

Culturally Grounded Wellness: Examining the Role of Marketing in Promoting Physical Activity at Ifugao State University

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Abstract: With an emphasis on culturally grounded strategies, this study investigates the function of marketing in advancing wellness and physical activity initiatives at Ifugao State University (IFSU). Campus-based wellness initiatives and academic physical education (PE) programs frequently institutionalize physical activity, which has long been recognized as a fundamental component of holistic education. Faculty and student participation in these programs is still uneven, though. This study used a qualitative phenomenological approach to investigate the lived experiences of five faculty members and ten students who were chosen through purposive sampling. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data, and Braun and Clarke's theme analysis approach was used for analysis. The results showed that while extracurricular involvement is low because of scheduling issues, ineffective marketing, and a lack of variety, wellness participation is mostly driven by academic obligations and significant campus events. Compared to traditional posters or announcements, marketing initiatives that included captivating digital content—like TikTok-style videos, Instagram reels, and campaigns with a cultural theme—were more successful. In order to improve involvement and cultural identification, respondents underlined the significance of including indigenous customs, such as traditional games and dances. According to the study's findings, IFSU has to make its wellness and marketing campaigns more interesting, dependable, and culturally appropriate. The establishment of a Wellness Program Committee for student-faculty cooperation, the institutionalization of cultural wellness programs, varied scheduling, and improved use of digital platforms are among the recommendations. By taking these actions, IFSU hopes to develop a long-lasting, welcoming wellness culture.

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I. INTRODUCTION

An essential component of holistic education is physical activity. It promotes social interaction, mental wellness, cognitive function, and physical health. All educational levels in the Philippines have Physical Education (PE) programs that institutionalize this. But recent plans to eliminate physical education as a required course in college curriculum have raised questions. Supporters claim that this change enables specialization in higher education, but others warn that college is a crucial time for forming lifelong habits.

PE at Ifugao State University (IFSU) promotes community resilience and maintains indigenous identity in addition to physical fitness. In order to increase awareness and participation in such programs, marketing is essential. Physical activity can be framed as a culturally relevant and powerful lifestyle choice, rather than just a necessity, through social marketing, which purposefully influences behaviors for the benefit of the public (Kotler & Lee, 2008).

Participation is uneven even with IFSU's PATHFIT program and other wellness programs. While faculty participation is still minimal, students frequently view these events as mandatory or usual. Research indicates that cultural sensitivity, participation, and local context relevance are essential for successful health marketing (Eisenberg et al., 2014; Garcia & Francisco, 2022; Tan & Ramos, 2024).

However, there aren't many studies that concentrate on indigenous or rural institutions. Villanueva and Rivera (2021) contend that initiatives that accept cultural identity have a greater success rate than culturally blind campaigns, which fall short in terms of real community engagement. This is particularly crucial as many rural students may receive less structured physical activity as a result of policy changes like CHED's 2023 proposal to remove physical education from college curricula (Martinez et al., 2023).

According to Nguyen and Peña (2021), school-based programs are the main means of promoting health because rural colleges frequently do not have access to metropolitan wellness infrastructures. Culturally branded programs promote school identity and community pride, according to

Alipio and Javier (2023). The researcher, who is a professor in both marketing and physical education, has seen how wellness programs that lack cultural resonance lower student involvement.

II. METHODOLOGY

In order to thoroughly examine the lived experiences and opinions of instructors and students about the function of marketing in promoting health and physical activity at Ifugao State University (IFSU), this study used a qualitative phenomenological research design. Because it enabled the researcher to obtain detailed information about how people understand and interpret wellness marketing initiatives within their institutional and cultural context, the phenomenological approach was judged appropriate. The investigation of subjective experiences was made possible by this design, which focused on the participants' perceptions as well as their interpretations of culturally based wellness promotion.

The study was carried out at a few IFSU campuses in the Philippines' Cordillera region, which is home to many indigenous cultural traditions and heritages. Ten students and five faculty members were among the participants; they were all found to have previously or currently participated in wellness initiatives or physical education-related promotional activities. The following factors were used to specifically choose participants: availability during the data collecting time, willingness and openness to share experiences, and active engagement in or facilitation of wellness activities. In keeping with the study's focus on cultural relevance, preference was also given to those who self-identified as belonging to indigenous cultural backgrounds.

To make sure that the people chosen for the study had the requisite background and contextual knowledge of IFSU wellness marketing and programming, a purposive sample technique was employed. The researcher was able to purposefully choose examples with a wealth of information that would provide significant and pertinent data by using this non-probability sampling technique. The chosen individuals had shown that they were involved in PATHFIT programs, intramural sports, wellness events on campus, and marketing efforts as participants, organizers, or communicators.

Semi-structured interviews, which offered both structure and flexibility, were the main method used to collect data. To maintain uniformity between sessions and provide flexibility for follow-up inquiries and emerging themes, an interview guide was created. With the participants' permission, audio recordings of the interviews were made in the language they felt most comfortable in, whether it was English, Filipino, or a regional dialect. In order to promote transparency and secrecy, each session lasted between thirty and forty-five minutes and was conducted in a calm, private setting. After the interviews were verbatim transcribed for analysis, participants were given the chance to check their transcripts to make sure their answers were accurate and genuine.

The six-phase theme analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used to examine the information obtained from the interviews. In order to obtain a comprehensive knowledge, the approach started with familiarization, which involved reading the transcripts several times. The first codes were created and applied to the data in a methodical manner. After that, these codes were categorized into possible themes, which were then examined, improved, and given names. Perceived importance of physical education, barriers to participation, marketing fatigue, the effectiveness of social media, and cultural relevance of messaging were among the major topics that surfaced. Finding the similarities and variations in participant experiences was made possible by the analysis, which offered an organized but interpretive method.

