

Integration of Traditional and Digital Marketing Communication Strategies in New Student Recruitment

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Abstract: Competition among universities to attract prospective new students is now increasingly fierce, encouraging higher education institutions to adopt more comprehensive and integrated marketing communication strategies. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of combining conventional marketing communication strategies (such as the use of brochures, participation in educational exhibitions, and publications in print media) with digital strategies (including the use of social media, email marketing, and official websites) in increasing new student enrollment interest. This study used a mixed methods approach, with data obtained through a survey of 150 prospective students and in-depth interviews with marketing teams from five private universities. The research findings indicate that the integration of the two approaches can expand audience reach while increasing positive perceptions of the institution. Digital strategies are considered effective in creating fast and dynamic interactions, while traditional approaches continue to play a crucial role in building trust and emotional connections, particularly with prospective students' parents. The study concludes that the synergy between traditional and digital approaches can significantly enhance the effectiveness of higher education marketing campaigns.

Keywords: Integrated Marketing Strategy, Digital Marketing Communication, Traditional Communication, New Student Recruitment, Social Media, Private Campus

1 Introduction

The evolution of digital technology has necessitated a transformation in marketing communication strategies for private universities (PTS) in Indonesia, particularly in North Sumatra, to effectively attract prospective students. Research shows that digital transformation enhances marketing strategy innovation, optimizes communication effectiveness, and increases brand awareness through various digital platforms (Pratama et al., 2024). Institutions such as Dehasen University and IAIN Ternate have successfully integrated traditional and digital media, using strategies such as social media marketing, direct outreach, and personalized communications to engage younger audiences (Laini et al., 2025) and (Hamka et al., 2025). Furthermore, re-

search highlights the significant impact of digital marketing techniques, including Google AdWords and social media, on prospective students' enrollment decisions, emphasizing the need for continuous adaptation to the evolving digital landscape (Wijaya et al., 2023) and (Alkaf, 2024). As competition intensifies, PTS must prioritize innovative, interactive, and technology-driven approaches to remain relevant and attractive to the younger generation. In North Sumatra, private universities (PTS) are increasingly recognizing the need for digital transformation to enhance their marketing strategies and attract prospective students amidst increasing competition and changing student behavior. Traditional marketing methods, such as educational exhibitions and print media, are becoming less effective as younger generations gravitate to-

wards digital platforms. Research shows that integrating digital strategies, particularly through social media, significantly impacts students' decision-making processes, increasing brand visibility and engagement (Pratama et al., 2024), (Zohriah et al., 2025), and (Hajatina, 2024). The concept of Smart University Image (SUI) has emerged as a crucial marketing strategy, promoting advanced technology and driving student satisfaction through value creation (Luckyardi et al., 2023). Furthermore, effective marketing strategies that align with consumer behavior and service quality are crucial for enhancing student satisfaction and institutional competitiveness (Sekartaji & Yuwono, 2025). Therefore, PTS must adapt to these digital trends to maintain relevance and attractiveness in the educational landscape.

Integrating traditional and digital marketing strategies at private universities (PTS) in North Sumatra is crucial for increasing new student recruitment. Research shows that combining local cultural values with digital technologies, such as social media and e-learning, can significantly strengthen institutional identity and expand reach to prospective students (Rofiki et al., 2024). Effective digital marketing strategies, particularly through social media, have been shown to attract students by increasing visibility and engagement; for example, 60% of potential students frequently encounter educational advertisements on these platforms (Caizaluisa Naranjo et al., 2024). However, challenges remain, including limited technological infrastructure and inadequate staff training, which can hinder the effective implementation of these strategies (Rofiki et al., 2024), (Nurkakim et al., 2025). Furthermore, a systematic review highlighted the need for educational institutions to adapt to digital marketing trends to remain competitive, emphasizing the importance of leveraging multiple online platforms for effective communication and engagement with a tech-savvy audience (Lestari et al., 2025). Thus, PTS managers are encouraged to develop adaptive marketing strategies that balance traditional approaches with innovative digital solutions to effectively attract new students.

