Analysing the integrated marketing communication message typology of Tshwane North College

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of the study was to analyse the integrated marketing communication (IMC) message typology of Tshwane North College.

Methodology: In order to analyse the IMC message typology of the Tshwane North College, in-depth interviews were conducted with students as one the college's primary stakeholders.

Findings: The study revealed, firstly, that the college deploys its marketing communication tools in an integrated manner (planned messages); secondly, the study has shown that participants are happy with the course mix (product messages), finding it practice oriented and geared to the training needs of industry and commerce; thirdly, the study revealed that the quality of the services it provides is good (service messages); and fourthly, the study revealed that the college is absent from intermediary sources such as the media.

Implications: Most importantly, this study sheds light on how educational institutions should use an IMC message typology to ensure message consistency and maximum impact. To this end, educational institutions such as Tshwane North College should use this typology as a logical structure for developing their stakeholder communication strategies.

Key phrases

Higher education marketing; integrated marketing communication message typology; relationship marketing; technical and vocational education and training

1. INTRODUCTION

Since 1994, the public Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector has been subject to a number of changes. Legislatively, the democratic government introduced a number of pieces of legislation such as the Further Education and Training (FET) Act

(1998), the Skills Development Act (1998) and the Skills Development Levies Act (1999) (Gamble 2003:1).

The release of "*A new institutional landscape for public Further Education and Training Colleges*" in August 2001 gave birth to a new vision for the sector (Department of Education (DOE) 2001:16-20). This vision includes the following:

- large multisite institutions;

- increased autonomy;

- a mixture of specialised and multipurpose institutions;

- new quality-assurance frameworks;

- an increased focus on open and distance learning;

- a greater focus on access for students with special needs;

- better articulation and collaboration with higher education;

- a commitment to improved student support services; and

- a focus on partnerships with government and the private sector.

With regard to programmes, the South African public TVET policy assumes that increasing the size of institutions and the number of overall enrolments can benefit quality and enhance TVET colleges' ability to offer a range of programmes and other services (Akoojee & McGrath 2008:256).

Currently, colleges offer programmes in fields such as business, engineering, general education (typically ABET and academic programmes for Grades 10-12), utility studies and social studies (Akoojee & McGrath 2008:261).After the fourth democratic elections in South Africa, a new department of Higher Education and Training was created. In his first budget vote speech, the new minister, Dr Blade Nzimande, stated that he intended "to establish a coherent college sector which includes the 50 TVET colleges and other career specific colleges such as agricultural colleges" (Nzimande 2009:1). The establishment of a ministry for higher education and training has elevated the TVET college sector to the higher education band from the further education and training sector.

One of these colleges is the Tshwane North College which is located in South Africa's capital city, Pretoria, in the Gauteng province. The college offers vocational learning programmes in business studies, utility and engineering studies.

The college is the subject of the study owing to the fact that it is one of the largest colleges in the country. TVET colleges, like all other organisations, are not immune to marketing and communication challenges. These challenges include a decline in student numbers and funding due to the high intensity of competition in the marketplace. This view is consistent with Beneke and Human's statement (2010:435) that "changes in the competitive environment largely spurred by restrictions in government funding and an increase in educational service providers in the market, have forced higher education institutions to become more proactive in terms of student recruitment". In the words of Brown (2012:118) "TVET colleges are struggling to fill their classrooms".

In order to overcome these challenges, Seric, Gil-Saura and Ozretic-Dosen (2015:958) advise organisations like colleges to embrace integrated marketing communication (IMC) as an instrument for coordinating and synergising marketing communication tools so as to ensure message consistency and maximum impact. In the words of Bruhn and Schnebelen (2017:474) "the loss of control and immense flood of content highlight the importance of implementing integrated marketing communication". Moreover, Vel and Sharma (2010:371) assert that IMC presents an organisation with an opportunity to differentiate its market offering from those of competitors. Therefore, IMC can be a source of sustainable competitive advantage. This paper begins by presenting the research problem before explaining the concept of IMC and presenting the research methodology, the research results and the implications of the study.

2.   THE CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Marketing in what was then called technical colleges started towards the end of the apartheid system in South Africa (Akoojee and Mcgrath 2008:132). A study by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) on some marketing and communication units in TVET colleges in South Africa revealed that they were "fragile and underdeveloped".

