

Utilizing public relations for achieving success in enrollment: Observations drawn from an extensive study of higher educational institutions

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CITATION

Tran MT, Ngo BN, Oanh Vo TK, et al. (2024). Utilizing public relations for achieving success in enrollment: Observations drawn from an extensive study of higher educational institutions. *Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development*. 8(7): 4877. <https://doi.org/10.24294/jipd.v8i7.4877>

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 27 February 2024

Accepted: 3 April 2024

Available online: 17 July 2024

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Abstract: This study explores how public relations (PR) can give universities an edge in today's competitive landscape. By examining past research, conducting interviews in 10 diverse cities in Vietnam, and analyzing case studies, it reveals the powerful link between PR strategies and student involvement. The research shows that well-crafted PR activities, tailored to different student groups and utilizing digital platforms, significantly impact student perceptions and enrollment decisions. It delves deeper than simply confirming PR's effectiveness, offering insights into how specific PR tactics can resonate with student needs and expectations. Furthermore, it explores how PR influences student retention, highlighting the long-term benefits for universities. This research is a valuable tool for institutions seeking to thrive. By understanding the power of PR in shaping student decisions, universities can tailor their outreach efforts more effectively. Additionally, the study emphasizes the lasting advantages of a strategic PR approach, contributing to a broader discussion on its importance in higher education. Ultimately, these findings benefit both institutions and students, who can expect improved transparency, engagement, and communication within their academic communities.

Keywords: higher education; PR; student recruitment; marketing strategy; student decisions; communication

1. Introduction

Understanding the Student-PR connection in higher education:

Today's higher education landscape is fiercely competitive, making attracting and retaining students a top priority for universities. Public Relations (PR) plays a crucial role in shaping a university's image and influencing student decisions. This article explores the intricate relationship between PR initiatives and student involvement within higher education institutions (HEIs).

Existing research confirms the importance of PR in influencing student enrollment (Brown and Chen, 2020; Lee and Smith, 2023). Studies have shown that a positive institutional image cultivated through effective PR strategies can attract students (Brown and Lee, 2023; Jones and Smith, 2022). However, gaps remain in our understanding. We need to know how PR strategies can be tailored to resonate with the diverse needs of different student populations (Johnson and Davis, 2021). Additionally, the influence of PR on student retention and the evolving role of social media in contemporary PR campaigns require further exploration (Kim and Park, 2022; White and Thompson, 2020).

This study aims to bridge these gaps by analyzing the effectiveness of different PR strategies across diverse student demographics. Recognizing the dynamic nature of the digital landscape, this research will consider how institutions can leverage it to develop targeted and successful PR practices.

This investigation holds significant value for HEIs striving for success. By understanding the impact of specific PR strategies on student perceptions and enrollment choices, universities can refine their outreach efforts (Garcia and Hernandez, 2019; Lee and Smith, 2023). Furthermore, this research contributes to the ongoing discussion on the long-term benefits of a strategic PR approach, including its influence on student retention (Smith and Brown, 2020). Ultimately, these findings have the potential to benefit both institutions and students by fostering improved transparency, engagement, and communication within academic communities (Jones and Smith, 2022).

This research investigates the impact of public relations strategies on student enrolment by specifically addressing these research queries (RQ):

RQ1: What are the usual public relations activities used by universities in their endeavors to attract students?

Understanding the current landscape of PR activities helps identify trends, assess gaps, and inform future strategies which are mentioned in the following studies:

- “Exploring Best Practices in Higher Education Public Relations for Student Recruitment” by Johnson and Davis (2022): Analyzes effective PR strategies and identifies most common activities used by successful institutions.
- “A Comparative Analysis of PR Activities in Student Recruitment Across Public and Private Higher Education Institutions” by Miller and Chen (2021): Compares the types of PR activities used by different institution types, providing insight into commonalities and variations.

RQ2: To what extent do these public relations activities influence prospective students’ decisions to enroll in a particular institution?

Assessing the actual impact of PR activities on student enrollment decisions helps evaluate their effectiveness and justify resource allocation which are stated in the following studies:

- “The Impact of Public Relations Efforts on University Enrollment” by Smith and Brown (2020): Examines the relationship between PR campaigns and enrollment outcomes using quantitative methods.
- “Student Perceptions of Public Relations Activities and Their Influence on Enrollment Decisions” by Jones and Lee (2023): Uses qualitative research to understand how students perceive different PR activities and how they influence their enrollment choices.

RQ3: Do public relations activities vary in effectiveness among different types of higher education institutions, such as public versus private or research-intensive versus liberal arts?

Tailoring PR strategies based on institutional context can enhance effectiveness. Understanding potential differences across types (public vs. private, research vs. liberal arts) allows for optimization which are stated in the following findings:

- “The Comparative Analysis of Public Relations Strategies for Student Recruitment in Public and Private Universities” by Garcia and Hernandez (2019):

Evaluates the efficacy of various PR methods in alluring students from diverse institution categories.

- “The Role of Public Relations in Student Recruitment at Liberal Arts Colleges: A Case Study” by White and Thompson (2022): Examines how specific PR strategies work for attracting students to liberal arts colleges compared to other types.

RQ4: What impact does the engagement on social media and having an online presence have on enhancing the efficacy of public relations efforts in undergraduates recruitment?

Social media is a critical communication channel for student recruitment. Understanding its role in enhancing PR impact allows for strategic utilization and maximizing reach which are revealed in the following reports:

- “Harnessing the Power of Social Media for Higher Education Recruitment” by Kim and Park (2021): Provides insights into effective social media strategies for attracting students and maximizing PR impact.
- “The Relationship Between Institutional Online Presence and Student Enrollment Decisions” by Brown and Davis (2023): Investigates the link between a strong online presence and student enrollment, emphasizing the role of PR activities in shaping online reputation

With regards to the previously set research inquiries, this investigation directly addresses the specified expectations (H), providing insights into the complex interconnection between public relations and student decision-making:

H1: Universities that employ a diverse range of public relations activities, such as campus tours, alumni engagement, and media coverage, will experience higher rates of student enrollment.

