



## Philosophical analysis of the establishment of the University of public relations at Guangzhou polytechnic open university

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received: May 22, 2024

Revised: September 16, 2024

Accepted: October 29, 2024

#### Keyword:

University of public relations, vocational colleges, propaganda work, data collection work, supervision study

### ABSTRACT

This research examines the state of public relations in higher education institutions, focusing on coordination, propaganda, data collection, emergency management, and consulting within vocational colleges. It aims to establish fundamental principles for effective public relations in these institutions. Employing a qualitative approach, the study utilizes questionnaires and interviews with teachers, administrators, and students from four locations in Guangdong Province: Zhongshan, Baiyunshan, Nanhai, and Guangdong Vocational College. A total of 2910 participants were considered, with a sample of 341 selected through proportional simple random sampling, adhering to Krejcie and Morgan's sample size table. The results show that these institutions' public relations efforts lack coordination, leading to significant delays in information collection and inefficiencies in crisis management. The study suggests enhancing crisis management, coordination, and service functions in university public relations.

## Introduction

Public relations (PR) in higher education encompasses the strategies and practices employed by universities to manage their image and relationships with various stakeholders. It includes coordination, publicity, information gathering, crisis management, and consulting (Daymon & Holloway, 2010). PR is both a practical profession and a theoretical discipline, and its principles are essential for fostering mutual understanding and improving organizational image (Yang, 2024).

College public relations are vital for establishing and maintaining the university's image, building relationships with the public, and addressing educational and management needs. Effective PR ensures the alignment of the university's actions with societal expectations and advancements (Worapongpat et al., 2020). Key principles guiding university PR include two-way communication, mutual benefit, innovation, truthfulness, and respect for human dignity (Chen & Culbertson, 2003).

Despite its importance, university PR often faces several challenges. These include inadequate coordination, insufficient publicity, ineffective information collection, and delays in emergency management. These challenges stem from sluggish communication channels, a lack of innovation, and inadequate public relations staff (Chen, 2013; Ning et al., 2023). To address these problems, universities should implement comprehensive PR strategies, including establishing news release systems, improving crisis management, and organizing regular events (Zhang et al., 2021).

Universities use PR as a unique management function to convey information, enhance public understanding, and foster a positive organizational image (Ngok & Guo, 2008). It involves a continuous, purposeful process of communication between the university and its stakeholders (Liu et al., 2015). Effective public relations requires a nuanced understanding of the relationship between the university and the public, as well as the ability to adapt to evolving societal demands (Rhoads et al., 2014; Po et al., 2015).

The philosophical underpinnings of PR highlight its dual nature: as a practical activity and as a conceptual framework for understanding organizational communication (Huang et al., 2016). While modern PR emerged in the early 20th century, it remains an evolving discipline, with ongoing debates about its theoretical foundations and practical applications (Han, 2014; Xiong, 2012).

## **Objective**

1. Investigate the current practices in university public relations, focusing on coordination, propaganda, data collection, emergency management, and consulting. Aim to establish foundational principles for effective public relations in higher education institutions.

Explore the Relationship Between University Public Relations and Vocational Colleges:

2. Analyze how university public relations impact vocational colleges and propose improvements to enhance PR practices in these institutions.

## **Literature review**

Public relations (PR) refers to the strategic communication process that builds relationships between organizations and their publics. The term "public relations" translates to managing relationships between many people and the public or among the public (Thanuttamanon, 2021). Historically, PR activities can be traced back to ancient civilizations. For instance, Confucius traveled and lectured extensively, while historical figures such as Liu Bei and Zhuge Liang utilized personal diplomacy to enhance their influence. In ancient Greece, Aristotle's Rhetoric provided early insights into influencing public opinion through communication techniques (Huang et al., 2023).

