016	Councillor for tourism (local governments - municipalities)	100 min
19.10.2016	Hotel manager (local companies)	75 min
20.10.2016	Head (communication agency)	85 min
26.10.2016	EPT representative (local organisations/associations for tourism)	110 min
27.10.2016	President of Amalfi firms' consortium (local companies)	95 min
31.10.2016	Councillor for tourism (local governments - municipalities)	70 min
03.11.2016	Head (communication agency)	75 min
03.11.2016	Pro-loco representative (local organisations/associations for tourism)	80 min
07.11.2016	Major (local governments - municipalities)	60 min
08.11.2016	Councillor for tourism (local governments - municipalities)	95 min
15.11.2016	Pro-loco representative (local organisations/associations for tourism)	135 min
15.11.2016	Councillor for tourism (local governments - municipalities)	70 min
16.11.2016	Head (communication agency)	95 min
22.11.2016	President of Amalfi district (local organisations/associations for tourism)	70 min
22.11.2016	Major (local governments - municipalities)	65 min
29.11.2016	Executive account (delegate for tourism promotion) (communication agency)	115 min
01.12.2016	Head (communication agency)	100 min
02.12.2016	Councillor for tourism (local governments - municipalities)	110 min
13.12.2016	Hotel manager (local companies)	85 min
13.12.2016	Pro-loco representative (local organisations/associations for tourism)	110 min
14.12.2016	Major (local governments - municipalities)	90 min
02.01.2016	Pro-loco representative (local organisations/associations for tourism)	70 min
02.01.2016	Executive account (communication agency)	65 min
11.01.2016	Restaurant manager (local companies)	80 min
11.01.2016	Head (communication agency)	75 min
13.01.2016	Hotel manager (local companies)	90 min
General Topics discussed:		

- Their understanding of IMC
- The factors that influence the adoption of an integrated approach in tourism communication and its relevance to their organisation/business
- Their experience of what they did in practice (how IMC has been or could be implemented)
- Discussion of what benefits have been (or can be) achieved through IMC
- Discussion of what barriers have been noticed in IMC application (and eventually how they have been overcome)