

Research on the Optimization of Professional Master Enrollment Promotion Model Based on Lasswell's "5W" Model

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Abstract: China's postgraduate education is moving towards high-quality development with increasingly fierce enrollment competition. Despite the consecutive decline in applicant numbers, the enrollment quota and proportion of professional degree postgraduates are on the rise, creating critical challenges for their enrollment and emphasizing the importance of effective promotion. As a targeted communication activity, enrollment promotion inherently aligns with Lasswell's "5W" model. This study applies communication theory and qualitative analysis to explore the five core elements of professional degree postgraduate enrollment promotion, and constructs an optimized 5W-based promotion framework.

It proposes building a four-dimensional communication team of admissions offices, supervisors, current students and alumni to boost credibility; designing candidate-centric promotional content highlighting practical and career advantages to create a "phenomenal" communication effect; integrating online-offline media channels to form a multi-dimensional communication matrix; utilizing big data to create precise candidate portraits for targeted enrollment; and establishing a comprehensive feedback mechanism to dynamically adjust strategies. This research provides practical references for universities to enhance their professional degree postgraduate enrollment promotion amid the complex and volatile current landscape.

Keywords: Lasswell's "5W" Model; Professional Degree; Postgraduate Enrollment Expansion; Decline in Application Numbers; Enrollment Promotion Model

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1. Introduction

According to the "Statistical Communique of the People's Republic of China on National Economic and Social Development in 2022" released by the National Bureau of Statistics, at the end of 2022, the national population experienced negative growth for the first time since 1962, with a natural population growth rate of -0.60%.^[1] At the same time, significant changes have also taken place in the postgraduate application situation in the field of education. In 2025, the number of national master's degree applicants was 3.88 million, a decrease of 500,000 compared with the previous year, a decline of about 11.4%.^[2] This change profoundly reflects that China is undergoing a profound transformation in terms of population structure and educational needs. Against the background of negative population growth, the supply and demand relationship in the social labor market has changed, putting forward new requirements for the quality and structure of talents. All walks of life have an increasingly strong demand for applied talents with high professional capabilities and outstanding practical abilities. In

this trend, professional master's degree education, which focuses on cultivating students' professional skills and practical application capabilities, has become an important way to meet the social demand for applied talents. In the 2025 master's degree unified examination enrollment plan, the planned enrollment of professional master's degree students was 602,000, accounting for 68.99% of the total enrollment plan, far exceeding the number of academic master's degree enrollments. The expansion of professional degree postgraduate enrollment has become the mainstream trend.

The expansion of enrollment scale has intensified the competition among universities for professional degree postgraduate students. However, the current enrollment promotion work is facing many challenges. To address the challenges and improve the scientificity and effectiveness of enrollment promotion, it is particularly necessary to draw theories and experiences from relevant disciplinary fields. Lasswell's "5W" model in communication science provides a comprehensive and systematic analytical framework for enrollment promotion work. By in-depth analysis of the key elements in enrollment promotion activities, such as communicators, communication content, communication channels, audiences, and communication effects, it can help universities optimize promotion strategies, accurately locate target audiences, improve the quality and attractiveness of promotion content, select appropriate communication channels, thereby enhancing the effect and influence of enrollment promotion, maximizing the value of enrollment promotion work, and promoting the high-quality development of professional degree postgraduate education.

2. Theoretical Basis

Lasswell, one of the four founding fathers of communication studies, proposed the "5W" model in his work *The Structure and Function of Communication in Society*. This model comprises five core elements: Who (the communicator), Says What (the message), In Which Channel (the medium), To Whom (the audience), and With What Effect (the effect).^[3] Widely applied in the field of mass communication, this model provides a fundamental framework for communication research. Despite its certain limitations—such as neglecting the feedback loop and the impact of the communication environment—it undoubtedly holds significant value in analyzing specific communication activities.

Li Bin argued that the 5W model introduces five major elements that have shaped the development of communication, covering nearly all content within the field and forming the theoretical framework of the entire discipline.^[4] Zhang Guoliang emphasized two key values of the model: first, it represents the first detailed dissection of the communication process in communication studies; second, it was the first to propose five major research areas in communication, offering new perspectives and pathways for subsequent in-depth and systematic exploration of communication theories. The advent of the 5W theory established a comprehensive framework, laying a solid foundation for the study of communication theories.^[5]

Scholars have also critically examined the limitations of the 5W model. Lasswell's remarkable contribution to communication studies lies in his provision of a clear direction for research, enabling scholars to identify focal points of investigation. For nearly half a century, the field of communication has focused on exploring the fundamental elements of the communication process, and the emergence of the 5W model has laid a profound groundwork for its long-term development. Lasswell's communication theory has served as a beacon for the discipline over more than half a century.^[6]

Enrollment promotion is essentially a form of communicative behavior. Its core objective is to attract potential students, foster their interest in the institution, and ultimately influence their decision to apply. This process involves shaping students' perceptions and guiding their decision-making. Currently, there exists a substantial body of research on enrollment promotion from a communication studies perspective in China.

