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Media Exposure Behavior and Satisfaction with Public Relations Media for Decision-making on Study Program at the Undergraduate Level: A Case of Thai High School Students

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Abstract

This research aimed to investigate (1) the demographic variables related to media exposure behavior, and satisfaction with exposed public relations media, and 2) relationships among study plans, duration of media exposure, and influential persons for decision-making. The subjects were 400 high school students in the academic and vocational streams in three provinces: Petchaburi, Prachuapkhirikhan, and Chumphon. The researchers used a survey questionnaire to collect data in June-September 2019. The obtained data were analyzed by frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation (S.D), chi-square and one-way ANOVA. The results were: (1) the subjects were in favor of websites (32.80%) and social media (20.3%) as suggested by their friends (50.3%) to obtain information for decision-making on study programs at the undergraduate level; (2) the preferred duration for the exposed public relations media was 6-12 months, (2) friends are influential in decision-making, and (4) the types and channels of exposed media did not relate to their satisfaction with media exposure. The researchers expected that the obtained findings can help universities plan for their student recruitment strategies effectively.

Keywords: Media exposure behavior, satisfaction, decision-making on study program, high school and vocational students

1. Introduction and Rationale of the Study

Higher education has its goal on providing education for graduates in terms of academic quality, knowledge, and forefront ideas in accordance with the needs of society, the changing trends of the world in modern times, and the sense of morals and social responsibility. Education plays a very important role in providing career opportunities for the Thai youth. A shortage of youth with good potential will slow down development of the nation toward prosperity at the international level. The government has to pay attention to the issue of workforce development by means of quality education, particularly the national policy on educational support to expand educational opportunities for students in all subject areas as stated in National Education Act, B.E. 2542 (Ministry of Education Thailand, 1999).

Universities undoubtedly play a vital role in providing education to meet the needs and expectations of students and have admission strategies to attract them to study programs offered in their academic calendar. Universities compete for their market share as a dream university in terms of a high academic ranking for excellence in teaching and research, modern technologies, and a recognized image in the circle of top-standing higher education institutions. Their target communities include social leaders or influencers, parents and counseling teachers to guide students' decision-making on a chosen university. As generally practiced, each university has arranged for its internal departments to survey the needs of potential customers and regularly conducted research on the public's perception of the university's image in various study fields for updated marketing plans. The current educational marketing trend is in line with the government's continuous development of information technology infrastructure in order to provide people with equal access to news and information. The use of smart phones, computers, and the Internet is to provide knowledge, skills and competencies in various fields for the development of the country in all aspects to catch up with today's world. Information technology has created an era of communication without borders and time limits. People can easily seek information for their study, work, and business (Information Technology and Vocational Education Center, 2018).

Since information is an important resource for human development at all levels, universities pay close attention to three kinds of resources: natural, human and information as essential foundations for the advancement of society and economy which are indispensable in making decisions at various levels of operations. According to a survey of the National Statistical Office Thailand in 2012, there were 21.2 million computer users or 33.7 percent, Internet users 16.6 million or 26.5%, and mobile phone users 44.1 million or 70.2 percent. The survey revealed that Thai people increased access to cyber media and communication technology. In the past, news dissemination and exposure focused on the mainstream media, such as television, radio and newspapers. But now with the development of communication technology, changes in new media occur rapidly and create more channels in sending, receiving, accessing and retrieving information for convenience and time-saving.

The field of Public Relations consists of the sender (Source), the message (Message), the media (Channel) and the receiver (Receiver) (Stavetin, 1996). The public relations process focuses on the audience as the sole target. Public relations can be effective when the recipient receives the media or news until the recipient reaches a desired decision. Their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, exposure to public relations media generally mean mass media exposure. Pattamathin (1973) gave the meaning of media exposure as a scope the public being exposed to various types of media. The media widely used in public relations today can be divided into four types: personal media, mass media, internet media and special media. The media are vitally important to public relations and no one type of media is best for every purpose. Publicists therefore need to know how to use media to suit public relations purposes. Media contents and target groups must be carefully considered to ensure effective communication.

The researchers recognize the importance of higher education, media and channels in sending-receiving public relations information for receivers' decision-making on a chosen study program at the university of their choice. The researchers therefore would like to investigate high school students' media exposure behavior and their satisfaction with the exposed public relations media for decision-making on a study program at the undergraduate level.

2. Research Objectives

There were two research objectives:

- (1) To identify the demographic variables related to media exposure behavior, and satisfaction with exposed public relations media, and
- (2) To investigate relationships among study plans, duration of media exposure, and influential persons for decision-making.

3. Scope of Research

This research covered a group of 400 high school students in the academic and vocational streams in three provinces: Phetchaburi, Prachuap Khiri Khan and Chumphon during June-September 2019.

