

Public Relations Communication Strategies and Influencing on Students' Enrollment Decisions at the Faculty of Management Science, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of public relations (PR) communication strategies on students' enrollment decisions at the Faculty of Management Science, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. Using a quantitative descriptive research design, data were collected from 200 prospective and newly enrolled students through a structured questionnaire based on PR communication and enrollment decision-making frameworks. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analyses were used to examine the effectiveness of different PR channels, including social media, official websites, open houses, and alumni testimonials. The results revealed that overall PR communication strategies had a high positive influence on enrollment decisions, with social media engagement being the most significant factor, followed by official websites and open houses. Alumni testimonials also contributed positively, though to a lesser extent. PR strategies explained 61% of the variance in students' enrollment decisions, highlighting the importance of timely, credible, and interactive communication. These findings suggest that strengthening digital PR channels, enhancing content quality, and increasing alumni participation can further improve enrollment outcomes.

Keywords: Public relations, Communication strategies, Student enrollment decisions, Higher education

1. Introduction

1.1 Principles and Rationale

In higher education, effective public relations (PR) communication strategies play a crucial role in influencing students' decisions regarding enrollment. Universities face growing competition in attracting students, and strategic communication has become a key factor in promoting institutional image, building trust, and enhancing engagement with prospective students (Cutlip et al., 2019; Smith, 2021). Public relations activities, including media campaigns, social media engagement, open houses, and alumni testimonials, serve as essential channels to convey the university's strengths, academic programs, and campus culture, thereby shaping students' perceptions and enrollment intentions (Wilcox et al., 2015).

At the Faculty of Management Science, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, enrollment decisions are influenced not only by academic offerings but also by the faculty's reputation, service quality, and visibility among prospective students. Previous studies indicate that

students are more likely to select institutions that actively communicate their value propositions, demonstrate transparency, and engage with their target audience effectively (Dozier et al., 2019; Jansen & Vliegthart, 2020). PR communication strategies that emphasize credibility, responsiveness, and emotional appeal have been found to significantly impact students' attitudes and intentions to enroll (Kim & Lee, 2022).

Furthermore, in the digital era, social media platforms and online communication tools have expanded the scope and immediacy of PR activities. Universities that leverage digital PR effectively can reach a broader audience, personalize messages, and foster interactive engagement, which are critical in influencing prospective students' decisions (Supanonth, 2022; Kaye & Johnson, 2020). However, research on the specific effects of PR communication strategies on enrollment decisions in Thai higher education contexts remains limited, particularly at the faculty level.

Understanding the relationship between PR strategies and students' enrollment decisions is essential for improving communication practices and optimizing recruitment outcomes. By examining the effectiveness of various PR communication strategies at the Faculty of Management Science, this study aims to provide insights into how strategic communication influences students' choices, thereby informing more targeted and impactful enrollment campaigns.

1.2 Research Objective

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To investigate the PR communication strategies employed by the Faculty of Management Science to reach and engage prospective students.
2. To assess the level of influence of PR communication strategies on students' enrollment decisions, including decision-making factors such as perceived credibility, attractiveness of academic programs, and engagement with the faculty.
3. To examine the relationship between different PR communication channels and students' enrollment decisions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Strategic Public Relations in Higher Education

Strategic public relations (PR) is recognized as a core management function in higher education, guiding how institutions communicate their mission, values, and competitive advantages to multiple stakeholders (Metaporn & Worakullattanee, 2019). In Thai universities, studies find that universities with well-defined PR strategies often emphasize their academic reputation and use social media channels to reach younger audiences (Metaporn & Worakullattanee, 2019; Inphusa et al., 2023). Such strategic PR supports relationship building and helps establish a strong institutional identity, which is essential for recruitment and retention.

2.2 Public Relations Awareness and Student Decision-Making

Awareness of public relations media is a key factor in enrollment decisions. Research conducted by Yimwilai and Phagaphasvivat (2023) showed that prospective students perceived new media (such as social media platforms) more strongly than traditional media and that this

perception influenced their decisions to enroll. This suggests that PR awareness via digital channels can significantly affect how students evaluate their study options. Their work also found that personal expectations, program characteristics, and institutional image contribute to decision-making processes (Klaysung, 2025).