Modern PR as a formal discipline emerged in the early 20th century in the United States. Edward Bernays, a key figure in the field, is credited with founding the theory of public relations as a distinct discipline separate from journalism and communication. His works, including *Public Opinion* (1923) and *Public Relations* (1952), established foundational principles and systematic study methods for PR, making it a recognized and independent field (Xunan & Worapongpat, 2023).

Development of public relations in China:

The concept of PR began to gain traction in China in the 1980s, with significant

developments in both practice and scholarship. Initial texts, such as the "Introduction to the Art of Image Building Public Relations" (1986), laid the groundwork for understanding PR in the Chinese context. Since then, numerous monographs and textbooks have been published, reflecting the growing importance and complexity of PR in China (Min & Worapongpat, 2023). The scope of PR research in Chinese schools often includes necessity, strategies, and internal and external public relations aspects (Zi Yun & Worapongpat, 2023).

#### Philosophical and Functional Aspects of University Public Relations:

University public relations represent a specialized management function that focuses on conveying organizational and personal information to improve public perceptions and foster mutual understanding. This involves two-way communication between the institution and various stakeholders, including government bodies, organizations, and individuals (TianShu & Worapongpat, 2022). Effective university PR aims to secure public understanding, support, and cooperation, thus enhancing the institution's image and creating a conducive environment for its development.

Despite its importance, philosophical research on university public relations remains limited, and existing literature primarily addresses practical and strategic aspects. Works on university PR often focus on practical issues rather than deeper philosophical considerations. However, a comprehensive understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of PR could provide valuable insights into its development and application in educational settings (Thanuttamanon, 2021).

### Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework for investigating university public relations involves several methodological approaches, each contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the field. Here's a detailed outline of the specific research methods:

#### 1. Investigation and research method

**Purpose:** To examine the practical implementation and operational aspects of public relations in colleges and universities.

**Approach:** Conduct a detailed and systematic investigation into the current practices and challenges faced in university public relations. This will include direct observation, interviews with PR professionals and stakeholders, and analysis of PR activities and strategies employed by various institutions.

**Outcome:** Develop a nuanced understanding of how public relations functions within the academic environment and identify areas for improvement based on real-world operations.

#### 2. Literature method

**Purpose:** To build a theoretical foundation by reviewing existing literature relevant to public relations in higher education.

#### **Approach:**

Identify and review scholarly articles, books, and reports that address public relations theories, practices, and case studies, particularly those focused on educational institutions. Summarize and synthesize key findings and perspectives from the literature to inform the research topic and develop a theoretical framework.

**Outcome:** Integrate established views and theories into the research, providing a scholarly context and grounding for the investigation into university public relations.

#### 3. Case analysis method

**Purpose:** To apply philosophical and theoretical perspectives to analyze specific instances of university public relations.

**Approach:**

Select and examine case studies of universities with notable public relations practices or challenges.

Apply philosophical theories to analyze these cases, focusing on how PR strategies align with or deviate from theoretical principles.

**Outcome:** Gain insights into how theoretical concepts manifest in practice and identify best practices or areas of concern within university PR.

#### 4. Comparative Analysis Method

**Purpose:** To understand the variations in public relations practices across different environments, events, and individuals.

**Approach:**

Compare and contrast PR strategies and outcomes in various university settings, including different types of institutions (e.g., public vs. private) and different geographical locations.

Analyze the similarities and differences in PR approaches and their effectiveness in different contexts.

**Outcome:** Provide a comparative perspective that highlights successful strategies and potential pitfalls, offering robust arguments and recommendations for enhancing public relations in universities.

**Summary**

The conceptual framework integrates multiple research methods to comprehensively explore university public relations:

**Investigation and Research:** Direct examination of PR practices in action.

**Literature Review:** Theoretical and historical context through existing research.

**Case Analysis:** Application of philosophical theories to specific instances.

**Comparative Analysis:** Evaluation of PR strategies across different contexts.

## Methods

### Philosophical analysis

**Objective:** To conduct a philosophical analysis of the establishment of university public relations, focusing on Guangzhou Vocational College, Guangdong Open University, and their affiliated centers in Guangdong, Zhongshan, Baiyunshan, and Nanhai.

