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ECD-IMC: an integrated marketing communications model for selected Philippine higher education institutions

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Abstract Private higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Philippines have been in turmoil due to three major occurrences: the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act of 2017, and the Coronavirus Disease. These contributed to the abating tertiary enrolment. One scheme for enduring the ordeal is the application of budgetary cuts. Competing in a scarcer market with financial constraints is an arduous task for marketing. The paper aimed to identify the most effective platform blend among numerous communication platforms employed in the industry by recognising the importance of integrated marketing communications (IMC) and maximising HEIs' return on marketing investments. About 380 students, parents, and administrators from five private HEIs in the National Capital Region offering Senior High School programs participated as survey respondents or interviewees. The paper utilised mixed methods, various statistical tools, and variance analyses. Among the twenty marketing communication platforms, the most efficient (efficiency rating>3.736) are referrals/word-of-mouth marketing, free entrance examination, website, scholarships/discounts, and social media. In contrast, in the lower quartile (efficiency rating<3.262) are billboards, television/radio/print ads, souvenir items, sending direct messages to prospective students, and newspaper articles. To some extent, the HEIs implementation level of the various platforms is aligned with communication platforms' efficiency ratings. Further, the study ascertained differences in the preference and reached ratings according to respondents' profiles. Finally, an Efficient, Coherent, and Dynamic (ECD)-IMC model was crafted to help HEI administrators/marketers improve their enrolment with the least possible costs and to provide reference to future researchers.

Keywords: communication platforms; integrated marketing communications (IMC); higher education institutions (HEIs)

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INTRODUCTION

Private higher education institutions (HEIs) all over the Philippines have been exposed to legal challenges and drastic changes, which have caused dwindling enrolment since 2016. This scenario instigated the development of a cost-effective Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) Model to ameliorate the effects of three phenomena, i.e., Republic Act 10533, Republic Act 10931, and Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19).

First, the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (R.A. 10533) took effect on 24 September 2013 under Section 41 of the D.O. 43, S. 2013 or its Implementing Rules and Regulations in the Philippines. The Philippines' Commission on Higher Education (CHED) recognised that its transition, the five years between 2016 and 2021, poses considerable strain not only to the basic education segment but also on other sectors' effects. Among those inescapably affected are the HEIs. As a Post-Secondary/ Senior High School (SHS) rolled out countrywide in 2016, students must spend an additional two years in high school (H.S.) instead of going straight to college, resulting in low enrolment in HEIs nationwide (CHED, n.d.). Moreover, the financial demand for two more years in H.S. and the assumption that SHS graduates are already employable reduced the number of potential tertiary students.

Second, the implementation of the "Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act of 2017" (R.A. 10931), which allows Filipino students to acquire free higher education in state universities and colleges (SUCs) and local universities and colleges (LUCs). Albeit this is mainly good news, it has an extensive impact on HEIs' enrolment for potential tertiary students lean toward SUCs or LUCs rather than private HEIs.

Third, the COVID-19 outbreak that instantly registered its first case in the Philippines on 30 January 2020 (WHO, 2020) formed a domino effect in various industries, including the academic domain and even in the way of life. The underlying causal sequence resulted in the declaration of community quarantines and advisories by the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Disease (IATF) and the CHED. Eventually, the "new normal" in the academic milieu led to a further decline in tertiary enrolment.

Resulting from the academic realm modifications, 865 private schools (Primary, Secondary, and Post-Secondary) momentarily cease operation in the school year 2021-2022, affecting 58,327 students nationwide (Hernando-Malipot, 2020; 2021). This number eventually adds up to the difficulties of tertiary enrolment.

One method of surviving the ordeal, practised by most universities and colleges, is the strict implementation of budgetary cuts. HEIs having a scarcer market to compete in, coupled with financial constraints, are quite arduous for marketing.

On the other hand, numerous scholars (Hunt, Mello, and Deitz, 2018; Caywood, Schultz, and Wang, 1991) share a similar viewpoint of coordinating multiple channels, including public relations, for the

effective transmission of clear and consistent messages to the intended audience. This concept is referred to as Integrated Marketing Communications or IMC. Its fundamental goal is to exploit the synergistic abilities of different marketing communications disciplines as a whole and not in isolation (Csikósová, Antošová, and Čulková, 2014). Likewise, its applicability has been observed in the academe (George, 2000; King, 2013; Dagumboy, 2019; Fierro et al., 2017; Starck and Zadeh, 2013), as evidenced by the twenty marketing communication platforms employed by universities and colleges in the Philippines.

Given the previous issues, the paper's quest was to single out the most efficient assortment of marketing communications to deliver desired messages to the intended recipients, which served as groundwork in scheming a flexible IMC model for HEIs to boost enrolment, whether in the old or new normal.

