INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION: A STUDY OF SELECTED MALAYSIAN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT: Integrated marketing communication (IMC) is efficient in adding value to the management strategies by sending clear and consistent messages about an institution in every contact point, thereby, enabling the improvement of institutions of higher education's (IHEs') reputation. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to ascertain the strategic processes of IMC and their relevance to the Malaysian IHEs. The method of quantitative analysis was used to observe the level of IMC implementation, barriers in implementing IMC strategy and leadership styles in the selected Malaysian IHEs. The IMC four-stage framework and six components of transformational leadership theory served as the basis of the study. The study found that all four administrators of the selected Malaysian IHEs claimed that their institution have implemented all four stages of the IMC framework (100.0%), whereas none of the four educators of the selected Malaysian IHEs claimed that their institution have implemented all four stages of the IMC framework (0.0%). The lack of budget (28.57%) and functional silo (28.57%) appear to be the main barriers concerning IMC implementation in their institution. The leadership style in the selected Malaysian IHEs was interpreted by at least one transformational leadership component (62.5%). In overview, leadership that supports an open system is required in the selected Malaysian IHEs in order to support open and honest communication policies, whereby every employee is able to communicate between them and customers to convey a message on their institution which will then be oriented towards a 'one-voice' communication.

Keywords: Integrated marketing communication framework, Malaysian institutions of higher education, transformational leadership theory

Subject Area: Humanities & Social Sciences

INTRODUCTION

IMC has been studied and practiced in mostly developed English-speaking countries, such as the United States of America, United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand since the beginning of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, several fast-developing Asian countries, such as India, Indonesia, Taiwan, Thailand and Malaysia are starting to adopt the concept of IMC in their industries.

In the reality, IMC may not be accepted and progressing at the same rate between developed Western countries and developing Asian countries. However, it is never too late to expand the studies and processes of IMC in countries where English is not the dominant language, and particularly so, in a multi-racial country, such as Malaysia, where English may not be its main language, but it is widely understood by its society as it is the second language of the country. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to ascertain the strategic processes of IMC and their relevance to the Malaysian IHEs.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

IHEs are chosen as the subjects of this research's case study because there are many good practices that support the important role of the university as an institution for critical thinking, where knowledge is developed and disseminated widely throughout the organisation as a source of value creation. The main concern of a university is to develop quality graduates, who should possess analytical and problem solving skills and interpersonal understanding as part of their learning achievements, thereby, contributing to the nation's goal of building a knowledge-based (k-based) society (Mohd Ghazali Mohayidin et al., 2007). Likewise, the National Higher Education Action Plan (NHEAP) (2007) state that the success of human capital development is closely related to quality of a national

education system, whereby, IHEs play important role in influencing human capital development (Morshidi, 2010). Moreover, to transform Malaysia to an international centre of higher education excellence until 2020 and beyond is the vision of Malaysia's government for higher education sector (NHEAP, 2007; Malaysia Ministry of Education, 2008). In other words, IHEs are capable of contributing in the economic growth of Malaysia by leading the industry through the power of knowledge.

In 1995, the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) found that 20 per cent of overseas-trained Malaysian students cost the country around USD800 million in currency outflow, constituting nearly 12 per cent of Malaysia's current account deficit. In order to reduce the outflows of funds, the government has intervened by increasing the capacity of public universities and expanding the capacity of local (private) higher education sector (Ziguras, 2001; Sirat, 2008). The Malaysian MOHE saw the local public and private IHEs as the key means of reducing this currency outflow and in the long term of transforming Malaysia into a net exporter of higher education (Ziguras, 2001).

There are five higher education legislations enacted by the Malaysian government in 1996, of which, they are considered a 'revolutionary' milestone in the development of the Malaysian higher education system (Johari, 1996). The following are the five lists of 1996 higher education legislations:
1) Education Act, 1996,
2) The Private Higher Educational Institutions Act, 1996,
3) National Council on Higher Education Act, 1996,
4) National Accreditation Board Act, 1996 and
5) Universities and University Colleges Act (Amendment), 1996.