**Scope:** The analysis will involve teachers, administrators, and educational institution administrators within the departments of Artificial Intelligence Technology, Computer Network Technology, Software Technology, and Computer Application Technology.

### Population and sample

**Population:** Teachers and student administrators in the departments of Artificial Intelligence Technology, Computer Network Technology, Software Technology, and Computer Application Technology at Guangdong Vocational College and Guangdong Open University. This includes a total of 2,910 individuals.

**Sample Size:** Based on Krejcie and Morgan's table (1970), the required sample size is 341 people. The sample will be selected using simple proportional random sampling (Proportional Simple Random Sampling) to ensure a representative subset of the population.

**Research instruments****Part 1: General status questionnaire**

Purpose: To gather demographic information about respondents.

Format: Check-list format including categories such as gender, age, education level, and work experience.

**Part 2: Philosophical Analysis Questionnaire**

Purpose: To collect opinions regarding the philosophical aspects of establishing university public relations.

Respondents: Teachers and administrators from Guangdong, Zhongshan, Baiyunshan, and Nanhai, Guangdong Vocational College, Guangdong Open University.

**Part 3: Educational supervision questionnaire**

Purpose: To obtain opinions on the role of educational supervision, including advice, promotion, support, monitoring, and evaluation related to teaching and learning.

Focus: Development of teaching practices, professional development, and assessment methods.

**Creating and quantifying the quality of tools**

1.1 Framework Development: Review documents, concepts, theories, and research on the philosophy of university public relations and educational supervision to establish a framework. This includes defining specific terms and setting guidelines for creating questions.

1.2 Questionnaire Design: Develop a comprehensive questionnaire based on the established framework.

**Quality assessment:**

2.1 Content Validity: Obtain feedback from 3 experts to evaluate the accuracy, comprehensiveness, and wording of the questionnaire items. Calculate the Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC) to assess the alignment with research objectives

2.2 Reliability Testing: Conduct a pilot test with a non-sample population to determine the reliability of the questionnaire. Revise the questionnaire based on feedback and test results to ensure robustness

Finalization: Refine the questionnaire to create a finalized version for use with the actual sample.

**Data collection****Primary data:**

Methods: In-depth interviews with target groups and administration of questionnaires.

Purpose: To gather direct responses and insights related to university public relations and educational supervision  
Secondary Data: Sources: Collect information from various documents, including books, academic papers, research reports, and electronic media.

Purpose: To provide additional context and background information relevant to the study.

**Data analysis and statistics qualitative data analysis**

Approach: Perform content analysis on information obtained from interviews and document reviews.

Objective: To identify themes, patterns, and insights related to the philosophical aspects of university public relations and educational supervision.

**Quantitative data analysis**

Methods: Use statistical techniques to analyze questionnaire responses. This includes descriptive statistics to summarize data and inferential statistics to draw conclusions and make recommendations based on the sample.

## Results

### 1. Principles and Necessity of Public Relations in Colleges and Universities

#### Basic Connotation and Function:

Public relations in colleges and universities encompass a range of activities aimed at managing the institution's image and relationships with various stakeholders. These activities include managing communications, handling crises, and fostering positive relationships with the public.

#### Principles:

Transparency: Ensuring open and honest communication.

Consistency: Maintaining a consistent message and image.

Engagement: Actively engaging with the public and responding to their concerns.

Accountability: Taking responsibility for actions and communications.

#### Necessity:

Establishing strong public relations is essential for building and maintaining a positive image, enhancing the institution's reputation, and effectively managing crises. It helps in fostering trust and ensuring that the university's objectives are communicated clearly to all stakeholders.

### 2. Subject and Object of Public Relations in Colleges and Universities

#### Subject:

The subject of university public relations is the university organization itself. This includes the university administration, departments, and affiliated entities.