METHODOLOGY

This paper employs descriptive research and a mixed methods approach to account for the conditions or phenomena in HEI marketing. The integration allows more thorough and synergistic data utilisation than separate quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. The research domains include five private institutions of higher learning located in the National Capital Region (NCR) Manila (Metro Manila) with SHS programs. These characteristics were carefully considered for the following reasons: (1) the private HEIs are the ones suffering from low enrolment relative to SUCs and LUCs; (2) there is a high concentration HEIs in the NCR, 308/1,729 private HEIs distributed across seventeen regions, (OPRKM-KMD, 2020); and (3) the presence of SHS program is necessary to identify the prospective tertiary students' behaviour toward the communication platforms.

There are three groups of respondents from the academic year 2020-2021: students, parents or guardians, and HEI administrators involved in marketing. The students were chosen for their first-hand experience and insights about the diverse communication platforms used by their respective/prospective universities. The first group comprised upper-level tertiary students, tertiary freshmen, and SHS students to cover a time-based array of perspectives. Filipino parents are known to strongly influence their children's choice of HEI (Dagang and De Mesa, 2017). They usually finance their children's education, assist in determining the HEI, and approve their children's choices. Hence, their involvement certainly qualifies them as a part of the HEIs' target audience. Lastly, the university administrators participating in the marketing sorties, knowing the extent of implementing different communication platforms used by their respective institutions, complete the three groups.

Cluster sampling was used to determine the composition of the 350 online survey student respondents. Eight HEI administrators with marketing involvement also partook in the survey. Furthermore, 18

students, parents/guardians of the students, and administrators from the institutions under study were randomly picked to participate in the interview to validate/support/explain the survey responses.

The research instruments used in this research study are survey questionnaires and interviews. The survey questionnaires comprise 20 communication platforms, based mainly on the observed marketing practices in the country and abroad. The respondents were asked about their degree of preference for each communication platform using the Likert five-point scale, wherein 1= "totally not preferred" and 5= "most preferred". In addition, the extent of agreement regarding the source of university's information was solicited from the respondents using response anchors: 1= "strongly disagree" and 5= "strongly agree". An unstructured question was incorporated into the instrument, "other means where you learn about the university," to obtain relevant information that the questionnaire may not cover. The mentioned survey questionnaire was used for both tertiary and SHS students, only structured in marginally different modes.

The survey instrument for the administrators was centred on the colleges/universities' implementation degree of the 20 communication platforms. Furthermore, the interviews were patterned on the questionnaires. The respondents were asked to share stories about their actual experiences/expectations with the different marketing communication platforms.

To validate the instruments' coherence and clarity of instructions, they were pre-tested by thirty two people composed of graduate and college students, university administrators and faculty members, and parents. The process led to the improvement of the questionnaires.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This portion chronicles the research study's data, outcomes, and findings. The demographic and geographic data presented in Table 1 show that, as intended, SHS, first-year college students, and upper-level students are almost equally represented with 33%, 32%, and 35%, respectively. The majority (67%) of the respondents belong to the 18 to 20 bracket, 25% are aged 21 to 30, and 8% are still minors. These figures are anticipated given their academic levels, except for one participant in the 31 to 40 bracket, probably a returnee. A large portion (65%) of the sample is female. The respondents who graduated from privately owned H.S.s (89%) outnumbered those from public educational institutions (11%). This may be attributed to the fact that all five HEIs understudy are private; hence, they cater to the higher-income market. Additionally, significant percentages of the respondents came from only three regions: 69% reside in the NCR, 15% from Calabarzon, and 11% from Central Luzon, which is sensible because of their proximity to the HEIs. Note that the figures are net of invalid responses.

Table 1. Demographic and Geographic Profile (n=350)

Characteristics	Categories	Frequency	Percent
Year Level			
	SHS	114	33%
	College Freshmen	113	32%
	Upperclassmen	123	35%
Age			
	17 years and below	28	8%
	18 to 20 years old	234	67%
	21 to 30 years old	87	25%
	31 to 40 years old	1	0%
Sex			
	Female	228	65%
	Male	122	35%
Type of SHS			
	Private	313	89%
	Public	37	11%
Place of Residence			
	NCR	243	69%
	Region I, Ilocos Region	5	1%
	Region II, Cagayan Valley	3	1%
	Region III, Central Luzon	39	11%
	Region IVA, Calabarzon	53	15%
	Region IVB, Mimaropa	3	1%
	Region V, Bicol Region	1	0%
	Region VII, Central Visayas	1	0%
	Region VIII, Eastern Visayas	1	0%
	Region XII, Soccsksargen, Central Mindanao	1	0%

Source: Data Processed by Author (2022)

Various studies (Reid, 2012; Starck and Zadeh, 2013; Hanover Research, 2014; Fierro et al., 2017; Mercado and Mercado, 2018; Dagumboy, 2019; and George, 2000) confirmed the utilisation of diverse marketing communication platforms as they presented resembling marketing communication options. Subsequent are the platforms being adopted by the universities and colleges in the Philippines: (1) billboard ads; (2) participating in career orientation/fair organised by SHS; (3) joining educational fairs/exhibitions organised by a third party like Inter-Ed and Edukasyon.ph; (4) holding on-campus events like concerts, fashion shows, seminars, etc.; (5) distributing flyers or brochures; (6) offering free entrance examination; (7) conducting on-campus inter-HS competitions (academics, sports); (8) newspaper articles; (9) having open houses or inviting prospective students for a campus tour; (10) conducting outreach programs; (11) referrals; (12) offering scholarships; (13) using social media like Facebook or Twitter; (14) giving souvenir items; (15) sponsorships; (16) tarpaulin or poster display; (17) communicating with potential students through telephone call, SMS (Short Message Service or text), or email; (18)

television/radio/print ads; (19) membership in collegiate athletic leagues like the University Athletic Association of the Philippines (UAAP); and (20) university website.

