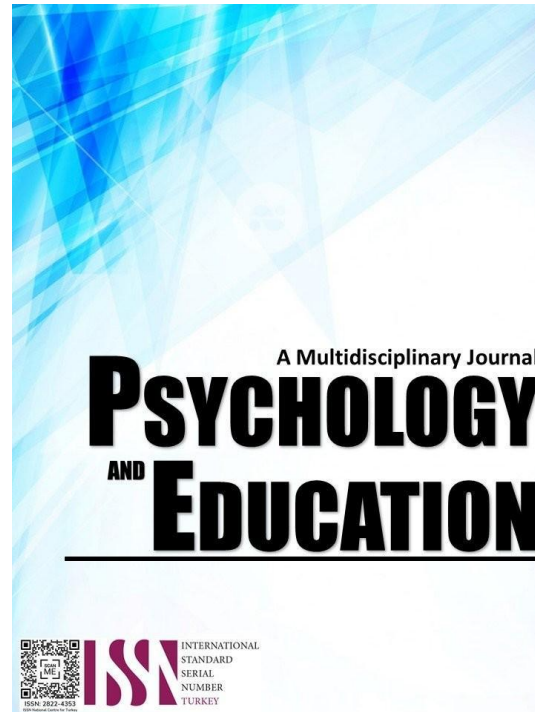


A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION FOR HEI INTERNATIONALIZATION IN REGION III, PHILIPPINES



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A Descriptive Study of Strategic Communication for HEI Internationalization in Region III, Philippines

Mary Ann P. Carranza

For affiliations and correspondence, see the last page.

Abstract

This study examined how strategic communication and regional branding drive internationalization among 11 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Region III, Philippines. Using a descriptive-quantitative design and a structured questionnaire administered to institutional leaders, the research profiled institutional characteristics and measured brand awareness, identification, architecture, organizational commitment, and internationalization practices. Findings indicate a pronounced internal brand identity and strong community loyalty, but limited external projection: HEIs reported neutral or low performance in strategic alliances, consultancy services, and the formal inclusion of internationalization within their mission and strategic plans. Programs prioritized for international outreach are predominantly Level III accredited and concentrated in Business Administration, Information Technology, and Hospitality Management, providing a credible foundation for regional promotion. Based on these results, the study proposes a centralized regional brand, "Region III: A Hub for Globally Competitive and Accredited Professional Education, to unify messaging and coordinate marketing. Recommendations urge CHED Region III to lead the initiative and advise HEIs to formalize internationalization in institutional documents, strengthen dedicated administrative units, invest in capacity-building, and implement monitoring and assessment frameworks. Prioritized short-, medium-, and long-term actions are outlined, and future mixed-methods research is recommended to contextualize implementation barriers and measure impact. These steps significantly strengthen regional competitiveness and international competitiveness.

Keywords: *brand awareness, internationalization, Philippine HEIs, strategic communication, regional branding*

Introduction

Globalization transformed higher education into a highly competitive transnational market in which institutions must compete for students, faculty, research partnerships, and reputation. Success in this environment increasingly depended not only on academic quality but also on a coherent strategic identity, characterized by clear branding and coordinated communication that signaled an institution's distinct value to international audiences (Compagnucci & Spigarelli, 2020; Brzaković et al., 2022). Collective initiatives—such as regional branding and coordinated marketing—have been shown in other contexts to amplify visibility beyond what individual institutions could achieve alone (Ferraris et al., 2021). ASEAN case studies further indicate that regulatory variation and resource asymmetries require adaptation of collective-brand approaches to local conditions.

In the Philippines, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) promoted internationalization through policy instruments (e.g., CMO 55, s. 2016), emphasizing quality assurance, mobility, and global partnerships. However, implementation at the regional level remained uneven. Regional profiling studies in the Philippines (e.g., Gallos et al., 2022) report similar disparities, where clusters of institutional strengths coexist with limited formalization and resource constraints. In Region III, a cluster of strengths—most notably a concentration of Level III-accredited programs in professional fields—coexisted with fragmented efforts, limited formalization of internationalization in institutional plans, and weak external projection through strategic alliances and consultancy services. These local conditions created a policy-relevant problem: how to consolidate dispersed institutional assets into a coherent and credible regional presence in global higher education markets.

This study addressed that gap by systematically profiling institutional characteristics and leaders' perceptions across 11 HEIs in Region III and by evaluating brand-related constructs (awareness, identification, architecture), organizational commitment, and internationalization practices using a descriptive-quantitative survey design. Its originality lay in linking empirical, program-level quality indicators (e.g., accreditation status, flagship programs) with institutional branding metrics to propose a data-informed, actionable regional brand and implementation roadmap—moving beyond descriptive accounts of internationalization to offer a practicable model for coordinated regional action.

