



The influence of public relations promotional strategies on student enrolment in Tanzanian tertiary institutions

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Recommended Reference: Sanga, F. E. (2026). The influence of public relations promotional strategies on student enrolment in Tanzanian tertiary institutions. *African Quarterly Social Science Review*, 3(2), 482–489. <https://doi.org/10.51867/AQSSR.3.2.42>

ABSTRACT

There is a deliberate effort taken by the government of Tanzania to increase enrolment in tertiary education, shifting from an elite education model to a mass education system to meet the demands of a growing economy; this makes the student enrolment process a crucial aspect of educational institution management. This study assesses the influence of public relations promotional strategies on student enrolment. The study was guided by framing theory, which posits that the way information is presented – its context, emphasis and wording – shapes how audiences interpret, process, and act upon it. The study employed a cross-sectional research design. The target population was students, public relations and administration officers from a tertiary university in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania. The study used a sample of 120 respondents from tertiary institutions in Dar es Salaam, employing simple random and proportional sampling methods. Data were collected through questionnaires, and quantitative data were analysed through SPSS ver. 21 (IBM). The study findings revealed that media relations, government relations, community relations, customer relations, and marketing communications show significant influence ($p < .05$), which implies that those are strong strategies used by PR to influence student enrolment. The results showed that promotional strategies for public relations had a positive and significant effect on student enrolment at tertiary institutions. Public relations promotional strategies have improved their understanding and made them feel emotionally engaged. This understanding has made them confident and improved their trust in the institution and social well-being. Therefore, tertiary institutions' management needs to increase efforts in terms of PR competence and financial issues to enhance student enrolment.

Keywords: Advertisement, Enrolment, Public Relations, Strategies, Tertiary

I. INTRODUCTION

Tertiary education systems around the world have grown dramatically in recent decades. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, virtually every affluent democracy had formed a High Participation System (HPS) (Czarnecki & Korpi, 2025). 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. (Tran et al. 2024). Existing research confirms the importance of PR in influencing student enrolment (Lee & Smith, 2023). Studies have shown that a positive institutional image cultivated through effective PR strategies can attract students (Jones & 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 & Davis, 2021).

Additionally, the influence of PR on student retention and the evolving role of social media in contemporary PR campaigns require further exploration (Ki et al., 2021; Eaton & Cates, 2023). Students are one of the important components in higher education and function as an indicator of the quality and popularity of a higher education institution. The process of obtaining new students is carried out through the delivery of effective information to prospective students through socialization and promotion carried out by public relations (Amin & Saputra, 2024). Researches show that well-crafted PR activities, tailored to different student groups and utilizing digital platforms, significantly impact student perceptions and enrolment decisions. It delves deeper than simply confirming PR's effectiveness, offering insights into how specific PR tactics can resonate with student needs and expectations, effective communication in an educational context must clearly and attractively convey the unique values and advantages of the institution. (Trital et al., 2024) By understanding the impact of specific PR strategies on student perceptions and enrolment choices, universities can refine their outreach efforts (Lee & Smith, 2023).

In the increasingly fierce competition, educational institutions are required to not only provide quality education, but also build a strong reputation in the eyes of the community. Brand awareness is an important element in increasing the competitiveness of educational institutions, establishing cooperation with various parties, and strengthening the



image of the institution (Amin & Saputra, 2024). This success heavily depends on the public relations strategies implemented by the institution.

In Tanzania, the expansion of tertiary institutions has led to high competition for student enrolment, studies shows that public relations use mostly social media as a significant tool in influencing public relations programmes towards improving stakeholders' relations in higher learning institutions. However, some scholars such as Lee and Smith, (2023) found that it was essential for Higher Learning Institutions to use social media especially in this digital era so as to meet the competitive edge. It was however further revealed that there is still limit use of social media among the selected Higher Learning Institutions where the use of traditional media was predominant over social media in engaging Higher Learning Institutions stakeholders. This coincides with Muniko and Akpabio's (2023) observation about the use of social media by the various organizations in Tanzania. The authors argue that PR practitioners in Tanzania have a positive attitude towards social media even though some of them are not comfortable with using it.