The study also found that student recruitment was the central focus of such units (Kraak & Press 2008:131). In the words of Fadahunsi and Pelser (2013:838), "the introduction of marketing practices in public FET colleges was intended to develop and empower colleges in South Africa to be able to effectively satisfy the needs of both internal and external stakeholders". Fadahunsi and Pelser's statement indicates that marketing is a tool of creating and nourishing relations between colleges and their stakeholders.

In the same vein, Vezi (2016:ii) remarks that " there is a need for marketing communication in the TVET colleges to be addressed urgently in order to improve public perceptions and enrolment rates at TVET colleges".

A literature review of higher education marketing internationally shows that studies have been conducted on such issues as image and reputation, the application of marketing models, transaction marketing, the 4Ps, relationship marketing and marketing communication (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka 2006:325-328). In marketing communication, studies have been conducted on the dissemination of marketing information in the context of choices made by potential students. Research has also been done on websites as a source of information for students. Nevertheless, Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006:332) argue that there are two areas where there is still paucity of research evidence. First, the marketing communication mix includes five elements: advertising, public relations, personal selling, direct mail and sales promotion and each of these areas provide potential for research. Secondly, a lack of research on word-of-mouth communications and the diffusion of innovations seem to provide further topics for future research.

As Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006:332) argue, word-of-mouth communication is one of the neglected areas of research. A study by Warring (2013:330) underscores the importance of word-of mouth communication amongst students and found that it is an effective communication tool when it comes to recruiting domestic students as opposed to international students.

Of special note is that word of mouth in communication is an important element of the integrated marketing communication (IMC) message typology. In addition, Moriarty (1994) claims that the IMC message typology is a logical framework for developing stakeholder communication strategies. Of concern is that few studies have been conducted on integrated marketing in educational institutions (Edmiston 2008; Morris 2003). A more recent study on integrated marketing communication in the education context focused of the IMC antecedents of planned brand identity such as brand elements, service attributes, public relations and places of origin (P Foroudi, Dinnie, Kitchen, Melewar & MM Foroudi (2017:528). Notably, the study by Foroudi (*et al*. 2017) did not focus on the IMC message typology.

Another study by Durkin, McKenna and Cummins (2012:154) focused on brand positioning within the higher education context. Clearly, there is still paucity of research evidence on IMC within the higher education context.

The rest of this article begins by giving the research problem statement, followed by a literature review and a discussion of the research methodology, the findings, and their implications, and ends with a conclusion.

3. RESEARCH PROBLEM STATEMENT

The literature review has shown that none of the studies on IMC in the education context were conducted in South Africa. Therefore, IMC remains a neglected area of research in the South African context. It is against this background that the study sought to analyse the IMC message typology of the Tshwane North College.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 Theoretical foundation

According to Sultan and Wong (2012:758) maintaining relationships with students is important for the long-term survival of higher education institutions. Consistent with Duncan's definition (2002:7) integrated marketing communication can be regarded as an instrument for creating and nurturing stakeholder relations. Thus, the theoretical foundation of the study is relationship marketing. Grönroos (1994:4) asserts that the emergence of relationship marketing has marked the end of an era where scholars and practitioners were obsessed with traditional marketing. Relationship marketing has brought about a shift from short-termism to building long-term relations with customers. This study is also informed by stakeholder theory, which emphasises the importance and centrality of customer stakeholders and non-customer stakeholders in the life of an organisation (Jensen 2001). Thus, without strong stakeholder support, organisations like TVET colleges are doomed to fail to translate their missions into reality.

4.2 Marketing higher education

The history of education marketing dates back at least 30 years to the United States of America, but it is only recently that education marketing has taken root in other countries. As indicated previously, marketing in colleges in South Africa was introduced towards the end of the apartheid system. Firstly, environmental changes such as new technologies and media forms have forced education institutions to change the way they conduct their business (Bonnema & Van der Waldt 2008:315). Secondly, state funding cutbacks and dwindling student numbers have contributed to increased marketing activity (Akoojee & McGrath 2008:141). Education institutions, like other non-profit organisations, have had to respond to pressures such as competition for funding and the need to earn money in order to fulfil their

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mandates (Washburn & Pretoshius 2004:35). According to Hawkins, Bulmer and Eagle (2011:230) IMC has "emerged as a strategy for gaining competitive advantage". Therefore, IMC can be an important weapon for an educational institution as it fights its competition.