Research Questions

The study generally determined how CHED Region III and participating HEIs develop a centralized regional brand and strategic communication framework to advance internationalization. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the institutional profiles of participating HEIs (type, location, target audience, programs for internationalization, accreditation level)?
2. How do HEIs rate their local branding (brand awareness and brand identification)?
3. How are brand architecture, organizational commitment, and practice of internationalization currently manifested and formalized in HEIs?

4. What prioritized actions and a feasible regional brand can be recommended to operationalize internationalization in Region III?

Methodology

Research Design

A descriptive-quantitative design was used to profile institutions and quantify perceptions of branding and internationalization constructs. The choice of quantitative approach is justified by the objective of measuring prevalence and comparative perceptions across institutional indicators, and deriving a region-level branding proposal grounded in aggregated quantitative evidence.

Given the study's primary aim to profile HEIs and quantify current branding and internationalization indicators across the region, a structured questionnaire enabled systematic cross-institutional comparison. However, the researcher acknowledged that qualitative insights (e.g., interviews, focus groups) could enrich understanding of institutional narratives and implementation challenges; this limitation is noted and proposed for future mixed-methods follow-up studies.

Respondents

Participants were key institutional officials (e.g., presidents, VPs for academics, internationalization officers) from 11 HEIs across Region III (SUCs, LUCs, and private HEIs). Purposive sampling was used to ensure respondents held direct knowledge of institutional strategic planning and internationalization efforts. Given the targeted population of institutional decision-makers, purposive sampling is defensible for exploratory, policy-oriented regional studies. Nevertheless, the limited sample size constrains generalizability beyond participating institutions—a limitation that is acknowledged and discussed.

Instrument

The survey instrument, distributed thru CHEDRO III Memorandum No.164 was composed of four parts aimed to identify the following: (1) Profile of each HEI, (2) Awareness of their respective brands, (3) Identification of their respective brands, and (4) their brand Architecture, divided into three subparts namely: Intentionality in creating a vision, Organizational commitment to internationalization, and practice of internationalization. This instrument was adapted from two different studies: (1) Brand Building of Higher Education Institutions Case Study: Islamic University of Gaza, and (2) Intentional Internationalization of Higher Education: A Strategic Institutional Response to Globalization. For reliability and validity, content validation was conducted through an expert panel. Cronbach's alpha for Brand Awareness = 0.937; Brand Identification = 0.870; Brand Architecture = 0.929; Organizational Commitment = 0.972; Practice of Internationalization = 0.976.

Procedure

Data were collected systematically over a contiguous three month period to ensure accuracy, reproducibility, and a high response rate. The data collection process followed a structured, sequential timeline comprising three phases. Month 1 involved institutional contact and securing permissions: formal request letters and the survey link were sent via email to the heads of target HEIs; upon receiving institutional approval, focal persons (typically internationalization officers or representatives of the president's office) were identified to coordinate respondent selection and survey distribution. Month 2 comprised instrument administration and active remote follow up: the structured questionnaire was administered online via Google Forms and distributed through email; standardized written instructions accompanied the survey, and follow up communications (telephone calls, instant messaging, and reminder emails) were used to resolve queries, encourage completion, and monitor response rates. Month 3 covered retrieval, data cleaning, and entry: survey responses were exported from Google Forms, checked for completeness and consistency, de identified and coded, and entered into statistical software for analysis; final reminders were issued to non respondents to maximize participation. This phased approach ensured transparency, ethical compliance, and methodological rigor throughout the data collection process.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected from the questionnaires were statistically treated using both descriptive and inferential analytical tools to ensure comprehensive interpretation and analytical depth. Frequency counts and percentages were utilized to describe the profile of the participating HEIs, including institutional type, accreditation levels, and courses offered for internationalization. Weighted means and standard deviations were calculated to address the main research questions concerning brand awareness, brand identification, brand architecture (intentionality in creating a vision for internationalization), organizational commitment to internationalization, and practice of internationalization. The computed means were interpreted using a predefined 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree) to determine the extent of agreement among respondents for each indicator.

Internal consistency reliability of the measurement scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. All constructs demonstrated excellent to good reliability (α range: 0.870–0.976), confirming that the instruments were internally consistent and suitable for further analysis.

To enhance analytical depth and interpretation strength, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among the five constructs. Correlation coefficients and their corresponding significance levels (p -values) were computed to identify significant

associations. Additionally, multiple regression analysis was performed to identify predictors of the Practice of Internationalization, with Brand Awareness, Brand Identification, Brand Architecture, and Organizational Commitment entered as independent variables. Model fit was evaluated using R^2 , adjusted R^2 , and root mean square error (RMSE). Regression coefficients (β), standard errors, t-statistics, and p-values were calculated to assess the significance and relative contribution of each predictor.

The integration of descriptive and inferential statistics allowed the researcher to interpret the data systematically, identify prevailing trends and patterns, test relationships among constructs, determine key predictors of internationalization practice, and draw objective, evidence-based conclusions regarding the strategic communication practices for internationalization among HEIs in Region III, Philippines. All statistical analyses were conducted with a significance level set at $\alpha = 0.05$.

