

FACTORS DETERMINING THE INFORMATION POLICY OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract. The information policy of a public university has two main objectives: it fulfils the duty to provide information and is a part of shaping the image and brand. In the context of the university management and the challenges of good and transparent governance, shaping this policy needs to reconcile the postulate of effectiveness and efficiency with the postulate of rational harmonization of operational practices and with the needs of stakeholders and the community. The information policy of public universities is determined by several factors. They have a major impact on the functioning of the internal and external models used communication and the comprehensive information policy. Public universities are an original field for conducting research in the field of communication, as they play a state-building role, and the importance of tradition plays a big role in their functioning. Such universities should fulfil social expectations, combining them with the requirements, binding them as public entities in the field of communication.

Key words: governance, management stakeholders, information policy, brand policy, public image, communication, public and administrative requirements.

Introduction

Higher education institutions fulfil some of the most important tasks in the social structure, including a cultural state-building role. This has to do with the process of the development of society in terms of education and training, as well as the process of economic development and living standards of society, drawing on academic knowledge. These schools, which are public, are in a special position. Firstly, according to the law they are public entities and therefore subject to all the duties involved with this, including the provision of public information. Secondly, they are participants in competitive markets: educational, scientific, and economic consulting.

The dynamics of technological change and the increase in competitiveness associated with globalization (including among universities), the need for transparency of actions including activities in the area of social responsibility, the problems of social and economic sustainability, as well as other challenges concerning both stakeholders in the university's external and internal environment trigger the need for changes in communication, which universities must meet.

Recognizing this multidimensionality and also the need to enter the current information policy of the university in its development strategy, and, related to

this – improving the university’s communication in its daily operational activities, the author has taken up the task of developing a model of public university information policy based on its current professional activities. This model, which in ensuring the optimal practice of informing, should reconcile the characteristics suitable for mass communication and including both academic elitism and the social role of universities. It is worth noting that the Latin root of the notion of communication (*comunicare*) means sharing something with someone, transfer, while *communicatio* is also involvement, compliance, and communication at the same time.

1. The research problem

The issue of transfer of information is related to the optimization of management processes, and interest in such an approach is rooted in the author’s experiences in relation to the tasks related to communication at every level of the institution, especially social and promotional communication, in terms of shaping the brand. The immediate premise of interest was the author’s commitment to improving these areas in the context of organizational and operational policy of information and communication processes, and to ensuring their consistency with the strategic objectives of the university. The first studies carried out by the author, beyond the literature research on the concepts, focus on describing the important factors affecting the operation and the overall information policy of a public university.

There are no direct methodological patterns, but also no indication of the determinants of information policy in the specific conditions of a public university. Although there are such standards for businesses, the degree of analogy is not enough, and moreover is controversial for the academic community and specifically the federalist organizational model of a typical university.

Information policy for a public university is action in the field of strategic management, in particular, it is the impact on stakeholders and forming appropriate relationships with them. In this connection, it should be a result of the “Strategy of development of the university”, be consistent with it, be common to the standalone units of the university, and more – serve their integration and to some extent enforce it. The author’s observations can be summarized as follows:

- public universities rarely use consciously selected information models, and often their approach is spontaneous (and therefore weakly conscious), and therefore are not necessarily consistent with the declared mission, and then also incompatible with their development strategy;
- models of information policy for public universities, even if they are deliberately put into service, are usually characterized by a random selection of implementation tools, which are also sometimes overinformative in the negative sense of the word;

- the reporting systems at work in public universities, such as POL-on, which is an integrated information system for higher education, supporting simultaneously the work of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, are not used for operational communication activities;
- the autonomy of departments, typical of public universities, and the mixed model of governance applied in the context of organizational structures, do not clearly define the oversight of information policy and the flow of information, which is heterogeneous, inconsistent and susceptible to interference;
- competencies concerning the hierarchy of the transmission of information are limited, neglected and improperly positioned organizationally; often based on stereotypically understood tradition or local custom;
- public universities, respecting legal requirements, develop information security policies, but forget to build communication plans cohesive with them;
- existing models rarely take into account the aspect of the social responsibility of the university, which is not properly understood, and which is usually associated with charity. This responsibility should indicate the practical side of functions carried out by universities in particular with respect to the rising tide of social expectations in relation to academic institutions (Geryk 2012: 135);
- negligence in the field of computerization of public universities also affects the quality of the functioning of the information policy and the solutions in operation.