In 2009, Malaysia was ranked the world's 11th most preferred study destination by the Institute of International Education (Lim, 2009). Malaysia achieved a 26 per cent increase in 2009 in international student numbers compared to 2008 and is estimated to reach 80,000 students in 2010 (Lim, 2009). Thus, seeing how important the roles of IHEs are in Malaysia, it is only rational to choose the IHEs as the subjects of case study. Meanwhile, as IMC is still considered a fresh discipline in Malaysia, the researcher decides that IMC and IHEs could make a good combination of study. In fact, Michael (1997) describes university in terms of relationship marketing as an assemblage of communities with different ideologies, agenda and academic traditions held together by a common institutional logo and name by its purest sense.

With the rapid development of information technology and the Internet, customer's choices are growing at a very fast rate (Kim, 2006). Customers of today have gained quick and easy access to a great wealth of product information, and they trust themselves more than sellers (Yastrow, 2000). It is noted that customer choice creates customer power (Hulbert, Capon and Piercy, 2003) which entitles customers to demand for more personalised products and services.

These factors are well reflected in the extremely competitive market environment in IHE (Dawes and Brown, 2002; Mount and Belanger, 2004). Potential student customers are more sophisticated; they have a very wide variety of IHE and programme choices, and they have access to ample programme information from various sources including government quality control agencies to their need for details. As a result, today's students do not easily trust the advertisements of IHEs. In the emerging customer-driven IHE marketplace, the customer is in control rather than the IHEs (Kim, 2006).

The stiff competition in the marketplace among the IHEs in Malaysia have made Malaysian IHEs realise that it is not easy to capture the hearts of students in selecting their institution, and even more difficult in maintaining their student recruitment, let alone increasing productivity in that sense. Licata and Frankwick (1996) stress that the increase in competition, a changing demographic and more sophisticated consumers make it necessary for institutions to develop management strategies that make their marketing communication (MARCOM) practices cohesive. For survival and expansion reasons, IHEs need to become better with the coordination of their MARCOM programmes and create a strong emotional bond with their markets in order to be perceived as a relevant choice in their target market's minds (Rosen, Curran and Greenlee, 1998; Armstrong and Lumsden, 1999; Mount and Belanger, 2004).

The concept of IMC is able to significantly add value to the management strategies of the Malaysian IHEs. The fragmentation of media (e.g. broadcast, press and online media) and the use of richer mix

of promotional tools (i.e. advertising, sales promotion, public relation and personal selling) have increased the need for IMC and have further contributed to the growth of IMC (Kim, 2006). Under the IMC concept, a company carefully integrates and coordinates its many communications channels to deliver a clear, consistent and compelling message about the company and its brand (Schultz, Tannenbaum and Lauterborn, 1993). In other words, IMC enables IHEs to improve their reputation. Even when an IHE has become well-known worldwide, it may still need IMC to enhance its own reputation (Kim, 2006). To reach the goal of becoming a regional centre of higher education, Malaysian IHEs must prevail in the marketplace and have their own sustainable competitive reputation, and this is where the role of IMC fits in.

Despite the importance of IMC in IHEs, barriers to its implementation still occur due to organisational resistance. Many career educators perceive IHE as an educational service provider which should not be corrupted with business orientation. Moreover, territorialism still exists in IHEs because traditional structures emphasise independence based on professional expertise more than interdepartmental cooperation which is essential to client satisfaction. Measurement difficulties and employees' fear of budget reductions add up the barriers to IMC implementation. These barriers occur mainly due to the lack of knowledge on IMC and appropriate training to go with it. Besides that, there is a lack of the right attitude in adapting to market and organisational change in institution. In order to move forward and think 'out of the box', IHEs will have to discard those barriers to IMC implementation.

In this study, the identified research problems are the need to observe (1) the background information of educators and administrators of Malaysian IHEs, (2) the level of IMC implementation in the Malaysian IHEs, (3) the barriers in implementing IMC practices in the Malaysian IHEs and (4) the leadership styles in the Malaysian IHEs.