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations of the Questionnaire Data-Preference (n=350)

		Preference	
Rank	Description	MEAN	STDEV
1	6. Free entrance examination	4.094286	1.107268
2	12. Scholarships offered by the university	4.017143	1.201595
3	11. Relatives/friends/others	4.000000	1.035197
4	20. University website	3.948571	1.066653
5	13. Social media	3.897143	1.128299
6	4. On-campus events	3.865714	1.103120
7	9. Open house/Invitation from the university for a campus tour	3.865714	1.128796
8	7. On-campus inter-HS competitions (academics, sports)	3.811429	1.106835
9	19. Collegiate athletic leagues	3.811429	1.177091
10	2. Career orientation/fair organised by my SHS	3.800000	1.051674
11	10. University's outreach programs	3.788571	1.118168
12	5. Flyers/brochures	3.702857	1.055884
13	15. Sponsorships	3.617143	1.100530
14	3. Educational fairs/exhibitions organised by a third party	3.554286	1.097625
15	16.Tarpaulins/posters	3.531429	1.031251
16	14. University souvenir items	3.451429	1.209649
17	17. Telephone call/SMS/email from the university	3.437143	1.194684
18	8. Newspaper articles	3.411429	1.138986
19	18.Television/radio/print ads	3.325714	1.095535
20	1. Billboards	3.168571	1.087905

Source: Data Processed by Author (2022)

The preference ratings for each communication platform are displayed in Table 2 via mean with their respective standard deviations. Using a quartile to demonstrate the results, the respondents' top preferred platforms (mean>3.889) are free college entrance examination, scholarships provided by the university, relatives/friends/others, the university website, and social media. These results are comparable to other pre-pandemic studies (Dagumboy, 2019; Hanover Research, 2014; Starck and Zadeh, 2013), wherein recommendations of relatives/friends/others, university websites, and social media are likewise the top choices. The university's free entrance examination and scholarships are new editions to the highly preferred platforms, which replaced open houses and on-campus events. Corroborated by students' statements during the random interview and as prescribed by national and international bodies (WHO, 2020; IATF, 2020; and CHED, 2020), the current condition is no longer suitable for

physical university visits or gatherings. Furthermore, the pandemic has negatively affected the parents' finances, causing students to seek scholarships. A student even stated that they were attracted to the free entrance examination, and after passing the test, they tend to cease scouting for other HEIs.

Conversely, in the lower quartile (mean<3.471) are the platforms least preferred by the respondents in ascending order: billboards, television/radio/print ads, newspaper articles, telephone call/SMS/email from the university, and university souvenir items, which are analogous to other studies (Hanover Research, 2014; and Dagumboy, 2019). The rest fall between the above groupings, and the median is 3.794. As confirmed in the interview, students often sleep in vehicles while travelling, and the pandemic restricted their mobility. Consequently, students seldom see billboards. Additionally, many resorted to online materials rather than television, radio, and newspaper during the new normal. Both students and HEI administrators also explained that university souvenirs could be a "crowd drawer" or complement/supplement to other marketing communication platforms, but it does not guarantee enrolment. Indeed, establishing the stakeholders' perception of value is essential in developing an IMC (Rimkienė, 2013).

It is notable that among the five most preferred, relatives/friends/others registered the second-lowest standard deviation (1.035197), denoting confidence in the overall responses. Oppositely, the scholarship offered by the university has the second-highest standard deviation (1.201595), implying that the respondents do not similarly regard it relative to other communication platforms.

The reach rating of each communication platform through means, with the corresponding standard deviation, is revealed in Table 3. Interestingly, the student respondents identified the following in the upper quartile (mean>3.555) to have mostly reached them: relatives/friends/others; free entrance examination provided by the university; university website; social media; and scholarships offered by the university. Validated during the interview with students and parents, almost all mentioned that their relatives or friends are also alumni of their HEIs. These findings resemble several studies. Recommendations from family, friends and others or word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing were proven effective (Mercado and Mercado, 2018; Kerin and Hartley, 2019). Website and social media are commonly utilised by HEIs in Asia and Africa (Paladan, 2018) for online strategies as optimal channels to attract students (Fierro et al., 2017). Additionally, offering scholarships was the most effective price marketing activity (Mercado and Mercado, 2018). Notably, asking for referrals, using social media, and offering scholarships belong to the top five marketing communication tools implemented by the HEIs understudy, as discovered through the administrators.

