

THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS

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Abstract: *In the current context, universities operate and develop under autonomy and accountability. It is an opportunity to encourage universities to be more dynamic, open, and adaptable to the times and to reduce dependence on state budget sources. Therefore, media activities in university admissions are particularly important, especially in private and international universities. In this article, the author discusses the role of media activities in admissions and their significance. With the development of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, it is easy to see that online media activities bring more benefits and influence. However, direct media communication remains an irreplaceable method. Through this article, the author proposes a research direction for developing media activities in university admissions and offers solutions to guide media activities in higher education institutions in the future.*

Keywords: *Communication, Admissions, University, Role of communication.*

I. Introduction

In recent years, the management trend in higher education institutions has been autonomy and accountability. It is both an opportunity and a challenge for universities. It allows universities to maximize their competitiveness, highlights their strengths, and aim for effective and high-quality education. However, it also requires proactive changes in the organization, personnel, finance, training programs, etc., to fulfil their tasks and enhance the educational value of the institution.

We live in the era of solid development of the Fourth Industrial

Revolution. Society is gradually shifting and changing with digital technology, the internet, a flat world, social networks, and so on, becoming an inevitable trend. Communication is the key to change in many fields and the fastest way to transmit information. Along with that development, many areas in life have used the influence of communication and applied it as leverage for outstanding growth.

On the other hand, in practice, communication in education has yet to be fully recognized and utilized to disseminate information in general and direct training and admission activities in particular. Traditional admission methods

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still exist or have been applied but could be more effective. It is also one of the existing issues of admission in education that needs to be changed to adapt to the times and participate in general development, especially the development of universities.

Moreover, the development of society leads to the development of human life and the demand for educational services increases. The directions for academic innovation, responsiveness to training quality, and learning experiences are increasingly demanding. Parents and students are more concerned about choosing schools with many criteria, such as faculty, facilities, training programs, training services provided by the school, even job opportunities after graduation, or the value of degrees. Therefore, universities need to have outstanding communication plans to highlight the distinctive strengths of each institution, making that information easily accessible to most audiences, especially students and parents.

II. Theoretical foundation

2.1. General context

According to Resolution No. 14/2005/NQ-CP on comprehensive reform of higher education from 2006 to 2020, the state desires to “transform public universities to operate under a self-governing mechanism, with full legal status, decision-making and responsibility for training, research, organization, personnel and finance” [8]. This resolution allows universities to exercise autonomy and take responsibility for all activities while opening opportunities for universities to enhance their quality and educational services and expand their cooperation and links with university programs worldwide. Therefore, in

Vietnam, the higher education environment is very diverse. In addition to public universities, students and parents also have options for private universities and foreign universities. [9] As a result, with the emergence and development of many educational environments, universities also compete in the quantity and quality of their entrance requirements, striving to gain an advantage and promote the development of their brand and reputation.

On the other hand, based on statistical data, 97% of the population in Vietnam use mobile phones; 66.1% of the population uses computers. These numbers reflect the habits of users in accessing popular media information nowadays. Among these, on average, users spend 6 hours 47 minutes daily on the Internet, 2 hours 40 minutes watching TV and online videos, and 1 hour 57 minutes reading newspapers and news. [10] Thus, user trends create conditions for media activities to develop and transmit information to suitable target groups. Similarly, in education, communication is essential in developing the school’s brand and position in society, attracting high-quality admission profiles to achieve the planned goals.

In summary, communication is a necessary activity and plays a crucial role in general social and professional fields, specifically in higher education. Indeed, communication is the core factor determining the success of each university’s admission activities.

2.2. Concept of communication in university admissions

“Communication is the process of transmitting information from one person to another through communication media, including traditional media such as newspapers, television, radio, and new

media such as the internet, mobile phones, and tablets.” [1]

“Communication is the process of transmitting information between participating parties through communication media to convey information, knowledge, and values from the sender to the recipient.” [2]

Admissions are selecting, screening and ranking candidates to choose the most suitable individuals for studying at universities, colleges, or other higher education institutions. The admissions process usually includes registration, submission of applications, testing, and interviews to assess the candidate’s capabilities. The criteria for evaluating the candidate’s abilities typically include scores, test results, social activities, and other achievements. Higher education and high school institutions may have different admission processes depending on the requirements of each institution and the regulations of the law.

There is no definition of communication in admissions in previous documents, but based on the definitions above, communication in access is the use of communication media (including television, press, internet, advertising materials, video, music, etc.) to introduce information about training programs, admissions criteria, admission information, and related admissions information of universities. [3]

Admissions communication activities include advertising on media and the school’s website, sending admission invitations to potential candidates, organizing program introductions and campus tours, using social networks to promote admissions information, etc.

Admissions communication is an

essential part of universities’ admissions strategy, helping attract interest and potential candidates to the school’s training programs.

