A DIGITAL COMMUNICATION MODEL CENTERED ON ACCREDITATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION INTERNATIONALIZATION STRATEGIES

Trieu Quoc Huy
Tra Vinh University
Nguyen Cao Phong
Mien Tay Construction University
Email: nguyencaophong@mtu.edu.vn.

Abstract: *This article proposes a digital "accreditation-centered" communication model in the context of higher education institutions promoting internationalization while simultaneously meeting the requirements for quality assurance and accreditation. The study employs a qualitative approach, analyzing secondary documents and selectively comparing international studies, reports, and experiences; thereby clarifying the concept and approach of digital communication models associated with accreditation, analyzing the context of internationalization and the role of quality accreditation. It also synthesizes several theoretical frameworks on digital communication and marketing in higher education. Based on that, the article proposes a digital communication model that is "accreditation-centered" and suggests some directions for its application in Vietnamese higher education institutions. The research also opens the door to further experimental surveys and case studies to verify, refine, and improve the model.*
Keywords: *Communication model; digital communication; higher education; internationalization; quality accreditation*

1. Introduction

The internationalization of higher education is now widely understood as a deliberate process that integrates international and intercultural dimensions into the core purposes, functions, and activities of higher education institutions in order to enhance quality and contribute to society (de Wit, 2018). Within this process, quality assurance and accreditation are no longer merely technical components; they increasingly serve as a "framework" through which institutions affirm their reputation, mitigate risks, and strengthen transparency in a highly competitive global environment. Achieving regional and international accreditation standards is therefore closely associated with the capacity of institutions to participate more deeply in the global higher education space.

In Viet Nam, recent strategies and policies for higher education development simultaneously emphasize two key orientations: improving quality and promoting international integration, in which the establishment of a quality assurance - accreditation system is considered a crucial pillar. Many universities have actively pursued national and international accreditation standards, regarding them as "strategic assets" for expanding cooperation, attracting international students, and enhancing institutional standing. However, the ways in which these accreditation achievements are translated into purposeful communication narratives, especially on digital platforms, have not yet been systematically conceptualized.

Meanwhile, recent reviews of communication and higher education marketing show that communication via social media and other digital platforms has become an integral component of universities' marketing strategies, closely linked to brand building, student engagement, and support for enrollment decisions. Nevertheless, content related to accreditation and quality assurance is still largely presented as secondary information and has not been designed as the "central axis" of digital communication strategies serving internationalization. From this gap, the article proposes a digital communication model "centered on accreditation" in higher education internationalization strategies, thereby suggesting a new way of structuring communication content for Vietnamese higher education institutions.

2. Research Methodology

This study primarily employs a qualitative approach based on secondary document analysis and comparative methods. Guided by the research objectives, the article purposefully collects policy documents, reports from regulatory bodies, materials from accreditation organizations, and scholarly publications in Viet Nam and abroad on the internationalization of higher education, quality assurance and accreditation, digital communication, and higher education marketing over approximately the past ten years. These materials are read, coded, and categorized into three thematic groups: (i) conceptions and trends of internationalization

linked to accreditation; (ii) theoretical frameworks and models of digital communication in higher education; and (iii) practices of accreditation and communication related to accreditation at selected higher education institutions in Viet Nam and other countries. On this basis, the article applies analytical - synthetic, systematizing, and comparative methods to contrast international experiences with the Vietnamese context, thereby proposing a digital communication model "centered on accreditation" and drawing implications for its application in higher education institutions.

3. Research Content

3.1. Concept and approach to a digital communication model "centered on accreditation"

In the context of higher education facing intense competition and pressures for internationalization, digital communication is understood as the overall set of activities through which institutions design, disseminate, and interact with information on digital platforms (websites, social media, online admissions portals, ranking platforms, etc.) in order to build their image and attract and engage stakeholders. Recent reviews show that communication via social media has become a core component of higher education marketing, playing a key role in brand positioning, supporting institutional choice, and shaping the student experience. At the same time, recent empirical studies demonstrate that the quality of social media communication and institutional brand image has a direct impact on international students' enrollment intentions (and on students' level of engagement and sense of belonging within the university environment).