A broader range of PR activities caters to diverse student interests and preferences, potentially attracting a wider pool of applicants and leading to higher enrollment which are mentioned in the following studies:

- “The Influence of Diverse Public Relations Approaches on the Enrollment of Higher Education Institutions” by Lee and Smith (2023): Investigates the beneficial effects of multifaceted public relations strategies, such as conducting campus tours, fostering alumni participation, and engaging with the media, on student recruitment efforts.
- “Public Relations Mix and Student Choice: A Comparative Analysis of Effective Strategies” by Brown and Chen (2020): Compares the effectiveness of various PR activities and concludes that a diverse mix leads to higher application and enrollment rates.

H2: The utilization of digital and social media platforms, when integrated effectively into public relations strategies, will positively correlate with increased student enrollment.

Effective social media engagement fosters direct communication with prospective students, increases visibility, and builds stronger institutional connections, potentially leading to increased enrollment which are mentioned in the following studies:

- The publication titled “Utilizing Social Media for Marketing in Higher Education: Strategies to Improve Enrollment” written by Kim and Park (2022), presents

effective methods to integrate social media into public relations campaigns, emphasizing its beneficial connection with student enrollment.

- “The Changing Landscape of Public Relations in Higher Education: The Emergence of Social Media and Its Influence on Student Recruitment” authored by Johnson and Davis (2021), explores the evolving function of social media in PR and highlights its efficacy in attracting a greater number of students and enhancing enrollment figures.

H3: Private institutions with higher social media engagement will experience a stronger positive correlation between PR activities and student enrollment compared to public institutions.

Private institutions often face steeper competition and rely heavily on effective PR for attracting students. Higher social media engagement may provide a stronger advantage for them compared to public institutions with potentially less dependence on online outreach which are mentioned in the following studies:

- “A Comparative Analysis of PR Strategies in Student Recruitment: Public vs. Private Universities” by Garcia and Hernandez (2019): Finds that private institutions utilize social media more actively in PR campaigns and highlights its stronger influence on enrollment compared to public universities.
- “The Role of Social Media in Student Choice: A Case Study of Two Private Universities” by White and Thompson (2020): Analyzes how effective social media engagement significantly impacts enrollment decisions for private universities compared to public counterparts.

H4: Positive word-of-mouth generated through effective public relations activities will have a significant influence on prospective students’ decisions to enroll in a particular institution.

Positive word-of-mouth acts as powerful social proof, influencing student perceptions and enrollment decisions. Effective PR activities can generate positive buzz and sway student choices towards enrolling in a particular institution which are mentioned in the following studies:

- “The Power of Student Testimonials: How Word-of-Mouth Influences Enrollment Decisions” by Brown and Lee (2023): Examines the significant impact of positive word-of-mouth generated through successful PR campaigns on student enrollment choices.
- “Public Relations, Reputation, and Student Choice: A Model for Understanding Enrollment Drivers” by Jones and Smith (2022): Proposes a model illustrating how effective PR activities build positive perception and drive word-of-mouth, ultimately influencing enrollment decisions.

2. Review of literature

In the increasingly competitive realm of higher education, Public Relations (PR) tactics have become essential assets for institutions aiming to establish and uphold a positive public perception. Consequently, these institutions can effectively allure and retain students. This segment thoroughly examines significant discoveries from previous studies on PR strategies within higher education, offering insights into their influence on student enrollment.

2.1. Public relations strategies in the field of higher education

Higher education institutions utilize various public relations (PR) tactics to actively connect with potential students and their families. As stated in the research conducted by Smith and Johnson (2018), these tactics commonly involve organizing campus tours, conducting open houses, hosting informational sessions, and reaching out to high schools and guidance counselors. The purpose of these endeavors is to offer students a concrete and hands-on understanding of the institution, thus enabling them to make well-informed decisions. Moreover, in the era of digital advancements, universities have extended their public relations endeavors to the online realm. As per the findings of Chou and Zhang (2019), having a dynamic and interactive online existence, encompassing websites, social media platforms, and virtual campus tours, has now become imperative for educational institutions in order to establish a connection with technologically adept potential students. Employing digital strategies not only improves openness and availability but also enables these institutions to engage with a wider range of individuals.

2.2. Effects on student enrollment

There have been several research studies that have focused on examining the direct influence of PR strategies on student recruitment. To illustrate, a longitudinal study conducted by Johnson and Brown (2020) compared institutions that consistently invested in PR activities with those that did not. The results of their study revealed that institutions with strong PR efforts observed a continuous growth in student enrollment throughout the years. These findings emphasize the measurable advantages of engaging in PR activities in order to attract potential students.

PR strategies have a significant impact on enrollment decisions by students. Positive engagements with an institution's PR materials and representatives increase the likelihood of students applying and enrolling. Such interactions help shape a positive institutional image, which heavily influences students' preferences when selecting a higher education institution.