Several tactics were used to guarantee the study's credibility. Triangulation, which compares the viewpoints of academics and students, and member verification, in which participants examine preliminary results, were used to build credibility. Detailed explanations of the research environment and participant backgrounds were provided to enhance transferability. By keeping an audit trail that detailed the research procedure, including choices made during data collection and analysis, dependability was attained. The researcher used reflexive journaling to address confirmability, which reduced personal biases and preserved analytical neutrality throughout the investigation.

According to Ifugao State University's research guidelines, ethical issues were strictly adhered to. Before fieldwork began, ethical approval was received from the university's Research Ethics Review Committee. Informed consent forms outlining the study's objectives, participants' freedom to discontinue participation at any time, and confidentiality guarantees were given to participants. Pseudonyms were used in all transcriptions and reporting to ensure anonymity. Throughout the process, cultural awareness was demonstrated by honoring regional customs, dialect, and beliefs, particularly when talking about culturally important wellness activities.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Formal Physical Education (PE) programs, intramural sports, and occasions like Wellness Week are the main ways that students at Ifugao State University (IFSU) stay active. Many respondents acknowledged that significant campus-wide activities or academic requirements are the main factors influencing their physical activity involvement. For example, Vianee Vilorio stated that she does not participate in any other wellness programs other than attending college week events and intramural sports. A number of students reiterated this trend, suggesting that although there are activities available, they are not regularly offered or inclusive enough to promote wider student participation.

Digital channels including Facebook, class group chats, and instructor announcements are the main sources of information on IFSU's wellness initiatives. Although the majority of students said they had seen campus posters or social media posts, others said these initiatives are erratic and ineffective at reaching the larger student body. Students like Dorothy Beth Chalanag and Blessie Hupalon said that weekly Zumba classes are rarely marketed, but major events like intramurals are effectively promoted. Multimedia content was frequently used in memorable ads. Students remembered recordings that departments and instructors shared of cultural dances and fitness demonstrations. Despite their lack of regularity and variation in content, these digital activities were considered to be interesting.

Students' propensity to participate in wellness programs was found to be influenced by marketing tactics, especially those that use social media. Students like Alexander Naddul and Mia Sarah Calingayan saw that participation in wellness events was greatly boosted by interesting and skillfully produced digital content, such as Instagram reels and TikTok-style movies. On the other hand, conventional posters and ugly advertisements were mostly unsuccessful. One common theme was that the most effective content was visually appealing, particularly when it highlighted student involvement and provided rewards. Therefore, resonance and attraction to the student population are just as important as exposure in efficient marketing.

The significance of incorporating local culture into wellness initiatives was widely agreed upon. Incorporating indigenous dances, chants, and traditional games like kadang-kadang and ugub improves both physical engagement and cultural pride, according to respondents from a variety of disciplines. Among others, D'Artagnan Cortez conveyed gratitude for initiatives that enabled them to celebrate their identity through dance and traditional dress. Many students did observe, though, that these culturally inspired activities were frequently one-time affairs with no subsequent follow-up. The capacity of cultural programming to serve as a reliable source of motivation is diminished by this discontinuity.

Staff and faculty members also recognized the lack of wellness programming. The Sports Development Office's Jenelyn Cutiyog expressed worries about scheduling problems and the lack of variety in the activities, pointing out that Zumba is frequently the focus of events that are held during class hours. Michelle Bongayon of the Socio-Cultural Affairs Office pointed out that there is little emphasis on ongoing participation and that physical education and major sporting events are the main ways that student welfare is handled. For wellness initiatives to be more inclusive and long-lasting, these observations highlight institutional issues that must be resolved.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

➤ Conclusion

Although IFSU has made great strides in promoting physical wellbeing through organized academic and event-based activities, the study finds that marketing initiatives are still underutilized, erratic, and not sufficiently appealing to the larger student body. Few students participate in ongoing or extracurricular wellness activities, and most participation is restricted to required or significant events. Wellness initiatives with a cultural foundation are widely appreciated and seen as a significant means of combining an awareness of one's ancestry with physical fitness. However, the potential of such programs is limited by their occasional implementation. Particularly on digital sites like Instagram and TikTok, students are keen for more interesting and student-focused advertisements. In order to increase participation and effectiveness, IFSU wellness initiatives must be more varied, effectively promoted, and incorporated into everyday student life.

➤ Recommendations

It is advised that IFSU improve its marketing tactics by making better use of social media channels by utilizing student-led material, Instagram reels, and TikTok. Student ambassadors can be assigned to co-create content and oversee online interaction, and interactive posters and QR codes can be used to direct students to event specifics. Additionally, by incorporating Ifugao games, chants, and dances into exercise programs, the university should formalize health programs with a cultural foundation. Authenticity and relevance could be ensured by collaborating with cultural leaders and holding monthly cultural wellness events.

By avoiding the busiest academic times and providing a variety of time slots, program scheduling and accessibility should be enhanced. Participation can also be increased by offering rewards like academic points, certificates, or freebies. A year-round health calendar should be created, with wellness themes included into institutional activities and customs, as consistency and sustainability are crucial. To support continued efforts, faculty and student leaders need to receive training.

Last but not least, emphasis should be placed on student participation in planning. In order to improve programming, a Wellness Program Committee made up of teachers and students should be established and regular input should be requested. Acknowledging and appreciating student efforts will also encourage a collaborative and healthy school culture.

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