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations of the Questionnaire Data-Reach (n=350)

		Reach	
Rank	Description	MEAN	STDEV
1	11. Relatives/friends/others	3.811429	1.152491
2	6. Free entrance examination offered by the university	3.660000	1.414761
3	20. University website	3.651429	1.212960
4	13. Social Media	3.620000	1.228202
5	12. Scholarships offered by the university	3.582857	1.374238
6	4. On-campus events like concerts, fashion shows, seminars, etc.	3.471429	1.286044
7	2. Career orientation/fair organised by my SHS	3.397143	1.279995
8	5. Flyers/Brochures	3.397143	1.150305
9	19. Collegiate athletic leagues	3.362857	1.369874
10	7. On-campus inter-HS competitions (academics, sports)	3.320000	1.289321
11	9. Open house/Invitation from the university for a campus tour	3.317143	1.372882
12	16. Tarpaulins/Posters	3.294286	1.131331
13	10. University's outreach programs	3.282857	1.279099
14	15. Sponsorships	3.160000	1.265636
15	3. Educational fairs/exhibitions organised by a third party	3.117143	1.246424
16	8. Newspaper articles	3.062857	1.219020
17	17. Telephone call/SMS/email from the university	3.002857	1.288029
18	14. University souvenir items	2.942857	1.294530
19	18. Television/radio/print ads	2.868571	1.160420
20	1. Billboards	2.800000	1.218294

Source: Data Processed by Author (2022)

On the opposite end are the platforms in the lower quartile (mean<3.076 in ascending order) or those that least reached the respondents: billboards; television/radio/print ads; university souvenir items; telephone call/SMS/email from the university; and newspaper articles. This finding accords with the responses of the HEI administrators, wherein billboards and television/radio/print ads are two of the five least implemented marketing communication tools because of the high budget and innumerable requirements. The other items' means are between the two sets with a 3.319 median.

The last item on the questionnaire, intended to learn other platforms or sources of information not included in the selection, gathered 87 answers from 61 respondents. Albeit relatives/friends/others, websites, social media, news articles, and brochures were specified in the questionnaire, 70 reiterated these as sources of information about the HEI, as shown in Table 4. It revealed that the majority, or 61 of the 87, knew about the university through "word of mouth," validating its wide use as a crisis marketing strategy

of HEIs (Panlilio, 2018). Eleven (11) responses pertain to the internet, whereas nine (9) are related to the performance of the HEI. In addition, some respondents learned about the HEI because of its proximity to their residence and through an actual site visit.

Table 4. Other Sources of Information about HEIs

Source of information		Frequency	Total
WOM	Alumni	9	
	Family	28	
	Former teachers	1	
	Friends	15	
	Hearsay	1	
	Peers	6	
	Referrals	1	61
Internet	Google	4	
	Social Media	6	
	Website	1	11
HEI's performance	Inquiries	1	
	News articles	1	
	Reputation	3	
	Research	1	
	Specialisation	3	9
Proximity		3	3
Site visit		2	2
Brochures		1	1
			87

Source: Data Processed by Author (2022)

How the information was passed on was not explicit. However, it could be surmised that some were conveyed through digital platforms, given the current condition. All the same, endorsements expressed online, or user-generated content (UGC) have reached paramount importance since people trust their peers significantly more than they trust corporate promotion (Munro and Richards, 2011). Thus, UGC or messages via earned media call for the organisation and its marketers' attention, given that the target cohort of the universities for tertiary education is the protagonist of this technology-based era (Dagumboy, 2019). Regarding the HEI's performance, product marketing activities may come into play, as Mercado and Mercado (2018) found it to be effective with special attention to the HEI's proficiency in program offerings, as well as promotion of the HEI's image (George, 2000). Resulting of the survey participated by administrators of the HEIs understudy, the implementation level of each marketing communication tool is shown in table 5.

Based on the Likert five-point scale's descriptive interpretation (mean=4.20-5.00), offering scholarships, outreach programs, and social media are always implemented by the HEIs understudy. Often implemented are (mean=3.40-4.19) distributing flyers/brochures, asking for referrals, participating in career orientations/fairs, newspaper articles, offering free college entrance examination, tarpaulin/poster

display, university website, sponsoring materials needed by SHSs, sending direct messages to prospective students, distributing university souvenir items, and organising on-campus events. On the other hand, the following are sometimes implemented (mean=2.60-3.39): open house/inviting prospective students for a campus tour, collegiate athletic league membership, billboard display, organising on-campus inter-HS competitions, participating in educational fairs/exhibitions organised by a third party, and television/radio/print ads.