To mitigate interpretive risks due to sample size constraints, the researcher notes that the multiple regression model included four predictors with a total sample of $n = 11$, which limits statistical power and increases the risk of overfitting. Accordingly, all inferential results are interpreted with caution and complemented by effect size estimates and 95% confidence intervals (CIs) for regression coefficients where feasible.

Ethical Considerations

The highest ethical standards were maintained throughout the study. The principle of informed consent was strictly observed; participants were provided with a clear explanation of the research objectives and procedures, and their voluntary participation was confirmed before they answered the questionnaire. The confidentiality of the participating institutions and the anonymity of the individual respondents were guaranteed. All collected data were coded to remove personal identifiers, ensuring no specific responses could be traced back to an individual or institution. Furthermore, the data were stored securely and used exclusively for the academic purposes of this research, and all findings have been reported with integrity.

Results

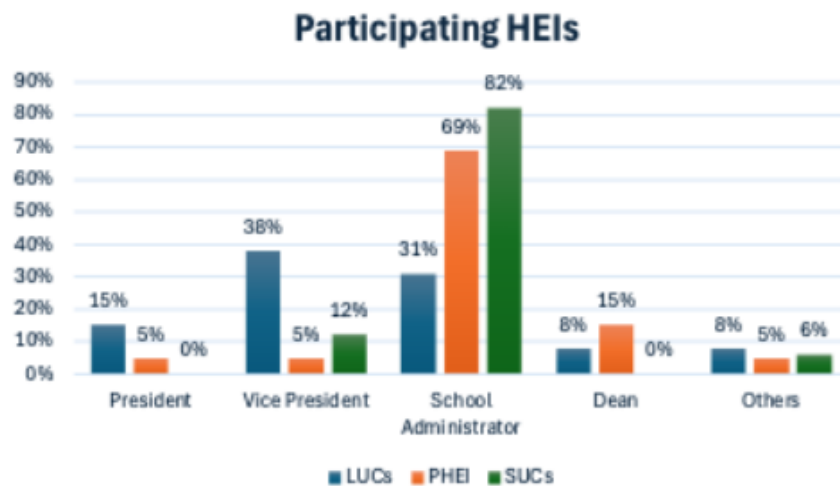


Figure 1. *Participating HEIs*

The profile of participating higher education institutions (HEIs) in Region III is predominantly comprised of private institutions. As shown in Figure 1, private HEIs represent the largest segment of respondents, significantly outnumbering the participation from State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) and Local Universities and Colleges (LUCs). This composition suggests that any regional branding strategy must be nuanced enough to encompass the diverse missions, visions, and resources inherent in the private education sector. The strong representation from private HEIs indicates a market-driven and proactive interest in internationalization, which can be a powerful force in a unified regional campaign. However, this institutional diversity also highlights the central challenge of crafting a cohesive brand identity that aligns with the distinct characteristics of both private and public institutions. The lower participation from SUCs and LUCs may indicate differing priorities or resource constraints that a regional strategy must address to ensure inclusive and equitable development. Therefore, a thorough understanding of this institutional landscape is fundamental to developing a strategic communication plan that effectively serves the region.

The data presented in Figure 2 clearly indicate that students are the primary target audience for the internationalization efforts of HEIs in Region III. This group constitutes the overwhelming majority, far surpassing faculty, researchers, and the local community as the primary focus of institutional strategies. This student-centric approach reveals that current internationalization activities are heavily geared towards international student recruitment, marketing, and mobility programs. While attracting students is vital, this narrow focus risks overlooking other critical dimensions of comprehensive internationalization, such as fostering research collaborations and promoting faculty development.

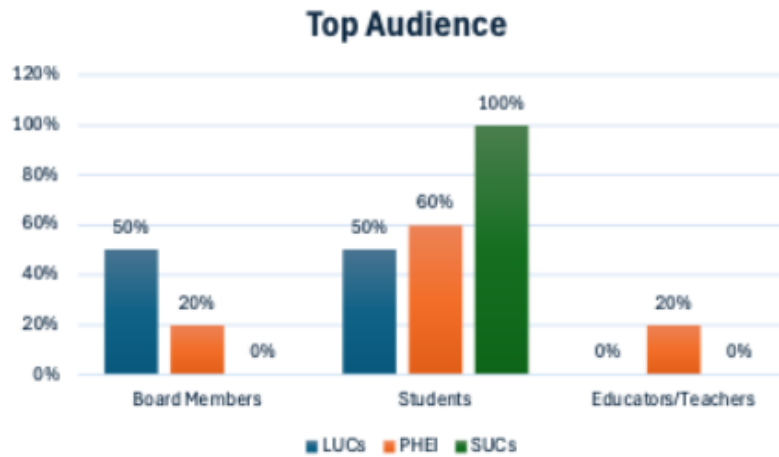


Figure 2. Top Audience

Therefore, a successful regional brand must appeal to prospective students and provide compelling opportunities for international faculty and researchers to engage. This prevailing focus may be a strategic decision to generate revenue or simply a result of more established frameworks for student exchange. Consequently, a holistic and impactful regional internationalization strategy must broaden its target audience definition to build a more robust global presence.

