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Integrated marketing communications' influence on student attitudes towards Zimbabwean polytechnics: The case of Mutare Polytechnic

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explored the influence of integrated marketing communications (IMC) on student attitudes towards Zimbabwean polytechnics. It aimed to understand the influence of selected IMC tools (advertising, personal selling, direct marketing, public relations, and digital marketing) on student attitudes (beliefs, feelings, and intentions) towards polytechnics in Zimbabwe, with the intention of proposing an IMC model for such institutions. The conceptual framework drew on the response hierarchy models, focusing on the hierarchy of effects model of Lavidge and Steiner, as well as on IMC tools and attitudes.

The research employed a cross-sectional, exploratory, case study design and qualitative approach. Convenience sampling was used to select 48 registered first-year students (35 of whom ultimately participated) from all six divisions at Mutare Polytechnic, and five staff members from the Marketing department. Data was collected remotely, using Zoom to conduct focus groups with students and interviews with staff. The institution's marketing communications and institutional documents were also examined. Data from focus groups and interviews was analysed using thematic analysis, and content analysis was used to analyse the secondary data.

The findings suggest that Mutare Polytechnic is increasingly adopting IMC to change the negative attitudes that students have towards polytechnics. Mutare Polytechnic is using several promotional tools (advertising, personal selling, direct marketing, public relations, and digital marketing), combined in such a way that they present messages that are consistent and unified, which in turn influenced the participants' attitudes positively. The findings also revealed that a more strategic coordination of the selected IMC elements and media should be adopted. Furthermore, it emerged that for an IMC programme to be successful, it must consider the marketing tools, message content, coverage, reach and accessibility, and marketing participants. A framework incorporating these aspects was presented. The study concluded that a deeper understanding of student attitudes towards Mutare Polytechnic will result in the institution developing more successful IMC strategies and an understanding of the role that different IMC tools play in moulding these attitudes.

Key words: attitudes, integrated marketing communications, polytechnics, promotional tools, Zimbabwe

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FGD	Focus group discussion
HEI	Higher education institution
IMC	Integrated marketing communications
MHTESTD	Ministry of Higher & Tertiary Education, Science & Technology Development
PR	Public relations
TVET	Technical & Vocational Education & Training
ZIMSEC	Zimbabwe Schools Examinations Council

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

The role of marketing in higher education has increased significantly in recent years (Mogaji, Maringe & Hinson, 2020). This research focuses on the influence of integrated marketing communications (IMC) on student attitudes towards polytechnics in Zimbabwe, using Mutare Polytechnic as a case study.

Polytechnics, also known as Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions, function in a competitive environment and are pushing for a better position within the tertiary education sector. Polytechnics are moving towards integrated marketing communications to "change students' attitudes, to gain competitive advantage and to differentiate themselves in the sector strategically" (Vrontis, Thrassou & Melanthiou, 2007:986). IMC refers to "a business marketing-oriented approach that embraces all the different types of communication and marketing of an organisation as a whole and in a consistent way" (Gordon-Isasi *et al*., 2021:58).

TVET refers to an approach to learning that emphasises the development of practical skills, and a comprehension of relevant sciences and technologies required for employment in a certain profession or occupation (Mawonedze & Banda, 2024). TVET colleges offer programmes that are usually narrow in scope and aim to prepare students for the workforce; they are often designed in collaboration with industry stakeholders to meet current job market needs. Polytechnics also offer TVET courses alongside other courses in managerial, scientific, and professional abilities from a broad scope. In Zimbabwe, polytechnics are state-run institutions under the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development (MHTESTD) and fall under the Tertiary Education Programmes (TEP). As opposed to theory-based learning, practice-based learning is heavily emphasised in the curriculum (Chikombongo, 2017). Higher education establishments called polytechnics are mandated to offer technical and vocational education (Chikombingo, 2017). Polytechnics are essential in providing students with real-world skills that satisfy the needs of different businesses; they also play an important role in job creation, national development, and individual growth as Zimbabwe's economy continues to change (Mahuyu & Makochekanwa, 2020). Polytechnics in Zimbabwe have gone through the 'TVETisation' process, which is the process of re-engineering training that aims to enhance trainees' abilities, skills, and knowledge, by refining training infrastructure and knowledge transfer techniques to better meet industry demands (Chikombimgo, 2017; Mabhanda, 2017). The goal of this kind of training programme is to create middle-level managers, including technicians, craftsmen, and technologists. To do this, polytechnics ought to offer an environment that encourages academic success for their students.

However, the challenges of lack of information on the benefits of courses offered at polytechnics, negative attitudes towards polytechnics, fear of not getting employed, and lack of resources hinder prospective students from enrolling at these institutions (Chimbi & Jita, 2023). The President of Zimbabwe has urged the youth to take skills development courses at polytechnics to revive the country's economy, and to encourage entrepreneurship to reduce the high rate of unemployment (africacheck, 2019). He indicated that polytechnic courses were the backbone of the Zimbabwean economy. The curricum and review department at the Higher Education Examinations Council has also tried to resolve this problem by coming up with courses with relevant skills needed in the job market today. In

Zimbabwe, scholars (Mahuyu & Makochekanwa, 2020; Makochekanwa & Mahuyu, 2021; Chimbi & Jita, 2023) have looked at the influences of negative perceptions towards TVET education, but no study has related IMC to student attitudes. This study aims to close that gap, by exploring the relationship between the combined use of IMC tools and student attitudes, and from this standpoint, this research will study the influence of IMC on student attitudes towards polytechnic education in Zimbabwe.

In Zimbabwe, polytechnics also provide students with practical learning opportunities that stimulate critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity (Makochekanwa & Mahuyu, 2021). These skills are necessary for lifelong learning and personal development, allowing students to fulfill their potential, both personally and professionally (Svodziwa, 2021). Although studies conducted recently have demonstrated the vital role that TVET plays in improving economic growth and addressing skills shortages, especially in Africa, low enrolment is evident at polytechnics (Mahuyu & Makochekanwa, 2020; Makochekanwa & Mahuyu, 2021). Despite Zimbabwe's polytechnics having a unique position in supporting this growth by offering education and training that is relevant to business, falling enrolment rates, cultural prejudices in favour of traditional academic courses, and the negative perception and allure of polytechnic education continue to be concerns (Chimbi & Jita, 2023). The absence of studies on the influence of IMC tools on students' attitudes towards polytechnics, particularly in Zimbabwe, motivated this research.

This chapter first gives the background to the study, focusing on polytechnics in Zimbabwe and Mutare Polytechnic specifically, as well as the rationale for conducting it. This is followed by the research problem, questions, and objectives, as well as its importance. The methodology, delimitations of the study, definition of key terms, and structure of the thesis are also outlined in this chapter.

1.2 Background and rationale for the study

Globally, students' attitudes towards institutions of higher learning have been changing, compelling polytechnics to find useful, reliable, and efficient ways of ensuring that potential students have adequate information to assist them in deciding to enrol at polytechnics (Messah & Mutali, 2011). Tertiary institutions around the world are experiencing transformations and are facing numerous challenges brought about by globalisation (Gordon-Isasi *et al*., 2021; Maringe, 2010). Seric *et al*. (2015) and Mudzanani (2018) urge institutions (such as polytechnics) to engage in IMC activities for them to overcome the challenges in a harsh, competitive environment. The marketing of tertiary institutions is challenging as a result of the availability of numerous substitutes (Gordon-Isasi *et al*., 2021). Educators must analyse how the discipline of marketing may be used by institutions to remain essential and buoyant (Mogaji, 2019; 2020). Muritala (2021) notes that every result-oriented corporation faces the issue of correctly coordinating its marketing communications efforts in order to present a vibrant, constant, credible, and competitive message about its organisational products and services; hence, the effective implementation of IMC strategies may positively influence students' and other stakeholders' attitudes towards polytechnics.

According to the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development's strategic report (2019), polytechnics are crucial to Zimbabwe's education and training, with respect to technical and vocational skills. The assumption that polytechnics provide lower-quality education than universities and the absence of efficient marketing methods to promote these institutions, are some of the many reasons for the negative attitudes that students have towards polytechnics and the fall in enrolment

therein (Tlapana & Myeki, 2020). The preference for and improvement of polytechnics' reputations have been linked to integrated marketing communications (IMC) (Tlapana & Myeki, 2020). In order to generate a coherent and consistent message that promotes a brand or organisation, IMC entails the synchronisation of numerous marketing communication tools, such as advertising, public relations, direct marketing, and digital marketing (Kitchen *et al*., 2019).

The notion of IMC pertains to the development of marketing communications, and emphasises the advantages of a holistic approach that appraises the strategic purposes of various communication disciplines, such as advertising, direct marketing, public relations, and sales promotion (Ma'ruf, 2024). This strategy can optimise transparency and the influence of communication by integrating these disciplines. The main goals of any IMC strategy are to engage target audiences, accomplish the promotional objectives, disseminate brand knowledge, influence a particular audience's behaviour, and build brand equity awareness, whilst also enhancing favourable perceptions, attitudes, and relationships regarding these products and brands (Nurjanah, 2020).

Esti (2020) carried out a qualitative study on the influence of IMC on the brand identity of a telecommunications company that had to establish a robust brand identity because of the prevailing market dynamics and competition. The study revealed that, through IMC, the company's market position shifted positively and its brand identity in the adolescent segment increased. Another qualitative study by Novrian and Rizki (2021) examined the influence of IMC on the brand awareness of a coffee business experiencing declining sales due the impact of COVID-19. The findings showed that implementing various integrated marketing activities led to a significant increase in sales due to increased brand awareness (Novrian & Rizki, 2021). From the studies cited above, it is evident that IMC is a powerful tool that organisations may use to be more consistent and successful. Integrated marketing communications are now seen as a crucial component of developing a business' marketing strategy and have become a top marketing management goal (Percy, 2023).

The history of education marketing dates back at least 30 years in the United States of America, but it is only recently that such marketing has increased (Mudzanani, 2018). Although Mogaji, Maringe and Hinson (2020) note that the marketisation of education has been facing many critics, educational institutions have been engaging in marketing activities to improve recruitment and student choice, as well as how they brand and position themselves, segment their services, and internationalise. Maringe *et al*. (2020) further note that, due to the marketisation of education since the early 2000s, university structures are now more like any other business structure in the corporate world. In their study of the marketisation of public and private universities in Nigeria, Olaleye, Ukpadi and Mogaji (2020) found that marketing communications, brand identity, and student satisfaction are important in student and parent decision-making. Mogaji *et al*. (2020) highlight that marketisation in Africa must be specific to tackle problems (poverty, unemployment, etc.) faced in Africa.

Nwedu (2019) conducted a review of the literature to compare the marketing approaches used by colleges in Africa and the West. Using a qualitative and analytical methodology, Nwedu (2019) found that few African universities had implemented online recruitment strategies, with most relying heavily on traditional marketing strategies such as open days, application fee waivers, alumni networks, disability support, student loans and scholarships, prospectuses and fliers, and student testimonials. The study

discovered that, in contrast to western universities, which had invested heavily in websites and related social media or social network platforms, African universities had poorly functioning platforms and websites lacking basic features, which prevented students from conducting all of their research online (Nwedu, 2019).

While the marketisation of higher education is still a relatively new phenomenon in Africa, its adoption is slowly increasing (Mogaji *et al*., 2020), hence the implementation of IMC in polytechnics is also increasing slowly. Some studies have been carried out to investigate students' attitudes towards polytechnics in Africa and beyond. For example, Eulalia (2011:03) found that "in South Africa, polytechnics are looked down upon by prospective students and their parents". Also in South Africa, a SABC News Twitter poll revealed that only 24.1% of respondents indicated that they would enrol at polytechnics, while 43.8% would enrol at universities (SABC News online, 2023). Chinyamurindi (2023) refers to the 'stigmatisation' of the TVET sector in South Africa, where the socio-cultural milieu feeds perceptions that TVET qualifications are inferior to university degrees. According to a study conducted in South Africa by Makola *et al.* in 2023, some participants had unfavourable opinions of TVET colleges because they believed that these provide a less advanced education with less emphasis on theory, while they were concerned about the limited course offerings therein, and preferred university education.

In Kenya, Muriithi (2013) investigated factors leading to low enrolment in polytechnics; his findings were that negative attitudes towards polytechnics are mainly influenced by the belief that they are a second chance for those who would have failed academically, and that the community looks down upon blue collar jobs. In Zimbabwe, Mahuyu and Makochekanwa (2020; 2021) found that both parents and students had negative attitudes towards polytechnics, which were viewed as catering for those who would have failed at Ordinary or Advanced level. A study conducted in Zimbabwe by Chimbi and Jita (2023), revealed that a noteworthy obstacle to academic success was the unfavourable attitude that students displayed towards TVET programmes. Such findings highlight the need to explore the potential contribution of IMC in fostering positive attitudes towards polytechnics. One study conducted by Tlapana and Myeki (2020) in South Africa found that IMC significantly influenced students' attitudes towards TVET colleges, and played an important role in student recruitment. In exploring this topic, this research focused on polytechnics in Zimbabwe, since there is limited research in this context.

The continued expansion of the tertiary sector in Zimbabwe, increased competitive pressures, the sprouting of several alternatives, and the complexity in students' attitudes are some of the factors driving polytechnics to implement IMC to be strategically positioned (Kwandai, 2017). With the government of Zimbabwe opening state universities in almost every province (Chisiri *et al*., 2023), it has increased the need for polytechnics to put more effort into changing students' negative attitudes towards these institutions for their survival. Reid and Luxton *et al*. (2015) emphasise that the same marketing communication tools are also used by competitors; therefore, in order to outperformthem, polytechnics need to use these tools more strategically and effectively (Makola *et al*., 2023).

Studies on IMC tools usage in higher education institutions include the 2011 study by Omboi and Mutali on the influence of specific marketing communications tools on student enrolment in Kenyan private universities, which revealed that newspapers and online media were the best tools to convey information to prospective students. Research carried out in Ghana (Wu & Baah-Boakye, 2014) on the use of public

relations in universities revealed that only three universities had adopted this as a promotional tool. Pokhrel, Tiwari, and Phuylah (2015) examined the influence of education marketing on student enrolment at private management institutions in Kathmandu. The word-of-mouth recommendations of family, friends, and relatives, college websites, and newspaper advertisements were discovered to be effective marketing tools for student enrolment. In her study of digital marketing strategies by private colleges in Nigeria's South West, Oluwasola (2020) found that most of them adopted an integrated strategy to marketing communication. Despite the fact that they used digital marketing strategies such as social media marketing, some digital marketing tools such as influencer endorsement, online relationship marketing, search engine marketing (SEM), mobile apps, email advertising, and display advertising were either not used at all or underutilised. The impact of public relations, sales promotion, advertising, and personal selling on university student enrolment was examined by Suraya and Saragih (2019) at Darma Persada University in Indonesia; the findings revealed that personal selling and direct marketing were used most, and were crucial in raising students' awareness of the university. Kimani and Obwatho (2020) investigated the impact of social media marketing on students' enrolment at Kenya's private universities. They found that social media had been a useful instrument for attracting students. The findings of Velelo and Matenda's (2023) study on digital marketing at a particular higher education institution in South Africa, showed that the university needed to take advantage of the fact that students spent a lot of time on social media. This study also highlights the necessity for HEIs to make sure that the information on their websites and Facebook pages is up to date and is connected to any information that prospective students might need. From the discussions above it is notable that IMC can have a substantial impact on students' attitudes towards HEIs, particularly in terms of addressing the value of education and status of an institute.

Concerning the influence of IMC on students' attitudes, little has been covered in the tertiary education sector in Zimbabwe. Polytechnics exist in an environment where there is stiff competition from universities (Chisiri *et al*., 2023). The rapid increase in universities in an era of economic and political difficulties in the country (Chisiri *et al*., 2023), has led to polytechnics striving for continued existence while struggling to convince students to enrol with them (Kwandai, 2017). The need to change students' attitudes towards polytechnics has become the force behind marketing, in order to have a competitive advantage over other institutions and to differentiate themselves from these (Tlapana & Myeki, 2020). According to Mogaji *et al*. (2020), marketisation of higher education in Africa is the way to go. Polytechnics may use IMC to reduce the gap in enrolment numbers between polytechnics and universities, since these figures vary considerably (Du Plessis, 2012; Mudzanani, 2018). Polytechnics are struggling to fill up all their courses (Mudzanani, 2018) while, at the same time, universities now have multiple campuses around the country, which shows that they are increasing their numbers (Chisiri *et al*., 2023). Consequently, it is critical to look into polytechnics' current use of IMC and to consider how their existing IMC strategies might be adapted in order to better achieve their objectives, such as changing students' negative attitudes and increasing enrolment.

IMC is imperative in maintaining or changing attitudes (Niosi & Chung, 2023), although there are other strategies that can be used to alter attitudes (e.g. servicescape, price, place, and so on). Niosi (2021) and Fill (2002) indicate that IMC stimulates consumers through their interpretation of messages surrounding them. Polytechnics need to implement more focused IMC strategies to intensify their influence on students' attitudes towards them. When potential students have adequate information and knowledge

about polytechnics, it becomes easier to change their attitudes towards these institutions (Tlapana & Myeki, 2020). In Africa, studies that have found that students have negative attitudes towards TVET institutions include those by Chinyamurindi (2023), Maluleka (2011), Maeko (2020), Tlapana and Myeki (2020), Makola *et al.* (2023), Ajilore and Babalola (2021), and Vezi (2016ii), to name a few. In Zimbabwe specifically, such studies include those by Chimbi and Jita (2023), Chikwature and Oyedele (2016), Mahuyu and Makochekanwa (2020), Makochekanwa and Mahuyu (2021), Maeko (2020), and Mabhanda (2020). In Africa, studies by Mogaji *et al*. (2020), Mogaji (2019), Vezi (2016ii), Maeko (2020), Vezi (2017), and Tlapana and Myeki (2020) have shown that there is a relationship between marketing and student attitudes. Also on the continent, studies related to IMC in higher education have been carried out, and have shown a significant relationship between IMC and choice of institution, increased enrolment, and changed perceptions. These studies include Mogaji *et al*. (2020), Maeko (2020), Camilleri (2020), Kieu *et al*. (2020), Ndofirepi *et al*. (2020), Olaleye *et al.* (2020), Mogaji (2019), Mudzanani (2018), and Vezi (2016ii). It is against this background that this study hopes that IMC will play a role in changing the negative attitudes towards polytechnics in Zimbabwe. In this country, however, the existing studies on student attitudes towards TVET have so far not been linked to IMC, hence the motivation to carry out this study.

Vezi (2017) researched the impact of marketing communication on students' choices to register at TVET colleges in KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, but no research linked to IMC and student attitudes as a strategy for polytechnic preference in Zimbabwe has been done yet. Indeed, there is a lack of empirical research on IMC in Africa as a whole. Seric (2018:675) also notes that "the empirical research on IMC in Africa (only 10%) was conducted in several countries, of which South Africa was the top research region, followed by Nigeria and Zimbabwe". This study is also motivated by the absence of studies on the link between IMC and consumer attitudes; Seric (2018:679) argues that "more research is needed on the consumer perspective of IMC, as research has tended to focus on the manager/brand perspective". Through this research, it is hoped that polytechnics will understand how advertising, personal selling, public relations, digital marketing, and direct marketing influence student attitudes towards polytechnics in Zimbabwe.

Barnes (2003:4) states that "Zimbabwe was graduating far too many students whose exam results were not good enough for university entrance, but who had no practical skills and therefore could not find employment". The Zimbabwe Schools Examinations Council (ZIMSEC) churns out thousands of O-level (ordinary level) and A-level (advanced level) graduates twice a year, who find themselves without employment as they lack the necessary skills to be employed. The dreams of these youths are to join universities and become degree holders, since this is perceived as an achievement in the community (Mahuyu & Makochekanwa, 2020; Myende, 2023). Because of the strict entry requirements at universities, however, most youths are left stranded and their only option is to enrol at a polytechnic where the entry requirements are more relaxed (South Africa, 2012:15). Despite this, polytechnics in Zimbabwe face the problem of low enrolment. Lack of information on the benefits of courses offered at polytechnics, negative attitudes towards them, fear of not getting employed, and lack of resources hinder prospective students from enrolling at these institutions (Chimbi & Jita, 2023; Nkosi, 2013).

The main purpose of polytechnics is to furnish students with life-long skills required to execute prolific work and research (Mahuyu & Makochekanwa, 2020; Vezi, 2017). A study by Mahuyu and

Makochekanwa (2020) revealed that it is not only students who have negative attitudes towards polytechnics, but that the general populace, political leaders, educationalists, proprietors, and parents also do not appreciate their significance. Research by Anyanwale *et al.* (2023) explored the attitudes of secondary school students' towards TVET subjects in Lesotho. It was discovered that school authorities did not encourage their students to enrol in TVET courses, and that family and community influences had a substantial causal relationship on attitudes towards these places of learning. The attitudes that students hold towards a polytechnic will influence their liking or disliking of it, as well as their decision to enrol there or not. Various researchers (e.g. Tum, 1996; Hong *et al*., 2022) have proposed that the main reason for students' negative attitudes towards polytechnics is their continuous poor ranking compared to universities.

Student attitudes towards polytechnics have also been greatly influenced by low entry requirements (Mohamed, 2022). The entry requirements for Zimbabwean polytechnics are that a prospective student needs only five ordinary level passes, whilst universities require passes at advanced level (Garwe & Thohlana, 2019). This has resulted in students viewing polytechnics as institutions for those who would not have excelled academically (Mahuyu & Makochekanwa, 2020; Ceza, 2008), and as the only option for students who fail to gain entry to a university. Most students have also held negative attitudes towards polytechnics for fear of not being gainfully employed after training (Tlapana & Myeki, 2020; Nkosi, 2013). This fear has mainly been raised because most industries in Zimbabwe have shut down due to economic pressures; as a result, many polytechnic graduates go to South Africa or Botswana seeking job opportunities, and the situation has been worsened by the low-level wages earned in the country.

Polytechnic training is often also considered as not so glamorous compared to university training, and diploma holders from polytechnics are not as respected in society as compared to university degree holders (Muriithi, 2013; Chipfakacha, 2019). According to research by Shereni (2020), the opinions of students who attended polytechnics in Zimbabwe differed; some students liked the practical lessons, while others felt that the institutions lacked the academic rigour of universities and did not provide enough theoretical knowledge. Like any other organisation, polytechnics need to use IMC to help alter student attitudes towards them. Adane (2021) notes that IMC affects customers in three ways: directly through their use of the product or service; indirectly through their reflection of or interpretation of the messages around them; and indirectly through unofficial communications that they receive from networks and other trustworthy information sources. The researcher of this study is of the view that IMC is a significant tool that can be used by marketers in polytechnics to maintain or alter attitudes held by potential students, their parents, and other stakeholders. Blakeman (2023) and Kayode (2014) note that consumer attitudes can be changed by employing the following tactics: using reliable and credible sources; repeating the message to ensure reinforcement and prevent habituation; and, whenever practical, using two-way communication, since feedback can reflect attitude change and its direction, which can be accomplished through IMC.

The next section focuses specifically on gaining a deeper understanding of polytechnics in Zimbabwe.

1.2.1 Polytechnics in Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, polytechnics are state-run institutions under the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development (MHTESTD). They fall under the Tertiary Education Programmes (TEP) sector, while universities fall under the Higher Education (HE) sector. Polytechnics were established to fill the nation's skills gap and offer relevant practical skills to address the demands of the market (MHTESTD, 2019). Mahuyu and Makochekanwa (2020) note that polytechnics provide practical training in skills development programmes that are needed in the country for economic development. In Zimbabwe, the first polytechnic opened its doors in 1988, and ten more have since followed, spread all around the nation in every province (Chisiri *et al.*, 2023; Garwe, 2015). The rate of unemployment in the country has resulted in polytechnics being mandated to train graduates who will start up their own businesses and create employment (Mawonedzo & Banda, 2024). TVET training was designed to reduce skilled worker shortages, key to eradicating the growing rate of unemployment in the country (Chimbi & Jita 2023; Nherera, 1999). Polytechnic education is considered an alternative to university education, which is more affordable and accessible to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Because polytechnics compete not only among themselves, but also with universities, they need to enhance their marketing strategies to become more competitive.

Polytechnic courses range from National Foundation Certificates (NFC), National Certificates (NC), National Diplomas (ND), and Higher National Diplomas (HND). Polytechnics offer a range of courses in various fields, including engineering, arts, agriculture, health, and business studies (MHTESTD, 2019). These courses are designed to provide students with practical skills that are relevant to the needs of industry and prepare them for employment or entrepreneurship. The target market for polytechnics is students who would have attained five O-level passes including English and Mathematics. Polytechnic students are trade tested at the end of their courses and are awarded journeyman cards to signify that they are specialists or artisans in their area of specialisation. The Zimbabwean government has recognised the importance of polytechnic education, and as such, it has developed a national strategy for tertiary education, 2019-2023, which aims to address some of the sector's challenges and promote the growth and development of polytechnics (MHTESTD, 2019).

1.2.2 Mutare Polytechnic

Mutare Polytechnic, which was established in 1948 as a satellite institution of Salisbury Polytechnic, is regarded as one of the top polytechnics in Zimbabwe (mutarepolytechnic, 2021). It is well known for its hands-on approach infused with the heritage-based philosophy of using locally-available resources together with Education 5.0, which emphasises teaching, research, innovation, and industrialisation. These learning pillars flourish in converting institutional concepts into concrete goods that enhance growth and service provision both inside and beyond the institution. The institution has around 3,500 students enrolled in different courses offered by Zimbabwe's Higher Education Council (HEXCO), including those in engineering, applied arts and sciences, commerce, civil and construction, information management systems, and research education enterprise development (mutarepolytechnic, 2021). At the National Certificate, National Diploma, and Higher National Diploma levels, these courses are provided full- or part-time on a block release basis. Because of its advantageous geographical position and easy availability of abundant raw timber resources, Mutare Polytechnic is able to conduct distinct studies that are difficult to duplicate anywhere else in the country.

The institution also has strong links with industry, providing work-related learning opportunities for students. Mutare Polytechnic values cultural diversity and is open to creating partnerships in its training, such as with the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Services and the Zimbabwe government's Climate Change Management Department National Ozone Unit (mutarepolytechnic, 2021). The college encourages extra-curricular activities, promoting collaboration and cooperation to create industry-ready, globally competitive students. Every programme is created with industry needs in mind.

1.3 Research problem

Lack of information and poor IMC implementation are among the factors that have resulted in negative attitudes towards polytechnics by potential students (Ajilore & Babalola, 2021; Vezi, 2016ii). The survival of polytechnics is thus partly based on how well they implement IMC to change these negative attitudes, and address the lack of information available to prospective students and their parents (Altman, 2010). Enrolment figures for polytechnics have remained low over the years (Chikwature & Oyedele, 2016), and lower than those of universities (Chisiri *et al*., 2023; Du Plessis, 2012).

The author has work experience of ten years in polytechnics, and has discovered that little is known about the courses offered there. In Zimbabwe, Mahuyu and Makochekanwa (2020) observed that the low enrolment rate of students in TVET institutions, inadequate facilities and resources allocated to their operations, low employability of graduates, and the mismatch between the curricula and industry demands all contributed to parents' negative attitudes towards TVET. Meanwhile in South Africa, both parents and students fear that students will not find suitable, well-paid jobs if they enrol at polytechnics (Chinyamurindi, 2023; Nkosi, 2013).

Eulalia (2011:04) notes that "all high school leavers and those still in secondary school should be persuaded to enrol with polytechnics". However, most school leavers dream of being university degree holders (Maluleka, 2011; Mahuyu & Makochekanwa, 2020), leaving polytechnics with the difficult task of convincing school leavers to enrol there. Between 2015 and 2017, the then Zimbabwean Minister of HTESTD, Professor Jonathan Moyo (*The Herald*, 26 July 2016), recommended that polytechnics be converted to universities because of poor enrolment. He argued that the government did not have sufficient funds to continue funding polytechnics. He encouraged them to review their marketing strategies to ensure prospective students had the relevant information, in order to change the negative attitudes that prospective students had towards them. This is in line with the findings of Gole (2022) and Gibbs and Murphy (2009), who note that the necessity for marketing communication strategies in higher education arises from the fact that most marketing practices in higher education (HE) have not been developed and lack a strategic direction.

Although some studies have been carried out on polytechnics in Zimbabwe (Shizha & Kariwo, 2011; Mahuyu & Makochekanwa, 2020; Mabhanda, 2017; 2020; Shereni, 2020), to the best knowledge of this research, no study has been done so far on the influence of IMC on students' attitudes towards polytechnics in Zimbabwe. In light of the aforementioned, the goal of this investigation is o examine the influence of IMC on students' attitudes towards a polytechnic in Zimbabwe. It addresses an identified gap in knowledge, as "there is little academic research that specifically looks at how IMC improves higher education marketing outcomes" (Huebner 2020:4). Gordon-Isasi, Narvaiza and Gibaja (2021) also highlight the need for more empirical research on IMC in the HE sector, and especially research that

explores the perspectives of stakeholders other than managers/practitioners. There being little such research on IMC in HEIs (Bennell *et al.*, 1999; Porcu *et al.,* 2019), especially in Africa at large and in Zimbabwe specifically, this research was worth pursuing.

1.4 Research questions

The key question that this research sought to address was:

1. How does IMC influence students' attitudes towards Mutare Polytechnic?

The sub-questions were:

1.1 How does advertising influence students' attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings, and intentions) towards Mutare Polytechnic?

1.2 How does personal selling influence students' attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings, and intentions) towards Mutare Polytechnic?

1.3 How does direct marketing influence students' attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings, and intentions) towards Mutare Polytechnic?

1.4 How does public relations influence students' attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings, and intentions) towards Mutare Polytechnic?

1.5 How does digital marketing influence students' attitudes (beliefs, feelings, and intentions) towards Mutare Polytechnic?

The second research question was:

2. What is an appropriate IMC framework/model to be used by Mutare Polytechnic?

1.5 Research objectives

The key objective was:

1. To explore the influence of IMC on students' attitudes towards Mutare Polytechnic

The sub-objectives were:

1.1 To examine the influence of advertising on students' attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings, and intentions) towards Mutare Polytechnic

1.2 To explore the influence of personal selling on students'attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings, and intentions) towards Mutare Polytechnic

1.3 To understand the influence of direct marketing on students'attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings, and intentions) towards Mutare Polytechnic

1.4 To understand the influence of public relations on students' attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings, and intentions) towards Mutare Polytechnic

1.5 To explore the influence of digital marketing on students' attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings, and intentions) towards Mutare Polytechnic

The second objective was:

2. To develop a framework/model for IMC to be used by Mutare Polytechnic

1.6 Importance of this research

The results of this investigation may provide guidance to polytechnics on the significance to students of various promotional tools, as well as how these tools could be effectively utilised to positively alter students' attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings, and intentions) towards polytechnics to increase enrolment. The government of Zimbabwe and the MHTESTD could also find the outcomes of this study beneficial. As indicated previously, Huebner (2020:4) notes that "there is little academic research that specifically looks at how IMC improves higher education marketing outcomes". The outcomes of this study may be used to inform policy development and decision-making related to TVET education, which will help policymakers to develop policies and initiatives that meet the needs of students and the broader community. The largest anticipated contribution of this research is the construction of a framework on how IMC may be best used to positively influence students' attitudes towards polytechnics in Zimbabwe. This research can also be used as a foundation for further research on students' attitudes towards polytechnics in Zimbabwe and elsewhere. Understanding the influence of IMC on student attitudes can help institutions to develop effective marketing strategies, ultimately leading to improved student outcomes and a more prosperous society.

1.7 Methodology

A cross-sectional, exploratory, case study design and qualitative approach were adopted in this research. Convenience sampling was used to select 48 registered first-year students from the six divisions at Mutare Polytechnic, as well as five marketing department staff from the same institution. Data was collected remotely, using Zoom-mediated focus groups for the students and interviews on the same digital platform for the staff. In addition, the institution's marketing communications and institutional documents were examined. Data from focus groups and interviews was analysed using thematic analysis, whereby key themes were identified in text, and content analysis was used to analyse the institution's marketing communications and documents. The methodology is fully explained and justified in Chapter Three.

1.8 Delimitations of the study

This research study focuses on IMC within the marketing communication sub-field of the broad field of organisational communication. The research focused on polytechnics and did not include other types of higher education institutions. It was limited to a case study of a single institution (Mutare Polytechnic) in Zimbabwe, to enable deep exploration of the phenomenon in a specific context.

The student participants in the study were limited to first-year registered students who resided on campus during the period of data collection, and who were in the age group of 18-25 years only. First-year students were selected because they would have recently enrolled at Mutare Polytechnic and their enrolment experiences would therefore still be fresh in their minds. The decision to focus on students residing on campus was motivated by the need for participants to have uninterrupted internet and power access, since the country has been facing long hours of power cuts.

1.9 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework on which this study was based draws on the the following constructs: IMC tools, the Hierachy of Effects (HoE) model, and attitudes.

Mogaji *et al*. (2020) found that HEIs must implement marketing activities to remain competitive. IMC is a marketing strategy used to plan, develop, organise, implement, assess, and evaluate brand communication strategies for consumers, suppliers, potential clients, purchasers, and other stakeholders of organisations (Lasi 2021). IMC involves combining various marketing communications tools to function in a coordinated and economical way. The IMC tools focused on in this study are advertising, personal selling, direct marketing, public relations, and digital marketing. Camilleri (2020) notes that it is important for HEIs to implement IMC activities so that they maintain a good market position in the minds of potential students. IMC may also be used by HEIs to create awareness of the courses that they offer, and to improve relationships with a range of stakeholders, including students (Camilleri, 2020). In this study, the selected IMC tools were explored in relation to their individual and combined influence on student attitudes towards a polytechnic in Zimabwe.

The HoE model examines how consumer decisions to buy particular brands and items are influenced by the communication effects employed by an organisation. From raising consumer awareness to the ultimate action of buying behaviour, the model outlines a sequence of steps that marketers should take. Cognition, affect, and behaviour/conative stages are highlighted in the model (Lavidge and Steinner, 1961; Rasoolimanesh *et al*., 2024). Milhart (2012) states that the hierarchy of effects model is useful when assessing the influence of IMC elements on consumer behaviour (attitudes, perception, motivation, and learning), which is influenced by market research and segmentation. Each component of the marketing mix (product, price, distribution, and marketing communications) has communication potential and is reflected in the hierarchy of effects model. This can be used as an intermediate measure of the effectiveness of communication.

By comprehending issues such as the psychological nature of how consumers perceive information, and evaluate and choose among various options, as well as the manner in which marketers may modify and enhance their promotional efforts and tactics to better connect with the consumer, consumer research helps businesses and organisations to improve their marketing strategies. Because the success of businesses greatly depends on their ability to attract and keep customers, understanding consumers has become a priority in the business world (Kotler, 2000). To weigh the influence of IMC on consumer behaviour, it is important to study consumer responses to the integrated communication sent by all the IMC elements. In this study, the hierarchy of effects model was used to help explore student responses to the IMC messages of the selected polytechnic. To plan effective actions at every step of the response hierarchy, companies must understand at which stage their target consumers are (Rasoolimanesh *et al*., 2024) and choose the best IMC tool to use at each stage, thus increasing the chances of purchase. It is against this background that this study adopted the hierarchy of effects model.

This study focuses on student attitudes towards a polytechnic. Attitudes are likes or dislikes that an individual has towards an object. Studies (Mahuyu & Makochekanwa, 2020; Makochekanwa & Mahuyu, 2021; Tlapana & Myeki, 2020) have shown that students have negative attitudes towards TVET institutions. In Zimbabwe, negative attitudes towards TVET institutions have been linked to family, society, and the fear of not getting employment after training (Mahuyu & Makochekanwa (2020); in Lesotho, there is a view that students from poor societies and those who will not have done well at school enrol at these institutions (Ayanwale *et al*. 2023); in Tanzania, school students believe in professions like

medicine, law, and accountancy (Kilasa *et al.* 2023). It is the aim of this study to explore the role of IMC in positively influencing student attitudes towards polytechnics in Zimbabwe.

The conceptual framework created for this research, which is presented in the next chapter, views IMC tools as the independent variable, the HoE as a mediating variable, and attitudes as the dependant variable. The framework clarifies the relationship between the IMC tools and student attitudes towards Mutare Polytechnic. It also guides the review of different studies on IMC and student attitudes in the higher education sector. The constructs used in the conceptual framework are discussed further in Chapter Two. Through this conceptual framework, this study aims to fully explain the influence of IMC on student attitudes towards a polytechnic in Zimbabwe.

1.10 Definition of key terms

For easy reference, a number of key terms used in the thesis are briefly defined below. These concepts are elaborated upon in the next chapter.

- **Promotional mix –** The promotional mix refers to the combination of communication means that a business uses to directly reach out to its intended consumers and execute the promotion process (Aniebiet & Unyime, 2023). Public relations, word-of-mouth marketing, web/interactive marketing, direct marketing, event/sponsorships, sales promotion, advertising, and personal selling are some of the promotional mix tools. Because of their ability to draw in and hold on to consumers, these tools help businesses to build their clientele, and consequently, their return on investment (Kotler, 2007). The promotional mix is used to attract, engage, and convert buyers and the target audience.
- **Integrated marketing communications -** "a concept of marketing communications planning that recognizes the added value of a comprehensive plan that evaluates the strategic roles of a variety of communication disciplines, for example, general advertising, personal selling, direct response, sales promotion, and public relations and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency, and maximum communications impact" (American Association of Advertising Agencies, 2014:9). Integrated marketing communications are beneficial to an organisation because they combine various promotional strategies to create a single, customer-focused, sales message.
- **Advertising –** this is "any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods, or services by an identified sponsor" (Kotler & Keller, 2009:510). The goals of advertising efforts and messaging are to raise awareness of an organisation's products and services, as well as the advantages that they offer and the places where visitors can find them.
- **Personal selling –** is "selling that involves a face-to-face interaction with the customer" (AMA, 2017:8). Personal selling allows a sales person to engage directly with the intended audience, and is a powerful tool for raising awareness, building lasting relationships and a way for company personnel to function as public relations representatives, projecting credibility for the brand and its offerings.
- **Direct marketing –** is the sum "total of activities by which the seller, in effecting the exchange of goods and services with the buyer, directs efforts to a target audience using one or more media (direct selling, direct mail, telemarketing, direct-action advertising, catalogue selling, cable selling, etc.) for the purpose of soliciting a response by phone, mail, or personal visit from a prospect or customer" (American Marketing Association, 2017:1). Direct marketing is contacting

customers directly via consumer-directed channels, and advertising goods or services without the use of marketing intermediaries.

- **Public relations (PR) –** is "the management function that focuses on the relationships and communications that individuals and organisations have with other groups (called publics) for the purpose of creating mutual goodwill" (Arens *et al*., 2011:635). The primary goals of PR efforts are to establish and maintain profitable connections with clients and to maintain solid ties with all stakeholders inside the organisation. PR supports an organisation's marketing initiatives by influencing people's perceptions of the brand or product.
- **Digital marketing –** is "any promotional message that is sent via a medium that uses digital technology" (Koekemoer, 2014:8). Digital marketing gives advertising staff less expensive options to reach their clients in addition to doing innumerable marketing tasks, including demand development, transaction processing, and order fulfilment.
- **Attitude -** is "acquired inclination to behave in a consistently positive or opposed manner with respect to a certain object" in the context of consumer behavior (Lutz *et al*., 1983:533). Positive or negative attitudes have the power to shape a person's actions, convictions, and feelings. These are intricate concepts that are influenced by many different things, such as individual experiences, personal beliefs, and social standards.

1.11 Structure of thesis

The thesis is structured as set out below:

- Chapter 1 (Introduction and background) provides the background to the study and sets out the problem statement, research objectives, research questions, and delimitations. It makes a case for the importance of and need for the study.
- Chapter 2 (Literature review) discusses the literature and theories pertinent to the study, including those related to IMC and attitudes. The conceptual framework is also presented and discussed.
- Chapter 3 (Research methodology) discusses and justifies the methodology used during the research. It addresses aspects such as the research philosophy, approach, and design, as well as sampling, data collection methods, data analysis, and interpretation. Data quality and ethical considerations are also covered.
- Chapter 4 (Data analysis and findings) presents the findings arising from an analysis of the data, which was collected through Zoom-mediated focus groups and interviews, along with documents. NVivo 11 software was used as a central databank, and helped with coding the themes and conceptions that developed from the focus groups, interviews, and institutional documents.
- Chapter 5 (Discussion of findings, conclusions, and recommendations) discusses the findings in relation to the literature, conceptual framework, and research questions. It synthesises understandings from the previous chapter to arrive at the study's conclusions and recommendations. The limitations of the study are also acknowledged.

1.12 Conclusion

Understanding the influence of IMC on student attitudes towards polytechnics is essential, as positive attitudes can lead to increased enrolment and retention rates, while negative attitudes can harm the reputation and image of these institutions. The background and rationale section of this chapter provided an overview of IMC use in the higher education sector, mainly in Africa. The section also looked at the importance of TVET education, especially in developing the practical skills of students in developing

countries, where unemployment levels are high. This chapter also revealed that the competitive The HE environment in Zimbabwe has had a negative impact on the enrolment figures of polytechnics in relation to universities.

The research problem section highlighted the low enrolment rate of students in TVET institutions, which may be linked to negative attitudes towards such institutions. This chapter also revealed that there were no existing studies on the influence of IMC on student attitudes towards polytechnics in Zimbabwe, thus supporting the need for this study. The research objectives and questions were addressed and the importance of the study was outlined, both for the institution under study and potentially for policy development in Zimbabwe. The study was delimited to first-year registered students at Mutare Polytechnic, aged 18-25, with recent enrollment experiences. Key terms used in the thesis were defined and the structure of the thesis was outlined. The next chapter presents a review of literature and theories pertinent to the study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The goal of this study is to examine the influence of integrated marketing communications (IMC) on student attitudes towards Mutare Polytechnic. The study focuses on IMC within the marketing communication sub-field of the broad field of organisational communication.

A company's communication system is considered to be its lifeblood. Communication is the methodical daily task of generating, distributing, understanding, and exchange of information (Owusu & Mardani, 2020). Organisational communication encompasses several modes of communication within and between groups and units within an organisation, such as written or spoken communication (Kitemu, Sang, & Wachira, 2024). Every company's daily operations depend heavily on effective organisational communication. According to Heath (2020) and Philip (2013), an organisation is deemed to be dead without effective organisational communication.

Firms acknowledge that marketing is a vital commercial activity that is essential in their attempts to obtain an edge over competitors in the business environment. According to Charma et al. (2022), marketing is defined as a human practice focused on achieving needs and wants through trade procedures or "the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners and society at large" (AMA, 2021). One of the strategies used by marketers is the marketing mix or 4Ps (price, product, promotion, and place). For this study, promotion (also known as marketing communication) is the focus. Promotion relates to communication by an organisation in an attempt to attract, engage, and convert buyers and a target audience. At its core, marketing communication revolve around communication (Kitchen & Schultz, 2003). According to Schultz (2003), businesses should view communication as the primary edge of the marketing strategy over competitors. Every company uses a variety of forms of marketing communication to advertise their products and services, regardless of whether they are service providers or business-to-business enterprises.

The growing significance of communication in marketing is demonstrated by modern marketing strategies such as IMC, which is more concerned with brand communication and external messaging, whereas organisational communication focuses on internal procedures and stakeholder management (Kitchen & Schutz, 2003). To succeed, though, both need to use effective, dependable, and transparent communication techniques. By fostering team alignment and a corporate culture that supports its marketing goals, effective organisational communication can improve IMC initiatives (Schultz & Kitchen, 2000).

This chapter examines the existing literature related to IMC and its influence on student attitudes towards polytechnics in Zimbabwe. The chapter begins with a discussion of IMC, focusing on aspects such as its definition, evolution, and benefits. The marketing communication mix is discussed, with a focus on those communication tools pertinent to the study. The chapter looks at the benefits of IMC, outlines the communication process, and discusses the implemention models that marketers may use, as well as the steps involved in developing an effective IMC programme. The study also discusses IMC in different contexts, i.e. IMC and business performance, IMC and consumer purchase intentions, and IMC in relation

to emerging economies in Africa. Higher education in Africa and IMC practices in HEIs are covered. Various response hierarchy models are reviewed and justification for using the hierarchy of effects model is provided. The literature on attitudes is also reviewed. The conceptual framework is then presented and discussed.

2.2 Integrated marketing communications (IMC)

According to Blakeman (2023), integrated marketing communications (IMC) is the successful integration throughout the promotional mix leading to a unified strategy. Similarly, Odongo and Ronald (2021) view IMC as the process of combining various promotional strategies to create a single, customer-focused, sales message, while Khizar *et al*. (2016) note that IMC calls for systematic coordination of all sales programmes, in particular media, advertisements, sales promotions, personal selling, public relations, and other forms of communication, in order to have a constant, unified message. Accordingly, IMC is officially regarded as a strategy for managing the marketing communication activities of a firm (Qasem *et al*., 2022).