Communicating an organization product/service offering to target market has witnessed tremendous and drastic changes especially with information communication and technology (ICT). The importance of digital technology and the internet as platforms of marketing communication is growing. More importantly, the media consumption habits of consumers are changing. Consumers are moving from traditional media to digital media. Based on this change, organizations are wittingly entering the digital environment. This has brought about heavy reliance on digital media by both consumers and organizations. Robust body of literature exists on studies about using digital technology to promote tertiary education in many countries. For instance, Bowen et al. (2012) conducted a descriptive study in Kenya to establish the marketing strategies that attract and increase student enrolment in private universities in the country. The authors 'findings show that advertising through an institution 's website, mass media, social media networks such as Facebook, open day on campus, career fair involvement, encouraging word-of-mouth and alumni support are part of marketing strategies that can offer opportunity to attract and increase student enrolment.

According to the British Institute of Public Relations, public relations is the whole effort made in a planned manner in order to create and maintain good will and mutual understanding between an organization and all audiences. (Czarnecki & Korpi, 2025) So its activities manage communication between the organization and the public. Thinking, planning and devoting resources to build and maintain mutual understanding between the organization and the public. According to Rine et al. (2021), public relations is a management function that recognizes, builds and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its various audiences where the success or failure of the organization is. The definition of public relations (public relations) is an effort to build and maintain a good and useful reputation, image and communication between the organization and the community. The success or failure of an organization can be affected by public relations activities. Therefore, public relations is a social science that analyzes trends, predicts, their consequences, advises organizational leaders and implements programs of planned activities that are beneficial to both the organization and its audience.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

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. (Tran et al., 2024). Existing research confirms the importance of PR in influencing student enrolment (Eaton & Cates, 2023; Lee & Smith, 2023). Studies have shown that a positive institutional image cultivated through effective PR strategies can attract students (Rine et al., 2021; Jones & Smith, 2022). Furthermore, the young generation, which comprises of the youth in the ages of 18-35, and who are mainly students, constitute the most adept users of social media as public relations tool. Despite of the importance public relations promotional strategies on enrolment of students in tertiary institutions in Tanzania, limited research has been carried out in this area. This resulted into a research gap that needs to be filled through an examination of the influence of public relations promotional strategies on student enrolment in tertiary institutions in Tanzania.

1.2 Research Objective

- i. To assess the influence of public relations promotional strategies on student enrolment in Tanzania tertiary institutions
- ii. To assess the appropriate strategies used by public relations to ensure student enrolment in Tanzania tertiary institutions



II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

The study was guided by framing theory, founded by Erving Goffman 1974, the theory posits that the way information is presented its context, emphasis and wording shapes how audiences interpret, process, and act upon it. By highlighting specific aspects while omitting others, it acts as a frame that guides perceptions and decision making, indirectly influencing attitude and behaviors. The theory was relevant to this study because the effect of the way information is presented to the audience shapes the way students interpret and enroll in the institutions.

2.2 Empirical Review

Universities of any nation reflect its economic, social and all human development. Male and female enrolment provides valuable insights into a nation's educational environment. The government of Nepal has prioritized female scholarship recipients over males and encouraged female enrolment in educational institutions. The University's faculties, institutes, research centers, schools, departments, and campuses support and improve teaching and learning. They also train, study, and coordinate academic, athletic, and welfare programs. Higher education accessibility is the goal of these programs (UGC, 2020). Participation in tertiary education has grown dramatically in recent decades, and the distribution of the costs for degrees between students, families and states has consequently become an intensely debated policy issue in many countries (Czarnecki & Korpi, .2025). The New Student Admissions (PPDB) process is a crucial aspect of educational institution management (Wang et al., 2023; Ngure). The success of PPDB heavily depends on the public relations strategies implemented by the institution (Otiso & Mandago, 2021; Opoku, 2025).

In the midst of globalization and increasingly fierce competition, educational institutions are required to not only provide quality education, but also build a strong reputation in the eyes of the community. Brand awareness is an important element in increasing the competitiveness of educational institutions, establishing cooperation with various parties, and strengthening the image of the institution (Halim & Rofiki, 2022). To increase brand awareness, a special role is needed so that this institution has a positive image. An effective public relations strategy is essential in increasing and strengthening the school's brand awareness among the community (Wang et al., 2023). The ability of public relations to build positive relationships between the institution and the public, both internal and external, is known as a constructive relationship (Johnson & Davis, 2021).

