مجلة جامعة الشارقة للعلوم الإنسانية والاجتماعية

اسم المقال: العلاقة بين مخرجات التعلم لبرنامج العلاقات العامة ومتطلبات سوق العمل في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة
اسم الكاتب: أماني حسن النقبي، خيرت معوض عياد
رابط ثابت: https://political-encyclopedia.org/index.php/library/9316
تاريخ الاسترداد: 2026/11/01 17:01 +03

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جامعة الشارقة
UNIVERSITY OF SHARJAH

University of Sharjah Journal

A Refereed Scientific journal

of

Humanities & Social Sciences



Vol. 20, No. 4
Jamadi II 1445 A.H. / September 2023 A.D.

ISSN : 1996 - 2339

University of Sharjah Journal for Humanities & Social Sciences, Volume 20, No. 4 December 2023
https//:doi.org/10.36394/jhss/20/4/14

The Relationship of PR Program Learning Outcomes and Labor Market Requirements in the UAE

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Received on: 20-06-2022 **Accepted on: 25-02-2023**

Abstract:

Recently, technology has made public relations overlap with other fields. In the UAE labor market, the demand for technology has increased and government entities have moved to remote work. This study, therefore, examines the extent to which university public relations (PR) education outcomes meet the needs of the UAE labor market. It also investigates the extent to which UAE universities provide academic programs in PR that keep pace with the evolution of new media technologies. The study draws on systems theory because local universities, international universities, and the labor market form an interconnected system, and none of these components can work alone. Using the qualitative method, which relies primarily on benchmarks, UAE government entities can better understand whether PR graduates are receiving a tailored education and are well qualified to handle ever-changing tasks. The result shows that UAE universities are providing students in PR programs with the latest information and essential tools they need to enter the UAE labor market and keep pace with new technology. However, local universities need to improve students' technological skills, as there is a big difference compared to what international universities offer their students. International universities are intensifying their programs to include technological skills such as media storytelling, data analysis, image and print design, and website management in addition to the usual PR skills and knowledge.

Keywords: system theory, media technology, public relations, PR education outcomes, labor market.

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Introduction:

In recent years, public relations (PR) in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has become a necessity for organizational effectiveness as it makes a paradigm shift from the traditional work process to one with an integrated work approach. As part of the strategic communication system, PR is widely known to be a powerful management process for organizations to reach their goals and objectives.

The UAE is also striving to keep pace with new technologies, including new media technology. The new communication technology is set to shape the future of PR and bring it to a new stage of development. It plays a major role in making a qualitative leap in PR. The rapid development in communication technology and its availability, anywhere, anytime, have increased the relationship between government and academic institutions in the country, this development needs the consolidation and improvement of relationships between them.

The UAE has paid close attention to government communications and has established communications offices in most major cities to address communication issues and activate communication channels with all institutions and agencies in the country. In the emirate of Sharjah, the Sharjah Government Media Bureau and the Sharjah Award for Government Communication have been established to develop the government's communication system, build partnerships with government entities and share information with various institutions including educational institutions (Aysh & Farooq, 2019).

Therefore, the UAE has paid great attention to building relationships between universities and government entities. Cooperation between

universities and institutions is necessary at this time because it meets the requirements of the labor market in the UAE. It has become a culture in the daily practice of work and communication relations. Universities can no longer perform their functions in isolation from society and its institutions (Ayad, 2021). University education is one of the means of shaping society, building the skills of its members, and preparing them for work in various fields. This is a complementary relationship and has a positive impact on the sectors of labor development in the country.

Research problem:

The overlap of PR with other fields in the UAE, as well as the rapid pace of development of media technology, have recently led to a situation where some UAE government entities are unsure as to what the PR role is, why it overlaps with other fields, and what it can do for them beyond the traditional tasks.

Government entities have also shifted to remote working and the demand for virtual events has increased, requiring PR staff to put more effort into developing innovative strategies, reaching online influencers, running virtual media campaigns, conducting social media analysis, and addressing the demographic differences between domestic and international audiences.

In terms of education, the problem for PR students acquiring skills across different courses is that they might have difficulty moving from having a partial skill to a fully developed one. PR students might also become less productive and effective.

Therefore, government entities need understand whether or not university education outcomes meet the needs of the PR field in the labor market and if graduate PR students are sufficiently qualified to handle constantly changing tasks. Thus, it is necessary to examine the essence and the basis of this issue and to answer the question: To what extent do universities' outcomes in the field of PR cover the requirements of the labor market in the UAE?

Research questions:

The aim is to examine how the UAE promotes the qualifications needed in the field of PR in various universities in the UAE, and how the outcomes of PR education are useful to government entities in the UAE, especially in the era of digital transformation. The study seeks to answer the following questions:

RQ1- To what extent do UAE universities provide academic programs in public relations that keep pace with the evolution of new media technology platforms?

RQ2- To what extent do the outcomes of public relations programs at universities meet the requirements of the UAE labor market?

Literature review:

The development of PR and communication technologies:

Today, the UAE is focused on development and striving to be better. The diversity of the media in the UAE has led to media institutions' public relations becoming more prominent, which, in turn, has helped them to reach the largest number of people (Badran, 2019).