The promotional mix is one of the 'four Ps' (4Ps) of the marketing mix (the others being product, price, and place) (Blakemen, 2023). In the 1950s, Neil Borden pioneered the idea of the marketing mix (4Ps) to emphasise the concept that the marketer is the mixer of these elements. Ndofirepi *et al*. (2023) point out that the marketing mix elements form the primary pillars on which marketing plans are grounded; in the context of services, such as education, additional Ps (i.e. people, process, and physical evidence) are also pertinent. By combining these marketing mix elements in the marketing activities, marketers create a platform for the exchange process between the organisation and the buyer (Wu *et al*., 2022). Successful implementation of the 4Ps results in a marketing model which organisations may use to solve key marketing problems, thus its traditional approach (Wu *et al*., 2022). Regardless of its challenges, the marketing mix is being used in the service sector, hence its extension into the 7Ps, including "people i.e. staff, physical evidence i.e. buildings and uniforms, and processes i.e. methods of producing, delivering and consuming the service" (Smith & Taylor 2004:9). In this study, however, the focus is on promotion.

The promotional mix is also known as the integrated marketing communication mix or the IMC mix (Blakeman, 2023). The IMC mix is a mixture of all the promotional communication tools that an institution may use to accomplish its marketing objectives (Blakeman, 2023). Smith and Taylor (2004:9) note that "the marketing communications mix should include employees and customers since word of mouth can be extremely effective among their network". The relationship between IMC and the 7Ps is presented in Figure 2-1.

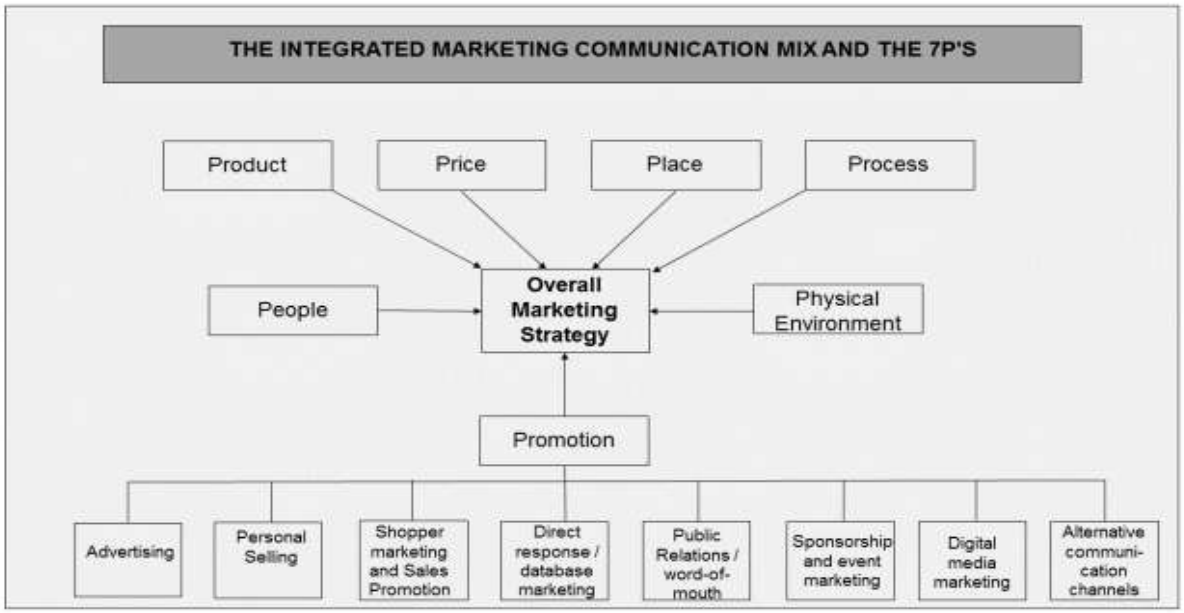

Figure 2-1: The IMC Mix and the 7Ps
Source: Koekemoer (2011:7)

2.2.1 Integrated marketing communications defined

Changing market conditions and technological advancements have led to a gradual change in IMC. Daszkiewicz and Pukas (2019) note that, while there are numerous comparable definitions of IMC, these primarily show that it is a strategic approach in which a firm actively combines and synchronises its several communication channels to convey a distinct, consistent, and persuasive image of the organisation. These definitions are not anything less than the administration of corporate communications, which creates long-lasting relations with all interested parties. Kitchen, Porcu and Barrio-Carcia (2017:694) postulate IMC 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". According to this notion, firms should integrate their marketing operations to achieve consistent messages and the greatest effect.

With the same view, 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". From Blakeman's (2023) assertion, it is apparent that IMC is a cross-functional practice for forming and nurturing lucrative associations with clients and other interested parties, by tactically monitoring all communications referred to these groups and inspiring a data-driven, determined interchange. According to Kliatchko and Uttamchandani (2024), in terms of application, IMC is a management and communication change in the creation, coordination, and distribution of messages. IMC comprises a

combination of communication disciplines to provide transparency, uniformity, and optimum interaction effect, according to Juska (2021).

Mudzanani (2018) asserts that IMC is an extensive, integrated, institution-wide activity to convey crucial information in an approach that targeted consumers will notice, comprehend, and react to. Mudzanani (2018) also notes that effective IMC implementation is contingent upon enough funding, vision, a plan of action, and the expertise of the staff. Moreover, Finne and Grönroos (2017:446) advise that "IMC must be customer centred" and note that "IMC is the consumer's combination of all the communications 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' (2017:446) 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 relation to HEIs, the key objective of IMC will be to directly influence and affect student behaviour. To determine the effectiveness of communication, marketers must assess if their target audience has understood the message and check whether the behaviour of the consumers is changing towards the desired response. Consumers are the starting point for all IMC activities; this is reinforced by Wu *et al.* (2022) who emphasise that every marketing communications activity must revolve around the consumer.

To guarantee message consistency and better communication impact, organisations should create a brand promise via scheduled communications, and should be capable to have an impact on the services provided, products offered, and unforeseen communications. Koekemoer (2014) asserts that the requirement for a unified approach to marketing was prompted by inconsistent and disorganised marketing efforts, since several marketing departments within a business carried out distinct but non-synergistic tasks. The outcome was disorganised marketing activities, which were not effective, and less than optimum results were achieved. This resulted in an cohesive approach to marketing becoming the solution to accomplish the best results through coordinating the different marketing functions (Blakeman, 2023). The use of the communication mix tools (such as advertising, personal selling, public relations/publicity, digital marketing, and direct marketing) allows organisations to be competitive and to have an influence over consumers' attitudes (Yu, 2022).

IMC, as used in this study, is a strategic approach that combines and synchronises several communication channels to reflect a business's distinct, consistent, and persuasive image. It is a stakeholder-centered, interactive strategy that promotes ongoing communication and the development of successful, enduring partnerships. IMC is a customer-focused company strategy that uses information and communication technology breakthroughs to accomplish both tactical and strategic objectives. It includes designing, coordinating, and delivering messages to ensure transparency, uniformity, and the maximum possible interaction effect. The successful implementation of IMC requires a vision, personnel experience, an adequate budget, and a plan of action.

2.2.2 Evolution of IMC

The development from promotional mix management to an IMC perspective took place around 1990, following the publishing of the book *Integrated Marketing Communications* by Schultz, Tannenbaum and Lauterborn in 1993 (Daszkiewicz & Pukas, 2019). The drive towards the development of IMC commenced when marketers discovered the strategic advantage of coordinating all promotional tools rather than managing them independently (Blakeman, 2023). The motivation of market-driven businesses is to build and maintain long-term relationships with their clients. This has resulted in many companies recognising the need to synchronise their IMC efforts to achieve efficient and effective communications (Kayode, 2014). This has prompted marketers to modify the way they manage promotional tools in a coordinated way. This development resulted in a synergy between all the promotional tools, and achieving organisational objectives was made more accessible (Blakeman, 2023). "The IMC approach seeks to have a company's entire marketing and promotional activities project a consistent, unified image to the marketplace. It calls for a centralised messaging function so that everything a company says and does communicates a common theme and positioning" (Belch & Belch, 2012:10). Students' attitudes towards an institution's brand are shaped by a combination of the bundle of messages that they are exposed to through its IMC activities. Through the integration of an institution's communication efforts, duplication of messages can be avoided, and more efficient and effective programmes are developed (Du Plessis *et al.*, 2011). The adoption of IMC shows that institutions are adjusting to the changing needs and wants of students, as well as the changing technological environment.

2.2.3 The promotional mix: The tools for IMC

In the marketing mix, promotion is an essential component that attempts to inform, persuade, and influence the targeted audience to make a purchase (Aniebiet & Unyime, 2023). The promotional mix refers to the combination of various communication tools that a company uses to carry out the promotion process and engage with its target audience. These tools include digital marketing, direct marketing, sales promotion, event sponsorships, public relations, word-of-mouth marketing, and personal selling (Aniebiet & Unyime, 2023). In order to thrive in the fiercely competitive marketing landscape, businesses of all sizes must employ promotional mix tactics to draw in and hold onto customers, fostering long-term connections and performance growth.

The American Association of Advertising Agencies (2014:9) defined IMC as "a concept of marketing communications planning that recognizes the added value of a comprehensive plan that evaluates the strategic roles of a variety of communication disciplines for example, general advertising, personal selling, direct response, sales promotion, and public relations and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency, and maximum communications impact". Accordingly, "institutions should create an integrated branding and marketing approach that ties together the digital online and offline worlds" (Hanover Research, 2015:4). Marketers must be able to identify the importance of using IMC to reach out to their actual and potential customers. Table 2-1 shows seven IMC tools, each of which has a distinct function in accomplishing different goals.

In his study on the global marketing landscape of HEIs, Camilleri (2020) revealed that the promotional mix promoted quality education. The study (Camilleri, 2020) also revealed that HEIs can foster collaboration with industry stakeholders as well as student mobility through IMC. Kerr and Keller (2017), in their paper on IMC education and digital disruption, benchmarked the progress of IMC education,

replicating Kerr's (2009) study. The findings emphasised the importance of IMC thinking as an integrator and digital marketing as a facilitator, focusing on content, customer service, and cross-functional planning. Abimbola *et al.* (2020) found that IMCs affected customer satisfaction in certain private universities in South-West Nigeria. In order to maintain and enhance their customer satisfaction record, the study suggested that private institutions focus more of their promotional efforts on public relations, web marketing, advertising, and service promotion, rather than on direct marketing (Abimbola *et al.*, 2020). Kango *et al.* (2021) studied promotion and college choice and found that, because of the growing, fierce rivalry among universities to attract new students, these institutions must perform well in their marketing initiatives. One such initiative is the creation of a positive brand through promotion, which can sway prospective students' decisions to enroll, as college decisions are heavily influenced by perceptions about education (Kango *et al*., 2021).

Table 2-1: Marketing Communication mix tools

Advertising	Sales promotion	Events & experiences	Public relations & publicity	Direct marketing	Digital marketing	Personal selling
- Print and broadcast ads - Reprints of ads - Packaging - Billboards - Cinema - Display signs - Brochures and booklets - POP displays	- Premiums and gifts - Rebates - Sampling - Low-interest financing - Fairs and trade shows - Trade-in allowances - Exhibits - Demonstrations -Continuity programmes -Tie-ins	-Sports - Entertainment - Festivals - Arts - Factory tours - Company museums - Street activities	- Press kits - Speeches - Seminars - Annual reports - Charitable donations - Publications - Community relations - Lobbying - Identity media - Company magazine	- Catalogues - Mailing - Telemarketing - Electronic shopping - TV shopping - Fax	- E-mail - Company blogs - Web sites - Chat room - Online customer review - Social media	- Sales presentations - Sales meetings - Incentive programms - Samples - Fairs and trade shows - Symposiums/ career days

Source: Kotler and Keller (2012:478)

This study explored the influence of IMC on student attitudes towards Mutare Polytechnic in Zimbabwe, focusing on the use of various IMC tools (public relations, digital marketing, advertising, personal selling, direct marketing), the channels utilised for messaging, and the audience, in order to improve recruitment. The goal of this study was to produce useful insights that can assist marketing efforts to reduce negative attitudes and increase the appeal of this institution.

The next section introduces the five selected IMC tools that were focused on in this study: advertising, personal selling, direct marketing, public relations, and digital marketing. These promotional tools and their pertinence to polytechnics are clearly outlined.

2.2.3.1 Advertising

De Pelsmacker *et al.* (2021) defines advertising as the adoption of different paid media by a company or individual to accomplish the goal of promotion, by transmitting its goods, services, or ideas. Advertising is a critical component of marketing that involves the creation and dissemination of messages aimed at promoting products or services to target audiences (Yu *et al.*, 2019). Aniebiet & Unyime (2023) state that the focal purpose of adverts is to make the target audience know the availability of the product/service and to influence their behaviour, awareness, and buying attitude. Large numbers of the target population may be reached by advertising messages that raise awareness, persuade, alter behaviour, and remind consumers about the company's offerings. According to Aniebiet and Unyime (2023), advertising is used to promote items by disseminating them through various media, such as print and electronic. Etuk and Emeny (2022) and Boone and Kurtz (2001) note that businesses must promote themselves to reach out to potential customers, entice them to buy their products, and explain their advantages.

Based on the definitions above, theis study views advertising as involving the use of various paid media for promotion. It seeks to inform and remind customers about a company's services, change behaviour, persuade, and increase awareness. Advertising is utilised to reach a big portion of the target population.

Aniebiet and Unyime's (2023) study on the use of the service promotional mix in the hotel sector, found that advertising campaigns should be increased on the internet, since many people are now using the platform. Another study by Salameh *et al.* (2022) examined the impact of internet advertisements on customer fulfilment, mediated by an understanding of brands, in the Multan region of Pakistan. The research found that the majority of businesses' clients were pleased with the presentation of an organisation's online advertisements. The study also found out that, due to increased information technology, internet adverts and buying were playing a key role in sustaining an organisation's position in the market. Findings from the study also revealed that online advertising directly affected consumer behaviour (Salameh *et al.*, 2022). In the context of education, Ali (2021) investigated the factors that influenced first-year students' decisions to attend Komar University in Iraq. The results showed that the university's advertisements on social media and television, that had been produced by its internal production unit, were more successful in attracting attention than those produced by outside advertising agencies. The university should thus use its own unit to produce more eye-catching advertisements due to its low cost and high effectiveness, and should concentrate its promotional efforts on well-liked social media and television platforms (Ali, 2021).

The ability to impact a large number of individuals at once, and the inclusion of straightforward statements that help recipients grasp a product or service without asking questions, are two of the main benefits of advertisements (Yu, 2022). By setting brands apart from their rivals, advertising can provide them with a competitive advantage. It is a relatively cheap way to engage customers, and because it does so, it is advantageous for the launch of new brands, boosting consumer demand for established goods, and developing the foundation of brands in developed markets (Yu, 2022). Each campaign is a long-term investment in the brand's image and increases brand value (Branding Strategy Insider, 2022). Advertising enhances a brand's value by changing consumer perceptions. Other tools of a marketing communication mix are aided and supplemented by advertising. The main disadvantages of advertising are that there is no room for response and that the advertiser cannot interact directly with the public.

Consumer replies cannot change the advertising message, and advertisements typically do not encourage buyers to make an immediate purchase (Yu, 2022). Additionally, it costs money because advertisements use mass media tools such as print, broadcast, and display media, all of which require someone to pay for the time or space in which they are run.

i. Television advertising

Television (TV) advertising is the most efficient form of mass communication (Zim media study, 2022). According to research by Geopoll (2021), 68% of Zimbabweans own a functioning TV. Every TV station reaches a sizable audience every day, regardless of the company's target market (Entrepreneur, 2017). Because the average person watches TV for three to four hours per day, TV has replaced other sources of information for the majority of consumers (Chron, 2017). The TV is a medium with effect because of the combination of noises, emotions, moving images, and colours, guaranteeing that the message is delivered in a potent and persuading way (Blakeman, 2023; Adesanoye, 2018). As such, TV advertisements are a great approach to reach a wide audience. The ability of TV commercials to potentially draw enormous numbers of customers is their major advantage. They are particularly helpful for a product introduction or re-launch because of the facility for demonstration that they offer, their high audience effect, and their capacity to simultaneously reach substantial portions of the population (Adesanoye, 2018).

However, there are some drawbacks to TV advertising, including the rising costs of producing and airing television programmes for advertising, the brief duration of television advertisements, and the potential for them to get lost in the clutter of other commercials (Adesanoye, 2018). Given the plentiful quantity of programmes available nowadays, advertising during one show does not ensure that it will reach a more diverse or uniform audience (Blakeman, 2023; Shimp, 2010). Due to the abundance of TV shows, viewers' attention is divided since they rapidly become bored after being exposed to excessive amounts of advertising, which causes them to switch channels (Adesanoye, 2018). It may be challenging to deliver the intended message in TV commercials because they are often broadcast for only 20 to 30 seconds.

Figure 2-2 shows the results of a survey carried out by Geopoll (2021) comparing the channels that Zimbabwean consumers watch.

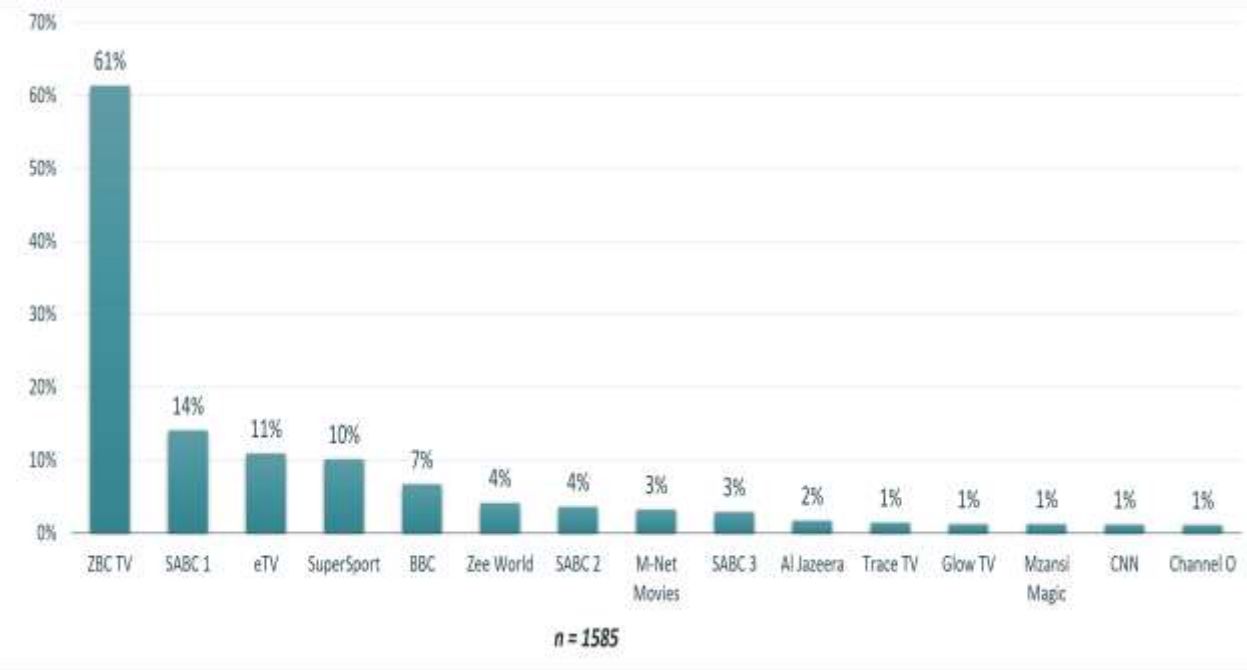

Figure 2-2: TV viewership in Zimbabwe
Source: Geopoll (2021)

From Figure 2-2 above, ZBC TV was the most viewed channel with 61% viewership in November 2021.

ii. Magazine advertising

When marketers want to reach a certain target population, magazines are an excellent tool. The fact that magazine advertisements feature higher-quality photographs than newspapers or direct mail advertisements, is their main advantage (Blakeman, 2023; Adesanoye, 2018). Additionally, magazines frequently focus on particular target audiences. Because magazines are used over time, particularly in waiting rooms, magazine advertisements are also more durable than the ones in newspapers because they last for a longer time.

The primary drawbacks of magazine advertisements are that they take time to compile and that they might only be available in certain areas (Blakeman, 2023; Entrepreneur, 2017; Adesanoye, 2018). Because the target audience may simply ignore the pages or be unable to recognise advertisements due to the abundance of these, some publications compile all the advertisements into a single section, which may be detrimental to the brand (Entrepreneur, 2017).

Figure 2-3 shows the most popular magazines among Zimbabweans.

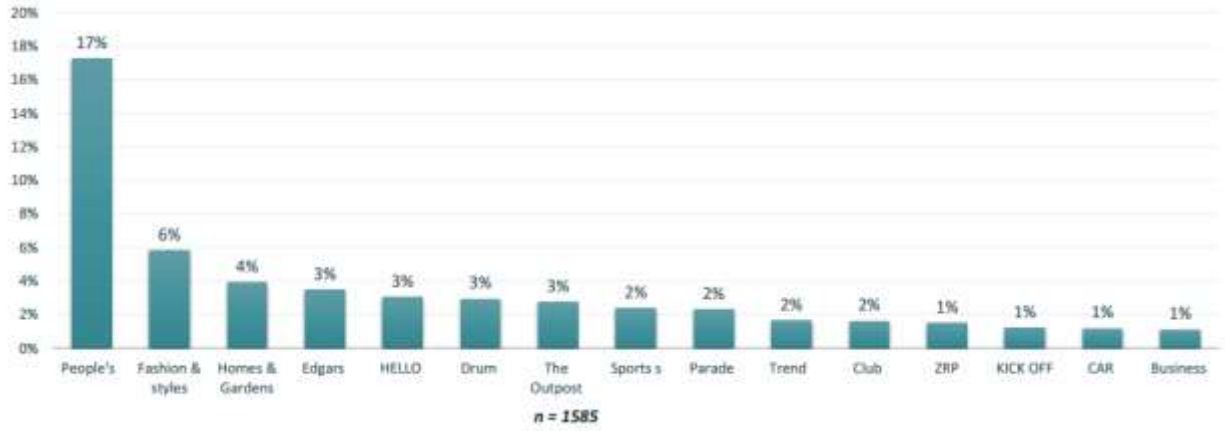

Figure 2-3: Magazine readership in Zimbabwe
Source: Geopoll (2021)

From the survey carried out by Geopoll (2021), it is clear that *People* magazine had the highest readership with 17%, followed by *Fashion and Style* with 6%.

iii. Newspaper advertising

Because older demographic groups read newspapers more regularly than the younger generation, newspaper advertising is a good way to reach a large number of parents and guardians (Blakeman, 2023; Entrepreneur, 2017). In Zimbabwe, the most popular newspapers are *The Herald*, *The Sunday Times*, and *The News Day* (Business Environment for News Media in Zimbabwe, 2021), as shown in Figure 2-4.

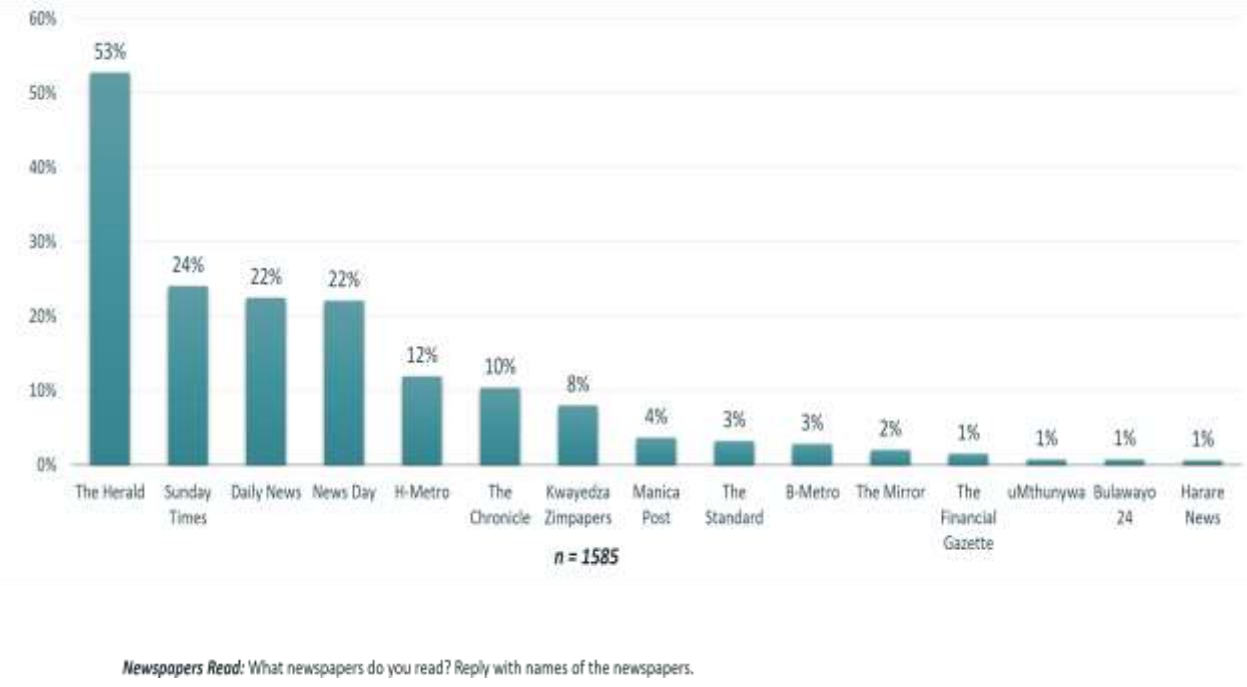

Figure 2-4: Newspaper readership in Zimbabwe
Source: Geopoll (2021)

From Figure 2-4 above, *The Herald* readership was highest at 53%, followed by the *Sunday Times* with 24%, and the *News Day* and *Daily News*, which each had 22%.

The main benefit of newspaper advertising for businesses is that it has a broad audience. Any business can use newspapers to advertise one-time sales events and reach both current and potential customers (Blakeman, 2023; Adesanoye, 2018). However, selectivity (i.e. placing advertising in the section/s most relevant to the target audience) is made possible by the availability of numerous sections (such as sports, lifestyle, and others). Newspaper advertisements also have restrictions or downsides. One of them is a decline of readers in the younger demographic as a result of the widespread use of the Internet (Geopoll, 2021). Another is that the text and image quality in newspaper advertisements is inferior to that in magazine ones, and static images make it difficult to clearly demonstrate the product or service being offered (Adesanoye, 2018). Additionally, print advertisements in newspapers may have less of an impact on the target audience due to the short shelf lives of the latter (Blakeman, 2023; Adesanoye, 2018).

iv. Radio advertising

The radio is one of the strongest media channels that organisations may use. Now that the majority of people in Zimbabwe are using smart phones, access to the internet and the radio has also increased, thereby allowing advertisements to reach both new and traditional audiences (Business Environment for News Media in Zimbabwe, 2021). Geopoll (2021) results show that 46% of radio listeners received such programmes on mobile devices, while 34% listened to them on traditional radio devices.

Many individuals listen to the radio at home, at work, in their automobiles, and in the grocery stores for long periods every day (Blakeman, 2023; Adesanoye, 2018). Every radio station caters to a particular audience, and once a company has determined the demographics of its target market, the radio becomes an easy way to deliver and serve the company's advertisement message to their target audiences (Blakeman, 2023; Entrepreneur, 2017). From this study’s observation, most polytechnics have been advertising on Radio Zimbabwe (which is more popular with the older generation) and Star FM (which is popular with youngsters). This is supported by research findings by Geopoll (2021), which show that Radio Zimbabwe had the most subscribers in the country (with an average of 195,000 listeners), followed by Star FM (119,000). With the start of the COVID-19 epidemic, 49% of radio listeners increased their overall radio intake, 55% increased their knowledge sources, and 24% stated that local community radio was their primary source of news (Geopoll, 2021).

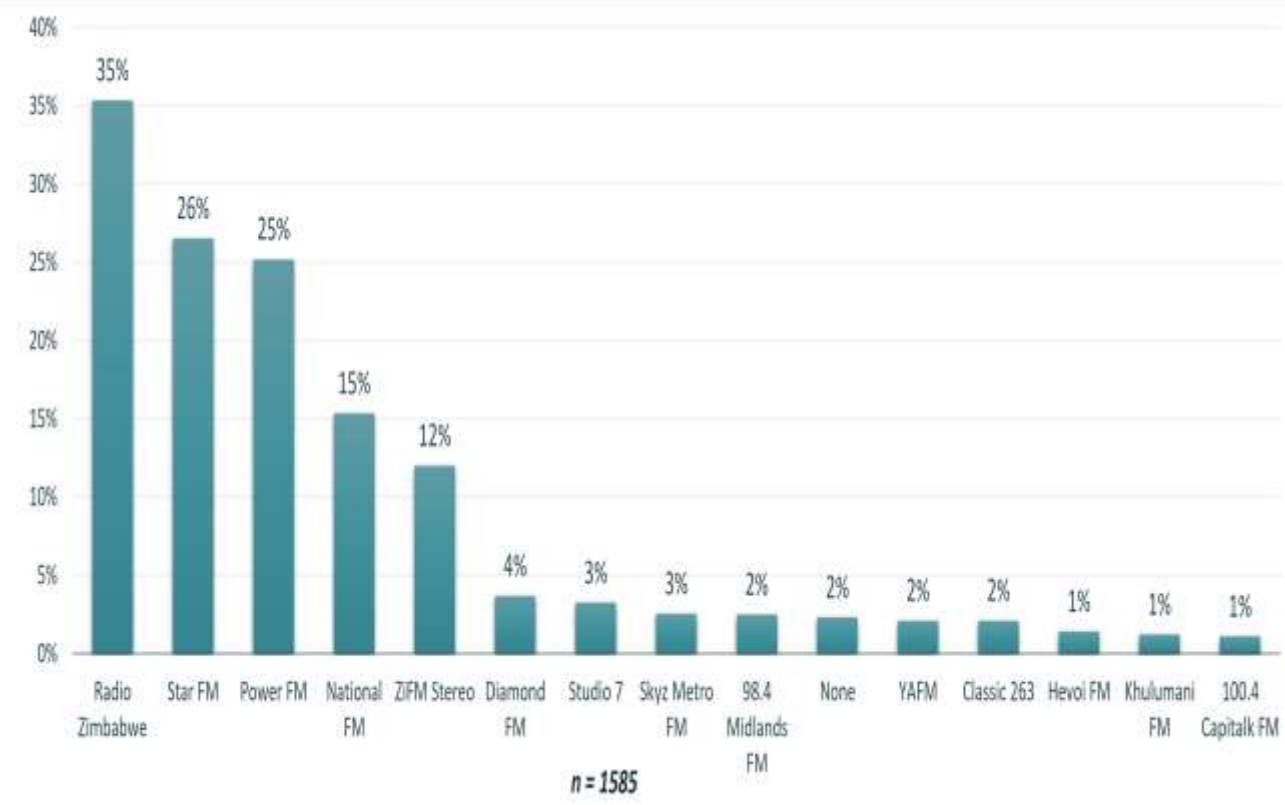

Figure 2-5: Radio listenership
Source: Geopoll (2021)

From Figure 2-5 above, Radio Zimbabwe has the highest listenership with 35%, followed by Star FM with 26%, while Diamond FM (a Mutare-based radio station) had 4% listenership.

The primary advantages that businesses can obtain from radio commercials are that they may reach an extensive range of audiences, and that they are excellent at raising brand awareness among different demographics (Blakeman, 2023; Adesanoye, 2018). Since radio advertisements are less expensive than other IMC strategies (Blakeman, 2023), Pickton and Broderick's (2005:113) claim that "producing and airing a radio advertisement is also relatively inexpensive, it is an effective technique to raise brand awareness in a short period of time" is supported.

There are also disadvantages of radio commercials, though. It is necessary to air advertisements multiple times in order to get extensive exposure and have a significant impact, due to the intangibility of radio advertisements and the fact that advertisers are restricted to audio. Another issue is that it is typically impossible to reach all listeners at once because radio stations are segmented into groups depending on demographics (Blakeman, 2023; Adesanoye, 2018).

v. Outdoor advertising

For organisations, outdoor advertising is an effective method of promoting the brand in specific geographic areas. An outdoor sign is frequently the first thing a prospective customer sees, so it must attract attention, be appropriately bright, and contain sufficient information on a company's

products and services (Vidiadari, 2020). Outdoor advertising is classified into two types: static outdoor advertising (such as billboards and posters) and moving outdoor advertising (Mwilongo, 2022). When done correctly, billboards and posters are extremely eye-catching, and prospective customers do not need to do anything to gain access to them. Billboards and banners can be set up at sporting occasions, along highways, in bus and train stations, and so on (Mwilongo, 2022). Transit advertising can be found on transportation (e.g. college cars and buses) or during sporting events, such as those run by the Tertiary Sports Association (TESA).

The capacity to reach a large and diverse audience, high contact frequency at a low cost and geographic selectivity are the main advantages of outdoor advertising (Anani, 2020). For instance, places surrounding a polytechnic could host similar advertising. Mwilongo (2022) adds that, because billboards are positioned in areas where lots of people can see them, they are effective at raising brand awareness, grabbing attention, and enhancing people's memory of them. The main disadvantages include property destruction (for example, posters may be stolen or damaged by vagrants), and that the message must be brief because, on average, people only look at billboards for three seconds (Entrepreneur, 2017).

2.2.3.2 Personal selling

According to Blakeman (2023), personal selling is a type of interpersonal communication in which a seller tries to help and/or convince potential customers to purchase the products or services of the business, or to take an action based on a concept. Personal selling is a promotional mix instrument used to intensify sales volumes through face-to-face interaction (Belch & Belch, 2018). Engaging directly with the intended audience is a powerful tool for raising awareness and for company personnel to function as public relations representatives, projecting credibility for the brand and its offerings (Blakeman, 2023; Akpoghiran, 2016). Personal selling is a prevalent IMC instrument utilised by both big and small companies to inform, create awareness, and persuade prospective and existing customers to purchase the company's offering (Juska, 2021; Belch & Belch, 2018). It can be classified into door-to-door selling, exhibition selling, retail selling, industrial selling, and telephone selling (Abel & Rugami, 2020; Adesanoye, 2018). Blakeman (2023) and Pawar (2014) posit that personal selling relies more on word-of-mouth, and is a reliable instrument in changing the buying behaviour of consumers. Keller (2022) explains that personal selling must be used in collaboration with other communication mix tools to be effective. Compared to advertising, personal selling is more concerned with building warm, long-lasting relationships between the organisation and the client (Abel & Rugami, 2020; Adesanoye, 2018).

This study notes that a firm can use personal selling to persuade potential clients to purchase its goods or services through various types of in-person interactions. Personal selling is a powerful tool for altering consumer purchasing habits and creating enduring relationships with clients, which should be utilised in concert with other communication mix tools for optimum effectiveness.

Suraya and Saragih (2019) examined the effects of advertising, sales promotion, and personal selling on university student enrolment. Using a descriptive qualitative methodology, they gathered information through student and marketing staff interviews at Darma Persada University in Indonesia. The study found that the university most frequently used personal selling tactics (academic exhibitions and career days), which were crucial in raising students' awareness of the university and increasing enrolment figures. According to Aprianto and Candraningrum's (2019) research, personal selling significantly

influences consumers' interest in making a purchase. This indicates that when a salesperson effectively communicates information that a customer needs, it can genuinely pique the customer's interest in making a purchase.

Many companies are spending big budgets each year for sales training because, according to Farinloye *et al.* (2020), personal selling may not be effective if salespeople lack the necessary skills and knowledge to address customer needs. This is supported by Ellen (2021), whose study found that better product knowledge gained through training significantly improved Ethiopian electronics retailers' sales performance. A study by Omar and Wahleed (2020), which found a strong positive association between salesperson product knowledge and the marketing effectiveness of small-scale bakeries in Jordan, also aligns with this viewpoint. Sales people are trained on the SPIN method, which uses four types of questions (situation, problem, implication, and need pay-off) to form lasting relations with customers and prospective ones (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Salespersons are also trained on how to go through the personal selling process. According to Peter and Donnelly (2001), the personal selling process comprises six elements which are shown in Figure 2-6 below. The six personal selling steps are: prospecting and evaluating, pre-approach, presenting and demonstrating, overcoming criticism, closing, and follow-up.

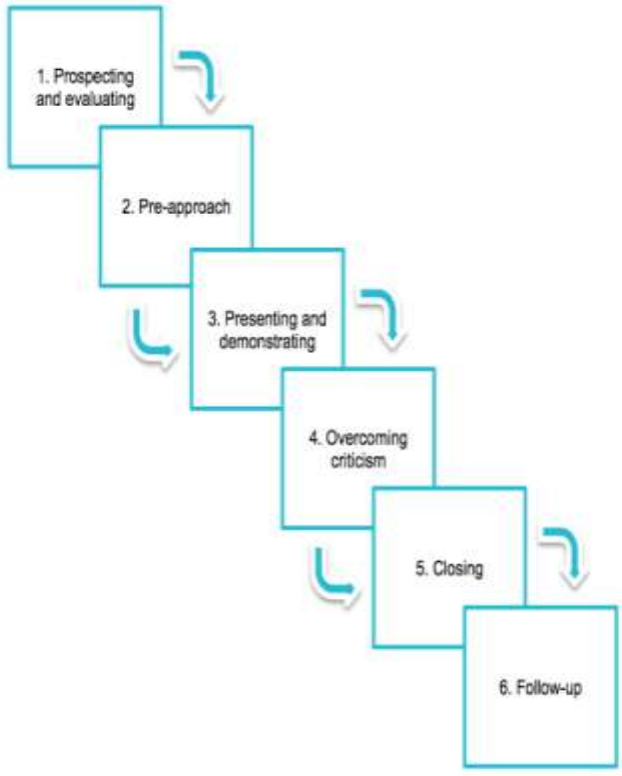

Figure 2-6: Six steps of personal selling
Source: Peter and Donnelly (2001:150)

Prospecting and evaluating can take place in a variety of settings, including through demonstrations, displays, trade fairs, and symposiums (Orasme, 2017). These days, almost all institutions prospect for new potential students and maintain existing ones through various strategies (Arevalo, 2021). Prior to

actually approaching actual and potential clients, the institution must "first acknowledge the buying process, then determine how best to approach the client" (Kotler & Keller, 2011: 525). The sales representative will try to determine the customers' needs during the presentation and demonstrations so as to meet these, by articulating the service features and benefits (Pickton & Broderick, 2005). Following the exhibition/display, the prospective customer might express concerns about the services offered, which the institution's representatives must address, and for which the most effective method is to take a positive approach (Pickton and Broderick, 2005). The main types of exhibitions that institutions may be involved in are public exhibitions and trade fairs. Public exhibitions (e.g. symposium) are geared toward consumers, whereas trade fairs (e.g. the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair) are geared toward professional groups. The sales representative may request clarification from the buyer, or convince the buyer to purchase the product first (Orasmae, 2017). When it comes to closing a deal, sales representatives have several options. The sales representative can help the prospective client with the order contract, enquire how much of the product is needed, and give the colour alternatives available. Follow-up is the final stage and it is important in ensuring the customer is happy. When the customer is content, it becomes easier to get their feedback (Blakeman, 2023; Pickton & Broderick, 2005). In the case of this current study, the institution will get feedback from current students and former ones, so that they gain positive word of mouth appraisals which may help in the recruitment process, while ex-students may also donate funds to the institution.

Personal selling has benefits and drawbacks, but its key benefits include being able to showcase a product or service to a specific market niche and raising brand awareness (Cromhout, 2020). Because personal selling necessitates interpersonal communication, such as through exhibitions, this presents the chance to network with potential clients, foster relationships with current ones, and get immediate feedback from them (Floor & Van Raiij, 2011; Cromhout, 2020). Personal contact enables sales professionals to instantly adapt their messages during customer interactions, making it extremely adaptable to the point where it enables the company's representatives to customise their presentations to the demands of the customers (Blakeman, 2023). It is also a good approach to recommend a company's goods or services to customers who might not be familiar with them (Orasmae, 2017). Personal selling has many associated costs, however; for example, according to Adesanoye (2018), keeping and training a skilled sales team comes at a hefty expense. Personal selling takes a lot of time and only a small number of clients can be handled at once (Blakeman, 2023; Adesanoye, 2018).

2.2.3.3 Public relations and publicity

Kotler *et al*. (2017) define public relations (PR) as using unpaid media to spread good brand messaging to potential customers, while it is defined by Aniebiet and Unyime (2023) as a variety of tactics aimed at improving the public perception of an organisation or product messaging, with a focus on businesses, government, media, employees, and customers. Aniebiet and Unyime (2023) add that PR involves carefully thought-out programmes, policies, and initiatives by organisations to build peace, approval, and credibility with the community. Orasmäe (2017) observes that the main purpose of PR activities is to build and sustain gainful relationships with customers, while upholding strong ones with all organisational stakeholders. By shaping how individuals feel regarding the brand or product, PR helps an organisation's marketing activities (Aniebiet & Unyime, 2023). PR activities are usually associated with lower costs compared to other promotional methods because there are no direct media expenses involved as compared to other forms of IMC (Ekhaguer, 2021). Successful execution of an IMC programme in an organisation usually results from the amalgamation of the marketing and PR functions in single, unified,

message activities (Aniebiet & Unyime, 2023). However, Kotler and Armstrong (2011) note that PR is the least-used IMC tool, only serving as a supplement to the other tools. PR has proved to be helpful in increasing brand knowledge and acceptance between target groups (Ekhaguer, 2021). Ekhguer (2021) states that PR is critical for establishing third-party trust and credibility in brands, goods, and services. Press releases, specialty media, individual approach, demonstrators, brochures, and leaflets are common forms of PR which a company can use when launching a new product or service.

As understood in this study, PR is a strategic tool used to protect a firm's reputation and spread brand messaging. Programmes, policies, and initiatives targeted at different stakeholders, including workers, customers, corporations, the government, and the media, are included as forms of PR. Public relations often has lower expenses than other promotional methods and helps organisations to maintain solid relationships with stakeholders and customers. A cohesive message action that integrates marketing and PR tasks is often the hallmark of successful PR implementation. Despite its significance, public relations is the IMC instrument that is used the least (Camilleri, 2020).

A study by Aniebiet and Unyime (2023), on service promotion mix strategies and marketing performance of indigenous hotels in Nigeria, found that PR adoption resulted in improved marketing performance and that events and sponsorship activities are necessary to showcase an organisation's brand. Anani-Bossman's (2021) study of Ghana's public relations industry found that PR in Ghana is typically administered at the technician level rather than at the managerial one, while being constrained by national cultural norms. Evidence from Anani-Bossman's (2021) study suggests that PR plays a crucial part in establishing the reputation of an organisation.

The significance of public relations in IMC has unquestionably been proved. Building long-lasting affiliations with a many stakeholders, and sustaining the trustworthiness of the message, are two of its benefits (Ekhaguer, 2021). Institutions can effectively communicate with their target audiences through PR, and can also avoid the misunderstanding that communications that resemble advertisements might bring about (Ekhaguer, 2021). The company's overall communication and promotional strategy may benefit from PR in order to influence a larger audience, build brand awareness, and enhance its reputation and credibility (Ekhaguer, 2021). Another significant benefit of public relations is the improvement in brand credibility that occurs when an outsider speaks favourably about a company's brand (Ekhaguer, 2021).

There are several down sides to public relations too, the biggest of which is the lack of control over journalistic reporting (Hurley, 2022). It could also be challenging to assess the success of PR operations (Hurley, 2022). Organisations may keep track of the number of articles published and media mentions, but it may be difficult to gauge the impact on the target audience (Hurley, 2022). Another drawback is that there is no assurance that a company's efforts to write a news release, gather suitable photographs, and meet with reporters will result in their story being published. Businesses cannot completely control how the press portrays their industry or when and where their message appears, unlike with advertising (Hurley, 2022).

2.2.3.4 Direct marketing

According to Blakeman (2023) and Kotler *et al*. (2012), direct marketing involves reaching out to clients directly through consumer-directed channels and promoting products or services without the need for

marketing facilitators. Aniebiet and Unyime (2023) note that direct marketing is an interactive framework that employs a variety of communication channels in order to generate quantifiable reactions. The American Marketing Association (AMA, 2017:1) defines direct marketing as the "total of activities by which the seller, in effecting the exchange of goods and services with the buyer, directs efforts to a target audience using one or more media (direct selling, direct mail, telemarketing, direct-action advertising, catalogue selling, cable selling, etc.) for the purpose of soliciting a response by phone, mail, or personal visit from a prospect or customer". These definitions reflect similarities and consistence in purpose, i.e. linking directly with existing and potential clients to increase sales volumes and develop long-term customer relationships (Yu, 2022). The growth of direct marketing has mainly been influenced by marketers' inability to reach specific market segments with targeted communications because of the increase in populations (Yu, 2022; Adesanoye, 2018). In order to encourage purchases, direct marketing involves giving each customer information about a specific product that is suited to their needs (Chen *et al*., 2020). When a company wants to satisfy its customers' dreams, it can employ direct marketing to obtain personal information about their preferences, requirements, habits, and wishes (Blakeman, 2023; Adesanoye, 2018).