Table 5. Implementation Level of Marketing Communication Platforms (n=8)

		Implementation	
Rank	Description	MEAN	STDEV
1	12. Offering scholarships	4.625	0.517549
2	10. Outreach programs	4.375	0.916125
3	13. Social media	4.250	0.886405
4	5. Distributing flyers/brochures	4.125	0.991031
5	11. Asking for referrals	4.125	0.991031
6	2. Participating in career orientations/fairs organised by different SHS	4.000	1.511858
7	8. Newspaper articles	4.000	0.925820
8	6. Offering free entrance examination	3.875	0.991031
9	16. Tarpaulin/poster display	3.875	1.356203
10	20. University website	3.875	1.807722
11	15. Sponsoring materials needed by SHSs	3.750	1.035098
12	17. Sending messages to prospective students via telephone/SMS/email	3.750	0.886405
13	14. Distributing university souvenir items	3.625	1.302470
14	4. Organising on-campus events like concerts, fashion shows, seminars, etc.	3.500	0.755929
15	9. Open house/inviting prospective students for a campus tour	3.375	1.187735
16	19. Collegiate athletic league membership	3.375	1.995531
17	1. Billboard display	3.250	1.669046
18	7. Organising on-campus inter-HS competitions (academics, sports)	3.250	0.886405
19	3. Participating in educational fairs/exhibitions organised by a third party	3.000	1.195229
20	18.Television/radio/print ads	2.750	1.581139

Source: Data Processed by Author (2022)

Probing the HEI Administrators' vantage point, the interview result elucidated the rationale behind their survey responses. Five from different HEIs named social media one of the top three picks for the most important/effective communication platform before and during the new normal. This is due to the following reasons. It has a wide coverage, which is an important consideration in the choice of platform as identified by scholars (Keller, 2013; Batra and Keller, 2016). The youth prefer it, particularly the centennials, who are natives of the digital age (Entrepreneur en Español, 2020). It can leverage marketing and facilitate communication with alumni who can provide various support

to the institution. Apart from the popular Facebook and Twitter, the Admissions Head of HEI 1 considered exploring LinkedIn, which is popularly employed by HEIs in Asia and Africa (Paladan, 2018; GlobalWebIndex, 2018) and TikTok. HEI 3 administrator added that the institution is sharing a good deal of information through social media, namely: announcements of no tuition increase, achievements of its faculty and students, officership of its faculty in professional organisations, and even the success of its alumni.

The administrator from HEI 4 mentioned that 3/10 inquiries they received are scholarship related, which can be attributed to the parents' financial challenges caused by the pandemic. This was supported by the information shared by a parent during the interview that one of the reasons her twins went to a particular university was because of the scholarships/discounts offered to them.

Half of the participants (HEI 1, 2, and 5) regard career orientation/talk, which ranked sixth in the level of implementation, for the following reasons: there is actual engagement; instant receipt of student feedback; students can directly raise their concerns/queries; the students feel the sincerity of the speaker. Moreover, the HEIs have sustained the conduct of career orientation virtually.

An interviewee emphasised outreach activities in communities/barangay. He cited alley beautification where the university's logo is being placed and inviting SHS students of their feeder school to join the college lecture/classes as a sort of immersion. Another gave an opposing opinion. Accordingly, outreach can be a part of the university's portfolio, but it should not be part of the marketing plan so as not to smear corporate social responsibility.

Administrators from HEI 1 and 5 also mentioned that television/radio/print ads and billboards are expensive. One administrator revealed that a billboard costs six hundred thousand pesos for three months and has limited exposure. Cost is an imperative criterion when designing an IMC (Keller, 2013; Batra and Keller, 2016) that justifies the need for the administrators' IMC evaluation (King, 2013; and Rimkienė, 2013) for efficient allocation of scarce resources. An administrator from another HEI mentioned that local government units (LGU) have many requirements when putting up billboards.

For apparent reasons brought by the deadly virus, organising on-campus inter-HS competitions, open houses, participation in athletic leagues like UAAP, and organising on-campus events are all at the bottom seven in terms of HEIs implementation. When asked for other communication platforms that can effectively transmit information to their aimed viewers, a number improved the platforms covered by the study. The following suggestions were offered concerning websites: a user experience (UX) design to provide meaningful and relevant experiences to the users; designating personnel to answer queries online to improve responsiveness; assigning a focal person per college to ensure quality and relevant content and to review and monitor the

web page. Referrals from the alumni can be enhanced through alum gatherings and the availability of scholarships/discounts for the children of the alumni. Moreover, career orientation's efficacy can be improved by tracing the source of the students, thereby identifying the schools for the conduct thereof. The same question fascinatingly generated new ideas to disseminate information about HEIs. These are live streaming for more significant audience potential, employing chatbots to engage in received messages automatically, and networking with target SHSs and other HEI marketers. Especially in this time of crisis, it is to "network or die," as one of the administrators underscored.

The standard deviations of the responses likewise have interesting revelations. Collegiate athletic league membership registered the highest standard deviation of 1.995531. This may be attributed to the mix of HEIs understudy: three are members of the UAAP, while two are not. During the interview, some administrators hinted that they were not optimising their websites. It explains the standard deviation of 1.807722, the second highest among the twenty communication platforms. Billboard has the third-highest standard deviation (1.669046). Although many administrators expressed its downsides, one HEIs is aggressively utilising it for advertisements to the point that it even has electronic ones. Another HEI administrator also mentioned that this platform is advisable if the HEI owns the facility; thus, there is no need to lease the billboard space. This is enjoyed by one of the HEIs involved in the study.

IBM SPSS Statistics Version 22 was employed to test the hypotheses. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) results revealed that five items garnered p-values under 0.05, which means the differences are significant. Different year levels regard the following items differently: billboards, free college entrance examination; university souvenir items; telephone calls/SMSs/emails from the HEI; and collegiate athletic leagues.