From another perspective, the internationalization of higher education is increasingly intertwined with quality assurance and accreditation. Internationalization is defined as a deliberate process of integrating international and intercultural dimensions into the purposes, functions, and activities of higher education institutions in order to improve quality. Within this process, quality assurance and accreditation mechanisms serve both as tools of governance and as "signals" of institutional reputation and accountability. Accreditation results-especially international accreditation-thus go beyond technical information to become strategic assets that need to be communicated purposefully to different stakeholder groups.

On this basis, the article proposes to conceptualize the digital communication model "centered on accreditation" as a model for organizing communication in which: (i) accreditation and quality assurance are regarded as a strategic content axis that orients the institutional narrative and core messages; (ii) the system of digital channels (websites, social media, ranking platforms,

international information portals, etc.) is designed as an integrated network that disseminates and "translates" accreditation standards for different audiences; and (iii) communication activities are designed according to the logic of contemporary higher education marketing, viewing students and other stakeholders as "customers" who experience a multi-touch information journey. This model therefore not only offers a new perspective on digital communication in higher education but also closely connects two strands of discussion that are often treated separately: marketing - communication and quality assurance - accreditation.

3.2. Context of higher education internationalization and the role of quality accreditation

Over the past three decades, internationalization has become an almost "default" attribute of higher education. Evolving from initially rather simplified understandings, internationalization is now approached as a deliberate process that integrates international, intercultural, and global dimensions into the purposes, functions, and activities of higher education institutions in order to improve quality and contribute to society. In many countries, internationalization is associated not only with student and staff mobility or joint and double degree programs, but also with requirements for transparency, accountability, and competitiveness in an increasingly globalized higher education "market."

Alongside this process, quality assurance and accreditation have emerged as an inseparable "twin pair." Research on internationalization and quality assurance shows that as institutions expand international cooperation and cross-border recruitment, risks relating to quality, reputation, and governance also increase; to "anchor" quality, accreditation systems are mobilized as mechanisms for standardization, oversight, and trust-building between institutions and their stakeholders. In Viet Nam, recent higher education reforms have placed strong emphasis on improving the quality assurance framework, developing independent accreditation centers, and encouraging participation in regional and international accreditation schemes. Accreditation has thus moved beyond a technical requirement to become a condition for institutions to assert their position and implement their internationalization strategies.

3.3. Theoretical framework on digital communication in higher education internationalization strategies

At the theoretical level, research on digital communication in higher education largely draws on marketing-branding and student behavior perspectives. Pawar's (2024) systematic review shows that studies on communication/social media in higher education tend to cluster around

five thematic areas: (i) student engagement, (ii) brand building, (iii) support for enrollment decision-making, (iv) management of relationships with stakeholders, and (v) strategic marketing planning. Building on this foundation, several recent studies have developed specific scales for "social media marketing activities" (SMMA) in higher education and examined the mediating role of brand equity in transforming digital communication activities into students' behavioral engagement. This theoretical line suggests that effective digital communication in higher education should be viewed as an integrated system of activities across social media, institutional websites, and information portals that collectively construct and reinforce the institution's image and brand throughout the learner's decision-making journey.

When placed in the context of internationalization, digital communication is further associated with international student recruitment and the construction of institutional image in cross-border markets. Li et al. (2025) demonstrate that the quality of social media communication and institutional brand image has a direct impact on international students' enrollment intentions, thereby underscoring the central role of digital communication in internationalization strategies based on attracting international students. At a broader strategic level, the study by Nguyen-Tan and Yen (2022) on innovative marketing strategies for sustainable internationalization proposes combining the 4C marketing mix with innovation strategies, in which the institutional website, social media, brand image, and international learning experiences constitute core pillars of international student recruitment. In parallel, the "digital internationalization" approach emphasizes the systematic integration of digital tools into the entire internationalization agenda - from teaching and learning and institutional partnerships to communication and the development of global networks.

Drawing on these foundations, this article approaches digital communication in higher education internationalization strategies along three main axes: (i) the marketing - branding axis, focusing on brand equity and institutional image as constructed through digital communication activities; (ii) the international student behavior axis, highlighting the role of online information and experiences across the whole search-evaluation - choice journey of studying abroad; and (iii) the organizational communication and trust axis, viewing digital communication as a space for building trust, engagement, and a sense of belonging between students and the institution. Within this theoretical framework, quality accreditation is regarded as an important source of "credibility capital": accreditation standards and outcomes must be "translated" into brand narratives, key messages, and concrete evidence across digital channels, thereby laying the groundwork for constructing a digital communication model "centered on accreditation" within internationalization strategies.

