PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING UNIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY OF SOUTHERN RAJABHAT UNIVERSITIES, THAILAND

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by

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**STRATEGI PERHUBUNGAN AWAM UNTUK MEMBINA KERJASAMA
UNIVERSITI DAN KOMUNITI: SATU KAJIAN KES DI UNIVERSITI-
UNIVERSITI RAJABHAT DI SELATAN, THAILAND**

ABSTRAK

"Jabatan Perhubungan Awam" adalah satu sektor yang sangat penting dalam setiap organisasi. Jabatan ini memainkan peranan penting dalam menyebarkan berita bermanfaat dan untuk berhubung dengan pihak-pihak berkepentingan termasuk masyarakat sekeliling mereka untuk mengambil bahagian dalam aktiviti organisasi. Universiti sebagai sebuah organisasi yang mendidik generasi muda juga harus menyediakan khidmat kepada masyarakat. Oleh itu, di Thailand, terdapat sekumpulan Universiti Rajabhat yang memenuhi keperluan masyarakat dalam pelbagai cara.

Kajian ini mempunyai tiga objektif penyelidikan; (1) untuk mengkaji tahap penglibatan masyarakat dengan aktiviti universiti (2) untuk mengenalpasti peranan jabatan perhubungan awam di Universiti-universiti Rajabhat di Selatan Thailand dalam usaha menggalakkan libat sama university dengan komuniti (3) untuk mengkaji strategi perhubungan awam dalam konteks membina libatsama university dengan komuniti. Penyelidikan ini menggunakan wawancara secara mendalam dengan pengarah dan pengamal perhubungan awam serta masyarakat awam. Kaedah penyelidikan dokumentari dengan media yang berkaitan dan bahan-bahan lain juga digunakan. Penyelidik mendapati beberapa jabatan perhubungan awam tidak mengumpul maklum balas dari masyarakat.Tahap libatsama masyarakat dengan aktiviti universiti tersebut berbeza-beza bergantung pada pendapat peserta, namun demikian, ia masih kurang.

Walaupun peranan jabatan perhubungan awam adalah pelbagai tetapi peranan mereka adalah sama di antara jabatan-jabatan di universiti. Berkaitan dengan strategi

perhubungan awam dalam membina libatsama universiti dan masyarakat, ia perlu dirancang bersama dengan perancangan pusat pentadbiran universiti.

Untuk membina libatsama universiti dan masyarakat, sesetengah jabatan perhubungan awam menggunakan media untuk berhubung dengan orang ramai; komunikasi lisan, surat berita dan juga media sosial seperti Facebook. Walau bagaimanapun, penggunaan aplikasi komunikasi ini sangat bergantung kepada kelayakan pengamal dan pemahaman mereka tentang penggunaan alat-alat tersebut. Strategi yang paling berkesan ialah universiti perlu meningkatkan bajet untuk program-program perhubungan awam sebab bajet ini memberi peluang jabatan untuk menganjurkan dan menyertai aktiviti masyarakat dengan lebih kerap.

Universiti juga harus membantu menyebarkan penyelidikan pelajar dan sarjana dan membina rangkaian media. Namun demikian, sesetengah jabatan perhubungan awam tidak mempunyai strategi atau merancang untuk melaksanakan tugas mereka dengan cara yang profesional.

PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING UNIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY OF SOUTHERN RAJABHAT UNIVERSITIES, THAILAND

ABSTRACT

"Public Relations Department" is a very essential sector in each organization. This department is instrumental in disseminating beneficial news and to connect with internal and external stakeholders including their community to participate in the organisation's activities. The university as an organization that educates the young generation should also provide community services to the society. Accordingly, in Thailand, there is a group of Rajabhat Universities that responds to the community's need in many ways. This research has three main research objectives; (1) To examine the level of public participation with the university. (2) To identify the roles of public relation departments in southern Rajabhat Universities in encouraging university and community engagement, and (3) To examine public relations strategies in terms of building university and community engagement. The researcher employed in depth interview with public relations directors and practitioners and the community. The documentary research method with the related media and other materials were also used. The researcher discovered that some public relations departments do not gather feedback from the communities. The level of community participation with the university's activities varies depending on participants' opinions, however, participation is still less. Even though the public relations department's roles are varied but those roles are similar among the departments in the universities. With regards to public relations strategy in building university and community engagement, it should be included with the university's central administrative planning. To build university and community engagement, some public relations departments employ the media to communicate with

the public; word of mouth communication, newsletters and online media such as Facebook. However, utilising these applications very much depend on the administrator's or the practitioner's qualification and their understanding of the tools used. The most effective strategy is that universities need to increase the budget for public relations programs as this can help departments to regularly organize and participate in community activities. The university should also help disseminate students' and scholars' research and build media networks. However, some public relations departments do not have strategies nor employ any plan to execute them in a professional way.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter identifies the background of the study, and also touches on the importance of community-university engagement and public relations tasks for community relationships that is practiced at Rajabhat Universities in Thailand. Other topics, including problem statement, research objectives, research questions and significance of the study are also demonstrated in this chapter.