1.1 Background

Private universities (PTS) in Indonesia, particularly in North Sumatra, play a crucial role in expanding access to higher education for the public. However, in recent years, PTS have faced increasingly complex challenges in recruiting new students. Fierce competition between institutions, demographic changes, and shifts

in information-seeking behavior among the younger generation demand innovation in marketing communication strategies.

Traditionally, private university marketing efforts have relied heavily on conventional approaches such as distributing brochures, placing advertisements in print and electronic media, organizing educational exhibitions, and visiting schools in person. This approach proved effective in its time because it allowed for direct interpersonal relationships. However, with the digital transformation and increasing use of the internet and social media, the effectiveness of these methods has begun to decline, particularly among Generation Z, who are more likely to rely on digital platforms for information and decision-making.

In this context, digital marketing is a strategic solution for reaching prospective students more broadly and efficiently. Utilizing institutional websites, social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, as well as data-driven campaigns through Google Ads and email marketing, are increasingly being adopted by private universities in North Sumatra. However, implementing digital strategies alone won't necessarily be effective if they aren't balanced with a personalized approach and local values that remain relevant to the cultural context and characteristics of prospective students in the region.

Therefore, the integration of traditional and digital marketing communication strategies has become an urgent need. This integrative approach is expected to combine the personalization and credibility of traditional methods with the reach, speed, and flexibility of digital channels. However, in practice, this integration process does not always run smoothly. Many private universities still face challenges in developing an integrated, targeted strategy, ranging from limited human resources and technology to understanding the ever-evolving digital behavior of their audiences. Given this urgency, a more in-depth study is needed to examine how private universities in North Sumatra integrate traditional and digital marketing communication strategies in their new student recruitment processes. This research is expected to provide an overview of best practices, challenges faced, and strategic recommendations for improving the effectiveness of higher education marketing in the digital era.

1.2 Research Question

1. How effective is the integration of traditional and digital marketing communication strategies in the new student recruitment process?

2. What are the challenges and opportunities faced by higher education institutions in implementing this integrated strategy?
3. How can an integrated marketing communication model be optimized to increase the number of applicants and strengthen the institution's branding?

1.3 Research Objectives

1. Analyse the effectiveness of integrating traditional and digital marketing communication strategies in new student recruitment.
2. Identify the challenges and opportunities in implementing an integrated marketing communication strategy in higher education institutions.
3. Formulate recommendations for an optimal integrated marketing communication model to increase new student recruitment and strengthen the institution's image.

1.4 Literature Review

1. Marketing Communication

In the context of higher education, marketing communications plays a crucial role in shaping the institution's image, introducing study programs, and influencing prospective students' decisions. An effective marketing communications strategy in higher education must deliver consistent and relevant messages through multiple channels that align with the characteristics of the target audience, as emphasized by [Shimp & Andrews \(2013\)](#). The competitive landscape of higher education requires institutions to differentiate themselves through unique value propositions, such as academic excellence, modern facilities, and career development opportunities, as demonstrated by INABA University's approach ([Meltareza & Tawaqa, 2023](#)). An Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) strategy, encompassing digital marketing, social media engagement, and alumni engagement, has been shown to significantly influence students' choice of higher education institution, as evidenced by research conducted in Bangalore, India ([Roy & Misra, 2024](#)). This strategy is crucial for building a positive brand image, increasing awareness, and increasing enrollment ([Meltareza & Tawaqa, 2023](#)) ([Danko, 2022](#)). Furthermore, the effectiveness of marketing communications in higher education is enhanced by the integration of various commu-

nication technologies, such as advertising, public relations, and direct marketing, into a cohesive system ([Danko, 2022](#)). The dynamic nature of the market and the evolving preferences of prospective students require continuous evaluation and adaptation of marketing strategies to ensure their effectiveness ([Durban University of Technology, 2022](#)). Furthermore, understanding the sociocultural and psychological profiles of modern applicants and students is crucial for tailoring marketing communications that resonate with the younger generation ([Kirpicheva & Konycheva, 2023](#)). Institutions must also consider the digitalization of the economy, which prioritizes internet communications, including websites and social media, as a key component of their marketing communications complex ([Deineha et al., 2020](#)). Overall, a well-structured marketing communications strategy in higher education not only attracts and retains students but also fosters long-term relationships with stakeholders, thus contributing to the institution's success and competitiveness in the global education market ([Danko, 2022](#)), ([Deineha et al., 2020](#)).

