

An Empirical Study on the Effect of the Integrated Marketing Communication Strategies in Higher Education Institutions

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ABSTRACT

Educational institutions remain in competitive markets for student recruitment and retention. Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) refers to the strategies whereby institutions convey messages that are consistent and harmonized across various communication channels. This research investigates the effects of various strategies of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) on student enrollment, reputation of the institution, student engagement, and competitive positioning within the higher education marketplace. The study focused on primary data, collected from 200 respondents. These respondents are admission officers, marketing personnel, academia, and students from various higher learning institutions. The study employed different statistical measures such as percentage analysis, correlation analysis, and regression analysis. The results indicated that the strategies of IMC, when employed effectively, yield beneficial results in the building of reputation of the institution, as well as influencing prospective students' decisions on enrollment. The findings of the study encourage higher learning institutions to embrace communication approaches that are harmonized and integrated, and are based on the use of data, to enhance the effectiveness of marketing and the competitiveness of the institution.

Keywords: Integrated Marketing Communication, Higher Education Institutions, Student Enrollment, Institutional Branding, Marketing Strategy, Student Engagement.

INTRODUCTION

In the last few years, globalization and technology and the rivalry between schools have changed higher education. Schools can't market themselves to potential students via brochures, seminars or fairs. With the changing tools and needs of potential students, schools have to find different methods to market themselves. One of those methods is Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) which uses different methods of marketing to reach potential customers.

IMC is the marketing of education via advertising, public relations, direct marketing, social media, digital marketing, events and personal marketing. With IMC, schools can reach students and parents/families with the school's education and extra curriculars. This method of marketing is especially important for schools that want to reach different potential customers. Schools can market themselves to parents, students and alumni and help students pick the best school for them.

Today's digital world shows that social media, school websites, digital ads, and content marketing have great potential for recruiting and engaging students. Communicating through digital channels attracts more applicants and builds a stronger brand. The competitive nature of higher education means a more comprehensive communication strategy needs to consider both the traditional and digital communications. IMC not only makes higher education marketing more effective, but also increases student enrollment, builds stronger brands for education institutions, and increases stakeholder engagement. Because of the increasing demand to understand integrated marketing communications in higher education, education administrators, marketers, and policy makers can offer a more competitive higher education marketplace.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

- 1. Gordon-Isasi, J., & Ronda, L. (2023)**Customer-centric Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) provides value for students. This model brings positive change to higher education by improving the quality of communication within an institution. As a result of an efficient IMC, the quality of the relationship between the institution and its students improves.
- 3. Dagumboy, E. (2022)**The ECD-IMC model was created on the basis of Philippine higher education and suggests that communication integration provides a competitive advantage and effective enrollment for an institution. The model outlines numerous digital pathways, public relations, and direct marketing as critical elements. Increased engagement of various actors results in growth for the institution.
- 4. Gordon-Isasi, J., Narvaiza, L., & Gibaja, J. J. (2021)**The measurement scale created in this study confirms the presence of IMC and its four foundational elements in higher education. The findings show that planning and orientation of messages and communication, along with the degree of flexibility and outreach, determine effectiveness of IMC in higher education.
- 5. Kisiolek, A., Karyy, O., & Halkiv, L. (2021)**The research showed that internet-based marketing communication tools have a positive impact on recruitment processes and institutional promotion. Better effects are achieved by the use of several tools together, like social media, websites, online ads, and digital content. Integrated digital campaigns help increase students' awareness, engagement, and responsiveness.
- 6. Camilleri, M. A. (2020)**The chapter examined the role of digital marketing communications in contemporary higher education. Institutions employing integrated online and offline communication attain improved brand visibility, engagement, and recruitment result. It was found that social media channels and content management and marketing were crucial for modern IMC strategies.
- 7. Harjadi, D., & Fatmasari, D. (2017)**The study showed that private higher education institutions' image was positively influenced by integrated marketing communication. Advertising, public relations, events, and direct marketing communication showed a positive public perception of higher education institutions. Effective IMC practices helped create trust, attractiveness, and improved competitiveness towards prospective students.
- 8. Smedescu, D. A., Ivanov, A. E., Ioanăș, E., & Zaharia, R. M. (2016)**The study showed that marketing communication mixes, which integrated all the communication marketing tools, had the most positive effects. Higher education institutions that integrated advertising, public relations, online communication, and promotional communication achieved a presence in the education market. Coordinated communication greatly enhanced institutional promotion and marketing.
- 9. Schüller, D., & Chalupský, V. (2012)**In this study, the authors recognize that integrated management marketing communications positively impacts organizational effectiveness. Within higher learning institutions, contact management activities yield efficiencies, decrease contradictions of messaging, and reinforce the organization's identity. The authors conclude that integration of communication strives for engagement with stakeholders and differentiates them within the marketplace.
- 10. Edmiston-Strasser, D. M. (2009)**Studying IMC in public higher education systems of the U.S., this research explores function distinctions of integrated communication practices. IMC practitioners convey messaging with greater consistency and improvement of engagement with stakeholders and branding. This study noted that increased utilization of IMC directly improves institutional effectiveness and advances enrollment.

