A COMPREHENSIVE FRAMEWORK FOR EVALUATING UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES IN VIETNAM - A RESEARCH MODEL PROPOSAL

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Abstract

In Vietnam's increasingly competitive higher education landscape, admissions communication is essential for institutional sustainability and growth. Yet, universities lack a systematic framework to evaluate its effectiveness. This study reviews existing literature and develops a comprehensive evaluation model tailored to the Vietnamese context.

Research purpose:
This study aims to propose and empirically validate a comprehensive model for evaluating admissions communication activities in Vietnamese universities by integrating theoretical foundations, prior studies, and pilot testing.

Research motivation:
Vietnamese universities face intense competition and often struggle to meet enrollment quotas. A systematic framework for evaluating communication effectiveness is lacking, hindering strategic optimization. This study aims to fill this gap.

Research design, approach, and method:
The study employs a mixed-method approach combining literature review, theoretical synthesis, and a pilot survey conducted at Hanoi University of Science and Technology (HUST). Measurement scales for five dimensions of communication effectiveness were developed and tested using reliability and validity analysis.

Main findings:
The study identifies five key evaluation dimensions: Information Quality and Relevance, Channel and Media Effectiveness, Stakeholder Engagement and Interaction, Brand Perception and Reputation, and Behavioral Outcomes and Enrollment Impact. Pilot testing with 183 respondents confirms strong reliability and construct validity of the proposed scales, providing empirical support for the conceptual model and hypotheses.

Practical/managerial implications:
The validated model and scales offer a practical framework for Vietnamese universities to systematically assess and enhance their admissions communication strategies. By applying the model, institutions can make evidence-based decisions on messaging, channel selection, and stakeholder engagement, thereby improving brand reputation and enrollment outcomes.

Keywords: university admissions, communication evaluation, higher education, Vietnam, evaluation model, pilot study

1. INTRODUCTION

The intensification of competition in higher education has placed significant pressure on Vietnamese universities to attract sufficient student enrollments annually (Phan & Nguyen, 2025) (Nguyen, Hoang, & Nguyen, 2023). As a result, communication has evolved from a support function into a central, strategic component of university management, intrinsically linked to institutional branding and sustainable development (Phan & Nguyen, 2025). Many institutions, however, struggle to meet enrollment targets, often failing to attract students from beyond their immediate locality. For instance, Dong Thap University's programs primarily attract local students, with few from other provinces in the Mekong Delta region (Nguyen, Nguyen, & Le, 2023). Similarly, Hanoi Capital University faced challenges with unprofessional and inconsistent communication efforts that were hampered by limited resources and inadequate staff training (Ngo H. X., 2021).

These challenges highlight an urgent need not only for more effective communication strategies but also for robust evaluation frameworks to measure their impact. Effective evaluation allows institutions to determine whether communication objectives, such as increasing awareness, shaping perceptions, or influencing application decisions, have been achieved (Nguyen, Dang, Nguyen, & Tran, 2022). Without a systematic evaluation process, universities cannot optimize resource allocation, refine messaging, or adapt to the evolving information-seeking behaviors of prospective students (Macnamara, 2005).

This article addresses this gap by reviewing international and local research on criteria for evaluating communication activities. Based on this review, we propose a comprehensive model for evaluating university admissions communication in the Vietnamese context, offering a practical tool for institutional improvement and strategic planning.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The evaluation of communication effectiveness has been a long-standing concern in both corporate and educational contexts. In higher education, admissions communication is not merely an information dissemination activity but a strategic process closely tied to institutional reputation, brand positioning, and student decision-making (Hemsley-Brown & Opla, 2015) (Maringe, 2006). This section synthesizes relevant theories and prior research to establish the foundations of the proposed model.

2.1. Theories of Communication and Effectiveness Evaluation

Classical communication theories, such as Shannon and Weaver's model of communication (1949), emphasize the clarity of messages and minimization of "noise" that may distort intended meaning. This foundation highlights the importance of message quality and accuracy in admissions communication (Shannon, 1949). Complementing this, McGuire's persuasion model (1989) stresses factors such as attention, comprehension, acceptance, and retention, all of which remain relevant in assessing how prospective students process university messages (McGuire, 1989).