#### Object:

The object of public relations is the public, which includes students, faculty, staff, alumni, prospective students, and the general community. The interaction between the university and these groups can vary based on societal values and the institution's goals.

### 3. Existing Problems, Causes, and Impacts

#### Problems Identified:

Inadequate Coordination: Lack of effective communication and coordination among different departments and stakeholders within the university.

Insufficient Publicity: Limited outreach and promotional activities to raise awareness about the university's programs and achievements.

Incomplete Information Collection: Gaps in collecting and analyzing data related to public opinion and institutional performance.

Lagging Emergency Management: Delayed and inefficient response to crises and emergencies.

Inadequate Consultation: Superficial or ineffective advisory and consultative processes.

Disconnected Functions: Public relations functions that are not aligned with the university's strengths and societal development.

#### Causes:

Inefficient Communication Channels: Poor internal and external communication pathways that hinder effective public relations.

Strong University Standard Thought: Rigid adherence to traditional methods and resistance to innovation in public relations practices.

Lack of Innovation: Insufficient creativity and modernization in public relations strategies.

Superficial Public Relations Work: Public relations activities that do not delve deeply into addressing stakeholder needs.

Low Quality of Personnel: Inadequate skills and training among public relations staff.  
 Misalignment with Social Development: Public relations efforts that do not keep pace with societal changes and demands.

Impacts:

Reduced Effectiveness: Decreased effectiveness in managing the university's image and relationships.

Negative Public Perception: Poor public perception and reduced trust in the university.

Increased Risk: Higher risk of mishandling crises and emergencies.

Missed Opportunities: Loss of opportunities for engagement and growth due to ineffective public relations.

#### 4. Recommendations for Improvement

Establish a Press Release System: Develop and implement a structured press release system to manage communications and announcements effectively.

Strengthen Crisis Management: Enhance crisis management strategies to ensure timely and effective responses to emergencies.

Improve Coordination and Service Functions: Foster better coordination among departments and improve the public relations service functions to address stakeholder needs more effectively.

Regular Special Activities: Organize regular special activities focused on public relations to engage with the community and enhance the university's visibility and reputation.

These measures aim to address the identified problems, enhance the effectiveness of public relations, and align the university's public relations activities with contemporary needs and societal expectations.

## Discussion

### The Challenge of balancing stability and development

In the context of Chinese higher education, the dichotomy between stability and development remains a significant challenge. As noted, while stability is crucial, the pursuit of development is often described as an "absolute truth" in addressing the evolving needs of colleges and universities. This tension highlights the difficulties institutions face as they navigate the complexities of growth and change amidst a backdrop of established norms and expectations.

### Contradictions and Influences in University Development

The development of colleges and universities in China is characterized by several prominent contradictions and challenges:

Safety and Stability: Ensuring the safety and stability of the campus environment is fundamental. This encompasses physical safety, as well as stability in institutional operations and academic integrity.

Employee Treatment and Welfare Distribution: Fair treatment and equitable distribution of resources and benefits among faculty and staff are crucial for maintaining morale and productivity.

Educational and Humanistic Environment: The quality of the educational environment, including teaching methods, facilities, and support systems, impacts both academic outcomes and the overall humanistic experience of students and staff.

Natural Environment: Environmental factors, such as campus sustainability and green spaces, contribute to the overall quality of life within the university setting.

To address these contradictions effectively, universities must engage in continuous

development and innovation. This requires adapting to both international trends and domestic conditions, ensuring that institutional policies and practices align with contemporary needs and expectations.

#### The Role of public relations in addressing challenges

Public relations play a crucial role in managing and resolving the challenges faced by universities:

**Coordination of Various Factors:** Effective public relations strategies help in coordinating efforts across different aspects of university life, including humanistic, natural, and social environments. This coordination can enhance the overall functioning and reputation of the institution.