1.2 Background of the Study

The word "university" has valuable meaning, which signifies higher education and beyond. It is a place where people are well educated and a place to create better job opportunities. The university is a very important institution for society because it provides knowledge to people, and also a learning centre for the community. Furthermore, it is also the wisdom resource centre for the area where it is located.

In general, the importance of community is to establish social practices, customs and traditions that will be transformed from generation to generation. Similarly, Bridger and Alter (2010) stated that a community is the area where people can interact together among several organisational patterns and they can also express their interests through various actions and activities. Interestingly, Bridger and Alter (2010) further pointed out that the "educational institution" is very vital for each society because everyone should gain an education to help, develop and prosper their local community.

According to Wallis (2006), a university's communities usually refer to professional organisations, businesses, industries, and local and higher level governments with whom the university interacts. Thus, the "university" is the educational institute that provides the highest level of education and is expected to serve the community in many aspects.

Many earlier scholars agree strongly on the importance of university toward community. In the case of Parsons (Perry & Wiewel, 2005), the writer pointed out that university is an important source of achieving knowledge or wisdom; moreover, it is a centre of culture and its role is to make society civilised. Jassawalla and Sashittal (1998; Buys & Bursnall, 2007) said university-community engagement provides a chance for people to gain common purposes via interactions, information exchange, and coordinated activities. Nesbit et al. (2007; Fletcher, 2008) suggested that institutions of higher education should locate themselves as learning organisations (Faris, 2003; Tinto, 1997; Fletcher, 2008) and the university should be aware of developing their capacity as sources of learning, resources, and partnerships. UNESCO Bangkok (2008) also reflected the same sentiment and concluded that higher education should be a catalyst for sustainable development and the building of a "learning society."

Thai scholar Chaichankul (2006) proposed that a university has to learn from the community and coordinate each other to solve problems, find solutions, and create success for both (Magrath, 2000; Chaichankul, 2006). Moreover, the education process should create educational opportunities that lead to community's empowerment instead of selecting clever people to study within the university at all (Soontornvipart, 2012). To conclude about a university's significance, Sinthunava (2009) stated, "Higher education is essential to human resource development,

especially in this era of globalisation, where a country's international competitiveness depends a great deal on the capacity of its citizens to thrive in a knowledge-based economy and society" (p. 6).

In general, the relationship between community and university is called community-university partnerships, community-university relationships, and/or community-university engagement (CE); however, for this research, the preferred term is "community-university engagement". For the word engagement, Byrne (2000) used the concept envisioned by the Kellogg Commission involving a partnership between the university and society who have mutual goals and objectives. This also implies a sharing of expertise and resources to serve society effectively. Engagement provides an opportunity for all—faculties, staff, students, and public—to learn together in solving real problems. Close interactions will enhance and strengthen both the university and the community as evidenced by the research of Buys and Bursnall (2007) that indicated community-university engagement provides many benefits to university research, teaching, and learning. Additionally, Wallis (2006) explained that the many advantages of community-university engagement are the teaching and learning outcomes; for example, increasing students' opportunities for experiential learning and internships and gaining more research partnerships opportunities and funding.

In the case of community-university engagement in Thailand, Sangnapaboworn (2003) presented the results of the Higher Education Reform according to the National Education Act 1999. The Higher Education Commission created several projects to cultivate students' intellectual creativity to become a powerful human resource and help develop the country. The Best and Brightest Project gives students an opportunity to participate in educational trips abroad for a deeper understanding

of globalisation, international exchange, technological advancement, and national development.

In addition, the Research Project on Technology Transfer to Community pushes faculties, staff, and students to transmit their knowledge, technology, and other resources to the community in order to improve industrial and agricultural productivity, making the community and its people strong and providing a sense of well-being. Hence, the community will become a learning society where everybody can learn together.