In addition, government employees in the UAE have long recognized the potential of social media, with the majority viewing its use as an important and creative tool for improving collaboration between government organizations and the public (Salem, 2014). However, as times change, so do people. Wohn and Bowe (2016) found that changes in the media environment have changed the way people are exposed to information and how they access or receive their news from media organizations.

Cernicova (2016) argues that the development of social media is putting pressure on the field of communication sciences in terms of additional tasks for PR practitioners. In many countries, access to the public relations profession is not necessarily linked to a specific type of education. Nevertheless, universities offer PR programs within the umbrella of communication studies and form a curriculum according to standards that are constantly challenged. Educational programs need to provide evidence on how they empower future professionals to: 1) connect business strategy and communication; 2) deal with digital development and social networks; 3) develop and maintain trust with active audiences; 4) be transparent when dealing with demanding and energetic audiences; and 5) deal with the increasing size of information flow.

Nowadays, due to the Covid-19 crisis, many government entities in the UAE have adopted remote-working systems. As a result, the Federal Authority for Government Human Resources in the UAE has made a study of the effectiveness of these systems in federal organizations to help in planning the future of the country. The study's sample included 6,327 employees and among the results, 96% of them confirmed that their organizations have applied the remote-working system, whilst 73% indicated that they can fully perform their duties (FAHR Annual Report, 2020).

Some studies reflect the change in the communication landscape in the modern era, which, at the same time, generates new and different kinds of PR practices. According to a study conducted by Zerfass et al. (2016) among 2,253 communication practitioners across Europe, 93% of the participating PR practitioners find content strategy essential to the future of the communication process in general, and 58 mentioned that their organizations are already implementing a strategic content strategy on how to produce, manage and distribute content.

Moreover, "during the past two decades, there was an increase in research dealing with the use of websites and social media in public relations practices. These researches have taken many directions: some of them focused on analyzing the content of organizations' websites to identify their characteristics, and others focused on the uses of the Internet in fields of marketing and strategic communication" (Ayad, 2020, p. 54).

On the other hand, Brahma (2018) states that good communication depends on the use of both modern and old media channels, and the good communicators do not abandon the old communication channels, but they are able to understand and use each media channel to the advantage of their organization.

However, Creedon and Al-khaja (2019) explain that public relations in the middle east and north Africa region (MENA) still largely focus on media relations and social media without thinking about who they are dealing with and why. PR practitioners need to go back to basics and learn reputation objectives, target audience, communication method, and evaluation. There are not enough PR practitioners who focus their work on research and target audiences, and that needs to change.

The need for public relations in government sectors:

Sezgul (2019) emphasizes that PR activity nowadays has become more important and has a prominent role in both the public and private sectors. PR activity in the public sector is more diverse in all aspects and has broader goals than it does in the private sector.

Tantivejakul (2019) states that Thailand's Government Public Relations Department (GPRD) supports the government's public agenda, including its pro-capitalist/anti-communist stance and economic and social growth policies. The GPRD expanded significantly in terms of media markets, local offices, and network coverage and was later given responsibility for playing a leading role in government public relations.

The government sector is rapidly embracing communication technologies. Jiang et al. (2021) highlight that the use of social media by governments is becoming more common. Social media provides a cost-effective and productive communication medium for governments at all levels to share information with the public and solicit public feedback and ideas, increasing transparency and involvement.

Public relations education:

According to Fitch (2014), the ideal curriculum in Australian universities provides a broad-based education, which indicates that public relations education at the university level is not limited to introducing students to the theories and practices of public relations, but is also designed to improve their problem-solving skills through comprehensive public relations education.

In Portugal, less than half of the bachelor's curricula deliver supervised work experience in public relations, and about half of the eight master's curricula offer subject areas mostly linked to functioning PR, such as PR applications, PR programming and creation, or PR communities. Only three of the eight-degree courses include a course in "PR ethics," and this core content is rarely included (Gonçalves et al., 2013).

As a survey of a sample of Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) practitioners and instructors of master's programs in public relations shows, PR students can learn about strategic management, business, theory, and globalization. They must be capable of thinking strategically, solving public relations issues in management, applying theories, working in a globalized environment that is increasingly international and multicultural, and mastering language/orientation or writing (Shen & Toth, 2013).

The Commission on Public Relations Education has described the following courses as being "ideal" for a public relations undergraduate major: introduction to public relations, case studies in PR, PR research, PR law and ethics, PR writing, PR planning, PR management, PR campaigns, and work experience, while the ideal courses for master's study are: PR theory, PR law, PR ethics, global PR, PR applications, PR management, PR research, PR programming and creation, PR publics, communication processes, management knowledge, behavioral knowledge, work experience and thesis (Turk (Ed.), 2006).

Teaching PR in the digital world:

Public relations professionals have had to build their skills to keep up with technological developments. This issue has led them to focus on new skills. According to Sutherland et al. (2020), online customer service, one

of these skills, is more sought after by graduate employers than skills in areas such as social media content production, strategy development, and analytics.

However, Tsetsura and Vergara (2021) argue that American academics and practitioners have identified three main skills in public relations as being the most important for the future and longer-term survival of the profession: 1) analytical thinking; 2) strategic planning; and 3) communication expertise.