4. Research Methods

The subjects were 400 high school students in the academic and vocational streams in three provinces: Phetchaburi, Prachuap Khiri Khan and Chumphon. There were 200 students from each stream making 400 in total and participating in the study on a voluntary basis.

As for the research instrument, the researchers used a survey questionnaire to collect data from the subjects. The questionnaire was tested for content validity and reliability (internal consistency) before reaching the final version. The researchers used the constructed questionnaire to collect data in June-September 2019.

5. Data Analysis

The researchers used both descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze the obtained data as follows:

- (1) Descriptive statistics to secure frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation of personal and social response data on media exposure behavior and satisfaction with the exposed public relations media for decision-making on a study program at the undergraduate level.
- (2) Inferential statistic to test the relationship between independent and dependent variables with the use of (1) chi-square, and (2) one-way analysis of variance (One-way ANOVA).

6. Research Results

6.1 Types of Public Relations Media

The results on public relations media used by the subjects to obtain information needed for their decision-making on a study program pointed to university websites at 32.8%, print media, such as posters, brochures at 22%, and social media, such as Line, Facebook, Instagram at 20.3%. Other public relations media types received less attention: school counselors (14.5%), alumni of the school (6%), the university's educational guidance activities as in an open house (4%) and the university's organized educational guidance activities (0.5%). (See Table 1.)

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage of Types of Public Relations Media

Types of Public Relations Media	Frequency	Percentage
University website	131	32.8
Social media, such as LINE, Facebook, Instagram	81	20.3
Print media, such as posters, brochures	88	22.0
School alumni	24	6.0
School guidance teacher	58	14.5
The university's educational guidance activities.	2	0.5
The university's educational guidance activities (Open House)	16	4.0
Total	400	100.00

6.2 Exposure Duration

The researchers found that the subjects were in favor of the media exposure duration for further study for 6-12 months before submitting their application (48.5%). This preference was followed by 3-6 months (32.8%). Less preferred durations were 1-3 months (9.8%) and more than 12 months (9%), as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage of Preferred Exposure Duration

Exposure Duration	Frequency	Percentage
1 – 3 months	39	9.8
3 – 6 months	131	32.8
6 – 12 months	194	48.5
More than 1 year	36	9.0
Total	400	100.00

6.3 Persons Involved in Decision-Making

As seen in Table 3 on persons involved in the subjects' decision-making on using public relations media, it was found that friends were the most influential (50.3%), followed by guidance teachers (16.8%), the majority of people in society (16.0%), family members (12.8%), self (3.5%), and famous people and celebrities (0.8%).

Table 3: Frequency and Percentage of Persons Involved in Decision-Making on Accepting the Media

Persons Involved in Decision-Making on Accepting the Media	Frequency	Percentage
Friends	201	50.3
Family members	51	12.8
Famous people and celebrities	3	0.8
Majority of people in society	64	16.0
School guidance teacher	67	16.8
Self	14	3.5
Total	400	100.00

6.4 Test Results of Hypothesis Testing

6.4.1 Relationship between the Study Plan and the Length Media Exposure before Admission

Table 4 shows that the relationship between the study plan and the length of media exposure before admission is not statistically significant. The study plan does not impact the length of media exposure before admission

Table 4: Test Results on the Relationship between Study Plan and Length of Media Exposure before Admission.

Study Plan	Length of Media Exposure before Admission			
	1-3 months	3- 6 months	6-12 months	More than 1 year
Academic stream	18 (9.0)	68 (34.0)	100 (50.0)	14 (7.0)
Vocational stream	21 (10.5)	63 (31.5)	94 (47.0)	22 (11.0)
χ^2	2.385			
Sig.	.496			

6.4.2 Relationship between Gender and Persons Involved in Decision-Making on Accepting the Media

The results shown in Table 5 indicate that there is relationship between gender and persons involved in decision-making on accepting the media.

Table 5: Test Results on the Relationship between Gender and Persons Involved in Decision-Making on Accepting the Media

Gender	Persons Involved in Decision-Making on Accepting the Media					
	Friends	Family members	Famous people and celebrities singers, actors, etc.	Majority of people in society	Self	Other
Male	29 (22.0)	27 (20.5)	1 (0.8)	32 (24.2)	34 (25.8)	9 (6.8)
Female	172 (64.2)	24 (9.0)	2 (0.7)	32 (11.9)	33 (12.3)	5 (1.9)
χ^2	64.636					
Sig.	.00					

Table 5 reports the Sig. (.00) < .05, thus rejecting H0, accepting H1 at a significance level of .05, i.e., gender difference. The persons involved in decision-making on accepting public relations media are different.

6.4.3 Relationship between Study Plan and Persons Involved in Decision-Making on Accepting the Media

Table 6 shows that there is relationship between the study plan and persons involved in decision-making on accepting the media.