The Learning Together to Strengthen Community Project of the Higher Education Commission promotes students' learning and working with people in the community in order to really understand society. The students conduct research based on community problems; they have to solve those problems and discover activities that should be conducted in the community. During summer vacation, students will be paid as a part time job, which means they will earn money and also achieve knowledge by working and studying with people in the community.

While most public universities are conducting research with the goal of being world class universities, there are 40 institutions across Thailand, converted from the Teacher's Colleges, with the aim of being educational institutions for community development; was established and developed to teach subjects on local wisdom, eradicating poverty, drug abuse, illiteracy, and so on to enhance a sustainable community. This conglomeration of institutions which was then upgraded to university status is the Rajabhat Universities of Thailand after June 2004. This legislative change meant that all Rajabhat Universities became independent, and the universities can develop their own administration and management systems. Moreover, Section Seven of the Rajabhat University Act of 2004 (Sinthunava, 2009)

specified that the primary purposes and responsibilities of all Rajabhat Universities were to develop local communities, maintain and promote Thai arts and culture, and provide lessons, research, and academic services to society (Office of the Prime Minister, 2004; Sinthunava, 2009).

According to Thiwapan, Thongsukdee and Phumipattrakom (2005), Rajabhat Universities are the leading universities in the community. They differ from other higher education institutes on many issues; they are based on the Teacher Training Schools and the Teacher's Colleges, they are governmental institutes that produce teachers from the certificate level to the level of bachelor's degrees, all of which are accepted across the society with alumni in many regions.

Furthermore, Rajabhat Universities are higher education institutes for developing communities in respect with the King's projects. They offer students a chance to become governmental officers, merchants, police officers, soldiers, officers of state enterprise, and community leaders. There are as many as ten thousand people per year who graduate with bachelor's degree and master's degrees in many majors that relate to the community needs for a reasonable fee.

Each university offers cultural capital, including others resources, such as natural beauty, environmental architecture, diversity of culture, civilisation and local wisdom, which are all important factors in developing the future. Ongoing development is facilitated by university council committees, administrators, lecturers, staff, alumni, and people in the community have enthusiasm to work together and coordinate with organisation both inside and outside the country.

Until today, all Rajabhat Universities must act under the Eleventh National Economic and Social Development Plan (2012-2016) issued by The Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board (2011). The second principle of

the plan is to emphasise humans at the center of development, to give importance to the participation process in every sector of society, and to promote the participation of people in the decision-making process.

The 15 year long-term framework of higher education, Volume 2 (2008–2022) of the Office of the Higher Education Commission, the Ministry of Education (2008) specified that the role of the university or higher education institute was to teach and transfer knowledge to students and at the same time accumulate, synthesise, analyse, create, and publish knowledge through conducting research in the past, present, and future. The result is that the society receives from university graduates the knowledge and ability to work as citizens of a refined society and culture to develop sustainable economy and enhance the status of the country.

Therefore, the 40 public Rajabhat Universities around Thailand will develop and give services to their communities in each region because their organising principle is to develop communities. This means that they have a more closed relationship to their communities than do other universities or institutes. In addition, all Rajabhat Universities have the principle role of providing education in many disciplines to people who are interested, both teenagers and adults. Rajabhat Universities also have the mission of conducting research in service of the community, giving the academic services to community, and maintaining the art and culture of the community.

Well-known Thai scholar, Chamarik (2006), reinforced the expectation that Rajabhat Universities be the educational institute that seriously enhances communities. In a speech in 2006, he stated that for "*Rajabhat Universities with Public Policy Movement for Good Living Quality of Community*," the aim is to serve people and community and to invite people in the community to come closer to the university; this means that communicating with people in community is absolutely

vital. He insisted that the community should possess an abundant wisdom that they need to maintain and develop. This is a huge task for an educational institute. That is why the relevant question is how to bring traditional wisdom to teaching procedures, conduct research, and build the base for the community and society. The 40 Rajabhat Universities have to realise and plan the same target goals and work for each area in a closed network collaboration.

In their article, "*Community Engagement for Sustainability: An Invitation and a Challenge to All Universities*," Renner and Cross (2008) outlined Rajabhat Universities' role toward the community:

> The Rajabhat Universities in Thailand have been given a mandate to provide educational programs at all degree levels with a focus on service to the local community. While the universities have their grounding in teacher education and training they have now diversified to offer degree programs from bachelor to doctoral level in disciplines such as education, science and technology, agriculture and industry, industrial arts, humanities, social sciences and management science across the country and even in surrounding countries. In addition, the Rajabhat Universities provide a comprehensive range or pre and in-service training programs to meet the needs of the professional workforce and the general public and conduct research related to rural development and sustainability (p. 392).