Effective communication in an educational context must clearly and attractively convey the unique values and advantages of the institution (Nguyen & Tran, 2022). Raising quality and improving the educational system by 2010 is a strategic goal of Ministry of Science, Education and Sports of the Republic of Croatia. This is the project that has been conducted in our educational institutions for four years. The strategy of increasing the interest of educational customer services becomes a fascinating study until the current era of the industrial revolution where the acceleration of educational institutions becomes increasingly dynamic, Sallis states that the strategy is an approach to achieving the quality of an educational institution (King, 2008).

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Description of the Study Area

Data was collected from 10 tertiary institutions in Dar es Salaam region. The region was selected since it has a large number of tertiary institutions. This was helpful to build evidence basing on the study subject matter. Dar es Salaam region was potential and qualified for collecting data towards assessing the influence of public relations promotional strategies on student enrolment in Tanzania tertiary institutions.

3.2 Research Design

The study employed a cross-sectional research design. The cross-sectional design was used because it is appropriate for descriptive purposes as well as for the determination of the relationship between variables and it is cost-effective and saves time over longitudinal and panel data.

3.3 Target Population

The population of this study was selected from 10 tertiary institution in Dar es Salaam region of Tanzania. The target population generated the required data on the subject matter. The population under which sample was selected involve public relations officers and students in selected tertiary institutions.

3.4 Sample Size

The study applied the formula as per Kothari (2004) to get the sample size. So, sample size will be obtained as follows:



$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} \dots\dots\dots (1)$$

Where:

n = sample size, N = sampling frame, e = level of precision (sampling error 5%)

Thus, the sample size for students were

$$n = \frac{171}{1 + 171(0.05)^2}$$

n = 120 respondents

120 respondents were involved in this study which ensured that data were accurate according to the needs of the study.

3.5 Sampling Techniques

The study employed simple random sampling whereby each person received an equal chance of being selected and the required sample size of respondents were proportionally selected from each tertiary institution. All these stages involved collaboration with students and public relations officers.

3.6 Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative information obtained from the questionnaires was edited, coded and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 25 IBM, USA.

3.7 Model Specification

The study applied multiple regression and binary regression models as described below.

3.7.1 Multiple Regression Models

The multiple regression models were applied to examine the influence of public relations promotional strategies on student enrolment as shown 1 below:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{1i} + \beta_2 X_{2i} + \dots + \beta_p X_{pi} + \epsilon_i \dots\dots\dots (2)$$

Whereby:

Y_i = Student enrolment, β₀ = Constant of the equation, β₁ – β_p = Regression coefficients to be estimated, X₁ to X_p vectors of independent variables which are media relations, investor relations, government relations, community relations, employee relations, customer relations, and marketing communications.

3.7.2 Binary Logistic Regression Model

A Binary logistic regression model was used to address the appropriate strategies used by public relations to enhance student enrolment and this model was useful to determine among the strategies which is the strongest than the other towards ensuring student enrolment. The model specification described below.

The logistic regression model was based on the logistic probability function given as:

$$P_i = f(Z_i) = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-Z}} \dots\dots\dots (3)$$

Where:

P_i is the probability of success i.e. the probability that a student enrolment is affected by appropriate strategies, and Z_i represents exposure to appropriate strategies that may enhance student enrolment i.e. Z_i = α + βX_i and its probability was expressed as:

$$Z_i = \ln\left(\frac{P_i}{1 - P_i}\right) \dots\dots\dots (4)$$

Thus;

$$Z_i = \ln\left(\frac{P_i}{1 - P_i}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \dots + \beta_n X_n + \epsilon_i \dots\dots\dots (5)$$

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_{14} X_{14} + \epsilon_i \dots\dots\dots (6)$$

Whereby:

Y_i = Depend variable X_i = Independent variables, β₁, β₂, β₃, β₄, β₅ ... and β₁₄ = coefficients of variables (βs indicate the degree to which strategies used affect student enrolment), α = constant term, ε_i is the error term, P_i is the probability of student enrolment affected, and 1 – P_i is the probability of student enrolment not being affected

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Strategies used by Public Relations in Tertiary Institution on Student Enrolment

The study sought to examine the strategies used by public relations departments in tertiary institutions to enhance student enrolment. The findings from the multiple linear regression analysis revealed that all public relations strategies examined significantly influenced student enrolment, indicating that public relations activities are important determinants of enrolment performance in tertiary institutions. This finding demonstrates a positive relationship between the independent variable (public relations strategies) and the dependent variable (student enrolment).