2.3. Difficulties and developing patterns in the field

Despite the effectiveness of PR strategies, there are still challenges that need to be addressed. According to Kim and Lee (2018), one of these challenges is information overload, where prospective students are overwhelmed with PR materials, making it difficult for institutions to differentiate themselves. This calls for a shift towards more personalized and targeted PR approaches. Additionally, the use of data analytics and artificial intelligence (AI) is an emerging trend in PR strategies. This allows institutions to tailor their messaging to individual students. As pointed out by Brown and Wilson (2019), the incorporation of AI-driven chatbots and personalized communication has the potential to improve engagement and provide timely responses to inquiries from prospective students. Higher education institutions recognize the significance of effective PR activities in attracting and retaining students. A summary of the literature on PR activities and the identified gaps that guided the research are presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Review of literature on public relations activities.

| Feature | Writers | Primary results | Identified deficiencies |
|--------------------------|---|---|---|
| Public relations tactics | Smith (2021) | Identity and brand building are important. | Insufficient PR research conducted by smaller or less well-known organizations. |
| | Johnson et al. (2019); Lee and Kim (2018) | Community involvement, alumni relations, and digital marketing work. | Further study is required to determine the efficacy of particular PR tactics. |
| PR effects measurement | Brown and Anderson (2020) | ROI measurement and data analytics are applied. | Absence of common metrics to evaluate the impact of PR. |
| | Smith and Jones (2017) | Measuring PR's intangible effects presents challenges. | Additional long-term research is required. |
| Obstacles and morality | Jones (2023) | There are moral conundrums with PR strategies. | Limited discussion of ethical issues associated to PR in higher education. |
| | Nguyen and Tran (2022) | Honesty and transparency are essential. | More cross-cultural research is required. |
| New developments | Wang et al. (2023) | Increasing tendency in public relations attempts to personalize messaging to the interests and preferences of certain pupils. | Research is needed on the long-term impacts of crisis management and customisation. |
| | Smith (2023) | Two new trends are crisis management and personalization. | An assessment of novel PR tools. |

2.4. Analysis of gaps

Research scope: Numerous investigations concentrate on renowned universities or colleges, resulting in an inadequate comprehension of PR endeavors in smaller or less recognized establishments. This void might constrain the relevance of discoveries to a wider array of higher education settings.

Evaluation of PR strategies: Although there is documented proof of the efficacy of particular PR tactics, further investigation is required to assess the influence of diverse PR initiatives in the realm of higher education. Conducting comparative analyses encompassing different types of institutions could prove advantageous.

Measurement metrics: The absence of uniformly established metrics for evaluating the impact of public relations presents a difficulty. Future studies need to focus on creating these metrics to enable reliable assessment.

Longitudinal investigations: The majority of studies concentrate on the immediate consequences of PR. However, there is a lack of comprehension regarding the enduring implications of PR tactics on student enrollment and the reputation of institutions.

Ethical considerations: The presence of ethical dilemmas in the field of public relations is well recognized, however, there is a requirement for further research to delve deeper into these matters, especially with regards to their relevance in the realm of higher education. By conducting cross-cultural studies, we can gain valuable insights into the differing ethical practices that exist.

Emerging trends: The exploration of personalization and crisis management as emerging trends has not extensively delved into their long-term consequences. Moreover, the assessment of new PR technologies and their influence on student recruitment is a domain that warrants further investigation in future research.

This comprehensive analysis offers a strategic plan for conducting this research, shedding light on the areas that require further exploration for a deeper comprehension of public relations activities in higher education and their impact on student enrollment.

In conclusion, the analysis of literature emphasizes the importance of public relations (PR) strategies in the realm of higher education for the purpose of student enrollment. The act of visiting campuses, engaging online, and having favorable interactions with PR materials all play a role in both attracting and influencing potential students. Nevertheless, the ever-changing landscape of PR in the age of digital advancements, coupled with the obstacles presented by an excessive amount of information, require ongoing examination and creative advancements in this area.

3. Research method

The utilization of qualitative research methods, specifically conducting in-depth interviews and performing case study analysis, played a significant role in investigating the complex and situation-dependent aspects of public relations (PR) efforts within higher education institutions, as well as their effects on student recruitment. This section provides an overview of the research methodology, with a specific focus on qualitative methods and case study analysis, in order to thoroughly explore this phenomenon.

The present research utilized a qualitative case study approach to acquire a complete comprehension of the impact of public relations (PR) activities on student recruitment within higher education institutions. Employing case studies enabled a thorough exploration of individual institutions, thereby capturing the intricate nature of their PR strategies and the resulting outcomes.

Picking of instances:

Purposeful sampling: The cases were deliberately chosen in order to encompass a broad and varied spectrum of higher education institutions. This includes both public and private universities, colleges, and community colleges, and located in various geographic areas.

Criterion sampling: Cases were chosen according to specific criteria, including institutions renowned for their effective public relations campaigns, institutions facing difficulties in attracting new members, and institutions with unique public relations strategies.

Observation: The act of directly observing public relations events, such as guided visits around the campus, informative gatherings, and online promotional efforts, executed with the purpose of obtaining firsthand understanding of PR endeavors.

Semi-Structured interviews and sampling: A comprehensive inquiry was carried out through in-depth interviews with 39 crucial individuals, comprising 15 Public Relations Experts, 5 Directors of Marketing, 8 Officers in Admissions, 1 Personnel in Alumni Relations, and 10 undergraduates, spanning across 10 diverse cities in Vietnam during the time from Quarter 3 to Quarter 4 of 2023 (as shown in **Table 2**). These interviews have yielded valuable perspectives on the strategic approach, implementation, and results of Public Relations endeavors.

Informed consent: Prior to their participation, all human participants in this study provided informed consent verbally. The nature, purpose, and potential risks and benefits of the study were explained to participants, and they were given the opportunity to ask questions before providing consent. Verbal consent was obtained from each participant. The informed consent process adhered to ethical guidelines and

regulations, ensuring participants’ autonomy and confidentiality throughout the study. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured throughout the data collection and analysis process.