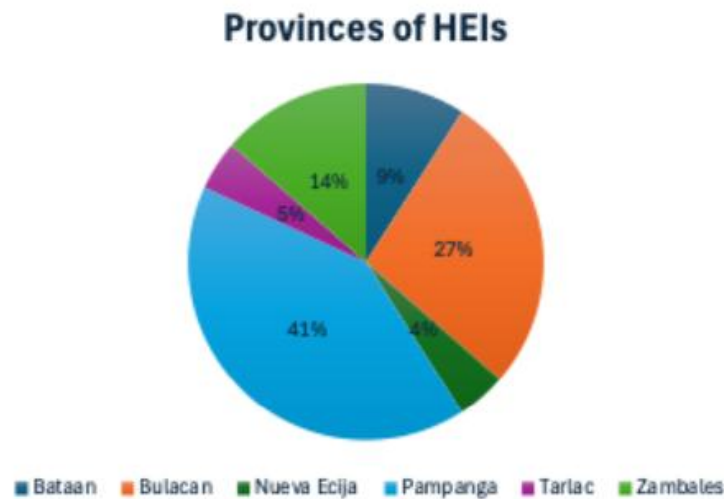


Figure 3. Location of HEIs

An analysis of the geographical distribution of participating institutions reveals a significant concentration in the provinces of Bulacan and Pampanga. Figure 3 shows that these two provinces house the majority of HEIs in the study, creating distinct educational hubs within Region III. This clustering suggests that these areas possess more developed infrastructure and a greater institutional readiness for internationalization initiatives than other regional provinces.

A key implication for a regional branding strategy is the need to ensure inclusivity and avoid a perception of favoring these dominant areas, while actively working to elevate institutions from less-represented provinces. This uneven distribution may reflect underlying disparities in economic development and resources, reinforcing the need for a centralized initiative to promote regional balance. The concentration of HEIs in these provinces presents an opportunity to build on existing strengths; however, a truly regional brand must strategically showcase the unique offerings of each locality.

The academic programs most frequently offered by Region III HEIs for internationalization are Business Administration, Information Technology, and Hospitality Management. As illustrated in Figure 4, these disciplines are the clear frontrunners, indicating a strategic focus on programs with high perceived global demand and strong employment prospects. This trend highlights a market-oriented approach, where institutions leverage academic fields that are traditionally attractive to a broad international student market. This emphasis provides a solid foundation for developing a specialized academic brand for the region, such as positioning it as a hub for business and technology education. However, this focus on a few key areas may also indicate a lack of diversity in program offerings, potentially limiting the region's appeal to students interested in other fields.



Figure 4. Courses Offered for Internationalization

This specialization likely aligns with regional economic strengths, creating valuable opportunities for industry-academe partnerships to enhance the internationalization agenda



Figure 5. Level of Accrediation of Courses Offered for Internationalization

A significant finding regarding the courses offered for internationalization is that most hold a Level III accreditation status, as detailed in Figure 5. This high level of accreditation is a crucial indicator of quality and is a significant asset in the competitive global higher education landscape. It provides a credible and robust foundation for a regional brand message centered on academic excellence, quality assurance, and rigorous standards. This commitment to quality aligns directly with the Commission on Higher Education's mandate to enhance the global competitiveness of Philippine HEIs. The prevalence of well-accredited programs enables the region to market its offerings to an international audience confidently. While some programs are at different stages of the accreditation process, the strong presence of Level III-accredited courses is a cornerstone of evidence-based international reputation for HEIs in Region III.

Table 1. Brand Awareness

Brand Awareness	Mean	Std. Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
Accreditation by National and International bodies.	3.55	1.47	Somewhat Agree
Facilities provided, and the output of research done.	3.41	1.56	Neutral
Consultancy services provided by the university/college.	3.27	1.38	Neutral
Strategic Alliances with national and international universities.	3.23	1.30	Neutral
Executive and management development programs designed and conducted by the university/college.	3.32	1.42	Neutral
Qualification and status of the faculty.	3.64	1.36	Somewhat Agree
Membership of professional bodies by the university/college.	3.77	1.23	Somewhat Agree
Community perception about the status of university/college.	3.55	1.22	Somewhat Agree
Visibility of the university/college in media.	3.59	1.36	Somewhat Agree
Student's feeling of belonging and loyalty to the university/college community.	3.82	1.25	Somewhat Agree
A sense of internal community of faculty, staff and workers of belonging and loyalty to the university/college.	3.77	1.23	Somewhat Agree
Grand Mean	3.53		Somewhat Agree

The overall brand awareness of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Region III is moderately positive, with a grand mean of 3.53, indicating a level of agreement that is "Somewhat Agree." The highest levels of agreement are found in internally focused aspects, such as students' sense of belonging and loyalty (3.82), the internal community feel among faculty and staff (3.77), and membership in professional bodies (3.77). Conversely, HEIs feel less confident about their brand awareness in externally-oriented activities, as reflected by the "Neutral" scores for strategic alliances with other universities (3.23) and consultancy services provided (3.27). This suggests that while HEIs perceive a solid sense of internal community and formal recognition, their visibility through collaborative and outreach initiatives is less established. The data indicates a prevailing sentiment of adequacy but highlights a clear opportunity for growth in external brand projection.