The findings in Table 1 show a significant level which is stronger than .05 as responses from the respondents which confirm that public relations use media relations, investor relations, government relations, community relations, employee relations, customer relations, and marketing communications to ensure student enrolment as per-requirement. In this matter, the study implies that, marketing communication is the first strategy with significant level of .007 followed by media relations with significant level of .011, community relations with significant level of .012, customer relations with significant level of .025, employee relations with significant level of .030, government relations with significant level of .032 and finally investors relations with significant level of .041.

Table 1

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis on Strategies used

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.400	.096		4.215	.000
	Media Relations	.051	.021	.064	3.529	.011
	Investor Relations	.020	.020	.053	1.071	.041
	Government Relations	.042	.010	.087	1.402	.032
	Community Relations	.062	.019	.051	1.500	.012
	Employee Relations	.761	.013	.769	21.990	.030
	Customer Relations	.019	.028	.071	2.501	.025
	Marketing Communications	.582	.080	.690	15.009	.007

Among the strategies assessed, marketing communications emerged as one of the most influential factors in enhancing student enrolment. The significant effect of marketing communications suggests that effective dissemination of information through advertising campaigns, institutional websites, social media platforms, brochures, and promotional events increases awareness among prospective students and positively influences their enrolment decisions. This finding supports the argument by Asemah et al., (2022) that consistent brand communication strategies help organizations establish trust, credibility, and positive relationships with their target audiences. Similarly, Otiso and Mandago, (2021) found that universities that effectively utilize social media platforms, exhibitions, newspapers, magazines, and other promotional channels experience increased student enrolment.

The findings further revealed that media relations significantly influence student enrolment. This implies that maintaining positive relationships with media organizations enables tertiary institutions to disseminate accurate and attractive information regarding academic programmes, facilities, and institutional achievements to prospective students. The finding concurs with Ngure (2018), who observed that tertiary institutions increasingly rely on broadcast, print, and digital media to market their programmes and attract potential students. The result also supports the view of Oanh et al., (2023), who reported that public relations activities significantly shape prospective students' perceptions and enrolment decisions.

Community relations also emerged as a significant predictor of student enrolment. This suggests that institutions that actively engage with surrounding communities develop positive institutional images that enhance public trust and encourage student applications. The finding aligns with the perspective of Nguyen and Tran (2022), who argued that public relations is fundamentally concerned with creating and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics. Positive community engagement enhances institutional reputation, which subsequently attracts prospective students.

Government relations were found to significantly influence student enrolment. This result indicates that maintaining constructive relationships with government agencies facilitates compliance with educational policies, accreditation requirements, and institutional recognition, all of which contribute to public confidence in the institution. This finding is supported by Wang et al. (2023), who emphasized that public relations play a critical role in institutional communication and promotion strategies, including engagement with regulatory stakeholders.

Customer relations also demonstrated a significant positive effect on student enrolment. In the context of tertiary education, prospective students and their parents represent important customers whose experiences and perceptions influence enrolment decisions. Institutions that provide timely information, effective responses to inquiries, and quality support services are likely to attract more students. This finding is consistent with Tran et al., (2024), who reported that personalized public relations initiatives that address the specific concerns and interests of prospective students have a strong influence on decision-making processes.

Even though investor relations and employee relations exhibited positive relationships with student enrolment, their influence was comparatively weaker. Nevertheless, the positive coefficients indicate that effective engagement with investors and employees contributes indirectly to enrolment by enhancing institutional resources, service quality, and organizational reputation. These findings support the argument by Opoku (2025) that the strategic use of public relations contributes significantly to organizational promotion and institutional success.

General, the findings indicate that public relations strategies are critical determinants of student enrolment in tertiary institutions. The results suggest that institutions that invest in effective marketing communications, media engagement, community outreach, government relations, and customer relationship management are more likely to achieve higher student enrolment levels.

4.2 Appropriate Strategies for Public Relations on Student Enrolment

The second objective sought to identify the most appropriate public relations strategies for enhancing student enrolment. The binary regression analysis revealed that media relations, government relations, community relations, customer relations, and marketing communications significantly influence student enrolment, whereas investor relations and employee relations, although positively related, were not statistically significant predictors.