Meganck et al. (2020) confirm that preparing PR professionals requires linking education to job requirements by acquiring educational competencies that increase their chances of employment with employers. These competencies include basic skills such as PR writing, advanced skills such as digital media, and soft skills such as administration, leadership, and the capability of working in teams. The authors point out that soft skills may not be taught directly at universities because it is difficult to teach them or because there is simply not enough time, but they can be influenced by various courses, assignments, and experiences.

Additionally, social media should be part of every curriculum, either as a stand-alone course or integrated into various courses. We live in a time of convergence and divergence (Kiesenbauer & Zerfass, 2015).

Teaching PR in the Arab world:

Zamoum (2013) has conducted a study titled "Teaching Crisis Management in Arab Universities: A Critical Assessment". The study evaluates the relationship between crisis management and Arab universities' programs. The researcher suggests that public relations educators in the Arab world should invest massively in textbooks as there is a major

shortage in all areas of PR, from principles and issues management to virtual PR. Academics in the Arab world should build relationships, and work effectively with, companies to align their programs and curricula with market needs, and they should consider expanding their PR practices from press agency to issues management and reputational management.

Michael and Grope (2017) highlight the importance of the need for more activities for UAE students relating to real-life experiences, participation in events, and workshops between students and PR experts that can help develop professionalism in the UAE work environment and ultimately contribute to their effective education.

Although there is much research highlighting the relationship between educational outputs and labor market demands, there is little work showing whether the educational outcomes offered by universities in the field of public relations meet the demands of the labor market in the UAE. However, this study finds that several studies illustrate the course materials and skills taught to PR students around the world, as well as the PR subjects taught in the digital media era. Most of these studies illustrate the importance of crisis management, PR management, leadership, strategic planning, and theories. These studies also addressed the importance of knowledge about international communication, cultures, and the basics of writing and speaking. In addition, it is clear that the government sector has a great need for PR compared to the private sector as it quickly adapts to communication technology to provide strategic plans, agendas, services, and the best communication and information tools for government and the public. Government sectors have broader goals than the private sector. It must also be remembered that it is the main engine of states and the image that shows and represents the state on the world stage. The UAE

government has recently seen an upsurge in the media landscape and some other sectors, in addition to some changes that have occurred due to the Covid-19 crisis, which has led most organizations to focus on social media applications, websites, and the use of the remote-working system. Given the rapid developments in communications technology, all of these things need to be rethought in the work of PR professionals in government agencies and linked to higher education outcomes.

Theoretical framework:

The world is simply a series of systems in which each element intersects and influences each other. Systems theory was developed in the 1940s by biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy, who tried to discover a new way to study the life system (Montuori, 2011). Systems theory, which represents an integrated group of variables interacting as a system to form a larger pattern, has its origins in European thought concerned with change, development, and order, particularly in the works of Geog Hegel, Charles Darwin, and Karl Marx (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). Systems theory is related to relationships, as variables affect each other in a stable way, even as time passes.

More generally, the structure of a system may include a hierarchy of subsystems, each of which contributes to the operation of the overall system. Closed and open systems refer to how open or closed organizational structures such as groups are to their environment. When organizations are considered closed systems, their environment doesn't interact with them, while open-system organizations interact with their environment (Cummings, 2015). The open system has qualities of wholeness, interdependence, self-regulation, harmony, balance, versatility, and equifinality (Gunaratne, 2008).

Regarding the above discussion, researchers may argue that this theory emphasizes the interdependence of organizations with their external and internal environments. Some organizations in the UAE have relationships with other parties such as: the government, media, financial institutions, and customers and they use two ways of communication with them. According to Badran (2017), the UAE government recently decided to directly solicit ideas, responses, and suggestions from UAE citizens to improve public services. This exercise aimed to engage citizens through technology. Therefore, UAE government entities are expected to use an open system because they are concerned about how to be productive in their relationship with customers, organizations, or other parties. Both parties can influence each other. They can create problems and opportunities for each other. Therefore, by using an open system, government entities can assess the expectations and needs of the other parties.

In this connection, the relationship between universities and government entities is an integrative one. It is based on collaboration in various areas to achieve multiple benefits for both parties. Universities, through this relationship, seek to develop their performance and ensure the high quality of their outputs from programs, studies and curricula, while government entities, through this reciprocal relationship, seek to improve the services they provide and ensure that staff carry out their work tasks effectively.

In this regard, the application of systems theory illuminates the understanding and evaluation of the relationship between universities and government agencies in the country. This theory provides a perspective to examine the dynamic and integrative system between the two parties and the extent to which universities meet the demands of the labor market. This theory also helps in gaining a better understanding of the conditions

of government agencies in the country, their problems, and the difficulties they are currently facing.

Since this study is based on systems theory, the impact of universities on labor market demand in the UAE can be observed, measured, and analyzed. Systems theory is assumed to highlight the integrated relationship between parties. It can be used to examine the extent to which all components (local universities, international universities, and the labor market) have combined to form a complex system and how it ultimately leads to an outcome where none of these components could function alone.