Furthermore, Oplatka (2004:418) is of the view that "educational marketing is an indispensable managerial function, without which the educational organisation could not survive its current competitive environment". Contrary to Oplatka's view (2004), some scholars are opposed to education marketing because it subjects education to market forces (Harvey & Busher 1996:26).

According to Armstrong and Kotler (2011:81) marketing communication is an important element of the marketing mix. The concept of the marketing mix was first introduced by Neil Borden in the 1950s to underscore the notion that the marketer is "the mixer of ingredients" (Grönroos 1997:323). Vignali (2001:98) asserts that the four Ps – product, price, place and promotion – are the "the principal foundation on which a marketing plan is based". In addition, Masterson and Pickton (2010:410) underscore the centrality of the four Ps in the marketing process. According to Maringe (2005:573), higher education like all other services has 7Ps of marketing.

The additional three Ps refer to people, physical evidence and processes. The focus of this study is on integrated marketing communication (IMC). Thus, the next section will review the literature on IMC within the education context.

4.3 Integrated marketing communication message typology

According to Porcu, Barrio-Carcia and Kitchen (2017: 694) integrated marketing communication can be defined as "the stakeholder-centred interactive process of cross-functional planning and alignment of organisational, analytical and communication processes that allows for the possibility of continuous dialogue by conveying consistent and transparent messages via all media to foster long-term profitable relationships that create value". In line with this definition, it can be argued that education institutions should integrate their marketing efforts to ensure message consistency and maximum impact.

This view is consistent with Duncan's (2002:7) assertion that IMC is "a cross-functional process for creating and nourishing profitable relationships with customers and other stakeholders by strategically controlling or influencing all messages sent to these groups and encouraging data-driven, purposeful dialogue". In the same vein, Seric *et al.* (2015:960) posit that:

"IMC is a tactical and strategic consumer-centric business process, boosted by advances in information and communication technology which, on the basis of information obtained from customer databases, delivers a clear and consistent message through coordination and synergies of different communication tools and channels in order to nourish long-lasting profitable relationships with customers and other stakeholders and create and maintain brand equity".

Kerr, Schultz, Patti and Kim (2008:515) assert that "from a practical side, IMC is a managerial and communicative shift in the production, coordination and dissemination of messages". Similarly, Quesenberry, Coolsen and Wilkerson (2012:61) state that IMC entails the combined use of communication disciplines to bring about " clarity, consistency and maximum communication impact" .Furthermore, in Black's (2004:54) own words, "collectively communications should present a consistent image of the institution designed to synergistically motivate students to enrol, persist or donate time or money. It is the cumulative effect of the communication plans that influences choice, not a single contact".

Black's view on IMC is shared by Servier (2004:49), who remarks: "IMC is a comprehensive, coordinated, institution-wide effort to communicate mission-critical messages in ways that target audiences notice, understand and respond to". Black (2004:54) further cautions that successful implementation of IMC depends on where "there is vision, adequate resources, action plan, staff skills and campus-wide buy-in". Moreover, Finne and Grönroos (2017: 446) advise that IMC must be customer centred in their statement that IMC is the customer's integration and sense-making of all the messages from any source, company-driven or stemming from other sources, the customer perceives as communication, forming value-in use for him/her for a specific purpose. Finne and Grönroos's assertion points to the importance of ensuring that the brand promise made through planned messages is consistent with actual experience as manifested in the organisation's product, service and unplanned messages.

In order to ensure message consistency and maximum communication impact, educational institutions should make a brand promise through planned messages and be able to influence product, service and unplanned messages. Thus, the next section will review the literature on the IMC message typology within the higher education context.

4.3.1 Planned messages

Students' perceptions and expectations of service quality at educational institutions are shaped by marketing communication (planned messages) (Sultan & Wong 2012:757). Finne

and Grönroos (2017:447) define marketing communication as "a process where a customer perceives an offering, product, service or person. It can be deliberated or embedded in context, visible or merely in the head of the customer".