2. Traditional Marketing in Higher Education

Traditional marketing strategies, such as print advertising, television, radio, and in-person activities, continue to play a significant role in university marketing efforts, particularly in areas with limited digital access or among demographics that are not fully engaged with digital platforms. These methods are effective in building trust through direct interaction, which is particularly important for reaching older or rural audiences who may be less familiar with digital marketing channels ([Comajeg-Guray, 2025](#)). Despite the rise of digital marketing, traditional methods remain relevant and effective, especially when integrated with modern technologies such as AI, which can enhance the effectiveness of traditional media by optimizing ad placement and content creation ([Warburton, 2024](#)). For example, AI-based techniques can increase marketing ROI and audience engagement by tailoring messages to specific demographics, thus bridging the gap between conventional and digital approaches ([Warburton, 2024](#)). Furthermore, traditional educational methods, such as themed print materials, have proven successful in engaging resource-limited audiences and motivating behavioral change, highlighting their continued

relevance in certain contexts (Sneed & Franck, 2021). In higher education, institutions often employ a mix of traditional and digital marketing strategies to increase visibility and attract prospective students, with traditional methods excelling in fostering local relationships and trust (Comajeg-Guray, 2025). The integration of print and digital media is particularly beneficial in rural areas, where print still holds considerable influence, enabling targeted marketing strategies that cater to local preferences (Garg et al., 2024). This balanced approach ensures that diverse student populations are effectively targeted, optimizing enrollment rates and maintaining competitiveness in the evolving educational landscape (Comajeg-Guray, 2025). Therefore, while digital marketing offers broader reach and real-time interaction, traditional marketing remains indispensable for its ability to build trust and engage with specific audiences, making a blended strategy essential for universities (Comajeg-Guray, 2025).

3. Digital Marketing and Prospective Student Behavior

Digital marketing in the educational context, particularly targeting Generation Z, has become increasingly significant due to the digitally native nature of this demographic, characterized by high internet usage and smartphone ownership (Bourke, 2019) (Wijaya et al., 2023). In Indonesia, where more than 75% of internet users aged 16-24 use social media as a primary source of information, educational institutions are leveraging platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok to engage prospective students (Fathurrohman et al., 2024), (Utomo, 2025), (Fauzani et al., 2025). The effectiveness of these platforms is evident in their ability to facilitate interactive and engaging learning experiences, which is crucial for Generation Z's preference for quickly accessible and personalized content (Fathurrohman et al., 2024). Studies have shown that digital marketing strategies, including Google Adwords and social media marketing, significantly influence prospective students' interest and enrollment decisions, highlighting the importance of adapting to evolving digital marketing dynamics (Wijaya et al., 2023), (Caizaluisa Naranjo et al., 2024). Furthermore, the integration of digital marketing in higher education not only enhances the visibility and reputation of institutions but also supports

the development of digital competencies among students, preparing them for a technology-driven world (Jasmine et al., 2025) (Choez et al., 2024). The strategic use of social media for digital promotion has been shown to significantly increase public awareness and interest in educational institutions, with platforms such as Instagram being particularly influential (Suprihartini et al., 2025). As educational institutions continue to navigate the digital era, the need to adopt personalized and data-driven digital marketing strategies becomes clear, ensuring their sustainability and relevance in the competitive landscape (Zohriah et al., 2025). Overall, the integration of digital marketing in higher education is not just an option but a necessity to effectively attract and engage Generation Z students (Zohriah et al., 2025).