**Enrichment and Improvement:** Continuous enrichment and improvement of public relations practices are essential for addressing emerging issues and serving the development goals of colleges and universities. This includes adapting strategies to align with societal changes and institutional needs.

**Theoretical and Decision-Making Support:** By providing a theoretical foundation and decision-making support, public relations contribute to the strategic planning and policy formulation processes. This support helps universities navigate the complexities of development and make informed decisions that foster growth and stability.

#### Conclusion

The dynamic landscape of higher education in China necessitates a balanced approach to stability and development. Universities must continuously adapt to changing political and economic conditions while fostering an environment that supports growth and innovation. Public relations serve as a vital tool in this process, helping institutions manage challenges, coordinate efforts, and contribute to both theoretical understanding and practical decision-making. Through ongoing development and refinement, public relations can enhance the effectiveness of universities and support their evolution in a rapidly changing world.

### **Body of knowledge**

This paper presents an original analysis of university public relations through the lens of Marxist theory, exploring the subject-object relationship within this field and its broader implications for the development of higher education institutions. By employing Marxist perspectives, the paper delves into the dynamics between universities (subjects) and their external audiences (objects), examining the necessity and impact of establishing robust public relations frameworks within these institutions.

#### Contribution to Knowledge

**Theoretical Framework:** The application of Marxist theory to public relations in universities provides a novel perspective that enriches the existing body of knowledge. This theoretical approach highlights the importance of understanding the power dynamics and social relationships involved in university public relations, shedding light on how these interactions influence the development and stability of higher education institutions.

**Identification of Problems and Causes:** The paper identifies and analyzes key problems facing universities, such as inadequate coordination, insufficient publicity, and lagging emergency management. It also investigates the underlying causes of these issues, including inefficient communication channels, a lack of innovation, and misalignment with societal development. This comprehensive analysis offers valuable insights into the systemic challenges that universities encounter in their public relations efforts.



**Proposed Solutions:** The paper contributes to the body of knowledge by proposing practical solutions to address the identified problems. These solutions include establishing a press release system, enhancing crisis management capabilities, and strengthening the coordination and service functions of public relations. By offering actionable recommendations, the paper provides a framework for universities to improve their public relations practices and better navigate the challenges they face.

**Contextual Relevance:** The discussion on the balance between stability and development in Chinese higher education adds a critical dimension to the understanding of public relations in this context. The paper argues that while stability is crucial, continuous development and adaptation to the political and economic environment are essential for fostering growth and innovation in universities. This perspective underscores the importance of aligning public relations strategies with the broader goals of institutional development and societal progress.

**Theoretical and Practical Implications:** The paper's exploration of public relations as a tool for coordinating and solving university problems emphasizes its role in enhancing the humanistic, natural, and social environments of higher education institutions. By demonstrating the potential of public relations to provide theoretical and decision-making support, the paper highlights its significance in shaping the future of university development and contributing to social advancement.

## **Acknowledgements**

This paper draws upon Marxist theory to explore the intricate dynamics of public relations within colleges and universities. By analyzing the relationship between the subject and object of public relations and the necessity of establishing effective communication frameworks, this study underscores the importance of addressing the challenges and complexities faced by higher education institutions.

The continuous evolution of higher education in China presents a range of contradictions, including issues related to safety, employee welfare, and the broader educational environment. These challenges necessitate ongoing development, innovation, and policy reform within university organizations. Institutions must adapt to both domestic and international contexts to cultivate talents that contribute meaningfully to societal development.

Public relations play a crucial role in navigating these challenges by addressing various factors such as the humanistic, natural, and social environments that impact universities. Effective public relations strategies can help universities maintain stability, enhance their public image, and support their growth.

The insights and recommendations presented in this paper aim to provide a theoretical basis and practical guidance for universities striving to improve their public relations efforts. The continuous enrichment and improvement of public relations practices are essential for universities to effectively serve their development goals and contribute to broader social progress.

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