Based on the definitions above, direct marketing is understood in this study as an engaging approach that employs a variety of communication channels to offer goods and services directly to customers without the assistance of marketing intermediaries. Its objectives are to boost revenue and establish enduring relationships with clients. The capacity of marketers to access particular market segments as a result of population expansion has impacted the growth of direct marketing. It entails informing clients about goods that meet their demands and gathering private data about their inclinations, wants and needs.

Amadi and Mohammed's (2024) study on the connection between direct marketing and customer loyalty at Nigerian banks found that, to increase customer loyalty, banks should keep incorporating telemarketing into their operations through short dial codes and dedicated customer care lines. Banks should also advance their use of email marketing to provide customer support, advertise their products, and notify clients of important account transaction information (Amadi & Mohammed, 2024). Valens *et al.* (2020) investigated how direct marketing techniques affected consumer awareness and company performance of the Konka Group, and found that their usage of direct marketing practices enhanced client awareness and business performance, by encouraging repeat business and increasing the sales volume.

There are various advantages of direct marketing communication. Organisations may profit from direct marketing since it is an excellent technique to send a particular message to specified target groups (Yu, 2022). The primary reasons for using direct marketing communication include: cost savings because it reaches many people in the same target group at once; individual adaptation because messages are tailor-made to meet individual needs; the ability to foster endless relationships by staying in touch; and easy access to actual clients, such as through e-mails on tuition adjustments, in the case of this study (Yu, 2022). To properly apply direct marketing, marketing employees must learn more about current and future customers with the goal to customise messages to the demands of the target market; yet, some clients may be irritated if they get too many messages from an organisation (Yu, 2022). Another key advantage of direct marketing is the capacity to tailor communications to certain demographic groups. Advertisers can set reasonable targets and increase revenue on a limited budget, by targeting a specified population through online direct marketing (Robinson, 2022; Gaille, 2016). Direct marketing can help

businesses to stay in touch with their clients and add value to the relationship (Robinson, 2022). Marketing communication teams can simply measure direct response programmes.

Direct marketing provides many benefits, but also has drawbacks. It might be challenging for business messaging to stand out from the crowd when a consumer receives an overwhelming volume of promotional e-mails or postal mail (Robinson, 2022). Telemarketing is misconstrued as spam, whereas direct mail might be confused for junk mail. Customers who find advertising tactics uncomfortable may form a bad impression of a brand and become less inclined to make a purchase from them. When campaigns are less concentrated in frequency, this happens more frequently (Yu, 2022). Due to the fact that direct marketing is subject to privacy and data protection rules, marketers must make sure that the list of subscribers only contains individuals who have consented to receive marketing communications from the business (Yu, 2022).

2.2.3.5 Digital marketing

Advances in technology have resulted in the increased usage of digital marketing by companies in the 21st century. Aniebiet and Unyime (2023) define digital marketing as any online activity intended to captivate customers or potential ones, and either directly or indirectly increase awareness, enhance brand perception, or boost product sales. According to Blakeman (2023), digital marketing refers to any form of advertising sent using a digital technology platform. Examples of such platforms include the internet, m-marketing (mobile marketing), e-mails, blogs, podcasts, and social media marketing. Through digital marketing, interactional and customised messages are enabled. A Geopoll (2021) survey showed that 98.5% of Zimbabweans had mobile connectivity; 69% of internet users indicated that they had accessed the internet in the last 30 days using mobile phones, while only 15% had accessed it using a laptop or computer. Figure 2-7 below shows mobile, internet, and social media usage in Zimbabwe. The switch to digital channels is on the increase, although it is constrained by data costs (Business Environment for News Media in Zimbabwe, 2021).

Figure 2-7: Mobile, internet and social media usage
Source: Geopoll (2021)

Tavlaridou (2019) explains that companies that have digitalised their marketing activities have a competitive advantage, as consumers have 24/7 access to their products and services. Digital marketing performs countless marketing operations such as demand generation, transaction processing, and order fulfillment, while also offering advertising personnel less expensive ways to reach their clients (Tavlaridou, 2019). Internet advertising is almost mandatory for firms that do business outside their local area in the twenty-first century. Consumers are using the internet for much more than just entertainment; indeed, it assists consumers in many aspects of their lives, giving online promoters numerous opportunities to target their messages (Blakeman, 2023; Chron, 2017).

Individualisation and interactivity are two key features of digital marketing. Individualisation implies that netizens have direct authority over how much information they want to unlock, which results in commercials and campaigns of significance to them. Consumers can view anything they wish thanks to interactivity, which also gives businesses the opportunity to contact them (Aniebiet & Unyime, 2023). To reach their customers, internet advertisers employ a variety of advertising formats through e-mails, websites, social networks, and advertising search engines. Tavlaridou (2019) highlights that many organisations now have web pages explaining the goods and services that they offer, the functions and activities taking place, and the way in which they started their business; this attracts traffic to the website. It is important for marketers to keep track of the visitors to their page and the time spent there by them because this allows the marketer to make informed decisions in relation to website content (Chron, 2017). Internet users can communicate through social network platforms, which are well-known for their massive traffic and global recognition (Tavlaridou, 2019). Most users use them to connect with other users, exchange opinions, and promote ideas, amongst other things. Companies frequently use WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, Snapchat, TikTok, and other social media sites to expand their clientele, by developing advertising campaigns that result in significant earnings. These apps are regarded as the primary media platforms in the contemporary world, with annual user growth of more than 50% (Tavlaridou, 2019).

From this study's perspective, digital marketing provides businesses with a competitive advantage by allowing them to generate demand, handle transactions, and execute orders around the clock in a cost-effective way. In the twenty-first century, businesses rely on the internet to contact clients through a variety of plaforms, such as email, websites, social networks, and search engines. Individualisation and interactivity are fundamental elements of digital marketing, allowing businesses to successfully target and communicate with their customers.

The findings of a study by Hudders, De Jans, and De Veirman (2021) show that social media use influences buyer choices and drives volume to corporate digital channels. Another study by Kitetu (2022), on digital marketing communication tools and student enrolment at Kenya's private hospitality colleges, found that HEIs should hire capable digital managers to supervise communication strategies and review content prior to publication, in order to preserve quality and ensure the timely release of pertinent information. Kitetu (2022) also found that universities should use various digital communication platforms to disseminate information quickly to a large audience, and suggested that they effectively

develop infrastructure and resources (including Wi-Fi and IT-savvy personnel) to facilitate the incorporation of digital communication instruments. Online commercials have an impact on all potential learners, irrespective of their age, academic standing, sexual orientation, or income level (Bapat *et al.*, 2021). Olaleye, Ukpabi, and Mogaji (2020) explored the use of Facebook by Nigerian colleges in stakeholder communication, pointing out that little is known about the specific ways that universities in developing nations use social media.

The key advantages of digital marketing include its low cost, the use of targeted messaging and interactive media, and the availability of an immediate reaction (Al-Adamat *et al.*, 2023; Adesanoye, 2018). Another advantage is that it is utilised to quickly and efficiently gather a wealth of information about goods and services. In order for a company to have better results when promoting advertising campaigns, digital marketing also provides excellent alternatives for public targeting. These options can be applied to the numerous social and demographic characteristics of their members (Tavlaridou, 2019). Digital marketing yields quick results, especially when it comes to the intended audience for a certain advertising campaign. There is a good likelihood that a sizable audience will be covered because information on the internet is accessible from anywhere in the world at any time (Al-Adamat *et al*., 2023; Adesanoye, 2018). Internet businesses have the opportunity to have a two-way conversation with potential clients backed-up with a lot of information on their website (Tavlaridou, 2019). Another advantage is that companies may use websites to advertise their goods, educate the general public about the characteristics, benefits, and advantages of these goods, and generate online sales (Al-Adamat *et al.*, 2023; Adesanoye, 2018).

The drawbacks of digital marketing include the high cost of purchasing data in Zimbabwe. The nation's telecom regulatory body (POTRAZ) approved a 200% increase in data bundle prices in 2020, as a result of increased costs to telecommunications due to the country’s unfavourable foreign exchange rate; this has resulted in reduced traffic on webpages and is one of the main limitations of digital marketing in a developing country like Zimbabwe (Business Conditions for Zimbabwe's News Media, 2021). Another drawback of digital marketing is the country's ongoing power outages, which have a negative impact on all network systems and lead to low website traffic. The digital divide, or gap between people who are digitally literate and those who are digitally illiterate (Geopoll, 2021), is yet another challenge of digital marketing.

2.2.3.6 Sales promotions

Sales promotion has the immediate appeal and primary goal of making an instant sale (Blakeman, 2023). It provides the sales force, distributors, or final buyer with a bonus or reward for purchasing an organisation’s product (Aniebiet & Unyime, 2023; Belch & Belch, 2004). Many temporary rewards, such as samples, discounts, and premiums for customers, advertising and display allowances for traders, and contests for sales people, are offered to encourage the trial or purchase of products or services (Aniebiet & Unyime, 2023). Sales promotions are short term and primarily aim to attract new customers and increase sales (Blakeman, 2023). However, they can also be utilised as a component of a brand-building strategy to influence intervening variables such as values, reputation, perspectives, and intent to buy (Sinha, 2022).

This study views sales promotion as a short-term tactic used to attract customers and boost sales by providing temporary incentives. It can also be employed in a brand-building strategy to affect variables such as values, reputation, perceptions, and purchase intent.

Sinha and Verma (2020) indicate that sales promotion techniques (e.g. contests and competitions) may be used by marketers to influence attitudes, but that once these incentives are removed, the probability of repeat purchases is very low. Sawyer and Dickson (1984), using attribution theory, analysed how sales promotion may impact consumer attitude formation. They propose that "consumers who consistently purchase a brand because of a coupon or price-off deal may attribute their behavior to the external promotional incentive rather than to a favorable attitude toward the brand" (Sawyer & Dickson, 1984:122). Similarly, Raghubir (2004:181) indicates that "promotions can decrease perceptions of quality and result in a discounting of brand image". These findings indicate that using sales promotions may actually negatively influence brand attitudes in different scenarios. Sales promotion is an IMC tool that tends to not be used often in the tertiary context and is more of a short-term tool, whereas attitude change is something that needs to be addressed on a more sustained basis. It is against this background that sales promotions were not included in the study.

2.2.4 Benefits of integrated marketing communications

IMC is a strategy approach that combines numerous marketing channels and instruments to present a consistent and appealing message to target consumers. Some of the advantages of IMC are outlined below:

- **Increased brand awareness**: IMC can help to boost brand awareness by ensuring that the same message is transmitted across many channels, such as advertising, public relations, and internet marketing (Belch & Belch, 2018).

- **Message consistency**: Through approaching IMC in a holistic manner, organisations are likely to convey consistent messages to their target audiences. When organisations come up with consistent messages, and customers are constantly exposed to the same message, any negative thoughts towards a brand are likely to be erased (Soyinka, 2021). IMC can also help to ensure that messaging and branding are consistent across all marketing media, increasing communication effectiveness and decreasing misunderstanding among target audiences (Lamb *et al.*, 2020).

- **Customer relationship management**: IMC activities are also meant to boost relationships between the organisation and target audience. As the target audience is constantly exposed to the organisation's messages, the product becomes more credible; in the long run, customers become loyal to the brand and can even refer the product (Porcu *et al*., 2019).

- **Change customer attitudes and perception**: Fill (2002:80) notes that "marketing communication influences consumers moderately through how they reflect or interpret the messages around them, partially through their direct experience with or use of the merchandise, and partly through informal messages they receive from their networks". From the way

communication strategies present products and services to how potential customers perceive and interpret the messages in relation to rival items, all of these messages collectively stimulate the decision-making process (De Pelsmacker *et al*., 2021). IMC is crucial in influencing, maintaining, and differentiating brands, reminding and reassuring the target audience, and sustaining attitudes. It is also essential for maintaining or changing stakeholders', customers', and potential customers' attitudes about an organisation (Soyinka, 2021).

- **Attain a better market position**: Through IMC, an institution will attain a better position in the minds of the consumer, gain a superior sales performance, and reach high levels of customer satisfaction (Tresna *et al*., 2019). Because consumers are exposed to consistent messages from an organisation, the probability of it occupying their minds is very high, and chances of referrals and loyalty are also high (Tresna *et al*., 2019).

- **Competitive advantage**: Every company is engaged in conflict with rivals. However, a corporation might get a competitive edge over its rivals by successfully implementing IMC (Adesanoye, 2018). This is due to IMC's customer-centricity, especially as clients progress through the various stages of the purchasing process (Soyinka, 2021). Forming an ongoing dialogue and relationship with the clients would follow as the business talks with them and strengthens its image. Because of the link of loyalty established between them, it can keep clients out of the grasp of other businesses.

- **IMC creates a distinct brand identity and equity**: According Blakeman (2023) and Belch and Belch (2018), IMC lets a business create and maintain its brand identity in the marketplace. According to Juska (2021), establishing well-known brands with beneficial, powerful, and unique connections in the minds of customers, is essential to establishing and preserving brand identity and equity. Many elements, such as the name, logo, symbols, design, and actual customer experiences, are considered when attempting to create a successful brand. It represents the totality of consumer interactions with the brand. The function of IMC in this situation is to offer channels for companies to connect with their clients (Blakeman, 2023; Adesanoye, 2018). These channels are the numerous IMC strategies that the business uses.

- **Enhanced credibility and customer loyalty**: By conveying a consistent and cohesive message across many platforms, IMC can help to increase brand credibility by fostering target audiences' trust and confidence (Yu, 2022). By creating a strong and consistent brand image and strengthening links with target audiences, IMC can help businesses increase their customers' loyalty (Lamb *et al*., 2020).

The benefits of IMC suggest that it may be a practical way for organisations to connect with their target audiences and accomplish their marketing objectives. According to Soyinka (2021), firms must regard communication to be the primary competitive edge of marketing, while Blakeman (2023) asserts that marketers must understand the fundamental aspects of effective communication in order to communicate effectively. Therefore, it is essential to examine the communication process.

2.2.5 Communication process

Yu (2022) notes that communication is the interchange of information by persons using gestures and media. Often communicators fall short of their goals because the supposedly simple communication process is, frequently, exceedingly intricate. Kotler (2000) asserts that there are eight components of the marketing communication process: the sender, encoding, message, decoding, receiver, noise, response, and feedback.

- **Sender:** The person or organisation that starts the communication process. Lingling (2022) asserts that the sender must be fully aware of the message that they wish to deliver and the target audience.
- **Encoding**: The process of communicating a sender's thoughts and opinions through the use of words or other visual cues (Lingling, 2022).
- **Message (media):** The information that the sender wants to get to the recipient. According to Lingling (2022), the message must be concise, understandable, and pertinent to the requirements and interests of the recipient. A communication passes from the sender to the recipient through the media. According to Belch & Belch (2018), the channel (such as radio, newspapers, or billboards) should be chosen with the message and target audience in mind.
- **Decoding:** The receiver comprehends the symbolic form that was communicated by linking the sign, words, or images employed during communication (Lingling, 2023).
- **Receiver**: The person or organisation that receives the message from the sender. The receiver must be able to interpret the message and comprehend its meaning (Lingling, 2022).
- **Noise:** Whatever blocks, twists, or lowers the rate of transferring information to the target audience. Noise occurs at any point during the communication process (Lingling, 2023; Kotler, 2000).
- **Response:** The message's reception is determined by what the receiver does after seeing, hearing, or reading it (Lingling, 2023; Kotler, 2000). The reactions of recipients can vary from person to person. A recipient may opt to hold the information in their mind rather than reply or act right away.
- **Feedback:** The recipient's reaction to the communication. Feedback is essential for good communication (Lingling, 2022), because it gives the sender the ability to change their message or channel in reaction to the receiver's answer.

Figure 2-8 below depicts the communication process.

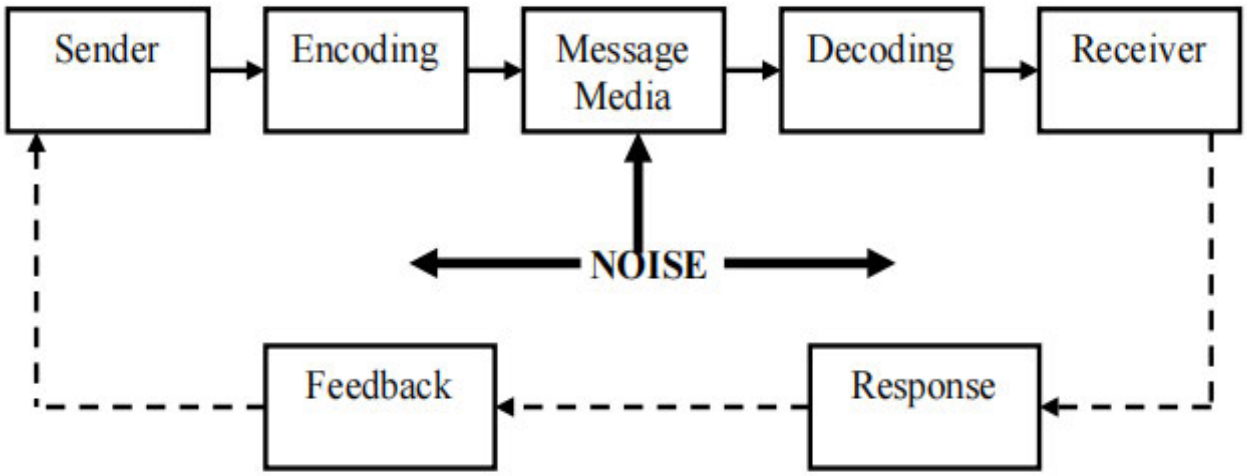

Figure 2-8: Communication process
Source: **Kotler (2000:542**)

The communication process is a complex and dynamic model that involves multiple components and factors. Effective communication requires careful planning, clear messages, appropriate channels, and feedback to ensure that the message is conveyed and understood as intended.

2.2.6 IMC implementation models

The academic community and the majority of marketing communication professionals concur that implementing the IMC method has some advantages for any organisation (Kehinde, 2009). The beneficial effect can be lower if the organisation does not know how IMC works and how such initiatives can be implemented. In order to develop a coherent and consistent brand message across all marketing communication platforms, an IMC strategy is used. To develop a coherent and compelling message that appeals to the target audience, the employment of IMC programmes entails the integration of multiple marketing communication tools and strategies. The following is a discussion of selected models that outline the steps that a company should take to establish an IMC strategy.

2.2.6.1 IMC model by Kliatchko

A model of IMC based on four pillars - stakeholders, content, channels, and results - was proposed by Kliatchko (2008). These pillars support the strategic management of brand communication initiatives. According to Kliatchko (2008), the pillars are crucial in the creation and execution of a new IMC programme. The four pillars are shown in Figure 2-9 below and explained thereafter.

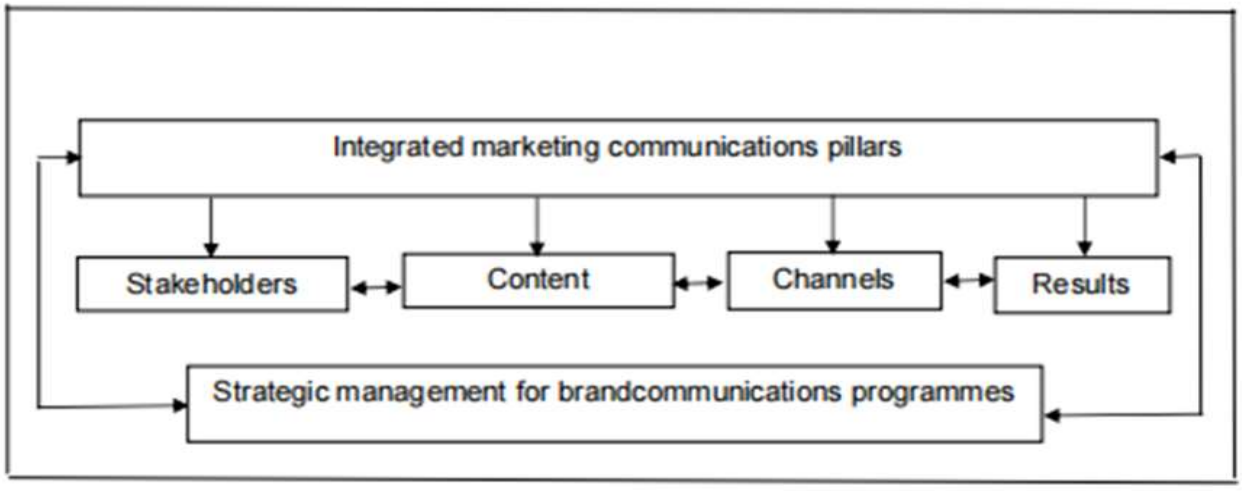

Figure 2-9: The four pillars of IMC
Source: Kliatchko (2008:145)

- **Stakeholders:** All clients who use a company's goods and/or services are stakeholders. Customers and prospects are external stakeholders, whereas employees and their managers are internal stakeholders (Kliatchko, 2008). IMC places its focus on the customer (Kliatchko, 2008); the focus of brand communication should be on meeting their communication needs. Delivering a consistent message at the many organisational contact points is a crucial part of the strategic management of brand communication activities.
- **Content:** Content is described as "messages or incentives" by Kliatchko (2008:147). According to Kliatcho (2008), successful content generation is based on understanding how consumers interact with a company's brand. Juska (2021) indicates that a brand helps consumers identify the creator of a product. It shields both the consumer and the manufacturer from rival products. Examples of communications include brand ideas, concepts, relationships, and various other qualities or opinions that marketers convey to customers. (Kliatchko, 2008). Incentives are temporary deals or gifts offered to clients in exchange for their business.
- **Channels:** Channels are all media and user interfaces that allow customers to interact with a company's brand (Kliatchko, 2008).
- **Results:** The IMC process must be assessed to determine whether communication goals are being met and where improvements can be made (Kliatchko, 2008).

The major strength of this model is that new media platforms continue to provide messages in real time, which has great promise because of user community interaction, response, and conversation among highly targeted audiences (Stengel, 2004). Another benefit of the model is that through listening and responding to stakeholder needs and wants, customer satisfaction is improved (Öhman & Sikblad, 2013).

One of the weaknesses of the four pillars model is that, although concentrating on stakeholders guarantees that all pertinent parties are considered, it may complicate the IMC process because the demands and expectations of many stakeholders (e.g. clients, staff members, investors) could result in competing priorities (Öhman & Sikblad, 2013). Another weakeness of the model is that it can be difficult to

continuously develop high-quality, interesting content, and the emphasis on content in IMC strategies can result in an excessive volume of it being generated, which can lead to content fatigue amongst viewers (Öhman & Sikblad, 2013).

2.2.6.2 IMC model by Pickton and Broderick

Pickton and Broderick (2005) depict the IMC mix architecture similarly, but give a new perspective by highlighting the parallels between the marketing communication platforms. Their model, shown in Figure 2-10, provides an insightful look at the operational aspects of IMC. It also illustrates how the functions of the various tools interact and demonstrates the different auxiliary components found in each of the functional categories. The sub-components of sales promotion include packaging, merchandising, displays, trade sales, and point-of-sale. PR includes branding, sponsorship, publicity, stakeholder communications, and lobbying. Trade sales, counter sales, direct sales, customer service, telemarketing, exhibitions, and other personal selling sub-components can all be visualised using the model. Advertising sub-categories include corporate/institutional advertising, direct response advertising, and product advertising.

Pickton and Broderick's (2005) IMC model recognises that many of these activities overlap. Some components of business communication (such as corporate advertising) might be referred to as PR or advertising. The promotion of sales and advertising (such as direct mail) are essential. Personal selling includes sales marketing, PR, and personal selling (such as at trade shows). The authors claim that, in addition to attempting to consider every possible circumstance, the IMC model highlights the essential marketing communication components that many other business experts have already noted.

An advantage of the approach is its ability to evaluate a company's present market position (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2010). Another strength of the model lies in the fact that promotional tools which were used successfully in previous campaigns, may be selected as tactical tools in order to help carry out current campaigns without any problems. The model is also more detailed as compared to Fill’s 2000 model (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2010).

The weaknesses of the model are that it does not significantly contribute to the stages of IMC implementation, while being far more thorough than Fill 2002's model (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2010). Therefore, rather than showing how an IMC strategy may be used across an organisation, the main goal of this model is to illustrate how a marketing communication campaign should be carried out, while there is little discussion of the order in which the various steps are supposed to occur or if they can be switched (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2010). Furthermore, because this model solely focusses on the execution of marketing communication campaigns, it fails to illustrate the long-term organisational applications of integrated marketing campaigns (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2010).

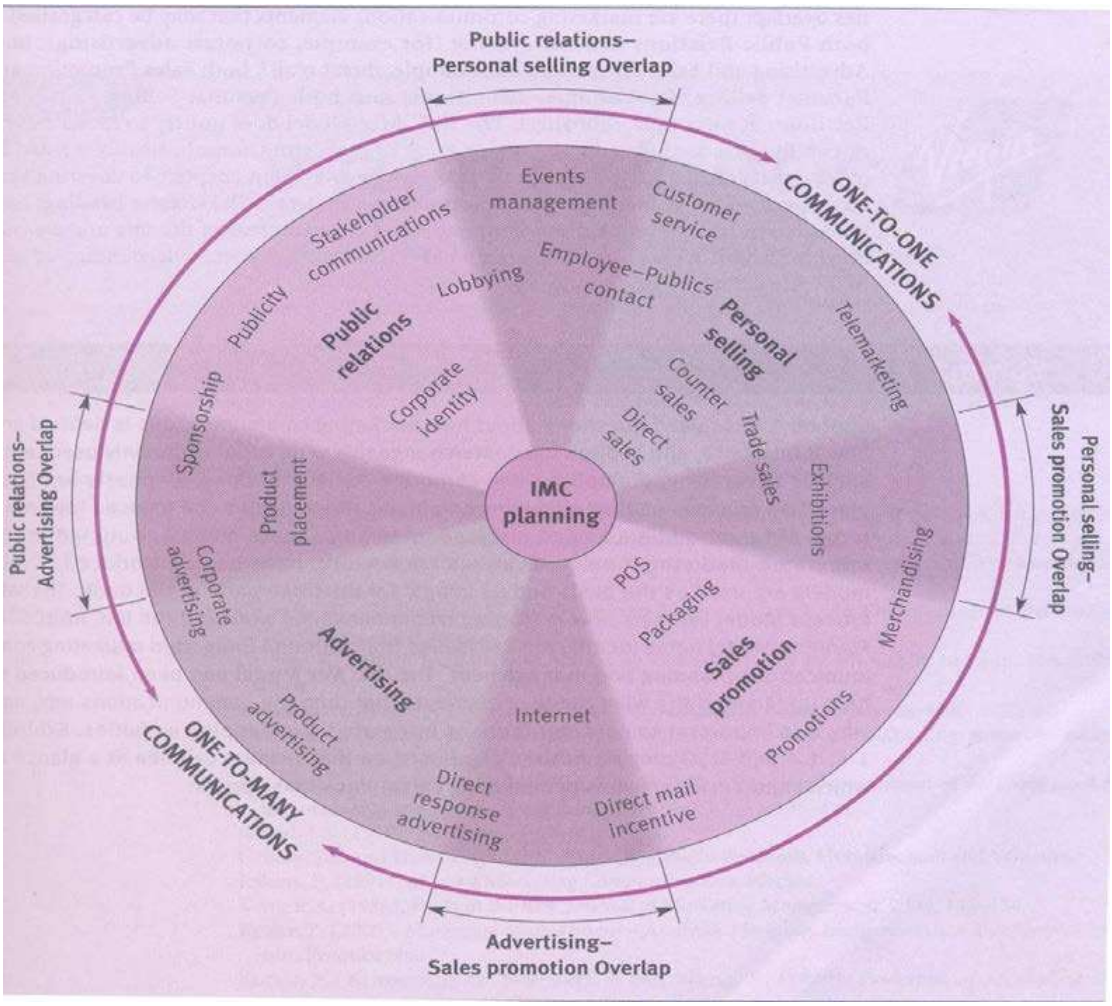

Figure 2-10: IMC model by Pickton and Broderick (2005)
Source: Pickton and Broderick (2005:542)

2.2.6.3 IMC model by Fill

The phases of this model are promotion coordination, functional coordination, cultural reform, and eventually, IMC (Fill, 2000). In the promotional coordination phase, the organisation ensures that all promotional materials are consistent and work well together. The second phase is functional coordination, during which the idea of internal marketing relationships is introduced to the various organisational units (Fill, 2000). The third phase, cultural reform, involves altering the organisation's beliefs and principles through staff training, so that they understand the need to implement IMC programmes. The fourth phase involves the company fully adopting the IMC programmes developed from the first three phases.

Kitchen and Burgmann (2010) note that the model is comprehensible, and forces marketers to ensure that promotional materials are thematically harmonised and consistent with one another. Additionally, if the entire organisation (e.g. corporate communications, finance, and human resources) is taught about IMC, the concept of 'internal marketing relationships' becomes successful (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2010). Therefore, in order for all employees to engage in a consumer oriented and driven manner, an IMC strategy necessitates a cultural shift of values and beliefs that must originate from within the organisation.

However, the challenge of accurately placing organisations at their respective stages in this specific model appears to be arduous (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2010). Moreover, in 2002, Fill conducted a critical evaluation of the existing IMC literature, which served as the model's original source rather than any empirical investigation (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2010).

The models presented above have the primary advantage of being straightforward and simply implementable by most businesses, including polytechnics.

2.2.7 Steps involved in developing an effective IMC programme

The effective implementation of an IMC programme requires a deep grasp of the target audience, the brand message, and the communication channels that are most effective for reaching and engaging the audience. In order to attain the required results, a clearly defined strategy that describes the goals, objectives and methods to be employed is also needed.

i. Identify the targeted audience

The target audience for the communication plan must be identified with clarity at the outset. According to Pawar (2014), businesses developing IMC should have a certain target audience in mind. This target audience may consist of present or potential clients, influencers, or any other specific group. What the organisation says, how it says it, where it says it, and to whom it says it are all influenced by its audience. According to Pawar (2014), an organisation can assess its target audience's loyalty to it or to rivals, as well as the extent to which people consume its goods and services, by having a clear description of its goal. The marketer must be well-versed with their target audience's demographic characteristics, such as age, education, income, gender, and geographic aspects, like where they live. This will help decide the most successful strategy to reach the target population (Caemmerer, 2009).

Because the target audience may have a specific understanding of the organisation's products, any attempt to integrate the promotional mix will be successful only if the message is matched with the target audience's demands (Blakeman, 2023). Pickton and Broderick (2005) pointed out that what appeals to one subset of consumers may not appeal to another, emphasising the importance of having a clear goal in mind when building IMC.

ii. Define the IMC objectives and goals

This is a key component of the IMC process. The accomplishment of successful integrated marketing objectives will be aided by the establishment of precise and clear objectives that are effectively conveyed throughout the organisation. When developing an IMC programme, an organisation may utilise one of three sorts of goals, according to Pawar (2014): Is the business trying to increase revenue, brand recognition, or the number of relationships it has with customers? These are questions that an IMC programme needs to be able to address. Once the organisation has outlined its aims and objectives, the marketing team may measure, assess, and manage the IMC (Helen, 2018).

iii. Craft a clear message

The organisation now develops the message that will be communicated to a larger audience. Organisations typically also experiment with different media to see which one best conveys their message. In fact, some businesses encourage customers to compete for the greatest message in order

to earn cash prizes. According to Pawar (2014), an audience should pay attention, be interested, want something, and act upon a clear and unambiguous message. A good message will almost always result in one of the above acts, even though not all messages in practice result in action. A number of factors should be considered. The message communicator must select one of three main appeals. The rational argument appeals to the self-interest of the customer and is achieved by stressing the best features of the good or service's attributes. The emotional appeal seeks to make consumers feel good about the company's offerings. Positive emotional appeals such as love, joy, and meekness may draw in more customers (Pawar, 2014). The morality appeal speaks to to a person's sense of what is right for society as a whole, including, among other things, equality and environmental purity. Additionally, message format must be considered. A conclusion-oriented message, a one-sided or two-sided message, and whether the strongest argument should be delivered first or last can all be included in the message structure. It is also assumed that the format of the communication is important, which is, of course, greatly influenced by whom is being addressed.

iv. Determine communication channels

Not all target audiences can be reached through all means. It is vital to understand that magazines, social media, etc., are not required for everyone. The question, "Which channels are familiar to my customers?" should be one that organisations are able to answer, along with, "How effectively can I accomplish my goals using these channels?" Personal and non-personal communication channels were set apart by Pawar (2014). Personal communication channels are any means of interaction involving two or more people, including phone, email, and other media. Non-personal communication channels, which are mostly commercial media, include print, broadcast, electronic, and billboard media (Lalramchuani, 2023; Schiff, 2014).

v. Ensure messages are integrated properly

The organisation should make sure that the message is clear, conveys the same meaning across all channels, is focused on attaining the same goals and objectives, and is in line with the company's strategy, regardless of the channel selected. According to Pawar (2014), a well-coordinated campaign message should be focused on achieving specific objectives like increasing sales and brand awareness, among others. This includes having the same message across e-mail, social media advertisements, search engine optimisation, and sales promotions. Regardless of their individual initiatives, the organisation should ensure that every member of the marketing team works together to accomplish the overarching goals and objectives. The message should be uniform and consistent, whether or not a company uses a range of advertising platforms (Lalramchuani, 2023; Schiff, 2014).

vi. Evaluation/feedback

Only until a metric for measuring the effectiveness of the promotion is in place can the campaign's success be determined. Therefore, information should be acquired in real time as the promotional effort progresses. This will make it simpler to comprehend how the discount and promotion codes have worked across various channels. There should be an open channel for input across all platforms as the campaign develops (Pawar, 2014).

By developing an integrated and consistent brand message that connects with customers and promotes company growth, IMC programmes can give organisations a competitive edge.

The following sections discuss IMC in different contexts.

2.3 IMC and business perfomance

Performance is a broad concept that plays a critical role in a business' success or failure. Yuvara and Abate (2013) define performance as the outcomes of workers' activities and skills within a certain setting. Organisational success comprises three aspects of a firm's outcomes: financial performance, product market performance, and shareholder return (Ajao & Ogieriakhi, 2018). Performance matters regardless of the size of a business, as all businesses want to grow in importance (Dung, 2023). As stated by Abimbola *et al.* (2020), performance evaluation is essential across all business sectors if organisations want to achieve better outcomes. Performance can consider standardisation, output, and other variables (Waed, 2021). According to Nur *et al.* (2023), performance is what is expected of an individual or team in a specific time frame.

IMC refers to a collection of components that work together to achieve the company's promotional objectives in the context of the dominant marketing attitude (Kotler *et al*., 2019). Because of intense competition, businesses are looking for cutting-edge strategies to maintain and increase their business performance, and IMCs are now seen as a crucial component of developing this for a company (Percy, 2023).

Al-Azzam, Alserhan and Al-Assaf's (2024) study examined the impact of IMCs on the performance of insurance companies in Jordan. Their results demonstrated that IMCs had a positive influence on organisational performance, with 65.3% of performance related to IMC. Nguyen *et al*. (2024) revealed that IMC had a strong effect on marketing performance in the hotel industry in Vietnam. A descriptive cross-sectional study conducted by Sharma, Mahajan, and Kapse in 2024 was undertaken to determine the relationship between IMC components and business performance in Indiana's SME sector in the USA. The findings demonstrate a robust relationship between improved firm performance and the five IMC performance parameters.

The literature above shows that IMC has some positive influence on business performance.

2.4 IMC and consumer purchase intentions

According to Wang *et al*. (2023), consumer purchase intention is the subjective likelihood or propensity of customers to purchase particular products or services. When it comes to practical application, many researchers separate it into two categories: intention to buy and referral to others (Wang *et al*., 2023). Getting the customer's attention is needed for marketing success, even though consumer demand can be controlled and boosted by intentionally producing external stimuli. Effective IMC visual design helps brands to pique consumers' interest in making purchases, prolongs their time in the store, and persuades them to turn their prospective shopping requirements into actual purchases. Due to the abundance of information sources available to customers today, IMC has become increasingly valuable in persuading consumers to purchase a product or service (Sawaftah, 2020). The goal of the highly focused IMC initiatives is to influence the target audience's decision to buy by leveraging the benefits of modern communication platforms. Developing a compelling message and selecting the most efficient communication channel are essential for establishing and maintaining consumer tastes for a company, brand, or product (Sawaftah, 2020).

Sawaftah (2020) found that consumer purchase intention was positively impacted by electronic integrated marketing communication (E-IMC), and significantly predicted by each of the E-IMC dimensions (online relationship marketing, online sales promotion, and online advertising). Furthermore, consumer trust acts as a mediator in the favourable association between E-IMC and purchase intention (Sawaftah, 2020). Ihzaturrahma and Kusumawati (2021) carried out a study on how IMC methods can affect brand awareness and brand image toward the purchase intention of local fashion products; they found that IMC strongly influenced purchase intention, with sales promotions and advertisements being the most effective elements.

2.5 IMC in relation to emerging economies in Africa

Investing in emerging economies is a challenging yet worthwhile venture, and IMC adoption differs in relation to the nature of the economy (Butkouskaya *et al*., 2020). Developing IMC tactics that are both locally relevant and flexible requires an awareness of the distinctive features of these markets, which include cultural diversity, economic inequality, and technical infrastructure. IMC research (Li and Liu, 2014; Butkouskaya *et al*., 2021b) emphasises how crucial market data is to the implementation of IMC and how information accessibility improves IMC functionality. IMC can be implemented more successfully by businesses in developed economies with more market activity and competitiveness (Li & Liu, 2014; Butkouskaya *et al*., 2021b). In most developing economies, internal knowledge is constrained by fewer communications and smaller customer databases (Einwiller & Boenigk, 2012). Less current knowledge regarding consumer wants emerges in the market when there is insufficient information available, and this impedes the acquisition of experience and organisational learning (Butkouskaya *et al*., 2020). According to Butkouskaya *et al*.'s (2020) research, this demonstrates some of the influence of IMC on the market performance of firms in developing nations as opposed to developed economies.

Chakraborty and Jain (2022) examined the advantages of digital marketing for firms operating in emerging areas. The study's first key finding was that there are now several options for businesses and consumers to interact thanks to digital marketing. On numerous social media sites, like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, this relationship is cultivated. These channels are being used by brands to spread value and raise awareness. Brand-consumer interactions are strengthened when IMCs are in line with digital marketing. In order to effectively leverage digital marketing and IMCs in emerging countries, the study proposes a framework for digital marketing as a new branding approach. Through IMC strategies, digitalisation has made it possible for firms in emerging economies to engage with their target audience (Chakraborty & Jain, 2022).

The next section reviews the literature on IMC within the higher education context in Africa.

2.6 Higher education in Africa

In a global economy that is growing more and more knowledge driven, higher education (HE) is becoming a significant factor in economic competitiveness. HE is provided by a range of institutions such as universities, colleges, polytechnics, professional schools (which prepare students for careers in engineering, law, theology, medicine, business, music, and the arts), teacher-training programmes, junior colleges, and technological institutes (Mbithi *et al*., 2021). These are referred to as Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). In recent decades, African governments, regional economic associations, and civil society organisations have come to realise the necessity of restructuring HE to better serve the continent's constantly evolving skill requirements. For HEIs to maximise students' development of skills, knowledge,

and attitudes that prepare them for the workforce and allow them to make a valuable contribution, fresh funding frameworks must also be implemented. According to UNESCO (2020), enrolment in HEIs in Africa is still low. Global trends show an increase in HE enrolment over the past 20 years, from 19% to 38% between 2000 and 2018, while Africa's HE enrolment has increased from 4% in 2000 to 9% currently (UNESCO, 2020). Mbiti *et al*. (2023) note that, while enrolment remains low, women are the most affected compared to their male counterparts; they further note that access to HE is affected by poor funding.

In Zimbabwe before independence, the colonial administration spent up to 20 times more per white student than per black student, and made education for white students mandatory thereby providing universal education (Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture, 2001; Chisiri *et al*., 2023). The liberalisation of education in Zimbabwe came after independence in 1980, when the president adopted the 'education for all' strategy. The demand for education at primary and secondary levels shot up and this increased demand for HE (Garwe, 2020; Chisiri *et al*., 2023). The prevailing belief in society there was that when one attained a degree from a university, one would be successful. The challenges that have mainly been encountered in HEIs in Zimabwe include poor funding from the government, poor quality education, poor employee retention, and lack of research support (Garwe, 2020). Stiff competition has arisen in the Zimbabwean HE environment as universities, polytechnics, and colleges vie for students. This has resulted in most institutions marketing their brands, as recommended by Mogaji *et al*. (2020). Compared to their western counterparts, however, most HEIs in Africa are still in their infancy in terms of marketing (Mogaji *et al*., 2020)

2.6.1 IMC practices in HEIs

The marketisation of education started in the developed nations, but it is only recently that educational marketing is gaining gravity in developing countries (Mogaji *et al*., 2020). In South Africa, the marketing of colleges was introduced towards the end of the apartheid system (Mudzanani, 2018). In Zimbabwe, the history of higher education dates back to the colonial era when the system favoured whites, who were enrolled at universities, as "the colonial government argued that blacks needed practical-oriented education that prepared them for blue-collar jobs, while white-collar professions were the preserve of Europeans" (Garwe & Thodhlana, 2019:2). "Even the few blacks who received university education trained for lower status jobs compared to their white counterparts" (Garwe & Thodhlana, 2019:2). Garwe and Thodhlana (2019:2) also note that, in Zimbabwe, "upon gaining independence in 1980, the new government introduced aggressive policy reforms to address colonial inequalities and anomalies, as well as to satisfy the growing need for workforce (sic) with high-level qualifications". Therefore, many Zimbabweans were encouraged to pursue higher education, especially in universities which were once reserved for whites only (Garwe & Thodhlana, 2019).

In order to draw prospective students to their university, higher education providers or HEIs must first set themselves apart in an environment of competition that has been created by the introduction of online education, as well as by the wider range of degrees provided by various universities and institutions (Gordon-Isasi *et al*., 2021). This has resulted in HEIs increasing their marketing activities. Secondly, there are more marketing efforts now because of reduced state support and fewer students (Mogaji *et al*., 2020; Mudzanani, 2018). IMC can be a valuable tool for HEIs to combat the fierce rivalry present in the market, according to Porcu *et al.* (2020), who claim that it has evolved as a method for attaining a competitive edge. Additionally, Jain *et al.* (2022) note that educational marketing is a crucial

administrative task without which an educational organisation would not be able to exist in the current hostile environment. Contrary to Jain *et al*.'s (2022) view, some scholars are opposed to education marketing because it "subjects education to market forces" (Harvey & Busher, 1996:26).

Camilleri (2020) and Kanibir, Saydan and Nart (2014) assert that IMC entails the practices of generating message opportunities, and the exchange of messages between students and the HEI. IMC encompasses synchronising communications through various means, with the main objective of coaxing the target market to have confidence in the institution and enrol for a course. In the case of HEIs, IMC is a change from traditional marketing, mainly used to send generalised information, to a student-focused approach (Jordan, 2023; Eberechukwu & Chukwuma, 2016). By connecting all institutional communications and media, HEIs may use IMC to strengthen their brand identity and their relationships with their students (Mogaji *et al*., 2020). IMC includes recognising all points of contact that a student may have with the school because every brand encounter has the potential to either positively or negatively impact the student. Anctil (2008) explains that HEIs can use IMC to link institutional objectives to stakeholders, and become adaptive rather than rigid to negotiate the community's needs and expectations of Further Education and Training. Jordan (2020) and Ivy (2005) state that the picture depicted by HEIs plays an important part in how an institution is perceived by its stakeholders, including its competitors and rivals. Zimmerman (2020) states that as potential learners gain more knowledge, marketing plays a crucial role in influencing students' college choices, hence HEIs need to adopt a more targeted marketing strategy to enhance their impact on consumer choice.

Of importance to note are the studies that support the use of IMC in HEIs. In their study of the connection between IMC and performance in HEIs, Gordon-Isasi, Narvaiza, and Gibaja (2022) found that the former had a favourable impact on the latter at universities. Saleem *et al*. (2023) also investigated how IMC and digital marketing may be used to promote HEIs. The study's conclusions emphasise the significance of an integrated and cohesive IMC approach that makes use of numerous channels of communication. The advantages of a coordinated marketing plan, which incorporates various communication channels to create fruitful and collaborative relationships with different stakeholder, are highlighted in a study by Camilleri (2019) on higher education marketing. Camilleri (2019) offered a thorough evaluation of the literature on IMC in HEIs. The effect of internet IMC tools on HEIs was studied by Kisiolek *et al.* (2021). This study looked at IMC tools in HEIs in Poland and Ukraine, and revealed that they had a favourable impact on the accomplishment of key marketing goals.