This study started with the research questions, method(s) used and ends with the results and analysis. If the results show that universities influence the labor market by offering courses in public relations that meet the needs of the labor market and the extent to which they focus more on certain skills than others, it certainly means that systems theory exists. The findings and results of this research are evidence of the interdependence of, and a strong relationship between, universities and the demands of the market, which allow this system to be understood and perceived.

Methodology:

To answer the above questions (RQ1 and RQ2), the study uses quantitative and qualitative methods.

Quantitative method:

- Benchmark study:

Measure and compare skills, technology, knowledge, and PR program outcomes between the PR departments of four universities from around the world: University of Southern California (US), University of Florida (US),

University of Winchester (UK) and Pennsylvania State University (US) and the three PR departments of local universities (United Arab Emirates University, University of Sharjah and Ajman University).

Qualitative method:

- In-depth interview:

Convenience sampling, (which is nonprobability sampling), is used in this study because the respondents are available and easy to reach. They are willing to share their perspective, opinions, and even make some suggestions. A sample of government communication department directors in government entities was used to identify the required qualifications and skills needed for PR graduates.

The interviewees were eight directors from different emirates to gain more comprehensive insights into the topic. They are as follows:

1. Ali Yousef Al Saad, Communication and International Relations Director, Emirates News Agency (WAM), Abu Dhabi.
2. Majda Al Hammadi, Director of Communications, Department of Economic Development, Abu Dhabi.
3. Salem Bel Youha, Director of Media Services and Acting Director of Communications, Government of Dubai Media Office.
4. Maitha Shuaib, Director of Corporate Communications, Dubai Women's Establishment.
5. General Arif Hasan Hudeib, Sharjah Police Media and Public Relations Department. Sharjah Police.

6. Jawaher Al Naqbi, Manager, International Government Communication Centre. Sharjah Media Bureau.
7. Maryam Al Dhuhoori, Institutional Relations Center Head, Department of Finance, Ajman.
8. Amal Ibrahim Al Nuaimi, Director, Institutional Communications Office, Ras Al Khaimah Antiquities and Museums Department.

Benchmark study:

- Benchmark brief:

To answer the research questions, a benchmark analysis has been used as a method. Benchmarking is applied to any area of an organization's products, services, or practices to learn from and compare to others. The benchmarking phase compares the objectives, key variables, themes, and underlying assumptions of each benchmark. Based on this analysis, overlaps, differences, gaps, and underlying assumptions of the selected data benchmarks are identified (Zuiderwijk et al., 2021).

Benchmarking can be done internally or externally. Companies use internal benchmarking to compare themselves with their own projects. Companies use external benchmarking to find projects of other companies. In this study, external benchmarking is used because the comparison is between local universities and other international universities.

In other words, benchmarking plays a similar role as the Six Sigma methodology for process improvement. The Six Sigma methodology consists of five interrelated steps: define, measure, analyze, improve, and control (DMAIC). The integrated steps of benchmarking are a continuous circle, each step interacting with, and influencing, the other steps. This

process confirms that the world is centered in a system which is system theory (National Research Council et al., 2005).

Therefore, benchmarking in this study, which is also a system, can help measure performance, identify gaps and areas for improvement. It can also help to better understand local universities, track their peers, and find out if they are applying the best international standards.

Sampling:

Many universities in the world offer PR at the undergraduate level, either as a stand-alone major or as a course of study. However, for this study, universities that offer an undergraduate degree in PR, rather than an undergraduate degree in mass communication in general, were selected for the sample.

The University of Southern California (US), University of Florida (US), University of Winchester (UK), and Pennsylvania State University (US) are among the world's leading universities with established public relations programs.

Therefore, these four universities in the field of PR were used and compared with three local universities in the UAE, which are: United Arab Emirates University, the University of Sharjah, and Ajman University.

Procedure:

This study's procedure compared the PR programs of four international universities with those of three local universities in terms of courses, skills, professionals, performance, and achievements.

Part 1: Planning for the benchmark:

Planning is the first step in this benchmarking process. After selecting the participating universities, the main competencies or variables have been determined. These variables are the main tools to accurately measure the success of the project. According to the literature review and research questions, the main variables/competencies in this study are skills, knowledge, technology, and outcomes. The information in this study is obtained from the websites and catalogs of the selected universities, (as shown in Table 1) with the exception of 'outcomes' which are based on the overall learning objectives/outcomes of the universities' PR programs. Therefore, the learning objectives of each university's programs have been reviewed to ensure that the variables are ultimately included in the 'outcomes' tables.

Table 1: Benchmark Planning

Name:	Operational Benchmarking- University Comparisons
Universities involved:	University of Southern California (US)- Pennsylvania State University (US)- University of Winchester (UK), University of Florida (US) United Arab Emirates University- University of Sharjah- Ajman University
Main competencies:	Skills, Knowledge, Technology, Outcome
Data collection requirements:	Searching for universities with established public relations programs and comparing them with those of local universities
Sources:	Universities' websites and catalogs
Duration time:	More than one month

Part 2: How to scale variables:

Basically, each variable should have a numerical value, without which benchmarking cannot work properly. When the variables have been rescaled, the data values (not offered, offered in one course, and offered in more than one course) are transferred from the original range to the new range of 1 to 3, where "not offered" is the minimum value and "offered in more than one course" is the maximum value, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Benchmark Data Values

Options	Scale
Not offered	1
Offered in one course	2
Offered in more than one course	3

Part 3: Search current status:

In this research, benchmarking is done by creating measurement tables with four main variables (skills, technology, knowledge, and outcomes), and with sub-variables that fall under each of the main variables. The sub-variables help to ensure that each university in the sample is accurately measured. Determining the variables and using measurement tools facilitate obtaining accurate information and answering research questions, while assessing each university in the sample helps to obtain adequate information on the strengths and weaknesses, as the tables determine the availability of global standards in PR and their effectiveness in these universities.

