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O33 - Drawing the Stars: Comics as a Medium for Astronomy Engagement in the Philippines

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The Cosmic Comic Strip Contest was organized as part of the 100 Hours of Astronomy celebration in the Philippines. The contest's theme "Tala't Lahi: Kuwento ng mga Bituin at Bayan (Stars and Heritage: Stories of the Sky and Our People)." was aimed to promote astronomy through creative storytelling and visual art by encouraging individuals or pairs to produce original comic strips that highlight the deep connections between Filipino culture, history, and the cosmos.

The contest was conducted entirely online, with mechanics, guidelines, and submission instructions disseminated through DOST-PAGASA's official Facebook page. Open to Filipinos aged 16 and above, the competition drew diverse participation—67% of entrants were 18 years old and above, while 33% were aged 16-17. Most participants (79.9%) joined individually, while 20.1% submitted as pairs.

A total of 139 entries were received, from which four top submissions were selected and awarded special prizes based on creativity/originality, thematic relevance, storytelling clarity, and artistic execution. Following the awarding ceremony, an evaluation form was administered to participants. Results showed that 85.7% reported learning new astronomy concepts, while the rest indicated they learned somewhat or not at all. Participants also identified their motivations for joining the contest, with 92.9% citing an interest in comics and art and 57.1% an interest in astronomy.

Overall, as the first astronomy-themed comic contest conducted by DOST-PAGASA, the Cosmic Comic Strip Contest proved to be a successful and effective platform for enhancing public engagement with astronomy and promoting culturally grounded science communication. The insights gathered, including participant motivations, challenges, outcomes, and the valuable recommendations, comments, and suggestions for future iterations provided, offer practical guidance for similar outreach initiatives.

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