A study by Mukosa (2022) investigated the effectiveness of social media marketing on the performance of HEIs in Zambia, and discovered that HEIs were focusing on advertising only. Consequently, the study recommended that HEIs must use social media in their IMC programmes (Mukosa, 2022). Kayomnbo (2019) investigated the factors that students consider when choosing an HEI; the results showed that print media, friends, education expos, and electronic media were most frequently consulted for information on universities, while friends, parents, and oneself had the most influence on students' decisions in Zambia. Another study by Maeko (2020) in South Africa and Zimbabwe looked at how HEIs used IMC, and found that the institutions promoted their programmes and services through a range of communication channels, including direct marketing, face-to-face activities, digital marketing, and advertising. The study concluded that the University of Limpopo must continuously upgrade its IMC strategies and focus more on digital communications, as teenagers spent their time on their digital devices, making it easier for them

to access information on HEIs. These studies indicate that IMC can be a successful strategy for HEIs to sell their services and develop positive student attitudes, highlighting the significance of a coordinated and consistent marketing approach that makes use of various channels of communication.
Polytechnics, like other non-profit organisations, have not been left behind in marketising themselves (Gordon-Isasi *et al*., 2021). The use of IMC tools has mainly been known in the business world but not in tertiary institutions; however, with polytechnics failing to fill their classes due to negative attitudes from students, IMC is the solution (Mudzanani, 2018). In relation to this study, polytechnics must provide prospective students with reliable and consistent information, in order to help to bring out the anticipated brand image and foster positive attitudes. Jusuf (2024) and Kitchen *et al.* (2004) indicate that IMC is also a brand strategy and not just meant to coordinate the communication mix elements. Through the use of IMC tools, businesses communicate particular insights of the business and products to their consumers and stakeholders; polytechnics can also use such tools to communicate their services to prospective students and their parents.

This study is of the view that IMC can be used as a method for establishing communication between polytechnics and students, in order to foster positive attitudes toward the polytechnic courses, and as a result, generate a strong liking for the polytechnic through the consumer decision-making process. This is supported by Gordon-Isasi *et al.* (2021), who assert that IMC is the best strategy to establish a relationship between an institution and its stakeholders. This study is also of the view that polytechnics must understand the needs and desires of students, in order to communicate effectively with their target audience using effective media. This may be achieved through personnel in the marketing department who must determine the target audience, explain the needed reaction, put together a message, select the medium or mediums, choose the source qualities, and gather input (Camilleri, 2020). Regardless of the medium used, the measures that must be taken to achieve effective communication are critical (Rodi & Luki, 2016).

Students' attitudes towards a polytechnic brand are partly shaped by the combination of the bundle of messages that they are exposed to through IMC (Mudzanani, 2018). The adoption of IMC shows that polytechnics are adjusting to the changing needs and wants of students, as well as the changing technological environment. As such, HEIs ought to develop a holistic strategy for branding and marketing that connects the online and offline digital domains (Hanover Research, 2015).

A polytechnic must develop an appropriate IMC strategy to achieve considerable success in educational marketing (Mudzanani, 2018). While having a strong curriculum and reasonable prices are important, these are not the only factors to consider. IMC cannot make up for the ineffectiveness of other marketing mix instruments (product, pricing, distribution, people, process, and physical environment). To encourage prospective students to join an institution (polytechnic), all current and prospective students should be informed about its aims, activities, and offerings, as well as attachments or jobs offered to the current students (Camilleri, 2020). Polytechnics, whether or not they have a communication programme, must always have messages on different platforms (i.e. traditional and modern IMC tools) to maintain visibility (Gordon-Isasi *et al.*, 2021). Before pursuing public communication, the institution must first assess its needs and what information gaps exist within the immediate environment (divisions, departments, workers, present students, and so on) (Rodi & Luki, 2016).

In polytechnics, IMC can be used to raise awareness of their courses, persuade students to enrol, and remind them of these institutions' existence in the education sector. IMC plays a significant part in altering, maintaining, and sustaining attitudes (Camilleri, 2020; Fill, 2002). For potential and current students to have a positive attitude towards polytechnics, the polytechnic must execute a successful marketing communications programme through the concurrent use of several promotional methods (Camilleri, 2020). Through IMC, both the polytechnic's brand and image can be enhanced by employing productive and successful marketing communication techniques.

Educational fairs/symposiums or open day events are by far the most popular promotional events in educational institutions (Camilleri, 2020). Parents' perceptions of just about everything supplied within the institution are frequently the focus of educational fairs. Educational fairs forestall the spread of rumours about the school in this way (Camilleri, 2020; Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2004), and parents are thus informed about the educational institution's accomplishments and features. The fairs do a great job of encouraging dialogue between the school and tparents.

Brochures are a popular kind of promotional activity with most institutions, and they serve as an initial point of interaction between the polytechnic and the students, resulting in the latter's decision to attend. Brochures can also be crucial in establishing and maintaining an institution's most favourable image in parents' minds (Harris, 2024; Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2004).

To reach a wide range of people, the institution needs more than a brochure or a website, and different instruments must be employed (Kristanto, 2021). Open days, international educational fairs, direct mail, brochures, social media, websites, and advertising on different media are some of the elements that can be utilised to attract possible future students (Butt, 2023; Ivy, 2008). It is important to emphasise that the notion of an academic advertising campaign must begin with selling skills and knowledge that would be acquired by enrolling at a polytechnic. Irrespective of the methods and types of communication employed by a polytechnic, honesty is paramount in the communication process. Social media should not be overlooked because it helps to build trust between the institution and its users (Mukosa, 2022). People are driven to communicate crucial information on social media, which implies a very personal note.

Polytechnics, just like any other institution, communicate with a variety of target audiences (i.e. students, parents, donors, staff, and the general public), all of whom have varied interests (Gordon-Isasi *et al*., 2021). Lecturers and professors are often inspired to improve their service offering through students' attitudes. Former students may also be philanthropists and departmental/divisional promoters, influencing the attitudes and actions of prospective and current polytechnic students through testimonials and unscripted videos that appear credible (Camilleri, 2020). Polytechnic personnel as service providers and students as service users have an equal impact on the public; as a result, the institution's image and reputation are heavily reliant on both groups (Camilleri, 2020).

In South Africa, Penceliah and Vezi (2019) examined how IMC influenced students' perceptions to enrol in TVET colleges located in KwaZulu-Natal. According to this study's conclusions, in order to enhance public awareness and enrolment at the selected colleges, their IMC activities need to be quickly addressed. A study by Tlapana and Myeki (2020) examined the IMC strategies used by TVET colleges that affect student choice in South Africa, hence enhancing students' perceptions of these institutions. The

findings from the study revealed that there was a positive relationship between IMC and students' perceptions of TVET colleges; this was achieved through creating a targeted marketing strategy and social media presence, since social media is essential for spreading information.

These studies imply that IMC can be a successful marketing tactic for polytechnic institutions' courses and offerings. Polytechnics can improve their reputation, brand image, and student recruiting efforts by coordinating numerous marketing communication platforms and presenting a consistent and engaging message. However, more investigation is required to determine best practices for IMC implementation and to examine the impact of IMC on students' attitudes towards polytechnics in Zimbabwe.

Having reviewed IMC in the preceding section, the next section discusses various response hierarchy models, with a focus on the hierarchy of effects model.

2.7 Theoretical background

2.7.1 Response hierarchy models

Marketers set marketing communication objectives with the main emphasis on how these will influence consumer attitudes (Adesanoye, 2018). Theories and models which provide insight into how communication objectives influence student attitudes, from the time the students become aware of the existence of the polytechnic until they enrol there, have been put forward by researchers. The response hierarchy model is one such model.

Response hierarchy models are classic models depicting activity from the point of lack of awareness until final purchase. Barry and Howard (1990:100-102) indicate that examples of such models are "the hierarchy of effects model (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961), AIDA model (Strong, 1925), the information processing model (McGuire, 1978), the innovation adoption model (Rogers, 1962) and DAGMAR model (Colley, 1961)". Mihart (2012) carried out research on the influence of IMC on consumer behaviour, based on the hierarchy of communication effects model. Mihart (2012:978) highlights that "IMC influence on consumer behavior processes, based on results of market research and market segmentation, is propagated by each component of [the] marketing mix (product, price, distribution and marketing communications), exploring its communicational potential, and is reflected in each step of the hierarchy of effects which can be used as an intermediate measure of communication effectiveness". In relation to IMC and the hierarchy of effects model, Belch and Belch (2004:23) note that "direct marketing messages certainly create awareness and interest in the product, and may even result in trial and sales that cannot be directly tracked by the behavioral criteria alone. Thus, to assess the true effects of the campaign, more intermediate hierarchy of effects measures such as awareness, attitude toward the brand, or trial might be included."

Kiamburu (2018) carried out research on IMC and consumer behaviour in the banking sector in Kenya using the hierarchy of effects model. Kiamburu (2018) emphasises that IMC tools aim to motivate consumers to make purchases through awareness, knowledge, liking, preference, and purchase.

The different response hierarchy models are now discussed in more detail.

2.7.1.1 AIDA model

The AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) behavioural model is an early and essential model among the hierarchy of effect models (Adesanoye, 2018). Lewis developed this model between 1898 and 1925 with the intention of ensuring that an advertisement increased awareness, piqued interest, and inspired desire in the consumer before prompting them to act (Alibrahim, 2024; Hackley, 2010). The AIDA model strongly implies that in order for an advertisement to be successful, it must be created in a way that takes the consumer through these four stages, each of which is crucial to its success. Despite its outdated nature, the model provides a solid basis for contemporary marketing models, such as the hierarchy of effects(HOE) model (Alibrahim, 2024). Even though it has been developed further and given rise to new models, the AIDA model is still useful for summarising consumer communications with certain target audiences. It also provides an enhanced explanation of customer experience by prioritising the his or her requirements and aspirations, hence improving consumer response to brand communication (Alibrahim, 2024). The AIDA model remains a widely-used research tool in advertising and personal selling, focusing on how individuals respond to sales and advertising presentations (Adesanoye, 2018).

Despite being widely regarded as a robust advertising theory, the model has faced criticism from various segments of the advertising industry, much like the other response models. According to critics, there exists no evidence that customers behave in this logical, orderly manner (Brierley, 2002). It is also noted by Páramo, García, and Peláez (2021) that not all commercials in the media elicit desire or action. The methodology disregards the ways in which context, surroundings, and mediation impact the efficacy of advertisements. Páramo *et al.* (2021) suggest that all four stages are not of equal significance and that the behavioural phases need to be given more consideration if an advertisement is to be successful.The importance of constant communication in modifying attitudes is also not addressed by the AIDA paradigm. Rather, it emphasises awareness and interest (Alibhahim, 2024). Alibrahim (2024) goes on to say that the model fails to accurately depict the communication-based relationship between awareness and interest. It is against this background that the model was not chosen in this study.

2.7.1.2 Innovation adoption model

The innovation adoption model was developed by Rogers in 1962, making it one of the first social science ideas. It was initially applied to communication to explain how an idea or object gradually gains traction and spreads throughout a certain neighbourhood or social structure (Supriani *et al*, 2022). This spread leads to people gradually assimilating new concepts, actions, or goods as a component of a social structure. When someone adopts a new behaviour, it means they are changing their previous behaviour (e.g., purchasing or using a new product, learning and exhibiting a new behaviour) (Menzli *et al*., 2022; Supriani *et al*., 2022). Adoption depends on how unique and creative each person finds the idea, activity, or product. This makes it possible for dispersion. Adoption of an invention is the process by which some people are more likely than others to accept a novel idea, behaviour, or thing. In a social structure, it doesn't happen all at once. According to Supriani *et al*. (2022), people who adopt innovations earlier in life typically exhibit different traits than those who do so later.

When selling an invention to the intended market, it is crucial to identify the characteristics that can either help or hinder their adoption (Menzli *et al*., 2022). Although the majority of the population at large usually falls in the middle of each of the five acknowledged adopter categories, it is still important to understand the traits that define the group being targeted (Supriani *et al*., 2022).

The stages that consumers go through with a new innovation include attention, interests, evaluation, trial, and adoption. The innovation adoption model was not used in this study because it is usually used to explore the spreading rate of new ideas, concepts, technology, technical information, and practices across societies or systems (Hidayat & Mukminin, 2022), while this study focused on the influence of IMC on student attitudes towards Mutare Polytechnic.

2.7.1.3 DAGMAR model

When Russell Colley wrote a study for the Association of National Advertisers, he founded DAGMAR (Ketena, 2021). 'Defining Advertising Goals for Measured Advertising Results', or DAGMAR for short, was the title of this paper (Belch & Belch, 1995). It was then released as a book in 1969 with the same title (Mackay, 2005). DAGMAR does not only address the message; it was developed to promote quantifiable goals at every communication step (Elrod & Fortenberry, 2020; Smith & Taylor, 2002). It focuses on measuring the effectiveness of an advertising campaign, and the levels of understanding that a client must have (Elrod & Fortenberry, 2020; Belch & Belch, 1995). Key findings of the DAGMAR theory were summarised as follows: every commercial communication that impacts a prospect's ultimate goal of a sale needs to take the potential consumer through four stages of comprehension (Ketema, 2021). Firstly, the prospect needs to know that a brand or organisation exists because if the potential customer is not aware of the brand, they will not go further in the consumer decision making process. Secondly, the prospect needs to know what the product is and how it will benefit him or her (Ketena, 2021). To make the comprehension stage a success, the marketer has to provide clear and persuasive information about the product. Thirdly, for the prospect to purchase the product in the end, the prospect needs to come to a mental conviction. In the final stage the prospect motivates themselves to action by making a purchase. The hierarchical model, which includes the four stages mentioned above, provides the foundation for the communication, since it must be precise and quantifiable (Ketena, 2021; Mackay, 2005).

Many planners make use of the DAGMAR model as their foundation since it has had a significant impact on how to define objectives in the advertising planning process. However, it has also drawn criticism. Similar to AIDA, a primary critique of DAGMAR is its dependence on the 'hierarchy of effects' theory. Clients do not always move through these phases in a straight path (Ketena, 2021). Furthermore, the DAGMAR approach is often criticised for excessively emphasising techniques. Many advertising creatives believe that the DAGMAR approach is overly focused on quantitative campaign data, while not searching for that big, original idea that would lead to a successful campaign (Belch & Belch, 1995).

2.7.1.4 Information processing model

Initially presented by McGuire (in 1968, 1969, 1985, and again in 2001), the information processing model is distinct from other models. Its application is primarily found in social marketing, or the promotion of goods and services related to health (Atkin & Salmon, 2013). The model, which has influenced many fields - including public health marketing through the use of mass media and includes an analysis of consumer behaviour in response to messages - has outperformed other traditional communication models that primarily target small populations at risk (Klahr & Wallace, 2022.). Five steps comprise McGuire's communication paradigm, ranging from the simplest to the most difficult, namely (1) attention, (2) comprehension, (3) acceptance, (4) retention, and (5) behaviour (McGuire, 2001). McGuire's communication model starts with the persuasive message being presented. It then goes on to the receiver listening to the message, understanding the arguments made in support of it, agreeing

with these, retaining the message in memory, and acting in accordance with the arguments made in support of it. Identifying and evaluating channels and tactics that can affect campaign outcomes is another task that the model can assist practitioners with (Klahr and Wallace, 2022.).

This model also meets with some criticism. The excessively limited number of steps required to modify behaviour is one of them. According to Klahr and Wallace (2022), a portion of the audience disappears during each stage of the message analysis process. Thus, increased exposure and awareness are necessary for this paradigm to function more effectively.

2.7.1.5 Hierarchy of effects model

The hierarchy of effects (HOE) model by Lavidge and Steiner (1961) describes the response process that consumers encounter from the point of lack of awareness of a good/service until post-purchase behaviour (Belch & Belch, 2021; Hanekom, 2006). This model also explains the activities moving through the phases of cognition, affect, and behaviour/conative stages (Rasoolimanesh *et al*., 2024; Koekemoer, 2004). Koekemoer (2004:91) further states that:

> This is a 'learn–feel–do' order and it entails communication. In the hierarchy of effect paradigm, the customer goes through an ordered sequence of cognitive, emotive, and behavioral responses to communicative stimuli, according to Pelsmacker *et al.* (2004). Conversely, considering [the] nature of the goods/service and the purchase circumstances, this ranking may change. This process to persuade necessitates the creation and modification of attitudes. Before a buyer considers buying, create awareness and influence attitudes.

Customers do not go from being utterly unaware to being persuaded to action (purchasing a product or service), according to this concept. The goal of the model is to illustrate the steps that advertisers believe consumers go through, throughout the actual purchasing process (Barry & Howard, 1990). The model comprises seven steps that, in a similar way to the other models, need to be completed in a linear fashion (unawareness, awareness, knowledge, liking, preference, conviction, and purchase). Not only are the steps different from the previous models, but so is the approach to passing from one to the next. Lavidge and Steiner (1961) suggest that the steps should be completed linearly, but potential purchasers may move up multiple steps simultaneously. Ketene (2021) concurs stating that ultimately, customers typically do not go straight from being interested to being persuaded buyers. The underlying assumption of this model is that advertising takes time to work and may not result in a purchase or response right away. Instead, there are a number of requirements that must be met in each phase being completed in order to go on to the next (Elrod & Fortenberry, 2020; Lavidge & Steiner, 1961). According to Belch and Belch (1998), the underlying assumptions of this model are that the effects of advertising are gradual, and that communication about advertising may not result in an instantaneous behavioural response or purchase. Rather, consumers must complete each step in the hierarchy before they can advance to the next level (Belch & Belch, 1998).

The HOE model has also received criticism, similar to the critiques of DAGMAR and AIDA. The processes are opaque, and there is still no proof that product knowledge precedes purchase (Ketena, 2021). Additionally, criticism has been levelled at each phase of the model separately. According to critics, the model does not adequately describe how customers would move between steps, and simply

pointing them out without providing more context is insufficient (Palda, 1966). Not every buyer completes every step before purchasing a product or service; some may quit at any point, and some may retrace their steps a few times before continuing to purchase the item (Ketena, 2021). Furthermore, the steps do not always happen in a hierarchical order. Impulse purchases also shorten the process (Smith & Taylor, 2002). The loop from the top to the bottom of the steps is something that is absent from all of these models and ideas. Such a loop would demonstrate that a purchase is often only the start of a continuing interaction with the client rather than the final step (Smith & Taylor, 2002). The outcome of a campaign is significantly influenced by the advertisement's design. According to Jobber (2004), advertising campaigns require a great deal of originality, and putting it all inside a model frame would stifle it. In sum, advertisers can use the hierarchy models to indicate the stages that customers often go through, but they cannot be utilised as clear guidance (Taylor & Smith, 2002).

The stages of the hierarchy of effects model are discussed below.

i. Cognitive stage

The first stage is the cognitive stage, consisting of the unawareness, awareness, and knowledge phases (Rasoolimanesh *et al*., 2024; Lavidge & Steiner, 2012). During this stage, the student becomes aware and knowledgeable of the polytechnic service being advertised. This level involves cognition, and knowledge is attained by the person synthesising information from other sources with first-hand experience of the attitude object (Rasoolimanesh *et al*., 2024; Vakratsas & Ambler, 1999). This stage is also characterised by attention, comprehension, and retention of information (Lamb *et al*., 2020). Advertising and other marketing communications are often used during this stage to increase awareness and knowledge of the product or brand (Cromhout, 2020). Beliefs are formed as a result of this knowledge and subsequent perceptions. As established by Pessemier and Wilkie (1973:30), "Cognitive processes were the dominating description of attitude development and modification in the 1960s and 1970s, with widespread adoption of belief-based models such as many alternatives of the expectancy-value model and multi-attribute utility models."

Because of the aforementioned presumption, it is assumed that changing an attitude necessitates changing the client's basic cognitive organisation or beliefs about the thing (Fishbein & Middlestadt, 1995). In order for prospective students to enroll at a polytechnic, they need to be aware of its existence. Even when students are aware of it, however, it is difficult to persuade them to enrol there because society has branded polytechnic students as failures, while university students are deemed to be superior (Tlapana & Myeki, 2020). As a result, according to the traditional hierarchy of impact models, businesses must do all they can to ensure that the consequences of IMC exposure lead to brand awareness, which in turn contributes to conduct and behaviour toward the commercial as well as the brand until purchase intention (Cromhout, 2020).

ii. Affective stage

The second stage is the affective stage, which includes liking, preference, and conviction (Rasoolimanesh *et al*., 2024; Lavidge & Steiner, 2012). During this stage, the consumer feels affection and emotion towards the product/service being advertised (Cromhout, 2020). This element records an individual's direct or overall evaluation of the attitude object, such as the degree to which the customer judges the commercial as good or awful (Cromhout, 2020).

Happiness, sadness, humiliation, contempt, wrath, anxiety, guilt, or surprise are just a few examples of the strongly emotional states that might result from affectively-based experiences, according to Ortony (2022). Cromhout (2020) proposes that such emotive situations may boost or augment positive or negative involvements, and that later remembrances of these experiences might inspire what customers think about and how they act. Ajzen and Fishbein (1977) elucidate that affective-based attitudes can originate from diverse origins, such as cultural and religious beliefs, sensory responses (e.g. dislike of chocolate), and conditioning (e.g. classical and instrumental conditioning). Additionally, Olson & Mitchell (1975) point out that the operational issues with pure affective models have long been critiqued because the cognitive component consistently shows up in the models' measures.

iii. Behavioural stage

The behavioural stage is the last stage in the model (Rasoolimanesh *et al*., 2024; Lavidge & Steiner, 2012), in which the consumer is expected to take some form of action, which might be positive (e.g. purchase, trial of the product, or adoption) or negative (e.g. rejection). Rasoolimanesh *et al*. (2024) notes that the conative stage consists of the exact behaviour, which includes the customer's intent to purchase; purchasing intention measures are used find out the probability of the customer buying the goods/services. Moreover, Blakeman (2023) emphasises that people's assessments of how others respond towards an attitude object, are the source of behaviourally based attitudes. The study by Omar *et al*. (2019) is in line with Bem's (1972) work on self-perception philosophy, which discovered that consumers may not be aware of their feelings until they are shown how they behave.

In conclusion, various models are able to clarify the purchasing procedure. It makes the most sense when considered in the context of all marketing communications. Message models, also known as response hierarchy models, is a term used to describe a number of useful models that describe the processes that a customer follows. These models have various stages or processes that a consumer must go through in order to make a purchase or choose which courses to enrol in.

This study is grounded on the hierarchy of effects model by Lavidge and Steiner (1961). Adesanoye's (2018) study of brand positioning in the banking industry proposed that the HoE model can be applied to the whole marketing communication mix. Adesanoye (2018) disagrees with the notion that the hierarchy of effects model focuses on advertising alone, stating that advertising and other marketing communication tools are all marketer-initiated efforts. This study explored the influence of various IMC tools on the various phases of a prospective student's decision to attend a polytechnic by using this all-inclusive approach.

The model also places special emphasis on the affective and cognitive mechanisms underlying behavioural outcomes, and this emphasis allows for a thorough examination of how IMC initiatives might foster favourable impressions and preferences for polytechnic education, which makes it especially pertinent when examining student attitudes. The model was also preferred for this study because IMC tactics frequently seek to lead target audiences down an awareness-to-action funnel. In their study on HoE models and higher education advertising in Malaysia, Yaakop *et al.* (2018) noted that, through the linear relationship of the model, HEIs may effectively provide information to potential students and their families, influencing their opinions.

In order to determine which tactics are most successful in influencing students' attitudes, the HoE model offers a systematic framework for evaluating the efficacy of different IMC components (advertsing, personal selling, public relations, direct marketing, and digital marketing) at each step. The main role of IMC is to guide consumers as they go through the above phases, hence such models are important in coming up with communication objectives to elicit responses from the target market (Belch & Belch, 2018). In the case of polytechnics, these stages can be applied to understanding how students' attitudes towards these are influenced by IMC.

The three stages are set out in Figure 2-11 below. In relation to this study, the cognitive component relates to the degree to which a student is aware of the polytechnic's existence, while the affective component demonstrates the emotional state or feelings that students attach towards the polytechnic. The conative component relates to the signs of intent to enrol with the polytechnic exhibited by the student. Therefore, when marketers at the polytechnic are setting marketing communication objectives, they must set objectives that can change the negative attitudes (beliefs, feelings, and intentions) that students have about polytechnics. Butt, (2023) and Kotler *et al*. (2012) state that the response hierarchy theory offers a valuable guide for IMC.

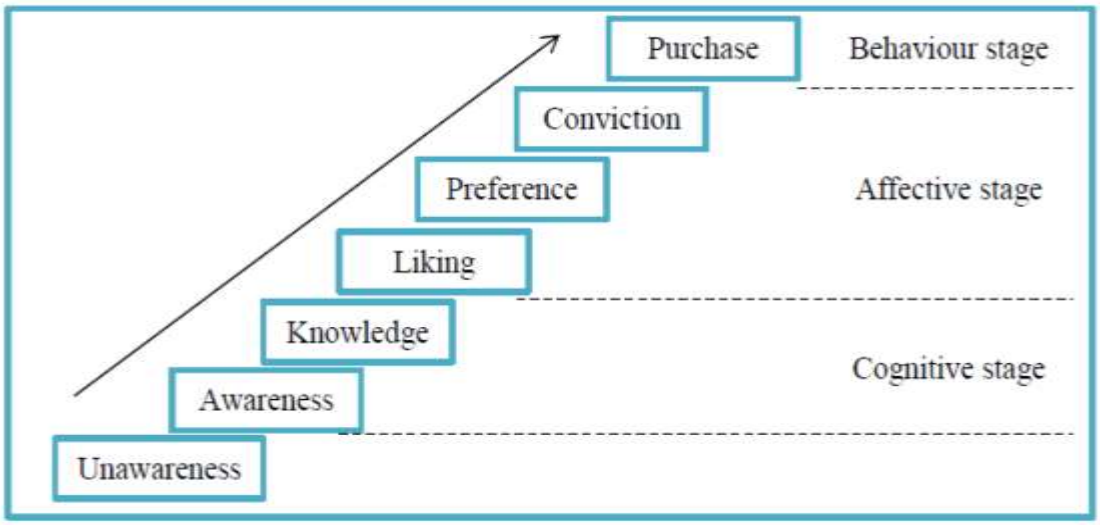

Figure 2-11: The hierarchy of effects model
Source: Lavidge and Steiner (2012:781)

2.7.2 IMC and the stages of the hierarchy of effects model

Based on the diagram above, the student will initially not be aware of the existence of the polytechnic. At the cognitive stage, the student becomes aware of the presence of the polytechnic in the tertiary education sector. Awareness can be created by capturing the attention of prospective students through various marketing communication tools, such as radio advertisements, billboards, social media, email marketing, and event marketing activities (Cromhout, 2020). Students start looking for information about polytechnics and their knowledge of the offerings there is enhanced. During this stage, the marketer can draw attention to the distinctive features that set polytechnics apart from traditional institutions, such as

industrial connections and practical training. Prospective students should be informed about the particular courses offered at polytechnics, as well as their advantages and employment options. Captivating slogans and eye-catching images can aid in drawing students' first attention. For example, a study by Velelo and Matenda (2023) found that social media and website advertising can be an effective tool for promoting an institution and increasing awareness of it. By using social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, polytechnics can reach a wider audience and raise awareness of their programmes and services. The polytechnic marketer should also provide educational content by way of blogs, webinars, and instructional films that outline the courses, resources, and alumni success stories. Students and their families can learn more about what polytechnics have to offer through open house events or virtual tours.

In this study, the affective stage is where a student forms their liking, preference, and conviction about the polytechnic. On liking the polytechnic, the marketers anticipate that this will lead to positive attitudes formed in the student's mind towards polytechnics and eventually a decision to enrol there. IMC may be applied to elicit a favourable emotional reaction towards the organisation (Cromhout, 2020). In relation to this study, the marketer will try to convince the prospective student that choosing to enrol at a polytechnic is the best decision for the latter. This can be accomplished by using a variety of marketing strategies that promote alumni and current students' success stories and touch prospective students' hearts, such as branding, storytelling videos, and testimonials. For instance, a study by Gelan *et al*. (2015) shows that in addition to Facebook and YouTube, students are now utilising blogs for their research to read reviews from former students and learning about student life. Social media is used as a strategy to create liking and preference of an institution, and this may also apply to this study, whereby IMC activities may have a favourable effect on students' impressions and preference of polytechnics in Zimbabwe. Polytechnics may build a strong emotional connection with prospective students by providing interesting content that emphasises accomplishments, student life, and the welcoming environment at polytechnics through their website and social media accounts. Interactive marketing strategies, like Q&A sessions or student takeovers on Instagram, can also be used to increase likeability and foster a personal connection. The polytechnic should also arrange career days and symposiums for students to engage with employers and accomplished alumni, in order to strengthen their resolve to enrol there.

The behavioural or conative stage examines the likely behaviour that the consumer is going to exhibit, such as enrolling in a programme. At this stage, the marketer is optimistic that the student has developed positive attitudes towards the college, with the chances of positive word-of-mouth accounts being high, and the latter starts referring their families and colleagues to enrol with the polytechnic, hence creating further awareness in the process (Cromhout, 2020). Polytechnics may use IMC to influence students' decision-making process, by providing them with the necessary information to make well-informed decisions. This may be done through various marketing channels such as email marketing, SMSs, digital advertising, and personalised communication. Mamun (2021) discovered that advertisements may be used to express an organisation's value proposition and develop a strong brand image. In the same manner, IMC can be a useful strategy for attracting and keeping students at polytechnics in Zimbabwe, as wel as for creating a strong brand image. Polytechnics can sway students' choices and boost enrolment by offering pertinent information and assistance. Enrolment can also be made easier by providing online platforms with clear instructions and support, thereby increasing convenience for students who live far from the polytechnic. Meanwhile, direct marketing strategies can be used to urge students to submit their applications on time, by sending them personalised emails or texts.

Polytechnics may influence students' attitudes towards these institutions and boost enrolment, by utilising IMC to address each level of the hierarchy of effects model. IMC can be a useful tool for changing students' attitudes towards polytechnics by raising awareness, evoking a positive emotional reaction, and offering pertinent information and assistance.

The next section discusses attitudes.

2.8 Attitudes

Attitudes have traditionally been seen as a foundational notion in social psychology, with early academics defining it as "mental and neurological state of readiness, organized by experience, exerting a directive and dynamic impact on the individual's behaviour to things and situations with which it is associated" (Allport, 1935:810). According to Verplanken and Orbell (2022), an individual's inclination towards expressing favour or disfavour towards a specific entity is known as their attitude. As a result, the idea of attitude was concentrated on its evaluative component and simply stated as 'likes and dislikes'. In a similar vein, attitudes are defined as a psychological state that denotes readiness for a particular action, the mental basis of an attitude, its durability, its identity, and its evaluative personality (Davadas and Lay, 2020; Rathidevi and Sudhakaran, 2019). Schiffman and Wisenblit (2019) define attitudes as a taught propensity to act in a persistently positive or negative manner towards a particular object. Attitudes refer to the evaluations or judgments that individuals make about people, events, objects, or ideas (Buhagiar & Sammut, 2020). They are complex constructs that are shaped by a wide range of factors, including social norms, personal values, and individual experiences (Buhagiar & Sammut, 2020).

Chou *et al*. (2020) and Thu Ha (2014) contend that attitudes are articulated through the assessment of a product/brand in opposite directions, which is liking or disliking, or feeling favourable or unfavourable. Attitudes have evolved over time and encompass cognitive, emotional, motivational, and behavioural factors. Solomon *et al.* (2012) note that an attitude object is anything that a consumer has an opinion about. Consumer behaviour researchers (Olson & Mitchelle, 1975; Myers & Alpert, 1965) note that the notion of attitudes may be applicable to different circumstances, i.e. consumer choice, target marketing, market segmentation, and assessing the effectiveness of promotional campaigns (Buhagiar & Sammut, 2020).

This study understands attitudes as a person's mental and neurological preparedness to show favour or disfavour towards a particular entity. It is a psychological condition that indicates identity, durability, mental foundation, evaluative personality, and preparedness for a specific task. Attitudes impact behaviour, beliefs, and emotions because they are assessments or judgements made about individuals, things, occasions, or concepts. By evaluating a product or brand from opposing angles, attitudes can be expressed and applied to customer choice, target marketing, market segmentation, and evaluating the success of promotional initiatives.

Individuals are likely to develop favourable feelings with regards to objects once they are informed and know facts about them (Hamilton, 2022; Krosnick & Petty, 1995). As Gwinn and Krajbich (2020) point out, attitude accessibility is the degree to which an attitude is easily remembered from memory. Attitudes are more likely to predict behaviour and remain consistent over time if they can be recalled from the

memory. Attitudinal ambivalence is defined as the degree to which an attitude objective is graded either as positive or negative simultaneously. As positive and negative evaluations reach a point of equilibrium, an attitude's ambivalence is said to increase. Chou *et al.* (2020) and O'Donohoe (2001) observe that there is a great deal of inconsistency regarding consumer views on promotional efforts, depending on the media/platform analysed.

The three components making up attitudes are cognitive, affective, and conative (Buhagiar & Sammut, 2020); they are also referred to as beliefs, feelings, and intentions/behaviour respectively. The facts and opinions that customers acquire through direct involvement with the attitude object, and information acquired from other sources, are known as the cognitive component (Hamilton & Johnson, 2020). The affective component is concerned with how the target audience feels, their sentiments, emotions, or moods towards a brand. The conative component looks at the actions that the target audience will take, based on what they know and how they feel (Hamilton & Johnson, 2020). Attitudes are complex constructs that play a significant role in shaping individual behaviour, beliefs, and emotions.

The notion of student attitudes towards polytechnics can be viewed as a tendency to react favourably or unfavourably towards certain IMC stimuli during a specific exposure event. When students go through an assessment of the best institution to enrol at, three factors influence their decision: the attitudes of fellow students, family decision, and situational factors (Adefulu, Farinloye, & Mogaji, 2020; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Mahmoudi, Laks, & Haugum (2024) argue that the degree to which a person's attitude lessens their preferences for a substitute, is subject to the intensity of their adverse attitude towards the chosen brand, as well as their drive to fulfil their friends' or family's wishes.

The goal of polytechnics is to give students research and work-related, lifelong skills (Mahuyu & Makochekanwa, 2020; Vezi, 2017). However, the general public, government figures, educators, business owners, parents, and students all have unfavourable opinions about polytechnics. Studies (Mahuyu & Makochekanwa, 2020; Vezi, 2017; Anyanwale *et al.*, 2023) reveal that attitudes are greatly influenced by family and society, and school administrators do not encourage kids to engage in TVET courses. Polytechnics' low standing in relation to universities is the primary cause of the unfavourable sentiments towards them among students. Low entry requirements at Zimbabwean polytechnics have led to students viewing them as institutions for those who do not excel academically (Mahuyu and Makochekanwa, 2020). Many fear not being gainfully employed after training, as many polytechnic graduates seek jobs in South Africa or Botswana due to economic pressures. Polytechnic training is often considered less glamorous than university training, and diploma holders are not respected (Shereni, 2020). As such, marketers can utilise IMC to uphold or change the attitudes of stakeholders, parents, and prospective students (Blakeman, 2023).

Mahuyu and Makochekanwa (2020) and Shiundu and Omulando (1992) postulate that this dislike towards polytechnics may have emanated, been propagated, and crystallised by colonial rulers in Africa, who did not allow Africans to be anything more than blue-collar labourers who were only allowed technical and vocational training, while academic training was held in reserve for Europeans who occupied white-collar professions. This resulted in undesirable attitudes towards polytechnics in the formal education system in Zimbabwe; hence, the need for polytechnics to use IMC to alter students' attitudes.

Studies by UNESCO-UNEVOC (2000) and Mahuyu and Makochekanwa (2020) discovered that the choice of career for most youth in developing countries is influenced, mainly, by the expectations of the community. As noted by Singoei (2021) and Kerre (2001), most African parents dream of their children in white-collar jobs (such as doctors, lawyers, teachers, and so on), resulting in few parents encouraging their children to enrol at polytechnics. Sumberg *et al*. (2021) and Kapiyo and Otieno (1986) found that most youths despise labour-intensive jobs, which has seen technical-agricultural-related training being neglected. The consequence of such negative attitudes towards polytechnics is a lack of skilled labour in the market, resulting in high levels of unemployment. Citing the African Economic Outlook (2011), Palmer and Clark (2011) note that the rate of unemployment has been soaring every year in spite of an immense pool of skills, opportunities, and talents. While demand for plumbers, carpenters, builders, and farmers is on the rise, most youth are opting for white-collar job courses such as education, business studies, and so on. The result is a skills mismatch.

These negative attitudes towards polytechnics are not only found in developing countries, but also in developed nations. Germany and Switzerland have a positive approach towards technical vocational education and this has impacted positively on their economies, while United Kingdom and France have not given much appreciation to technical vocational training (Jerome Frantz, 2017). In France, polytechnic education is not given much importance, maintaining the view that academic learning is valuable as compared to labor-intensive jobs (Jerome Frantz, 2017). In Germany, most youth (65%) in the age range of 15-19 years are already on apprentice training, while in England only 6% of the youth train for apprentice in the same age group. This has resulted in youths who are employable in Germany, resulting in the country's economy being one of the strongest (Jerome Frantz, 2017).

2.9 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework designed for the study shows the selected IMC tools (advertising, personal selling, direct marketing, public relations/publicity, and digital marketing) as having effects (cognitive, affective, and behavioural) that influence students' attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings, and intentions) towards polytechnics. In this study all three attitude components (i.e. beliefs/cognition, feelings/affect, and intentions/conation) were included. Argyriou and Melewar (2011) state that vibrant marketing strategies rely on a sound understanding of consumer attitudes. Schiffman and Kanuk (2004) acknowledge that altering consumer attitudes is an important approach that marketing specialists may consider. Makanyeza (2014) notes that the three components that make up the tri-component attitude model are beliefs, feelings, and intentions to purchase. As a result, a close measure of all consumer attitude elements (beliefs, feelings, and intentions) is of importance in the success of the formulation of the marketing strategy. The tri-component theory has mainly been used in first-world countries (Assael, 2004). Makanyeza (2014:877) notes that "calls have been made to conduct more consumer behaviour studies in relation to the tri-component attitude model in developing and emerging economies because most of these studies have been conducted in developed nations". Figure 2-12 below depicts the conceptual framework.

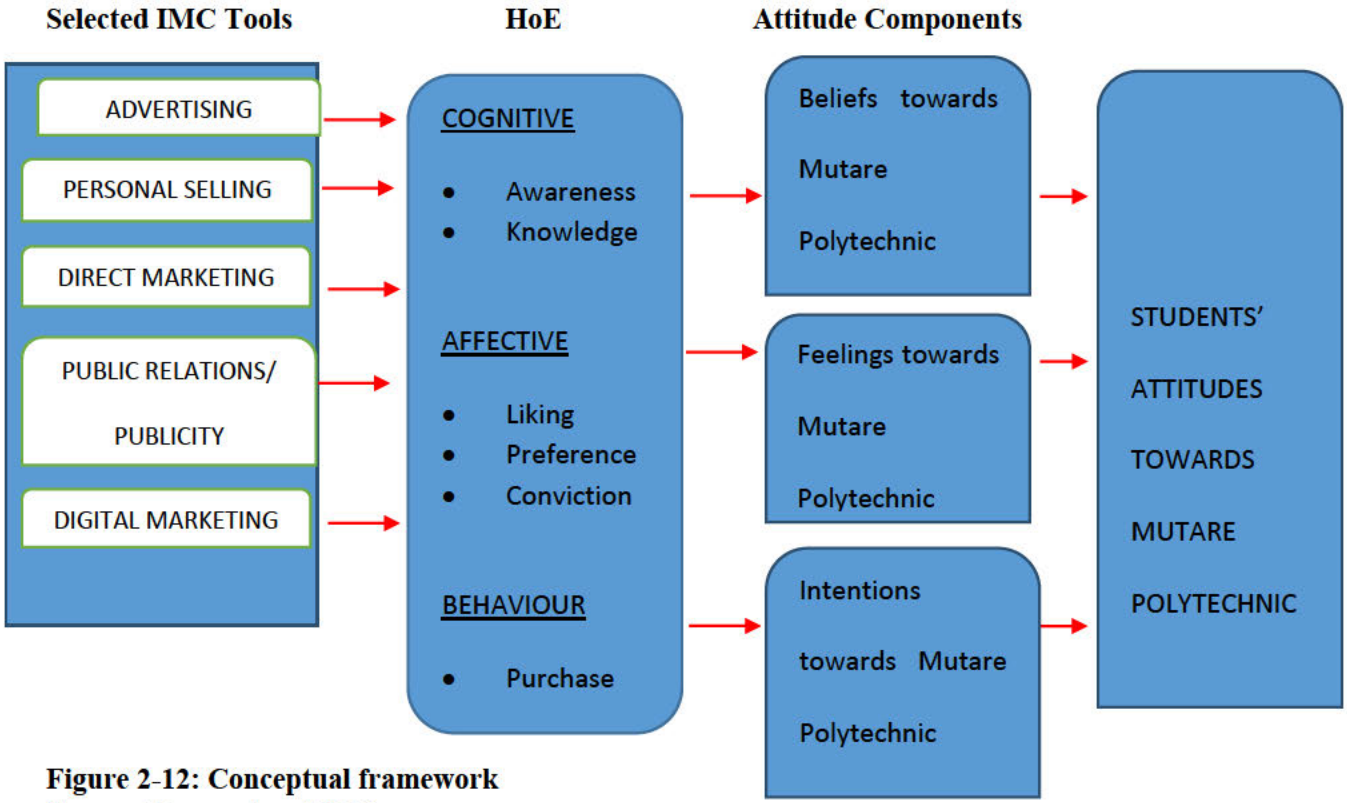

Figure 2-12: Conceptual framework
Source: Researcher (2022)

The researcher developed this conceptual framework with the intention to demonstrate how selected IMC tools (advertising, personal selling, direct marketing, public relations/publicity, and digital marketing) may be used to influence students' attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings, and intentions). Using the model, this study tried to match each of the IMC elements to the attitude components, with the intention of finding how IMC would influence students' attitudes.

2.9.1 IMC components as they relate to students' attitudes

2.9.1.1 Influence of advertising on students' attitudes

Advertising has been found to influence consumer attitudes towards products, services, and even institutions (Kotler & Keller, 2018). According to Aniebiet and Unyime (2023) and Belch and Belch (2018), advertising can create awareness of, provide information about, and create favourable attitudes towards a product or service. Additionally, advertising can be used to create a positive image of an institution, which can influence students' attitudes towards it.

Camilleri (2020) and Jones (2002) note that, with increasing competition, most HEIs are augmenting their budgets for advertising activities. Advertisements may be used by polytechnics to build awareness of the courses offered, provide information, and create an image of quality services. Advertising involves paid presentation and promotional designs of courses, programmes, or services, whether in print, digital, or

transit media (Aniebiet & Unyime (2023). As the war for students intensifies between polytechnics and other HEIs, and government financial support decreases, polytechnics must form and sustain a distinctive image in the education sector for students to have a positive attitude towards them. Tlapana and Myeki (2020) assert that advertising is important in improving student enrolment at HEIs. Frequent flighting of advertisements by polytechnics will attract students, while creating an image of quality services provided and a trust that frequently advertised services have a unique value (Tlapana & Myeki, 2020).

Bamfo and Atara (2013) investigated "The role of marketing communications on student enrolment in private universities". Their main finding was that advertising was the most efficient method of marketing used by these private universities, with the largest impact on their enrolment decisions. The conclusion from this study was that private universities should effectively utilise this form of marketing communication. However, the study also recommended the need for these universities to use other types of marketing communication, so as to give students a variety of choices and get the maximum benefit. Also of importance to note is the recommendation that an institution's brand is best communicated via mass media advertising, and that this influences the high probability of students enrolling there. Dorkenoo *et al*. (2015) examined the influence of advertising at the Ho Polytechnic in Ghana, focusing on informative advertising. They found informative advertising to be an effective marketing tool for creating awareness. A Malaysian study by Mudzanani (2018) discovered that advertising had a great impact on how students decided to enrol at TVET colleges, as well as a favourable impact on students' perceptions of these institutions. The results from an investigation by Maina (2018) indicated that the majority of respondents concurred that advertising strategies, such as print media, television, radio, and billboards, influenced their choice of universities in Kenya. In another study by Bisetegn (2021), on students' attitude toward social media advertising, the findings revealed that university administrators should focus on improving the entertainment component of the advertising message, keeping students up to date, being credible, and ensuring that the medium employed is interactive for students. Bishau and Samkange (2015) conducted a study on the low enrolment of ODL students from ZOU in Chitungwiza, Zimbabwe; the results indicated that negative media coverage of the region damaged the university's reputation, and as a result, decreased student enrolment. Universities in this region, thus, needed to repair their reputations through massive advertising in order to draw in more students.

From the studies above, it appears that advertising can have a significant impact on students' attitudes; therefore, polytechnics should consider using advertisements to achieve this.