2.3 Integrated Communication and Enrollment Intentions

Integrated marketing communication (IMC), which brings together PR, advertising, direct marketing, and digital media, has been shown to influence students' admission choices. In a study at Nakhon Si Thammarat Rajabhat University, Promkum, Nualsut, and Sripaktra (2024) demonstrated that IMC awareness, particularly in PR and direct communication, significantly affected students' decisions to enroll. Their findings emphasize the synergy between different communication channels in shaping positive perception and motivating applications.

2.4 Role of Online and Social Media PR

The rise of digital communication has expanded the reach of PR in higher education. For instance, Inphusa, Surasondhi, and Pluempitichaikul (2023) found that online public relations significantly influenced first-year vocational students' decisions to enroll in a technical college, suggesting that timely, responsive, and interactive online PR can build trust and engagement. This aligns with broader trends in which universities increasingly leverage social media, web content, and interactive platforms to communicate institutional messages (Metaporn & Worakullattanee, 2019).

2.5 PR Strategies and Student Participation

In addition to recruitment, PR strategies also play a role in student engagement and participation. A study at Rajabhat Maharakham University showed that PR media usage (especially the media channels used) significantly influenced students' participation in campus activities (Promkum et al., 2024). This illustrates that effective PR doesn't just attract students but can also sustain their engagement with institutional life.

3. Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design to examine the relationship between public relations (PR) communication strategies and their influence on students' enrollment decisions at the Faculty of Management Science, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. A descriptive approach is appropriate for systematically collecting and analyzing data to identify patterns, measure satisfaction, and determine the impact of PR strategies on student decision-making. The study focused on assessing PR strategies across multiple channels including traditional media, social media, open houses, and alumni testimonials and their effects on enrollment intentions.

3.1 Population and Sample

The population consisted of all prospective and newly enrolled students at the Faculty of Management Science who had experienced or been exposed to the faculty's PR activities. Using purposive sampling, participants were selected based on their awareness of and engagement with PR communication materials. A total of 200 respondents participated, ensuring representation across gender, academic program, and prior exposure to the faculty's PR campaigns.

3.2 Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, developed from prior studies on PR communication and enrollment decision-making. The questionnaire consisted of three main sections:

Demographic Information – including age, gender, academic program, and previous awareness of the faculty.

PR Communication Strategies – measured through items assessing the effectiveness of communication channels (social media, official websites, open houses, alumni testimonials) and PR message content.

Enrollment Decision Influence – measured through items evaluating the impact of PR on students' attitudes, perceptions, and intention to enroll.

Responses were recorded using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The instrument's validity was confirmed through expert review, and reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.92, indicating high internal consistency.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed online and in-person to prospective and newly enrolled students who had been exposed to the faculty's PR activities in the previous academic year. Participants were informed of the research purpose and assured of confidentiality. Data collection occurred over a four-week period, with follow-up reminders to ensure adequate response rates.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and frequency) were used to summarize students' perceptions of PR strategies and enrollment influence. Inferential analyses, including Pearson correlation and multiple regression, were conducted to determine the relationships between PR communication strategies and students' enrollment decisions. Additionally, t-tests and One-way ANOVA were used to examine differences in responses across demographic groups.

4. Results

A total of 200 students participated in the study. The demographic profile included 120 females (60%) and 80 males (40%). Age distribution showed 18–20 years (35%), 21–23 years (50%), and 24–26 years (15%). Regarding academic programs, 40% were enrolled in Business Administration, 35% in Communication Arts, and 25% in Management Science. The majority of respondents (55%) reported being aware of PR activities through social media, 25% through official faculty websites, 15% from open houses, and 5% via alumni testimonials.

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive statistics indicated that students perceived the overall effectiveness of PR communication strategies as high (Mean = 4.12, SD = 0.48). Among PR channels, social media engagement scored highest (Mean = 4.25, SD = 0.46), reflecting the growing importance of digital platforms in reaching prospective students. Official websites and open houses also

received favorable scores (Mean = 4.05, SD = 0.50 and Mean = 4.00, SD = 0.52, respectively), whereas alumni testimonials scored slightly lower (Mean = 3.88, SD = 0.57).