In the field of public relations and strategic communication, Macnamara's (2005) evaluation framework argues for moving beyond output measures (e.g., number of brochures) toward outcome-based assessments such as attitude and behavior change (Macnamara, 2005). Similarly, the Excellence Theory of Grunig and Hunt (1984) emphasizes two-way symmetrical communication, underlining the role of feedback and stakeholder engagement, an essential element in admissions communication where prospective students and parents actively seek dialogue (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

Within marketing communication, the Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) perspective (Kotler & Keller, 2016) advocates for consistency and synergy across channels, reflecting the growing importance of cross-platform communication in higher education recruitment.

2.2. Evaluating University Admissions Communication

Several studies in higher education marketing have identified critical dimensions of communication effectiveness. Ivy (2001) and Helgesen (2008) underscore that communication must align with institutional image, affecting students' perceptions of quality and trust. Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2015) provide a comprehensive review of university choice literature, highlighting the significance of communication channels, brand reputation, and word-of-mouth in shaping enrollment outcomes.

In the Vietnamese context, empirical studies also stress similar criteria. For example, Ngo (2023) evaluated marketing communications in student admissions and identified efficiency in digital platforms as a key factor. La and Le (2022) found that student feedback on communication strategies at Dalat University correlated strongly with application decisions. Additionally, Nguyen, Hoang, & Nguyen (2023) demonstrated that clear, accurate, and accessible admissions information enhances prospective learners' trust and decision-making.

2.3. Key Dimensions of Communication Effectiveness

Based on these theoretical and empirical foundations, five interrelated dimensions emerge as central to evaluating admissions communication:

2.3.1. Information Quality and Relevance

The core of any communication effort is the message itself. Its effectiveness hinges on whether the recipients understand it and find it relevant to their needs. Key criteria for evaluating information include:

- ***Clarity and Accuracy:*** *Information must be presented in a clear, unambiguous manner* (Nguyen, Hoang, & Nguyen, 2023). *Prospective students and their parents value well-defined and publicly accessible procedures for admissions and academic training as indicators of institutional professionalism.*
- ***Timeliness and Consistency****: Communication must be delivered promptly and maintained consistently across different platforms to build trust and ensure reliability* (Albuali, 2021).

2.3.2. Channel and Media Effectiveness

The choice of communication channels is crucial for reaching the target audience (Ngo D. V., 2023). In Vietnam, prospective students predominantly use university websites and social media platforms (Facebook, Zalo, YouTube) to search for information. Parents often rely on university websites for evaluation (Phan & Nguyen, 2025). While direct consultations and admissions fairs are also influential, traditional with lower costs compared to traditional advertising, making budget efficiency an important evaluation criterion (Ngo & Do, 2021).

2.3.3. Stakeholder Engagement and Interaction

Modern communication is a two-way process. Effective strategies encourage feedback and dialogue, which helps build trust and relationships. On digital platforms like Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube, real-time interaction is a key advantage. The participation of internal stakeholders, such as current students and faculty, is also critical (Chang & Lum, 2024). Current students, in particular, can act as powerful "communication ambassadors" by sharing authentic experiences on social media, which significantly enhances institutional appeal. Key evaluation indicators include:

- ***Interaction Metrics:*** *Number of likes, comments, shares, views, and other indicators of engagement on social media. For example, a study comparing Facebook and Instagram Live showed real-time interactions (e.g., comments during the stream) are strongly correlated with higher overall engagement* (Chen, Pham, & Tran, 2025).
- ***Feedback Mechanisms:*** *Whether the university maintains channels for direct feedback (live chats, Q&A sessions, hotlines) and how professional and responsive the consulting staff are. The importance of feedback and visibility in digital social networks among scholars and faculty has been documented* (Romero-Hall, Gomez-Vasquez, Forstmane, Ripine, & Da Silva, 2024).
- ***Internal Participation:*** *The degree to which students and staff are encouraged and enabled to contribute to creating and promoting content for the university. Research on stakeholder engagement in universities shows that internal stakeholders (students, faculty) are essential in building trust and strengthening the university's image via social media* (Kwamboka, 2024).