These findings suggest that the brand awareness of HEIs in Region III is more inwardly focused than outwardly projected, which has significant implications for internationalization. According to Amani (2022), a strong internal community and sense of belonging are foundational for creating authentic brand ambassadors, a principle well-supported in university branding literature, which states that institutional identity must be built from within. However, the neutral perception of strategic alliances is a notable weakness, as partnerships are a cornerstone of modern internationalization efforts, facilitating student mobility, research collaboration, and global visibility, as highlighted by scholars such as Suarez-Herrera et al. (2024). This disparity indicates a gap between the internal brand identity and the external-facing strategies required to compete globally. This reinforces the study's premise that a disjointed approach hinders the region's international presence. A unified regional strategy could bridge this gap by creating a platform to showcase and expand these crucial alliances.

Table 2. *Brand Identification*

<i>Brand Identification</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Verbal Interpretation</i>
Our brand communicates our school's story – history, vision, and future.	3.91	1.41	Somewhat Agree
We have enough loyal alumni and support to community.	3.82	1.22	Somewhat Agree
We are able to highlight the strength as an educational institution.	3.77	1.11	Somewhat Agree
We have highly qualified teachers and rigorous curriculum.	3.59	1.09	Somewhat Agree
We are able to market our school and attract target audience.	3.82	1.22	Somewhat Agree
Our official website is engaging and tells a story about our school.	3.68	1.28	Somewhat Agree
Our social media presence is current and relevant.	3.86	1.32	Somewhat Agree
We have a consistent brand in terms of message, vision, logo, and school colors.	3.77	1.34	Somewhat Agree
We have a concise and compelling tagline for our school.	3.82	1.36	Somewhat Agree
We use social media effectively in advertising school events.	3.82	1.22	Somewhat Agree
Grand Mean	3.79		Somewhat Agree

The HEIs in Region III generally agree that they have established a distinct brand identity, as evidenced by a grand mean of 3.79. Respondents feel most confident communicating their institution's story, history, and vision (3.91) and maintaining a current and relevant social media presence (3.86). This indicates a firm grasp of narrative-based and digital branding strategies in defining their institutional identity. The data also shows positive agreement on the importance of having loyal alumni, marketing effectiveness, and consistency in visual branding elements. Interestingly, while still rated as "Somewhat Agree," the lowest-scoring item is the ability to communicate the strength of having highly qualified teachers and a rigorous curriculum (3.59). This suggests that core academic strengths might be under communicated relative to other, more narrative-focused branding elements.

The strong emphasis on storytelling and digital presence aligns with contemporary marketing theory, prioritizing engagement and narrative to build a compelling brand in a competitive marketplace. A unique institutional story helps to differentiate an HEI and attract its target audience (Antena, 2021). However, the slightly weaker confidence in communicating academic rigor represents a significant strategic vulnerability in internationalization. For many prospective international students and partners, objective quality measures, such as faculty qualifications and curriculum strength, are paramount decision-making factors, as confirmed by numerous studies on student choice. As Jibeen and Khan (2015) noted, enhanced academic quality is a primary benefit of internationalization, and failing to broadcast this core asset could severely limit an institution's global appeal and undermine its recruitment efforts.

Table 3. *Brand Architecture*

<i>Brand Architecture</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Verbal Interpretation</i>
Campus internationalization at this university/college began with the institution's leadership establishing vision that had the end in mind.	3.64	1.21	Somewhat Agree
The leadership of this university/college is committed to internationalizing the institution based on what the institution will look like in the future, and not based on the institution's current or past identity.	3.59	1.22	Somewhat Agree
The process of internationalizing at this university/college was initiated by a charge from the leadership of the institution.	3.45	1.33	Neutral
This college/university's leadership ensured that the vision for campus internationalization was clearly articulated in the institution's mission statement.	3.45	1.29	Neutral
This college/university's leadership ensured that the vision for campus	3.41	1.29	Neutral

internationalization was clearly articulated in the institution's strategic plan.	3.55	1.29	Somewhat Agree
The leadership of this college/university is committed to the accomplishment of internationalizing this institution.	3.45	1.26	Neutral
The leadership of this college/university sustains the progress of internationalization at the institution by tactically allocating resources to internationalization efforts and activities.	3.45	1.26	Neutral
The leadership of this college/university assumes responsibility for defining the future of internationalization at the institution.	3.55	1.33	Somewhat Agree
The leadership of this college/university inspires employees to increase their capabilities beyond their current levels to successfully internationalize the institution.			
Grand Mean	3.50		Somewhat Agree

The data on brand architecture reveals a positive but not fully formalized commitment from institutional leadership, with an overall mean of 3.50, or "Somewhat Agree." They strongly agree that their leadership has established a vision for internationalization (3.64) and inspires employees to work towards this goal (3.55). This points to the presence of visionary and motivational leadership at the helm of these institutions. However, there is a noticeable decline in confidence regarding the formal integration of this vision into institutional documents. Respondents rated the articulation of the internationalization vision within the institution's strategic plan (3.41) and mission statement (3.45) as "Neutral." This suggests a disconnect between the leaders' intent and the formal, systematic frameworks required to guide and sustain the internationalization process.