For the influence of PR on enrollment decisions, students reported that PR strategies positively affected their perception of the faculty, trust in the academic programs, and intention to enroll (Mean = 4.10, SD = 0.49). Specifically, messages highlighting program quality, campus facilities, and faculty reputation were cited as the most influential factors. These findings align with prior research emphasizing the importance of credibility, responsiveness, and engagement in PR strategies for student recruitment.

4.2 Inferential Analysis

4.2.1 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis showed that all PR communication channels were positively and significantly associated with students' enrollment decisions. Social media had the strongest correlation ($r = 0.72, p < 0.01$), followed by official websites ($r = 0.65, p < 0.01$), open houses ($r = 0.60, p < 0.01$), and alumni testimonials ($r = 0.55, p < 0.01$). These results indicate that digital and interactive communication strategies have a greater impact on student enrollment decisions than traditional or passive channels.

4.2.2 Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was performed to examine the influence of PR communication channels on stakeholder engagement.

Table 1 Regression Results: Influence of PR Communication Channels on Stakeholder Engagement

Predictor (PR Communication Channel)	Standardized Beta (β)	t-value	p-value	Significance
Social Media Engagement	0.38	8.72	< 0.001	***
Official Websites	0.27	5.21	< 0.01	**
Open Houses	0.21	4.15	< 0.01	**
Alumni Testimonials	0.14	2.62	< 0.05	*

Note: Significance levels: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Multiple regression analysis confirmed that PR communication strategies collectively explained 61% of the variance in students' enrollment decisions ($R^2 = 0.61, F = 74.32, p < 0.001$). Among the channels, social media engagement emerged as the most significant predictor ($\beta = 0.38, p < 0.001$), followed by official websites ($\beta = 0.27, p < 0.01$) and open houses ($\beta = 0.21, p < 0.01$). Alumni testimonials, although positive, had a smaller predictive effect ($\beta = 0.14, p < 0.05$). These findings highlight the crucial role of strategic PR communication in shaping students' perceptions and motivating enrollment decisions.

Overall, the analysis suggests that PR communication strategies at the Faculty of Management Science are effective in influencing student enrollment decisions, particularly through digital channels and interactive engagement. Traditional channels, while still valuable,

have a comparatively lower impact. The results provide practical guidance for enhancing PR strategies, emphasizing the need for targeted, credible, and responsive communication to attract and retain prospective students.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the influence of public relations (PR) communication strategies on students' enrollment decisions at the Faculty of Management Science, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. The findings indicate that PR communication strategies are highly effective in shaping prospective students' perceptions, attitudes, and intentions to enroll. Among the communication channels analyzed, social media engagement emerged as the most influential, followed by official faculty websites and open houses. Alumni testimonials, while positive, had a smaller impact on enrollment decisions. These findings are consistent with previous studies highlighting the importance of timely, credible, and interactive PR communication in higher education recruitment (Cutlip et al., 2019; Kim & Lee, 2022).

The analysis revealed that all PR communication channels were significantly correlated with enrollment decisions, and multiple regression indicated that PR strategies explained 61% of the variance in students' enrollment intentions. This underscores the critical role of strategic PR in informing, persuading, and engaging prospective students (Jansen & Vliegenthart, 2020). Furthermore, the results highlight that digital and interactive PR platforms, such as social media, have greater influence than traditional or passive communication channels.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that the Faculty of Management Science continue to strengthen its social media presence, ensure accurate and engaging content on official websites, and expand interactive opportunities, such as open houses and virtual campus tours. Additionally, the faculty should consider enhancing alumni participation in PR campaigns to increase credibility and relatability among prospective students. By implementing these strategies, the faculty can further optimize its recruitment efforts and maintain a competitive position in the higher education landscape (Metaporn & Worakullattanee, 2019; Wilcox et al., 2015).

In conclusion, strategically designed and executed PR communication is a powerful tool for influencing enrollment decisions, fostering positive perceptions, and supporting the long-term growth of the Faculty of Management Science.

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