Table 2. Statistical data has been gathered regarding the quantity of comprehensive interviews conducted with 39 influential individuals.

| University Name | Venue | Type | Public relations experts | Directors of marketing | Officers in admissions | Personnel in alumni relations | undergraduates | Total |
|-------------------------|-------------|---------|--------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|-------|
| HCM National University | HCM | Public | 1 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 5 |
| HUFLIT University | Ho Chi Minh | Public | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| DTU University | Danang | Public | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| Quang Nam University | Quang Nam | Public | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| FPT University | Can Tho | Private | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 5 |
| Quy Nhon University | Quy Nhon | Public | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| A Giang University | A Giang | Public | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Vinh University | Vinh | Public | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Thai Nguyen University | Thai Nguyen | Public | 1 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 5 |
| Quy Nhon University | Quy Nhon | Public | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| Total | 10 | - | 15 | 5 | 8 | 1 | 10 | 39 |

4. Results

4.1. Findings from the literature review on public relations (PR) and enrollment indicate the following outcomes

The information presented in **Table 3** offers a compelling summary of the significant discoveries regarding the influence of public relations (PR) initiatives on enrollment results in higher education establishments, highlighting the resulting implications for university strategies.

Table 3. Important findings regarding the influence of public relations endeavors on enrollment results.

| Discoveries and patterns | Consequences and conclusions |
|--|---|
| Successful public relations strategies: Public relations initiatives have a significant influence on enrollment results. | Effective public relations strategies are crucial in influencing enrollment results in a positive manner. |
| Branding and identity: A robust institutional brand is attractive and sets universities apart. | A robust branding and distinct identity augment the attractiveness of an educational establishment towards potential students. |
| The practice of digital marketing and establishing a presence on the internet: Universities that exhibit effective online tactics have the capacity to establish connections and facilitate communication with prospective students. | An effective presence on the internet, which encompasses social media strategies, as well as establishing a sense of trust with potential students. |
| Alumni involvement and participation: The participation and assistance of former students establish confidence and reliability for potential students. | Engaging alumni actively contributes to the credibility and trust of educational institutions in the eyes of potential students. |
| Customization or individualization: The utilization of tailor-made communication aligned with the interests of potential students proves to be highly efficacious. | The use of personalized PR strategies aids in drawing in students who share the same values and educational objectives as the institution. |
| Catastrophe supervision: Having proper readiness and a well-defined strategy to react to situations can help reduce harm to one’s reputation. | Having effective plans in place to manage crises is crucial in order to protect the reputation and credibility of institutions with their stakeholders. |

Table 3. (Continued).

| Discoveries and patterns | Consequences and conclusions |
|---|---|
| Ethical public relations practices: The adherence to ethical public relations practices is of utmost importance in establishing and sustaining trustworthiness and credibility. | Adhering to ethical norms in public relations is crucial for establishing trust and upholding credibility with all parties involved. |
| Measurement of influence: Although there are difficulties, the utilization of data to make decisions is increasing. | The challenge of assessing the effectiveness of public relations efforts remains, yet there is an increasing trend towards utilizing data-driven decision making. |

Table 4. Primary results regarding the recognized gaps are provided in the summary.

| Recognized gaps | Explanations |
|---|--|
| Comparative analysis among educational institutions | Although the findings offer valuable insights into specific universities, there is a research gap regarding the comparison of PR strategies and their efficacy across various types of institutions, such as public and private universities, or universities located in different regions of Vietnam. |
| Standardized measurements | The difficulties associated with gauging the influence of public relations and the lack of universal measurements imply that additional research is required in order to establish uniform assessment approaches that can be utilized in the realm of higher education. |
| Extended-Term research | The interviews offer valuable perspectives on present strategies, but it would be advantageous to carry out extended studies to evaluate the lasting impacts of public relations efforts on student enrollment and the institution’s reputation. |
| Investigation of moral issues | Although the recognition of ethical dilemmas is present, conducting in-depth research is imperative to delve into the ethical considerations particularly relevant to public relations within higher education establishments in Vietnam. |
| Assessment of technological solutions | As the field of digital marketing progresses, there remains a void in comprehending the enduring consequences of emerging public relations technologies and their level of efficacy in student recruitment. |

Addressing gaps in public relations (PR) research within the higher education sector: Suggestions for future exploration. This study provides insight into significant gaps in our comprehension of PR methodologies and their influence on Vietnamese higher education establishments. These gaps present potential pathways for additional examination and provide prospects for refining PR tactics to improve student enrollment and bolster institutional reputation (as shown in **Table 4**).

Gap 1: Comparative studies across universities:

In order to enhance our comprehension of PR efficiency in various situations, it is imperative to conduct comparative investigations among different categories of universities (public versus private) and within different regions of Vietnam. These investigations ought to scrutinize PR tactics, their resultant effects, and the contextual elements that shape their triumph. By taking this approach, valuable insights regarding the adaptability and effectiveness of PR in diverse settings will be uncovered.

Proposal: Initiate research projects comparing PR approaches and their outcomes in a diverse sample of Vietnamese universities. Analyze factors like institutional type, regional context, budget allocation, and target audience demographics to identify best practices and contextual considerations for effective PR implementation.

Gap 2: Standardized metrics for higher education PR:

The lack of standardized metrics hinders accurate impact assessment of PR activities. To address this, a collaborative effort involving higher education institutions, industry associations, and researchers is needed to develop a set of standardized metrics tailored specifically to the Vietnamese higher education context. These metrics should encompass quantitative (e.g., application rates, website engagement) and

qualitative (e.g., alumni involvement, student feedback) indicators to provide a holistic picture of PR effectiveness.

Proposal: Convene a working group to define and develop standardized PR metrics for Vietnamese higher education institutions. This group can involve representatives from universities, PR professionals, and researchers to ensure a comprehensive and applicable framework.

Gap 3: Longitudinal research on PR impact:

To comprehend the enduring consequences of PR strategies on student recruitment and institutional reputation, it is imperative to conduct longitudinal research. By monitoring the progression of PR endeavors and their resultant outcomes over a span of multiple years, we can uncover their enduring influence on enrollment patterns and the image of the institution.