4. Integration of Traditional and Digital Marketing Communication Strategies

An integrated marketing communications (IMC) strategy in higher education is crucial for creating a cohesive and impactful message that enhances the experience of prospective students and influences their decision-making process. Integration of offline and online promotional activities is crucial, as highlighted by Roy and Misra, who found that IMC strategies significantly influenced students' choice of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Bangalore, India, with digital marketing and social media engagement being particularly influential (Roy & Misra, 2024). Deshpande emphasized that IMC ensures consistency across various components of the communication mix, facilitates impactful interactions with stakeholders, and reduces costs (Deshpande, 2015). A study by Laini et al. at Dehasen University described an effective combination of traditional and digital media, including AI-based content creation and personalized direct marketing, which has led to increased student enrollment (Laini et al., 2025). Similarly, Suprihartini et al. demonstrated that social media platforms such as Instagram significantly increase public awareness and interest in educational institutions, contributing to increased student applications (Suprihartini et al., 2025)). Research by Edmiston highlights the role of IMC in strengthening institutional brand recognition in US public institutions, underscoring the importance of leadership and formal communication mechanisms (Edmiston, 2008). Marbun's study further supports the no-

tion that IMC enhances competitiveness and fosters long-term stakeholder relationships through strategic coordination and digital technology optimization (Marbun, 2025). Finally, Maxwell's exploration of the integrated communications model at Florida State University highlights the significant impact of cross-divisional collaboration on student engagement and retention, underscoring the value of a cohesive Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) strategy. The "Hello FSU!" campaign exemplifies how an integrated approach, involving multiple campus partners, can increase student engagement by providing consistent, personalized communications across multiple platforms, such as AI-infused emails and social media videos, thereby fostering a sense of belonging and increasing awareness of campus offerings (Maxwell, 2025). This aligns with broader findings in the IMC field, which emphasize the importance of aligning messages across channels to create a seamless and engaging experience for audiences, thereby enhancing brand perception and consumer loyalty (Ahmed et al., 2024).

5. Regional Context: Private Universities in North Sumatra

The integration and effectiveness of marketing strategies in private universities in North Sumatra are influenced by several factors, including digital transformation, value-based marketing, and the use of social media. Digital transformation plays a crucial role in enhancing marketing strategy innovation, broadening institutional appeal, and strengthening engagement with prospective students. It optimizes marketing strategies, enhances communication effectiveness, and increases brand awareness through digital platforms, thereby improving operational efficiency and competitiveness of private higher education institutions (Pratama et al., 2024). Furthermore, value-based marketing strategies, particularly in Islamic universities, emphasize brand image, service quality, and transformative student experiences, significantly contributing to institutional competitiveness. This approach integrates spiritual and value-based principles into branding and service quality, offering a strategic blueprint for university management to enhance competitive positioning (Mulyono et al., 2025). Social media is another important tool, as demonstrated by Primagraha University, which effec-

tively uses platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and its website to engage with prospective students, build brand awareness, and promote the university's excellence (Suyatna et al., 2023). In addition, the marketing mix, which includes product, price, promotion, place, people, process, physical evidence, and customer service, is effectively implemented in universities to attract prospective students and enhance institutional image (Scorita & Handayani, 2022). The competitive landscape also requires an innovative, adaptive, and data-driven marketing approach, as seen in the analysis of historical student admissions data, which provides an empirical basis for developing effective marketing strategies (Firmansyah et al., 2025). Furthermore, marketing strategies that consider consumer behavior, market segmentation, and brand image, in addition to service quality, play a crucial role in shaping student satisfaction and enhancing university competitiveness (Sekartaji & Yuwono, 2025). Overall, the integration of these strategies, supported by digital transformation and value-based principles, is crucial for private universities in North Sumatra to navigate high competition and achieve sustainable competitive advantage.

2 Research Methodology

2.1 Type of Research

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach, with the aim of understanding in-depth how private universities (PTS) in North Sumatra integrate traditional and digital marketing communication strategies in the new student recruitment process. This approach was chosen to explore the processes, strategies, and dynamics that occur in the field.

2.2 Research Locations and Subjects

The research was conducted at several private universities in North Sumatra, selected based on the following criteria:

1. Active promotional activities through traditional and digital media.
2. Officially registered under the LLDIKTI Region I North Sumatra.
3. Has a marketing or public relations unit that manages student recruitment strategies.