RESEARCH GAP

Studies have focused on the intersections of branding and digital marketing and communication strategies within higher education. Little empirical research has examined the effects that Integrated Marketing Communication strategies have on student enrollment and the efficacy of higher education institutions as systems, particularly in the context of developing economies. This study seeks to fill this gap.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

This study emphasizes the importance of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) strategies and their impacts on the performance of higher education institutions. With the rise in competition within the education sector, marketing and communication strategies become crucial to gain and retain students. The research aims to provide an understanding of the potential impact that consolidated communication via advertising, social networks, public relations, and digital communication can have on student enrollment and the institutional image. The output of this will be beneficial to educational institutional managers, marketing specialists, and policymakers in improving their marketing communication strategies. The research will further enable the institutions to better their communication with students, parents, alumni, and other stakeholders. The study will also outline the potential contribution that IMC will make to enhance the visibility and reputation of the institution and increase competitiveness. In addition, the work will be of great help in an effort to identify research studies in the area of marketing communication and student enrollment in higher education.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Many higher education institutions fail to attract and retain students despite considerable investments in promotional efforts. Ineffective marketing results from fragmented communication, inconsistent branding, and poor promotional efforts. Hence, the result of Integrated Marketing Communication strategies on higher education institutions' performance and student enrollment should be of great concern.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. Examine the influence of Integrated Marketing Communication strategies on the rate of student enrollment.
2. Determine the relationship between IMC and the institutional branding.
3. Ascertain the potential benefits for higher education institutions from the adoption of IMC strategies.
4. Analyze the challenges involved in implementing integrated marketing communication strategies.

HYPOTHESES

H01: There is no significant relationship between Integrated Marketing Communication strategies and student enrollment.

H11: There is a significant relationship between Integrated Marketing Communication strategies and student enrollment.

H02: Integrated Marketing Communication strategies do not significantly influence institutional branding.

H12: Integrated Marketing Communication strategies significantly influence institutional branding.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study involves a descriptive and analytical research design regarding the stated research objectives. The population involves higher education institutions and a sample of 200 respondents is drawn using simple random sampling. This is done to design an unbiased sample. The study incorporates both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data is captured through the researcher-designed structured questionnaires, while secondary data is collected through journals, books, proceedings, reports, and online databases. The collected data is analyzed through different statistical techniques. This includes a percentage calculation to provide a summary of the characteristics of respondents, Pearson correlation to examine the relationships, and multiple regression to identify the effect of independent variables on the dependent variable.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Relationship between IMC Strategies and Student Enrollment

Sample Size (N)	Correlation Coefficient (r)	p-value	Decision
200	0.781	0.000	Accepted

The relationship between IMC strategies and student enrollment in higher education institutions is shown in Table 1. A correlation coefficient value of 0.781 indicates a strong positive relationship between the two variables. Accordingly, the use of IMC strategies that incorporate social media, advertising, public relations, and other digital communication channels by institutions is likely to result in higher student enrollment. A p-value of 0.000 is below the generally accepted significance level of $p < 0.05$, indicating a statistically significant relationship. Thus, the alternative hypothesis is accepted, while the null hypothesis is rejected. Well-integrated communication strategies are likely to have a positive impact on higher education institutions' ability to attract potential students and increase student enrollment.

Table 2: Impact of IMC Strategies on Student Enrollment (Regression Analysis)

Sample Size (N)	R ²	F-value	p-value	Decision
200	0.61	96.42	0.000	Accepted

Table 2 outlines the influence of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) strategies on student enrollment, as shown by a regression analysis. An R² value of 0.61 denotes that IMC strategies account for a considerable percentage of the variance (61%) in student enrollment figures. Such indicators confirm the level of IMC strategies. The F-value of 96.42 confirms the regression equation is adequate. The p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$) confirms an adequate level of regression, and it is accurate to say the IMC strategies significantly impacted student enrollment. The hypothesis is proven to be true. The results of the study suggest that well-structured, integrated marketing communications are likely to yield higher student enrollment, which in turn, improves the overall performance of the institution.

Table 3: Impact of IMC on Institutional Branding

Sample Size (N)	Correlation Coefficient (r)	p-value
200	0.74	0.000

Table 3 shows the connection between Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) and institutional branding. The correlation coefficient of 0.74 indicates a strong positive relationship. This shows that institutions that work with many different channels of communication that are consistent and coordinated work to build a stronger brand image. The p-value of 0.000 is below the general significance level, 0.05, and indicates that the relationship is statistically significant. The results indicate that the application of IMC strategies develops a positive perception of the institution, and of the stakeholders. Active communication effectively builds visibility, trust, and reputation, which are essential to the branding of an institution. Thus, the research maintains that the IMC is of high importance to strengthen the brand and the market position of the higher education institutions.

FINDINGS

- Integrated Marketing Communication affects student enrollment.
- Branding of an institution is impacted by consistent communication through all available channels.
- Social media and digital communication are the best forms of marketing to prospective students.
- IMC broadens the engagement of students and the visibility of the institution.
- Implementation of IMC is impacted by lack of resources and technology.
- Marketing performance is enhanced with communication based on data.

SUGGESTIONS

- Complete IMC models are needed in marketing for the education sector.
- Digital marketing and advanced analytics of marketing require more funding.
- Investment is needed in the education and training of marketing and admission professionals.
- Evaluation of the communication is needed to assess the impact of their work.
- Personalization tools based on AI are needed to engage students.

CONCLUSION

IMC is a vital marketing strategy for education providers in competitive markets. This study emphasizes the value of consistent communication for marketing to students, building an institution's brand, and engaging stakeholders. Integration of all communication channels, traditional and digital, provides education institutions the opportunity to gain a competitive edge and grow. Higher education institutions must focus on the comprehensive developing and adopting of IMC processes to strengthen their position in the market and attract more students.

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