Findings and result:

The study's findings and results are presented under two sub-titles:

1. Analysis of PR programs in the selected international and national/ local universities in terms of skills, technology, knowledge and learning outcomes.
2. Answers determined from the study's questions.

Analysis of PR programs in the selected international and national/local universities

This study looks at the variables used by international and local universities. The study shows that the degree of focus on particular variables varies from one university to another. Tables 3,4,5 and 6 show that there are fundamentals or priorities with which universities want to educate their students and these range from high level, medium level to low level. The sum for each variable is scored as follows: high from 15 to 21, medium from 8 to 14, and low from 1 to 7.

Table 3: The Main Skills of the Universities Program

Skills	International Universities		UAE Universities	
Writing and editing	12	25.5%	9	23.2%
Public speaking	6	12.8%	4	10.3%
Interpersonal communication	7	14.9%	7	18.0%
Etiquette and protocol	4	8.5%	4	10.0%
Research and scanning	10	21.3%	9	23.1%

Negotiation and problem-solving	8	17.0%	6	15.4%
Total	47	100.0%	39	100.0%

The data from Table 3 show that international universities outperform local universities in terms of the main skills. Table 7 shows that international universities have the highest percentage of skills in 'writing and editing' (25.5%), while the percentage for 'negotiation and problem-solving' is also high (17%). For local universities, the percentage of 'writing and editing' skills (23.2%) is higher than the other skills as is the percentage of 'negotiation and problem-solving' skills (15.4%), which are excellent percentages when compared with international universities, but the percentage of concentration on these two skills varies from university to university, regardless of whether they are international or local. The least concentrated skills are 'etiquette and protocol' (8.5% in international universities and 10% in local universities).

Findings from the interviews emphasize evidence of benchmarking analysis; participants also emphasized the importance of 'writing and editing' as an essential component of public relations. Salem Bel Youha, Director of Media Services and Acting Director of Communications, the Government of Dubai Media Office, confirmed that 'writing and editing' are the most important skills required for public relations staff. He mentioned that the ability to write concise, easy-to-understand messages helps meet the goals of the office. Maryam Al Dhuhoori, an Institutional Relations Center Head at the Department of Finance, Ajman, agreed that public relations staff need to have several skills and the most important of them is being able to create content and interactive material such as an article,

infographic, video, or image, to engage and excite the target audience.

Participants also pointed out that public speaking and interpersonal communication skills are as important as being able to write. Maitha Shuaib, Head of Corporate Communications, Dubai Women's Establishment, confirms that one of the most important skills public relations staff need to acquire is the ability to communicate and speak effectively, because PR staff is always communicating with different people and audiences, even from different countries, whether during a meeting or an event. With the presence of technology and social media, the effectiveness of communication has an even greater impact on the success of these relationships, mutual understanding, and task completion. The better this ability is, the greater the reach of a given audience. Bel Youha also mentioned that another important skill is 'public speaking', which relies on the ability to listen well in order to give an appropriate response, as well as interpersonal communication skills, which contribute to the effective dissemination of information to the public and across various media.

Participants also stated that conducting research improves the awareness and knowledge of public relations staff whilst some highlighted that 'research and scanning', 'etiquette and protocol', and 'negotiation & problem-solving' skills are important, but they did not elaborate, express opinions, or give examples as to why.

Table 4: The Main Technology of the Universities Program

Technology	International Universities		UAE Universities	
Media storytelling	8	16.66%	4	13.79%
Driving engagement	8	16.66%	4	13.79%
Website management	4	8.33%	4	13.79%
Social Media data analytics	10	20.83%	5	17.24%
Audio-Visual maker	9	18.75%	5	17.24%
Print Materials Maker	9	18.75%	7	24.13%
Total	48	100.0%	29	100.0%

All the analyzed universities include technology in their curricula – the extent to which, varies according to each institution, but international universities outperform local universities in terms of teaching technology in their curricula. From Table 4 (above), the data show there is a big difference in technology education undertaken between international and local universities, as the total number of sub-technological variables in international universities is 48, compared to just 29 in local universities. At the same time, 'Print Materials Maker' and 'Audio-Visual Maker' are the most common media technologies taught in the universities covered in the study, regardless of whether they are international or local. Moreover, as data from Table 4 show, not all universities focus on teaching 'Website Management'. It is also worth noting from the data that the University of Southern California (USC) and Pennsylvania State University (PSU) demonstrate the greatest interest in their students to learn how to use modern technology. The USC demonstrated skills specializations in computational, digital, interactive, and converged communication. According to ("Degree

specializations," n.d.), students learn digital skills such as: social media management, search engine optimization, and multimedia design, to a high level, and all of which are necessary for current and future PR specialists. At the PSU, "the PR curriculum prepares students for the challenges of PR practice in a highly competitive, technological, multicultural, and global environment" ("Advertising/PR, B.A. Penn State," n.d.).