Finne and Grönroos's definition underscores the role of marketing communication in creating customer perceptions and expectations. Planned messages, according to Duncan and Moriarty (1997:78) and Dahlén, Lange and Smith (2010:34), are messages that are sent via the traditional elements of the marketing communication mix, namely, advertising, personal selling, public relations, sales promotion and sponsorships. In the IMC context the marketing communication tools should be deployed in an integrated manner. In other words, communication campaigns should integrate all the elements of marketing communication to ensure maximum communication impact. Thus, organisations like colleges are discouraged from having separate marketing and public relations campaigns which may be characterised by message inconsistencies.

Curtis, Abratt and Minor (2009:405) argue that "the quality of and quantity of available information about the institution is an important consideration when students make choices". Sultan and Wong (2012:764) state that information in the context of education can be defined as "explicit and implicit messages that students receive directly or indirectly from an education institution before enrolment".

According to Harvey and Busher (1996:30) and Maringe (2005:573) marketing communication in the education context entails creating awareness about the institution's work among its internal and external stakeholders. The internal stakeholders include the immediate and extended families of staff, students and governors (both past and present), and of others who use the facilities. The external stakeholders, on the other hand, are identified as feeder schools, community organisations, industry and commerce and local authorities.

According to Koekemoer (2011:3) marketing communication tools should not work in silos. In other words, they should be deployed in an integrated manner. Marketing communication tools include advertising, publicity, public relations and sales promotion (Belch & Belch 2012:9). Given the multiplicity of stakeholders, educational institutions use a number of different tools, including open days, exhibitions, direct mail and advertising (Nicholls, Harris, Morgan, Clarke & Sims 1995:33).

According to Ivy (2001:278), and Keller (2013:236) marketing communication tools include recruiter visits to schools, direct mail to schools, advertising in the press, open days, career fair involvement, contact with school career counsellors and promotion on the world wide web.

A study by Moogan (2011:577) revealed that a prospectus and a website were important sources of information about educational institutions; whilst Hossler (1999:9) found that radio and television are effective communication channels. Garwe (2016:241) also found that students obtained information on educational institutions from promotional materials, websites, radio and television advertisements, exhibitions and open days.

According to Belch and Belch (2012:567) public relations can be defined as "the management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies policies of an organisation with the public interest and executes a programme of action to earn public understanding and acceptance". In the same vein, The Institute of Public Relations and Communication of South Africa (PRISA) defines public relations as "the management through communication of perceptions and strategic relationships between an organization and its internal and external stakeholders" (Skinner, Essen & Mersham 2004:4). In endorsing the PRISA definition, Fill (2002:619) states that "public relations is a management activity that attempts to shape the attitudes and opinions held by an organization's stakeholders". Cutlip, Center and Broom (2001:1) also define public relations as the function responsible for building what they call "mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its publics". Organisations use various methods and techniques to build sound relations with their publics, some of which, according to Fill (2002:631), are publicity issues, management, public affairs, lobbying, investor relations and corporate advertising.

Koekemoer (2011:13) defines personal selling as "a person-to-person process by which the seller learns about the prospective buyer's wants and seeks to satisfy them". Kotler and Keller (2009:591) assert that "nearly 12% of the total workforce in the US works in full-time sales occupations both non-profit and for-profit". In the education context, marketing officers often visit schools and industries to sell their market offering.

Consumer promotions are short-term inducements of value to consumers to encourage them to buy a product or a service. Such sales promotional tools directed at consumers include coupons that can be redeemed for cash, sweepstakes and contests that involve prizes and rebates on a purchase (Assael 1990:553). Education institutions can offer bursaries, or even laptops, as incentives to attract students.

Assael (1990:552) defines advertising as "a paid, ongoing, non-personal communication from a commercial source such as a manufacturer or a retailer". Similarly, Berkowitz (2011:354) asserts that advertising is different from other forms because it is paid for and non-personal. Grace and O'Gass (2005:106) state that advertising has the potential of making services tangible. Significantly, it creates positive brand attitudes.

According to Mortimer (2002:460), advertising is a tool to help consumers through a challenging decision-making process. Butterick (2011:43) advises that advertising should be used to introduce a new product or service .Grace and O'Gass (2005:106) recommend that advertising should address issues of the intangibility, heterogeneity and perishability of services.

These recommendations include advertising that

- "should make the service understood;

- capitalize on word-of mouth communications;

- provide tangible cues, promise what can be delivered;

- aim advertising at employees; and

- maintain advertising continuity" (Grace & O'Gass 2005:106).