METHOD

Quantitative analysis of survey research was employed to measure and access the level of IMC implementation, with regards to Schultz and Schultz's (2004) four stages of IMC framework and the leadership style based on Bass' (1985) six components of transformational leadership theory.

In this study, public and private Malaysian IHEs were selected as the subjects of case study since both play important roles in transforming Malaysia into a net exporter of higher education (Ziguras, 2001) through quality education (Wilkinson and Yussof, 2005), and thus, generate the economic growth of Malaysia. Then, the researcher narrows down the scope by selecting only public and private (with university status) Malaysian IHEs which provide marketing and communication (MARCOM) or IMC programme or course in the communication or business and/or management faculty or department, by means of having a better focus in examining IMC implementation.

A public university in Penang and Perlis was selected as subjects of public Malaysian IHE since these institutions have an undoubtedly long history of establishment. The selected public university in Penang has been declared as one of the six research-intensive universities in Malaysia, alongside Universiti Malaya and Universiti Putra Malaysia (Wikipedia, 2013), whereas the selected public university in Perlis has been rated as an excellent IHE and was awarded by MOHE as Entrepreneurial University of the Year in 2012 (Wikipedia, 2013). Meanwhile, a private university in Perak and Selangor was selected as subjects of private Malaysian IHE since both are outstanding Malaysian higher learning institutions. The selected private university in Perak is a pioneer in Malaysian private education, offering a commendable range of industry-driven courses. It has been established for 17 years and is public listed company in Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange, under the subsidiary of a major corporate company in Malaysia, whereas the selected private university in Selangor despite being only 14 years old since its establishment, is actively playing its role in delivering higher education programmes in order to enhance the development of human capital excellence.

In the Malaysian IHEs, their stakeholders include customers or clients (students), employees (administrative and academic staff), suppliers, distributors, shareholders, the media, MARCOM agencies, government regulators, communities, financial and investor community and special interests groups (Kim, 2006). According to Kim (2006), other than customers, the next most important stakeholders are the employees because satisfied employees can create favourable brand impression, and thus, satisfy and impress customers. Hence, in this study, the purposive target samples are internal stakeholders, particularly, educators and administrators.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with one administrator and educator from two selected public and private Malaysian IHEs. The criteria for identifying administrators as respondents for the interviews was based on their (1) involvement in strategic planning and/or (2) involvement in the execution or support of the MARCOM or IMC plan, whereas the criteria for identifying educators as respondents for the interviews was based on their (1) involvement in teaching MARCOM or IMC-related courses and/or (2) involvement in coordinating MARCOM or IMC programme.

The four stages of IMC framework by Schultz and Schultz (2004) and transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985) served as the basis for the study since they were determined to be most relevant to IHEs (Edmiston, 2008). Table 1 provides an overview of the indicators of the four stages of IMC, whereas Table 2 provides an overview of the six components of transformational leadership theory.

Table 1:   Indicators of the Four Stages of IMC Framework

Orientation	Indicators
Stage 1	*Tactical coordination of MARCOM* • Coordinate interpersonal and cross-functional communication within the organisation and with external partners.
Stage 2	*Commitment to market research in support of IMC* • Utilise primary and secondary market research sources as well as actual behavioural customer data. • Maintain a multitude of feedback channels to gather information about customers and effectively act upon customer feedback throughout the organisation.
Stage 3	*Application of information technology in support of IMC* • Leverage technologies to facilitate internal and external communications. • Adopt technologies for market research and data management purposes. • Employ technologies to determine individuals who have the potential to deliver the highest value (financial or service contributions) to the institution.
Stage 4	*Strategic integration of IMC* • Active support of institutional leadership. • MARCOM staff empowered by senior leadership to lead the integration of external communication with internal communication directed to students, staff, alumni and other constituents. • Measure effectiveness of MARCOM and incorporate findings into strategic planning.

Source: Adapted from Schultz and Schultz (2004).