Findings from interviews with the selected experts show that 'social media data analytics' is the most highlighted area by the participants. Ali Yousef Al Saad, Director of Communication and International Relations, WAM, said, "It is very important that graduates of PR are proficient in the use of social media. By that, I do not just mean the way they post a picture, a video, a story, a like or even a comment. Rather, I mean that they should be able to gather information, analyze data, and evaluate social media platforms. They should have a deeper understanding of how to perform social media analytics, manage an account, set a content strategy, know the engagement rate of followers, measure the level of interactions, and engage in account posts." Majda Al Hammadi, Director of Communications at the Department of Economic Development, Abu Dhabi, in an uncompromising view, acknowledged that given today's technological advances, she saw no need or value for a degree in public relations program if public relations graduates do not have 'social media data analytics' skills. She stated that the government needs to rethink what is taught in universities and focus on ensuring that public relations graduates specialize in specific skills rather than general skills.

In addition, the participants affirmed that 'media storytelling' and 'driving engagement' are the most powerful ways to influence and connect with people. For example, Maryam Al Dhuhoori highlighted that

repurposing content on social media is one of the most important ways to move to digital outreach, and integrate marketing content into a company's communication programs, i.e., reusing content already created and turning it into new interactive materials and stories. The same point of view was expressed by Salem Bel Youha, who believes that a good story improves attention and interactive communication between a company and its audience.

'Audiovisual production', 'print production', and 'website management' were not highly valued by the participants. Maitha Shuaib felt that 'website management' and 'visual and print media design' could be handled by another specialized person. However, one participant took a different view. General Arif Hasan Hudeib said that he works in a security agency and considers it necessary for employees to have professional writing and editing skills and be able to design printed and visual matter is without relying too much on third-party execution.

Table 5: The Main Knowledge of the Universities Program

Knowledge	Western Universities		UAE Universities	
PR and media history	9	18.75%	9	23.07%
PR and media theories	9	18.75%	8	20.51%
PR campaign	8	16.66%	5	12.80%
Relationship management	6	12.50%	7	17.90%
PR Management	9	18.75%	4	10.25%
Crisis management	7	14.58%	6	15.38%
Total	48	100.0%	39	100.0%

Despite the higher sum in the knowledge sub-variables for international universities than for local universities (as shown in Table 5), it is noticeable that the percentage of the sub-variables in some areas of knowledge are higher for local universities when compared to their international counterparts. The local universities have a stronger focus on 'PR and media history; and 'PR & media theories' compared to international universities, followed by a greater focus on relationship management'. In addition, the concentration on 'crisis management' is relatively the same for both international and local universities. For 'PR management' and 'PR campaign', the percentages are higher at international universities (18.75% for PR management and 16.66% for PR campaign), compared to those from local universities which have 10.25% and 12.80%, respectively.

Findings from interviews show that knowledge of 'relationship management' and 'PR management' were among the most important needed for PR staff but these were mentioned only indirectly by the participants. It was mentioned as one of the outcomes that can be developed through acquiring knowledge of sciences such as social, diplomatic, and even cultural. Thus, Ali Yousef Al Saad said that today's technology requires more communication with different segments of society and with different nationalities from all over the world. He added that his agency holds meetings or makes agreements with different institutions outside of the country.

The PR officer must be familiar with 'relationship management', know the media laws, and understand the practices of countries and the system of international relations. Social sciences also contribute to the understanding of cultures and patterns of social relations in different societies. Another piece of feedback came from Maitha Shuaib, who confirmed that 'PR

management' is necessary to develop strategies and maintain relationships. She explained that among the most important knowledge that public relations staff must have are social and cultural sciences because they help staff understand social behaviors, customs, and needs. She mentioned that "society is constantly changing and the world has become more open due to the presence of technology and social media.

Therefore, it is necessary to understand and recognize the social environment and cultures in order to strengthen relationships with other societies". Moreover, Jawaher Al Naqbi, manager of the International Government Communication, Sharjah Media Bureau, confirmed that human and social sciences, psychology, and data science are important to understand the behavior of individuals and the public to improve the management of PR, develop campaigns, and set strategies to meet the needs of the public.

Running a PR campaign, which is a tool to improve reputation, increase outreach and spread awareness, is among the essential components of knowledge for participants in the study. General Arif Hasan Hudeib confirmed that the key skills of public relations personnel should include conducting PR campaigns, understanding public opinion, and assessing its impact on the public. Another opinion came from Majda Al Hammadi, who stressed the importance of media campaigns, but from a marketing point of view, and she confirmed the necessity of it through social media.

Although participants emphasized the importance of theories, they did not talk much about them, unlike history, which, whilst not receiving much support from participants, nevertheless received mention from some who expressed the reasons for its importance. Ali Yousef Al Saad said it was

very important to know the history of Emirati media and media theories to understand the developments that have taken place and where we are today. Majda Al Hammadi pointed out that in addition to marketing, all important sciences such as media history should be understood and learned.