Rogers (1995:21) is of the opinion that marketers should not only use the basic measured media, such as television, radio, magazines, newspapers, outdoor and transit, but also alternatives to basic media, such as visual indoor and outdoor displays, direct mail, throwaways, point-of-purchase advertising, awards, trade shows and exhibitions, seminars, audio visuals, audio cassettes, cinema, house organs, literature and annual reports, directories, annuals, telemarketing, and live speakers, which add substantially to the range and efficacy of a marketing campaign.

4.3.2 Product messages

Organisations like educational institutions should provide value for their customers. Customer value according to Finne and Grönroos (2017:446) means that after they have been assisted by a self-service process or full service process, they are or feel better off than before. In the context of education, it means when students leave the education system they must be better human beings and members of society. To create customer value a study by Ramachandran (2010:549) suggest that students should provide feedback during the development of learning programmes. In addition, academics from other educational

institutions should play an important role in the development of learning programmes (Ramachandran 2010:549). Product messages emanate from the attributes of a product, for example pricing, durability, distribution networks, form, features, performance, conformance, quality, reliability, reparability and style (Aaker 1995:204; Kotler & Keller 2009:363; Little & Marandi 2003:120; Venter & Van Rensburg 2009:260).

In education, the product entails deciding on what will benefit the student. This may include curriculum development, general planning and planning pastoral care programmes, as well as any other forward planning required (Harvey & Busher 1996:30; Ivy 2008:289; Maringe 2005:573).

Notably, the expectations that are created through planned messages (marketing communication tools) should match the actual performance (experience) of the product. In simple terms, the planned messages should be consistent with the product messages. Moreover, product messages are more believable than planned messages because they reflect the actual experience with the product offering.

According Kotler (1997:431-432) a product has five levels namely, core product, tangible product, augmented product, expected product, and potential product. At the basic level, students are buying the benefits that a degree or learning programme can provide in terms of employment and status. At a secondary level, tangible attributes include the physical layout of the campus, the library, laboratories and sporting facilities. Meanwhile, the augmented level is made up of intangible attributes such as library membership for graduates, student loans, and finance and employment services, among others. The expected product refers to the students' expectations regarding the educational experience while potential product entails the additional value that students may get from attending an educational institution.

4.3.3 Service messages

A study by Sultan and Wong (2012:755) found that students look for evidence of quality services when they select education institutions. According to Duncan and Moriarty (1997:84), service messages "originate from interactions with the organisation's employees". This assertion is consistent with Sultan and Wong's statement (2012:756) that higher education is a pure service that requires a greater amount interpersonal contact. In addition, the tangibles and administrative processes are also determinants of service quality.

According to Goldsmith (1999:182), the personnel dimension of the marketing mix refers to employees who provide the service for customers. Goldsmith (1999) further asserts that services marketing theory "places emphasis on hiring, training, supporting, evaluating and rewarding employees". In the education context, "people" refers to the academic and administrative staff that makes contact with potential and existing students. In a service market context, the quality of staff determines the quality of service (Eccles 2004:413; Nicholls *et al.* 1995:32).

Consistent with this assertion, a study by Umbach and Porter (2002) found that good teaching or faculty has an impact on the satisfaction of students. Physical evidence refers to things such as teaching materials, buildings and lecture halls while processes are all the administrative procedures involved, such as handling enquiries, registration, course evaluation, examinations, result dissemination and graduation (Eccles 2004:413; Ivy 2008:290; Nicholls *et al.* 1995:33). A study Carter and Yeo (2010) found that institutions' facilities, namely, IT, and relevant facilities support, library and retail shops, were important to students.

4.3.4 Unplanned messages

In order to create and nourish relationships with students, the brand promise made through planned messages should match what other people (unplanned messages) say about the educational institution. The messages from intermediary sources are more believable than planned messages because the intermediary sources are not biased. A study by Garwe (2016) revealed that students rely on others to help them to select education institutions. There are various unplanned communication activities which are major determinants of the attitudes and behaviours of consumers. These activities include word-of-mouth or interpersonal communication, intrapersonal communication and intermediary communication (Dahlén *et al.* 2010:34; Melewar & Karaosmanoglu 2006:852). In the education context, the intermediary sources include family, friends and media.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to analyse the IMC message typology of the Tshwane North College, a qualitative research design was used. Creswell (2009:5) opines that "qualitative research is an enquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting". In-depth interviews were conducted with 23 students at Tshwane North College. Students are one of the key stakeholders of the college and their perspectives can

help shape the college's marketing and communication efforts. The participants were selected on the basis of convenience. In total eight male and 15 female students participated in the study. As part of the research protocol, each participant was assured of anonymity.