Communication is the process of exchanging and sharing information between two-way communication subjects. Specifically, in the admissions process at universities, communication activities are the process of providing and exchanging information between the school and candidates about admission content, such as registration time to receive applications, testing or screening methods, admission results, and even counselling and orientation activities for choosing majors or careers in the future.

In summary, communication in university admissions is a series of ongoing activities to promote the school’s image; provide complete admissions information to candidates; and exchange information, knowledge, and values between the school and candidates.

2.3. Media Activities in University Admissions

Media activities in university admissions are aimed at conveying information, promoting the image, and building the brand of universities, colleges, or other higher education institutions to attract potential candidates’ interest and increase community awareness about their educational programs and learning opportunities.

Media activities in university admissions may include:

- Broadcasting advertisements on television.
- Posting information on websites and social media networks.
- Developing advertising materials.

- Organizing educational seminars and exhibitions.

- Designing multimedia communication campaigns to promote the image of the university.

Currently, in the general context of society, universities are gradually focusing on and intensifying their media activities, especially in university admissions. Each university will have its media activities with unique characteristics to promote the institution's image and assert its position in society. However, media activities, in general, can be divided into the following groups:

- Advertising

In university admissions, advertising promotes information about the university, its educational programs, activities, and attractive incentives to candidates and parents through various media channels. Advertising in university admissions aims to attract the target audience's attention, increase awareness of the university or admission organization's brand, and attract candidates to register and participate in educational programs.

Advertising activities in university admissions are demonstrated through two online and offline advertising media. With the development of technology and changes in user habits, online advertising media such as websites, fan pages, social networking sites, and especially television, newspapers, and other popular media channels are utilized extensively by universities. However, offline advertising media is an indispensable factor that cannot be replaced. Specifically, universities provide information and convey messages through advertising banners, outdoor signs, introduction books, brochures, or direct admission counselling activities at high schools for each class.

- Public relations

In the admissions field, Public Relations (PR) is building relationships between universities or admissions organizations and the public, including students, parents, and those interested in the admissions process.

PR activities in admissions may include building the brand image of the university or admissions organization, organizing admissions events such as seminars, open houses, education fairs, advertising and social media outreach, creating admissions information content on the website and other media, and providing support and information to applicants and parents.

PR in admissions aims to attract positive attention and evaluation from relevant stakeholders, help build long-term relationships, enhance the credibility and reputation of the university or admissions organization, and increase the number of applicants and successful candidates. Collaborating with partners to introduce information about the university and admissions content is crucial to communications success in the admissions process, specifically, relationships with media partners, high schools, and other media channels as image or admissions event support partners.

In summary, all of these activities help universities to enhance awareness and interaction with prospective students and parents, helping to attract more potential candidates and to improve their position.

2.4. The role of media in university admissions

There have been significant changes in the university admissions process in recent years. With increasingly fierce

competition, universities must make more significant efforts to attract potential candidates. In building an effective admissions strategy, media activities have become one of the essential factors in enhancing the university's brand recognition and attracting candidates' attention. Therefore, media plays a significant role in university admissions.

2.4.1. The role of advertising in admissions

Advertising is essential in attracting the interest of candidates and parents and enhancing awareness of the university and its programs. Specific functions of advertising in admissions include:

- Introducing information about the university and its programs: Advertising helps introduce information about the university and its programs to students and parents, helping them better understand the school and the courses offered.

- Enhancing the image and reputation of the university: Advertising helps enhance the image and reputation of the university in the public eye, making it stand out and be highly valued by candidates and parents.

- Creating interest and stimulating admissions demand: Advertising helps stimulate interest and create admissions demand from candidates and parents, especially in the stages of the early admission.

- Creating differentiation and uniqueness: Advertising can help create differentiation and uniqueness for the university in the eyes of candidates and parents, making the university a more attractive choice compared to competitors.

2.4.2. The role of public relations in admissions

- Building and promoting the university's image: Public relations can help the university maintain a reputable and professional image in the public eye, including students, parents, partners, and employers.

- Enhancing understanding of the university: Public relations can help the university reach target customers through PR campaigns, seminars, presentations, and other activities. It can enhance customers' understanding of the university and help them decide to enrol.

- Introducing new programs and learning opportunities: Public relations can help the university introduce new programs, as well as learning opportunities for target customers, including students, parents, and potential partners.

- Strengthening relationships with partners and employers: Public relations can help the university strengthen relationships with partners and employers, helping to attract talented students and create opportunities for students after graduation.

III. Research Methods

3.1. Theoretical research methods

- The authors searched and collected printed books and documents on specialized online journals; Google Scholar (as listed in the reference list) with keywords such as communication in education, communication in university admission, and management of communication activities in admission. The collected documents were manually filtered to retain the necessary ones for the research.

- From the document system (in Vietnamese and English), the authors used methods of analysis, synthesis,

comparison, and generalization of the theoretical system related to the role of communication in university admission to build the article's theoretical framework.