This apparent gap between vision and its formal documentation is a critical finding for the strategic development of internationalization in the region. While visionary leadership is an essential catalyst for change, educational management literature emphasizes that for a vision to be truly effective, it must be embedded within the organization's formal strategic planning processes, as scholars like Reynita et al. (2025) argue. According to Jimenez et al. (2024), a vision not clearly articulated in strategic plans risks being perceived as merely aspirational rather than a core institutional priority. This lack of formalization can lead to inconsistent resource allocation, unclear objectives, and the "disjointed" implementation this study seeks to address. A centralized regional framework could provide the structure to help institutions translate leadership vision into actionable, measurable strategic goals.

The assessment of organizational commitment to internationalization across Region III HEIs is decidedly neutral, with a grand mean of 3.21. Every single indicator within this category, from publicizing the strategic plan (3.14) to ensuring employees identify with the vision (3.14), received a "Neutral" interpretation. This pervasive neutrality suggests a significant lack of clarity, communication, and systematic implementation of internationalization initiatives within the institutional structures. It indicates that the vision established by leadership has not yet been translated into concrete, organization-wide commitment or engagement. The responses reflect a collective uncertainty about whether the necessary administrative structures, policies, and communication channels are effectively in place to support the internationalization agenda, pointing to a critical implementation gap.

Table 4. *Organizational Commitment to Internationalization*

<i>Organizational Commitment to Internationalization</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Verbal Interpretation</i>
This college/university has developed a strategic plan for campus internationalization based on the vision established by the leadership of the institution.	3.27	1.38	Neutral
This college/university's strategic plan for campus internationalization is amply publicized throughout the institution.	3.14	1.32	Neutral
The scope of the challenge to internationalize this college/university is clearly outlined and communicated to employees at all levels of the organization.	3.23	1.30	Neutral
The core competencies, along with policies and operational procedures, required for internationalizing this college/university are clearly established and communicated to employees at all levels of the organization.	3.36	1.39	Neutral
Employees at all levels of the organization have a sense of identity with the internationalization vision of this college/university.	3.14	1.28	Neutral
Employees at all levels of the organization have an opportunity to become critically engaged in the internationalization vision of this college/university.	3.27	1.20	Neutral
Employees at all levels of the organization are committed to the internationalization vision of this college/university.	3.14	1.28	Neutral
This college/university has established one or more competent administrative structures to implement the campus internationalization vision of the institution.	3.14	1.35	Neutral
All the administrative structures of this college/university work in a coordinated manner to accomplish the campus internationalization vision of the institution.	3.23	1.34	Neutral
All activities pertaining to internationalizing this college/university are clearly detailed and communicated to employees at all levels of the organization.	3.23	1.30	Neutral
Grand Mean	3.21		Neutral

This widespread neutral stance on organizational commitment represents a formidable barrier to achieving meaningful internationalization. The internationalization process is not a top-down directive, but a comprehensive transformation that requires deep and broad institutional buy-in, as noted by de Varas-Fuente et al. (2022). Without a shared sense of purpose and clear

communication, employees at all levels are unlikely to become actively engaged, and administrative structures will fail to function in a coordinated manner. The findings suggest that internationalization has not yet been woven into the cultural and operational fabric of the institutions. In connection with Jantassova et al. (2021), this highlights the pressing need for a collaborative regional approach that focuses on capacity-building, sharing best practices for organizational change, and fostering a shared sense of identity around internationalization goals.

Table 5. *Practice of Internationalization*

<i>Practice of Internationalization</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Verbal Interpretation</i>
A culture of organizational flexibility, innovation, and enthusiasm exists at this institution regarding campus internationalization.	3.18	1.46	Neutral
Employees at this university feel inspired as they work toward the achievement of the vision of internationalizing the institution.	3.18	1.36	Neutral
Internationalization changes agents have been developed in the process of internationalizing this college/university.	3	1.38	Neutral
Champions of the new culture of internationalization have emerged in the process of internationalizing this college/university.	3.27	1.38	Neutral
Continuous risk-taking and improvisation is seen as critical in the process of internationalizing this college/university.	3.09	1.37	Neutral
Innovation during the process of internationalization is accomplished through creativity and experimentation.	3.05	1.36	Neutral
During the process of internationalization, as barriers are overcome and goals are met, employees' enthusiasm and drive to succeed increase, momentum accelerates, and change is mastered.	3.14	1.42	Neutral
This college/university embarks on internationalization with an enterprising campus spirit.	3.32	1.35	Neutral
This college/university engages in a systemic approach to internationalization.	3.27	1.27	Neutral
This college/university has a mechanism in place to successfully assess the effectiveness of the internationalization process.	3.09	1.37	Neutral
Grand Mean	3.15		Neutral