2.3.4. Brand Perception and Reputation

Ultimately, communication activities aim to build and reinforce a strong institutional brand. A university's reputation is a decisive factor for many students and is influenced by perceptions of training quality, research, and graduate employability. For example, a study in Mozambique found that reputation, including academic competence, social attractiveness, and responsible management, has a significant positive effect on student loyalty (Raja, 2023). Another study in North Jakarta showed that student satisfaction and university brand image significantly affect word-of-mouth communication, mediated by brand loyalty (Suwandi & Imam, 2017). Evaluation should measure:

- ***Image Alignment:*** *Does the perceived image of the university align with the desired institutional identity and core values being communicated?* (Le H. Q., 2018)
- ***Reputation Metrics:*** *While difficult to quantify, changes in perception can be tracked through surveys conducted before and after major communication campaigns. Public rankings, while sometimes controversial, are influential and can serve as an indirect metric* (Selten, Neylon, Huang, & Groth, 2020).
- ***Brand Loyalty and Advocacy:*** *A strong brand fosters loyalty, encouraging positive word-of-mouth (WOM) from students and alumni, which is a powerful and cost-effective recruitment tool. The enrollment decision is often influenced by recommendations from family, friends, and teachers* (Suwandi & Imam, 2017).

2.3.5. Behavioral Outcomes and Enrollment Impact

The ultimate measure of admissions communication effectiveness is its impact on behavior, specifically, the decision to apply and enroll (Nguyen, Dang, Nguyen, & Tran, 2022). While a direct causal link can be difficult to establish, several indicators can provide strong evidence. Key metrics include:

- ***Application and Enrollment Data:*** *Tracking the raw numbers of applications received, the ratio of applications to enrollments (yield rate), and whether enrollment quotas are met. These provide measurable bottom-line indicators. The Dalat University survey observed correlations between communication channels and actual enrollment decisions* (La & Le, 2022).
- ***Source of Information:*** *Conducting surveys with newly enrolled students to identify how they first heard about the university and which sources most influenced their choice. The Dalat University study reported that word-of-mouth and Facebook were among the top sources influencing enrolment* (La & Le, 2022). *Similarly, a longitudinal study in Vietnam showed that in the early stages of university choice, students rely heavily on word-of-mouth, whereas in later stages they depend more on institution-generated information and events* (Le, Nguyen, Nguyen, & Nguyen, 2022).
- ***Conversion Rates:*** *For digital channels, key metrics include click-through rates (CTR), ad impressions to application portal visits, and the percentage of applicants who ultimately submit applications. Ruffalo Noel Levitz (2021) reported that nearly half of graduate enrollment leads in some U.S. programs now originate from digital advertising and SEO/organic sources, highlighting the importance of tracking leads through to enrolment. Moreover, community colleges using targeted email nudges (e.g., reminders to complete financial aid, orientation, and registration) observed significant improvements in applicant conversion rates* (EAB, 2020).

3. PROPOSED MODEL FOR EVALUATING ADMISSIONS COMMUNICATION IN VIETNAM

Drawing on theoretical foundations and prior empirical research, this study proposes a multi-dimensional model for evaluating university admissions communication in Vietnam (Figure 1). The model integrates five interrelated dimensions into a unified framework, allowing for both quantitative and qualitative assessment. Similar approaches emphasizing multi-dimensional evaluation in higher education communication have been highlighted in previous studies (Hemsley-Brown & Opla, 2015) (Maringe, 2006).

