

PEDTR 2019**18th International Scientific Conference “Problems of Enterprise Development:
Theory and Practice”****EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT INFORMATIZATION AS A PROCESS OF
THE UNIVERSITY PR-PROMOTION**

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Abstract

The article is devoted to determining the place of PR-activity in the system of promoting educational services, forming a positive image of the high education institution (HEI). The demographic situation creates stiff competition in the educational services market. The role of PR activities in the field of education in the current environment is increasing dramatically. In such conditions, competent promotion of the own product can become a decisive success factor. Creating a system of effective communication helps to increase the HEI competitiveness. Understanding the role and significance of PR activities for HEIs, the authors identified tasks to form the desired image and reputation that can be solved with the help of an effective PR company. The main problem in this area is that the effect of PR activities is not immediately apparent, but receiving information about a HEI and its product over a certain period, the consumer develops trust, respect for this organization, and awareness of its products and services. If a higher educational institution has a goal to improve its own reputation and image, then it is necessary to combine work on the PR image of both the own full-time professionals and engaged specialists from a PR agency. In this case, full-time employees perform current, internal work, and external consultants are engaged in the periodic PR company to attract new applicants to the HEI. The authors concluded that no one PR company can save an educational organization if it does not constantly and effectively use modern interactive information technologies.

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Keywords: Information technologies, information environment, PR promotion, PR activities, HEI.

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1. Introduction

Informatization of various forms of educational activity in modern market conditions is determined by the transition from the market of educational services to the market of consumers of these services. Nowadays, the volume of supply in the field of educational services significantly exceeds the demand level. This is due to the entry into the market of a large number of non-state universities that do not always faithfully perform the promised services and it leads to the low confidence in them from both sides: applicants and organizations that need young professionals. Currently, there is a trend of fierce competition for each applicant, not only among non-state high educational institutions, but also among state ones. The government of the Russian Federation tries to control the current situation in this market and dictates the need for finding new ways to improve the competitiveness of higher education institutions, including through the use of new information technologies. Such technologies are increasingly being used to transmit information and ensure student-teacher interaction in the modern education systems. Therefore, modern teachers should be competent by using them in their professional activities (Nikolaeva, Nikolaev, Shikhovtsova, & Shikhovtsov, 2014; Saveleva & Berdnikov, 2016; Saveleva, Ivanova, & Shekhanin, 2015).

2. Problem Statement

The process of PR-promotion allows showing the uniqueness of services provided by a particular educational institution, its identity, quality, and value. The organization of PR activities and the use of PR technologies in the educational field becomes a necessity, an urgent task that has its own specifics and significance for every educational institution (Balitskaya, 2017). The research tasks include:

- Determine the role and significance of PR activities in an educational institution;
- Identify ways of effective PR activities of an educational organization;
- Analyze the work on PR activities at a particular HEI.

3. Research Questions

The main problem in this area is that the effect of organizing and managing PR activities is not immediately apparent, but these activities lead to awareness of consumers (applicants and their parents) of the specific features of a particular educational organization and its services. Therefore, the consumer gradually develops trust and respect for this organization. However, taking into account all the variety of offers on the market of educational services, an applicant may experience great difficulties when choosing an educational institution (Ashmarina et al., 2019). And since now every higher education institution is fighting for a greater number of applicants entering it, the existing prestige of the institution plays a great role by choosing a particular HEI together with the quality of the provided services and the professional level of teaching staff.

4. Purpose of the Study

PR-activity is a communicative function of management that allows an organization to adapt to its environment; as a result, this function can change or save the company in order to achieve its organizational goals. This concept reflects a principled approach to both the goal of the PR-activity and its content, being at the same time the most complete definition of this phenomenon. Therefore, PR-activities of an educational institution should be primarily directed not to the promotion of consumer properties of its services for applicants, but to the explanation of a positive value of these services for the society and a consumer. The authors believe that the purpose of PR-activities of a HEI is to convince applicants and their parents to think in a new way or in a different way, or to convince them to save the previous positive opinion. The purpose of this research is to analyze the number and quality of incoming applicants to the Samara State University of Economics, and the impact of PR-activities on this indicator.

5. Research Methods

The tendency to improve the quality of services provided by a HEI indicates the application of a strategy that is focused primarily on a consumer, and, consequently, on the increase in the level of his satisfaction with educational services. In order to achieve the research goal, the following research methods were used: study and analysis of scientific and methodological literature on the research issues, content analysis, qualimetry, and standardized observation.