Examples of institutions that could serve as subjects include: Pembangunan Panca Budi University, Muham-

madiyah University of North Sumatra and Prima Indonesia University.

2.3 Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was conducted using the following techniques:

1. In-depth interviews with staff from the marketing, public relations, or student recruitment teams.
2. Direct observation of campus promotional activities (both offline and online).
3. Documentation studies of promotional materials such as brochures, digital advertisements, social media content, and new student admissions reports.

2.4 Research Instruments

The primary instrument in this research is the researcher herself, as a key instrument in the qualitative approach. The researcher will be assisted by a semi-structured interview guide and observation sheets to record communication strategies observed at each campus.

2.5 Data Analysis Techniques

The data obtained will be analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, which include the following stages:

1. Data reduction: selecting relevant data from interviews and observations.
2. Data presentation: organizing data into categories (e.g., digital strategies, traditional strategies, forms of integration, barriers, and effectiveness).
3. Conclusion drawing: compiling interpretations and findings that answer the research problem formulation.

2.6 Data Validity Test

To ensure data validity, triangulation techniques were used, comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation. Validity was also strengthened by conducting member checks with respondents to ensure that the researcher's interpretations align with the reality intended by the informants.

3 Research Results

3.1 General Description of Findings

This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of integrating traditional marketing communication strategies (such as brochures, billboards, and educational exhibitions) and digital (social media, SEO, digital advertising) in supporting new student recruitment at private universities in Indonesia. The results indicate that integrating both strategies yields more optimal results than if implemented separately.

3.2 Qualitative Findings

Based on interviews with heads of marketing and recruitment staff at three private universities, it was found that:

1. Traditional strategies remain relevant in building trust, especially in areas with low digital adoption rates. For example, brochures and school visits have a positive impact in directly reaching students and parents.
2. Digital strategies are more effective in reaching Generation Z, who are active on social media. Instagram and TikTok are considered the most effective in building brand awareness, while WhatsApp is used for follow-up communications.
3. The synergy between the two strategies expands reach and increases engagement. For example, prospective students who first learned about the campus through Instagram ads later attended offline seminars to learn more about the campus.

3.3 Quantitative Findings

Survey data from 150 new students at three different campuses shows:

Initial Communication Channels	Percentage (%)
Social Media (IG/TikTok/FB)	42%
Brochures and Educational Exhibitions	25%
Official Campus Website	18%
Recommendations from Alumni/Student	10%
Digital Advertising (Google Ads)	5%

Additionally:

1. 63% of students admitted that the combination of social media and school visits significantly influenced their decision.
2. Campuses that integrated digital strategies with

offline events experienced a 22% increase in enrolment compared to the previous year.

3.4 Effectiveness Analysis

A SWOT analysis shows that the strength of this strategic integration lies in its ability to reach two important segments simultaneously: students (through digital channels) and parents (through traditional channels). However, its weaknesses include the need for greater human resources and costs.

From the data above, it can be concluded that the integration of traditional and digital marketing communication strategies has proven more effective in increasing the number and quality of new student applicants. Digital strategies excel at building brand awareness and reaching prospective students broadly, while traditional strategies strengthen trust and personal relationships. Using both strategies synergistically increases recruitment effectiveness and yields significant results.

4 Discussion of Research Findings

The findings of this study demonstrate that the integration of traditional and digital marketing communication strategies produces a significantly more effective outcome in supporting student recruitment within private higher education institutions. As shown in the results, institutions that combine offline approaches such as brochures, school visits, and educational exhibitions with digital platforms like social media, SEO, and online advertising achieve broader reach and stronger engagement compared to those relying on a single communication channel. This finding reinforces the central premise of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC), which emphasizes the strategic alignment and coordination of multiple communication channels to deliver consistent and persuasive messages across diverse audience touchpoints.

From a theoretical perspective, this study supports the evolving understanding of IMC as no longer limited to message consistency across media, but as a dynamic, multidimensional framework encompassing digital interactivity, personalization, and audience engagement. The effectiveness of communication, therefore, is not determined by the superiority of a particular channel, but by the degree of integration across communication ecosystems. This aligns with contemporary perspectives that conceptualize marketing communication as a networked system in which value is

co-created through continuous interaction between institutions and their audiences.