Table 6: The Main Outcomes of the Universities Program

Outcomes	International Universities		UAE Universities	
Specialists in relationship building	7	7%	9	11.10%
Specialists in media planning	11	11%	7	8.64%
Specialists in social media management	8	8%	4	4.93%
Specialists in Communication and dialogue	9	9%	6	7.40%
Specialists in Protocol and etiquette	5	5%	4	4.93%
Specialists in planning PR campaign - initiatives	9	9%	7	8.64%
Specialists in writing for PR media	12	12%	9	11.10%
Specialists in media production	10	10%	8	9.87%
Specialists in problem-solving and crisis management	7	7%	8	9.87%
Lead team to achieve objectives	9	9%	8	9.87%

Aware of media and PR ethics	9	9%	8	9.87%
Specialists in planning and organizing events	4	4%	5	6.17%
Total	100	100%	83	100%

The main learning outcomes describe what PR students should understand or be skilled in after completing the PR program. According to data from Table 6, the sum of the sub-variables of the international universities is higher than that of the local universities. Both international and local universities focus primarily on having their students specialize in PR writing and media production. The data also show that international universities show great interest in having their students specialize in 'media planning', 'social media management', and 'communication and dialogue' while local universities focus on having their students specialize in 'relationship building;. In addition, when it comes to having their students specialize in 'leading a team to achieve goals', being 'aware of media and PR ethics', 'protocol and etiquette', 'problem-solving and crisis management', and 'planning & organizing events,' the respective percentages for both western and local universities are broadly similar.

Findings from the interviews show that all participants emphasized that 'media planning', 'social media management', 'media and PR ethics', 'crisis management', 'research design and performing' and 'organizing events and initiatives' were among the most important outcomes of the public relations program, with the exception of 'event planning', which participants rated as being less important than the other areas. For example, Majda Al Hammadi found that marketing, media campaigns, and online

events via social media are much more important than organizing them on the ground.

In addition, Salem Bel Youha said public relations staff must know how to handle media crises to avoid or minimize negative publicity and maintain the reputation of the company. Regarding 'social media management', Ali Yousef Al Saad said that learning how to use and manage social media helps spread news faster, reach a larger audience, and track followers' engagement. Amal Ibrahim Al Nuaimi, Director of Institutional Communications, Department of Antiquities and Museums, Ras Alkhaimah also confirmed that using social media and analyzing its data are the most important things that should be learned from the PR programs.

According to the data, there were some diverse and ambitious proposals for the PR program from some participants. In addition to participants' suggestions about social sciences, diplomacy, and marketing, Jawaher Al Naqbi pointed out the importance of adding digital knowledge, such as artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, and data science to understand the new changes in technology and how they can be used to benefit the service of public relations. She added, "another important skill is social and emotional intelligence, which enables PR employees to play a critical role in shaping a PR team". Moreover, Amal Ibrahim Al Nuaimi said that the science of human resources must be mastered before any other knowledge. She confirmed that the science of human resources makes it possible to know the hierarchy and understand the nature of work and the limits of the required tasks. She added that the science of human resources helps to build a work structure that meets the needs of public relations and uses the best skills in the field. Maryam Al Dhuhoori explained that the most important thing in the field of public relations is the continuous acquisition

of knowledge, as it is related to the development of events and technologies. She added that PR staff must always update their knowledge and skills, especially in terms of technological and social development, as these two areas are interrelated.

Answers to the study's questions

This research intends to provide evidence based on the extent to which universities' PR outcomes meet the needs of the UAE labor market. A clear conclusion is that universities in the UAE play an important role in building and refining the skills of new graduates in the field of public relations. Based on the findings, local universities provide students with the latest information and essential tools they need to enter the labor market and prepare them to keep up with technology.

Comparing the results of the benchmark and the results of the interviews, the local universities are not only compatible with international universities, but also meet the requirements of the labor market in the field of PR in the country, except for technology-related subjects. Although technology-related skills are taught in the PR program, they need to be intensified and developed to meet the demands of the labor market. Returning to the main questions posed in the introduction to this study, the conclusions are as follows:

RQ1- To what extent do UAE universities provide academic programs in public relations that keep pace with the evolution of new media technology platforms?

The data show that there is a difference between what UAE universities offer their students when compared with their international counterparts. The rapid development of technology has changed the PR labor market

by requiring PR students to achieve high standards and skills in the use of new media technology. Therefore, to keep up with the development of new media technologies, academic PR programs in the UAE need to improve and enhance the technological skills of students.

The literature review and data show that local universities not only need to teach technological skills, but also to raise their students' knowledge and skill sets to a higher level, especially in the area of 'social media management' such as media storytelling, engagement driving, and social media analytics. The data confirm that knowledge of 'social media management' is very important for communication departments. As social media networks evolve, 'social media management' must include developing strategies for these accounts and an understanding of their technical tools. 'Social media data analysis' should include monitoring the number of followers, total number of posts, and overall engagement. In addition, universities need to offer advanced learning programs that include a curriculum that places emphasis on 'PR campaigns', 'media planning', and 'communication and dialogue'.

RQ2- To what extent do the learning outcomes of public relations programs at universities meet the requirements of the UAE labor market?