Table 2:   Components of Transformational Leadership Theory

Orientation	Interpretation
Factor 1	*Idealised Influence* indicates whether one holds subordinates' trust, maintain their faith and respect, show dedication to them, appeal to their hopes and dreams, and act as their role model.
Factor 2	*Inspirational Motivation* measures the degree to which one provides a vision, uses appropriate symbols and images to help others focus on their work, and try to make others feel their work is significant.
Factor 3	*Intellectual Stimulation* shows the degree to which one encourages others to be creative in looking at old problems in new ways, create an environment that is tolerant of seemingly extreme positions, and nurture people to question their own values and beliefs and those of the organisation.
Factor 4	*Individualised Consideration* indicates the degree to which one shows interest in others' well-being, assign projects individually and pay attention to those who seem less involved in the group.
Factor 5	*Contingent Reward* shows the degree to which one tells others what to do in order to be rewarded, emphasises what one expect from them and recognises their accomplishments.
Factor 6	*Laissez-faire* measures whether one requires little of others, is content to let things ride and let others do their own thing.

Source: Adapted from Bass and Avolio (1992).

All the collected data were manually coded by topic areas, such as the survey respondents' background information, level of IMC implementation, barriers to IMC implementation and leadership styles in the selected Malaysian public and private IHEs, where keywords or themes were identified.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 3 shows that all eight survey respondents have worked in their institution for more than three years, and a significant number of them have been working for 14 years or more (38.0%). The length of service between the administrator and educator of each institution is equal, except for the administrator (11 – 13 years) and educator (14 or more years) of the public university in Perlis. The administrator (17 years) and educator (14 years) of the private university in Perak have the longest years of service (14 or more years), and second goes to the administrator (13 years) and educator (15 years) of the public university in Perlis (11 – 13 years, 14 or more years). The administrator (five years) and educator (five years) of the public university in Penang have worked at the shortest length of service (4 – 6 years) compared to the other administrators and educators of the selected Malaysian IHEs.

Table 3:   Cross-tabulation of Survey Respondents' Length of Service in Percentage

Years of Service	Designation		Total (*N*=8)
	Administrator (*N*=4)	Educator (*N*=4)	
1 – 3	0.0	0.0	0.0
4 – 6	25.0 (A1)	25.0 (A1)	25.0
7 – 10	25.0 (S2)	25.0 (S2)	25.0
11 – 13	25.0 (A2)	0.0	12.0
14 or more	25.0 (S1)	50.0 (S1, A2)	38.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: A1=Public university in Penang, A2=Public university in Perlis, S1=Private university in Perak, and S2=Private university in Selangor

Table 4 and 5 shows that all eight survey respondents have had experiences related to MARCOM and management before working in the IHE. The most often MARCOM tool used in their previous job duty was public relations with a total of 26.32 per cent (i.e. administrator=28.57%, educator=25.0%), and sales promotion comes next with 21.05 per cent in total (i.e. administrator=28.57%, educator=16.67%). Internet comes in third place with a total of 15.79 per cent (i.e. administrator=33.3%, educator=66.67%). Meanwhile, direct marketing and personal selling come in fourth place with 10.53 per cent in total (i.e. administrator=14.29% each, educator=8.33% each). Advertising, sponsorship and conference were the least MARCOM tool used in the survey respondents' previous job duty, with 5.26 per cent in total (i.e. administrator=0.0% each, educator=8.33% each). The educators were obviously more extensive in terms of MARCOM knowledge or experience scope compared to the administrators, since all eight MARCOM tools were present (see Table 4).

Table 4:   Cross-tabulation of Survey Respondents' Marketing Communication experiences in Percentage

Marketing Communication Tools	Designation		Total (*N*=19)
	Administrator (*N*=7)	Educator (*N*=12)	
Advertising	0.0	8.33	5.26
Public relations	28.57	25.0	26.32
Direct marketing	14.29	8.33	10.53
Sales promotion	28.57	16.67	21.05
Personal selling	14.29	8.33	10.53
Internet	14.29	16.67	15.79
Sponsorship	0.0	8.33	5.26
Conference	0.0	8.33	5.26
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 5 shows the position(s) held by the survey respondents in their previous career. A significant number of them (25.0%) were heads in their departments (i.e. administrator=0.0%, educator=50.0%) and executives (i.e. administrator=25.0%, educator=25.0%), whereas the rest was admin, manager, negotiator, officer (12.5%) (i.e. administrator=100.0% each, educator=0.0% each) and trainee (12.5%) (i.e. administrator=0.0%, educator=100.0%). The data on the survey respondents' MARCOM and management experiences shows that the administrator of the private university in Perak has had the most prominent experience in marketing, where his focus was on retail and promotions when he worked as a marketing executive at *First World Plaza* in Johor Bahru and *Technology Park Malaysia*