One of the most important insights emerging from this study is the continued relevance of traditional marketing strategies, particularly in the context of developing countries such as Indonesia. While the global discourse often emphasizes the dominance of digital marketing, the empirical findings suggest that traditional approaches remain highly effective in building trust and credibility. Face-to-face interactions, school visits, and printed materials function not only as informational tools but also as relational mechanisms that foster emotional connection and institutional legitimacy. This is particularly significant in regions where digital literacy and access are uneven, and where interpersonal communication continues to play a central role in decision-making processes.

These findings indicate that the transition toward digital marketing should not be interpreted as the displacement of traditional media, but rather as their transformation into complementary components within an integrated communication strategy. In this sense, traditional channels serve a unique function in reinforcing trust and supporting the later stages of the decision-making process, especially when prospective students and their families require reassurance before making high-stakes educational choices.

Conversely, the study highlights the dominant role of digital marketing strategies in engaging Generation Z, a demographic group characterized by high digital literacy and strong dependence on social media platforms. The findings reveal that platforms such as Instagram and TikTok are particularly effective in building initial awareness and capturing attention, while messaging applications like WhatsApp facilitate personalized follow-up communication. This reflects broader shifts in consumer behavior, where audiences increasingly prefer interactive, visual, and authentic forms of communication.

The effectiveness of digital channels can be explained by their ability to provide immediacy, interactivity, and algorithm-driven personalization. Short-form video content, user-generated content, and real-time engagement enable institutions to establish emotional resonance and foster a sense of authenticity, which are critical factors in influencing trust and brand perception among younger audiences. As a result, digital platforms play a crucial role in the early stages of the decision-making process, particularly in generating awareness and initial interest.

More importantly, this study reveals that the in-

tegration of traditional and digital strategies creates a structured communication pathway that closely resembles a multistage customer journey. In this hybrid model, digital channels primarily function as entry points that attract attention and stimulate interest, while traditional channels serve to deepen engagement and facilitate final decision-making through direct interaction. This sequential and complementary relationship illustrates how communication effectiveness is achieved through the orchestration of multiple touchpoints rather than reliance on isolated strategies.

This finding aligns with the principles of omnichannel marketing, which emphasize the importance of delivering a seamless and cohesive experience across different communication platforms. By ensuring consistency in messaging while adapting to the strengths of each channel, institutions can enhance both the quality of engagement and the likelihood of conversion. Thus, this study contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence of how hybrid communication strategies operate in practice within the higher education sector.

When compared with previous studies, the results both confirm and extend existing knowledge. While earlier research has consistently highlighted the growing importance of digital marketing in higher education, this study challenges the assumption of its universal dominance by demonstrating that traditional communication channels continue to play a strategically significant role. The findings suggest that the effectiveness of marketing communication is highly context-dependent, influenced by factors such as technological infrastructure, cultural norms, and audience characteristics.

In this regard, the study addresses an important gap in the literature by emphasizing the need for context-sensitive communication strategies, particularly in emerging markets. It demonstrates that the success of digital marketing cannot be fully understood without considering the socio-cultural environment in which it is implemented. Therefore, rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach, institutions must develop adaptive strategies that integrate both global trends and local realities.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study advances the IMC framework by introducing the concept of context-sensitive integration. This perspective highlights that effective communication strategies must not only integrate multiple channels but also adapt to variations in audience behavior, access to technology, and cultural expectations. Furthermore, the study

extends existing theories by emphasizing the importance of offline–online complementarities, suggesting that meaningful engagement is achieved through the balance between digital interaction and interpersonal communication.

In terms of practical implications, the findings provide several strategic insights for higher education institutions. First, institutions should adopt a hybrid communication approach that leverages both traditional and digital channels in a coordinated manner. Second, segmentation strategies should be refined to account for differences in generational preferences and levels of digital access. Third, institutions should design structured communication pathways that guide prospective students from initial awareness through to final enrollment decisions. This involves integrating digital outreach with offline engagement activities to create a cohesive and persuasive communication experience.

