

Strategic Communication for Zimbabwean Public Universities Amidst Crises

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Abstract

Strategic communication, that is, the deliberate use of communication in order to achieve organisational goals, has proliferated in traditionally conservative sectors such as the higher education sector amid a wide range of challenges and opportunities that vary depending on geographical location of the concerned institutions. While higher educational institutions across the world are sailing in relatively stable environments, notwithstanding the COVID-19 pandemic, Zimbabwean public universities, while aiming to match both national and international standards of university education, have for long operated in turbulent and highly volatile economic and political settings, coupled with dwindling government subventions. This has resulted in intensified competition for students who have become the main source of revenue as well as the upgrade of their status to clients which demands universities to adapt from traditional communication to strategic communication, especially when dealing with students. In that regard, using an extensive literature review approach, this chapter discusses pertinent communication strategies that can be used by universities to manage university stakeholders in the context of the economic and political challenges and opportunities, higher education policy changes, such as the ‘massification’ of education in order to address social gaps, the shift from Education 3.0 to a heritage-based educational philosophy of Education 5.0, the implementation of minimum bodies of knowledge (MBKs) that seek to put all universities on a par and the ravaging waves of COVID-19 and other crises that can hit universities. It is shown that universities frequently face crises of varying magnitudes and that their communication needs to be always alert. It is no longer business as usual as not only are universities prone to crises but communication itself has further been compounded, especially with the advent of social media.