In a later speech, Krua-ngam (2008), the president of Songkhla Rajabhat University Council mentioned the role of Rajabhat Universities in a similar way but gave more details: Rajabhat Universities must work and develop community, acknowledge community wisdom, create a relationship between graduate students and community, help community to be able to adapt themselves along with the changing world, create academic excellence by using community wisdom, Thai wisdom, and international wisdom as principles, support cultures in community, and have an important role in developing personnel in community.

There are some successful projects where Rajabhat Universities play a significant role in their communities; since 2002, over 280 community experts have

been given "Teachers of Thai Wisdom" status supporting their local schools with their expertise as well as reaching over 117,000 community learners through a nationwide network of 82 local wisdom centres.

The Teachers of Thai Wisdom is an initiative program which has created a cohort of teachers across the country and has established Local Centres of Thai Wisdom. These centres have provided adults and students to access to learning and have promoted traditional skills for local communities' development. This has reinforced the overall thrust towards a learning society and the importance of self-sufficiency (Ministry of Education, n.d.).

Furthermore, from 1982 to 2009, there has been a total of 4,404 Royal Development Projects under the responsibility of the Office of the Royal Development Projects Board which has collaborated with Rajabhat and other universities (The Office of The Royal Development Projects Board, 2012) (Refer to Table 1.1).

Table 1.1: Numbers of Royal Development Projects Classified by Categories (The Office of The Royal Development Projects Board, 2012)

Categories	Projects
Water Sources	1,579
Agriculture	536
Environment	1,039
Occupational Promotion	343
Public Health	49
Communication	115
Public Welfare	166
Others	577
Total	4,404

The role of Rajabhat Universities toward the community is very important and necessary to promote these essential projects successfully; however, to build the community-university engagement, it is necessary to have a channel connecting each other; this is called "communication." If the universities act without communication,

they cannot achieve their goals in the community; likewise, the community cannot gain what they want from the university without communication. That is the reason why communication is the most important action and influence between community and university.

Kowalski (2003) proposed that communication is the vital key of effective practice which provides organisation's success; in the same way, Howard, Gervasoni and Butcher (2007) found one significant principle that contributes to successful community engagement in the case of Australian Catholic University (ACU National), which was communication in raising awareness. It would seem communication is an essential factor in making community-university engagement successful. The researchers stated communication is essential to support relationship/partnership formation, ensure sustainability, and enhance awareness of initiatives among communities.

In a related research, Judde and Adams (2008) identified six key components that provide successful community-university engagement. These factors are commitment, communication, collaboration, flexibility, trust, and the maintenance of a mutually beneficial relationship. Once again, communication is discussed as an essential factor in building a community-university partnership.

Because of the necessity and importance of communication, an organisation to manage effective sharing of information with the community, must have "public relations". This department's responsibility is to communicate with the people on the university's current events and to promote the university's good image in a positive way.

In recent years, numerous universities have established public relations departments. This is beneficial for better communication with students, alumni,

donors, communities, and the general public (E.Grillis, 1997; Mullins, 1996; Luo, 2009). Besides, universities look to their public relations departments to manage crises, boost rankings, increase donations, and manage other important tasks (Hirsh & Weber, 1999; Spagnolia, 1998; Luo, 2009).

According to Kowalski (2003), public relations departments build good image, build educational value in the public's attitude, provide interaction and apply two-way communication between schools and community. Meanwhile, Kim, Brunner and Fitch-Hauser (2006) mentioned that universities should pay close attention to local communities in order to gain good image in academic aspect and build relationship with community at the same time.

Therefore, public relations departments are an important part of any organisation. There are some public relations practitioners who have a role both internally and externally in an organisation. Kruckeberg and Starck (1988; Valentini Kruckeberg & Starck, 2012) identified several ways in which public relations can contribute to a community: helping community members and their organisations become aware of common interests, helping individuals in the community overcome argument, helping individuals seek security and protection through association with others, taking part in community projects promoting progress, and creating personal friendships.