6. Findings

To understand the role and significance of PR-activities of an educational institution, we focus on the following aspects:

- Any educational organization is involved in communication processes; therefore, it is interested in attracting partners who can provide support and influence the success of the organization;
- Not all higher education institutions in Russia use state PR-funds at the domestic and international level, so they have to look for PR tools and methods in modern market conditions. Therefore, an educational organization becomes a subject of market relations, and as we know, the market cannot exist without competition. The development of a competitive environment creates new, non-price parameters for the organizational positioning. Therefore, it is necessary to systematically and purposefully build the image and good reputation of the organization. Otherwise, the image itself can be formed without the participation of the organization, the question is whether it is the image that the organization would like to have;
- In an educational organization, as in any other, the human factor plays a huge role; forming a team as a group of like-minded people who share the policy of the management and are ready to solve any set of tasks jointly. Here, too, the key concept of PR activities is "public", which refers to the activities of groups, or a single person, that can affect well-being of the society under certain circumstances. When the group's position on an issue is developed, it is formed as an opinion. Accordingly, by changing the public opinion, which becoming stable, appears

in the verbal form or in the form of an action, we get the opportunity to influence actions of groups which are interesting for us.

It should be noted that taking into account all these aspects, it is necessary to constantly study the public opinion. This determines two main areas of the PR activity of a HEI:

- Study of the public opinion, based on the results of which the required policy is developed and management decisions are made;
- Creating the necessary information flow in order to distribute the relevant information.

There are different ways to organize PR activities:

- To hire a full-time specialist (PR Manager) who will carry out the communication efforts that are necessary for establishing proper relationships with different public groups;
- To create the own PR service department;
- To attract consultants from professional PR agencies who will implement the necessary activities themselves;- to combine the work of own PR managers with employees from professional PR agencies.

Samara State University of Economics (SSEU) has its own small PR service department, people who work there are assigned a large amount of PR work; they know the external and internal environment of the organization, the public opinion about the HEI and are interested in success. However, this service is under constant pressure from the administrative staff, in addition, the own PR service department requires certain costs to maintain its operation, but the HEI's top management always strives to save in this aspect. And, therefore, the best PR agents will not do the low-paid work. When it comes to solving various PR tasks, professional agencies use well-established contacts with the necessary people and organizations; these contacts serve as an indisputable advantage of external consulting (Ashmarina, Kandrashina, Izmailov, & Mirzayev, 2020). The negative side of such agencies is the high cost of their services, insufficient knowledge of the organization and its problems, incomplete control by the HEI's management over the realized PR activities, as well as the possible reluctance of mass media to interact with this institution.

Therefore, you should not expect a special effect from the SSEU PR department, since two people combine functions of different specialists: communication with the external environment, content of internal news of the organization, management of advertising activities, communication with the mass media, writing various materials, creating exhibitions, publishing a university newspaper, accompanying the management, etc. However, this budget option is still better than nothing, and it allows focusing on the most necessary PR activities. In addition, it facilitates the management control over the work of the university PR department. Since the PR activities at this university (SSEU) are primarily aimed at increasing the number of incoming applicants, let's consider these indicators for the last five years (Table 01).

Table 01. Admission results of applicants to SSEU for undergraduate programs in distance learning and full-time education programs

	Number of applicants	Number of budget places	Number of diplomas with honor	Average score on the Unified State Exam results
2015	2543	601	684	77,8
2016	2522	541	697	81,4
2017	2679	481	455	81,0
2018	2189	362	375	83,0
2019	2320	270	313	83,6

Source: authors.

From the Table 01 we see that despite decreasing total number of applicants and reduction in the number of budget places, the quality of incoming students (the average score on the exam) is improving, although the number of diplomas with honor by admitted applicants has also significantly reduced. Based on this, we can conclude that despite all the subjective reasons, a well-coordinated and professional work of the PR service department is necessary to increase the number of applicants who want to enter the HEI.

7. Conclusion

In our opinion, if the goal of a higher educational institution is to improve its own reputation and image, then it is necessary to combine the work on PR-image of both the own staff and outsourcing professionals from a PR agency. In this case, full-time employees perform current, internal work, and external consultants are connected to this work for the period of a PR company to attract new applicants.

Thus, understanding the role and significance of PR activities of an organization, we can outline some ways to create the desired image and reputation that can be achieved with the help of an effective PR company in a HEI, namely: to establish and continually improve the image and reputation of the organization; to create the positive recognition of its administration (top management) in the professional communities; to give the educational events conducted in the organization a social meaning; to establish an efficient system of business communication in the organization; to form the HEI's information aura; to regularly adjust the public opinion in situations that are unfavorable for the educational organization; to implement fundraising and lobbying of goals of the educational organization; to create a friendly atmosphere within the institution.

But not one, even the best PR company, can save an educational organization if it does not constantly use modern interactive and information technologies. HEI's leaders should not forget that information technology already occupies a large part of our education, and will definitely expand its influence in this area in the near future. Therefore, students and teachers should improve their knowledge of using ICTs and their tools in the educational process, as well as improve previously created methods of conducting classes and create new ones.

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