For instance, drawing on Lasswell's "5W" model and combined with Augmented Reality (AR) technology, Li Han (2022) took Harbin Institute of Technology as a case study to design an AR enrollment promotion brochure. Through demand analysis, design and development, and evaluation, this approach addressed issues such as one-way information dissemination and homogenization inherent in traditional materials, effectively communicating enrollment information and the university's spirit. This research provided a reference for innovation in university enrollment promotion, facilitating the attraction of high-quality applicants.^[7]

Wang Jin (2021) applied the "5W" model to analyze enrollment promotion at the University of Science and Technology Beijing, analyzing the current situation through each communicative element and proposing improvement strategies. This

study offered insights for higher education institutions to enhance enrollment effectiveness and improve the quality of undergraduate applicants.^[8]

Lu Wei et al. (2020) utilized the “5W” model to examine enrollment promotion at Southwest Jiaotong University, exploring strategic shifts and existing issues in the new media era, and putting forward optimization suggestions. Their work provided a reference for innovation in university enrollment promotion.^[9]

Wu Yanzhe and Liang Rong (2015) analyzed enrollment promotion in vocational colleges using the “5W” model, dissected the process elements, and constructed corresponding strategies. This research provided theoretical support and practical reference for vocational colleges to enhance the effectiveness of their enrollment promotion efforts.^[10]

Zhang Lina and Li Yan (2019) employed the “5W” model to analyze enrollment promotion for international students in Chinese higher education institutions. After clarifying the current situation and problems, they designed effective strategies to improve the accuracy and effectiveness of student recruitment.^[11]

Therefore, based on the characteristics of enrollment promotion activities and existing preliminary research, this study introduces Lasswell’s model. It aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the various elements within professional master’s enrollment promotion using this theoretical framework, optimize promotion strategies, enhance the effectiveness and targeting of enrollment efforts, better achieve enrollment objectives, and promote the high-quality development of professional master’s education.

3. Analysis of Problems in Professional Master’s Enrollment Promotion Based on the “5W” Model

The “5W” communication model proposed by Lasswell provides a systematic analytical framework for decomposing the enrollment promotion work of professional master’s degree postgraduates. Essentially, enrollment promotion is a communication activity that accurately reaches target groups and conveys core values, and its effectiveness depends on the coordinated efforts of five links: communicators, messages, media, audiences, and effect feedback. Many current pain points in professional master’s enrollment promotion correspond exactly to the shortcomings of each dimension of the “5W” model, and the problems in each link are interrelated and influence each other, forming a closed-loop bottleneck that restricts the promotion efficiency. The following specifically analyzes the prominent problems in enrollment promotion work in combination with each core dimension of the “5W” model.

3.1 Single Communicator Structure: Failure to Form a United Propaganda Force

In the traditional postgraduate enrollment process, the communicators exhibit a homogenized structure, failing to effectively integrate resources and consolidate a united propaganda force. In practice, the primary task of information dissemination in postgraduate enrollment mostly falls on the university’s admissions office. This department shoulders key responsibilities such as formulating enrollment policies, releasing enrollment information, and planning promotional activities, and its work possesses a certain degree of professionalism and targeting. However, this communication model, which relies entirely on a single department, greatly restricts the breadth and depth of enrollment information dissemination. While the admissions office is professional, it lacks effective collaboration with other departments (colleges, research teams, alumni associations, etc.), leading to a flattened information transmission process. This prevents a comprehensive and multi-level display of the university’s enrollment advantages and characteristics. Especially since professional master’s degree education focuses on practical application, the involvement of industry experts and corporate partners should be emphasized. A single enrollment subject makes it difficult to gather diverse forces for enrollment promotion, resulting in a weak propaganda offensive and significantly reduced efficiency.