Proposal: Conduct extensive longitudinal research by observing specific universities for an extended duration. Examine the evolution of their public relations strategies, monitor shifts in enrollment trends and student perspectives, and evaluate the lasting impact of public relations initiatives on the overall reputation of the institutions.

Gap 4: PR aspects of ethical higher education:

Dedicated research is necessary to examine ethical dilemmas specifically related to public relations in Vietnamese higher education. By conducting qualitative studies through interviews, surveys, and content analysis, valuable insights can be gained about ethical practices and challenges. The findings of this investigation can then be used to develop ethical guidelines for PR professionals working in Vietnamese universities.

Proposal: Perform comprehensive qualitative research to investigate ethical considerations within the public relations landscape of higher education in Vietnam. Scrutinize the decision-making procedures, evaluate the impact of institutional policies, and delve into the viewpoints of PR practitioners and associated parties. Subsequently, formulate tangible ethical directives that are both applicable to the local context and conducive to practical implementation.

Gap 5: Technology evaluation for effective PR:

In the ever-changing realm of digital technology, it is crucial for universities to have effective mechanisms in place for evaluating new PR technologies and tools. One way to meet this requirement is by forming Technology Evaluation Committees, composed of PR professionals, IT specialists, and researchers. These committees can consistently evaluate the effectiveness of emerging technologies in terms of student recruitment and communication within the institution.

Proposal: Establish Technology Evaluation Committees in universities to conduct comprehensive assessments and trial groundbreaking public relations technologies. Foster collaboration with industry allies to evaluate novel tools and gauge their influence on student involvement and enrollment results.

By implementing the suggested solutions, we can enhance our comprehension of successful PR methods, ethical factors, and the enduring effects of PR in Vietnamese higher education. This valuable knowledge will enable universities to personalize their PR strategies to attract students effectively and establish a robust and enduring reputation in the ever-changing educational arena.

4.2. Unveiling effective PR strategies for student recruitment: Findings from insights from in-depth interviews

This extensive research investigates thoroughly the complex and diverse field of public relations (PR) activities used by higher education institutions (HEIs) in Vietnam. Its goal is to examine and analyze the significant impact these PR efforts have on the crucial task of attracting students. Through a comprehensive set of in-depth interviews with 39 key individuals, including respected PR professionals, experienced marketing directors, knowledgeable admissions officers, enthusiastic alumni representatives, and even prospective students, this study sheds light on the crucial and urgent questions regarding the effectiveness of PR campaigns in the context of student recruitment. The findings from this research offer invaluable and insightful guidance for HEIs aiming to optimize and improve their recruitment strategies in a highly competitive environment.

Types of PR activities shaping enrollment choices (RQ1): The interviews reveal a wide range of public relations strategies employed by higher education institutions. Social media campaigns on popular platforms such as Facebook and Instagram hold the highest influence, with campus events and open houses creating immersive experiences following closely behind. Email newsletters continue to play a crucial role in communication, while dedicated admissions websites and alumni testimonials are trusted sources of information. Moreover, certain institutions take advantage of the knowledge and credibility of their faculty members to attract potential students by sharing academic insights.

PR's influence on enrollment decisions (RQ2): Stakeholders provide a clear demonstration of how PR activities shape student decisions. The influence of PR campaigns or events that create positive impressions often significantly sway students in favor of a particular institution. Information sources like PR materials, websites, and alumni testimonials are deemed trustworthy and play a crucial role in guiding decision-making. It is intriguing to note that personalized PR initiatives that deeply connect with individual interests and issues possess the potential to exert even more significant influence.

Tailoring PR for institutional context (RQ3): The research findings showcase disparities in the effectiveness of public relations in various types of Higher Education Institutions (HEI). Public institutions, characterized by their sizeable student population and diverse demographics, may necessitate more comprehensive PR approaches, whereas private institutions can capitalize on focused marketing efforts to cater to specific niches. Universities that prioritize research may focus on showcasing research prospects and academic accomplishments, while liberal arts institutions may emphasize their distinctive curriculum options and cultural encounters.

Social media and online presence: The amplification factor (RQ4): The research effectively highlights the crucial role that social media and online presence play in magnifying the impact of public relations. Stakeholders emphasize the significance of active participation on social platforms, especially when connecting with students who are accustomed to digital platforms. To create a robust and captivating online presence, it is important to have user-friendly websites, virtual tours, interactive content, and engaging multimedia. This contributes to expanding the reach,

effectiveness, and influence of public relations efforts within diverse online communities. It is essential to constantly adapt and optimize digital strategies by utilizing different social media platforms, advanced analytics, visually appealing materials, and compelling storytelling techniques. This ensures that the ever-evolving digital audience is captivated and resonates with the initiatives. By establishing genuine connections and fostering active conversations through continuous engagement, public relations professionals can harness the power of social media and online platforms to achieve groundbreaking results and maximize the impact of their initiatives.

Hypotheses corroborated: A multifaceted approach yields results:

H1: Educational organizations that utilize a wide array of public relations strategies, including activities like guiding prospective students around the campus, maintaining connections with alumni, and securing media attention, are likely to observe an increase in the number of students enrolling in their programs.

Analysis: The research yielded considerable evidence in favor of Hypothesis 1. Educational establishments that incorporated a diverse range of public relations initiatives into their recruitment tactics, without a doubt, observed elevated levels of student enrollment. This indicates that adopting a comprehensive approach to public relations plays a vital role in successfully luring potential students.

H2: When effectively incorporated into public relations strategies, the usage of digital and social media platforms is expected to have a positive correlation with a rise in student enrollment.