3.2. Research methods in practice

- Experience summarization method: With the current job positions of the authors, all of whom are directly and indirectly involved in the university admission process, they have drawn on their practical experience of the role of communication in admission from many years of work.

- Observation and study of admission records: The authors conducted a direct observation of the admission activities of Swinburne University over the past two years; they also studied the records that contain information about the university's admission activities as a basis for confirming information from the theoretical framework of the article.

IV. Discussion Results

Based on studies on communication in university admissions, the author cites some actual research results as follows:

A study on university admissions communication published in the *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education* surveyed PR activities in university admissions in the US. The study showed that PR activities such as admissions events, advertising, and social media communication play an essential role in attracting the interest of prospective students. In addition, collaborating with partners to introduce information about the school and admissions content also plays a critical role in the success of admissions communication activities. [11]

A study conducted in Vietnam in 2020 by Tran Van Thanh and Doan Thi

Thanh Huyen showed that using social media to promote university admissions positively impacts students' decisions to enrol in a particular school. This study surveyed a random sample of 500 high school graduates, and the results showed that more than 80% of students used social media as a source of information to learn about universities and admissions information. [12]

Another study published in the *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education* in 2020 by author Kim Witte focused on the role of traditional advertising (such as newspaper, magazine, and television advertising) in university admissions. This study surveyed 1000 students in the US, and the results showed that students who were exposed to traditional advertising were more likely to enrol in advertised universities. However, the study also showed that other forms of communication, such as email marketing and admissions materials, positively impact students' decisions. [13]

Based on the combination of theoretical foundations and research results, the author provides some directional suggestions for the development of admissions communication activities in the future to bring efficiency to universities.

4.1. Identify the specific target audience for admission

To increase the effectiveness of communication activities, universities need to identify their target audience for admission, specifically high school students and parents. From there, they can plan appropriate communication activities to reach that audience. To identify the target audience, universities should:

- Consider the university's admission policies: Each university will have different admission policies, so it's essential to research each policy to target specific groups of potential students.

- Participate in counselling and career guidance activities: These activities will allow universities to directly interact with counselling experts and current students, allowing them to gather information about specific target audiences.

- To optimize advertising activities, universities should study their customer base, including age, gender, interests, future vision, etc. To ensure the effectiveness of public relations activities, universities should build a synchronous communication strategy between different communication channels, from mass media to internal communications.

4.2. Use diverse communication channels

Choosing appropriate and effective communication channels is crucial in increasing the ability to reach and interact with the target audience for admission.

Communication channels may include social media, websites, email marketing, video marketing, media events, TV and radio advertising, print media, magazines and books.

4.3. Creating Quality Content

The content of communication activities needs to be produced with high quality and attractiveness to attract the attention of prospective students.

To attract prospective students' attention, universities must create attractive, unique, and relevant communication content that appeals to their interests and psyche.

Advertising messages must be unique, impressive, and suitable for the target audience to attract attention and create a good impression of the brand.

4.4. Designing communication

Activities according to Strategic Plans Universities must design strategic communication plans for admissions to ensure that communication activities align with the university's goals and vision.

To ensure that public relations activities are carried out effectively, universities should strengthen their professional public relations teams and provide training for employees working in this field. Moreover, active interaction with customers through sending emails, making phone calls, organizing admission events, career counselling, etc., should be encouraged.

4.5. Measuring the effectiveness

Communication activities need to be measured for effectiveness so that universities can identify the strengths and weaknesses of these activities and adjust their strategic communication plans accordingly.

V. Conclusion

Communication activities in admissions play a crucial role in helping universities search, attract, and select suitable candidates for their requirements. Thanks to technology and communication's constant development, information channels have been diversified, enabling universities to reach specific target groups. However, for communication activities in admissions to fulfil their role, based on the research on the role of communication in admissions, the authors propose some suggestions as follows:

(1) Universities need to establish a Communication Department, which includes a person in charge of communication in admissions; personnel of the department should be selected with publicly announced criteria and following the characteristics of communication professionals, such as understanding technology, being sensitive to information, having good organizational skills, etc.

(2) Universities need an integrated communication strategy in their scientific admissions strategy based on existing resources that can be mobilized from within the university and relevant external parties. (3) Use diverse forms and methods of communication to ensure timely and sufficient information with the principle of being easy to understand, accessible, and highly instructive.

(4) Emphasize the evaluation of the effectiveness of communication activities in admissions, which is also an essential factor that helps universities adjust and optimize their strategies and achieve the goal of delivering information to the most needed group as quickly as possible.

(5) Universities need to have a policy of prioritizing resources for communication in admissions, both in terms of personnel and communication technology. It is an important area of survival for universities in the current context.

Implementing these solutions requires a roadmap based on the practical conditions of each university to maximize the effectiveness of communication in the admissions process at universities in Vietnam today.

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