at Bukit Jalil, Selangor, and as advertising and marketing executive at *Metrojaya Berhad*, Kuala Lumpur. Meanwhile, the administrator of the public university in Penang has also had prominent experience in marketing, where she was exposed to various marketing aspects, such as public relations, public affairs and promotions when she worked in the hotel, tourism and hospitality fields. Besides that, the educator from the public university in Penang is prominently experienced in marketing since she applied corporate communication and public relations in her own company and while working as an executive in a government-linked agency. The educator from the public university in Perlis is considerably experienced in marketing since he worked as a head of department and manager in *Telekom Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur, where he was in charge of handling product marketing.

Table 5: Cross-tabulation of Survey Respondents' Management experiences in Percentage

| | Designation | | |
Job Position	Administrator (*N*=5)	Educator (*N*=4)	Total (*N*=9)
Admin	20.0	0.0	11.11
Executive	20.0	25.0	22.22
Head	0.0	50.0	22.22
Manager	20.0	0.0	11.11
Negotiator	20.0	0.0	11.11
Officer	20.0	0.0	11.11
Trainee	0.0	25.0	11.11
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 6 shows that Stage 1 (tactical coordination of MARCOM) and Stage 2 (commitment to market research in support of IMC) of the IMC framework are the most implemented in the selected Malaysian IHEs (30.43%) (i.e. administrator=25.0%, educator=42.9%), whereas Stage 3 (application of information technology in support of IMC) of the IMC framework comes in second with a total of 21.74 per cent (i.e. administrator=25.0%, educator=14.2%). Stage 4 (strategic integration of IMC) of the IMC framework is the least implemented in the selected Malaysian IHEs, with a total of 17.39 per cent (i.e. administrator=25.0%, educator=0.0%).

Table 6: Cross-tabulation of the Level of Integrated Marketing Communication implementation in selected Malaysian Public and Private Institutions of Higher Education

| | Designation | | |
IMC Framework Stages	Administrator (*N*=16)	Educator (*N*=5)	Total (*N*=21)
Stage 1	25.0	42.9	30.43
Stage 2	25.0	42.9	30.43
Stage 3	25.0	14.2	21.74
Stage 4	25.0	0.0	17.39
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 7 reveals that all four administrators of the selected Malaysian IHEs claimed that their institution have implemented all four stages of the IMC framework, making the frequency of all four stages of IMC framework implementation the highest score in total (50.0%) (i.e. administrator=100.0%, educator=0.0%), whereby evidently, none of the four educators of the selected Malaysian IHEs claimed that their institution have implemented all four stages of the IMC framework. The educators of the selected Malaysian IHEs have mostly claimed that their institution have achieved two stages of the IMC framework (25.0%) (i.e. administrator=0.0%, educator=50.0%). Meanwhile, the frequency of zero and three of the overall IMC framework implementation come next with a total of 12.5 per cent each (i.e. administrator=0.0% each, educator=25.0% each). The educator from the selected Malaysian public IHE in Penang did not give any answer regarding the level of IMC implementation in her institution, whereas the educator from the selected Malaysian private IHE in Selangor claimed that his institution has achieved level 3 of the IMC framework.