Center, Jackson, Smith and Stansberry (2008) proposed public relations tasks toward community relationships: issuing interesting news and providing beneficial information to the community; representing the organisation in volunteer activities; managing the contributions function; counseling management on contributions of employees; arranging facilities and equipment used by community groups; functioning as the organisation's middleman with local government, civic,

educational, and ad hoc groups concerned with reform, social problems, and celebrations; planning and helping to implement special events; preparing advertising or position papers which residents or local government need or desire; preparing publications for distribution to resident groups; and planning and conducting open houses or tours as needed or desirable. In addition, public relations departments should be proactive in such ways that public relations practitioners should understand situations surrounding themselves and know how to prevent crises and promote current issues related to their organisation.

To implement public relations practices, public relations practitioners should employ strategies such as having a plan, method, or series of maneuvers or stratagems for obtaining a specific goal or result (The International Design Business Management, 2002). Therefore, the leader or manager must have all the information he or she needs in order to make the best decisions. Strategy is very meaningful and applicable to make public relations successful.

According to Palea (2010), public relations also represents a combination of multiple strategies and creativities. However, practitioners may have different qualities and different ways for conducting their tasks. Wilcox (2009; Palea, 2010) wrote in his book *"Public Relations: Strategies and Tactics"*, that there are some fundamental characteristics for successful public relations practitioners. These are the ability to write and speak skillfully; to identify and define problems; to find new and efficient solutions with creativity; and to deliver charming and awesome presentations. Moreover, Dozier and Grunig (1992; Rhee, 2004) commented additionally that public relations departments should integrate into a single department so that the vertical working structure of the organisation becomes more powerful.

To conclude, having a public relations department at the university is essential in informing the community how the university can serve them and how the university operates. The public relations department communicates with the community regarding their participation in the university's activities, and that is the highest objective of all Rajabhat Universities.

1.3 Problem Statement

Most universities agree to pay attention to community and university engagement and implement them to maintain their relationship for the improvement of every aspects. Universities must particularly realise the needs and expectations of society and give education related to society's values and morals (Cansaran, Orbay & Kalkan, 2010). Furthermore, real partnerships between universities and their communities must be built on mutual respect, equal status and mutual giving and receiving (LeGates & Robinson, 1998).

In Thailand, there is a group of universities named Rajabhat Universities that is established to be a learning centre for the communities they serve. They are like friends who aid people in all levels by making available expertise from academic staff, knowledge, innovations, equipment, etc. to fulfill community needs. This is stated in Rajabhat University Act in 2004 (Suan Dusit Rajabhat University, n.d.). At the same time, a top mission of every Rajabhat Universities is to be responsible for accomplishing the Royal Development Projects which are the projects of His Majesty's private study, research and implementation and these projects are aimed at solving the major problems facing the people and communities (The Office of The Royal Development Projects Board, 2012). The Rajabhat Universities must take part in planning, operating and building public participation to facilitate these projects to

be successful and effective in related communities. This means that the Royal Development Projects and other community projects need support from universities.

According to the constitution of Thailand, the emphasis is to give the people their constitutional right for participation; however, from the literature review of many previous research of Thailand, mentioned that public participation of Thai people is passive. The people do not pay attention to public participation except in voting for election because they lack space to express their opinion. For the poor people, they do not get opportunities at all (Timmuang, 1998; Kaewthep, 2010). Likewise, Niyomwech (2011) stated that the decision making came only from government officers and also there is the problem that education is not cultivated into public participation through the communities. This gives the impression that the participation in governmental affair is limited for certain people only. That is why, the people lack enthusiasm to express their ideas or voluntarily accept participation with governmental sectors.

At the same time, the universities cannot respond to the communities' needs and they also ignore community services as well (The Office of National Education Commission, 2007; Lertwachara, 2012). People in communities wish universities to solve flood problem, polluted water, social management and health problem and they also desire introduction of career for gaining more income to community (Mang-on, Ngeunsuk & Anggasit, 2007).

Accordingly, Komolmas (n.d.) cited Mr. Anand Panyarachun, a former Prime Minister of Thailand who addressed key points on the impact of quality of higher education. The problems are lack of understanding of basic concept of democracy among the faculties, staff and students. In addition, faculty members are narrow-minded; they cannot cooperate together and this affected the relationship building

between community and university. On the other hand, the university should offer services to everybody by surveying their needs first; likewise, the services should not cater too much about income but should emphasise on academic aspect (Dulsamphan, C, Muang-na, Dulsamphan, S. & Chutiparo, 2006). Therefore, many Thai scholars were dissatisfied with the university's roles toward communities. They stated that universities are not active to engage with their communities and there is limited participation from communities as well.