The researcher collected data at the college campus on the 21st of April 2017. The interview guide covered four areas namely, planned messages, unplanned messages, product messages and service messages. In order to identify patterns in the data, the technique of vivo coding was used. In other words, terms and phrases used by the participants were coded giving them a voice in the research. Once written data were scrutinised, a network of important themes was revealed. Accordingly, the most common perspectives were identified. These perspectives are presented in the following section concerning findings.

6.   FINDINGS

As indicated earlier, the goal of this paper was to analyse the planned and unplanned messages, and the product and service messages of the Tshwane North College. To this end, in-depth interviews were conducted with 23 students. Accordingly, the findings include the perspectives of students, as one of the primary stakeholders, on the planned, unplanned, product and service messages of the college.

6.1   Planned messages

As indicated previously, planned messages, according to Duncan and Moriarty (1997) and Dahlén *et al.* (2010) are messages that are sent via the traditional elements of the marketing communication mix, namely, advertising, personal selling, public relations, sales promotion and sponsorships. In terms of planned messages, the participants indicated that the messages conveyed by the college's marketing communication tools such as exhibitions, publications, websites and social media are consistent and not characterised by internal contradictions.

By implication, the participants claim that the college deploys its marketing communication tools in an integrated manner. This finding is consistent with a study by Fadahunsi and Pelser (2013:838) which found that all marketing materials produced by selected colleges in the Gauteng Province carried consistent messages. However, the participants lamented the fact that the college still does not have a strong online presence. This view is expressed in one of the participants' assertions that "the Facebook page is not regularly updated".

Other participants also pointed to the need for a strong presence on social media like Twitter. In addition, the participants indicated that technological innovation should not

replace personal communication in the form of school visits to sell the college's market offering to prospective students. In the words of one of the participants, "school visits are the most powerful way to reach potential students". Clearly, the marketing communication tools used by the college are to a large extent similar to those recommended in studies by Garwe (2016), Hossler (1999), Ivy (2001) and Moogan (2011).

6.2 Product messages

As indicated in the literature review, product messages are messages that emanate from an organisation's product offering. The majority of the participants indicated that they were happy with the college's course mix. "The course mix is geared towards preparing us for the real world of work", one of the participants remarked.

Another participant said that the college's learning programmes are practice-orientated. This assertion was endorsed by another participant who was of the view that the learning programmes give them a competitive advantage in the labour market.

However, there were a few participants who recommended the introduction of new courses such as military studies, nursing studies and project management. The students' recommendations are consistent with Ramachandran's (2010) assertion that feedback from students is critical in the development of learning programmes. This view does not exclude the contribution of prospective employers and academics from other education institutions.

Participants were disappointed with placement after completing their courses as they were not aware of the college's student placement services. Furthermore, the majority of the students were not satisfied with the application process for financial services. As one of the participants put it, "the process is fraught with delays".

6.3 Service messages

According to Duncan and Moriarty (1997:84), service messages "originate from interactions with the organisation's employees". Commenting on the service messages of their college, the majority of participants indicated that their service quality is good and there was consensus that both their academic and administrative staff members are competent.

As one of the participants put it, "both lecturers and admin staff are helpful". This is consistent with a study by Umbach and Porter (2002) which found that the quality of teachers has an impact on student satisfaction. Nevertheless, there were a few participants who were of the view that some of the admin staff is rude.

In addition, the majority of the participants indicated that their physical environment is conducive for teaching and learning. As one of the participants put it, "the lecture rooms and the library are still in good condition". In terms of the location of the college, the majority of the participants were of the view that the college is centrally located. In the words of one of the participants, "the college is next to taxi ranks and other forms of transport". "It is next to municipal libraries", another participant remarked.