Table 7:   Cross-tabulation of the Frequency of Integrated Marketing Communication Four-stage Framework implemented in selected Malaysian Public and Private Institutions of Higher Education

Number of IMC Four-stage Framework implemented	Designation		Total (*N*=8)
	Administrator (*N*=4)	Educator (*N*=4)	
0	0.0	25.0	12.5
1	0.0	0.0	0.0
2	0.0	50.0	25.0
3	0.0	25.0	12.5
4	100.0	0.0	50.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

As shown in Table 8, it is apparent that the lack of budget (i.e. administrator=37.5%, educator=16.67%) and functional silo (i.e. administrator=12.5%, educator=50.0%) is the biggest barriers in the implementation of IMC to the selected Malaysian IHEs, which sum up to a total of 28.57 per cent each. The lack of competent employees is also often mentioned as one of the IMC implementation barriers, with a total of 21.43 per cent (i.e. administrator=25.0%, educator=16.67%). Moreover, the mind-set of stakeholders (i.e. total=7.14%; administrator=0.0%, educator=16.67%), technical constraints (i.e. total=7.14%; administrator=12.5%, educator=0.0%) and time constraints (i.e. total=7.14%; administrator=12.5%, educator=0.0%) are other barriers to be concerned of. Table 8 overviews that the lack of budget appears to be the utmost barrier to the administrators of the selected Malaysian IHEs, where it was mentioned by the administrator of the Malaysian private IHE in Perak and Selangor, and Malaysian public IHE in Perlis. In contrast, functional silo is believed to be the main barrier to the educators; educator of the Malaysian private IHE in Perak and Selangor, and Malaysian public IHE in Penang. The response from the administrator and educator of the Malaysian public IHE in Penang seems to synchronise together since functional silo is in their statement of the IMC implementation barrier. The barrier in budget is also stated by both the administrator and educator of the public IHE in Perlis.

Table 8:   Cross-tabulation of Barriers to Integrated Marketing Communication implementation in selected Malaysian Public and Private Institutions of Higher Education

Barriers	Designation		Total (*N*=14)
	Administrator (*N*=8)	Educator (*N*=6)	
Budget	37.5	16.67	28.57
Competent employees	25.0	16.67	21.43
Functional silo	12.5	50.0	28.57
Mind-set	0.0	16.67	7.14
Technical	12.5	0.0	7.14
Time	12.5	0.0	7.14
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 9 shows that Factor 2 (inspirational motivation) of transformational leadership was the most mentioned by the survey respondents, which sums up to a total of 40.0 per cent (i.e. administrator=33.3%, educator=50.0%). The rest were Factor 1 (idealised influence) (i.e. administrator=33.3%, educator=0.0%), Factor 3 (intellectual stimulation) (i.e. administrator=0.0%, educator=50.0%) and Factor 4 (individualised consideration) (i.e. administrator=33.3%, educator=0.0%). Meanwhile, none of the survey respondents' answers can be interpreted as Factor 5 (contingent reward) and 6 (laissez-faire). Table 9 exposes that the leadership styles adopted in the selected Malaysian IHEs are not applicable or rather irrelevant with the components available in transformational leadership.

Table 9: Cross-tabulation of Leadership Styles in selected Malaysian Public and Private Institutions of Higher Education

Transformational Leadership Theory Factors	Designation		Total (*N*=5)
	Administrator (*N*=3)	Educator (*N*=2)	
Factor 1	33.3	0.0	20.0
Factor 2	33.3	50.0	40.0
Factor 3	0.0	50.0	20.0
Factor 4	33.3	0.0	20.0
Factor 5	0.0	0.0	0.0
Factor 6	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 10 overviews that a majority of the survey respondents mentioned only one component of transformational leadership in their answer (i.e. total=62.5%; administrator=75.0%, educator=50.0%). The other 37.5 per cent made up of zero (i.e. administrator=25.0%, educator=50.0%).