When it comes to determining the extent to which PR program learning outcomes of universities meet the requirements of the UAE labor market, essential skills assessment becomes an extremely important measure. In this matter, the result of the study finds that international universities are better than local universities in focusing on the main skills of PR. Moreover, both international and local universities show great interest in teaching writing and media production as these skills are among the fundamentals

of PR. However, both national/local universities should work more on the learning outcomes of PR as the participants in the interview confirm the need for learning outcomes among PR employees.

The study also suggests that local universities should include more 'media planning' and 'social media management' in their curricula, as the results show that there is a large gap between what is taught in international and local universities in terms of these skills, which, according to the literature, are also among the skills required in the labor market.

It is impressive that the results of the UAE universities in teaching 'relationship building' and 'crisis management' surpass those of international universities. 'Crisis management' is considered one of the new skills needed by university graduates, especially after the advent of the Covid-19 crisis, as previously mentioned in the literature.

What is worth noting from the results is that neither international nor local universities showed much interest in teaching students 'protocol and etiquette' and 'planning and organizing events', although the labor market today requires activities across great distances and frequent communication with audiences from different nationalities. Finally, it is worth noting that, as described in the literature, the labor market nowadays requires those in PR to be able to organize virtual media campaigns and events.

Discussion:

To conclude, this paper examined the extent to which universities' outcomes meet the needs of the UAE labor market in PR. The data confirm that universities are meeting the needs of UAE government entities by providing PR graduates with comprehensive learning outcomes, new

skills, and insightful knowledge. The data also confirm that both national/ local universities need to focus more on the main new technologies in their curricula.

The overall data demonstrate that the most important thing in PR is for PR employees to proactively learn all new technologies, as they must always be ready to face the challenges so that they do not pose an obstacle to their work in the future.

Consistent with system theory, the results confirm that there is a strong relationship between local universities and labor market demand in the UAE. They do not operate in isolation from one another but form a coherent system that influences each other. The data also confirm that the system between the universities and the labor market is a complex one in which one part cannot function without the other.

The results illustrate that understanding a PR education system provides a better understanding of how it relates to labor market demand in the UAE. In other words, higher levels of education are associated with a more successful labor market and increase the chances of government agencies in the Emirates performing better and being able to compete in global markets.

After a careful review of the results, this research recommends that similar regular studies be conducted and compared with the teaching offered at international universities, as well as measuring the demands of the labor market and preparing PR programs at universities, based on these findings. There should be an emphasis placed on proactive education in the curricula, especially in relation to technologies such as social media management, artificial intelligence, and others.

Government entities should expand their relationships with universities, participate in the development of PR learning programs, and offer continuing education courses for their employees. Government entities and educational institutions must benefit from the services and solutions provided by the government communication offices in the country in order to achieve an integrated communications system and keep pace with global developments in this field. The final point of the recommendations is that PR employees should focus on their own self-development and should not be limited to what is offered by educational institutions.

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العلاقة بين مخرجات التعلم لبرنامج العلاقات العامة ومتطلبات سوق العمل في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة

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ملخص البحث:

في الآونة الأخيرة، جعلت التكنولوجيا العلاقات العامة تتداخل مع المجالات الأخرى. في سوق العمل الإماراتي، وازداد الطلب على التكنولوجيا، وانتقلت الهيئات الحكومية للعمل عن بعد. لذلك، تبحث هذه الدراسة في مدى تلبية مخرجات التعليم الجامعي في العلاقات العامة لاحتياجات سوق العمل في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة. كما تبحث الدراسة في مدى تقديم الجامعات الإماراتية لبرامج أكاديمية في العلاقات العامة تواكب تطور تقنيات الإعلام الجديدة. تعتمد الدراسة على نظرية النظم؛ لأن الجامعات المحلية والجامعات الدولية وسوق العمل تشكل نظامًا مترابطًا، ولا يمكن لأي من هذه المكونات العمل بمفردها. باستخدام الطريقة النوعية التي تعتمد بشكل أساسي على مؤشر الأداء، يمكن للجهات الحكومية الإماراتية أن تفهم بشكل أفضل ما إذا كان خريجو العلاقات العامة يتلقون تعليمًا مخصصًا وما إذا كانوا مؤهلين تأهيلا جيداً للتعامل مع المهام المتغيرة باستمرار. تظهر نتيجة الدراسة أن جامعات الإمارات تزود طلابها في العلاقات العامة بأحدث المعلومات والأدوات الأساسية التي يحتاجونها لدخول سوق العمل الإماراتي ولمواكبة التكنولوجيا الحديثة. ومع ذلك، تحتاج الجامعات المحلية إلى تحسين المهارات التكنولوجية للطلاب؛ إذ يوجد فرق كبيرمقارنةً بما تقدمه الجامعات الدولية لطلابها. تكثف الجامعات الدولية برامجها لتشمل المهارات التكنولوجية، مثل: سرد القصص الإعلامية، وتحليل البيانات، وتصميم المطبوعات والمواد المرئية، وإدارة مواقع الويب بالإضافة إلى مهارات وعلوم العلاقات العامة المعتادة

الكلمات الدالة: نظرية النظام، تكنولوجيا الإعلام، العلاقات العامة، مخرجات تعليم العلاقات العامة، سوق العمل

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