With regard to the registration process, the majority of participants complained about long queues during the process. The participants indicated that even if they register online, they still need to submit registration documents in person. Furthermore, participants' results are not released on time as some results are always pending. As far as teaching materials are concerned, the majority of the participants complained that some of the textbooks do not contain sufficient information and that some of the textbooks they receive are damaged and some have pages missing.

6.4   Unplanned messages

According to Dahlén *et al.* (2010) and Melewar and Karaosmanoglu (2006), unplanned communication activities include word-of-mouth or interpersonal communication, intrapersonal communication and intermediary communication. The majority of the participants were influenced by their relatives and friends to enrol at the college. As one of the participants put it, "I was influenced by my brother to enrol at the college". Another stated: "I was influenced by my cousin to enrol at the college". Surprisingly, all the participants agreed that the college was not visible in the mass media. This means that the college has failed to generate free media exposure or publicity.

7.   IMPLICATIONS FOR TSHWANE NORTH COLLEGE AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN GENERAL

Consistent with the research results and Moriarty's view (1994), educational institutions should use IMC message typology as a logical structure for developing stakeholder communication strategies. Thus, educational institutions should use the IMC message typology to create and nurture stakeholder relations. This is because relationships are built when the brand promise (planned messages) is in line with actual performance as manifested in the educational institution's product, service and unplanned messages, since they represent the students' direct experience with the institution.

This study dispels the notion that IMC is about the integration of marketing communication tools (planned messages) and suggests that educational institutions should align their communication strategies to the IMC message typology in its entirety. As Duncan's IMC definition (2002:7) suggests, an organisation should control (planned messages) or influence the messages (product, unplanned, and service messages) to its stakeholders.

On the whole, it may thus be said that an IMC programme should incorporate activities aimed at making a brand promise or creating customer expectations (planned messages) and also activities aimed at influencing the unplanned product and service messages. Therefore, in order to ensure message consistency and maximum communication impact, an IMC message typology orientated programme should involve planned and unplanned message activities, and product and service messages activities.

In terms of planned messages, the study implies that the Tshwane North College should increase its social media activity as part of its planned communication. As far as product messages are concerned, the college should look into areas such as student placement services and financial assistance services to improve efficiency and effectiveness. One of the participants was of the view that the problem around these areas stems from poor internal communication. Thus, it is prudent that the college improve its internal communication to ensure the timely dissemination of information.

This view is important because communication is an instrument for creating and nurturing stakeholder relations. With regard to product development, the college should include students, employer representatives and academics from other institutions in determining their course mix, thereby ensuring that the needs of the various interested parties are satisfied by the outcome of the process.

While the majority of the participants are happy with the service quality (service messages), there is a need for staff training in customer care especially for the admin staff. With regard to registration, it is recommended that the process be fully online. Moreover, communication of exam results should be improved. As one of the participants suggested, students should be able to access exam results online. Study material should also be available online, another student remarked

With regard to unplanned messages, the college should embark on a campaign to turn its stakeholders into ambassadors for the college, particularly current students and alumni.

Therefore, the college should make sure that media relations feature strongly in the college's integrated marketing communication strategy. In other words, the college has the daunting task of highlighting the news value of its activities to the media.

8.   LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The limitations of the study stem from its qualitative approach. As the participants were not recruited on a probability basis, the findings cannot be generalised. This study was an exploratory study focusing on a single college.

This study serves to stimulate further investigations in the area. Future research should focus on the implementation of IMC in more than one TVET college and it is recommended that a quantitative methodology be employed.

Most importantly, the study highlights that the IMC message typology is a logical structure for developing stakeholder communication strategies and that IMC is not limited to the combined use of marketing communication tools.

Organisations like TVET colleges should ensure that the brand promise made through planned messages (marketing communication tools) is consistent with actual performance as manifested in their service messages, product messages and unplanned messages.

9.   CONCLUSION

The goal of this study was to analyse the IMC message typology of Tshwane North College. This goal was achieved by conducting in-depth interviews with students at the college. In terms of planned messages, the study revealed that the college uses the marketing communication tools in an integrated manner. With regard to product messages, the college offers learning programmes that prepare students for the real world of work. As far as service messages are concerned, it can be said that they offer quality service. When it comes to unplanned messages, however, it can be argued that media relations are one of the college's weaknesses.

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