Mirroring the findings on organizational commitment, the actual practice of internationalization within Region III HEIs is perceived as "Neutral," with a grand mean of 3.15. This assessment holds across all measured practices, including the existence of an innovative and flexible culture (3.18), the development of change agents (3.00), and the use of mechanisms to assess effectiveness (3.09). This suggests that tangible, on-the-ground activities related to internationalization are not being actively or dynamically pursued. Rather than an enterprising and experimental process, internationalization appears to be a passive concept that has yet to be translated into a robust set of institutional practices. The lack of a perceived culture of continuous risk-taking and improvisation further reinforces this interpretation.

These neutral findings on practice are the logical outcome of the gaps identified in strategic formalization and organizational commitment. Effective internationalization is not merely a plan but a dynamic process that, according to scholars like Hanv et al. (2024), requires creating a campus culture that embraces innovation, systemic approaches, and continuous improvement. The data suggests this culture does not yet exist in the region. The neutral score on having assessment mechanisms is especially concerning, as it implies that institutions are operating without the ability to measure progress, learn from failures, or make data-informed decisions to improve their strategies. Kruk et al. (2018) highlight a critical need for a unified regional plan that not only outlines a vision but also provides practical tools, benchmarks, and a supportive framework to cultivate a vibrant and effective practice of internationalization.

Table 6. *Pearson Correlation Results*

<i>Variables</i>		<i>Organizational Commitment</i>	<i>Brand Architecture</i>	<i>Brand Identification</i>	<i>Brand Awareness</i>	<i>Practice of Internationalization</i>
Organizational Commitment	Correlation Coefficient	-	0.746	0.638	0.658	0.820
	Sig.	-	0.013**	0.002**	0.039**	0.004**
Brand Architecture	Correlation Coefficient	0.746	-	0.788	0.642	0.833
	Sig.	0.013**	-	0.012*	0.041**	0.033**
Brand Identification	Correlation Coefficient	0.638	0.788	-	0.836	0.673
	Sig.	0.002**	0.012**	-	0.027**	0.033**
Brand Awareness	Correlation Coefficient	0.658	0.642	0.836	-	0.654
	Sig.	0.039**	0.041**	0.027**	-	0.040**
Practice of Internationalization	Correlation Coefficient	0.820	0.833	0.673	0.654	-
	Sig.	0.004**	0.033**	0.033**	0.040**	-

Legend: * $p < .05$; **

The Pearson correlation results in Table 6 indicate strong positive relationships among the constructs of Brand Architecture, Brand Identification, Brand Awareness, Organizational Commitment, and the Practice of Internationalization. The strongest observed correlation is between Brand Architecture and Brand Identification ($r = 0.788$), suggesting that as the architecture of a brand becomes more cohesive, the organization's identifying signals (story, voice, visual identity) are perceived as more aligned and coherent. This alignment supports a unified regional branding effort, which can enhance consistency across HEIs when communicating internationalization priorities to external audiences. In practice, such coherence is likely to enhance message clarity and reduce confusion among prospective international partners and students (de Wit, 2020).

While external signals, such as strategic alliances, show moderate correlations with Brand Awareness (0.658) and the Practice of Internationalization (0.654), the overall pattern reveals that Brand-related constructs strongly interrelate with internal cohesion (Brand Identification and Brand Architecture) more than with externally oriented outcomes. This implies that, even though internal branding elements are being developed, external visibility and strategic partnerships may lag, potentially constraining internationalization efforts. The observed associations justify targeting integrated branding enhancements (architecture and identification) as a lever to improve external collaborations and the overall effectiveness of internationalization activities.

Table 7. *Regression Coefficients*

<i>Practice of Internationalization</i>	β	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Brand Awareness	-0.056	0.268	-0.209	0.843
Brand Identification	0.749	0.375	1.995	0.103
Brand Architecture	-0.588	0.414	-1.419	0.215
Organizational Commitment	1.035	0.346	2.991	0.030

Legend: * $p < .05$; **

The regression results in Table 7 show that Organizational Commitment is a significant positive predictor of the Practice of Internationalization ($\beta = 1.035$, $t = 2.991$, $p = 0.030$), indicating that when institutions commit resources, align their policies, and foster staff engagement toward internationalization, tangible practices are accelerated. In contrast, Brand Awareness ($\beta = -0.056$, $p = 0.843$) and Brand Architecture ($\beta = -0.588$, $p = 0.215$) do not show statistically reliable direct effects in this model, suggesting that mere awareness or architectural coherence, without deeper organizational buy-in, may be insufficient to translate into practice. This pattern aligns with theories that emphasize the primacy of organizational commitment and coordinated institutional action in achieving meaningful internationalization outcomes (Palumbo et al., 2020).