3.2 Outdated and Vague Messages: Severe Homogenization of Enrollment Promotion Content

Although enrollment promotion materials have evolved from print media to printed matter and then to electronic publications, their content remains highly homogenized, lacking uniqueness and differentiation.^[12] Currently, university profiles, discipline classifications, faculty rosters, academic achievements, and enrollment policies still form the core promotional content of most universities, creating a stereotyped propaganda routine. The presentation is often perfunctory and uniform, failing to highlight key points and overlooking the unique concepts and distinct differences among universities in professional master’s

degree cultivation. Consequently, candidates struggle to accurately distinguish the unique charm and competitive advantages of each university and its programs amidst the massive volume of enrollment information. Furthermore, the lack of innovation in promotional content—being outdated and vague—leads to extensive redundant information, failing to leave a lasting impression on candidates and yielding unsatisfactory promotional results.^[13]

3.3 Insufficient Media Innovation: Limited Effectiveness of Enrollment Promotion Methods

At present, many domestic professional master's degree enrollment institutions still rely on traditional methods as their primary means of promotion, such as releasing regular enrollment updates, setting up enrollment inquiry hotlines, distributing printed enrollment brochures, and conducting off-site enrollment lectures in student source areas. This enrollment promotion pathway, centered on traditional models, has numerous drawbacks that hinder the efficient progress of enrollment work. On the one hand, the efficiency of information transmission is low. Printed enrollment brochures and materials incur high production and distribution costs with limited dissemination effects and slow transmission speeds. Enrollment updates posted on official websites mainly reach candidates with active application intentions, making it difficult to effectively reach a broader target candidate group. On the other hand, there is a lack of interactivity. Traditional enrollment promotion models are mostly one-way communication, lacking interaction with potential candidates. This makes it challenging for candidates to fully understand the university and for the university to promptly address their questions and needs. The over-reliance on traditional, rigid promotion methods with insufficient innovation fails to meet the diverse application needs of candidates from different groups.

3.4 Undifferentiated Audience Targeting: Lack of Precision in Enrollment Promotion Objects

In the field of professional master's degree enrollment promotion, the accuracy of audience positioning plays a crucial role in achieving promotional effects. However, the current situation is worrying: enrollment promotion exhibits obvious undifferentiation in terms of the audience, lacking meticulous precise positioning and in-depth analysis of potential student groups. When conducting enrollment promotion activities, institutions often adopt a "wide-net" strategy. While they can cast a wide net, they fail to focus on key targets, resulting in high costs and low efficiency.^[12] In practice, institutions usually release a large number of generalized promotional materials through various enrollment promotion channels. These materials lack targeting, failing to fully consider the differentiated needs of different potential student groups. Due to the absence of precise positioning, it is difficult for universities to highlight their own advantages amidst numerous enrollment promotions, or to showcase the unique value of their professional master's degree education to potential students. For candidates, facing a massive volume of homogenized promotional information, it is challenging to screen out the universities and programs that truly meet their own requirements and expectations. This leads to low contact efficiency with the target group, an imbalance in the input-output ratio of enrollment promotion work, and a situation of high cost and low efficiency.^[14]

3.5 One-way Effect and Feedback Process: Absence of a Feedback and Evaluation Mechanism for Enrollment Promotion

Effective enrollment promotion requires smooth feedback channels to promptly understand the needs and feedback of potential candidates. Nevertheless, current enrollment promotion practices in domestic universities lack systematic and comprehensive summary and evaluation of student source quality. Horizontally, it is difficult to reflect the gaps compared with other postgraduate enrollment institutions at the same level; vertically, there is also a lack of comparative evaluation of the quality of student sources in the institution over the years, and a dynamic adjustment mechanism for enrollment promotion forms and methods has not been formed.^[15] During the enrollment promotion process, universities only focus on one-way information output, and there is a serious lack of interaction and communication mechanisms with potential candidates, making it difficult to timely grasp the actual needs of candidates and their feedback on promotional content. Evaluating the effectiveness of enrollment promotion is a key link in improving promotional strategies. The lack of clear and definite evaluation criteria leads to great subjectivity and uncertainty in evaluation results, making it difficult to adjust and optimize promotional strategies. On the one hand, it fails to provide a solid and reliable basis for the scientific adjustment of promotional strategies, causing enrollment promotion work to linger at a low level and making it difficult to achieve a qualitative breakthrough. On the other hand, it is impossible to conduct fair and effective assessment and incentives for the performance of different departments or

individuals in enrollment promotion work, making it difficult to fully mobilize the enthusiasm and creativity of all parties. Ultimately, this leads to low efficiency of enrollment promotion work, failure to give full play to its due effectiveness, and also affects the selection of high-quality student sources to a certain extent.

4. Construction of Enrollment Mode Based on Lasswell's "5W" Model

In the practice of enrollment promotion for professional degree postgraduate students, Lasswell's "5W" model provides a solid theoretical foundation and clearly outlines the key context of the communication process. Starting with an in-depth analysis of the five basic elements of the communication process—communicator, message, medium, audience and effect—this paper accurately identifies the current situation and problems of each element, and then formulates targeted strategies to optimize and upgrade the enrollment promotion mode for professional degree postgraduate students.