For this reason, the essential element to build and maintain this relationship is through "Public relations" which is defined as "a planned and systematic two-way process of communications between an educational organisation and its internal and external publics designed to build morale, goodwill, understanding and support for that organisation" (The National School Public Relations Association, 1986; Kowalski, 2004, p.10).

Nevertheless, from many previous research, there are a lot of general and specific problems of Rajabhat Universities' public relations work in their effort to communicate with the public; particularly, with the community surrounding the universities which resulted in an ineffective relationship between community and university: The administrators do not understand the role of public relations departments; which is why they do not take this issue into account and pay less importance to them (Buawech, 2007).

Lack of short, middle, and long term plan and research evaluation affect unclear, ineffective, wasteful, and extravagant public relations (Buawech, 2007). Besides, Buawech (2007) pointed out that public relations departments have often encountered the necessary equipment insufficiency involving inadequate and inappropriate public relations media to target (Yuangsoi, 2004).

With regard to public relations practitioners' constraints, apart from having excessive workload, practitioners require more knowledge and experience to be more efficient in their work (Santakit, 2005). Furthermore, some universities lack qualified practitioners who can coordinate within the sectors, this problem may cause misunderstandings, provoke difficulties in public relations both inside and outside the sectors (Sutthiwattanaphan, 2001; Buawech, 2007) and limit participation from personnel in different departments or from outside people (Yuangsoi, 2004).

When Rajabhat Universities faced these public relations problems, it means Rajabhat Universities' practices of public relations with the public are less effective.

In order to solve these problems, the administrators and public relations practitioners should seriously pursue continuous communication between the community and university utilising the proper and efficient public relations processes; particularly, Participatory Communication, which is suitable for creating relationship between university and community that reflect the democratic practices of Thailand, which supports public participation in all levels of Thai society.

For this research, the researcher selected five public relations departments from five southern Rajabhat Universities as case studies in order to analyse their public relations strategies in building successful Participatory Communication between communities and universities.

Rajabhat Universities have a duty to coordinate and facilitate the Royal Development Projects (Krua-ngam, n.d.). For the case of the southern group of Rajabhat Universities, it is considered the smallest group with only five universities. Nonetheless, they take part in 807 projects which is the biggest proportion compared with other groups of Rajabhat Universities (Refer to Table 1.2); consequently, it seems to be a difficult and challenging responsibility for each public relations

department in southern Rajabhat Universitiey to operate and coordinate with communities to achieve their goal, in developing the community.

Table 1.2: Numbers of Royal Development Projects Operated by Rajabhat Universities Classified by Regions (The Office of The Royal Development Projects Board, 2012)

Group of Rajabhat Universities	Projects
Rattanakosin Group and Central Group (15 Universities)	1,024
North eastern Group (8 Universities)	929
Northern Group (12 Universities)	1,221
Southern Group (5 Universities)	807
Not specified	423
Total	4,404

Therefore, the southern group was chosen as case study for this research to examine the public relations strategies for building university participatory with the community; in as much as, the application of strategies of public relations that made an impact to the communities.

1.4 Research Objectives

For this research, the researcher aims to examine the level of public participation with the university, to identify the role of public relation departments, and to examine public relations strategies of public relations departments in Rajabhat Universities in terms of building university-community engagement.

Therefore, this research has three main objectives:

1.4.1   To examine the level of public participation with the university

1.4.2   To identify the roles of public relation departments in southern Rajabhat

Universities in encouraging university and community engagement

    1.4.3   To examine public relations strategies in terms of building university and community engagement

1.5 Research Questions

    Relevant to the objectives, the researcher imposed three research questions and related sub questions developed from The Excellence Theory of Public Relations which specified the appropriate characteristic of public relations department.

    1.5.1 Which level of community participation with the university?

       1.5.1 (a) How does the community give feedback to your public relations department?

       1.5.1(b) How does the community participate in the university's projects/ activities?

    These research questions are specified to evaluate the level of public participation with university, to identify the patterns and the channels of communities' feedback and to examine the characteristics of communities' participation with university.

    1.5.2 What are the roles of each public relations department in encouraging university and community engagement?

       1.5.2(a) What are the roles of public relations department in each university?

     1.5.2(b) What are the roles of your job description in the sector?

     1.5.2(c) What is the public relations process in your sector?

     1.5.2(d) Do you have any participation in decision making of your sector?

If yes, how does it affect your decision making?

1.5.2(e) Does your knowledge and ability qualify you to be a public relations director/practitioner? And how?