A closer look at the preference ratings suggests that billboard is most preferred by first-year college students, as evidenced by the mean of 3.442, and least favoured by SHS students, as indicated by the mean of 3.009. The university's free entrance examination's desirability is highest for SHS students (mean=4.211) and lowest for upperclassmen (mean=3.894). This can be attributed to the financial difficulty experienced by SHS students during the pandemic. Ergo, they would resort to taking free entrance tests rather than paying for them, compared to upper-level students who already took the college entrance test at a financially comfortable time. University souvenir items, telephone calls/SMS/emails from the university, and collegiate athletic leagues received the highest preference ratings of 3.611, 3.664, and 4.159 from the first-year college students and the lowest (3.228, 3.211, and 3.439) from the upper-level students, respectively. However, for the other 15 items that registered p-values above 0.05, the differences are insignificant based on the respondent's year level.

To further investigate the significant differences between sets, the items deemed as having significant differences were treated using the post hoc test, specifically Multiple Comparisons-LCD. The p-values lower than 0.05 denote significant differences between groups. The material difference often exists between first-year college students and upper-level students. Again, this can be pandemic related since these groups experienced distinct academic environments. Comparison outcomes above 0.05 indicate immaterial differences between the groups' preferences; thus, these will not matter when designing a segmented IMC model.

The ANOVA results of the preference ratings weighed up based on the age of the respondents reveal that the respondents have similar communication platform preferences except for item 11-relatives/friends/others, which solely emerged with a p-value (0.012) less than the assigned alpha. Furthermore, the means for 17 years and below, 18 to 20 years old and 21 to 30 years old, are 4.357, 4.056, and 3.759, respectively. Younger ones, mainly the minors, are more reliant on family/friends/others' suggestions against their seniors, which is congruent to the study of Knoll et al. (2015) that social influence decreased with age. Note that one of the responses was secluded since the respondent's age is in the 31 to 40 bracket, which does not represent the target audience's profile. Hence, the number of treated responses is only 349.

Further, Multiple Comparison-LCD shows significant differences between the responses of 17 years and below and 21 to 30 years old and between 18 to 20 and 21 to 30 years old. Indeed, adolescents are more susceptible to prosocial influence than young adults and adults (Foulkes et al., 2018). These younger groups are the typical incoming first-year college students - 17 to 18 years of age. Further, members of this cohort, classified as generation Z, are tech-innate pragmatists. They communicate with images and are hyper-cognitive and very at ease with gathering and cross-referencing several sources of information and assimilating online and offline experiences. (Parker and Igielnik, 2020; Mckinsey & Company, 2018). Therefore, there are no significant differences in the communication platforms preferred by the respondents based on age, except for relatives/friends/others.

The significant differences in the respondents' communication platform preferences clustered by sex were treated using independent samples t-test with 5% significance level. Nine of the twenty identified communication tools have registered values less than the assigned alpha. These are career orientation/fair organised by the SHS, educational fair/exhibition organised by a third party, on-campus events, relatives/friends/others, scholarships offered by the university, sponsorships, tarpaulin/posters, collegiate athletic leagues, and university website. Unexpectedly, the means of the abovementioned items are higher for females than for male respondents. It can be inferred that women value these communication platforms more than

men do. The other eleven items have p-values more than 0.05; therefore, sex did not influence the respondents' preference for these platforms.

T-test results reveal significant differences in the responses when sorted according to the respondents' type of SHS. Among the Twenty identified communication platforms, six garnered p-values less than the assigned alpha of 0.05. These platforms have significant differences: on-campus events, flyers/brochures, relatives/friends/others, social media, tarpaulins/posters, and university websites. However, there are no significant differences in the respondents' preferences based on their school origin for the other 14 communication platforms (p-value>0.05).

Analysing the preference ratings of the preceding platforms, it can surmise that students from private academic institutions are more inclined to them than those from the public SHSs. Considering the market profile of private HEIs, these findings are relevant to developing marketing strategies.

The significant differences in the communication platforms' actual reach to the respondents, when set by sex, are uncovered using independent samples t-tests. Only two communication platforms garnered significance values less than the assigned alpha of 0.05. These are relatives/friends/others and the university's website, with p-values of 0.000 and 0.001, respectively. Undoubtedly, relatives/friends/others have a better reach for women (3.996) than men (3.467). The university websites share the same condition; females gave a higher reach rating of 3.807 versus their male counterparts, with 3.361 ratings. Whereas for the other 18 items, the null hypothesis that there are no significant differences in the communication platforms' reach to the respondents based on sex is accepted.