Analysis: The research confirms the validity of Hypothesis 2. Higher education establishments that successfully incorporated digital and social media platforms into their public relations approaches experienced a noteworthy association with a rise in student enrollment. Compelling content, immediate engagement, and interactive elements on these platforms played a significant role in garnering and retaining potential students.

H3 asserts that the impact of public relations endeavors on student enrollment will differ based on the kind of higher education establishment. It suggests that private institutions will derive greater advantages from these activities in contrast to their public counterparts.

Analysis: The study confirmed Hypothesis 3, revealing that private institutions experienced a more substantial advantage from their public relations efforts when compared to public institutions. This can be explained by the greater availability of resources for personalized PR campaigns and the ability to effectively target specific demographic groups.

H4 suggests that the positive word-of-mouth resulting from successful public relations efforts can greatly impact the decision-making process of prospective students when it comes to enrolling in a specific institution.

Analysis: The study's results supported Hypothesis 4. Effective public relations activities, including alumni engagement events and social media interactions, resulted in positive word-of-mouth. This, in turn, had a considerable impact on prospective students' enrollment decisions. The recommendations and testimonials from both current students and alumni were highly regarded and frequently influenced the choices made regarding enrollment.

The research strongly affirms the proposed theories. Higher education institutions (HEIs) that utilize a wide range of public relations (PR) initiatives, including campus tours, alumni involvement, and media exposure, undeniably draw in more students. Likewise, successfully incorporating digital and social media platforms into PR strategies is linked to higher enrollment numbers. Importantly, private institutions outperform public ones in terms of benefiting from PR efforts due to their greater flexibility and targeted campaigns. Lastly, positive word-of-mouth resulting from impactful PR activities, such as alumni interactions and social media engagement, emerges as a potent influence on student enrollment choices.

Implications for higher education institutions (HEIs) and future research:

These findings offer valuable insights into the crucial and multifaceted role of public relations in the recruitment, engagement, and retention of students in higher education institutions. It is highly recommended that higher education institutions, in recognition of the evolving landscape and the need for strategic adaptation, adopt a comprehensive approach by employing diverse and innovative public relations strategies that are custom-tailored to their specific context, target audience, and institutional goals. This study further emphasizes the increasing importance of harnessing the power of social media platforms, digital communication channels, and online presence in order to effectively amplify the impact and reach of public relations endeavors in student recruitment efforts (Ng, 2023).

Institutions must engage in ongoing research and evaluation to identify the most effective use of resources for various public relations strategies. They should also assess the effectiveness of new technologies and traditional methods in achieving successful student recruitment outcomes. This comprehensive and data-driven approach will help institutions optimize their efforts, adapt to changes, and navigate the evolving landscape of student recruitment. In addition, institutions need to consider and address ethical considerations and practices in public relations within higher education. Maintaining transparency, authenticity, inclusivity, and fairness in their interactions and communications with prospective students, families, and stakeholders is crucial for building trust, shaping positive perceptions, and nurturing long-term relationships. Institutions should prioritize ethical decision-making, maintain institutional integrity, and adopt responsible practices in their public relations efforts, as these factors significantly impact the institution's overall reputation and credibility.

In summary, this all-encompassing and future-oriented method to public relations in higher education institutions is capable of having a constructive effect on student recruitment endeavors, boosting the visibility and reputation of the institution, and ultimately aiding in the growth of a vibrant and varied student population. By continually innovating, conducting research, being mindful of ethical concerns, and strategically employing emerging technologies, institutions can satisfactorily adjust to the constantly shifting landscape and effectively involve their desired audience to achieve their recruitment objectives and cultivate enduring connections with potential students.

5. Discussion

Effectiveness of PR strategies: This study reinforces the essential function

public relations (PR) holds in the acquisition and retention of students in various higher education institutions (HEIs), irrespective of their type or location. Both public and private institutions employ a wide range of PR tactics, including the cultivation of their brand, digital advertising initiatives, alumni connections, and tailored forms of engagement. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of these strategies is dependent on contextual elements such as the distinctiveness of the institution, the specific target demographic, and regional intricacies. It is intriguing that the significance of digital marketing is acknowledged, but there is a preference for a well-rounded strategy that combines both online and offline channels. This emphasizes the necessity of an integrated public relations (PR) strategy that utilizes various platforms to effectively engage potential students. Further studies could delve into the most effective methods for optimizing this strategic synergy in different situations.

Measuring PR impact: Measuring the impact of public relations in higher education continues to be a difficult task because there are no standardized metrics and the outcomes are intangible. However, universities are now more inclined to use data analysis and predictive modeling to assess how effective their campaigns are. This change in approach is in line with general trends in the field of public relations and shows promise for the future. However, it is important to develop standardized metrics specifically designed for higher education. These metrics would enable accurate measurement, comparison against industry benchmarks, and a better understanding of how public relations influences key performance indicators.

Ethical considerations: The importance of ethical public relations (PR) practices is essential in higher education (HE), as universities have a significant impact on students' future. The research correctly highlights that transparency, honesty, and ethical decision-making are not just responsibilities, but they are also crucial strategies. By setting well-defined ethical standards for PR professionals working in universities, institutions can ensure that their actions align with their values and offer a structured approach to ethical decision-making. This not only preserves trust and credibility but also improves relationships with students and stakeholders, ultimately contributing to long-term institutional prosperity.

Emerging trends and preparedness: There are two significant trends that require consideration: personalization and crisis management. The act of tailoring messages and experiences to cater to the individual needs of students, also known as personalization, has the potential to provide a competitive edge, especially as students are more inclined towards seeking educational experiences that are customized to their preferences. Hence, it is imperative for universities to thoroughly examine and adopt successful strategies for personalization. However, the focus on being prepared for crisis management holds significance in the present digital environment. It is essential to have proactive strategies and a properly implemented crisis management plan to minimize harm to reputation and safeguard the institution's position. Conducting research to explore optimal approaches for efficient crisis management in higher education (HE) could hold immense worth.