2.9.1.2 Influence of personal selling on students' attitudes

Personal selling involves face-to-face communication between a salesperson and potential customer (Arevalo, 2021). In the context of polytechnics, personal selling may be used to influence students' attitudes towards the institution, particularly in terms of increasing enrolment and retention. To attract new students, keep current ones, and establish enduring relationships with them, HEIs can engage in personal selling activities (Smith & Taylor, 2004; Camilleri, 2020). According to Wiese (2008), open days and career fairs were ranked by students as one of the most useful sources of information in HEIs in South Africa. These face-to-face interactions can take the form of symposiums, exhibitions, and career guidance drives that HEIs can carry out to inform, induce, and influence positive attitudes from students towards an institution (Maina, 2018). Polytechnics can influence positive word of mouth through former students and companies employing them (Camilleri, 2020). Coetzee and Liebenberg (2004) note that, in

most cases, potential students prefer using first-hand communication channels. Through personal selling, instant feedback is exchanged between the polytechnic and student, messages can be clarified when they are not clearly understood, and dialogue with prospective students can persuade them to enrol, through customising messages for each unique student and building relationships with them and their guardians. Sultan and Wong (2012) and Gole (2022) assert that preserving ties with students is critical to the long-term viability of universities.

Because personal selling is linked to academic and non-academic sectors, as well as the value of services given in these two sectors, this tool can have a significant impact on polytechnics. Personal selling has a large impact on the student purchasing process (Mutali & Omboi, 2018). Front-office admissions workers are in a good position to engage in two-way contact with prospective students. When providing technical support to prospects, applicants, and accepted students concerning their questions, institutions must be conscious that they are 'selling' the institution (Arevalo, 2021). They may also need to know how to deal with the concerns of students and offer them quality services and facilities (Gole, 2022). As a result, front-desk staff should be observed and assessed on a frequent basis.

Arevalo (2021) investigated the effectiveness of marketing communication tools in higher education recruitment, and found that personal selling has a strong impact on students. Although personal selling is more expensive than other forms of IMC, it seems to be more effective because it is more interactive than other forms of communication, and university staff can give accurate information to persuade a student to enrol in a university programme (Arevalo, 2021). Another study by Camilleri (2020) on higher education marketing communications in the digital era, revealed that HEI staff in the admissions department and front office is best placed to disseminate information. The findings also revealed that institutions must engage previous students for positive word of mouth, that personal selling may be used successfully to develop relationships with potential students and influence their attitudes towards an institution, and that personal selling maybe be a successful strategy for drawing in new students (Camilleri, 2020). These findings relate to those of Krishna *et al*. (2022), which indicate that students value the relationships that they have with administrative staff, and this has an effect on their attitudes towards an institution. In South Africa, Vezi (2017) compared marketing communication to students' perceptions; the findings revealed that visits to the college or visits by the college to schools were important to students. According to the study, personal selling is a useful strategy for interacting with students, establishing rapport, providing pertinent information, and attending to their wants and worries to change their perceptions of TVETs (Vezi, 2017).

2.9.1.3 Influence of public relations on students' attitudes

Public relations (PR) are a marketing communication tool that involves creating and maintaining a positive image of an organisation through activities such as media relations, community engagement, and crisis management (Camilleri, 2020). In relation to polytechnics, PR can be used to influence students' attitudes towards the institution, particularly in terms of increasing enrolment and student retention. Amiso (2000) and Gole (2022) posit that PR plays a significant function in improving HEIs' appeal to students. PR has proven to be popular because of its credibility and its capacity to form a positive picture in students' minds. Once an institution publishes its activities in a magazine or newspaper, prospective students are likely to form positive attitudes towards it. Student or alumni testimonies would most likely give useful information about the quality of polytechnic education or the success of their curricular

programmes through PR operations (Camilleri, 2020). The unscripted films of students' testimonials may appear more genuine than professionally polished marketing content (Camilleri, 2020). It is critical for HEIs to highlight the achievements of their former students who are currently employed in senior government or corporate positions, as these sectors may provide internship programmes to new graduates from these institutions (Camilleri, 2020). PR initiatives on institutional campuses, such as sponsorship events or sporting activities, can help strengthen brand equity (Camilleri, 2020). The author of this current study is also of the view that through PR, polytechnics may also recruit overseas students from various markets to pursue academic degrees in specialised areas; for example, the Equatorial Guinean students who are studying at various polytechnics in Zimbabwe under government-to-government agreements.

The results of a study by Ronke and Olayinka (2022) on the function of PR in maintaining organisational image, show that PR contributed to institutional image building at Rufus Giwa Polytechnic, Owo, Nigeria. According to Penceliah and Vezi's (2019) study of marketing communications in TVET colleges, PR is a useful tool for changing the general public's negativity into positivity, through community engagements, giving students pertinent information, and fostering a favourable perception of the insititution.

Despite the paucity of research on PR's influence on students' attitudes towards polytechnics in Zimbabwe, some PR studies have been conducted recently. Nyagadza and Mazuruse (2021) conducted research on the significance of public relations aspects, as well as digital media, in developing a favourable company image and identity, and looked into how some private institutions in Zimbabwe might use publicity to increase student enrolment. They found that seminars and speeches were used less often than other digital PR approaches in private colleges, which can affect students' enrolment and the college's survival, as well as the ability to build relationships with stakeholders and promote the institution's offerings (Nyagadza and Mazuruse, 2021). According to Ngondo (2019), academics and practitioners should keep highlighting the value of PR in the business mix and education, especially in countries like Zimbabwe where it is occasionally conflated with marketing. The findings demonstrated that PR may be used to establish long-lasting bonds with all categories of stakeholders, including prospective students and their families.

Based on the above research, PR is a useful strategy for cultivating relationships with stakeholders, promoting institutions' programmes, and influencing student perceptions of polytechnics.

2.9.1.4 Influence of direct marketing on students' attitudes

Direct marketing is a marketing communication tool that involves reaching out to customers directly, using channels such as e-mail, social media, telemarketing, and direct mail (Lim *et al*., 2023). In the context of polytechnics, direct marketing may be used to influence students' attitudes towards the institution and student retention (Mudzanani, 2018), while allowing them to network with learners and guardians. Any activity that is carried out intending to get instant feedback from students, and that allows an institution to measure the influence of the tool used, is called direct marketing (Meltareza &Tawaqal, 2023). Marketers in polytechnics may use direct marketing to send e-mails and messages on social media to prospective students, informing them about their courses and other services offered (Vezi, 2017). Advancements in technology have allowed polytechnics to use the internet to provide prospective students with information and receive instant feedback (Hanover, 2015).

Messah and Mutali (2011) found that direct marketing has a positive impact on the decision to enrol at HEIs. According to research conducted by Hanover (2015), there are different ways in which institutions have utilised direct marketing. The findings revealed that direct marketing helps to: avoid repetition and ensure that information only reaches potential students; reach the target market with tailored information; and boost potential students' experience. E-mail marketing was the form of direct marketing that was seen to be the most effective in reaching students.

Mamat *et al.* (2015) researched the role of telemarketing in student enrolment at a private college in Malaysia. They concluded that telemarketing was the most efficient method of direct marketing and led to the largest number of students enrolling at the college. It was seen as a quick way of getting feedback from students and the school administration. Another finding from the study was that telemarketing was an efficient way of collecting information and communicating with students (Mamat *et al*., 2015). Stark and Zadeh (2013) did a study on marketing within HEIs in Thailand, focusing on two private universities. They found that different marketing communication tools were used by these institutions, and that online marketing, which also involves direct marketing, was one of the most important tools. Meltareza and Tawaqal (2023) discovered that direct marketing was a useful marketing strategy for raising student knowledge, addressing their wants and issues, and changing their views towards an institution.

From the discussion above, direct marketing can successfully affect students' attitudes towards polytechnics in Zimbabwe.

2.9.1.5 Influence of digital marketing on students' attitudes

Digital marketing is a marketing communication tool that involves promoting products, services, and institutions, through digital channels such as social media, e-mail and search engines (Kitetu, 2022). In the case of polytechnics in Zimbabwe, digital marketing may be used to influence students' attitudes towards the institution, particularly in terms of increasing enrolment and student retention. Considering that potential students are always surfing the internet, digital media tools such as websites, emails, blogs, podcasts, and social media communication should not be overlooked by polytechnics in their IMC. A study carried out in South Africa shows that "websites were identified as one of the most useful channels of communication used by South African students" (Coetzee & Liebenberg, 2004:70). It is, therefore, not surprising that "in recent years, branding, marketing, and recruitment in higher education have shifted towards online and digital strategies" (Hanover Research, 2015:4). Social media contests, SEO and private blogging, e-mail automation, landing pages, banner and pop-up advertising, and other alternatives are available to present customers with a unique digital experience (Anand *et al*., 2018).

According to a study conducted by Diraditsile and Samakabadi (2018) on the use of social media by students at the University of Botswana, 98% of students had active Facebook profiles that they used to communicate with friends and search for information. Kisiołek *et al.* (2020) examined internet usage in the marketing activities of HEIs in Poland and Ukraine; and the findings showed that due to its quick access to information, the internet permitted effective promotional activities in HEIs, delivered pertinent information to students, addressed their wants and problems, and developed relationships with them. The results of a different study by Kitetu (2022) on the influence of digital marketing communication methods on student enrolment in private hospitality colleges in Kenya, showed that social media, e-mail, and

content marketing all had a favourable and significant impact. According to this research, HEIs should make use of a range of digital communication tools to spread information more quickly and to a wider audience. Digital marketing through social media allows for a variety of interactions and reactions because of its capacity for two-way communication and multitasking (Kusumawati, 2019). It is also effective and efficient thanks to its comment and other features, and offers video and photos with minimal captions, making it easier for audiences to understand; this has resulted in boosting institutions' competitive positions by maintaining a consistent presence in the eyes of their target markets (students). Paladan (2018) found that the majority of the top 25 Asian and African colleges use Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube for digital and social media marketing, though there are differences in terms of the goals of their use and the degree of digital technology adoption. The findings demonstrate how HEIs use social media and digital marketing to promote their programmes and inform the public about their activities and research. The majority of Asia's top 25 colleges, however, have already completely embraced digital technology and uses it for creative creation and design. Additionally, the majority of HEIs use website interface and design as a key component of how they provide information (Paladan, 2018). Findings from Mukosa (2022) reveal that social media is useful for promoting HEIs in Zambia; according to the study, digital marketing is a useful technique for raising awareness of HEIs and changing students' perceptions. Redmond (2010:72) found that "the majority of respondents (96%) indicated that they use the internet to gather information about the choice of college".

During this era, in which students depend on digital media platforms (i.e. internet and social media) to link and connect with HEIs, the failure to define a college's brand signifies a special concern (Pharr 2018). According to Scott (2015:2), a renowned digital branding professional and successful trade writer, "Gone are the days when marketers could simply persuade large segments of their target markets of the benefits and advantages of their products through paid, company-controlled mass-media advertising." Polytechnics, just like any other organisation, should constantly attempt to build their brands to be in line with the changes taking place. Simultaneously, complicated outside environmental circumstances have brought a new level of attention to HEI marketing in general, and institutional branding in particular (Conick 2017). External factors such as the growing importance of college positions, rising tuition that concentrates on value and excellence, and shifting student expectations due to rapid technological advancements, have all contributed to the growing interest among many institutions in using institutional values to create unique brand profiles and competitive advantages (Girard 2016:12).

Institutions have been compelled to use social networking sites such as MySpace, Twitter, and Facebook to perform viral marketing as a result of technological improvements (Kashorda, 2002). In his study on HEI image, Ivy (2001) states that planning for sustained IMC is crucial for institutions. Another recent study looked at how students' decisions about higher education are impacted by digital marketing. Harbi and Ali (2022) found that HEIs should focus more on social media marketing, particularly of a creative nature, in order to draw in their target audiences if they want to thrive. Furthermore, their study demonstrated that parents and students use social media (such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube) to enquire about the specifics of university programmes. Krishnamoorthy and Srimathi (2019) note that colleges have accounts on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. According to Rajkumar *et al*. (2021), higher education institutions must employ digital media to engage and continuously feed user-generated information in the form of text, photographs, infographics, videos, and podcasts to potential students for admission and enrolment. Maresova *et al*.'s (2020) study revealed

that digital marketing has a favourable influence on students' impressions of HEIs, particularly with regard to their assessments of institutional reputation and educational standards.

By providing relevant information, addressing their needs and concerns, and forging relationships with students online, digital marketing has a good chance of changing students' perceptions of polytechnics.

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the literature related to the influence of IMC on student attitudes towards polytechnics. The introduction highlighted the relationship between communication, organisational communication, and IMC before considering various defintions of IMC. The review revealed that IMC has evolved from a simple promotional tool for coordination to a strategic, holistic approach, emphasising synergy among communication tools for consistent, clear, and compelling messages. This chapter also explored the various IMC tools, including advertising, personal selling, direct marketing, public relations, and digital marketing, which can be used to influence student attitudes.

The chapter highlighted the benefits of IMC such as consistent messaging, improved performance, and stronger stakeholder connections. A discussion of IMC implementation models emphasised strategic alignment and coordination within organisations for unified communication efforts. The review revealed progress in IMC practices in African HEIs, although there is still room for improvement, particularly for leveraging digital platforms and data-driven marketing strategies. The relationship between IMC and organisational performance was examined, and it was evident from the discussion that the former can help organisations achieve better outcomes. The review also explored IMC in emerging economies where economic and technological challenges may hinder IMC activities.

Response hierarchy models were discussed, with an emphasis on the hierarchy of effects model. This discussion provided important insights into how IMC influences student decision-making, from a point of unawareness to enrollment, which is essential for polytechnics to effectively influence student attitudes. Attitudes, in general, and students’ attitudes towards polytechnics were also discussed. Negative attitudes towards polytechnics are influenced by parents’ perceptions, societal views, low entry requirements, fear of not being gainfully employed, and polytechnics low standing in relation to universities. Finally, the conceptual framework based on IMC, HoE, and attitudes was presented and discussed. The conceptual framework linked IMC strategies with student attitudes, in line with the study's objectives.

The methodology is presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The goal of this study was to explore the influence of IMC on student attitudes towards Mutare Polytechnic. This chapter describes and justifies the research methodology adopted in the study to address the research objectives. The material is offered to help the reader understand how the empirical data and findings were gathered and generated.

The chapter leads the reader in turn through the research philosophy (interpretivism), design (cross-sectional, exploratory, and case study), approach (qualitative), data collection (focus groups, interviews, and document analysis), and analysis (thematic analysis and content analysis) strategies. Justification is provided to explain why these choices are believed to be the most appropriate ones for the particular setting of the research.

3.2 Research philosophy

The initial stage in the development of knowledge in a particular field during the research process is marked by the selection of a research philosophy (Handema *et al.*, 2023). The five research philosophies identified by Saunders *et al*. (2016) are pragmatism, interpretivism, critical realism, positivism, and post-modernism. The philosophy chosen in a study shows the researcher's perspective that directs their investigation (Handema *et al*., 2023). Research paradigms are philosophical perspectives on the universe and the philosophy shows how a study will be undertaken (Mashingaidze, 2020; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

Table 3-1 provides a synopsis of the five research philosophies according to five criteria: general description, ontology, epistemology, axiology, and research methods.

Table 3-1: Comparison of the research philosophies

Ontology (nature of reality)	Epistemology (what constitutes acceptable knowledge)	Axiology (role of values)	Typical methods
Positivism			
Real, external, independent One true reality (universalism) Granular (things) ordered	Scientific method Observable and measurable facts Law like generalizations	Value-free research Researcher is detached, neutral, and independent of what is researched Researcher maintains	Typically deductive, highly structured, large samples, measurement, typically quantitative methods of analysis, but a range of data can be analysed.

	Numbers Causal explanation and prediction as contribution	objective stance	
Critical realism			
Stratified/layered (the empirical, the actual, and the real). External, independent intransient. Objective structures. Causal mechanisms	Epistemological relativism. Knowledge historically situated and transient. Facts are social constructions Historical causal explanation as contribution.	Value-laden research Researcher acknowledges bias by world views, cultural experience an upbringing. Researcher tries to minimize bias and errors. Researcher is as objective as possible.	Retroductive, in-depth, historically situated analysis of pre-existing structures and emerging agency. Range of methods and data types to fit subject matter.
Interpretivism			
Complex, rich Socially constructed through culture and language Multiple meanings, interpretations, realities Flux of processes, experiences, practices	Theories and concepts too simplistic Focus on narratives, stories, perceptions and interpretations. New understandings and worldviews as contribution.	Value-bound research Researchers are part of what is researched, subjective Researcher interpretations key to contribution. Researcher reflexive	Typically inductive, small samples, in-depth investigations, qualitative methods of analysis, but a range of data can be interpreted.
Postmodernism			
Nominal Complex, rich Socially constructed through power relations. Some meanings, interpretations,	What counts as "truth" and "knowledge is decided by dominant ideologies Focus on absences, silences and oppressed/repressed meanings, interpretations and	Value constituted research Researcher and research embedded in power relations Some research narratives are repressed and silenced	Typically, deconstructive reading texts and realities against themselves. In-depth investigations of anomalies, silences and absences. Range of data types,

realities are dominated and silenced by others. Flux of processes, experiences, and practices.	voices. Exposure of power relations and challenge of dominant views as contribution	at the expense of others. Researcher radically reflexive	typically qualitative methods of analysis.
Pragmatism			
Complex, rich, external "reality" is the practical consequences of ideas. Flux of processes, experiences and practices.	Practical meaning of knowledge in specific contexts. "True" theories and knowledge are those that enable successful action. Focus on problems, practices, and relevance Problem-solving, informed future and practice as contribution	Value-driven research Research initiated and sustained by researcher's doubts and beliefs Researcher reflexive	Following research problem and research question Range of methods: mixed, multiple, qualitative, quantitative, and action research. Emphasis on practical solutions and outcomes

Source: Saunders *et al*. (2016: 136-137)

Once a research philosophy has been chosen, that position must maintained throughout the study. The researcher's findings are then assessed in light of the selected paradigm. This study was guided by the interprevitist philosophy.

3.2.1 Interprevitism

The chief research philosophies employed in marketing research are positivist and interpretivist philosophies. According to Collins and Hussey (2013:265), regarding the former:

> The positivist paradigm is an objective research philosophy that has its grounds in natural sciences and further aims to discover new theories based on observations, surveys and experiments. Logical reasoning, objectivity and precision underpin the approach that often relies on statistical analysis from quantitative research data.

By contrast, interpretivism focuses more on human behaviour (Saliya, 2023; Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Interpretivism is founded on finding out the life experiences of customers in relation to their beliefs, feelings, and values, by analysing their ordinary lives (McLaughlin, 2007) through the use of qualitative research approaches (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Interpretivism emphasises the subjective experiences and viewpoints of individuals, supporting the idea of many, built realities (Lim, 2023). This viewpoint has significant effects on how researchers explain their research, choose and apply methods, generate knowledge, and interpret the world (Saliya, 2023). The human mind's construction of social reality around important matters can only be analysed using the interpretivist method (Irshaidat, 2022). Since

interpretivism is a subjective and adaptable method, new ideas and concepts can emerge during the course of a study (Lim, 2023; Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Comparing the interpretivist approach to the positivist one for this study, the fundamental advantage of the former is that it is more humanistic and through qualitative research, interpretivism gains an understanding of the nature of human emotions.

The interpretivist paradigm entails the investigator understanding the particular significance of social acts (Lim, 2023; Saunders *et al*. 2009). Since this research was an exceptional and intricate scenario, an interpretivist paradigm was considered appropriate. Saunders *et al.* (2009:115) highlight that an interpretivist view is applicable in commercial and administration studies.

When paired with qualitative data collection, the interepretivist paradigm also serves as the most effective way to get meaningful insight into individual opinions, motivations, and behaviours (Saliya, 2023; Malhotra & Birks, 2007), as opposed to restricting the research questions to "what is". This paradigm was also selected because its in-depth analysis supports local stakeholder situations and facilitates research on small cases or areas, while recognising that human experiences are contingent on context and time, as well as on motivations and meanings (Irshaidat, 2022). This study also chose interpretivism because of its suitability to uncover the circumstances and background contributing to student attitudes towards the said polytechnic, as well as due to its flexibility.

In this research, this paradigm was used as a guide for the proper gathering of data; for example, the use of small samples and qualitative data. Qualitative methods such as ethnography, focus group discussions, case studies, and interviews that yield rich, comprehensive data are frequently used in this philosophy. The complexity and subtlety of human experiences can be captured by researchers using these methods, which are not always possible with strictly quantitative approaches (Lim, 2023). Interpretivism offers a thorough grasp of the situation and surroundings in which a study is located by concentrating on the individualised interpretations of those involved ascribed to their circumstances (Lim, 2023). The positivist paradigm was not chosen because it was too restricting, hence not appropriate.

Most IMC studies have been quantitative (71.25%), while only 20% were qualitative, hence the additional motivation to carry out this qualitative study as "qualitative research can explore more in-depth impressions and motivations" (Seric, 2018:678).

An interpretivist philosophy was therefore applied to the research as this is in alignment with the nature of the research, which wanted to understand the relationship between IMC and students' attitudes towards polytechnics, by exploring in a flexible and in-depth fashion the perspectives and experiences of the participants.

3.3 Research design

Huysamen (1993:10) states that a research design is "a plan or alternatively a blueprint which acts as a data collection tool to investigate and analyse the research hypothesis". It gives the investigator details related to the study procedure (Sreejesh, Mohapatra & Anusree, 2014).

This research is a cross-sectional study examining the six divisions of Mutare Polytechnic as a cross-section of the population of students. Cross-sectional design relates to studies that examine data from a population at one particular point in time through observational methods (Wongn & Yaakub, 2021). As such, cross-sectional studies help to provide a picture of a group at a given point in time. They are reasonably inexpensive and do not take much time to conduct (Hemed, 2015). Its ability to facilitate an extensive examination within a feasible and controllable structure (Wang & Cheng, 2020) made this design an excellent option for this study. It further made it possible to gather information from a large sample of students from various departments at Mutare Polytechnic, giving a comprehensive picture of their sentiments.

The two main categories of research design are conclusive and exploratory research (Malhotra & Birks, 2007), which differ mainly around the research objectives. Conclusive research "aims to test and measure hypotheses of clearly defined phenomena", while exploratory research "provides insights and aims to understand the nature of such phenomena" (Malhotra & Birks, 2007:168). Exploratory research is appropriate when there are few or no prior studies to use as a guide (Swedberg, 2020; Collis & Hussey, in Pellisier 2013), or when the issue is not well defined. It is used to gain a deeper grasp of the current research issue (Mbaka & Isiramen, 2021).

This study adopted an exploratory research design mainly because of the lack of existing research on the influence of IMC on students' attitudes towards polytechnics as a study area (Omar *et al*., 2020; Lee *et al*., 2009c; Knittel *et al*., 2016). Adopting an exploratory design allowed this research a chance to find out new insights and bring in new knowledge to the research area (Omar *et al*., 2020). Because of the adaptability and flexible nature of exploratory research, the wide original emphasis of the study gets narrower as the it proceeds and its direction changes in most cases with fresh understandings from the data gathered (Saunders *et al*., 2009). This study also used exploratory research because its associated qualitative methods such as focus groups and interviews, can yield rich, in-depth insights (Omar *et al*., 2020) about student attitudes and the subtle ways in which IMC initiatives affect them. Mutare Polytechnic could benefit from the insights gathered from exploratory research and improve their ability to engage with and draw in new students, while being guided in the creation of tailored IMC campaigns.

For the purpose of this research, a case study design was employed. A case study, according to Robson and McCartan (2016), entails an empirical assessment of a specific current event from its real-life setting, utilising various forms of data. It produces an in-depth comprehension of a current problem or event inside a limited system (Coombs, 2022). Similarly, Schoch (2020) states that case study research comprises an in-depth and rigorous examination of a specific occurrence, condition, social unit, or group. According to Yin (1984), case studies should centre on a specific circumstance, occasion, or institution, with the primary goal of offering comprehensive sociological explanations of it. In this study, Mutare Polytechnic was the case that was used to interpret the influence of IMC on student attitudes towards polytechnics in Zimbabwe. The case study design was also adopted because it provides fresh perspectives and questions accepted notions, particularly in a field that is still largely unexplored, such as the one that is the focus of this study.

Yin (1994:20) points out that a case study comprises five elements: "the study's questions, its propositions, its unit(s) of analysis, the logic linking the data to the propositions, and the criteria for

interpreting the findings". When dealing with research questions in a case study, four other components are also discussed, starting with the unit of analysis, i.e. the "entity that forms the basis of a sample" (Easterby-Smith *et al*., 2012:65). The unit of analysis can either be a single element, a cluster, an establishment, or a social artefact, such as a family, married people, or groups of friends. Identifying the unit of analysis is important as it helps researchers to identify the relevant information to be collected. Using individuals as units of analysis involves researchers describing, explaining, analysing, and aggregating the behaviours of individuals, and ultimately combining such descriptors to form a clear picture of the sample represented by the individuals. One particular advantage of using people as the unit of analysis is that they are able to speak. This study made use of registered first-year students and marketing staff at Mutare Polytechnic as the units of analysis.

It should also be noted that case studies can include individual or multiple cases. The findings from a single case might be hard to generalise given its limited scope (Yin, 1994). Darke, Shanks and Broadbent (1998:277) argue that multiple case studies, by comparison, "allow cross case analysis and comparison, and the investigation of a particular phenomenon in diverse settings". Yin (1994:46) consolidated this idea when he argued that "multiple-case studies follow replication logic". However, single case studies allow for careful investigation of the potential case, which helps in reducing the chances of misrepresentation. Therefore, this study involved a single case, enabling it to investigate and understand the phenomenon in depth.

This study is a single case in that it focuses on Mutare Polytechnic only. Of importance to note is that the key objective of the case study design is to ensure that data is triangulated. Triangulation is the use of multiple methods in a study to increase study credibility and reliability. Yin (2009:117) points out that:

> Triangulation comes in different forms that includes triangulation of data sources (data triangulation), different evaluators (investigator triangulation), perspectives to the same data set (theory triangulation), methods (methodological triangulation) and theoretical triangulation, which is the use of multiple theories in the same study for the purpose of supporting or refuting findings in different theories.

In this study, data and methodological triangulation were employed. Different types of data (primary and secondary) were gathered, through a variety of methods (focus groups, interviews, documents, and websites). This allowed for a multi-pronged, holistic, in-depth exploration of the phenomenon, and for trustworthiness through being able to support findings with multiple sources of evidence.

3.4 Research approach

This research was qualitative in its approach. According to Mason (2001), qualitative research is a relatively open methodology that focuses on learning about and comprehending people's perspectives, behaviours, and life events. Asper and Corte (2021) note that qualitative research is a continuous procedure that improves scientific understanding by identifying new, noteworthy distinctions that arise from drawing closer to the phenomenon being examined. Qualitative research is an approach used when examining intricate, multidimensional problems where human experience and interpretation are crucial (Lekan, Collins, & Hayajneh, 2021). It is especially helpful in disciplines such as psychology, anthropology, sociology, education, and health sciences where it is essential to comprehend the subtleties

of social phenomena and human behavior (Gautam & Gautam, 2023). Findings are detailed, as well as thick descriptions, including direct quotes capturing participants' perspectives and experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research benefited this study in that it enabled observation of the behaviour of participants during interviews, it was less costly, and timely data was obtained while the participants' opinions were presented in the study outcomes.

This study gathered data in July 2022, related to human-related matters, i.e. opinions, views, feelings, and interactions. Qualitative research was chosen because the phenomenon under investigation required data that the researcher was not aware of; therefore, it provided a platform for participants to discuss the topic, even beyond the scope anticipated in this research. Through the qualitative method, richer data was able to be gathered compared to what would have been possible through a quantitative approach. Rich data means that data has depth, which can be identified in the speech, actions, signs, and natural objects exhibited by the participants (Lindlof & Taylor, 2012). The intricacy and diversity of student attitudes towards Mutare Polytechnic were best captured through a qualitative approach, which provided insightful information for both theoretical comprehension and real-world implementation. The comprehensive findings of qualitative research could provide the polytechnic with useful suggestions on how to improve their IMC tactics, thereby increasing their ability to draw in and engage new students. The qualitative approach was also adopted because it allowed for the collection of data directly from participants, using methods like focus groups and interviews that captured their opinions and voices. As such, this approach helped shed light on the subjective interpretations and driving forces underlying student attitudes towards Mutare Polytechnic.

Through the qualitative approach, there was the opportunity to observe and understand the behaviour exhibited by participants while asking questions. The findings were detailed, thick descriptions including direct quotes capturing participants' perspectives and experiences. Scholars concur that qualitative research allows the participants to be involved in realistic and instructive behaviour (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). This approach was also appropriate for this study as it enabled target group opinions to be included in its outcomes. Qualitative research methods aided in gaining a deeper understanding and explanation of challenging topics, such as attitudes, behaviours, and relationships among students at polytechnics in Zimbabwe. This study paid particular attention to the possible meanings created by the students when they were decoding the promotional activities carried out by the polytechnic, by looking at the images, language, and graphic choices used. The bias towards quantitative research in existing IMC studies provided further motivation to carry out this qualitative study as "qualitative research can explore more in-depth impressions and motivations" (Seric 2018:678).

3.5 Study site

This study was carried out in the city of Mutare, the capital city of Zimbabwe's Manicaland province. The population of Mutare's urban area is 199 243, while its rural one is 260 567 (Census, 2022). Mutare Polytechnic is situated two kilometers from the city centre, to the east of the CBD.

3.6 Target population

Schindler and Cooper (2006:146) define target population as "the overall number of elements/units of analysis from which the researcher wishes to draw conclusions". At the institutional level, the target

population comprised the eight polytechnics in Zimbabwe, an overview of which is provided in Table 3-2.

Table 3-2: Zimbabwean Polytechnics

	Polytechnic	Province	Enrolment
1	Harare	Harare Metropolitan	4 000
2	Bulawayo	Bulawayo Metropolitan	3 200
3	Kwekwe	Midlands	2 800
4	Gweru	Midlands	3 120
5	Mutare	Manicaland	2 650
6	Masvingo	Masvingo	2 300
7	Joshua Mcabukho Nkomo	Matebeleland South	2 170
8	Kushinga Phikelela	Mashonaland East	2 100

Source: Ministry magazine (2022)

The study selected one polytechnic as a case study because focussing on a single institution allows for a more thorough analysis of its unique use of IMC tactics, and how these affect student attitudes, resulting in richer findings. Furthermore, given the limitations of time, money, and resources, it was prudent to restrict the study to a single polytechnic. However, findings would not be generalisable to other institutions. Mutare Polytechnic was chosen, in part, because the researcher used to work there. Besides being conveniently located for the researcher (bearing in mind that she originally intended to do in-person data collection, before COVID-19 necessitated a change to a virtual approach), the choice of this institution offered other research benefits, such as the researcher's familiarity with the institution, making it easier to access institutional knowledge; this resulted in a deeper and more detailed investigation. Additionally, it was personally motivating to study a problem in one's previous workplace context.

Mutare Polytechnic has several divisions, namely Commerce, Applied Arts and Sciences, Research and Education, and Mechanical, Civil and Construction, and Electrical forms of engineering. At the individual participant level, the target population comprised all first-year students registered at Mutare Polytechnic in all six divisions, as well as staff working in the institution's marketing department. These divisions were chosen based on the view that the resulting findings would provide a fair representation of student attitudes at Mutare Polytechnic. The decision to use students in the study was mainly motivated by the fact that, in education marketing, they are the main participants and their attitudes and perceptions have a direct bearing on enrolment decisions. Similar studies in Africa (Vezi, 2016; Camilleri, 2020; Mudzanani, 2018) have also used students, who are usually the primary target demographic when creating IMC campaigns for educational institutions. It is possible to gain insights regarding campaign effectiveness and areas for development by comprehending student views and reactions.

Statistics obtained from the Registry Department (see Table 3-3) show that there were 696 registered first-year National Certificate students in all six divisions on 30th June 2022. Registered first-year students were chosen because the decision process to enrol at a polytechnic would still be vivid in their minds, since they would have done this recently. As such, they would be well placed to provide insights into the IMC tools, media, and messages that proved most and least persuasive in influencing positive attitudes towards the polytechnic. First-year students can offer valuable feedback on recruitment and admissions

processes, including which marketing messages resonated with them and why they chose the polytechnic over other options. Acquiring an understanding of first-year attitudes can help better understand factors that contribute to student satisfaction and retention. Furthermore, knowledge of how IMC methods affect student experiences and outcomes throughout their academic journey can potentially be gained by conducting longitudinal studies, which begin with first-year student research and follow changes in attitudes and perceptions over time.

Table 3-3: First year registered (National Certificate) students at Mutare Polytechnic as on 30th June 2022

Division	Female	Male	Total
Applied Arts & Sciences	90	55	145
Commerce	75	49	124
Civil Engineering & Construction	17	90	107
Electrical Engineering	15	105	120
Mechanical Engineering	5	130	135
Research & Education	39	26	65
Total	**241**	**455**	**696**

Source: Admissions Office, Mutare Polytechnic (30 June 2022)

The college marketing department has five staff members, who constituted the target population for staff. They were chosen because they are responsible for the institution's IMC, and can therefore provide insight into the IMC campaigns that the institution runs to attract potential students, as well as the effectiveness of such campaigns. Of importance to note is that all five staff members are also lecturers at Mutare Polytechnic (from the marketing and other relevant departments).

3.7 Sampling strategies

Gates (2010:35) states that a sample is "a portion of a larger population that the researcher has selected to obtain information". In this research, convenience sampling was used. Scholtz (2021) explains that this is a non-probability sampling technique that selects a sample based on ease of access, such as posting advertisements on notice boards, and is useful for researchers recruiting college students. The researcher specified the requirements for the study (i.e. first-year students, residing on campus, aged 18-25, and enrolled for the first time), and the first eligble 48 students (eight from each of the six divisions of Mutare Polytechnic) who indicated interest, willingness, and availability to participate in it were selected. First-year students were selected as the influence of IMC on their decision to enrol at the polytechnic would still be quite fresh in their minds. The study also considered students who resided on campus and who thus had uninterrupted internet access because for off-campus students, this is not reliable due to frequent power cuts in Zimbabwe. This was important because data collection would take place remotely, via Zoom. Students in the 18-25 years age group who were enrolled in college for the first time, were also recruited. All five staff members from the marketing department were selected since there were few of them in this department, and, therefore, including all of them would allow for some diversity in terms of years of service and qualifications. In addition, Saunders *et al*. (2009) highlight that five is the minimum recommended sample size when gathering data using semi-structured interviews.

The researcher, with the help of the six heads of division at the polytechnic, carried out the recruitment of the student participants. Through a formal letter, she asked for permission to carry out interviews and focus groups through the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development. The approval letter from the Ministry was then presented to the principal at Mutare Polytechnic and permission was granted. The six heads then assisted in placing fliers on the noticeboards in their respective division, and listing the names of the first eight students from their respective divisions, who had offered to take part in the research. The heads of division also assisted in arranging convenient times to carry out the focus group discussions (FGDs). Regarding staff participants, the Public Relations and Marketing Officer helped the researcher to get in touch with and recruit the staff members from the marketing department.

3.8 Sample size

A convenience sample of 48 first-year students from the six divisions (eight students from each of the six divisions), and five staff from the institution's marketing department were chosen for the study. Babbie (2016) notes that it is ideal to have a group size of not more than eight participants in each focus group. Fern (1982:12) carried out an experiment which showed that FGDs of eight participants produced more meaningful concepts compared to those of only four participants. Adam and Cox (2008:24) argue that "too large groups are difficult to control and make it hard to solicit input from all participants". Ogwuegbuzie and Collins (2007) posit that small sample sizes make it difficult to achieve data saturation, yet a very large sample impedes deeper case-oriented analysis. In support of this selection, Lipstein (1975:34) notes that "increasing sample size is not a guarantee of increasing accuracy. On the contrary, the sheer size makes many kinds of errors highly likely."

Although 48 students initially agreed to participate in the FGDs, it later emerged that only 35 actually did so. The planned six focus groups were maintained, but each group had fewer than the anticipated eight participants. Five groups had six participants each, while one group had five. The fact that there were fewer student participants than anticipated was not viewed as a concern because saturation had been reached, meaning that nothing new was being discussed in the later focus groups that had not already been brought up in the earlier ones. According to Fusch *et al.* (2018), saturation is the point at which the researcher realises that all the necessary data has been gathered, and there is no longer any fresh relevant information or data that can be gathered from the study participants. According to Hennink and Kaiser (2022), saturation is typically attained between the fourth and eighth focus group. When a study is saturated, a researcher must stop gathering new data for that particular topic. One of the key factors to consider when performing qualitative research is saturation. In order to achieve this, a researcher must really exhaust the interviewing of respondents until they are unable to provide any more information. In addition to ensuring the accuracy and reliability of the data for the study, the saturation threshold also saves the researchers' time and effort by ensuring that each participant takes part sufficiently to allow for the collection of an adequate volume of data. Because there are several participants in each focus group, saturation is likely to occur sooner than it would with interviews. Interviews typically produce less information than focus groups do. Hennink *et al.* (2019) claim that the study's purpose, the use of codes, the number of groups in each stratum, the type of saturation, and the degree of saturation can all have an impact on focus groups.

Meanwhile, five is the minimum recommended sample size when gathering data using semi-structured interviews (Saunders *et al*., 2009), hence this research recruited all five staff members in the marketing department.

3.9 Data collection

Both secondary and primary data sources were used. This allowed for synchronisation of the current data gathered specifically for the problem at hand, and existing data collected previously for other purposes. Primary data was gathered via FGDs and interviews, while secondary data included organisational and ministry documents, as well as the institution's marketing communication activities, available in the public domain. Due to COVID-19, this research used remote/electronic data collection methods (i.e. FGDs and interviews took place via Zoom to gather data from the students and staff). Data collection took place in July 2022; FDGs were carried out from Saturday 9th July 2022 until Saturday 23rd July 2022, while interviews for staff were on different dates that suited their programmes.

The sections below elaborate on the data sources. The research commenced with the reviewing of secondary data, in order to help choose the emphasis of the subsequent primary data collection. The different types of data are presented in the order in which they were processed during the study.

3.9.1 Secondary data

Thomas *et al*. (2017) are of the view that the collection of secondary data is usually associated with case studies in management and business research. Saunders *et al.* (2009) highlight that secondary data contains unprocessed data and published summaries. In this study, the secondary data comprised the polytechnic's marketing communications in various media, as well as institutional and ministry documents available in the public domain. Use of internal documents (e.g. marketing reports in the college magazine, and enrolments records) allowed this research to have relevant facts about the polytechnic's marketing communication activities. Newspapers provided information on advertisements and PR activities being carried out, while digital media (e.g. internet, institutional website, and social media sites) provided the most current institutional advertisements. This information assisted in preparing for the primary data collection phase, and in discussing the research findings and recommendations. Polytechnics, like any other business, gather and store an assortment of data to back up their activities; hence, institutional documents offered a rich source of secondary data. Bryman and Bell (2007) highlight that official institutional documents are very important to researchers, although at times they may not be available in the public domain. Indeed, as the researcher was collecting secondary data, it emerged that some documents were not accessible (e.g. financial documents which show the actual investments in marketing activities).

Secondary data offers several benefits and some drawbacks. One of the most significant advantages of document analysis is that it can provide information that is not readily available through other methods (Morgan, 2022); for example, the MHTESTD report (2019) was used in thi study to find information on the establishment of polytechnics. Documents provided insights into historical events, organisational procedures, and human experiences that interviews or observations did not reveal, for example, enrolment statistics. Furthermore, document analysis proved to be a cost-effective strategy because it did not require the acquisition of fresh data. Document analysis allowed for the triangulation of data from FGDs and staff interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018), thereby strengthening the research findings. One the disadvantages

encountered, however, was that the documents did not provide a comprehensive picture of the topic under consideration. For example, this research was looking for possible reasons why enrolment figures were going down with each intake, whereas the documents only had enrolment statistics. In addition, there were no clear documents on the IMC programme used by the institution. Some of the documents that the researcher came across were biased towards the polytechnic and some of the information was inadequate. Furthermore, document analysis takes time since the data had to be thoroughly evaluated and interpreted.

3.9.2 Primary data

Primary data is gathered for a specific problem, resulting in data being in alignment with the research questions (Taherdoost, 2021). In most cases, primary data collection involves FGDs, observations, experiments, surveys, and interviews (Kabir, 2016). Considering the background and context in which the problem was researched, where student and staff attitudes were very significant, primary data was gathered using FGDs and interviews. These data collection methods were helpful in assembling valid and consistent data that was relevant in answering the research questions.

Interview types include structured, semi-structured, and unstructured or in-depth interviews, with semi-structured and unstructured interviews being the most suitable for qualitative studies where the interviewees' points of view are of importance (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Because structured interviews have prearranged questions, they are likened to questionnaires which gather finite data (Ghauri & Grönhaug, 2005), hence, this research did not use them. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, themes and codes are identified and the formerthemes help to identify patterns in the data related to the research question (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). On the other hand, unstructured interviews allow participants the freedom to converse about their views on specific issues. They are given a chance to respond freely even when only a single question would have been asked. In this exploratory research, semi-structured interviews were used to gather data from the staff participants, alongside the FGDs used for the student participants. Each of these methods is discussed below.

3.9.2.1 Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions (FGDs) are "a qualitative approach used to discover human behavior, attitudes, and respondents facing a particular concept and it is a mixture of interviewing and observation" (Taherdoost, 2021:20). In qualitative research, the approach which informs FGDs is that "the nature of reality is viewed as phenomenological, and multiple views of reality can exist therefore individuals are invited to participate in a discussion where their diverse opinions and perspectives are desired" (Brotherson, 1994:101). Zoom FGDs were held with first-year students at Mutare Polytechnic to, among other things, discuss the various meanings that they understood from the IMC messages flighted by the polytechnic.

Focus group discussions, also known as group discussions, benefit from group interface and interactions amongst participants, with the aim of gathering rich data through varied sentiments and perceptions (Creswell, 2014). Because this study focused on examining the attitudes of students towards polytechnics in Zimbabwe, FGDs were found to be effective in discovering these attitudes and opinions in a group setting. FGDs assisted the students to discover and describe their opinions in a better way than they would have done in individual interviews, because they built on ideas from their peers. This is supported by Collumbien *et al*. (2012:145), who note that "group interviews can generate a breadth of ideas and

opinions which extends beyond a single person's experiences and verbal abilities." In this study, FGDs were suitable since the researcher had a list of open-ended questions which encouraged varied replies from the students. Mack (2005:45) notes that "the use of open-ended questions is useful in exploratory research as it gives participants the opportunity to respond in their own vocabulary and from their own perspectives." Through FGDs, other themes and topics were discovered in this study, as the students conversed in groups and reflected on matters raised during the discussions. During these, the researcher noticed that some students unconsciously evoked fresh thoughts and opinions in their counterparts that had not had been raised earlier during the discussions. In this study, FGDs therefore assisted by enabling the exploration of students' attitudes towards polytechnics and related matters; the discussions also assisted in understanding the motivations underlying the participants' attitudes and behaviours. FGDs gave a structured framework for the discussion, while still allowing for freedom in the questions asked and the direction of the discussion. FGDs also assisted in identifying the patterns and themes that individual interviews may not have shown. Notably, FGDs were used to build rapport between participants and researcher. Participants were able to communicate and share their experiences, which helped in building trust and creating a more comfortable and open atmosphere for the conversation. Additionally, FGDs can be conducted in a range of settings, including in person, via phone, or online, which can increase accessibility and flexibility in the research. In this case, they were conducted online.

One of the most significant disadvantages of focus groups is that they might be impacted by group dynamics, whereby members in a focus group may be hesitant to express their genuine beliefs or may be swayed by the views of others (Marques *et al*., 2021). To avoid this problem, all the participants were motivated to speak through allowing them a chance to. Nonetheless, certain participants dominated the discussion (especially those who were eloquent in English), while others were hesitant to speak up, resulting in uneven participation; to attempt to mitigate this problem, the discussion was led in both Shona and English.

Another disadvantage of FGDs is that they may not be appropriate for discussing delicate or personal matters (Tümen, 2020). A further drawback encountered in this study was that some participants felt awkward addressing issues of digital marketing, as they shyly indicated that they did not have smartphones; from there onwards, their participation decreased and the researcher felt this limited the depth and quality of the data acquired.

Six FGDs were conducted, comprising six participants in five groups and five in the other group. These Zoom FDGs were held with first-year students at Mutare Polytechnic to discuss the various meanings that they created from the polytechnic's IMC messages. The moderator shared their screen with participants, so that they could see the IMC examples to be discussed. Participants could communicate in either English or Shona, to allow free expression of thoughts and ensure that they were comfortable. This was because the researcher had noticed that some students had a strong rural background, hence, forcing them to participate in English only would potentially have affected their responses. The use of FGDs allowed large volumes of information to be attained within a short space of time, which the researcher was able to record via Zoom. The FGDs were conducted on Saturdays over a three-week period (i.e. from the second to the fourth Saturday of July 2022), between 09h00-11h00 and 13h00-15h00, when most of the participants were free from lessons; two FDGs were conducted each Saturday.