3.4. Proposed digital communication model "centered on accreditation" for higher education institutions

Based on the foregoing context and theoretical framework, this article proposes a digital communication model "centered on accreditation" as a heuristic framework for reorganizing communication activities, particularly in the context of internationalization. The starting point of the model is the notion that quality assurance and accreditation are not merely internal technical processes, but strategic assets that need to be purposefully "narrated" on digital channels in order to strengthen institutional credibility, build trust, and differentiate the institutional brand in the eyes of stakeholders.

In terms of structure, the model comprises three closely interconnected layers. The core layer is the internal quality assurance system and accreditation outcomes (standards applied, procedures, evidence, results, and recommendations for improvement). This constitutes the institution's "credibility capital." The intermediate layer is the system of content and messages, in which data, results, and recommendations from accreditation are "translated" into narratives that are accessible and meaningful for different audiences: commitments to quality, continuous improvement, transparency, alignment with international standards, and opportunities for study and research in a quality-assured environment. The outer layer is an integrated network of digital communication channels (institutional website, admissions portals, social media, electronic newsletters, ranking platforms, accreditation agencies' webpages, and partner channels) designed to disseminate coherent messages along the information journeys of students and other stakeholders.

In terms of operation, the model proposes a four-step digital communication cycle centered on accreditation. First, planning is carried out on the basis of "mapping" stakeholder groups (current students, prospective international students, parents, employers, academic partners, regulatory agencies) and their information journeys, while at the same time defining objectives and indicators (awareness of accreditation, levels of trust, contribution to recruitment, engagement with accreditation-related content, etc.). Second, content design and production draws on self-evaluation reports, external review reports, and quality evidence, transforming tables, standards, and recommendations into news items, feature articles, infographics, videos, personal stories, and online talks linked to the concrete experiences of students and faculty. Third, multi-channel dissemination and interaction ensures that

the institutional website and dedicated accreditation pages serve as a central hub, while social media, email, newsletters, and online events function as channels that direct audiences back to this "anchor" of reliable information. Fourth, monitoring, evaluation, and adjustment rely on digital analytics (page views, viewing time, interaction rates, feedback) to refine content, prioritize effective channels, and ensure alignment between communication messages and actual quality improvements after accreditation.

The model is open and flexible, allowing each higher education institution to adapt it to its resource conditions, level of digital transformation, and specific internationalization strategy. For Vietnamese universities, implementation can begin with concrete, incremental steps such as: developing user-friendly accreditation sections on institutional websites; designing social media content series that "demystify accreditation"; integrating information on standards and accreditation outcomes into recruitment messages and program brochures; or linking accreditation milestones with internal communication activities to raise awareness among faculty and students. In this way, quality accreditation is no longer a "one-off announcement," but becomes a strategic content axis that is systematically leveraged across the institution's digital communication activities.

3.5. Comparing the proposed model with international practice and lessons for Vietnamese higher education institutions

Observations of international practice show that many leading universities are, in effect, operating communication models quite close to an "accreditation-centered" approach, even if they do not explicitly label them as such. International accreditation standards (AACSB, EQUIS, ABET, AUN-QA, FIBAA, etc.) are often placed in prominent positions on institutional websites, in admissions materials, digital publications, and communication campaigns targeting international students, employers, and partners. A common feature is that these institutions do not merely "display accreditation logos," but link accreditation standards to concrete messages about program quality, career opportunities, and learning experiences in an international environment, thereby making accreditation an organic part of their brand narratives and internationalization strategies. The model proposed in this article - with its three layers (accreditation core, content-message layer, and integrated digital channel layer - is essentially compatible with these practices, but is more systematically articulated so that it can be adapted to different resource conditions and levels of digital transformation across institutions.