It was noted that these observations well characterized gap problems that require investigation. The public university is in fact a specific type of corporation, i.e. an organization with a complex structure, of multiple relations of cooperation, and of autonomy of action of internal organizational units, related by a strategy of implementing common objectives. Information policy must take into account both the specifics and other factors that determine them. It consists primarily in the fact that:

- the university functions in the context of the university tradition with a significant social and state-building role;
- the public university is a public entity and in this scope its activity is strongly determined by law, in which sense it is a specific kind of government office;
- the public university is part of public administration and, therefore, its computerization, made in order to improve the efficiency of the public authorities and the construction of the information (digital) society, takes on significance;

- the public university operates in competitive markets: educational, academic, research, and service and advisory (both the phenomenon of competition and cooperation have a place here).

The identity and sense of the use in universities of specific patterns of information processing, tailored to the multi-dimensional needs of these institutions recognized in the report edited by du Valla (2011), paying attention to their scale, highlighting the conflict between increasing globalization on the one hand, and on the other hand increasingly restrictive regionalisms. According to Wójcicka (2006), the institution of higher education is one of many within the social structure. However, it is distinguished by a specific set of accepted values. The main task of the university is “the service of knowledge”, i.e. its collection, expansion of its resource, and dissemination. Another of the factors that determine the functioning of the information policy of a university is tradition, whose strength and timeless values, as much as enhancing the prestige of the university, can when neglected in the area of brand management have a conservative influence on the university’s information policy. This particularly applies to modern forms of information and promotion communication of the university and the development of IT tools. Finding the right way to communicate about the important traditional values of the university in a technologically advanced manner, preferably by means of communication that builds lasting relationships, can be a real challenge for the services of the publicity and information departments and social communication of the university.

Today it is natural that in the economic environment of the university an acceleration of innovation activities and a dramatic increase in competitiveness can be observed. Meanwhile, the university tradition means that the public university undergoes critical modernization, commercialization and technologizing with difficulty (Beck et al. 2009).

In each of the aspects of a public university’s activities it is important to communicate with stakeholders. Of particular importance is the manner of its formulation, consistent with the internal culture of autonomous academic communities, while forcing new technologies and communication tools to be followed. Such action can be seen in the way of promoting the university’s educational and recruitment offer, especially in the context of social media primarily related to the Internet, which has dominated the world of media and communications. With respect to the institutional character of public universities, in each of which some basic target groups of messages edited in university and other social media can be extracted. Note that the primary audience groups for social media in public universities include: undergraduates, doctoral students, candidates for studies, alumni, faculty, and ancillary staff. It should be noted that each of the groups is not only a receiver but also a stakeholder participating in the further processes of the communication chain.

Therefore, the formulated research problem is to identify the determinants of efficiency and effectiveness of information policy in the public university and its management, both in the area required by law, and both in the areas of internal and external communications as well as in the areas of building competitive advantage and concerning brand and promotion.

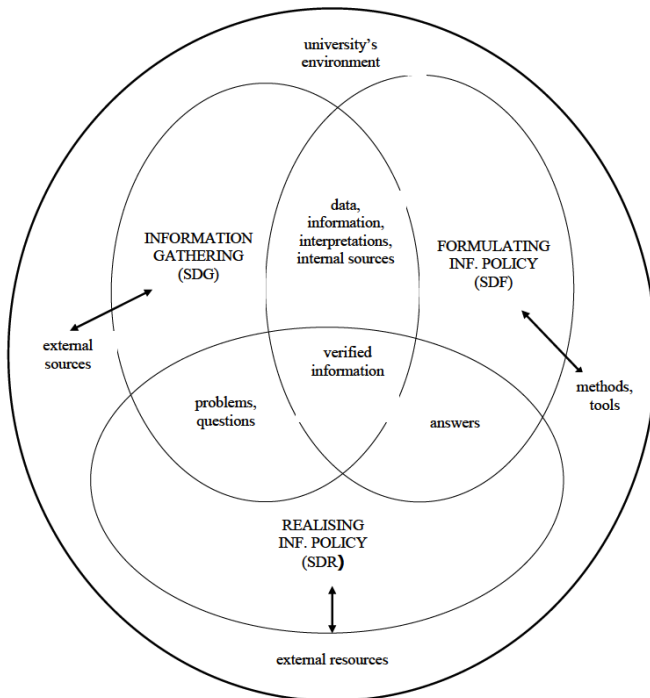
The objective of this study is to present both the research conducted so far on the model and the rules for formulating and applying information policy at public universities. The study presents a global approach to issues that were previously reported on consecutively in different publications.

The study includes both studies of the literature and also empirical research with the aim to identify the current state of knowledge on information policy and to diagnose the actual state of solutions that exist across universities.