An FGD guide (see Appendix A) was used to help to facilitate the discussions. The researcher constructed the guide based on the research questions. The introductory question was meant to warm up the participants to the topic under discussion, and to give everyone a chance to speak from the start of it. After the introductory question, all the other questions on the guide were open ended, thereby allowing the participants to freely express themselves. In designing the guide, the researcher made sure to use words that were not difficult for the participants to understand or pronounce. A pilot study was carried out because it was crucial to test the research instrument. For example, if the pilot had shown that any of the questions were unclear, they would have been changed before the actual data collection. The guide was piloted with 16 first-year students from the Retail Management Department at the researchers' place of work. The sample chosen for the pilot were also in the 18-25 years age group, were first-year registered students and resided on campus; however, they were not from Mutare Polytechnic (i.e. the primary study population) because those students were in the midst of an examination session (practical assessments and final examinations) at the time. The pilot and took 45 minutes. After the pilot, no changes were made to the guide because no problems were raised. However, the actual research participants subsequently criticised the length of the guide, even though its length had not been raised as as an issue by those who participated in the pilot study.

A Zoom group was set up by the researcher for each FGD session and passwords were shared with the participants. As previously mentioned, students who resided on campus were chosen to participate since there is free Wi-fi on campus, as well as backup generators for power supply (considering the long hours of power cuts being experienced in Zimbabwe).

The discussion from the focus groups helped in obtaining a profound, shared meaning of responses, deepening the trustworthiness of the research outcomes (Stahl *et al*., 2011). It also provided the chance to acquire a rich group interaction-based data on IMC and student attitudes.

3.9.2.2 Interviews

Individual, in-depth interviews were utilised to collect information from the staff employed in the institution's marketing department. In-depth interviews are a qualitative technique involving dialogue with prudently nominated participants to discover their viewpoints, specific programme, circumstances, or ideas (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Through the interviews, the researcher managed to explore matters in depth.

Even though the interviews were electronically mediated, they provided the interviewer with an opportunity to create a comfortable environment that prompted interviewees to discuss all they thought was relevant for the research. The interviews gave the researcher a flexible way to collect data, respond to participant comments, and explore new subjects as they came up. The main goal of these interviews was to understand the participants' basic inspirations, views, and attitudes by asking them questions about a specific subject, in this case IMC. The interviews brought insight into the IMC activities and campaigns used by the institution to attract potential students, and the effectiveness of such campaigns. Semi-structured interviews gave the dialogue a defined framework, and also gave the interviewer some latitude in the questions asked and the flow of the conversation (Belina, 2023). Semi-structured interviews also allowed the researcher to enquire further when it was felt that a participant had not exhausted their thoughts.

The interviews allowed for the collection of information from a variety of participants with varying levels of education, from diploma to master's holders. Another advantage of interviews is that they may be done in a variety of locations, including in person, over the phone or online, which can assist in making the research more accessible (Belina, 2023). In this study, the interviews were conducted online via Zoom; this permitted the investigator to collect data from the staff members in Mutare, while in Harare. It also allowed the researcher to examine the interviewees' bodily actions and facial expressions displayed during the sessions.

However, there are some drawbacks to conducting semi-structured interviews. Because participants may be hesitant to disclose their experiences in an open-ended discourse, these may not be the optimal strategy for gathering data on sensitive or difficult themes (Belina, 2023). In this study, the staff members were hesitant in speaking about IMC programme implementation.

The construction of the interview guide (i.e. the arrangement, phrasing, and content of the questions) was done by the interviewer and grounded according to the research objectives. The guide (see Appendix B) was designed to collect information relating to IMC activities carried out by the marketing department at the polytechnic, i.e. their advertising, personal selling, public relations, direct marketing, and digital marketing activities. Prior to employing the interview guide on the chosen sample, a trial run was carried out with two marketing members of staff at the researchers' workplace who were not involved in the main study. The pilot took place outside of the activities of Mutare Polytechnic; however, the pre-test sample was chosen by the investigator to be representative of the study's sample. Piloting was intended to pre-test the instrument in order to help ensure that the questions were easily understandable by the participants, and to determine whether the guide was going to yield the information needed for the study. The interview substance, the questions' clarity, and any challenges that they might experience during the study were all thoroughly evaluated by the participants. Twenty interview questions were used in the pre-testing exercise, which was completed in about 30-40 minutes. According to the participants, the language employed in the interview guide was simple to understand. The questions in the last section of the guide, namely on whether the polytechnic had an IMC programme, were the most difficult ones and the participants asked for clarifications. The researcher changed a few words to simplify the challenging words that had been highlighted.

The interviews were conducted when the participants were free. Through the assistance of the Head of Marketing and Public Relations, the participants were not given any work tasks so that they could participate in the study, and they chose a venue which was not busy or noisy. As indicated previously, the researcher conducted Zoom interviews with the staff participants. Through the use of semi-structured interviews comprising open-ended questions related to the research objectives, the researcher managed to follow the list of questions of relevance to the research objectives which appeared on the interview guide was also able to probe into participants' thoughts and reactions, where necessary. By contrast, in a scenario with unstructured interviews, interviewees freely express their thoughts, even when they are not related to the subject under discussion (Saunders *et.al*. 2009).

3.9.3 Data capture

The researcher obtained informed consent in writing from each participant. Their permission was sought to record the Zoom FDGs and interview audios. Recordings helped with confirmability as they enabled the researcher to check the findings against them. After administering the informed consent procedure, and before the FDG or interview took place, each participant was allocated a distinctive ID number. The researcher, who is fluent in both Shona and English, later manually transcribed verbatim the recordings of the FDGs and interviews, to create a written record of the data. The researcher went over the transcript again to check for accuracy and translate the Shona responses into English. After checking for accuracy, the researcher thematically coded using NVivo 11 software and deduced meanings from the output. Data analysis is discussed further in Section 3.11.

3.10 Data quality control

Shenton (2004) identifies four key criteria for the trustworthiness of qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

3.10.1 Credibility

A genuine representation of the event being studied is how researchers hope to build credibility (Shenton, 2004). The strategy of triangulation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) was employed to reduce the threats to credibility and strengthen the systematicity of the study. The findings from the student FDGs were compared to those from the staff interviews and document analysis; as such, triangulation contributed in reinforcing the systematicity of the study by availing a variety of sources for proof (Suter, 2012.). Additionally, the FGDs and interviews were recorded, giving the researcher the chance to listen to the audio repeatedly, and enabling third parties to confirm the investigator's findings and conclusions. To explain the results and make sure that each participant's point of view was grasped correctly, the investigator shared the findings with them after each interview and FGD session. The researcher also made sure that every participant was free and willing to take part, which led to the authentic and honest responses, contributing to credibility.

3.10.2 Transferability

Regarding transferability, writers should "provide sufficient detail of the context of the fieldwork for a reader to be able to decide whether the prevailing environment is similar to another situation with which he or she is familiar and whether the findings can justifiably be applied to the other setting" (Shenton, 2004: 69). In this regard, in-depth contextual background to the fieldwork was provided in the methodology chapter. Details about the participants in the research were given, including the total number of participating divisions, number of participants (including staff members and students), limitations on participants' data contribution, data gathering techniques employed, and the time period during which data was collected. With the primary objective of enabling readers to have an improved appreciation of the study and have the ability to compare the phenomenon under study with other research from similar contexts, transferability was also achieved through providing a sufficiently thick description of the phenomenon.

3.10.3 Dependability

Dependability is "the adoption of an 'audit' approach to keeping a complete record of all phases of the study" (Bryman & Bell, 2015:403). In this research, a detailed audit trail was provided, specifying the

data collection procedure, how categories were derived during analysis, and the decisions made. Reliability was also achieved by attaching the interview guide (Appendix B) and FGD guide (Appendix A) so that the study could be replicated to confirm the findings. This material was included to provide as much detail as possible on the techniques of data collectiion and procedures used.

3.10.4 Confirmability

In order to achieve confirmability, researchers must take steps to demonstrate that findings emerge from the data and not from their own predispositions (Shenton, 2004:72). The researcher frequently compares data, obtains multiple points of view (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and double checks the data (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). In this study, the researcher recorded the FDGs and interviews on Zoom, as this enabled the findings to be checked against the data. The audio was also used to support the results during member checks. The investigator created an audit trail to track the analysis of the data, from beginning to end, in order to achieve confirmability. This eliminated bias by ensuring that the study outcomes were based on the data rather than the researcher's opinions. Additionally, triangulation was used to achieve confirmability, which lessened the impact of researcher bias.

3.11 Data analysis

Cohen *et al*. (2007:461) assert that qualitative data analysis is best defined as "the process of making sense from research participants' views and opinions of situations, corresponding patterns, themes, categories and regular similarities". This type of analysis of data allowed for the identifying of patterns and themes, with the former being used to answer the research questions.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse data from the interviews and FGDs. Krippendorf (2014:99) indicates that "analyzing focus group interviews using thematic analysis is not greatly different from analyzing one-person interviews". Theme analysis is an incessant, comparative approach that requires repeated readings of the written materials in an organised way (Cavendish, 2011); the primary element is that the analysis be methodical in order to ensure the final outcome is of high quality. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe a six-phase system for audio recording, transliteration, and analysis of data. Table 3-4 shows the phases of data analysis according to Braun and Clarke (2006).

Table 3-4: Thematic steps

Phase	Description of process
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set; collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2); generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Source: Braun and Clarke (2006:87)

The researcher's familiarisation with the data, which involved listening to and reviewing transcripts of the recorded conversations, was the first step of the procedure. This stage helped to identify the kind (and quantity) of themes that might appear from the data. In fact, this stage is vital since it guides some extra activities that might be needed to fully assess the data. All transcripts were loaded into NVivo 11 for analysis. As the researcher read the transcripts, all of the noteworthy details were underlined. By going through all of the data in this way, the main objective was get wholly engaged in it.

The second step was the development of primary codes, where the researcher meticulously coded data-provoking elements. Following the first stage of data analysis, also known as becoming comfortable with it, the richness of the early discoveries became apparent. On the other hand, it was considered how important it was to read the excerpts again before really writing the codes. The investigator then carefully analysed the transcripts again and coded all of the information. Using the effective NVivo coding technology, different codes can be applied by locating key words, phrases, or paragraphs. For example, some of the codes that were found were repeated exposure, entertaining advertisements, and peer and family support. All of the transcripts were coded after being carefully reviewed numerous times.

Braun and Clarke (2006) claim that the third step starts with a long list of the codes that were discovered in the dataset. Discovering trends and connections both within and throughout the process of collection was the main objective of this stage (Chamberlain, 2015). It was crucial to look at the codes to ascertain how different ones could be integrated to generate a unified theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, the codes of 'tour of premises', 'presentability of personnel', 'student participation and peer marketing',

‘attended roadshows & symposiums’, ‘Mutare Poly team visited’, and ‘my school was invited’ were unified under theme, namely ‘influence of career guidance’. In other words, topic analysis rather than code analysis was the primary focus of this step. According to Brown and Clarke (2006:10), "a theme captures something important about the data in relation to a research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data." In order to create prospective themes connected to the research topic, it was crucial to mix similar or multiple codes, and think of those codes as building blocks (Ansari, 2015). This was the hardest step of the process of analysis. In order to speed up the procedure, a list of the codes was made on a different sheet and then arranged into theme piles, which considered how themes and codes related to one another, as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). The transcripts were then read again, with various codes combined into probable themes, and all pertinent coded data extracts within the themes were collated. When creating the topics, the ideas and problems noted in the literature review were consider. This study learned that certain topics from the literature review were profoundly important and that certain codes might be categorised under them. Even though it was mentioned in a few publications, the analysis considered all pertinent data.

In the fourth stage, all the themes—master, central, and sub-themes—were now consciously brought together to extend and exhibit the first collected themes spontaneously. Themes should be evaluated for both outward heterogeneity (differences between them) and internal homogeneity (coherence and consistency), according to Braun and Clarke (2006). This stage was divided into two. First, all coded excerpts retrieved from the NVivo file that were relevant to each preliminary theme were extracted stage one, and then put in a Microsoft Word document to enable cross-referencing of coded extracts with themes and meaningful retrieval, comparison, and categorization of coded extracts and themes.

By rereading each of the extracted extracts for each theme, the researcher then grouped all of the themes and sub-themes and arranged them in a logical order. To determine if a coherent pattern could be created that accurately conveyed the outlines of the data that was coded, all of the codes and themes as well as the extracted data were taken into consideration. In the second stage, a related procedure was used with respect to the whole set of data. The relevance of specific topics to the dataset was considered at this point. It was essential that the "thematic map 'accurately' reflects the meanings visible in the dataset as a whole" (Braun & Clarke, 2006:91). This resulted in reviewing all the transcripts to make sure the themes worked with respect to the complete dataset. To better show the themes that were created for the study, the researcher regrouped the themes and adjusted the thematic map. The fifth stage started with the intention of clarifying and describing the themes, i.e. "identifying the essence of what each theme is about (as well as the themes overall), and determining what aspect of the data each theme captures" (Braun & Clarke, 2006:92). A theme cannot be too diverse and complex, claim Braun and Clarke (2006). To come up with a uniform and cohesive profile, the extracts of data for each theme were referred to. The intricacies of all the subjects were meticulously honed. A compilation of the report’s findings was the last phase. Braun and Clarke (2006) assert that a theme analysis report should motivate the target audience of the significance and validity of the study. In the discussion, the investigator showed how the themes arising in the research were similar or different to previous research, and the literature was used to explain the ‘why’ behind the themes. Consequently, a deliberate attempt to offer a succinct, cohesive, and rational justification of the narrative was made, and the data was epitomised in and through themes. For the themes to address the objectives, the data from the FGDs and interviews was analysed. The analysed data answered the research questions on which the objectives were hinged upon.

Secondary data (i.e. institutional records and marketing communications activities) were analysed through qualitative content analysis, which is "a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005:1278). For this research, content analysis was used to determine and analyse the inclusion of specific themes, phrases, characters, words, or sentences in data that was previously gathered. Newspapers, institutional documents, and websites were used. Next, the categories and units of analysis were defined, and in this case, the level at which they analysed the chosen texts were chosen, by keeping track of the frequency of specific words and phrases. The following phase involved developing a set of coding standards, through categorising the units of meaning into specified categories. It was essential to lay out the rules for what would happen. This was included in the coding process to guarantee that all the texts were consistently tagged, particularly with more conceptual categories. It was ensured that the texts were coded following the standards in the earlier step. The researcher browsed over each sentence and noted all pertinent information, categorising it during the process. In the final step, the researcher considered the findings and made conclusions. The data was coded and analysed concurrently, looking for trends and then making conclusions from the judgements (Krippendorf, 2014).

During the content analysis process, the codes arising from all the research questions were looked at. Codes that were similar were then merged. Some codes were easy to identify during this process (for example, 'repeated exposure', 'campus visits', and 'student participation'); however, others were more difficult and necessitated rereading the related sections from the documents while trying to match them with other codes.

The sub-sections below briefly explain word clouds and word trees, both of which are used to represent sections of data, and which will be incorporated into the next chapter to support the presentation and discussion of the study's findings.

3.11.1 Word clouds

A 'word cloud' is a text visualisation technique in which the words that are used more frequently are highlighted by them taking up more space in the representation (McNaught & Lam, 2010). Words that appear more frequently in a text look larger in a word cloud than words that appear less frequently. Thus, word clouds allow researchers to give an overview of the text's primary ideas and themes, and to spot recurring patterns - two things that are essential to the work of many qualitative researchers. Word clouds created from various texts can also be compared to show where their thematic similarities and variances lie.

3.11.2 Word trees

Wattenberg and Viegas (2008) developed the 'word tree' visualisation methodology, which presents a novel information retrieval method for use with text data. In a word tree, the words or phrases that follow a specific word or phrase are given a tree structure, which is then used to spatially arrange those words or phrases. Similarly to a word cloud, the graph enlarges words or phrases that appear more frequently. A word tree also has a visual tree structure that makes it simple to identify repetition in the words that immediately follow a word or phrase.

3.12 Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained before collecting data. The writer first attained a gatekeepers' letter from Mutare Polytechnic, granting permission for the study involving its students and staff. When recruiting participants, informed consent was obtained by making them aware of the purpose, benefits, and risks of the study, and requesting permission to record responses. In this research, students who were happy to participate in a Zoom meeting with others were recruited, and when they signed the written consent documents, they did so out of free will. The right to privacy was respected and guaranteed by providing anonymity in reporting the research findings. Where quotes were used, pseudonyms were used so that the participants were not identified and their privacy was maintained. All the participants were free to use either Shona or English and for them to be comfortable, the group discussions and interviews were carried out on campus using Zoom. Thus, a variety of values and ethical guidelines were considered in this study, including informed consent, the need to guarantee beneficence, respect for anonymity and confidentiality, and respect for privacy, among others. In addition, it was ensured that every source of secondary information included in the research was properly cited.

3.13 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the methodological framework that directed this research about the influence of IMC on student attitudes towards a polytechnic in Zimbabwe. The goal of the chapter was to outline and justify the methods and methodology adopted to address the research questions. The study was guided by the interprevitist philosophy and was cross-sectional in nature, involving a sample of students from all six divisions of Mutare Polytechnic. It adopted an exploratory research design due to the lack of existing research on the topic. A case study design was also employed, focusing on Mutare Polytechnic as the case institution.

The qualitative research approach that was used, aimed to understand student attitudes towards Mutare Polytechnic through a focus on participants' perspectives and experiences. Convenience sampling (a non-probability sampling technique) was used to select participants. Both primary data sources (FGDs and interviews) and secondary data sources (organisational documents and public domain marketing communication activities) were used. Due to COVID-19, remote electronic data collection was undertaken. Steps taken in relation to conducting the research ethically included receiving gatekeepers' permission from the relevant ministry and institution, obtaining infomed consent from participants, and safeguarding participants' privacy by not identifying them in the reporting of the findings. Data quality was addressed through various measures taken to enhance credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the primary data, while secondary data was analysed using content analysis.

In summary, the methodology chapter has solidified the inquiry by offering a reasoned explanation for the selected methods and techniques. The findings of the study are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from a qualitative investigation into the influence of IMC on student attitudes towards Mutare Polytechnic. Drawing upon the rich, descriptive data collected through FGDs with students and interviews with staff, this analysis sought to uncover the underlying themes and patterns that shape such attitudes. In line with a qualitative research approach, in-depth and open-ended input was sought in order to account for unanticipated events and explain unusual conditions. The primary objective of this chapter is to explore how various elements of IMC strategies employed by polytechnics (advertising, personal selling, direct marketing, public relations, and digital marketing) influence student attitudes. By delving into the narratives provided by the participants, this study aimed to illuminate the factors that enhance or hinder the effectiveness of these communications in influencing students' educational choices.

The data analysis process was guided by thematic analysis, a method well-suited to identifying and interpreting patterns of meaning across the dataset. This approach allowed for systematic coding of the data and the development of themes that reflect the complex interplay between IMC efforts and student attitudes. To support the presentation of findings, illustrative quotes from participants are provided to enrich the analysis and ground the interpretations in the voices of the students. An attempt was made to offer the findings in a concise and easily understandable fashion. This chapter creates a link between the previously developed methodological framework and the study's conclusions and consequences, laying the groundwork for a thorough comprehension of how IMC influences student attitudes towards polytechnics in Zimbabwe.

Before presenting the findings, a summary of the research methodology and an overview of the study's participants is provided.

4.2. Summary of the research methodology

A cross-sectional, exploratory, case study design and qualitative approach was adopted in this research. Convenience sampling was used to select 48 registered first-year students from the six divisions at Mutare Polytechnic. All five marketing department staff from the same institution were selected. While the planned sample size for the focus groups was 48 students, it emerged during the data collection stage that only 35 students actually participated. Although this was fewer than planned, it was not considered to be problematic as saturation was reached, i.e. the later focus groups were not adding new information that had not already been raised in the earlier ones. According to Hennink and Kaiser (2022), saturation is typically attained between the fourth and eighth focus group session. For the planned sample size of five staff for the interviews, the response rate was 100%. Therefore, the study involved a total of 40 participants (35 students and five staff). Data was collected remotely via Zoom, both for the focus groups with the students and interviews with the staff, and was analysed using thematic analysis. The polytechnic's marketing communications and institutional documents were also examined, whereby content analysis was used to analyse these.

4.3 Demographic profiles of the participants

The demographic profile of the student participants is shown in Table 4-1 below.

Table 4-1: Demographic profile of the student participants

Code	Age	Gender	Division
A1	19	Female	Applied arts and Sciences
A2	19	Female	Applied arts and Sciences
A3	21	Female	Applied arts and Sciences
A4	20	Male	Applied arts and Sciences
A5	20	Female	Applied arts and Sciences
A6	20	Female	Applied arts and Sciences
B1	21	Female	Commerce
B2	19	Male	Commerce
B3	19	Female	Commerce
B4	20	Male	Commerce
B5	21	Male	Commerce
B6	21	Female	Commerce
C1	19	Male	Civil & Construction
C2	20	Male	Civil & Construction
C3	21	Female	Civil & Construction
C4	21	Male	Civil & Construction
C5	21	Male	Civil & Construction
D1	21	Male	Electrical
D2	22	Male	Electrical
D3	19	Male	Electrical
D4	22	Female	Electrical
D5	19	Male	Electrical
D6	20	Female	Electrical
E1	21	Male	Mechanical
E2	19	Female	Mechanical
E3	22	Male	Mechanical
E4	21	Female	Mechanical
E5	21	Female	Mechanical
E6	20	Male	Mechanical
F1	20	Female	Research & Education
F2	22	Male	Research & Education
F3	19	Female	Research & Education
F4	19	Male	Research & Education
F5	19	Male	Research & Education
F6	19	Female	Research & Education

Table 4-1 shows the overall gender and age distribution of the 35 participating students. In all, there were 18 males and 17 females (51% and 49% respectively). All the participants were aged 18-25 years, broken down as follows: 12 (34,3%) were 19 years of age, eight (22,9%) were 20, 11 (31,4%) were 21, and four (11,4%) were 22.

The demographic profiles of the staff participants are shown in Table 4-2 below.

Table 4-2: Demographic profile of staff participants

Code	Age	Gender	Work Experience	Position	Highest Academic Qualification
S1	42	Female	13 years	Lecturer; PR & Marketing Director	Master's Degree in Journalism & Media Studies
S2	45	Male	15 years	Lecturer; Assistant PR & Marketing Officer	HND Marketing Management
S3	42	Male	15 years	Lecturer; Assistant PR & Marketing Officer	HND Marketing Management
S4	36	Female	10 years	Lecturer; Assistant PR & Marketing Officer	BA in Communication; Diploma in Marketing Management
S5	41	Male	5-10 years	Lecturer; Assistant PR & Marketing Officer	BSc in Arts and Design; National Certificate in Marketing Management

Table 4-2 above displays the overall gender and age distribution of the staff participants. As a whole, the gender split was three males and two females (60% and 40% respectively). Their ages ranged from 36 to 45 years. As shown in the table, the marketing personnel at Mutare Polytechnic were also lecturers from different departments. This scenario is the result of the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education having deregularised Marketing and PR department posts; however, the polytechnics cannot operate efficiently without this department, so they have appointed capable lecturers to carry out this institutional marketing function.

The following section presents the findings with regards to the research questions.

4.4 Findings

The presentation of the findings is structured in line with the research questions. All the findings relating to a particular question are presented together, whether drawn from the staff interviews or student focus groups, in order to enable a holistic understanding. In presenting the findings, a graphical representation (word cloud/tree generated from the transcripts) is provided to depict the main themes that arose during the interviews and focus groups. This is followed by a discussion of the main themes depicted, using quotes from participants as supporting evidence.

4.4.1 How does IMC influence student's attitudes towards Polytechnics in Zimbabwe?

The first research question attempted to understand how IMC influences students' attitudes towards polytechnics in Zimbabwe. The study previously characterised the IMC mix as a precise blend of IMC tools that an organisation uses to achieve its promotional aims and goals. The study focused on five IMC tools (advertising, personal selling, direct marketing, PR/publicity, and digital marketing). At the beginning of each FGD session, the participants were shown examples of Mutare Polytechnic's IMC activities, in order to stimulate discussion. Attitudes and the three attitude elements (i.e. beliefs, feelings, and intentions) were also defined up-front, so that participants had a shared understanding of the concepts going in to the discussions.

Each of the sub-sections that follow presents the findings related to one of the IMC tools.

4.4.1.1 *The influence of advertising on students' attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings, and intentions) towards polytechnics in Zimbabwe*

Figure 4-2 depicts a word cloud for advertising and student attitudes.

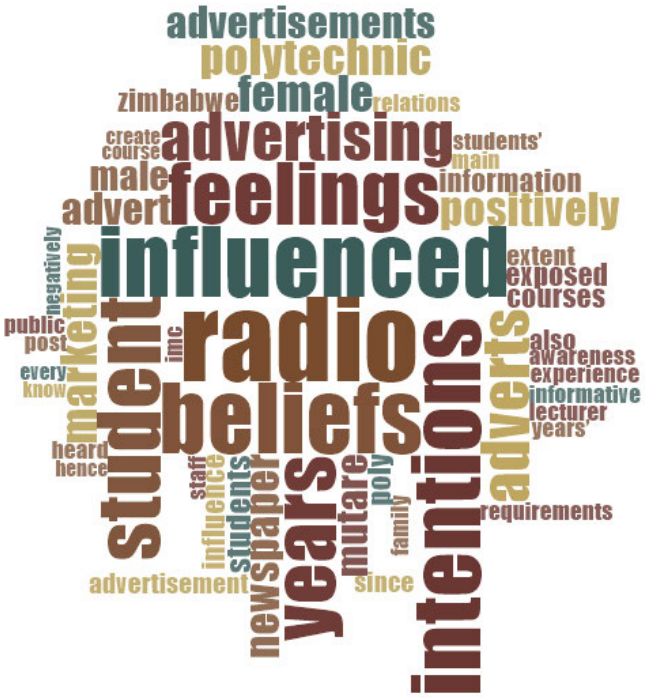

Figure 4-1: Word cloud for advertising and student attitudes

As shown in Figure 4-1 above, most of the participants alluded that advertising was done to some extent, through radio, newspapers, TV, banners, and billboards. Radio and newspapers were the media that the students were the most exposed to. Most of the participants also highlighted that the adverts had a positive influence on their attitudes towards Mutare Polytechnic, including motivating them to enrol. They felt that radio adverts clearly explained the benefits of enrolling there. Message presentation and content was considered to be a significant factor in determining the influence of advertising. In this instance, radio presenters were hailed for showcasing the adverts in an entertaining yet informative, educative, and persuasive way. Newspaper adverts provided detailed information about entry requirements and other relevant details. For example,

Participant C2 stated:

> *"Yes, I have heard about IMC, this is the communication that takes place between an organisation and its stakeholders. Before coming to Mutare Polytechnic, I was exposed to radio and newspaper adverts. The radio advertisements created awareness that Mutare Polytechnic was enrolling their 2023 intake, and they advised all interested students to visit the college website or visit the Polytechnic in person to go through the application process. The radio advert only positively influenced my feelings, while the intentions and beliefs were influenced negatively because the information was not sufficient to make a decision. When I bought the Manica Post the following week, a double page had all the requirements for all Mutare Polytechnic courses. This influenced my feeling, intentions and my beliefs positively. The newspaper adverts influenced my feelings, intentions and beliefs positively to a greater extent because of the depth of the messages advertised."*

Participant C5 concurred:

> *"The only method that I was exposed to is radio advertisement on Diamond FM. My father first heard the programme and he told me to tune in the next programme, we listened as a family and the matter was discussed, and it was decided that I must go and study at Mutare Poly since I met all the requirements and this influenced my feelings, intentions and beliefs positively. Radio advertisements positively influenced my feelings, intentions and beliefs the most because the radio advert was informative, educative and persuasive, and the DJs were a good combination - they knew how to convince people in an entertaining manner. The decision was also reached as a family hence the positive attitudes towards the Poly."*

With regards to message content, gender-inclusive adverts positively influenced the attitudes of female students. For example,

Participant F6 stated:

> *"When I heard the radio advert, my feelings, intentions and beliefs were positively influenced because what caught my attention was the fact that they were motivating girls to come and apply in the engineering departments."*

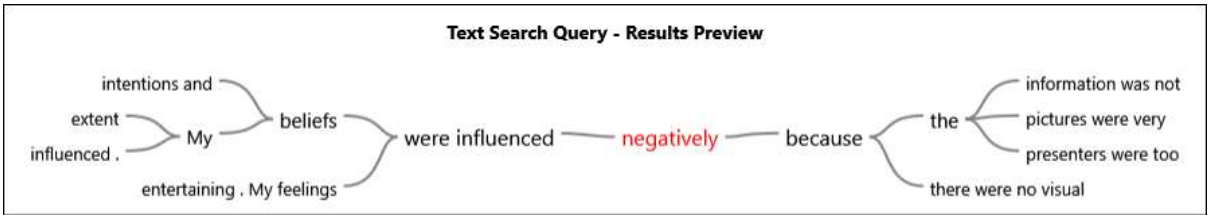

Figure 4-2: Word tree for negative influences of advertising on student attitudes

However, as shown in Figure 4-2 above (a word tree depicting the negative influences of advertising on the students' attitudes), some students indicated that message presentation negatively impacted the influence that the radio and newspaper adverts had on their attitudes. In this regard, the main downside was the lack of visual images or videos and the speed of presentation. For example,

Participant F5 elaborated:

> *"Yes, I have heard about IMC - it is when a company does brand and have roadshows and advertise their products. Before joining Mutare Poly, I was exposed to radio advertisements and digital marketing. Radio advertisements positively influenced my intentions and beliefs because the radio programme was very informative and entertaining. My feelings were influenced negatively because there were no visual images on radio, of which in my case I usually like to see the visuals before making a decision, and during the radio presentation I could not manage to take note of all the courses and their requirements."*

Participant E2 concurred:

> *"Advertising influenced my feelings because I heard the advert through [the] radio station, but it was hard to understand, hence my beliefs and intentions were not influenced. My beliefs were influenced negatively because the presenters were too fast during the presentation and I did not hear most of the necessary information."*

Although TV adverts overcame the negative effects of lack of visuals, they suffered the same drawback of being presented too fast. This had a negative effect on the students' information retention, which resulted in some negative perceptions of the adverts. For example,

Participant E6 stated:

> *"I was more exposed to advertising. Television advertising influenced my intentions and beliefs because there were some videos, pictures which were attractive, and also their TV presenter were marketing in detail. However, to some extent my beliefs were influenced negatively because the pictures were very fast such that you could hardly get all the information."*

Furthermore, some participants bemoaned that some of the adverts were not completely honest about campus life (for example, on the issue of accommodation), and this somehow negatively influenced their perceptions both of Mutare Polytechnic and of advertising as a marketing tool. For example,

Participant B1 remarked:

> *"The presenters on Radio Zimbabwe were very good at describing life at Mutare Polytechnic such that you feel obliged to be part of the institution. However, on the same note, what they portray on the advert at Joina City and what is on the ground is very different - they over-promise. When they advertise, they promise that every student stays on campus, but when we*

opened schools, not everyone managed to get accommodation on campus, some had to go and rent out of campus."

Other participants underscored the importance of repeated exposure to an advert as an important factor in determining the influence that it had on the attitudes of a potential or current student. Repeated adverts had a more positive influence than once-off ones. For example,

Participant CI indicated:

"I think IMC is whereby an organisation gives people t-shirts and other material so that they know about the institution. With regards to advertising, there was a radio programme I used to listen to on Radio Zimbabwe and it was done on Saturdays, some time back. This did not influence my attitude, since it happened some years ago."

Participant B2 echoed similar sentiments:

"I think IMC is when a company engages in advertising, personal selling, sales promotions so that people know about them. Advertising was the main source of information for me. The radio adverts influenced my feelings, intentions and beliefs, as I followed all the programmes every week on Radio Zimbabwe. Radio advertisements influenced my feelings, intentions and beliefs because the continuous airing of the programme every Saturday morning made me realise a lot of things I did not know about polytechnic courses."

Some participants also suggested the significance of merging advertising with other forms of media marketing communication tools, such as digital marketing, to ensure maximum positive impact. For example, whereas initial contact can be achieved through radio or newspaper adverts, more detailed information could be obtained from others sources, such as websites and Facebook pages (digital marketing). In addition, a potential student's individual circumstances also determined the influence that an advert had on their attitudes. For instance, an advert was most likely to have a positive impact on a potential student who did not meet the entry requirements for university. In this regard,

[Participant D1 explained:

"I think IMC is about wearing t-shirts written Mutare Poly [on them], and our cars and buses are also written Mutare Polytechnic [on them], so that people know about us. I was exposed to, maybe, advertising, personal selling direct marketing, digital marketing and public relations. I first read about Mutare Poly in the Manica Post newspaper and I started searching for more information on their Facebook page and their website. I believe the Facebook posts changed my beliefs and feelings towards polytechnics because my dream was to go to university. The main advertisements that may have positively influenced my feelings towards polytechnics are the ones placed in the Manica Post and the radio advertisements played on Radio Zimbabwe on Saturdays. My intentions were also positively influenced through these advertisements because I had always dreamt of becoming an engineer, and I had hoped to do an engineering course with NUST or UZ, but my points were very low and could only enrol at [the] Polytechnic."

Other participants indicated that the influence that advertising had on attitudes, was moderated by peer and family support, as well as opinions and role modeling. In this regard, positive opinions and support

from family and friends, together with role modelling, resulted in a more positive influence towards the advert. For example,

Participant C3 explained:

> *"Radio advertisement on Mutare Poly intake were placed on Diamond FM every Saturday, and this positively influenced my feeling, intentions and beliefs. Radio advertisement influenced my feelings, intentions and beliefs because we discussed about the advert as family and it was decided I must enrol with Mutare Poly."*

Similarly**, Participant A4** alluded:

> *"Newspaper adverts influenced my feelings because there were some pictures of some students wearing some worksuits who were doing engineering, and this made me picture myself wearing the same worksuits."*

On the other hand, a few of the participants indicated that they were not influenced by adverts because of the lack of exposure and accessibility of these, and as a result, were generally indifferent. For example,

Participant A5 stated:

> *"Advertisements did not influence my feelings, intentions and beliefs since I was not exposed to any adverts."*

Similarly, **Participant B6** echoed:

> *"I only saw a digital billboard once at Joina City in Harare and this did not influence my feelings, intentions and beliefs."*

Staff members concurred with the sentiments raised by the student participants on the negative, positive, and lack of influence of advertising as a marketing communication tool. They, however, added that advertising was used to a lesser extent because of its cost implications. For example,

Participant S3 remarked:

> *"Mutare Polytechnic uses advertising moderately since the authorities always complain the adverts are very expensive. The main objectives of the advertisements are to create awareness of the courses on offer and the entry requirements for each course. Newspaper advertising plays a significant role in positively influencing students' feelings and beliefs, while the radio adverts usually influence the intentions of students. But I have also noted that some students complain that the radio adverts are fast for them such that it is difficult to jot down all the important points, hence it influences the students' feelings and beliefs in a negative way."*

Overall, the findings from this study showed that a significant number of students indicated that they were influenced by advertisements. These results are consistent with those of a study by Bamfo and Atara (2013), who investigated the role of marketing communications on student enrolment in private universities. They found that advertising is the tool that, when used by these private institutions, would have the largest impact on enrolment decisions (Bamfo and Atara, 2013). The students in this study also highlighted that the advertisements were informative, which concurs with the findings of a study by Dorkenoo *et al*. (2015), who examined the influence of advertising at the Ho Polytechnic in Ghana, focusing on informative advertising. The outcome of this study was that informative advertising was

found to be an effective tool for creating awareness and maintaining institutional image (Dorkenoo *et al.,* 2015).

The staff participants noted that advertisements were used to create awareness of Mutare Polytechnic's courses among potential students. Olusawayo (2020) asserts that advertising can raise awareness of, give information about, and foster favourable views towards an institution. From the responses in this study, it is evident that advertising can be used to promote a positive image of the institution, influencing students' attitudes towards Mutare Polytechnic. The findings reveal that Mutare Polytechnic hass mainly been using radio and newspaper advertisements to raise awareness of it. Advertisements in newspapers can provide thorough information about the polytechnic and its programmes, influencing students' attitudes towards it. In this way, newspaper advertisements can raise student knowledge of the advertised product or service, and positively influence students' attitudes towards the institution, as stated by Hossler (1990). From the findings, it is evident that radio commercials can be effective in reaching a large audience and promoting the institution's image, thereby influencing students' attitudes towards Mutare Polytechnic. Radio commercials, according to Hossler (1990), can improve brand image and positively influence consumers' sentiments towards the advertised product or service.

The findings from this study also revealed that billboard advertisements, particularly in high-traffic areas, can be useful in raising awareness of Mutare Polytechnic and its programmes. This reinforces Atarah and Peprah's (2014) assertion that billboard advertisements can raise students' awareness of the advertised institution, while also positively influencing their sentiments towards it. Billboard advertising by Mutare Polytechnic has the ability to inform prospective students of the courses on offer and this is supported by findings by Atarah and Peprah (2014), who noted that this type of advertising has the ability to inform prospective students and their parents about an institution's products and services.

From the study's findings, it is clear that different types of advertising can play a role in influencing students' attitudes towards Mutare Polytechnic, by creating institutional awareness, providing information about programmes there, and creating a positive image of the institution. Some students indicated that their attitudes towards Mutare Polytechnic were positively influenced by a newspaper advertisement which had a picture of students. This supports Camilleri (2019), who noted that current and past students should be involved in the IMC campaigns of educational institutions. The findings also revealed that most students were exposed to radio advertisements and this influenced their feelings and intentions the most; this was because the programmes were informative and entertaining.

However, there are challenges to this. According to the findings of Ghosal *et al*. (2020) on the impact of digital marketing in promoting student enrolment in private universities, advertisements through print media have a negative effect on increasing enrolment rate in remote areas with limited internet access and technological penetration. Similarly, in this study some student participants indicated that their only source of information about Mutare Polytechnic was radio or newspaper advertisements because they did not have access to the internet. Dagumboy (2022) found that billboards and television/radio/print advertisements were two of the five least-adopted marketing communication tools in Philippino HEIs due to expenses and restrictions. This is somewhat mirrored in this study's findings, as the staff participants indicated that the number of billboard advertisements had been reduced because of cost implications.

4.4.1.2 The influence of personal selling on students' attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings and intentions) towards polytechnics in Zimbabwe

Figure 4-3 presents a word tree related to personal selling.

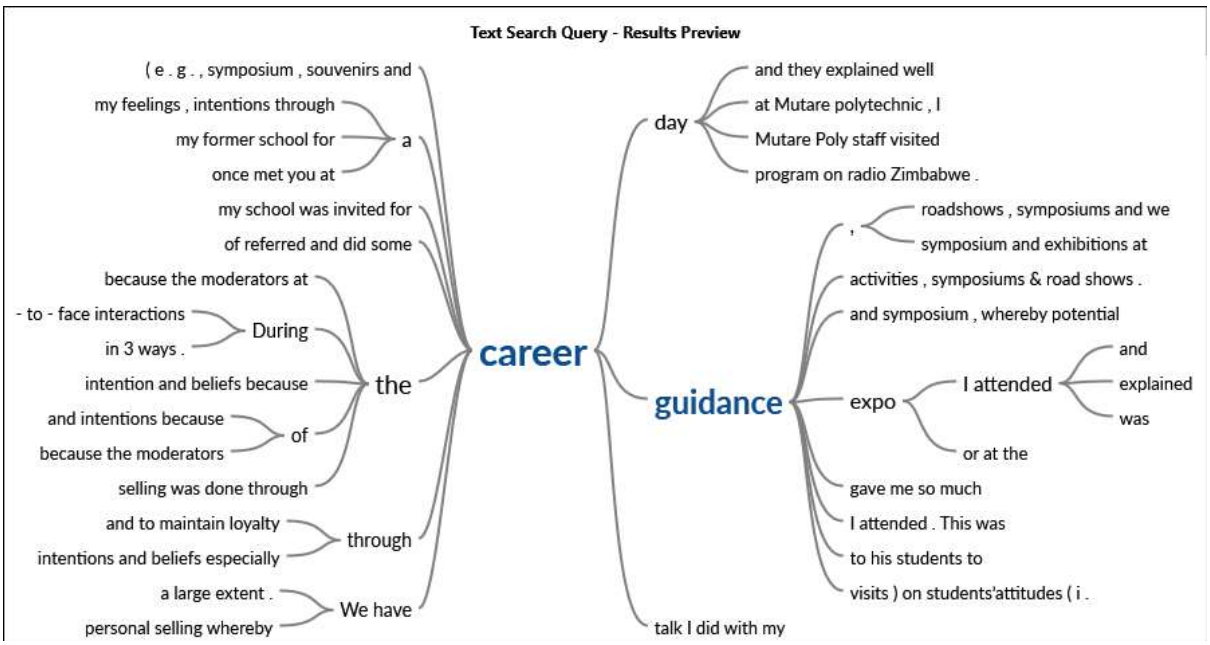

Figure 4-3: Word tree for personal selling

Most participants indicated that personal selling had the most positive influence on student attitudes towards Mutare Polytechnic. As shown in Figure 4-3 above, the strategies used included school visits, national events, shows, and exhibitions, road shows, visits to high schools, career day expos, symposiums, and campus tours. Campus tours positively influenced the students' attitudes because they saw the evidence that the polytechnic had adequate infrastructure and equipment to deliver high-quality practical education. Personal selling also offered the advantages of face-to-face interaction, demonstrations, immediate feedback, and opportunities to ask detailed questions and get in-depth responses. Furthermore, it offered the opportunity to create lasting impressions and professional relationships. For example,

Participant A1 remarked:

> *"Personal selling influenced me the most and positively. It was very convincing for me. Mutare Polytechnic staff came to our school advertising, and there was a radio advertisement we used to listen to on Radio Zimbabwe. I also saw Mutare Poly staff at the Mutare Agricultural Show and my school was invited for career day at Mutare Polytechnic - I liked the Polytechnic as we were allowed to go around the whole college. The visit to Mutare Polytechnic positively changed my attitudes towards the Polytechnic - we visited many departments and I noticed that it was well equipped which gave me confidence that I would be trained adequately."*

Participant S5, a staff member, supported this:

"The most used promotional tool is personal selling whereby we have career guidance, roadshows, symposiums, and we never absent ourselves from the Harare Agricultural Show, the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair and the Mutare Agricultural Show, and the main objectives will be to be visible as possible and to have relationships with many people across the country. As far as I am concerned, IMC has a positive influence on students' feelings, intentions and beliefs because when we engage different people for face-to-face interactions, we thrive to leave them satisfied and yearning to visit the campus in person if we meet them out of campus."

Similarly, **Participant S4** a staff member explained:

"Mutare Poly uses personal selling to a large extent, and it is used to create relationships with potential students, and the main objective is to make sure potential students have as much information as possible about Mutare Poly. Personal selling plays a huge role in positively influencing students' feelings, intentions and beliefs because so far it is the most used communication tool and the enrolment figures have been going up. At times when you are going about the institution, a student comes up and tells you that they once met you at a career guidance expo or at the agricultural show exhibition."

Other participants also indicated that personal selling had a more positive influence than other forms of marketing, because the message was very detailed and articulate. Also, the disseminators of the information were very presentable, offered great hospitality, and provided information on graduates' prospects. In this regard,

Participant B1 stated:

"I think IMC is a way of attracting customers to what you are selling. I was exposed to personal selling, advertisements and direct marketing. Personal selling was done through the career day programme on Radio Zimbabwe. Personal selling influenced my feelings, intentions and beliefs in three ways. During the career day, Mutare Poly staff visited my former school for a career day and they explained well the courses offered at Mutare Poly, and this made me want to enrol with the institution. Also, during the symposium we were given lunch at the canteen and this made me happy. I also visited their stand at the agricultural show, and the people at the stand were very smart, and it made me want to join Mutare Poly. I think it is because of the way they explained Polytechnic courses. They indicated that by doing an engineering course with Mutare Polytechnic, my chances of getting a job outside of Zimbabwe were higher."

Other participants also indicated that personal selling had a more positive influence on their attitudes than other IMC tools because of student participation, demonstrations, and the effect of role modelling. For example,

Participant D1 echoed:

"Personal selling activities may have influenced my feelings, intentions and beliefs because when I was still in high school, I visited their stand at the Mutare Agricultural Show and the stand was very attractive. The students from various departments were the ones to carry us through the whole tour of their stand. Although my dream was to go to university, I had a picture in my mind doing the same when I finished high school."