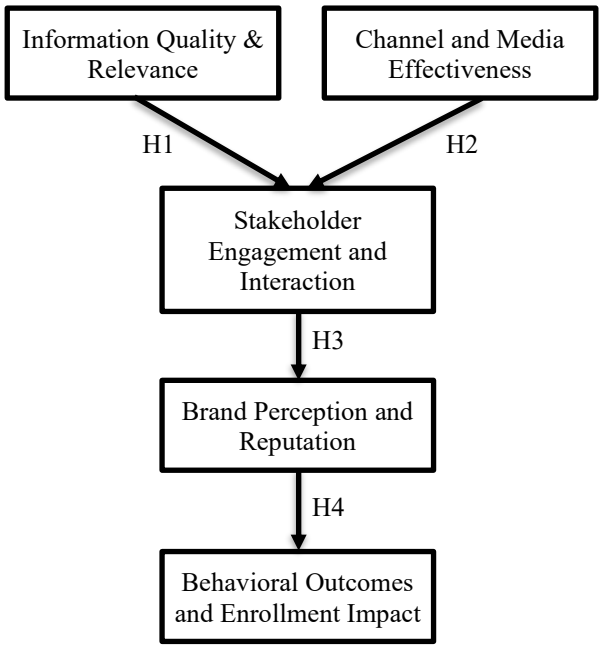


Figure 1: A Multi-Dimensional Model for Evaluating University Admissions Communication

[Source: Developed by the authors]

Building on this framework, the study formulates five research hypotheses to test the relationships among the dimensions and their influence on enrollment outcomes. Each dimension is operationalized through specific key performance indicators (KPIs), which can be measured using diverse tools and methods, consistent with recommendations from higher education marketing and communication research (Table 1) (Ivy, 2001) (Helgesen, 2008).

H1: The Quality and Relevance of Information has a positive impact on Stakeholder Engagement & Interaction.

H2: The Effectiveness of Channels & Media has a positive impact on Stakeholder Engagement & Interaction.

H3: Stakeholder Engagement & Interaction has a positive impact on Brand Perception & Reputation.

H4: Brand Perception & Reputation has a positive impact on Behavioral Outcomes & Enrollment Impact.

H5: The relationship between "Information Quality & Channel Effectiveness" and "Enrollment Impact" is mediated by "Stakeholder Engagement" and "Brand Perception & Reputation."

This model encourages a continuous cycle of planning, implementation, measurement, and refinement. By regularly collecting and analyzing data across these five dimensions, universities can gain a holistic understanding of their communication performance and make evidence-based decisions to improve their strategies.

Table 1: KPIs and Measurement Tools for the Evaluation Model

Evaluation Dimension	Key Performance Indicators(KPIs)	Measurement Tools & Methods
1. Information Quality & Relevance	- Clarity and accuracy of admissions information (Nguyen, Dang, Nguyen, & Tran, 2022) (Drummond, 2004) - Timeliness and consistency of updates across channels (Nguyen, Hoang, & Nguyen, 2023) (Ngo & Do, 2021) - Coverage of key student concerns (careers, programs, fees) (Do & Huynh, 2021)	- Content audit of website, brochures, social media posts (Nguyen, Nguyen, & Le, 2023) (Hoang & Nguyen, 2016) - Surveys of prospective and enrolled students (Ngo H. X., 2021) (Nguyen, Nguyen, & Le, 2023) - Feedback analysis from Q&A sessions (Phan & Nguyen, 2025)
2. Channel & Media Effectiveness	- Website traffic and user engagement (e.g., time on site) (Nguyen, Nguyen, & Le, 2023) - Social media reach and impressions (Nguyen, Nguyen, & Le, 2023)	- Google Analytics, Social media analytics tools (Le N. T., 2023) - Enrollment data from direct consultation events (Phan & Nguyen, 2025) - Cost-benefit analysis of channels