2. Preliminary results

The author’s previous research on university information policy and the factors determining it yielded preliminary conclusions. A framework structure of the process of formulating and practising public university information policy is shown in Figure 1 and Table 1.

Figure 1. The idea of the process of formulating and practising an information policy



Source: Kamińska, Zawila-Niedźwiecki 2015.

Table 1. Stages of the process of information policy

Stage	Characteristics
<p>1. (SDR) Needs (framed/forecast).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What information is needed? - Three types of information: as communication as part of management, as the transmission of knowledge, and as communication and promotion in terms of marketing (including cooperation in the broad range) - Who needs this information? 	<p>The stage is executed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - with a decision on cyclic action (including the obligation resulting from public university reporting) - the stage is also run as a cyclical effect with respect to the university's marketing operation, as a supplement to the educational and promotional offer, and other regular activities related to the construction of the image of the university informative in nature, including those designed for internal stakeholders (in line with the organizational structure) - <i>ad hoc</i> need, resulting e.g. from a question associated with answering in the mode of public information or answers to questions from the media - the need to supplement the information resource of a given unit (current organizational work) by another administrative unit (according to the organizational structure) - decisions on the basis of development, operational, or investment needs, and in the case of new development or investment activities information about them unconditionally feeds the marketing and promotion knowledge base <p>The transition to Stage 2 or Stage 17, if the required information is verified.</p>
<p>2. (SDG) Identifying needs (research needs, problems, questions).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What information is needed? - Who needs this information? 	<p>The actions can be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - spontaneous and the result of the tasks of a given position/cell, which is only established for such tasks, - the result of the activation of this stage in the course of the next spiral of improvement, - response to the need reported on an <i>ad hoc</i> basis as understood above.
<p>3. (SDG) Identifying sources of needs (internal/external, people/institutions/systems/documents).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is the information gap? - Where can this information be found? - Who can provide the information? 	<p>Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - first they link to resources of information which is owned, - when it is absent, they seek to establish other sources of information. At this stage, it is necessary to determine the scope of the information provided. <p>In practice, the border with the previous stage may be blurred, but it is very important what mode of operation launched the previous stage.</p>
<p>4. (SDG) Identifying places of hidden information.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who is the holder of such information? - To what extent does it have the character of hidden information? 	<p>The actions can be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - part of a systematic penetration of potential sites for hidden information, (where these activities in the provision cannot constitute business secrets, and if they do the process is stopped and limited to the issue by the rector of a decision to refuse the public information in the manner provided for by the Code of Administrative Procedure - response to specific needs of a defined urgency, including as a separate category – <i>ad hoc</i> questions. (as above)

<p>5. (SDG) Identifying beneficiaries of information (organizational cells/people/ systems/ documentation).</p>	<p>The actions are intended to define:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – routine beneficiaries, when the search for information is systematic, – additional beneficiaries in the case of information reported on an <i>ad hoc</i> basis. (as above)
<p>6. (SDG) Identifying forms of communication/ codification/ storage/ verification/ update. The relationship between the information source and the beneficiary.</p>	<p>The actions are intended to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – is the relationship to be permanent? – what rights and what obligations do its parties have? – what are the forms of communication? – in relation to the information there is a division into marketing and communication activities.
<p>7. (SDG) Classifying information (development of areas, issues, problems, questions).</p>	<p>Monitoring is conducted on the types of owned and acquired information. New information is properly attributed. Generally, information is periodically evaluated to be classified, especially information acquired on an <i>ad hoc</i> basis.</p>
<p>8. (SDG) Organizing obtaining information</p>	<p>Previous stages indicate a need for the transfer of information, i.e. formal, organizational and technical activities. After this stage, it is possible to move to the audit (stage 21) or return to step 2.</p>
<p>9. (SDF) Identifying forms of communication/ codification/ storage/ verification/ update.</p>	<p>The activities aim to establish the practical establishment of relations, powers, duties and forms that have been identified in stage 6.</p>
<p>10. (SDF) Selection of search methods and tools</p>	<p>It is possible to formalize the search.</p>
<p>11. (SDF) Descriptions of the areas of information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – an information area is defined which narrows the search for the information needed, – hidden information is revealed, – the information is codified at the level of the area.
<p>12. (SDF) Descriptions of the issues within the areas</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – a catalogue of issues is defined which narrows the search for the information needed, – hidden information is revealed, – the information is codified at the level of the issues.
<p>13. (SDF) Descriptions of the problems within the areas</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – a catalogue of problems is defined which narrows the search for the information needed, – hidden information is revealed, – the information is codified at the level of the problems.
<p>14. (SDF) Formulating answers to questions in the context of problems</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – answers to the questions are defined, which narrows the search for information, – hidden information is revealed, – the information is codified at the level of the answers.
<p>15. (SDF) Unusual proceedings (e.g. Consultations)</p>	<p>Performed optionally for cases of problems that are complex, unusual, involving different ranges of a given area of information.</p>
<p>16. (SDR) The procedure for answering</p>	<p>The process of responding is implemented in the event of queries relating to public information (in case of disagreement on replying an administrative decision is issued). The entire administrative process must be consistent with the mode of the Code of Administrative Procedure.</p>
<p>17. (SDF) Archiving of information (copying, archive of outdated versions)</p>	<p>Efforts are made to secure information resources. The end of the SDF spiral, return to stage 9 or switch to the SDR spiral (stage 17).</p>