Participant F1 concurred:

> *"I was also exposed to personal selling. I visited the Polytechnic for a symposium when my sister was still a student at the Polytechnic and I liked what I saw. Personal selling influenced me more when I visited the Polytechnic. The way the students explained how their different departments operated and the types of projects they did during their learning, impressed me. Personal selling influenced my feelings, beliefs and intentions a lot through the demonstrations done by the students - it showed they were confident and that was how I pictured myself being a confident young lady."*

Similarly, **Participant D6** remarked:

> *"Through personal selling, my neighbour explained the courses offered and the life on campus; knowing very well that I love sports, he told me about the sports which are done on campus and this influenced my feelings, intentions and my beliefs. My neighbour's character changed for the good; he carried himself professionally, at their home he was called [an] engineer, since he is studying Mechanical engineering, since he enrolled at Mutare Poly, so I was positively influenced by his character, so my feelings, beliefs and intentions were influenced."*

Other participants also indicated that personal selling was most effective because it could be integrated with other IMC tools such as brochures and calendars (direct marketing). For example,

Participant E4 remarked:

> *"I think personal selling was most effective. I met a Mutare Poly team in Mutoko and they explained about Mutare Poly - they even gave us calendars and brochures - and this showed that the Polytechnic was a beautiful place. Personal selling influenced my feelings, intentions and beliefs because the Poly team I met clearly explained the courses done at Mutare Poly and their requirements; at the same time, they gave me confidence that it was very easy to get a job out of Zimbabwe after passing trade tests*."

However, some participants indicated that, although personal selling positively influenced their attitudes through family and friends' participation and support, some negative attitudes resulted from the information shared regarding the quality of campus life (for example, on dress code, passes, resource availability, and infrastructure). Beliefs, feelings and intentions were influenced by friends and family support. In this regard,

Participant F2 explained:

> *"I have never heard of IMC before. I was exposed to personal selling. My friend recommended me to come and join him at Mutare Poly. This referral positively influenced my feelings, intentions and beliefs. I have never heard or seen any adverts by Mutare Poly, hence my feelings, intentions and beliefs were not influenced. Personal selling positively influenced my feelings, intentions and beliefs more because my friend recommended me and I wanted to learn [at the] same place with him. The only thing that influenced my feelings negatively was when my friend told me that I had to start buying formal clothes, and that during weekends you have to seek for a pass to leave campus. I did not expect that at tertiary level."*

Similarly, **Participant E2** noted:

> *"I was referred to Mutare Poly by my brother who went there, hence my feelings, beliefs and intentions were greatly positively influenced because my brother is doing quite well in South Africa."*

Participant E6 echoed similar sentiments:

> *"Personal selling influenced my feelings, intentions and beliefs negatively because after finding information on the website and Facebook, I asked a cousin sister who had learnt at Mutare Polytechnic [and she] discouraged me from enrolling [there], because she said the standards in the hostels and canteen have gone down; also, most of the equipment in the workshops is no longer enough for the huge classes that are being enrolled now. But my parents insisted that Mutare Poly was the best option of all the Polytechnics."*

Other participants also indicated that in addition to the positive effect of family and friends' participation in personal selling, individual factors (such as wanting to learn closer to home) and the student's academic capabilities also determined the effect that personal selling had on their attitudes;

For example, **Participant A5** stated:

> *"Personal selling positively influenced my feelings, intentions and beliefs the most because I was referred by one of my closest friends to come and join her at Mutare Poly. She convinced me to come and enrol for an engineering course [rather] than go and do a degree that would make it difficult for me to find a job later. I was also influenced to come to Mutare Polytechnic because I wanted to stay in my home town [rather] than go elsewhere - at least I go home during weekends."*

Participant E3 concurred:

> *"Personal selling positively influenced my feelings, beliefs and intentions to a greater extent because the moderators at the career guidance gave me so much hope that I could become someone with just five O-levels passes. Having been an average student, my prospects of going to university were limited because I could not even trust myself to pass A-level when I had repeated O-levels thrice. This influenced my feelings, intentions and beliefs positively."*

Other participants indicated that personal selling had a positive influence on their attitudes due to the participation of various stakeholders, including high school authorities.

For example, **Participant F3** elaborated:

> *"Partially, my secondary school headmaster influenced my feelings, intentions and beliefs towards Polytechnics because he did some career guidance and reffered his students to study Mutare Polytechnic courses. He always advised that as students this was our time to make wise decisions in relation to our future. So, in this case personal selling influenced my attitudes*."

However, despite the mostly positive influence of personal selling, some participants pointed out that, unfortunately, it also had a greater chance of producing negative attitudes. This was the case, for example, if the target audience picked up some shortcomings in the presentation of the message. Other participants

also indicated that personal selling had no influence on their attitudes due to a lack of exposure and accessibility to it. For example,

Participant S3, a staff member, remarked:

> *"To a very large extent, MP (Mutare Polytechnic) uses personal selling and the main objectives of the programmes is to create awareness of polytechnic courses, and to maintain loyalty through career guidance, symposiums and exhibitions at different national events. Personal selling plays a very huge role in positively influencing the feelings, intentions and beliefs, especially through career guidance and symposium, whereby potential students have all their questions answered and they also experience demonstrations during the symposium, thereby positively changing their attitudes towards polytechnics. Personal selling activities may result in negative attitudes if the student is attended [to] by an unconfident (sic) representative or personal prejudice may also influence the attitudes negatively."*

Similarly, **Participant C3** stated:

> *"Personal selling did not influence my feelings, intentions and beliefs. I never met anyone from Mutare Poly."*

The findings from this study show that through personal selling, the majority of the students' feelings, intentions, and beliefs were influenced resulting in positive attitudes towards Mutare Polytechnic. This is similar to assertions by Vezi (2017) that personal selling is a helpful method for engaging with students, building rapport, providing them with relevant information, catering to their wants and concerns, and changing their impressions about TVETs. The findings of this study also showed that Mutare Polytechnic uses personal selling to create awareness, build relationships, and maintain loyalty, as echoed by Kristanto *et al*. (2021). The findings of a study by Lubis *et al*. (2023) on personal selling and the decision to choose a college, affirmed that effective personal selling strategies directly influence college choice decision-making in a positive way. As such, they relate to the findings of this study, in which some students noted that personal selling changed their feelings, intentions and beliefs towards Mutare Polytechnic.

From the participants' responses, the majority stated that their attitudes towards Mutare Polytechnic were influenced when they met the institution's staff. This reinforces Maina's (2018) assertion that face-to-face interactions at symposiums, exhibitions, and career guidance drives can inform, induce, and influence positive attitudes in students towards an HEI. A study on the effectiveness of the marketing practices of a non-profit HEI in the United States, found that personal selling was one of the most effective marketing strategies that the university's career centre had used (Sams *et al*., 2023), which corroborate with these findings of this study. Wiese (2008:11) indicated that "in HEIs, students rated open days and career exhibitions at first place as the most useful sources of information"; the findings in this study reinforce this, as students also rated open days as the most useful source of information. It was also found that student visits to Mutare polytechnic had a huge impact on their feelings, intentions, and beliefs about the institution; Vezi (2017) agrees that trips to a college or visits made by the college to schools are significant in the eyes of students. This study's findings also revealed that the majority of students felt that personal selling was more engaging than other IMC tools, which relates to Arevalo's (2021) findings, because it is more engaging than other forms of communication, and university employees can present accurate information to persuade students to join the university curriculum.

Overall, this study's findings show that personal selling is a useful tool in influencing the attitudes of students towards Mutare Polytechnic, which may also be used to increase prospective students' trust and credibility in the institution.

4.4.1.3 The influence of direct marketing on students' attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings and intentions) towards polytechnics in Zimbabwe

Figure 4-4 below depicts a word cloud for direct marketing and student attitudes.

Figure 4-4: Word cloud for direct marketing and student attitudes

As shown in Figure 4-4 above, the participants indicated that the direct marketing that they were exposed to, was mainly done through brochures and fliers. Direct marketing was used to a lesser extent than some of the other IMC tools, and it required considerable stakeholder participation through staff members, church members, and shop owners. The main objectives of direct marketing were to create awareness of the polytechnic's courses, provide detailed information about entry requirements, reach potential students in an efficient way, personalise and customise messages meant for potential students, attract new students, increase business value over time, support long-term relationships, improve customer satisfaction, create a sense of importance in the potential student, and enhance loyalty. With regards to its influence on student attitudes, most participants did not consider it to have any influence because the brochures and fliers were easily and quickly disposable.

For example, **Participant S5**, a staff member, remarked:

> *"We use direct marketing to some extent, usually we dish out fliers and brochures when we go out of campus; we try by all means to leave our fliers at schools we pass through; we stick our brochures at growth points and leave our fliers in shops, and encourage shop assistants to offer their customers our fliers and our brochures. We even give other lecturers and staff members brochures and fliers to share in their neighbourhoods and at their churches, and the main objective will be to create awareness. I would like to believe that direct marketing influences*

students' beliefs, feelings and intentions to some exteny, but at times, you notice that after a function the brochures are strewn all over the place and you wonder, have people already gone through the flier and understood the information in such a short space of time, therefore giving me questions if direct marketing influences attitudes at all."

Participant S4 a staff member concurred:

"Direct marketing is used moderately, and [we] mostly offer fliers and brochures to potential students wherever we go, and its main objective is to create awareness of the Polytechnic courses. Direct marketing plays a significant role towards students' beliefs, intentions and feelings because brochures offer better communication to the student, since all the requirements are clearly outlined. The main objectives are to reach potential students in an efficient way to personalise and customise messages meant for potential students, attract new customers and increase business value over time, and support long-term relationships and improve customer satisfaction. Direct marketing creates a sense of importance and value that will result in customer loyalty."

Other participants also elaborated that, although direct marketing provided the merits of providing detailed information on entry requirements and courses offered, as well as repeated exposure, it had some serious negative influences. For example, it offered limited exposure and accessibility, since only those present could get the brochure. In addition, there was no room to ask questions, or get instant feedback and clarifications. For example,

Participant S3, a staff member, explained**:**

"As far as I am concerned, we are using direct marketing to some extent. The main objective of direct marketing is to make sure that we obtain more potential student through providing sufficient information of the courses and their requirements, and allow students to make decisions at their own pace using brochures and fliers. We normally pitch our tent at Meikles Park in town (CBD) and dish out brochures and fliers. Direct marketing plays a big role in influencing students' feelings, intentions and beliefs because we are assured as a department that the students have sufficient information on the courses and their requirements, but this mainly influences the persons who are available. Direct marketing may result in negative feelings, intentions and beliefs if the prospective student fails to get [the] meaning of the courses and their requirements."

Participant C2 agreed:

"Direct marketing had a negative influence on me because I remember seeing a message on WhatsApp and it only stated that Mutare Polytechnic enrolment had started, [but] no entry requirements were shown; this influenced my feelings, intentions and beliefs negatively because it seemed like the organisation was not serious about communicating with potential students."

Furthermore, a number of participants claimed that direct marketing had a negative impact on their attitudes, due to the manner in which the pamphlets were distributed. Also, other participants indicated that this IMC tool did not have any influence on their attitudes, due to limited exposure and accessibility, while for others it was because of individual circumstances (such as hopes of going to university). For example, **Participant E2** said:

"I was handed a brochure at a supermarket by someone, and I did not go through the brochure seriously. The way I was given the brochure seemed like I was being forced to take [it] and this influenced my feelings, beliefs and intentions negatively."

Meanwhile, **Participant A4** mentioned:

"Direct marketing did not influence my beliefs, feelings and intentions because I was not exposed to them."

Participant B6 concurred:

"I once got a brochure in town from a Mutare Poly team, although at that time I had high hopes that I was going to university, so it did not influence my feelings, intentions and beliefs."

However, other participants reported that direct marketing had a beneficial influence on their opinions, due to the support of family and high school officials. It also had a more positive influence when integrated with other IMC tools, such as career guidance expos (personal selling) and WhatsApp (digital marketing). It also enabled repeated exposure. For example,

Participant F3 highlighted:

"Direct marketing positively influenced my feelings, intentions and beliefs through brochures and fliers we got through our headmaster at my high school. My headmaster's daughter was a marketing lecturer at Mutare Polytechnic and she always gave our headmaster a box of fliers and brochures, and our headmaster's hope was for every student to get information from the brochure and a flier, and this made me have sufficient information about Mutare Polytechnic courses and their requirements."

Similarly, **Participant B3** indicated:

"Direct marketing activities positively influenced my feelings and intentions through the brochures I received during the career guidance expo, and the brochure helped me discuss with my family and friends - this influenced my feelings, intentions and beliefs."

Participant D1 echoed these sentiments:

"I think the brochures we got from a church mate may have ignited some feelings towards polytechnics in me. When we first got the brochure, I never really went through the brochure, [and] it was before the results were out; when the results came out and my results were not very good, that's when I thought about the brochure."

The findings reveal that direct marketing has some influence on students' attitudes, which are consistent with the research by Messah and Mutali (2011), who discovered that direct marketing influences students' decisions to enrol at HEIs in a favourable way. The findings from this study also revealed that direct marketing was a useful strategy for delivering pertinent information to students, addressing their wants and problems, and developing relationships with them; this is similar to the findings of Kisioleki *et al.* (2021), who looked at the effect of direct marketing on students' attitudes towards higher education institutions in Poland and Ukraine. In this study, some students came to know about Mutare Polytechnic through direct marketing activities, echoing Mammadova's (2023) findings that students' awareness, interest, and intention to enrol in HEIs were positively impacted by direct marketing. The findings also

showed that some students' feelings and intentions were mainly influenced by direct marketing; these findings are in sync with Mehmood *et al*. (2021), who reported that direct marketing had a considerably beneficial impact on students' intentions to enrol in HEIs.Staff participants further indicated that direct marketing was used to create awareness of Mutare Polytechnic and the courses on offer there, corroborrating Sunny *et al.*'s (2023) study, which revealed that direct marketing increased students' awareness and interest in vocational high schools, resulting in higher enrolment rates.

In summary, this study's findings demonstrate that the attitudes of students who had been exposed to direct marketing, had been greatly influenced.

4.4.1.4 The influence of public relations on students' attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings, and intentions) towards polytechnics in Zimbabwe

Figure 4-4 depicts a word cloud for public relations and student attitudes.

Figure 4-5: Word cloud for public relations and student attitudes

Figure 4-5 above shows that most participants indicated that Mutare Polytechnic's PR activities included clean campaigns, donations, and sponsorships. The main objectives of PR activities were to: maintain a positive reputation of the brand and maintain a strategic relationship with various stakeholders; create a positive image of the brand; and make it reveal its honesty, success, importance, and relevance. With regards to their influence on student attitudes, however, most participants indicated that PR activities had none because these were not directly linked to the students. In addition, most student participants felt that the PR activities were obligatory on the part of the polytechnic. Furthermore, some of them also explained that PR activities did not have any influence on their attitudes because of a lack of exposure and accessibility to them. For example,

Participant S3, a staff member, elaborated:

> *"Mutare Polytechnic is involved in many PR activities, which include the clean campaigns, sponsorships to the local soccer teams, and the main objectives of PR are to maintain a positive image of the Polytechnic and to maintain long-term strategic relations with [the] community. PR plays a big role in positively influencing students' feelings and intentions because it helps disseminate information on when the next intake will be, and through the sports sponsorships to secondary schools PR closes the trust gap with the community. I have noticed that students' beliefs may be affected negatively through PR activities because most students do not consider PR to be essential to them."*

Similarly, **Participant S5**, also a staff member, commented:

> *"We use PR to a greater extent because we try by all means to engage in public activities, especially around Mutare; for example, we take part in the clean campaigns almost every month, and the main objective is to maintain a positive image in the society and to have positive relations with industry players. I think public relations has some positive influence on students' feelings, intentions and beliefs, but I think it works more when the students are involved like the clean-up campaign. [I'm] (*n*)ot sure how it causes negative influences."*

Participant F6 stated:

> *"My knowledge on PR [activities] is very limited, but I doubt if they influence any feelings, intentions or beliefs because it looks like they are not linked to the student directly like the other methods."*

Participant C5 concurred:

> *"PR did not influence my feelings, intentions and beliefs, and I also concur with my colleague who stated that PR is not meant for students; maybe it's meant to improve relations with the government or other stakeholders"*

Participant C4 added:

> "*I once saw a group of people sweeping in town and they were wearing Poly caps and t-shirts, but this did not influence my feelings, intentions and beliefs; to me it was a normal exercise that almost all government departments are doing as a directive."*

Most participants indicated that PR activities had no influence on their attitudes because of lack of exposure and accessibility to them. For example,

Participant E4 stated:

> *"I was not exposed to public relations hence it did not influence my feelings, beliefs and intentions."*

On the other hand, other student participants mentioned that PR activities had a positive influence on their attitudes, since it showed that the polytechnic cared about the community and the environment. For example,

Participant A4 said:

"The Polytechnic participated in the presidential clean campaigns every month. This shows that they are concerned about the environment they work in. The Polytech donated some t-shirts for a soccer game at Dangamvura High. They also had clean-up campaigns and this positively influenced my feelings, intensions and beliefs."

Similarly, **Participant B1** indicated:

"The Polytechnic donated t-shirts for a sports event held at Dangamvura High School where I was a student in 2018. This created a strong intention for me to enrol with the Poly."

The findings of this study showed that some students were not aware of any PR activities done by Mutare Polytechnic, even though the institution does engage in such activities. This may support Camilleri (2020), who asserts that PR operations have no impact in Africa because they are employed in collaboration with other IMC tools, and are therefore overshadowed by these. From the findings of this study, it is evident that Mutare Polytechnic engages with the community through sponsorships and clean-up campaigns; this relates to Vezi's (2017) assertion that TVET colleges in South Africa needed to shift the general public's negative views about TVET towards positive ones through community engagement. Staff members revealed that Mutare Polytechnic engaged in PR activities to maintain their image, and these findings are supported by Nyagadza and Mazuruse's (2021) study on PR in relation to private colleges' corporate image, showing that seminars and speeches are important for public engagement and public image enhancement of such institutions. Soim, Haryanti and Nurohmah (2022) also found that PR may be used by HEIs to maintain their public image. The findings from Prastama (2023) also noted that PR activities improve institutional image and stakeholder relations. Ege *et al.* (2020) likewise found that Facebook PR influenced student behaviour. In this study, it was revealed that Mutare Polytechnic donated t-shirts to local secondary schools (potential students), which created a connection with students from these school. This relates to Fathurrochman *et al.* (2020), who note that PR for HE can also be used to create a positive emotional connection with potential students and other stakeholders, such as alumni or donors. The findings are further supported by Tran *et al*. (2024), who found that PR had an influence on a student's choice of university.

In this study, while all the staff of the Marketing and PR department held qualifications in marketing or related fields (i.e. communications, media, etc.), none appeared to have specialised qualifications in PR. Furthermore, the staff members in this department were also lecturers at the polytechnic, resulting in divided attention with respect to their duties. Harder (2019) notes that it is important for an institution to have qualified PR personnel for effective PR methods, such as involving stakeholders and encouraging openness and accountability, as this can positively influence students' impressions of public universities. Kuhar and Cerepinko (2024) also found that most public education institutions do not have trained PR managers, which affects PR activities negatively. This point about poor PR qualifications is also supported by Anggreni (2018), who aimed to identify the roles and positions of staff in PR at Mahendradatta University in Indonesia, through evaluating their performance as part of management. The results revealed that not all the officers performed their roles effectively, because they were not qualified and had different understandings of PR, resulting in the university not attracting qualified students.

As highlighted previously, some student participants were not even aware of any PR activities by Mutare Polytechnic. According to a study by Kisioek *et al.* (2021), university marketing managers frequently employ internet advertising tools, but they struggle to put PR into practise. Similarly, Nkrumah and Bekoe's (2023) findings reveal that Ghanaian HEIs face challenges in maintaining effective media relations due to weaknesses in PR departments and inadequate understanding of PR management. This study's findings also revealed that the majority of the students' feelings, intentions, and beliefs were not influenced by PR activities, as compared to other IMC tools.

The findings therefore indicate that public relations maybe be a useful strategy for promoting Mutare Polytechnic.

4.4.1.5 The influence of digital marketing on students' attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings, and intentions) towards polytechnics in Zimbabwe

Figure 4-6 depicts a word cloud for digital marketing and student attitudes.

Figure 4-6: Word cloud for digital marketing and student attitudes

Most participants mentioned that digital marketing was used as an IMC tool, to a great extent. The strategies that were used included social media such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. Digital media tools such as websites, e-mails, blogs, and podcasts were also employed. However, Facebook and websites emerged as the main digital platforms that students were exposed to with respect to Mutare Polytechnic. Participants noted that one of the key merits of digital marketing was that it was the fastest communication channel to reach many people within a very short space of time, given advances in and accessibility of modern technologies. In addition, digital marketing also helped to reduce advertising costs and reach as many people as possible, even globally. Furthermore, multiple content types (such as blogs, podcasts, emailers, e-books, visual content, infographics, social media posts, and webinars) facilitated increased engagement and interaction. For example, **Participant S2**, a staff member, remarked:

"We use digital marketing to a greater extent, as Mutare Poly has adapted the use of social media such as WhatsApp, Instagram and Twitter, where direct communication as well as feedback with potential students is gathered from. Considering that potential students are always surfing the internet, digital media tools such as websites, emails, blogs, podcasts, and social media communication cannot be ignored by Polytechnics in their marketing campaigns, as it is the fastest communication channel to reach as many people within a very short space of time."

Similarly, **Participant S1**, also a staff member, indicated:

"Digital marketing is used to a large extent, and the main objective is to create brand awareness, to reduce advertising costs, and to reach as many people as possible. Digital marketing plays a huge role through global reach, lower costs, multiple content types, such as blogs, podcasts, emailers, ebooks, visual content, infographics, social media posts, [and] webinars, and increased engagements."

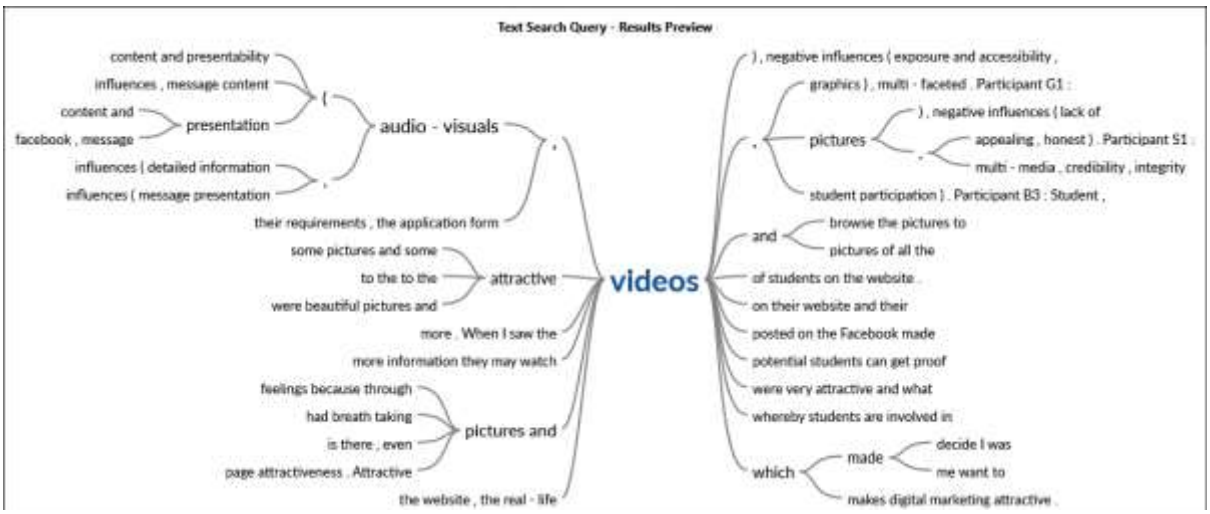

Figure 4-7: Word tree for visuals and student attitudes

As shown in Figure 4-7 above, with regards to its impact on students' attitudes, almost all participants concurred that digital marketing had a positive influence. This was mainly because of the use of audiovisuals, videos, and pictures, which were captivating, entertaining, and informative for students. In addition, more detailed information could be provided, with repeated exposure as well instant interaction, feedback, positive student testimonials. The website was also efficient and easy to navigate. For example, **Participant S3**, a staff member, noted:

"Mutare Polytechnic uses digital marketing to [a] great extent these days - we post information on courses and their requirements, the application form, videos and pictures of all the activities taking place at Mutare Polytechnic on the website and Facebook page. Digital marketing plays a significant role in positively influencing beliefs, intentions and feelings because through pictures and videos, potential students can get proof that we are a vibrant institution…"

Participant C1 concurred:

"To some extent, digital marketing positively influenced my intentions and feelings towards Mutare Poly, because when I was going through the application process, I was forced to go

through the college website to access the application process. It was efficient and that gave me the belief that the institution was efficient. The website is very easy to go through and it made life easy for me since it was my first time to use the internet. Digital marketing also positively influenced my intentions, feelings and beliefs because their website is very informative - all the information is there, even pictures and videos - which makes digital marketing attractive. I also went on social media platforms websites, going through about (sic) the information of Mutare Poly; there were positive testimonials left by students, students' reviews, PDF, as well as videos and this positively influenced my feelings, beliefs and my intentions."

Participant E1 added:

"Digital marketing played a huge role in influencing my feelings, intentions and beliefs towards Polytechnics. The website for the Polytechnic is very informative and it even shows short clips of life on campus for students, which clearly impressed me. I also followed their Facebook page religiously and it influenced me to a greater extent. Digital marketing mostly positively influenced me since I am on Wi-Fi most of my times (sic), so it was easy to Google about the college, and this influenced my intentions, feelings and beliefs. Digital marketing also positively influenced my feelings and beliefs through receiving instant feedback on the Facebook page, and I also viewed video posts on the Facebook page, and this motivated my feelings and intentions and beliefs. There was a digital billboard that used to run at Joina City and it showed a very good picture of Mutare Polytechnic, thereby increasing my beliefs that it was a good institution."

Some participants also indicated that digital marketing had a more positive influence on their attitudes because of student participation in the activities, role modelling, sharing of student successes, family and friends' support, and personal selling.

For example, **Participant F2** remarked:

"Digital marketing influenced my feelings, intentions and beliefs the most because I followed their Facebook and would frequently visit their website. Both the Facebook page and the website had breathtaking pictures and videos, whereby students are involved in the activities taking place. From the website I also downloaded the application, which made it easy for me to upload back into the registry system."

Participant E2 concurred:

"Digital marketing positively influenced my feelings, beliefs and intentions more because the website was well organised, and it had all the information that was useful, and it was easy to navigate through. The website was beautifully designed with images of students doing practicals and naturally I fantasised it was me doing those practicals, and this influenced my feelings, beliefs and intentions to a greater extent."

Participant E6 added:

"My feelings, intentions and beliefs were influenced positively through digital marketing. When the 2021 A-level results came out in January 2022, I was very disappointed because my results were too low to go for a degree. As I was going through my Facebook account, I noticed that one of my friends had liked the Mutare Polytechnic page, and I also liked it. I started following the post and went on to view their website and I was impressed by what I saw. Immediately I showed my parents, who also showed interest in the idea that I enrol with Mutare Polytechnic. I was also

amazed by the post on their page about students winning awards, hence this positively influenced my feelings, beliefs and intentions"

However, participants also pointed out that digital marketing could sometimes have a negative or no influence on student attitudes due to various factors. These included: social media bullying, lack of exposure and inaccessibility, lack of technical know-how, negative social media reviews, and system downtime. For example,

Participant S4, a staff member, stated:

"...digital marketing plays a huge role in positively influencing students' beliefs, intentions and feelings towards polytechnics because of the visuals that are on the website and the Facebook page, but the Facebook page has high chances of influencing attitudes negatively because of social media bullying."

On further enquiry about this, the staff member indicated that some followers had a tendency of making negative comments towards any other follower who published a good comment, when the Marketing and PR team posted photos or any other material.

Similarly, **Participant S5**, also a staff member, elaborated:

"...in relation to negative attitudes, I guess this may happen if one fails to use the website on themselves (sic), or if one stays in an area that has poor network, or they do not have gadgets to access the internet."

Negative opinions were also raised by students:

"To some extent, the recruitment message that I saw circulating on social media helped in increasing my feelings and intentions towards polytechnics - the Polytechnic Facebook page is also attractive with the beautiful buildings and happy students on the page. However, the college website was not functional at some point, somehow, [so] I felt as if the college was not moving on with the times, hence this had a negative influence on my beliefs and intentions. I also followed Mutare Poly's Facebook page and the page is live with student comments, although at one point I felt discouraged when I saw current students complaining of food in the canteen. Thus, my feelings, intentions were negatively influenced to some extent." [**Participant A1**]

"Digital marketing had little influence on my feelings, intentions and beliefs, as I had limited access to the internet, no smart phone, no data to surf on their website." [**Participant B1**]

The findings from this study revealed that the majority of prospective students utilised social media to learn more about the institution that they want to attend. This supports Kusumawati's (2019) finding that digital marketing strongly influenced students' decision-making processes while choosing an HEI. The findings also showed that Mutare Polytechnic is using digital marketing to reach out to prospective students, respond to their questions and wants, and develop relationships with them. Hung *et al*. (2022) report similar findings, namely, that website marketing and social media digital marketing were useful techniques for luring potential students, because they significantly improved student enrolment at private universities. Rajkumar *et al*. (2021) also found that HEIs should utilise digital media to effectively communicate with prospective students for admission, while Biswas (2020) found that digital marketing

is an effective and efficient marketing strategy, enabling universities to make reports and interact with students. This study discovered that most students at Mutare Polytechnic found information about the institution on the institution's website and Facebook page. According to Fathurrochman *et al*. (2020), electronic media - mainly social media that directly engages the millennial generation and offers engaging content, including Whatsapp, Facebook, Instagram, and institutional websites - is a tactic utilised to draw in potential new students. Paladan (2018) also found that the top 25 universities in Asia and Africa predominantly utilise Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube for digital marketing. This study also revealed that digital marketing increased students' knowledge of and interest towards Mutare Polytechnic, which eventually led to enrolment at the institution. This relates to the findings by Cordero-Gutiérrez *et al.* (2020), who examined the success of Facebook advertising campaigns for promoting postgraduate programmes, and highlighted their effectiveness in increasing awareness, engagement, and student recruitment. These results are further supported by Makrydakis' (2021) study, which explored the perceptions of Greek public university administrators regarding the impact of digital marketing on attracting students. The results showed that digital marketing significantly attracted students, particularly high school graduates, and was highly prioritised due to its influence on university choice (Makrydakis, 2021). It was also revealed that digital marketing was an important IMC tool for Mutare Polytechnic, which is similar to Kisioek *et al.*'s (2021) findings, which discovered that internet marketing communication was an important component of HEIs' marketing strategies, resulting in positive student attitudes. Basha's (2019) study on digital marketing in the education sector, also revealed that it played a significant role in students selecting an institution.

The findings from this study showed that digital marketing was influencing students' feelings, intentions, and beliefs about Mutare Polytechnic, through videos on the Facebook page and website.

4.4.2 What is an appropriate IMC framework/model to be used by polytechnics in Zimbabwe?

This section presents the findings related to the second research question. The students and staff were asked how they thought Mutare Polytechnic should be using IMC to positively influence student attitudes.

Figure 4-8 depicts a word cloud for the framework of IMC tools.

Figure 4-8: Word cloud for the framework of IMC tools

As indicated in Figure 4-8 above, a synthesis of the findings from both the staff and student participants, revealed that a framework for IMC that can be used by polytechnics in Zimbabwe, to positively influence the attitudes of both existing and future students towards such institutions. They should address four interconnected areas, namely: (i) the ***marketing tools and strategies*** to be used; (ii) the marketing ***message content and presentation***; (iii) the marketing tool's ***coverage, reach, and accessibility***; and (iv) the ***participants*** to be involved in the marketing campaigns. This framework is discussed in detail below.

4.4.2.1 Marketing tools and strategies

All the participants agreed that Mutare Polytechnic should use an integrated and multi-faceted approach to marketing, so as to reach a wider targeted audience. IMC tools that they indicted should be used included: (i) advertising (radio, newspaper, TV, and billboards); (ii) personal selling (career guidance expos and symposiums, demonstrations, campus visits and tours, high school visits, shows and national exhibitions, and the use of various stakeholders including the alumni, current students and high school authorities); (iii) public relations activities (donations, sponsorships, media engagement, clean-up campaigns, and participation in other environmental and community activities); (iv) direct marketing (both physical and electronic brochures and fliers); and (iv) digital marketing (WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, websites, emails, blogs, and podcasts). However, the most preferred tools were personal selling (because of a relatively high degree of impact) and digital marketing (due to a relatively high degree of impact, reach, and accessibility).

The participants also indicated that Mutare Polytechnic should have well-designed IMC plans and strategies, which are adequately funded, resourced, and supported by both senior management and the government. Such IMC plans and strategies should benchmark and collaborate with industry where possible, and the necessary technical training should be provided.

Participant S1, a staff member, elaborated:

"Integrated marketing communications (IMC) is the process of merging a brand's messaging to make it consistent across all media that the brand uses when communicating with [the] target audience. Currently we are involved in advertising, public relations, personal selling, direct marketing and digital marketing. I think IMC is essential because it can create brand awareness. The use of IMC will enable the tools to complement each other. Each one will address the weaknesses of the other and will create brand awareness which will increase enrolment. Online advertising is the most effective because it is instant and travels far and wide. Also, [it] engages students in most of the processes and activities in the institution to create ownership of the processes and promotions. This will again enable other students to identify with them. We do not have a specific IMC programme that we use. We use the traditional ones that we mix and use at random. The challenges include lack of expertise and digital know-how for some of the digital tasks that are deeply IT- and design-related. We also lack updated machinery to do some of the tasks. So, we outsource some of the activities."

Participant S3, also a staff member, concurred:

"IMC is a modern concept which involves integrating all the promotional mix elements to achieve maximum communication impact. My organisation is involved in advertising (radio, print, billboard, TV), digital marketing (website, Facebook, LinkedIn), direct marketing (brochures, fliers, teardrops), personal selling (roadshows, career guidance, symposium) and public relations (sponsorships, donations, community activities). Yes, IMC is the best tool that can be used to change the negative attitudes towards polytechnics. This is because some of the potential students lack knowledge about TVET education, while some thought polytechnics are for those who are academically challenged. [By] (e)ducating all secondary school-going students, IMC is the way to change these attitudes. Through my experience at Mutare Polytechnic, I have noted that personal selling plays a big role in changing the negative attitudes of parents, students and secondary school authorities, since they all influence the students' college choices. Mutare Poly has mainly been carrying out career guidance expos and symposiums to inform and educate students on the benefits of doing Polytechnic courses."

Participant A2 added:

"Mutare Polytechnic must use all IMC tools to inform potential students and their guardians of the courses available and their benefits; they must also inform the society of the course requirements because a lot of people, especially in remote areas, have all the requirements but they do not have sufficient information. They must also emphasise that all genders are free to choose the course of their choice. Mutare Polytechnic must use digital marketing, personal selling, and advertising. Mutare Polytechnic must emphasise their messages on modes of study on offer, enrolment criteria, [and] tell students the importance of doing Polytechnic courses. They must create awareness of the other activities they do at Mutare Polytechnic, for example, disinfectants they manufacture on campus."

According to the findings, it is critical for Mutare Polytechnic to incorporate all IMC techniques in order to create powerful, consistent messages that will influence student attitudes. These findings are reinforced by those of Penceliah and Vezi's (2019) study of IMC in TVETs in South Africa, in which the institutions promoted their programmes and services through a number of communication channels. The findings in

this current study also revealed that the adoption of IMC was found to be positively connected with the institution's ability to attract students. These findings are similar to those of Tlapana and Myeki (2020) and Mudzanani (2018), which revealed that IMC can be an effective technique for attracting new students and publicising an institution's offerings. Based on the above, it is important for Mutare Polytechnic to implement IMC programmes.

4.4.2.2 Message content and presentation

Figure 4-9 depicts a word tree for 'informative' in the framework for IMCs tools.

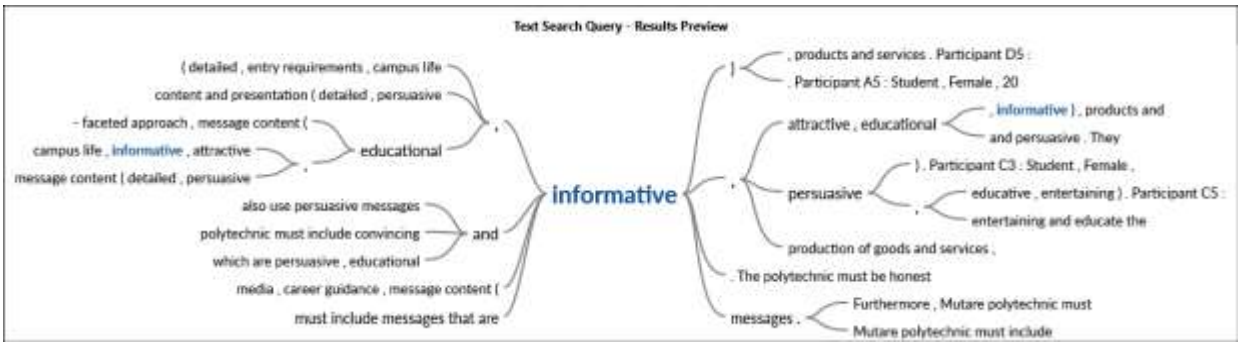

Figure 4-9: Word tree for 'informative' in the framework for IMCs tools

The above figure shows that, with regards to message content and presentation, participants felt that polytechnics should provide detailed information on courses offered, enrolment dates, and entry requirements. In addition, the marketing messages should detail the career prospects for students, including sharing information about successful alumni. Furthermore, polytechnics should provide information about the goods and services that they manufacture in their engineering departments, as well as about extra-curricular activities and gender equality. The marketing communication tools used should enable demonstrations, instant feedback, interaction, and question and answer sessions.

Technical support for digital media and platforms should also be readily available. In addition, the marketing messages should be presented in a way that is captivating, educational, persuasive, and entertaining. This includes, for example, the use of audiovisuals, pictures and videos, and projects being done or completed by students. Furthermore, the message should allow for repeated exposure and future reference. Also, the marketing messages should be honest rather than exaggerated, and provide all relevant details about campus life, including dress code, infrastructure, and availability of equipment and resources. The disseminators of marketing information should be presentable, confident, knowledgeable, and have good interpersonal skills. Responses to enquiries should be timely and negative reviews should be addressed with honest, persuasive, and assuring responses. It was also considered very important for the marketing messages to be presented in a way that enhanced information retention by the targeted audience; for example, through adjusting the speed of presentation or repeating the messages, where necessary. PR activities should be clearly linked to student activities, prospects, and other aspects of student life. These assertions are supported by the following quotes from the study's participants.

Participant C5 noted:

> *"Mutare Polytechnic must include messages [about] all the courses they offer, from short courses to their degree programme, [and] communicate all the entry requirements for each*

course, so that students may easily make decisions based on their passes - they must tell the whole world about the products they manufacture. Mutare Polytechnic must also use personal selling, advertising, digital marketing and direct marketing. They must include messages that are informative, attractive, educational and persuasive. They must include information [about] the dress code, social life of students on campus, [and] availability of accommodation on campus."

Participant B5 added:

"Mutare Polytechnic must include information on the course requirements, availability of accommodation, [and] sporting activities to change the attitudes of students.Mutare Poly must engage more in social media because these days a lot of people are on social media, using the local radio station, since most homes and public transport tune in to Diamond FM. I think they must also do more career guidance to schools, because most students choose Mutare Poly as a last resort when they have failed, plus career guidance even helps those who finished school years ago but do not know what to do. Mutare Polytechnic must include messages that are informative, persuasive, entertaining and [that] educate the society about the courses available. Mutare Polytechnic must also state that their courses do not have an age limit."

Therefore, from the study's findings, it is important for Mutare Polytechnic to provide detailed information when using all IMC tools.

4.4.2.3 Coverage, reach and accessibility

The participants indicated that the marketing communication tools used should ensure maximum coverage, reach, and accessibility for the target audience. This would provide support for an integrated, multi-faceted approach using all IMC tools, and enable the marketing messages to reach target audiences of different capabilities, socioeconomic backgrounds and situations, and technical abilities. In this regard, digital marketing was seen as offering a relatively extensive coverage because of advances in and improved accessibility of technology and electronic gadgets, such as smart-phones and computers. It was felt that personal selling should also be expanded further into remote areas. From these findings, IMC has been identified as a key strategy for promoting and enhancing the image of polytechnics. Some of the participants had the following to say in this regard.

Participant S2 a staff member, had this to say:

"We use general advertising in the Manica Post, Radio Zimbabwe and Diamond FM. We also use personal selling using student[s] during their field/practical assignments, and also Public Relations being carried out by the PR department. IMC tools are very important because the offerings of polytechnics are not much known out there by the potential students, who only think of going to universities after high school. Personal selling is more effective because it allows potential students to enquire [about] more information on whatever they want to know concerning what is on offer at the Polytechnic. We have been conducting open day/symposiums where we invite high schools to come to the campus so that students could see for themselves what is on offer at polytechnics. Digital marketing is also widely used through the use of internet, [and] digital media tools such as websites, emails, and social media communication."

The majority of participants felt that, through certain IMC tools like advertising, personal selling, and digital marketing, Mutare Polytechnic would be able to reach a wide coverage around the country and beyond.

4.4.2.4 Participants in IMC campaigns

All the participants alluded that marketing messages were more credible and influenced attitudes more positively if students were at the forefront of the marketing tools. Thus, be it advertising, PR, personal selling, direct marketing, or digital marketing, students (current or alumni) should be leading these marketing activities. This was considered significant because of the effect of role modelling, as well as the fact that potential students could relatively easily identify with and believe other students compared to other stakeholders. The polytechnic must also have students at the forefront when they have personal selling activities, such as symposiums, because most students indicated that they were influenced by current students who were in charge of the function.

However, marketing strategies should also involve multiple stakeholders, including polytechnic staff, high/secondary school administrators and teachers, the government, family, friends, and the community. These findings are perhaps related to the assertion by Camilleri (2020) that polytechnics must offer employment and attachments to former and current students so that prospective students will be motivated. Camilleri (2020) also notes that it is critical to highlight the achievements of former students who are currently employed in senior government or corporate positions, as they may provide internship programmes to students from their former institution. Mahuyu and Makochekanwa (2021) found that students' perceptions towards polytechnics in Zimbabwe were influenced by factors, such as the quality of teaching, availability of resources, perception of parents, and the job prospects after graduation. These findings show that if former students are employed at the polytechnic, attitudes may change.In support of the above, participants had the following to say.

Participant D1 remarked:

> *"Personal selling activities may have influenced my feelings, intentions and beliefs because when i was still in high school I visited their stand at the Mutare agricultural show and the stand was very attractive. The students from various departments were the ones to carry us through the whole tour of their stand. Although my dream was to go to university i had a picture in my mind doing the same when I finished high school."*

Participant B6: concurred

> *"I was exposed to personal selling before joining Mutare Polytechnic. I attended a symposium and from the gate to the touring of departments we were escorted by students, and this made me believe I could also be the same to do this, hence my feelings, intentions and beliefs were positively influenced. I attended a symposium and I was impressed with the way students carried themselves and did the presentations and this positively influenced my feelings, intentions and beliefs."*

These findings show that it is important to involve students in Mutare Polytechnic's IMC activities because prospective students' attitudes towards the institution are positively influenced.

4.4 Conclusion

Findings based on analysis of qualitative data collected from both students and staff of Mutare Polytechnic were presented and interpreted in this chapter, in relation to the research questions. The findings offer insight into participants' understanding of IMC tools, as well as their perspectives and experiences about the influence of these tools on student attitudes towards Mutare Polytechnic. Students stated that they were positively impacted by persistent and innovative advertising initiatives that increased the polytechnic's prominence and visibility. Particularly effective were advertisements that showcased success stories and those featuriung a female student studying engineering courses. Students were more likely to remember and talk about visually appealing and captivating advertisements (such as TV commercials and billboards), indicating a clear connection between high-quality advertising and student interest. The findings also revealed that having face-to-face conversations with polytechnic representatives at career fairs and information sessions was highly valued by many students. These personal selling activities promoted trust while offering customised content that spoke to each person's goals. The study also found that public relations initiatives involving neighbourhood alliances and community projects were thought to improve the institution's standing by encouraging a sense of social responsibility and community involvement. The research also found that direct marketing initiatives, such sending pamphlets to potential students, were helpful in giving targeted and pertinent information. Students did point out that sending generic or too frequent messages could drive people away. With reagrds to digital marketing, the study found that social media platforms that were dynamic and participatory played a vital role in fostering favourable attitudes by giving students a forum to discuss and interact with polytechnic content directly, while having access to extensive online information and virtual tours was very helpful in helping students make decisions because it gave them the freedom to investigate polytechnic offers at their leisure. A framework for using IMC tools to affect student attitudes positively was suggested.