Additionally, the strategic use of digital platforms should prioritize interactivity, personalization, and authenticity, as these elements are critical in capturing the attention and trust of Generation Z audiences. At the same time, traditional channels should be utilized to strengthen relational connections and reinforce institutional credibility, particularly during the decision-making stage.

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations. The qualitative nature of the research and the relatively small sample size limit the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the focus on private higher education institutions in Indonesia may restrict the applicability of the results to other contexts. Future research should employ quantitative methods to validate these findings and explore larger and more diverse samples. In addition, further investigation into platform-specific dynamics, such as algorithmic visibility and engagement metrics, would provide deeper insights into the mechanisms underlying digital marketing effectiveness.

In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of adopting an integrated and contextually adaptive approach to marketing communication in higher education. By demonstrating the complementary roles of traditional and digital strategies, it contributes to both theoretical advancement and practical application in the field. The findings suggest that the future of marketing communication lies not in the dominance of a single channel, but in the strategic orchestration of multiple channels to create a cohesive, engaging, and impactful communication ecosystem.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the integration of traditional and digital marketing communication strategies produces a significantly more effective outcome in supporting student recruitment within private higher education institutions. Institutions that combine offline approaches such as brochures, school visits, and educational exhibitions with digital platforms achieve broader reach and stronger engagement compared to those relying on a single communication channel. This finding reinforces the central premise of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC), which emphasizes the strategic alignment of multiple communication channels to deliver consistent and persuasive messages across diverse audience touchpoints (Porcu et al., 2022; Kliatchko & Schultz, 2023).

From a theoretical perspective, IMC has evolved into a multidimensional framework integrating digital interactivity, personalization, and customer engagement. Contemporary studies argue that communication effectiveness depends on how well institutions orchestrate interactions across media ecosystems rather than relying on isolated channels (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2023). This study supports this shift by demonstrating that communication effectiveness emerges from integration rather than channel dominance.

One of the most significant findings is the continued relevance of traditional marketing strategies, particularly in developing country contexts such as Indonesia. While digital transformation dominates global discourse, traditional approaches remain crucial for building trust and credibility. Interpersonal communication, such as school visits and face-to-face engagement, plays a key role in shaping perceptions and reducing uncertainty in high-involvement decisions like higher education selection (Camilleri, 2020; Ivy & Naude, 2023). This confirms that traditional channels function as relational mechanisms that foster institutional legitimacy rather than merely acting as informational tools.

These findings suggest that digital transformation does not eliminate traditional media but instead repositions them as complementary elements within an integrated communication strategy. This aligns with recent IMC literature emphasizing the importance of hybrid communication models that combine digital efficiency with human interaction (Kerr & Patti, 2022).

Conversely, the study highlights the dominant role of digital marketing in engaging Generation Z. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok are particularly effective in building awareness, while WhatsApp fa-

cilitates personalized communication. This is consistent with research indicating that Generation Z prefers visual, short-form, and interactive content, which enhances engagement and emotional connection (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021; Lim et al., 2023).

Digital platforms are especially effective due to their ability to provide immediacy, personalization, and algorithm-driven content distribution. Studies show that authenticity, relatability, and user-generated content significantly influence trust and brand perception among younger audiences (Lou & Yuan, 2022; Tafesse & Wood, 2023). Therefore, digital channels play a critical role in the early stages of the decision-making process, particularly in generating awareness and interest.

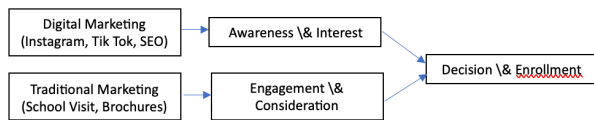
More importantly, this study reveals that the integration of traditional and digital strategies creates a structured communication pathway resembling a multistage customer journey. Digital platforms function as entry points, while traditional channels reinforce trust and support final decision-making. This finding aligns with omnichannel marketing theory, which emphasizes seamless customer experiences across multiple touchpoints (Verhoef et al., 2022).