The interviewees who are working in public relations departments in each university will identify themselves with regard to the roles for which they are responsible. This result is for the researcher to examine the job descriptions or the job criteria of public relations departments in each university.

1.5.3 What are the public relations strategies adopted in building university and community engagement?

1.5.3(a) Which media do you use for doing public relations and how do you communicate with both internal and external target groups?

1.5.3(b) How do you conduct public relations with the community?

1.5.3(c) How does your sector evaluate the feedback from your public relations practices?

1.5.3(d) Are there any problems or difficulties faced by your sector?

1.5.3(e) What are the public relations strategies carried out in your sector? Are they effective to implement?

1.5.3(f) What are the best public relations strategies for enhancing community and university engagement?

These questions try to examine the public relations strategies for building university and community engagement, which may be different according to each university. It is vital to compare all data to discover which public relations strategies are the best process for the successful building of participation between the university and the community.

1.6 Significance of the Study

Due to the origin of the establishment, the group of Rajabhat Universities is set up to serve the community. Communicating with the community is essential and necessary, particularly with regard to Participatory Communication, which is a tool designed to encourage people in the community to participate in university activities. Consequently, the researcher is interested in studying public relations strategies for building university and community engagement for contribution to universities.

The researcher selected a group of southern Rajabhat Universities as a case study because the group is small in numbers, but they have to be responsible for the Royal Development Projects which is a principle university's mission in the biggest proportion compared with other Rajabhat Universities group; therefore, to build public relations strategy for community-university engagement is necessary.

In addition, from literature review, the researcher did not find any Thai researches related to public relations strategy to build community-university engagement; therefore, the researcher expects that this research will be beneficial for application by other universities.

1.7 Conclusion

This introductory chapter has described the background of the research, specified the research problem, identified the research objectives, asked research questions, and given the significance of the study. The following chapters will display further information on Rajabhat Universities which is a case study of this research.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND: RAJABHAT UNIVERSITIES

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is designed to propose further information and origin of Rajabhat Universities, consisting of history, misson, name of Rajabhat Universities, division of Rajabhat Universities, role of Rajabhat Universities, Rajabhat Universities and community projects and Rajabhat Universities at present. The researcher would like to provide this information of Rajabhat Universities so that is can be appreciated.

2.2 History

Rajabhat Universities were developed from Teacher Training Schools from around the country. The first Teacher Training School was opened on 12th October, 1901 situated in the area of a building for sheltering children in Suan Ma-li Subdistrict, Bamrungmuang District, Phranakorn Province (it is now the Phranakorn Rajabhat University). Then, Rajabhat Universities expanded to be established in every region. Teacher Training Schools changed their name to Teachers' Colleges and in 1992, they got the name Rajabhat Institutes from King Bhumibol Adulyadej; Rajabhat means savant of the king.

In 1995, the Thailand legislation permitted the universities to use its formal name "Rajabhat Institutes". These universities were built to promote higher education and to develop the community. The university's further objectives was to educate people for both academics and careers, to do research; to provide academic services to society; to improve, transfer and develop technologies; to maintain art and culture; to produce teachers; and to support their academic standings.

In 2004, the name was changed again to "Rajabhat Universities" and in 2005, the name Rajabhat Universities was formally until the present day, according to legislation (Phranakhon Rajabhat University, 2012).

2.3 Mission

The Rajabhat University Act (2004), Section Seven, states:
> The university is an institute of higher education for local development in order to help reinforce national intelligence, revive the learning force, promote local wisdom, create artistry for secure and sustainable prosperity of the people, take part in managing, maintaining, utilizing natural resources and environment on balance and sustention basis under the objectives of providing education, enhancing advanced knowledge and professionalism, providing lessons, researching, providing academic services to society, improving, transferring and developing technology, maintaining arts and culture, generating teachers and enhancing the academic standing of teachers. (Office of the Prime Minister, 2004, p.2; Sinthunava, 2009, p.17)

2.4 Division of Rajabhat Universities

Although all 40 Rajabhat Universities in Thailand had to relate to the National Education Act (1999) and the Rajabhat University Act (2004); those located outside Bangkok face different local cultures and environments. For example, Rajabhat Universities that are located in Southern Thailand are different in their policies and strategic plans to Rajabhat Universities in Bangkok because the needs of local communities and local employees are different from Bangkok (Sinthunava, 2009).

The 40 Rajabhat Universities are divided into five groups involving the region where they are located according to the Office of the Higher Education Commission (2012).