A summary of the findings, as well as their implications, recommendations and limitations are presented in Chapter Five. The contribution of the study is also highlighted.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

As previously indicated, the goal of this study was to explore the influence of IMC on student attitudes towards Mutare Polytechnic. This chapter summarises the findings presented in Chapter Four, in relation to the study's objectives. The research aimed to uncover the specific ways in which the combined use of IMC components (advertising, personal selling, public relations, direct marketing, and digital marketing) shaped student attitudes towards Mutare Polytechnic. The knowledge gathered from this study provides a comprehensive grasp of how these communication tactics can successfully capture the interest of potential students and shape their decisions.

This chapter first considers the objectives of the study, highlighting the main findings pertinent to each objective. The findings are interpreted in the context of Mutare Polytechnic, with an emphasis on the implications for the conceptual framework and its real-world implementation. A refined conceptual framework is presented, highlighting the variables that were identified in this research as important for further research on this topic. The chapter also discusses recommendations, which offer actionable strategies for Mutare Polytechnic to enhance its marketing communication strategies, in order to improve its appeal to prospective students and enhance its competitiveness in Zimbabwe's HE landscape. The section on implications explores the combined use of IMC tools by Mutare Polytechnic, revealing their influence on student attitudes. This section proposes a comprehensive framework for designing effective IMC plans, emphasising the importance of detailed, informative, and persuasive content. Stakeholder participation and student role modeling are also crucial for enhancing the positive impact of these tools. The limitations of the study are discussed, and its contributions to theory, practice, and policy are outlined. This chapter seeks to integrate the study's findings with existing knowledge, identify areas for future research, and foster a deeper understanding of the role of IMC in influencing student attitudes.

5.2 Summary of findings

5.2.1 Research Objective 1: To explore the influence of IMC on students' attitudes towards Mutare Polytechnic

5.2.1.1 Sub-objective 1.1: To examine the influence of advertising on students' attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings, and intentions) towards Mutare Polytechnic

The study found that advertising was done to a lesser extent than on some other IMC tools, through radio, newspapers, TV, banners and billboards. Radio and newspapers were the most frequently used media for advertising. Most participants highlighted that the adverts had a positive influence on their attitudes towards polytechnics, including motivating them to enrol. The radio adverts clearly explained the benefits of polytechnics. Message presentation and content was considered to be a significant factor in determining the influence of advertising. In this instance, the radio presenters were hailed for presenting the adverts in an entertaining and yet informative, educative, and persuasive way. Newspaper adverts provided detailed information on entry requirements and other relevant details.

With regards to message content, gender-inclusive adverts positively influenced the attitudes of female students. However, some students indicated that message presentation negatively impacted the influence

that radio and newspaper adverts had on their attitudes. In this regard, the main downside was the lack of visual images (on radio) or videos, and the speed of presentation. Adenesayo (2018) also found that the lack of images in radio advertisements has an impact on the attitudes of consumers. Although TV adverts overcame the negative effects of lack of visuals, they suffered the same drawback of the presentations being too fast. This had a negative effect on students' information retention, which resulted in some negative perceptions of the advert.

Some participants also hinted at the importance of integrating advertising with other marketing communication tools, such as digital marketing, to ensure maximum positive impact. For example, whereas initial contact can be achieved through radio or newspaper adverts, more detailed information could be obtained from other sources such as websites and Facebook pages (digital marketing). These findings mirror those of Yu (2022), who notes that organisations must integrate different IMC tools to remain competitive. In addition, a potential student's individual circumstances also determined the influence that an advert had on their attitudes. For instance, an advert was most likely to have a positive impact on a potential student who did not meet the entry requirements for university.

Other participants indicated that the influence that advertising had on attitudes, was moderated by peer and family support and opinions, as well as by role modeling. These findings reinforce those of Mahuyu and Makochekanwa (2020), who note that students' decisions to enrol at a TVET institution are influenced by parents. In this regard, positive opinions and support from family and friends, along with role modelling, resulted in a more positive influence of the advert.

5.2.1.2 Sub-objective 1.2: To explore the influence of personal selling on students' attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings, and intentions) towards Mutare Polytechnic

Most participants indicated that personal selling was the most frequently used IMC tool, and also had the greatest positive influence on student attitudes. The strategies used included school visits, shows and national exhibitions, road shows, visits to high schools, career day expos, symposiums, and campus tours. Campus tours positively influenced students' attitudes because through these, they saw the evidence that the polytechnic had adequate infrastructure and equipment to deliver high-quality practical education. Personal selling also had the advantage of face-to-face interaction, demonstrations, immediate feedback, and opportunities to ask detailed questions and get in-depth responses. These findings reinforce those of Vezi (2017), who found that campus visits resulted in positive attitudes towards the institution, and offered the opportunity to create long-term impressions and professional relationships.

However, some participants indicated that, although personal selling positively influenced their attitudes through family and friends' participation and support, some negative influences resulted from the information shared regarding the quality of campus life (for example, on dress code, passes, resource availability, and infrastructure). Individual factors (such as wanting to learn closer to home and the student's academic capabilities) further determined the effect that personal selling had on students' attitudes. In addition, some participants indicated that personal selling had a positive influence on their attitudes, due to the participation of various stakeholders, including high school authorities.

However, despite the mostly positive influence of personal selling, some participants pointed out that, unfortunately, it also had a greater chance of producing negative attitudes. This was the case, for example, if the target audience picked up shortcomings in the message presentation. Other participants also

indicated that personal selling had no influence on their attitudes, due to lack of exposure and accessibility to it.

5.2.1.3 Sub-objective 1.3: To understand the influence of direct marketing on students' attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings, and intentions) towards Mutare Polytechnic

The study found that direct marketing for Mutare Polytechnic was mainly done through brochures and fliers. It was used less than personal selling, advertising, and digital marketing, while requiring considerable stakeholder participation of staff members, church members, and shop owners. The main objectives of direct marketing were to create awareness of the polytechnic's courses, provide detailed information about its entry requirements, reach potential students in an efficient way, personalise and customise messages meant for potential students, attract new customers, increase business value over time, support long-term relationships, improve customer satisfaction, create a sense of importance in the potential student, and enhance customer loyalty. Although direct marketing was used to a lesser extent than some other IMC tools, it was used to create this awareness. This aligns with Mudzanani's (2018) finding that direct marketing is a useful method for raising awareness of vocational education, and changing students' attitudes towards these types of institutions. With regards to its influence on student attitudes, however, most participants did not consider it to have any influence, as brochures and fliers are easily and quickly disposable.

Other participants felt that, although direct marketing had the merits of providing detailed information on entry requirements and courses offered, as well as repeated exposure, it had serious drawbacks. For example, it offered limited exposure and accessibility as only those present could obtain a brochure or flier. In addition, there was no room to ask questions, get instant feedback, or clarification. Furthermore, some participants indicated that direct marketing had a negative influence on their attitudes because of the way in which the brochures were distributed. Others indicated that this IMC tool did not have any influence on their attitudes, due to limited exposure and accessibility, while for others it was because of individual circumstances (such as hopes of going to university).

On the other hand, some participants indicated that direct marketing had a more positive influence on their attitudes, due to family and high school authorities' support. It also had a more positive influence when integrated with other IMC tools, such as career guidance expos (personal selling) and WhatsApp (digital marketing). It also enabled repeated exposure. Yu (2022) notes that direct marketing allows for individual adaptation because messages are tailor-made to meet individual needs, have the ability to foster endless relationships by staying in touch, and provide easy access to actual clients, such as through e-mails on tuition adjustments.

5.2.1.4 Sub-objective 1.5: To understand the influence of public relations on students' attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings, and intentions) towards Mutare Polytechnic

Most participants indicated that Mutare Polytechnic's PR activities included clean-up campaigns, donations, soccer team sponsorships, and interactions with the media. The main objectives of PR activities for the brand were to uphold its positive reputation and create a positive image of it, maintain a strategic relationship with various stakeholders, and allow it to reveal its honesty, success, importance, and relevance. With regards to their influence on students' attitudes, most participants indicated that PR activities had none because these were not directly linked to the students. In addition, most student participants felt that PR activities were obligatory on the part of the polytechnic, but that these did not

have any influence on their attitudes towards it because of lack of exposure and accessibility to them. Camilleri's (2020) study also notes that most consumers do not understand the importance of PR activities because of lack of exposure to these. On the other hand, some student participants alluded that PR activities had a positive influence on their attitudes, since they showed that the polytechnic cared about the community and the environment.

5.2.1.5 Sub-objective 1.5: To explore the influence of digital marketing on students' attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings, and intentions) towards Mutare Polytechnic

Most participants noted that digital marketing was the most used IMC tool. The strategies used included social media, such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. Digital media tools such as websites, e-mails, blogs, and podcasts were also employed. However, Facebook and the institutional website emerged as the most frequently used digital platforms. One of the key merits of digital marketing was that it was the fastest communication channel to reach as many people as possible within a very short space of time, given advances in and accessibility of modern technologies. In addition, it also helped to reduce advertising costs and reach the largest audience, even globally. Moreover, the use of a variety of material formats - including podcasts, blogs, electronic mail, e-books, visual data, social network posts, and webinars - facilitated higher levels of interaction and participation than other forms of IMC.

With regards to its influence on students' attitudes, almost all the participants concurred that digital marketing had a positive influence. This was mainly because of the use of audiovisuals, videos, and pictures, which were captivating, entertaining, and informative for students. In addition, more detailed information could be provided, with repeated exposure as well instant interaction, feedback, and positive student testimonials. The website was also efficient and easy to navigate. Some participants also indicated that digital marketing had a more positive influence on their attitudes than other IMC tools, because of student participation in the activities, role modelling, sharing of student successes, as well as family and friends' support and personal selling.

However, some participants also pointed out that digital marketing could sometimes have a negative or no influence on student attitudes, due to various factors including social media bullying, lack of exposure and inaccessibility, lack of technical know-how and negative social media reviews.

The conceptual framework tested in the study is depicted in the next section.

5.2.2 Research Objective 2: To develop a framework/model for IMC to be used by Mutare Polytechnic

A synthesis of the findings from both the staff and student participants revealed that a framework for IMC that can be used by Mutare Polytechnic to positively influence the attitudes of both existing and future students, should address four interconnected areas, namely: (i) the ***marketing tools and strategies***; (ii) the marketing ***message content and presentation***; (iii) the marketing tools' ***coverage, reach and accessibility***; and (iv) the ***participants*** to be involved in the marketing campaigns.

With regards to marketing tools and strategies, all the participants agreed that polytechnics should use an integrated and multi-faceted approach to marketing, so as to reach a wider target audience. IMC tools that should be used include: (i) advertising (radio, newspaper, TV, and billboards); (ii) personal selling (career guidance expos and symposiums, demonstrations, campus visits and tours, high school visits, shows and

national exhibitions, and the use of various stakeholders including the alumni, current students, and high school authorities); (iii) PR activities (donations, sponsorships, media engagement, clean-up campaigns, and participation in other environmental and community activities); (iv) direct marketing (both physical and electronic brochures and fliers); and (v) digital marketing (WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, websites, emails, blogs, and podcasts). However, the most favoured tools were personal selling (because of a relatively high degree of impact) and digital marketing (because of a relatively high degree of impact, as well as reach and accessibility).

Mutare Polytechnic should also have well-designed IMC plans and strategies which are adequately funded, resourced, and supported, by both senior management and the government. Such plans and strategies should benchmark and collaborate with industry where possible, and the necessary technical training should be provided.

With regard to message content and presentation, the polytechnic should provide detailed information on the courses offered, enrolment dates, and entry requirements. In addition, marketing messages should detail the career prospects of students, including sharing information about successful alumni. Also, the polytechnic should provide information about the goods and services that they manufacture and provide, as well as about extra-curricular activities and gender equality. The marketing tools used should enable demonstrations, instant feedback, interaction, and question and answer sessions. Technical support for digital media and platforms should also be readily available.

In addition, the marketing messages should be presented in a way that is captivating, educational, persuasive, and entertaining. This includes, for example, the use of audiovisuals, pictures and videos, and projects being done or completed by students. Furthermore, the message should be capable of repeated exposure and future reference. Also, the marketing messages should be honest rather than exaggerated, and provide all relevant details about campus life, such as dress code, infrastructure, availability of equipment, and resources. The disseminators of marketing information should be presentable, confident, knowledgeable, and have good interpersonal skills.

Responses to enquiries should be timely and negative reviews should be addressed with honest, persuasive, and assuring responses. It is also very important for the marketing messages to be presented in a way that enhances information retention by the targeted audience, for example, through adjusting the speed of presentation or repeating the messages where necessary. Public relations activities should be clearly linked to student activities, prospects, and other aspects of student life.

The marketing tools used should also ensure maximum coverage, reach, and accessibility by the target audience. This provides support for an integrated, multi-faceted approach using all IMC tools, such as advertising, personal selling, public relations, direct marketing, and digital marketing, being employed at the same time. This enables the marketing messages to reach target audiences of different capabilities, socioeconomic backgrounds and situations, and technical abilities. In this regard, digital marketing offered a relatively wider coverage than the other tools because of advances in and improved accessibility of technology and electronic gadgets, such as smart-phones and computers. Personal selling should also be expanded further into remote areas.

All the participants alluded that marketing messages were more credible and influenced attitudes more positively if students were at the forefront of the marketing tools. Thus, be it advertising, personal selling, direct marketing, or digital marketing, students (current or alumni) should be leading these marketing activities. This was significant because of the effect of role modelling, as well as the fact that potential students could easily identify with and believe other students relatively more than most other stakeholders. In addition, marketing strategies should also involve multiple stakeholders, including polytechnic staff, high/secondary school administrators and teachers, the government, family, friends, and the community.

5.2.2.1 Refined conceptual framework

The conceptual framework that was presented in Chapter Two was refined after rigorous qualitative data analysis. Through the integration of contextual considerations, the framework ensures that the analysis is applicable and significant to local stakeholders, providing theoretically sound and practically applicable insights. It was found that for IMC tools to be efficiently used, there should be maximum coverage, reach and accessibility, and support and funding from senior management and the government. These elements, like funding, coverage, content, and marketing participants are included to enable a more in-depth investigation of the circumstances under which IMC tactics work best. These elements emphasise the significance of context in communication strategies, by influencing the direction and degree of the interaction between IMC efforts and student attitudes.

This study also discovered that besides IMC activities, prospective student attitudes are also influenced by other factors, such as the perception of parents, quality of education, and grades attained at O- or A-level (O-levels are taken at the end of secondary school while A-levels are taken in preparation for university or any other post high school training). These findings reinforce those of Mahuyu and Makochekanwa (2020). By recognising the larger social and family influences on students' decisions, their inclusion in the framework offers a more comprehensive view of the decision-making environment. As a result, promotional messaging or IMC methods, media, and messages cannot be solely responsible for students' attitudes towards Mutare Polytechnic.

This study also found that the effective implementation of all IMC tools together, has a high chance of positively influencing students' attitudes towards polytechnics. Every component is examined for its distinct and synchronistic impacts on student attitudes towards polytechnics, acknowledging that these components cooperate to form an integrated communication approach. The findings of this research may be a stepping stone towards gaining a deeper understanding of the influence of IMC on attitudes towards polytechnics in the Zimbabwean context.

This conceptual framework is unique because the literature review has shown that so far, no such studies have been carried out in Zimbabwe, even though several studies (Mogaji, 2019; Mogaji *et al*., 2020; Maringe *et al*., 2020; Ndofirepi *et al.*, 2020; Camilleri, 2020; Mudzanani, 2019; Vezi, 2016) on higher education marketing and student attitudes towards TVET have been carried out in Africa. Meanwhile, the studies that have been carried out in Zimbabwe on student attitudes towards TVET education (Mahuyu & Makochekanwa, 2020; Makochekanwa & Mahuyu, 2021), did not focus on higher education marketing; hence, this refined conceptual framework is a first for Zimbabwe. This conceptual framework is also unique because it has used IMC, HOE, and attitudes, while related studies (Mahuyu & Makochekanwa, 2020; Makochekanwa & Mahuyu, 2021) so far have only looked at student attitudes, but did not combine

all three aspects in their research. Furthermore, this conceptual framework offers the potential for new in-depth insights in the study of the influence of IMC on student attitudes towards polytechnics, because the framework synchronises IMC tools, stages of HoE model, attitudes, perception of parents, quality of education, and attained grades at O-/A-level.

To implement the conceptual framework successfully, this study suggests that Mutare Polytechnic follow the implementation steps outlined by Cromhout (2020):

-The polytechnic must first identify its key stakeholders, both internal and external. After identifying the stakeholders, the polytechnic should come up with objectives to fulfil their goals. After setting the objectives, resources must be allocated so that the objectives will be fulfilled.

-Next step is for Mutare Polytechnic to select the IMC tools they want to use for the implementation (advertising, personal selling, public relations, direct marketing and digital marketing)

-Mutare Polytechnic will also consider the cognitive, affective and behavioural responses of the target market. The institution will use the selected IMC tools to find out the responses and measure the responses through surveys and open day feedback.

-Finally, the institution will have to measure and control all its activities to measure the effectiveness of the programme.

Figure 5-1 below is the refined conceptual framework after analysis of the data.

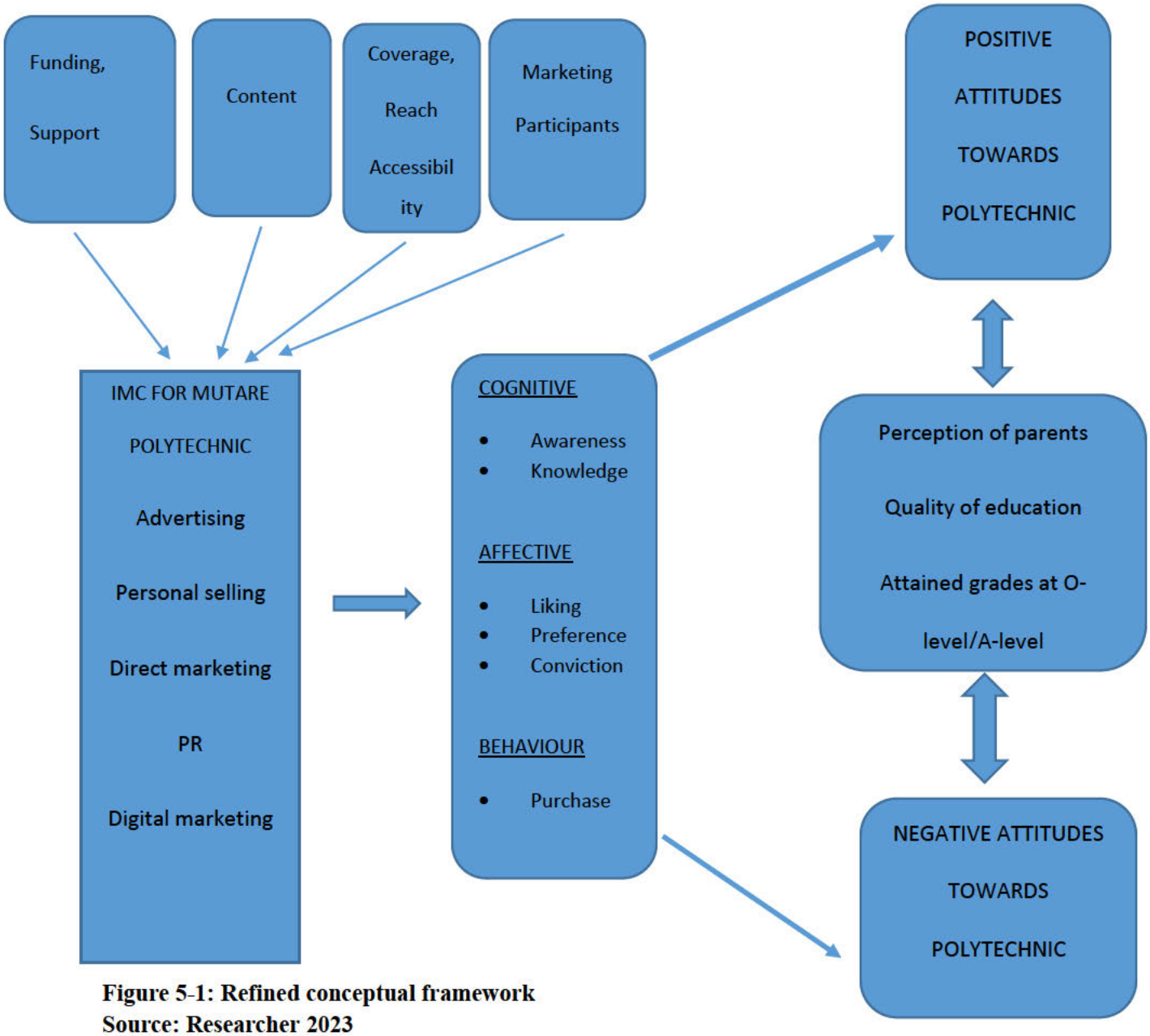

Figure 5-1: Refined conceptual framework
Source: Researcher 2023

In light of the research objectives outlined in Chapter One, a discussion of the findings was offered. The first section described the investigation into the influence of advertising on students' attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings, and intentions) towards Mutare Polytechnic. The findings revealed that advertising, primarily through radio and newspapers, influenced attitudes towards Mutare Polytechnic, motivating students to enrol. The second set of findings looked at the influence of personal selling on students' attitudes towards

the institution; these revealed that personal selling was an important IMC tool which positively influenced student attitudes, with strategies including school visits, exhibitions, road shows, and campus tours.

The discussion of the findings on the influence of direct marketing on students' attitudes towards Mutare Polytechnic, revealed that this institution primarily uses this method through brochures and fliers, with significant stakeholder participation. The fourth section looked at the influence of PR on student attitudes towards the said Polytechnic; the findings showed that this institution's PR activities (e.g. clean-up campaigns, donations, soccer team sponsorships, and media interactions) aim to maintain a positive brand reputation and strategic relationships with stakeholders, although most participants felt that these activities had no influence on their attitudes, due to a lack of exposure and accessibility to them.

An exploration of the influence of digital marketing revealed that it was also a noteworthy IMC tool, employing social media, websites, and emails. The last section looked at the development of a framework/model for IMC to be used by Mutare Polytechnic and suggested that this institution should develop an IMC framework that addresses four key areas: marketing tools and strategies; message content and presentation; tool coverage, reach, and accessibility; and participant involvement.

The study found that Mutare Polytechnic has invested in IMC tools, including advertising, personal selling, direct marketing, public relations, and digital marketing. The institution uses various techniques to reach prospective students, including email, newsletters, brochures, press releases, SMS, telemarketing, television, radio, billboards, magazines, open days, career days, the internet, and social media. It was found that factors such as marketing tools, message content, coverage, reach, accessibility, and participation in campaigns influence student attitudes towards this institution.

The next section will look at recommendations.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the study's outcomes, the following recommendations are made;

5.3.1 Recommendations for practitioners

Mutare Polytechnic should combine digital marketing, PR, personal selling, direct marketing, and advertising to create a high-impact marketing strategy that has the most reach and influence. However, as personal selling and digital marketing have the greatest impact and reach, more resources ought to be allocated to these. The staff interview findings show that there were no clear IMC programmes and strategies because of inadequate funding. The study recommends that Mutare Polytechnic should have IMC programmes and strategies which are well documented, resourced, financed and supported by senior management and the government.

The institution should also avail more funds for career days, visits to secondary schools,
and open days on their campus. From the findings, some first-year students indicated that they were motivated to enrol at the polytechnic by current students who presented during the open day at Mutare Polytechnic. Based on this, it is recommended that current students and alumni should play a prominent role in the marketing campaigns, so as to enhance the credibility of the messages and eventually change the attitudes of prospective students towards Mutare Polytechnic.

Further, Mutare Polytechnic should hire full-time, experienced marketers who will work independently from other responsibilities at the institution. Currently, lecturers in marketing and related fields are responsible for institutional marketing, in addition to their teaching duties. The hiring of permanent skilled specialists for the Marketing and PR Department will ensure that IMC strategies and initiatives are carried out following standard implementation procedures. The marketing strategies and programmes at Mutare Polytechnic should be handled by a dedicated department on a full-time basis, to address the attitudes of students and other stakeholders, in addition to being supervised by the Ministry of Higher & Tertiary Education, Science & Technology Development head office.

The study discovered that Mutare Polytechnic was not fully using all the IMC tools. As such, the institution is not maximising the usage of direct marketing and public relations, which are key elements in sustaining its competitive edge and image. Additionally, Mutare Polytechnic should place more of an emphasis on strategies that attempt to create a sustainable competitive advantage, such as corporate social responsibility, instead of focusing on more conventional advertising strategies. Due to the growing rivalry in the higher education market, this will help it to establish itself as the institution of choice.

Mutare Polytechnic ought to utilise digital marketing tools like websites, social media presence, and the internet to publicise its programmes, infrastructure, and capabilities. People are increasingly spending more time sifting through information online rather than in newspapers. Digital marketing solutions should improve contact, provide a fast response, and provide a forum for clarifications. Digital marketing messaging should also be thorough, instructive, compelling, instructional, engaging, and honest.

Financial resources are required for the progress of IMC campaigns to capitalise on IMC opportunities. According to the research's findings, the biggest challenge facing the marketing department at Mutare Polytechnic is funding to carry out marketing communications. The management should allocate sufficient funding for IMC operations in their yearly financial plan, which can be expanded annually. This will guarantee that IMC receives the attention that it merits as a crucial activity for the institution's ongoing survival.

According to the findings, advertising has a large impact on students' attitudes. The study recommends that print media, television, radio, and billboards should be used, since they influence students' attitudes towards Mutare Polytechnic. The analysis further found that because of rigorous and entertaining advertisement activities, students' attitudes were influenced positively. The study, therefore, recommends that Mutare Polytechnic should continue with advertisements in all media to influence the attitudes of students and their parents. The allocation of sufficient funds, as indicated in the previous recommendation, would be a prerequisite for the best use of this IMC tool.

IMC strategies cannot effectively generate awareness and exposure for the polytechnic without other elements of the marketing mix, such as relationships with students and their parents. As a result, while designing and implementing marketing communication initiatives, educational institutions and other marketing organisations should consider extra factors that might have an impact.

5.3.2 Recommendations for researchers

The recommendations for further research are largely tied to the limitations of this study, which are elaborated upon in Section 5.5. This study focused on the influence of IMC tools on student attitudes towards polytechnics in Zimbabwe, using the case of one polytechnic. It is therefore proposed that more studies could be done which include more of these institutions. In addition, since this study used an exclusively qualitative research approach, future research could adopt either a quantitative or mixed methods approach. Moreover, the model/framework suggested could also be tested using empirical evidence from different polytechnics. The influence of the different IMCs tools on the attitudes of different stakeholders, apart from students or potential ones, can also be explored. Furthermore, other factors that influence students' attitudes towards polytechnics can also be studied.

5.4 Implications of the study

The study provided insight into the use of IMC tools by polytechnics in Zimbabwe. The findings also shed light on the relative influence of various IMCs tools (advertising, personal selling, direct marketing, public relations, and digital marketing) on student attitudes towards polytechnics. This can be very important in designing an effective IMC plan and strategy. In addition, a comprehensive framework for the design and implementation of IMC tools that could be used to positively influence student attitudes, was also proposed. Such a framework included emphasis and recommendations on integrating the various marketing tools, ensuring that the message content and presentation were detailed, captivating, informative, educative, persuasive, and honest. In addition, stakeholder participation, most importantly the students' participation, and role modelling in the marketing campaigns enhanced the chances of a maximum positive impact. Such a framework contributes to both the theory and practice of effective marketing strategy and communications.

5.5 Limitations

The primary emphasis of this study was on the influence of IMC on student attitudes towards Mutare Polytechnic. It is therefore important to note that these findings are particular to this institution and cannot be generalised to all polytechnics in Zimbabwe. The case study approach has inherent limitations because data from one polytechnic was utilised to develop the conceptual model. Studies of student attitudes at other polytechnics may find entirely different attitudes towards their respective institutions. Therefore, it is suggested that more research be conducted, especially at other polytechnics.

When creating the research instruments, the researcher made a number of assumptions that might have impacted the validity of some of the findings. The main one was that student attitudes towards Mutare Polytechnic were shaped by both their experiences there and the IMC programmes offered therein. Therefore, it can be challenging to distinguish between some of these views and personal experiences of individuals at this institution.

Another limitation was in relation to the focus group guide. For example, the student participants criticised its length, even though this parameter had not been raised as as an issue by the students who participated in the pilot study. Some of the participants in the main research group also complained that some of the questions were too similar, and felt like they were being repeated needlessly. Again, this issue had not been raised during the pilot study. As indicated previously, however, because students in the primary study population were occupied with exams at the time, other students were used to test the

research instrument. The duration of the guide may have also deterred some participants because they were no longer responding with enthusiasm towards the end of the FGDs.

Additionally, some crucial enquiries that might have provided more insightful data for the study were left out. For example, questions on the influence of parents and of service delivery on student attitudes towards Mutare Polytechnic, might have been included.

Where IMC is eliminated as a variable, marketing communication researchers may consider assessing the impact of other factors, such as parents' perceptions of polytechnics, grades earned, and quality of education delivered, on student attitudes. Finally, more research is necessary for IMC implementation, and Zimbabwe's research in this field has to expand. Researchers in marketing communication are encouraged to create ideas, concepts, and academic discourse in the field of higher education using strong empirical studies. For instance, research should determine what significant investment in IMC might help the finances and survival of HEIs.

5.6 Contribution to theory, practice and policy

This study on the influence of IMC on student attitudes towards Mutare Polytechnic, has the potential to contribute to theory, practice, and policy in many ways.

5.6.1 Contribution to theory

Traditionally, studies on IMC have mainly been carried out in the business sector, but this one has extended the use of IMC to the higher education sector, specifically to polytechnics in Zimbabwe, which is an under-explored area in the literature. Mogaji *et al*. (2020) support the adoption of marketing in African HE. This study will help to contribute to the development of higher education and marketing theories, through the findings derived from the examination of how IMC strategies affect student attitudes. This research also contributed to the theory through the integrated examination of different theories, such as the communication process, hierarchy of effects model, and marketing theory, thereby proposing an all-inclusive understanding of how IMC influences student attitudes. Another contribution to the theory was made, by exploring how IMC strategies shape student attitudes towards polytechnics, influencing their perceptions of an institution's value and credibility, as well as of their own future prospects.

5.6.2 Contribution to practice

Mutare Polytechnic and other HEIs can benefit from the study's practical insights on how to create and carry out more successful IMC campaigns. By figuring out which aspects of IMC (such as messaging, channels, and timing) have the greatest impact on student attitudes, institutions can better target their marketing efforts to attract and retain prospective students. The results can be used by Mutare Polytechnic to improve its recruitment tactics, by emphasising the IMC components that have been demonstrated to have the biggest influence on student attitudes and choices. Higher enrolment rates and more effective use of marketing funds could result from this. Furthermore, Mutare Polytechnic may use these findings to refine its targeting and segmentation strategies, focusing on appropriate demographic groups (high school students and working professionals looking for skills training) and identifying effective IMC channels for each segment. Polytechnics may also be able to improve their market positioning by using the research to

pinpoint the essential characteristics that appeal to students. In the HE industry, this may result in more competitive positioning and a better brand identity.

5.6.3 Contribution to policy

Evidence-based findings from the study may help to shape policy, both institutionally and more broadly. The findings could be used by policymakers to create more effective initiatives that support polytechnic education, and take student choices and attitudes into account. Policymakers might start national awareness campaigns or incorporate the promotion of vocational education into the national curriculum. Based on the study's findings, policymakers may be able to distribute funds and resources more effectively. As the findings have revealed that IMC strategies have demonstrated efficacy, resources may be allocated towards expanding these endeavours; for example, policymakers may provide funds to create a substantive marketing and PR office at all polytechnics in Zimababwe.

In summary, this study has contributed to theory, practice, and policy by providing practical insights that polytechnics and policemakers may use.

5.7 Conclusions

The study looked at the impact of IMC on students' attitudes of polytechnics in Zimbabwe. The cause of negative views towards polytechnics was determined to be a lack of information regarding the advantages of studying there. To comprehend students' views towards Mutare Polytechnic, a conceptual model that included the hierarchy of effects model as a measure of IMC, was constructed. According to the study, direct marketing and public relations initiatives had the least impact and should be used more sparingly. Personal selling and digital marketing had the greatest positive impact, followed closely by advertising. Additionally, it was important that the marketing tools be integrated (IMC) and employed simultaneously for the greatest impact. Lastly, a successful IMC plan should also consider the participants in its marketing activities, message content and presentation, and IMC instruments used.

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Appendix A: Focus group discussion guide – For student participants

Opening

Good day to you all and welcome to this discussion. Thank you for sacrificing your time to join me to discuss integrated marketing communications' (IMC's) influence on students' attitudes towards polytechnics in Zimbabwe: Case of Mutare Polytechnic. I have invited you for this session because you are a first-year student at Mutare Polytechnic and you recently went through the enrolment process. I am interested in understanding the role played by various IMC tools in shaping your attitudes towards Polytechnics, and your decision to study at Mutare Polytechnic.

I have sent you the consent form and the information sheet beforehand that has my contact details, the contact details of my supervisor and the ethics board contacts that are available to you at any point during and after this interview. I confirm that I have received the signed consent form from you and this grants me permission to commence with the interview. The information sheet as indicated grants you permission to end the discussion at any point.

As indicated in the consent form, I also request permission to record the discussion. This will allow me not to miss anything during the analysis. I would like to confirm with you whether you are comfortable for us to conduct this discussion in English or in Shona. As indicated, the discussion will take approximately an hour.

During this discussion, our views are different, hence no contribution is wrong. Feel free to contribute even when your views are different from what others are saying. Let's start.

Introductory/background questions

1. Have you heard about integrated marketing communications (IMC) before? If so, what is your understanding of it?

   If students do not demonstrate a good understanding of IMC and the various IMC tools, the researcher will explain further before proceeding to the next question.

Questions addressing the research objectives

RO 1: To explore the relative influence of selected IMC tools on students' attitudes towards Polytechnics in Zimbabwe

2. What sorts of marketing communications (e.g. advertising, personal selling, direct marketing, digital marketing, public relations) were you exposed to from Mutare Polytechnic, before you decided to join Mutare Polytechnic?

3. Thinking about the various marketing communications you were exposed to at that time from Mutare Polytechnic, which of them do you think mostly influenced your attitudes (i.e. your beliefs, feelings and intentions) towards Mutare Polytechnic? Why was this?

Sub-objectives:

- ***To examine the influence of advertising on students' attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings and intentions) towards Polytechnics in Zimbabwe***
- ***To explore the influence of personal selling on students' attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings and intentions) towards Polytechnics in Zimbabwe***
- ***To understand the influence of direct marketing on students' attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings and intentions) towards Polytechnics in Zimbabwe***
- ***To understand the influence of public relations on students' attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings and intentions) towards Polytechnics in Zimbabwe***
- ***To explore the influence of digital marketing on students' attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings and intentions) towards Polytechnics in Zimbabwe***

I am now going to show/share some examples of marketing communications used by Mutare Polytechnic, and ask for your opinions about them. Specifically, I am interested in how these communications influence your beliefs, feelings and intentions towards Mutare Polytechnic.

Show examples of communications representing the various IMC tools. For each tool, solicit students' input on how the communications affect their beliefs/feelings/intentions (i.e. attitudes) towards MP.

.

Show examples of advertising (e.g. print/radio/TV/billboards) *from Mutare Polytechnic.*

4. How did these advertisements influence your beliefs, feelings and intentions towards Mutare Polytechnic?

Probing/follow-up questions

- *If the responses tend to be only positive, ask about possible negative influences (and vice versa).*
- *If the responses do not cover all of the three specified attitude components (beliefs, feelings and intentions), ask about those that have not been covered.*

Show examples of personal selling (e.g. symposium, souvenirs and career guidance visits) from Mutare Polytechnic.

5. How did these personal selling activities influence your beliefs, feelings and intentions towards Mutare Polytechnic?

Probing/follow-up questions as noted under Q4.

Show examples of direct marketing from Mutare Polytechnic.

6. How did these direct marketing activities influence your beliefs, feelings and intentions towards Mutare Polytechnic?

Probing/follow-up questions as noted under Q4.

Show examples of public relations from Mutare Polytechnic.

7. How did these public relations activities influence your beliefs, feelings and intentions towards Mutare Polytechnic?

Probing/follow-up questions as noted under Q4.

Show examples of digital marketing from Mutare Polytechnic.

8. How did these digital marketing activities influence your beliefs, feelings and intentions towards Mutare Polytechnic?

Probing/follow-up questions as noted under Q4.

RO 2: To develop a framework/model for IMC to be used by Polytechnics in Zimbabwe

9. How do you think Mutare Polytechnic should be using IMC to foster positive attitudes among potential students?

10. Which IMC tools do you think Mutare Polytechnic should be focusing more on?

11. What sorts of messages should they be using in their marketing communications?

Concluding questions

12. Is there anything you would like to add that was not raised earlier during the discussion?

Closing

Thank you for taking the time to attend this focus group discussion.

May I contact you again should I need to clarify/confirm any of your responses?

Appendix B: Interview guide for staff

SECTION A: OPENING

Thank you for agreeing to meet me virtually for this interview. My name is Chido Makanza and I am a PhD student with the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The purpose of this study is to explore what influence various integrated marketing communications tools (i.e. advertising, personal selling, direct marketing, public relations and digital marketing) have on students' attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings intentions) towards Zimbabwean Polytechnics, with a specific focus on Mutare Polytechnic. Through the Ministry of Higher Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development, I have been granted permission to interview you. Through this research, I hope to conceptualise the IMC process and its influence on students' attitudes, in the context of Zimbabwean Polytechnics.

I have sent you the consent form and the information sheet beforehand that has my contact details, the contact details of my supervisor and the ethics board contacts that are available to you at any point during and after this interview. I confirm that I have received the signed consent form from you and this grants me permission to commence with the interview. The information sheet as indicated grants you permission to end the interview at any point.

As indicated in the consent form, I also request permission to record the interview. This will allow me not to miss anything during the analysis. I would like to confirm with you whether you are comfortable for us to conduct this interview in English or in Shona. As indicated, the interview will take approximately an hour.

If you have any questions during the interview, feel free to ask. Can we start?

SECTION B: BODY

Introductory/background questions

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself and your work?

    - *Probing/follow-up questions (if not covered in the response to the above question)*
        i. For how long have you been working in the Marketing department at Mutare Polytechnic?
        ii. Besides the education sector, which other industries have you worked in?
        iii. Being a marketing practitioner at Mutare Polytechnic, what roles and activities have you been involved in?
        iv. What sort of education and training have you had related to your work as a marketing communications practitioner?

Questions related to the research objectives

RO 1: To explore the relative influence of selected IMC tools on students' attitudes towards Polytechnics in Zimbabwe

2. What is your understanding of integrated marketing communications (IMC)?
3. Describe the IMC activities your organisation is involved in currently.
4. Research has shown that one of the reasons for low enrolments at Polytechnics is negative attitudes towards Polytechnics. Do you think the use of IMC tools (i.e. advertising, personal selling, public relations, direct marketing and digital marketing) can help to change this? If so, how? If not, why not?
5. Which IMC tool/s do you think may be most effective in changing potential students' negative attitudes towards Polytechnics? Why do you feel this?
6. How has been your organisation dealing with negative student attitudes towards Polytechnics?

Sub-objective: To examine the influence of advertising on students' attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings and intentions) towards Polytechnics in Zimbabwe

7. To what extent and how does Mutare Polytechnicuse advertising in its marketing communication programme? What objectives do you aim to achieve through the use of advertising?
8. What role do you think advertising plays in influencing students' beliefs, feelings and intentions towards Polytechnics in Zimbabwe generally, and MP specifically?

Probing/follow-up questions

- *If the responses tend to be only positive, ask about possible negative influences (and vice versa).*
- *If the responses do not cover all of the three specified attitude components, ask about those that have not been covered.*

Sub-objective: To explore the influence of personal selling on students'attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings and intentions) towards Polytechnics in Zimbabwe

9. To what extent and how does Mutare Polytechnic use personal selling in its marketing communication programme? What objectives do you aim to achieve through the use of personal selling?
10. What role do you think personal selling plays in influencing students' beliefs, feelings and intentions towards Polytechnics in Zimbabwe generally, and MP specifically?

Probing/follow-up questions as noted under Q7.

Sub-objective: To understand the influence of direct marketing on students'attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings and intentions) towards Polytechnics in Zimbabwe

11. To what extent and how does Mutare Polytechnic use direct marketing in its marketing communication programme? What objectives do you aim to achieve through the use of direct marketing?
12. What role do you think direct marketing plays in influencing students' beliefs, feelings and intentions towards Polytechnics in Zimbabwe generally, and MP specifically?

Probing/follow-up questions as noted under Q7.

Sub-objective: To understand the influence of public relations on students' attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings and intentions) towards Polytechnics in Zimbabwe

13. To what extent and how does Mutare Polytechnic use public relations in its marketing communication programme? What objectives do you aim to achieve through the use of public relations?
14. What role do you think public relations plays in influencing students' beliefs, feelings and intentions towards Polytechnics in Zimbabwe generally, and MP specifically?

Probing/follow-up questions as noted under Q7.

Sub-objective: To explore the influence of digital marketing on students' attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings and intentions) towards Polytechnics in Zimbabwe

15. To what extent and how does Mutare Polytechnic use digital marketing in its marketing communication programme? What objectives do you aim to achieve through the use of digital marketing?
16. What role do you think digital marketing plays in influencing students' beliefs, feelings and intentions towards Polytechnics in Zimbabwe generally, and MP specifically?

Probing/follow-up questions as noted under Q7.

RO 2: To develop a framework/model for IMC to be used by Polytechnics in Zimbabwe

17. Does your organisation have a specific IMC programme that you follow? If yes, can you share how the programme is implemented? If no, explain how your organisation is conducting IMC activities.
18. What challenges have you encountered so far in developing an IMC programme for your organisation? What can be done to reduce these challenges?

19. Besides IMC, do you think they are other strategies which can be used to change the attitudes of students towards Polytechnics?

Concluding questions

20. Is there anything that you would like to add that has not been covered?

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this session. Thank you once again for taking time to discuss with me your experiences.

Appendix C: Informed consent

UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

Date:

Greetings,

My name is Chido Makanza (Student Number 219095712) from the University of KwaZuluNatal, College of Law and Management Studies, School of Management, Information Technology and Governance. Contact details: 219095712@stu.ukzn.ac.za, +[redacted]. Supervisor: Dr Aradhna Arbee: +[redacted]4; arbee@ukzn.ac.za

You are being invited to consider participating in a study that involves research into 'Integrated marketing communications' influence on students' attitudes towards Zimbabwean Polytechnics.' The aim and purpose of this research is to investigate the influence of various integrated marketing communications tools on students' attitudes towards Polytechnics in Zimbabwe. The study is expected to include 48 first-year students across the six divisions at Mutare Polytechnic, as well as five staff members from the institution's marketing department. This study will involve participating in one of six focus group discussions (if you are a student), or in an individual interview (if you are a staff member). All focus group discussions and interviews will take place virtually, via Zoom. The duration of your participation, if you choose to participate and remain in the study, is expected to be an hour.

Through this study, I hope to understand the role played by integrated marketing communications in shaping students' attitudes towards Polytechnics.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number_____).

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher [redacted] or 219095712@stu.ukzn.ac.za) or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
Research Office, Westville Campus Govan
Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban 4000 KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Your participation in the study is voluntary and by participating, you are granting the researcher permission to use your responses. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time with no negative consequence. Your anonymity will be maintained by the researcher and the School of Management, I.T. & Governance and your responses will not be used for any purposes outside of this study.

All data, both electronic and hard copy, will be securely stored during the study and archived for 5 years. After this time, all data will be destroyed.

If you have any questions or concerns about participating in the study, please contact me or my research supervisor at the numbers listed above.

Sincerely

Makanza Chido
219095712@stu.ukzn.ac.za

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

I (_____) have been informed about the study entitled ***Integrated marketing communications' influence on students' attitudes towards Zimbabwean Polytechnics: The case of Mutare Polytechnic*** by Makanza Chido (Student Number 219095712).

I have been given an opportunity to ask questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

I have been informed about any available compensation or medical treatment if injury occurs to me as a result of study-related procedures.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at (+[redacted]; 219095712@stu.ukzn.ac.za).

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
Research Office, Westville Campus Govan
Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609 Email:
HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Additional consent, where applicable

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview / focus group discussion YES / NO

_____ _____

Signature of Participant **Date**

_____ _____

Signature of Witness (Where applicable) **Date**

_____ **_____**

Signature of Translator (Where applicable) **Date**

Appendix D: Ethical clearance approval notification

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

15 April 2022

Chido Makanza (219095712)
School Of Man Info Tech & Gov
Westville Campus

Dear C Makanza,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00004051/2022
Project title: Integrated marketing communication's influence on students' attitudes towards Zimbabwean polytechnics: The case of Mutare Polytechnic
Degree: PhD

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 31 March 2022 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL.**

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 15 April 2023.
To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa
Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 **Email:** hsrec@ukzn.ac.za **Website:** http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics
Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

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