Brand Identification's positive association with the Practice of Internationalization is indicated ($\beta = 0.749$), but not statistically significant at conventional levels ($p = 0.103$). This could reflect a limited sample size or the need for more robust measurement of how perceived brand identity translates into concrete actions. The findings still suggest a potentially meaningful role for a clearly articulated brand identity when combined with a strong organizational commitment. Overall, the model emphasizes that enhancing leadership commitment and strategic alignment appears essential to advance practical internationalization activities, more so than increasing brand metrics alone. This reinforces the value of integrating branding efforts with institutional development and capability-building initiatives (Stoica et al., 2025).

Discussions

Region III's higher education institutions exhibit a clear pattern: strong internal brand signals, such as student belonging, faculty and staff loyalty, and active involvement in professional bodies, are well-developed, while external brand signals, like strategic alliances and consultancy outputs, remain relatively weaker. This divergence suggests that internal coherence has been established. However, the translation of that interior strength into outward-facing internationalization activities has not fully materialized, indicating a gap between internal identity and external reach. Addressing this gap requires translating internal brand equity into externally oriented collaboration opportunities, so that partnerships, mobility programs, and international visibility are anchored in a consistent narrative. The observed relationships among branding constructs, where brand awareness and identification are robust internally and brand architecture reflects leadership-driven vision, underscore that enhancing external collaboration depends on aligning governance, resources, and processes around a shared internationalization agenda, thereby enabling a more credible and coordinated regional presence. This alignment is essential because contemporary branding scholarship emphasizes that internal coherence serves as a prerequisite for credible external signaling, and without it, attempts at international outreach risk appearing disjointed or opportunistic.

Conclusions

The evidence suggests that internal branding strengths within Region III HEIs are robust, as evidenced by strong narratives around institutional stories, active social media engagement, and loyal alum networks. In contrast, outward-facing branding and international collaboration remain comparatively underdeveloped. This pattern suggests that internal coherence serves as a solid foundation, but translating that coherence into external visibility requires deeper organizational alignment, formal planning, and cross-institutional coordination. The relationships among brand identity, leadership-driven vision, and organizational commitment reveal a critical insight:

without embedding the internationalization vision within formal governance structures and performance metrics, branding efforts may fail to yield durable, externally observable outcomes, such as sustainable mobility programs and strategic partnerships. Consequently, progress hinges on bridging the gap between aspirational leadership and concrete, measurable planning, ensuring that internal strengths catalyze tangible internationalization impact.

Second, organizational commitment emerges as a key predictor of practical internationalization activity. When institutions commit resources, align policies, and mobilize staff toward internationalization goals, tangible practices, such as mobility schemes, cross-border partnerships, and capacity-building initiatives, tend to materialize. Conversely, high levels of brand awareness or coherent brand architecture without corresponding organizational commitment are unlikely to translate into sustained practice. This finding underscores the importance of fostering a shared sense of purpose and integrating internationalization into daily operations through clear accountability, incentives, and cross-functional collaboration. A stronger focus on organizational commitment is thus essential to convert branding readiness into actual international engagement and performance.

Finally, the case for a centralized regional branding framework is compelling. A coordinated approach can harmonize messaging, align capacity development, and optimize resource use across HEIs, mitigating disparities in accreditation and geographic access while sustaining a coherent regional value proposition for international students, partner institutions, and regulatory bodies. Such a framework would enable joint quality assurance practices, shared marketing platforms, and pooled mobility funding, turning regional branding into actionable development programs. In sum, the findings support a shift from isolated institutional branding toward a regional, structured strategy that integrates leadership vision, formal planning, and collaborative development to achieve measurable external impact.

To institutionalize these insights, the following recommendations are offered: first, formalize internationalization in institutional documents by embedding the internationalization vision within mission statements and strategic plans, accompanied by clearly defined, publishable objectives, timelines, and accountability mechanisms. Establish cross-institutional governance bodies to oversee the regional brand and monitor progress, ensuring consistent messaging across audiences and channels. This formalization will translate leadership aspirations into actionable plans, thereby improving resource alignment. Second, implement integrated capacity-building and resource-allocation mechanisms at the regional level. Create shared programs for faculty development, joint international partnerships, and pooled mobility funding, with performance metrics that tie institutional incentives to progress on internationalization indicators. Third, design an inclusive regional branding framework that highlights the diverse geographic and programmatic strengths of the region. Develop a regional communications platform that features diverse institutional profiles, supports cross-institutional collaborations across fields beyond current priorities, and provides a unified yet flexible brand narrative adaptable to different audiences, including international students, partner universities, and accreditation bodies.

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Affiliations and Corresponding Information

Mary Ann P. Carranza, DBA
Bulacan State University
Main Campus – Philippines