Compared to previous studies, these findings both confirm and extend existing knowledge. While prior research has emphasized the dominance of digital marketing in higher education, this study challenges that assumption by demonstrating the continued strategic relevance of traditional channels in specific contexts. This indicates that marketing effectiveness is context-dependent and influenced by socio-cultural and infrastructural factors (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2022).

From a theoretical standpoint, this study advances IMC theory by introducing the concept of **context-sensitive integration**, highlighting that effective communication strategies must adapt to audience characteristics, technological access, and cultural environments. This extends existing IMC models by incorporating offline online complementarities as a critical dimension of communication effectiveness (Porcu et al., 2022).

Practically, the findings suggest that higher education institutions should adopt hybrid communication strategies, refine segmentation based on generational and technological differences, and design structured communication pathways that guide prospective students from awareness to enrollment. Digital platforms should prioritize interactivity and authenticity, while traditional channels should reinforce trust and credibility.

Figure 1. Hybrid IMC Model for Student Recruitment



Despite its contributions, this study has limitations related to its qualitative design and limited sample size. Future research should employ quantitative methods, expand geographical scope, and explore platform-specific dynamics such as algorithmic engagement and conversion metrics.

In conclusion, this study highlights that the future of marketing communication lies not in the dominance of a single channel but in the strategic orchestration of multiple channels within an integrated and contextually adaptive framework.

4.1 Name of Model

Hybrid Integrated Marketing Communication Model for Student Recruitment Structure of Model.

This model illustrates the flow of marketing communication based on integration:

1. Digital Marketing (Entry Point)
Platform: Instagram, TikTok, SEO Function: Building awareness Attracting initial attention (attention economy)
2. Awareness & Interest Stage
Output from digital exposure Characteristics: Visual engagement Emotional appeal
3. Engagement & Consideration
Transition: Digital → deeper interaction Media: WhatsApp Direct communication
4. Traditional Marketing (Trust Builder)
Activities: School visit Brochure Educational exhibition Function: Trust reinforcement Institutional legitimacy
5. Decision & Enrollment
Final stage: Decision on campus selection Influenced by: Combination of digital exposure + of-line trust

5 Conclusion

This study concludes that the integration of traditional and digital marketing communication strategies plays a decisive role in enhancing the effectiveness of student recruitment in private higher education institu-

tions. The findings clearly demonstrate that neither traditional nor digital channels alone are sufficient to achieve optimal communication outcomes; rather, effectiveness emerges from their strategic integration across multiple stages of the student decision-making process.

The study reveals that digital marketing platforms serve as critical entry points by generating awareness and initial interest, particularly among Generation Z audiences who are highly engaged with social media environments. In contrast, traditional communication approaches such as school visits, brochures, and face-to-face interactions—remain essential in building trust, reinforcing institutional credibility, and supporting final decision-making. This complementary relationship highlights that communication effectiveness is inherently multidimensional and context-dependent.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study advances the Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) framework by introducing the concept of context-sensitive integration, emphasizing that the success of communication strategies depends on their alignment with audience characteristics, technological accessibility, and socio-cultural environments. Furthermore, the study contributes to the literature by proposing a hybrid IMC model that integrates digital and traditional channels within a structured customer journey, thereby extending existing perspectives on IMC and omnichannel marketing.

Practically, the findings suggest that higher education institutions should adopt a hybrid communication strategy that combines the strengths of both digital and traditional approaches. Institutions are encouraged to design integrated communication pathways that guide prospective students from awareness to enrollment, while also tailoring their strategies based on generational behavior and varying levels of digital access. The effective use of digital platforms should emphasize interactivity, authenticity, and personalization, while traditional channels should be leveraged to strengthen relational engagement and trust.

Despite its contributions, this study is limited by its qualitative approach and relatively small sample size, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research is recommended to employ quantitative methods, expand the scope across different regions and institutional types, and further investigate platform-specific dynamics and measurable outcomes such as engagement rates and conversion metrics.

In conclusion, this study underscores that the future

of marketing communication in higher education lies not in the dominance of a single channel, but in the strategic orchestration of integrated, adaptive, and contextually grounded communication systems.

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