The result shows a statistically significant (Table 2) implying that it is implausible to find out that the factors built-in in the model do not clarify the variations obtained in strategies used by public relations ensuring student enrolment goal is achieved. The coefficients of media relations, government relations, community relations, customer relations and marketing communications are significant at 5% this implies that the strategies have strongly influence on the student enrolment aspect. However, investor relations and employee relations are also positive but not statistically significant, signifying a straight relationship between these variables and student enrolment. The study implies that, strategies are used by PR to ensure student enrolment are many but among those there is strategies which are strong than the other viz media relations with significant level of .008, government relations with significant level of .000, community relations with significant level of .001, customer relations with significant level of .001 and marketing communications with significant level of .031.

Table 2

Binary regression results: Appropriate Strategies

		B	S.E.	Wald	Sig.	Exp (B)
1	Media relations	.613	.524	.945	.008	2.181
	Investor relations	.654	.849	.730	.579	.957
	Government relations	1.137	.542	6.415	.000	1.318
	Community relations	.944	.799	1.127	.001	.638
	Employee relations	.831	.332	.696	.426	3.174
	Customer relations	2.663	.966	7.503	.001	13.342
	Marketing communications	1.251	.471	5.107	.031	4.210
	Constant	1.930	.975	1.509	.181	.396

B-Slope, SE- Standard error, Wald-, Sig- Significance, Exp- Expected

The findings indicate that customer relations represent one of the strongest determinants of student enrolment. This suggests that prospective students are highly influenced by the quality of interactions they receive from institutional representatives. Effective communication, responsiveness to inquiries, and provision of accurate information create positive perceptions that encourage enrolment. This finding is consistent with Tran et al., (2024), who emphasized that personalized communication strategies have a substantial impact on prospective students' decisions regarding higher education institutions.

Government relations also emerged as a highly significant strategy. This finding suggests that institutions that maintain positive relationships with government authorities are perceived as more credible and compliant with educational standards, thereby increasing public confidence and attracting prospective students. The result supports Wang et al. (2023), who highlighted the importance of stakeholder engagement in institutional promotion and communication.

Media relations and marketing communications were also found to significantly influence student enrolment. The findings imply that institutions that effectively utilize traditional and digital media platforms are more successful in



reaching prospective students and communicating their educational offerings. These results are consistent with KanKam (2022), who found that web-based advertising provides an effective mechanism for reaching large populations, particularly in areas with limited physical infrastructure. Similarly, Zia and Raza (2017), cited in KanKam (2022), observed that television advertising serves as an important source of educational information and influences students' awareness of university programmes.

Community relations were also identified as an important strategy influencing enrolment decisions. Institutions that actively engage with local communities build goodwill and strengthen their reputation, which positively affects student recruitment efforts. This finding supports the broader public relations literature, which emphasizes the role of stakeholder engagement in enhancing organizational image and legitimacy.

The study further supports the findings of Khan and Qureshi (2010), who argued that promotional tools constitute a critical component of strategies used by tertiary institutions to attract prospective students. The significant influence of media relations, marketing communications, and customer relations observed in this study reinforces the notion that effective promotional activities contribute directly to increased enrolment levels.

In summary, the findings demonstrate that the independent variable, public relations strategies, significantly affects the dependent variable, student enrolment. Specifically, media relations, government relations, community relations, customer relations, and marketing communications were identified as the most appropriate and effective public relations strategies for enhancing student enrolment in tertiary institutions. These findings are largely consistent with previous empirical studies, confirming that strategic public relations practices play a fundamental role in attracting and retaining students within higher education institutions.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The study revealed that public relations promotional strategies had a positive and significant effect on student enrolment in tertiary institutions. Public relations promotional strategies have improved their understanding and feel emotionally engaged through the use of strategies, namely; media relations, investor relations, government relations, community relations, employee relations, customer relations, and marketing communications. This understanding has made them confident and have improved their trust to the institution and social well-being.

5.2 Recommendations

Well-implemented public relations strategies positively impact various aspects of institutional success, including student enrolment. Tertiary institutions are encouraged to invest in public relations departments, provide continuous training for public relations staff, and adopt proactive approaches such as developing social media approach. By comprehending the nuanced ways in which public relations strategies impact student recruitment, institutions can tailor their approaches more effectively, ultimately enhancing their ability to attract and retain students. The public relations technologies provide valuable insights into their potential advantages towards student enrolment. Tertiary institutions can make well-informed choices regarding the adoption and incorporation of proper technologies in their public relations practices to improve their efforts in student enrolment.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Funding Declaration

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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