18. (SDR) Documentation of the use of information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Portions of stable information are placed in resources needed for specific operations or posts, – guidelines/ instructions are created on how to obtain needed portions of variable information.
19. (SDR) Training in the use of information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – transmission of information resources in different perspectives, – learning to use codified information, – seeking hidden information. The stage closes the fixed range of the SDR spiral and it is possible to proceed to stage 19 or return to stage 1.
20. (SDR) Administering the sharing of information, including archiving not only to update, but rather in line with the requirement of archiving of answers.	The determinations from stages 6 and 9 are realized with respect to the technology for access to information. See the proceedings related to the providing responses
21. (SDR) Administration of access to information	The determinations from stages 5, 6 and 9 are realized with respect to the rights to access to information.
22. (SDG) Audit of the consistency of the content/ forms/ methods/ tools	An assessment is made, and in case of perceived imperfections recommendations are formulated. This stage is only carried out from time to time.
23. (SDG) Audit of the organizational efficiency of information management	An assessment is made, and in case of perceived imperfections recommendations are formulated. This stage is only carried out from time to time.

Source: Kamińska, Zawła-Niedźwiecki 2015.

They have been described by Kamińska and Zawła-Niedźwiecki (2014b). Basically, the information policy, despite the complexity of the factors determining it, includes two ranges of influence. Directly dependent on the university is its activity in terms of information, but only indirectly dependent is the brand in the public perception. Fulfilment of the contents of this policy is a task that is specific for a given university and is:

- at the strategic level – the determination, consistent with the tradition and vision of development, values and image and information goals; these values should take into account the tradition and cultural heritage of the university and its social responsibility;
- at the operational level – to plan, according to the strategy and legal obligations, a regularly updated program of information, opinion-forming and brand building activities;
- in the functional aspect – on the separation of social roles of each area: (a) learning, (b) teaching, (c) cooperation with the socio-economic environment, (d) statutory disclosure obligations (BIP, the provision of information under public information);
- in the organizational aspect – on ensuring a clear division of powers and responsibilities and a coherent organizational structure;
- in the technical aspect – the use of modern technologies determining the prevalence, diversity, and effectiveness of communication.

Factors determining the information policy of public universities have a major impact on the formulation and practice, including the rules conditioning it (Kaminska, Zawila-Niedzwiecki 2014a):

- the principle of indicating strategic value;
- the principle of compliance of the information policy with the development strategy of the university;
- the principle of perseverance in the observance and protection of its values;
- the principle of social responsibility of the university;
- the principle of the primacy of the tradition of the university over the current political and market context;
- the principle of identification and detailed analysis of stakeholders and their needs;
- the principle of transparency of information;
- the principle of improving good governance;
- the principle of well-balanced management);
- the principle of individual responsibility for information policy);
- the principle of preservation of processes and best practices;
- the principle of flexibility in use of resources and solutions;
- the principle of keeping up with technological developments;
- the principle of relatedness in dealing with all stakeholders of public universities.

Conclusions

The paper defined primarily determinants of information policy of the university to define its principles, seeking to develop a model taking into account operationalization. Operationalization is based on current concepts of knowledge management and branding.

At the present stage of advancement of research it was noted that the information policy of public universities must take into account three categories of determinants: the legal obligation laid down by the Access to Public Information Act; obligations touching the morality and image determined by the traditional social role of universities; and the requirements of the academic market. It was agreed that communication in the context of information policy should cover the entirety of phenomena in the context of the external and internal world surrounding a university, i.e. it should be based on a holistic approach. This has been used in the processes of the various stages of the framework structure for the formulation and practice of information policy as a result of the application of the principles discussed, and based on a process analogous to the process of knowledge management.

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