Table 10: Cross-tabulation of the Frequency of Transformational Leadership Components practiced in selected Malaysian Public and Private Institutions of Higher Education

Number of Transformational Leadership Components practiced	Designation		Total (*N*=8)
	Administrator (*N*=4)	Educator (*N*=4)	
0	25.0	50.0	37.5
1	75.0	50.0	62.5
2	0.0	0.0	0.0
3	0.0	0.0	0.0
4	0.0	0.0	0.0
5	0.0	0.0	0.0
6	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, the administrators and educators of the selected Malaysian public and private IHEs are considered as adequately experienced in MARCOM and management, since all eight of them have had experiences in those areas for more than five years. Obviously, through working experiences, the educators get well equipped with knowledge particularly on MARCOM and management where they learnt about the eight MARCOM tools, as well as got hands-on with them. Therefore, these educators are capable of educating the students on IMC, pertinently, and at the same time, they are able to set an image and impression of the institution to the students. These facts make sense as Kim (2006) and Szántó and Harsányi (2007) stated that teacher employees play roles in providing information and affecting students' attitudes, whereby creating image or brand impression.

A contradiction is present in the responses of the administrators and educators of the selected Malaysian IHEs regarding the level of IMC implementation. This finding is evident where all the four administrators interviewed claimed that all four stages of the IMC framework were applied in their institution (100.0%). In contrast, the educators were rather uncertain about the level of IMC implementation in their institution, whereby the educator of the selected Malaysian public IHE in Penang stressed out that she has information on it at a very basic level. Meanwhile, the educator of the selected Malaysian private IHE in Selangor pointed out that he has no idea about certain level of IMC implementation in his institution.

The lack of budget (28.57%) and functional silo (28.57%) appear to be the main barriers concerning IMC implementation in the survey respondents' institution. The presence of barrier on functional silo seems to answer as to why educators of the selected Malaysian IHEs were uncertain about the level of IMC implementation in their institution. According to the educator of the selected Malaysian private IHE in Perak, the departments at her institution tend to work in silo. Meanwhile, the educator of the selected Malaysian public IHE in Penang claimed that the employees in her faculty still rely on the traditional way, and even much of the market strategies are from the Public Relations Office or the top management of the institution. She added, "In Communication, we go with the main advertisement for the institution, so when we put up promotions for our courses, we become just a little under them." In

addition to that, the educator of the selected Malaysian private IHE in Selangor claimed that working cultures and the organisational set up are the barriers to IMC implementation in his institution. On the other side, the administrator of the selected Malaysian public IHE in Penang stated that it is difficult to get the stakeholders in her institution to stick to one decision. These data prove that territorialism exists in the selected Malaysian IHEs because the traditional structures in their institution tend to rely on professional expertise rather than interdepartmental cooperation. The administrators of the selected Malaysian IHEs also mentioned the problem on the lack of budget more than the educators (75.0%) since they might have feared that IMC could cause budget reductions.

The administrators and educators of the selected Malaysian IHEs primarily interpreted the leadership style in their institution by at least one transformational leadership component (62.5%). In brief, most of the survey respondents claimed that their leaders are democratic, by means that decisions are made based on discussions. According to the administrator of the selected Malaysian public IHE in Perlis and Malaysian private IHE in Perak, it is important for leaders to listen to other people's opinions and suggestions. Meanwhile, the administrator of the selected Malaysian public IHE in Penang pointed out that leaders should have good attitude – be it female or male.

In summation, the MARCOM functions are separated from each department in the selected Malaysian IHEs due to their organisation setting. Overcoming tradition and culture is understandably difficult, but it is not impossible. The administrator of the selected Malaysian private IHE in Selangor had even pointed out that IMC is time consuming. Schultz, Tannenbaum and Lauterborn (1993) realised the fact that implementing IMC takes time, but after having gone through numerous researches on IMC, they are certain that IMC implementation is possible if the organisation is willing to reorganise or adapt to new organisational structures. Leadership that supports an open system (i.e. permeable boundary, adaptive to environmental change, accommodative, holistic, ethical, encourages of feedback) operating philosophy, as suggested by Mulnix (1996) is required beforehand in the Malaysian IHEs in order to support open and honest communication policies. Then, every employee needs to be engaged in reaching their IHE goal by communicating between them and customers to convey a message on their institution. These messages from every employee and customers will then be oriented towards a 'one-voice' communication, since in IMC, productivity is not merely directed at the marketing department, but it involves everyone. When IMC works well in the institution, stakeholder relationship could be sustained, and thus, brand and customer equity could be leveraged.

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