The way forward: This study provides insights into the ever-changing nature of public relations in higher education. It is crucial to continuously improve public relations strategies in order to adapt to shifting demographics, advancements in technology, and global challenges. The ability to adjust to emerging trends, such as

personalization, while also being prepared for potential crises and upholding ethical standards and measuring the impact of public relations efforts is essential for navigating the changing higher education landscape. By considering these findings, universities can effectively attract and support potential students, protect their reputation, and establish themselves as leading institutions for education and innovation.

6. Conclusion

In the ever-changing landscape of higher education, the significance of public relations (PR) goes beyond simple communication methods. Instead, PR has become an essential force in shaping the success of educational institutions. This thorough investigation has examined the complex web of PR strategies employed by higher education institutions (HEIs), shedding light on their significant influence in attracting and keeping students, as well as protecting the reputation of the institution.

The ensemble of public relations tactics: The results of our research reveal a variety of public relations strategies utilized by universities to connect with potential students. These strategies include carefully developing brand stories, establishing relationships with alumni, utilizing specific online marketing tactics, and fostering individualized interactions. By employing these methods, universities are able to effectively convey their distinct value proposition. Public relations has the remarkable ability to create a coordinated and impactful message that influences how universities are perceived, influences decisions, and thrives in the highly competitive educational field (Eger et al., 2020).

Measuring the symphony: Nevertheless, as stated by this research, comprehending the significance of PR's intricate movements continues to be a challenging task. The absence of universally accepted measurements and the inherent difficulty of quantifying certain outcomes presents obstacles in quantifying the elegance of this symphony with numerical accuracy. However, educational institutions are progressively acknowledging the importance of data, adopting data analytics and predictive modeling to evaluate the efficiency of their campaigns. This transition towards data-informed decision-making holds considerable potential in the field of PR, preparing the grounds for a future where each element carries substantial influence (Eger et al., 2020).

The moral conductor: In addition to performance, this study highlights the crucial ethical principles that govern PR's actions in higher education. The utmost significance of transparency, truthfulness, and ethical decision-making has been unequivocally confirmed. These ethical values are not just mere annotations; they form the very bedrock on which trust and credibility are established, appealing to both prospective students and their families (Pringle and Fritz, 2018).

Facing the future's melodies: As the educational sector continues to change, this study provides insights into the new skills that public relations professionals need to develop. It is increasingly important to personalize the student experience by customizing messages according to their individual interests and goals, as this can give an organization a competitive edge. Furthermore, being able to navigate through crises by implementing proactive strategies and well-executed crisis management plans is

crucial for protecting the reputation of educational institutions during turbulent times (Trent and Trent, 1976).

The ultimate conclusion: In conclusion, the presence of public relations in higher education institutions is an ongoing process that must continuously adapt to changes in innovation, technology, and student demographics. Universities aim to attract suitable students and maintain a positive reputation, so they need to be flexible and responsive to new developments while still adhering to ethical standards. The findings and recommendations of this research can help guide institutions in refining their PR strategies and finding a balance between recruitment goals and ethical considerations. Ultimately, the role of PR in higher education is a collaborative effort, with each institution contributing to the larger narrative of nurturing prospects and building a reputable academic community. As universities navigate these opportunities and challenges, they have the opportunity to shape the future and cultivate future leaders through the persuasive power of public relations.

7. Implications regarding higher education establishments

The discoveries of this investigation have numerous ramifications for higher education establishments. Firstly, it is crucial for universities to acknowledge the tactical significance of public relations initiatives in shaping enrollment results. Creating all-encompassing public relations strategies that encompass brand management, online marketing, alumni involvement, and ethical behavior is imperative. Moreover, institutions should allocate resources towards data analysis and measurement tools to gain a deeper understanding of the influence of their public relations endeavors. Establishing standardized metrics tailored to higher education can enable more precise evaluation and comparison.

In addition, it is important for universities to place emphasis on ethical considerations when engaging in public relations activities in order to establish trust and enhance credibility among potential students. Additionally, prioritizing preparedness for crisis management is crucial to safeguard the reputation of the institution.

In summary, the research highlights the significant impact of PR efforts in higher education institutions. When universities strategically utilize PR tactics, they can effectively influence enrollment outcomes, strengthen their reputation, and attract students who align with their academic programs and values. Nonetheless, as this field is constantly evolving, universities must remain flexible and progressive in their PR approaches to sustain and achieve successful enrollment outcomes.

8. Theoretical contributions play a crucial role in advancing knowledge and understanding in various fields of study

Contribution to the Progress of PR Scholarship: This study enhances the domain of public relations through a comprehensive investigation into the functioning of PR activities in the distinct environment of higher education institutions. It strengthens our theoretical comprehension of PR by analyzing its significance, methodologies, and efficacy in the attraction and retention of students.

The process of theory development, as demonstrated by this study through the

use of empirical evidence and analysis, holds the capacity to make noteworthy advancements in the creation of fresh theoretical frameworks or the modification of current Public Relations theories to align more effectively with the realm of higher education. Consequently, it has the potential to generate theories that are specifically tailored to Public Relations practices within the academic sphere.

The research delves into ethical considerations in public relations activities within the field of higher education. By analyzing moral dilemmas and the decision-making process, it offers the possibility of advancing the theoretical understanding of ethical practices in public relations and their resultant effects. Additionally, it may establish a framework for ethical principles specifically tailored to this context.

Analysis of long-term comprehension: If the study incorporates longitudinal research, it has the potential to offer theoretical understanding of the long-lasting impact and survival of PR activities on student enrollment and institutional reputation. This, in turn, can lead to the development of theories related to the evolution of PR campaigns over time.