However, the gap between the proposed model and actual practice in many Vietnamese higher education institutions remains significant. Quite a number of

universities have achieved international accreditation, yet the information is still fragmented, presented in a highly technical manner, and rarely "translated" into language that is accessible and meaningful to students; digital channels (websites, social media, admissions portals, newsletters) often operate in a fragmented way, lacking a common content axis centered on quality and accreditation. Compared with international experience, three key limitations can be identified: (i) accreditation is not yet viewed as a "strategic communication asset" but primarily as a compliance requirement; (ii) there is a lack of close coordination between quality assurance units and communication-recruitment offices; and (iii) digital data on learner behavior and levels of interest in accreditation-related content have not been fully exploited to adjust messages and channel strategies.

From this comparison, several lessons can be suggested for Vietnamese higher education institutions. First, accreditation needs to be repositioned within communication strategies -not merely as a "result announcement," but as a foundation for building trust and differentiating the institutional brand, especially in campaigns aimed at international students. Second, institutions should establish regular coordination mechanisms among quality assurance units, academic affairs offices, and communication - recruitment teams in order to jointly develop "content scripts" around key accreditation milestones (self-evaluation, external review, publication of results, post-accreditation improvement). Third, a minimum level of investment in digital infrastructure and data is required, including user-friendly accreditation sections on websites and systems to track traffic and engagement metrics for accreditation-related content, thereby gradually refining messages, formats, and channel choices. Fourth, each institution can start with small but consistent steps-such as standardizing how accreditation information is presented across digital channels and embedding quality improvement narratives into recruitment communication-in order to progressively move closer to a digital communication model "centered on accreditation" that is aligned with its own internationalization strategy.

4. Conclusion

In a context where the internationalization of higher education is increasingly intertwined with requirements for quality assurance and accreditation, this article has clarified the theoretical basis for approaching digital communication from an "accreditation-centered" perspective, analyzed the context and role of accreditation within internationalization strategies, synthesized key theoretical frameworks on digital communication and higher education marketing, and proposed a three-layer digital communication model (accreditation core, content-message layer, integrated digital channel layer) with a four-step operational cycle organized around accreditation.

The comparison with international practice indicates that the model is feasible and consistent with the emerging trend of treating accreditation as a "strategic asset" in competition and integration, while also highlighting gaps in communication practice at Vietnamese higher education institutions, particularly in terms of coordination between quality assurance and communication - recruitment functions and the use of digital data. As a qualitative study based on document analysis and comparative methods, the article is primarily exploratory in nature. Future research could focus on testing and refining the model through quantitative surveys and in-depth case studies at selected universities, as well as measuring the effectiveness of "accreditation-centered" communication campaigns on learners' awareness, trust, and enrollment intentions in both domestic and international markets, thereby further tailoring the model to the diverse conditions and objectives of higher education institutions ∎

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Mô hình truyền thông số "lấy kiểm định làm trung tâm" trong chiến lược quốc tế hóa giáo dục đại học

Triệu Quốc Huy, Trường Đại học Trà Vinh
Nguyễn Cao Phong, Trường Đại học Xây dựng Miền Tây
Email: nguyencaophong@mtu.edu.vn.

Tóm tắt: Bài viết đề xuất mô hình truyền thông số "lấy kiểm định làm trung tâm" trong bối cảnh các cơ sở giáo dục đại học đẩy mạnh quốc tế hóa gắn với yêu cầu bảo đảm và kiểm định chất lượng. Nghiên cứu sử dụng phương pháp định tính, phân tích tài liệu thứ cấp và so sánh có chọn lọc các nghiên cứu, báo cáo và kinh nghiệm quốc tế, qua đó làm rõ khái niệm và cách tiếp cận mô hình truyền thông số gắn với kiểm định, phân tích bối cảnh quốc tế hóa và vai trò của kiểm định chất lượng, đồng thời tổng hợp một số khung lý thuyết về truyền thông số và marketing giáo dục đại học. Trên cơ sở đó, bài viết đề xuất mô hình truyền thông số "lấy kiểm định làm trung tâm" và gợi ý một số định hướng vận dụng cho các cơ sở giáo dục đại học Việt Nam. Nghiên cứu đồng thời mở ra hướng tiếp tục khảo sát thực nghiệm và nghiên cứu trường hợp nhằm kiểm chứng, hiệu chỉnh và hoàn thiện mô hình.
Từ khóa: giáo dục đại học; kiểm định chất lượng; mô hình truyền thông; quốc tế hóa; truyền thông số.