Table 6: Test Results on Relationship between Study Plan and Persons Involved in Decision-Making on Accepting the Media

Study Plan	Persons Involved in Decision-Making on Accepting the Media					
	Friends	Family members	Famous people and celebrities	Most people in society	Non-existent	other
ordinary	99 (49.5)	13 (6.5)	3 (1.5)	37 (18.5)	41 (20.5)	7 (3.5)
vocational education	102 (51.0)	38 (19.0)	0 (0.0)	27 (13.5)	26 (13.0)	7 (3.5)
χ^2	20.220					
Sig.	.001					

Table 6 reports the Sig. value (.001) < .05, therefore rejected H0, accepted H1 at a significance level of .05, i.e., the study plans are different. Persons involved in decision-making on accepting public relations media are different.

6.4.4 Comparison of Satisfaction with Media Exposure Classified by Exposure time before Admission

Table 7: Results of ANOVA on Satisfaction with Media Exposure Classified by Length of Media Exposure before Admission

Length of Media Exposure before Admission	Frequency	Mean	S.D.	F-value	Sig.
1-3 months	39	4.41	.498	38.864	.00
3-6 months	131	3.95	.524		
6-12 months	194	4.56	.575		
More than 12 months	36	3.89	.523		
Total	400	4.29	.620		

Table 7 reports the Sig. (.00) < .05, therefore rejecting H0, accepting H1 at the significance level of .05, i.e., the length of exposure to public relations media before admission was different. The satisfaction with the exposed public relations media was different.

The researchers summarized the major findings as follows:

- The participating students considered websites as the first public relations media; they also used social media as public relations media, like Line, Facebook, Instagram at a high level.
- Their needs and motivations in media exposure were to obtain information for decision-making on a study program at the university of their choice. Friends enhance their

confidence in selecting the media to reach a final decision. They were satisfied with overall media exposure for high speed of accessing and receiving the target information.

Hypothesis results:

- Different genders and study plans didn't affect the types and channels of media exposure.
- Different genders, the media exposure period before admission application, different study plans didn't affect media exposure period before admission application.
- Different genders and different study plans, persons involved in media exposure decision-making were different (i.e., with effect).
- Different types of media and different channels of media exposure, satisfaction with media exposure were not different (i.e., no effect).
- Different media exposure periods before admission application, satisfaction with media exposure were different (i.e., with effect).
- Different persons involved in media exposure decision-making, satisfactions with media exposure were not different (i.e., no effect]

7. Discussion of Results.

With high expectation, high school students need reliable sources of information to choose a study program at the undergraduate level. Their behavior can be explained by the theory of media use and satisfaction with the process of exposure (Katz, Blumer & Gurevitch, 1974). The use of media by individuals or groups shows that media consumption depending on the needs or motivations of the information recipients themselves. These recipients have their own objectives, intentions and a desire to utilize the media to satisfy their own needs. Studies on media use and media satisfaction (uses and gratification) indicate that people use mass media to meet their needs, know about events (surveillance) by tracking various movements and observations around them, stay up-to-date and learn what is important to know (McCombs & Becker, 1979).

As seen in the findings of the study, the subjects were satisfied with the exposure to public relations media for the reason that they were able to get quick access to vast and up-to-date information. As known, media selection comes from the foreseeable predictions to guide the target audience toward useful information as a reward or a positive effect. A reward as a psychological effect generally results from media use or exposure that allows individuals to assign value to different reward outcomes. Satisfaction derived from the media is considered media gratification (Kaewthep, 2009).

The results of the study highlighted that the types of media and channels of exposure to public relations media did not seem to relate to satisfaction received from exposure to public relations media. This could stem from the condition that people have their intention in seeking information to be useful in some way. Therefore, the use of media is not an activity that is carried out without goals, but with a definite purpose (goal-oriented activity); the recipient seeks and chooses the available media in the direction the person wants as a primary cause in that type of media. In this regard, the needs of that person stands as the primary cause for the needs to be translated into incentives (motivation) that will drive people to move toward the use of different types of media (Kaewthep, 2009).

8. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers would like to recommend the following:

(1) Relevant student recruitment agencies can use the obtained results on high school students' perception of public relations media exposure to guide their strategies in contact with potential customers who might look for their study program at a particular university. They could prioritize the types of public relations media and educational activities as responsive to customers' needs. It is vitally important to improve the public relations media in a professional format to suit and attract the interest of potential customers or message recipients.

(2) Since this study dealt with female high school students in the central education district in Thailand, the points of investigation on the types of media and satisfaction with the exposed media could be studied further in other districts to get a large picture of high schools students using web or social media in decision-making on a study program.

9. The Authors

The three authors Sanya Wuttikorn, Weerawat Pengchuay, and Akera Ratchavieng, Ph.D. are lecturers in the Faculty of Industry and Technology, Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin, Nakhon Pathom, Thailand. They share research interest in the areas of media technology, public relations media and activities for educational marketing, and effects of media exposure as experienced by different age groups.

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