2.4.1 Rattanakosin Group or Bangkok Group (six Rajabhat Universities)

Bangkok, the capital city of Thailand, covers an area of 1,500 square kilometres (Bangkok.com, n.d.) and the population is 5,673, 560 (National Statistical Office

Thailand, 2012). Bangkok contributes to agriculture, economy, trade, and foreign contacts. As a result, the region is the most densely populated area in the country. (Foreign Office, The Government Public Relations Department, n.d.).

Moreover, it is surrounded by royal temples, shopping centers and museums (Thailand For Visitors, n.d.) and has a famous nightlife scene (Bangkok.com, n.d.). Bangkokkian and people from rural areas working here are usually businessmen, sellers, office workers and labourers.

In the case of students, they prefer to study in Bangkok because it enables them to earn and study as the same time. Therefore, there was overpopulation due to people from other rural areas desiring to study in this capital. The Rattanakosin Group or Bangkok Group which consists of six universities were organised and expanded in the Bangkok area.

2.4.1(a) Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University

2.4.1(b) Suan Dusit Rajabhat University

2.4.1(c) Chandrakasem Rajabhat University

2.4.1(d) Phranakorn Rajabhat University

2.4.1(e) Dhonburi Rajabhat University

2.4.1(f) Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University

2.4.2 Northern Group (eight Rajabhat Universities)

There are17 provinces in the north of Thailand with a population of 11,802,566 (National Statistical Office Thailand, 2012) and an area covering 169,600 square kilometres (Foreign Office, The Government Public Relations Department, n.d.)

This population includes the tribal villagers who live in many mountains in the north. The temperature in the mountainous area is cool enough to cultivate various

fruit and vegetable and to also become a popular tourist attraction for tourists who love cool weather. The people here not only engage in agriculture but also businesses serving tourists such as rafting, trekking or elephant trekking or even sport such as golf or cricket (Sawasdee.com, n.d.).

There are eight Rajabhat Universities in the big provinces of the North of Thailand.

2.4.2(a) Chiang Mai Rajabhat University

2.4.2(b) Chiang Rai Rajabhat University

2.4.2(c) Lampang Rajabhat University

2.4.2(d) Uttaradit Rajabhat University

2.4.2(e) Pibulsongkram Rajabhat University

2.4.2(f) Kamphaeng Phet Rajabhat University

2.4.2(g) Nakhon Sawan Rajabhat University

2.4.2(h) Phetchabun Rajabhat University

2.4.3 North Eastern Group (12 Rajabhat Universities)

There are 20 provinces in the north eastern region of Thailand with a population of 21,697,488 (National Statistical Office Thailand, 2012). This region has the largest area compared with other regions. It covers an area of 168,854 square kilometres. Due to the soil being mostly sandy and storing hardly any water, this results in dry conditions which are not suitable for cultivation although some areas can cultivate jasmine rice. Livestock raising is therefore the main occupation of the people here. (Foreign Office, The Government Public Relations Department, n.d.).

Among 20 provinces surrounding the north eastern region, there are 12 Rajabhat Universities which each educate people in a variety of fields or subjects.

2.4.3(a) Udon Thani Rajabhat University

2.4.3(b) Rajabhat Maha Sarakham University

2.4.3(c) Loei Rajabhat University

2.4.3(d) Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University

2.4.3(e) Nakhon Ratchasima Rajabhat University

2.4.3(f) Buriram Rajabhat University

2.4.3(g) Surindra Rajabhat University

2.4.3(h) Ubon Ratchathani Rajabhat University

2.4.3(i) Kalasin Rajabhat University

2.4.3(j) Chaiyaphum Rajabhat University

2.4.3(k) Roi Et Rajabhat University

2.4.3(l) Sisaket Rajabhat University

2.4.4 Central Group (nine Rajabhat Universities)

In the central region, there are 25 provinces and around these provinces, the population is 10,549,332 people (National Statistical Office Thailand, 2012). It covers an area of 102,447 square kilometer. Central Thailand is a vast flatland around the Chao Phraya River. It is appropriate for cultivating rice, fruit farming and fishery industries while tourism still plays a strong part in the economy (Foreign Office, The Government Public Relations Department, n.d.).

This Rajabhat Group is bigger than the others because there are 25 provinces including western provinces and eastern provinces of Thailand; however, there are only nine Rajabhat Universities that must be responsible for the students from a large area in this region.

2.4.4(a) Phranakhon Si Ayutthaya Rajabhat University

2.4.4(b) Rambhai Barni Rajabhat University