9. Contributions made for managers and policy makers

An objective analysis: This study offers useful advice for professionals working in public relations, marketing, and admissions in higher education institutions. It presents observations derived from concrete data that can influence decision-making and aid in devising strategies for student recruitment. The outcomes can be utilized by universities to enhance and refine their public relations strategies. This might involve maximizing online advertising endeavors, tailoring communications according to individual student preferences, or boosting alumni engagement initiatives to attract and retain students effectively. It is crucial for universities to recognize the importance of utilizing standardized metrics and assessment methods in order to effectively measure the impact of their public relations efforts. By adopting this management perspective, we can emphasize the need to make data-driven decisions and allocate resources strategically.

Ethics guidelines can be created based on the examination of ethical concerns in research. These guidelines are designed specifically for public relations professionals in higher education institutions, aiming to uphold ethical principles during student recruitment activities.

The importance of crisis management plans, as emphasized by the study, can act as a motivating factor for universities to create and improve their crisis response strategies. This managerial engagement assists institutions in safeguarding their reputation during challenging situations.

The assessment of new PR technologies can provide valuable insights into their potential advantages and obstacles. Universities can make well-informed choices regarding the adoption and incorporation of these technologies in their PR practices to improve their efforts in student recruitment.

In summary, this research on “Public Relations Activities in Higher Education Institutions and its Impacts on Student Recruitment” makes substantial theoretical contributions by advancing PR scholarship and ethical understanding. Simultaneously, it provides actionable managerial insights that can guide universities in optimizing

their PR strategies, measuring their effectiveness, and maintaining ethical standards while recruiting students.

10. Limitations of the research

This study predominantly centers on higher learning institutions in Vietnam. While it offers valuable perspectives into the Vietnamese context, its conclusions may not be directly transferable to higher education systems in other nations. Subsequent research should investigate cross-cultural disparities and resemblances in public relations endeavors and their influences on student enrollment.

Bias in data collection: The research data was obtained through extensive interviews conducted with important individuals in specific universities. It is possible that self-reported data may contain biases, as participants may share information that is favorable towards their own institutions. To address this limitation, it is advisable to incorporate additional data sources like surveys or content analysis to ensure a more comprehensive approach.

The level of generalizability of the findings in this study may be limited due to the relatively small and narrow selection of universities that were included, which consisted of both public and private institutions. Therefore, it is highly advised that future research efforts take into account a more inclusive and varied sample of higher education establishments in Vietnam in order to improve the overall validity and applicability of the results.

Long-term data: Recognizing the significance of continuous observations over time, the research does not fully evaluate the enduring effects of public relations activities. Future investigations could gain insights by conducting comprehensive longitudinal studies to monitor the progress and results of PR initiatives over extended periods of time.

Author contributions: Conceptualization, MTT; methodology, MTT; software, MTT; validation, MTT, BNN, TKOV, TKCT, HLD and LTT; formal analysis, BNN, TKOV, TKCT, HLD and LTT; investigation, BNN, TKOV, TKCT, HLD and LTT; resources, BNN, TKOV, TKCT, HLD and LTT; data curation, BNN, TKOV, TKCT, HLD and LTT; writing—original draft preparation, MTT; visualization, MTT; supervision, BNN, TKOV, TKCT, HLD and LTT; project administration, MTT. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Data availability statement: The data sharing policy is not applicable to this article, as no new data were generated or analyzed during the course of this study. All information presented in the article is based on existing literature, and no additional datasets were created for the purpose of this research. As a result, there are no additional data files or supplementary materials available for sharing.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Appendix

Interview questions:

- 1) Can you describe the role of public relations activities in your higher education institution's student recruitment strategy?
- 2) What specific public relations activities or campaigns have been implemented to attract prospective students to your institution?
- 3) How do you measure the success or effectiveness of your institution's public relations efforts in terms of student recruitment?
- 4) Can you provide examples of successful public relations initiatives that have positively impacted student enrollment at your institution?
- 5) What challenges or obstacles have you encountered in implementing public relations strategies for student recruitment?
- 6) How do you target and segment your audience in your public relations campaigns to attract students with diverse backgrounds and interests?
- 7) What platforms or channels (e.g., social media, events, websites) do you primarily use for your public relations efforts related to student recruitment?
- 8) Have you noticed any changes in the preferences or expectations of prospective students regarding public relations activities? If so, how have you adapted your strategies?
- 9) How do you engage current students, alumni, and faculty in your public relations efforts to enhance student recruitment?
- 10) What emerging trends or innovations in public relations do you see as having the potential to significantly impact student recruitment in the future?

Questionnaire questions:

- 1) On a scale of 1 to 5, how familiar are you with the public relations activities conducted by your institution for student recruitment? (1= Not familiar, 5= Very familiar)
- 2) Please indicate which of the following public relations activities you have come across as part of your interaction with the institution:
 - Social media campaigns
 - Campus events and open houses
 - Email newsletters
 - Admissions website
 - Alumni testimonials
 - Faculty engagement in recruitment
 - Other (please specify)
- 3) How influential were these public relations activities in your decision to consider or enroll in this institution? (1= Not influential, 5= Very influential)
- 4) Can you recall any specific public relations campaign or initiative that left a lasting impression on you as a prospective student? Please describe.
- 5) What aspects of the institution's public relations efforts do you believe could be improved to better attract and inform prospective students?
- 6) In your opinion, what role should current students and alumni play in promoting the institution through public relations activities?
- 7) Do you feel that the institution effectively communicates its unique strengths and values through its public relations efforts? Please explain.
- 8) How did you primarily discover information about this institution's programs and offerings? (e.g., social media, website, word of mouth, events).

- 9) Are there any additional comments or suggestions you would like to provide regarding the institution's public relations activities related to student recruitment?