	- Search Engine Optimization (SEO) ranking (Hoang & Nguyen, 2016) - Attendance at admissions events (Hoang & Nguyen, 2016)	(Nguyen Q. T., 2022)
3. Stakeholder Engagement & Intereaction	- Social media interaction rates (likes, comments, shares) (Nguyen, Dang, Nguyen, & Tran, 2022) - Volume and sentiment of online discussions (Hoang M. , 2019) - Responsiveness of admissions staff (hotline, email, chat) (Drummond, 2004) (Ngo H. X., 2021) - Level of participation from current students/alumni (Hoang M. , 2019)	- Social media monitoring tools (e.g., sentiment analysis) (Hoang M. , 2019) - "Mystery shopper" tests of communication channels (Ngo H. X., 2021) - Internal surveys of staff and students (Nguyen, Dang, Nguyen, & Tran, 2022)
4. Brand Perception & Reputation	- Brand awareness and recognition among target audiences (Nguyen, Hoang, & Nguyen, 2023) (Dinh & Dang, 2022) - Perceived institutional reputation (quality, prestige) (Nguyen, Nguyen, & Le, 2023) - Volume and nature of WOM referrals (Ngo D. V., 2023)	- Pre- and post-campaign brand perception surveys (Nguyen, Dang, Nguyen, & Tran, 2022) - Media monitoring and analysis (Phan & Nguyen, 2025) - Analysis of referral sources in student enrollment data (Do & Huynh, 2021)
5. Behavioral Outcomes & Enrollment Impact	- Number of applications received vs. enrollment targets (Ngo H. X., 2021) - Conversion rate (from inquiry to application; application to enrollment) (Nguyen, Nguyen, & Nguyen, 2024) - Geographic diversity of applicants (Nguyen, Nguyen, & Le, 2023) - Source of influence on enrollment decision (Do & Huynh, 2021)	- Web analytics for conversion tracking (Ngo H. X., 2021) - Post-enrollment surveys of new students (Do & Huynh, 2021)

4. METHODOLOGY AND PILOT STUDY

To operationalize the framework, measurement scales were developed drawing from validated sources and adapted to the Vietnamese context. The questionnaire (see Appendix) covered 5 constructs with sub-dimensions:

- *Information Quality & Relevance (IQA, IQB, IQC): clarity, timeliness, comprehensiveness.*
- *Channel & Media Effectiveness (CMA, CMB, CMC): ease of use, effectiveness of events, intention to use digital channels.*
- *Stakeholder Engagement & Interaction (SEA, SEB, SEC, SED): online engagement, discussion, responsiveness, alumni participation.*
- *Brand Perception & Reputation (BPA, BPB, BPC): brand recognition, academic reputation, word-of-mouth.*
- *Behavioral Outcomes & Enrollment Impact (BOA, BOB, BOC): application consideration, conversion, enrollment intention.*

The pilot survey was administered to 183 respondents including high school students, parents, and current students of Hanoi University of Science and Technology (HUST), over the period July to August 2025. Respondents were selected using a purposive sampling approach to capture perspectives from both prospective applicants and stakeholders already engaged with the institution. All items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Data analysis proceeded in two stages. First, reliability testing demonstrated high internal consistency across the five dimensions, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.80 for all scales. Second, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) confirmed the expected five-factor structure, with each item loading clearly on its intended

construct. This provides empirical evidence of the construct validity of the proposed model.

The pilot results revealed several important insights. Information Quality and Channel Effectiveness showed strong positive correlations with Stakeholder Engagement, which in turn strongly influenced Brand Perception. Furthermore, Brand Perception was a significant predictor of Behavioral Outcomes, consistent with the hypothesized causal chain. These findings provide preliminary support for the theoretical framework and justify its application in broader, multi-institutional studies.

Overall, the pilot study confirms that the proposed scales are reliable and valid for evaluating admissions communication in the Vietnamese higher education context. The results highlight the importance of integrating stakeholder engagement and brand perception as mediators, underscoring the need for a holistic approach to communication evaluation.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The pilot findings confirm the robustness of the proposed evaluation model. By integrating five dimensions, the model provides a holistic and practical framework for assessing admissions communication effectiveness in Vietnamese universities.

The validated measurement scales offer practical tools for institutional managers to systematically collect data, monitor performance, and refine strategies. Furthermore, the results highlight the importance of internal stakeholders (students and alumni) as communication ambassadors, consistent with global findings (Chang & Lum, 2024; Kwamboka, 2024).

Future research should conduct large-scale surveys across multiple universities to test the model's generalizability. By embedding evaluation into strategic management, universities can strengthen brand reputation, enhance stakeholder trust, and improve enrollment performance in Vietnam's increasingly competitive higher education landscape.

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