T-test results (P-values<.05) indicate that 19/20 communication platforms have considerably disparate reach to students from private academic institutions and those from publicly operated SHSs. Moreover, it is discernible through the higher means from the private SHSs students that they were reached better by the platforms than those from the public SHSs. Consequentially to the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act of 2017, students from public schools opt to go to public universities and colleges (Lim et al., 2018), which is corroborated by the measly 11% of respondents from the public SHS. In support, the Coordinating Council of Private Educational Associations' survey shows that over 80% of the participating member schools reported that the prime cause of enrolment decrease is the financial difficulties of the student's families and the resulting migration to public schools, LUCs, and SUCs. Based on DepEd data, the S.Y. 2019-2020 enrolment in basic education (private sector) of 4.305 million plunged to 3.376 million in S.Y. 2020-2021 (Hernandez-Malipot, 2021). Hence, private HEIs centre their efforts on the higher-income segment. This may have caused the disparity in the platforms' reach. Conversely, the only communication platform in the roster with a p-value above 0.050

(0.411) is the university's telephone calls/SMS/emails. Thus, its reach has no sizable bearing on the type of SHS.

Based on ANOVA outcomes of communication platforms' reach according to the respondents' place of residence, four of twenty items emerged with a p-value under 0.05. These are career orientations/fairs, open houses, university souvenir items, and tarpaulin/posters. A closer view via reach rating would disclose that variances in the platforms' scope are due to the respondents' proximity to the HEIs. NCR got the highest reach ratings, and "others" covered distant areas relative to Metro Manila got the lowest in all four items. Note that career orientations are being conducted virtually nowadays. Still, respondents residing in NCR have the most significant access to it. This can be attributed to regional variation in the availability or quality of internet connectivity favourable to NCR. In fact, according to the DepEd survey participated by 6.9 million parents/guardians, internet connection is the number one challenge of distance learning. Moreover, 2.8 million students have no means of going online, which is particularly common in the rural regions where 53 per cent of the populace live and where access and speed of the internet can be a challenge (Bernardo, 2020; Santos, 2020).

The above information on geographic segments may give HEI marketers an edge in identifying convenient platforms for potential students (Hunt et al., 2018), marketing and distribution, and advanced targeting on digital platforms (Qualtrics, 2019).

In light of the antecedent, herewith is the proposed Integrated Marketing Communications Model for private HEIs in NCR (Figure 1). The Efficient, Coherent, and Dynamic (ECD)-IMC Model was designed based on the efficiency, preference and reach ratings' average (Appendix-A) of the communication tools employed by HEIs, concurrently warranting its synergistic effect by ensuring that the eight major communication platforms (Batra and Keller, 2016) are represented. Furthermore, it possesses adaptability to changing circumstances, including crisis periods. (Appendix-B)

As Figure 1 illustrates, Tier 1 comprises marketing communication tools with efficiency ratings in the upper quartile: referrals/WOM marketing, free college entrance examination, university website, scholarships/discounts, and social media. On top of having the highest efficiency scores, four of them serve multiple functions. For instance, social media can be used for advertising, online and social media marketing, and mobile marketing, which is particularly advantageous in the Philippines, being the social media capital of the world (Mateo, 2018; Universal McCann, 2008; and Liao, 2008).

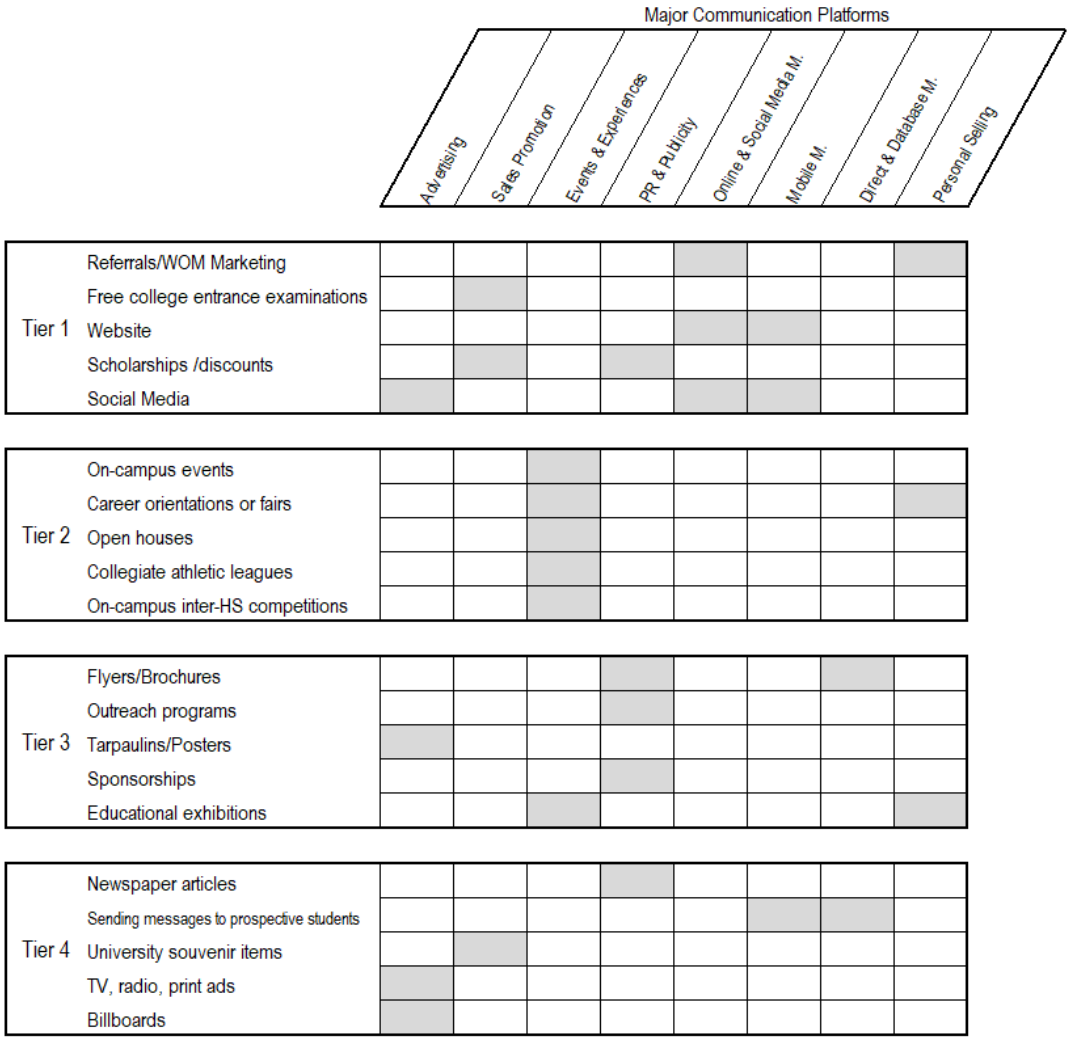

Figure 1. ECD-IMC Model
Source: Author Formulation (2022)

Tier 2 comprises on-campus events, career orientations/fairs, open houses, collegiate athletic leagues, and on-campus inter-HS competitions. All five are similar to purpose wise and methods of conduct wise. These are all classified under event and experience and were held face-to-face, usually with a huge crowd, which is not normally appropriate. Apparently, the only choice from the second tier in the current academic milieu would be career orientation. Apart from being the only one in the group with dual functions, it has evolved into a virtual version. Assuming we would return to the old ways wherein gatherings are allowed, HEIs may choose additional communication platform/s from the same roster.

Flyers/brochures, outreach programs, tarpaulins/posters, sponsorship, and educational exhibitions comprise Tier 3. Flyers/brochures can be disseminated via courier, or they can be digitised. Either way, it applies to the new normal. During trying times, particularly the pandemic, the public would appreciate outreach programs. Social responsibility expresses corporate commitment to contribute to its surrounding community and society for mutual benefits

that could help build trust between the HEI and its stakeholders (Almunawar and Low, 2013). The three other marketing communication platforms in Tier 3 serve similar purposes to those mentioned and from the higher tiers. Ergo, HEIs may or may not implement tarpaulins/posters, sponsorship, and participate in educational exhibitions, depending on the budget.

The bottom-most tier comprises newspaper articles, sending messages to prospective students, university souvenir items, television/radio/print ads, and billboards. The objective of identifying the most efficient assortment of marketing communication conduits to lessen HEIs' financial burden while sustaining effectual marketing is that Tier 4 may be trimmed from the roster since they registered the lowest efficiency ratings and have redundant functions relative to those in the upper tiers.

In times of crisis, it is of utmost importance to identify those that can assist HEIs in maintaining successful performance despite turbulence in the operational environment. Köksal and Özgül (2007) discovered that institutions that adjust their strategies appropriately could maintain or improve their performance in predicament periods. In addition, Panlilio (2018) suggested capitalising on the association between marketing strategies and institutional performance of HEIs that will lead to matching beneficial impacts on the latter.

CONCLUSION

Inferred through the results of variance analysis, subsequent recommendations are specifically for the market profile of private HEIs in NCR: (1) HEIs should develop or enhance referral mechanisms or regularly produce social media content enticing to generation Z to create engagement to facilitate WOM Marketing. (2) Although women, comprising the majority of the sample (65%), were reached by relatives/friends/others and university websites than men, 35% is still not negligible. Hence, HEIs should also generate men-centred social media and website content. (3) Given that the target audience, students from private SHSs, prefer recommendations from their family/friends/others (WOM Marketing), social media, and university websites, HEIs should maintain or enhance these platforms. During the pandemic, flyers/brochures can be digitised, while on-campus events and display tarpaulins and posters can be revived upon normalcy. (4) HEIs should maintain aggressive marketing campaigns in NCR, CALABARZON, and Central Luzon since they contribute a huge percentage to the studentry. (5) Further study on live streaming, chatbot, online helpdesk, and immersion of Grade 12 students in college classes as new marketing communication platforms is recommended. (6)HEIs should find ways for a free college entrance test, collegiate athletic leagues, and open house to reach the target audience, especially upon the resumption of normalcy.

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Notes from Editor:

APPENDIX A
Communication Platform Efficiency Ratings
Available on: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1CinfYHGBzUg4O94t-04S29yigzivko2f/view?usp=share_link

APPENDIX B
ECD MODEL for HEI
Available on: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1CinfYHGBzUg4O94t-04S29yigzivko2f/view?usp=share_link