4.1 Optimizing the Communicator Element to Form a Four-Dimensional Promotion Team of "Admissions Office, Supervisors, Current Students and Alumni"

The training of professional degree postgraduate students focuses on practical application and professional literacy, so their enrollment promotion should meet the core needs of candidates and optimize the construction of the communicator team. Combined with the practices of universities in many provinces and cities, the establishment of a four-dimensional promotion team of "Admissions Office–Supervisors–Current Students–Alumni" can transform promotion from "one-way indoctrination" to "two-way interaction" and improve its effectiveness.

As the overall coordinator, the Admissions Office is responsible for policy release, platform operation and team support. At Zhejiang University, the university and school-level admissions offices collaborate to form promotion teams by region, compile promotion manuals and conduct regular volunteer training, solving the problem of fragmented promotion efforts.

The supervisor promotion team fully satisfies the credibility effect in communication studies: the higher the credibility, the greater the persuasive effect, and vice versa ^[10]82. South China University of Technology has established a dual-supervisor team of "industry + academia", inviting industrial supervisors from enterprises such as Huawei to give lectures based on their experience, while academic supervisors interpret training programs, providing all-round guidance for promotion activities.

The current student team conveys real campus information and narrows the distance with candidates. Shandong University and other universities have set up enrollment ambassador teams, grouped by region, to share exam preparation and practical experience through live broadcasts and consultation groups, alleviating candidates' information anxiety.

The alumni team broadens promotion channels by virtue of resource advantages. Shandong University of Finance and Economics relies on alumni associations to hold special lectures at alumni enterprises in many regions, expands promotion through enterprise cooperation, and builds a bridge for employment connection to achieve a virtuous cycle.

In summary, through division of labor and collaboration, the four-dimensional team meets candidates' information needs regarding future learning environment, research directions, employment status and other aspects, helping candidates form a true, comprehensive and objective perception ^[16]. Cases from the four universities fully prove its feasibility, and its operation mode can provide a reference for other universities to effectively solve the problem of vague and general promotion.

4.2 Highlighting Message Advantages, Candidate-Oriented, and Creating a "Phenomenal" Effect

From the perspective of messages, the content of professional degree postgraduate enrollment should be accurately positioned around candidates' needs and the unique orientation of professional degree education. On the one hand, in content construction, the practical-oriented characteristics and career development advantages should be highlighted. Practical courses in the professional degree curriculum system should be introduced in detail, including case teaching closely integrated with industry practice, project-driven learning, enterprise internships and training, enabling candidates to clearly understand how the major transforms theoretical knowledge into practical operational capabilities through practical teaching, thereby enhancing their future workplace competitiveness. Attention should be paid to demonstrating the career development advantages of professional degrees, providing detailed employment data and destination information such as the employment ratio of graduates in different industries and enterprises, average salary levels and career promotion paths, outlining a clear career development blueprint for candidates.

On the other hand, from a design perspective, adhering to a student-oriented approach, we should accurately position can-

didates' needs, gain an in-depth understanding of their exam preparation links and key concerns such as question difficulty, exam skills and employment prospects, so as to design targeted and practical promotional materials. For example, producing exam preparation guides, mock tests and experience-sharing resources helps candidates better prepare for exams and plan their future, subtly making them recognize the university brand and optimizing promotion effects. In-depth exploration of outstanding deeds of current students, such as scientific research achievements, social practice and voluntary services, should be widely publicized through press releases, videos and other forms. Current students and alumni take the initiative to release and spread relevant information, becoming "information hubs" ^[15]20, radiating to candidates' social circles through mainstream online media platforms such as WeChat Moments, forming a point-to-area "phenomenal" effect and greatly improving the influence and popularity of the major.

4.3 Constructing Diversified Enrollment Media Channels, Building a Promotion Media Matrix, and Integrating Online and Offline Promotion

First, develop distinctive enrollment channels for precise connection with target students. Industry exhibitions are important windows for displaying practical achievements. Universities can intuitively present students' practical works at exhibitions to demonstrate the effectiveness of professional practical training. For instance, the Hongqi College of Northeast Normal University displays practical project achievements of professional degree postgraduate students and school-enterprise cooperative training works at industry exhibitions related to smart vehicles, attracting the attention of participating enterprises and potential candidates, and simultaneously conducting on-site consultations with cooperative enterprises such as FAW, realizing two-way empowerment of enrollment promotion and industry-education integration. Meanwhile, deepen school-enterprise cooperation and expand internal recommendation channels relying on alumni enterprises. For example, China Jiliang University cooperates with alumni enterprises including Zhejiang China Commodity City Group Co., Ltd., using internal enterprise communication networks to accurately push enrollment information to in-service personnel with career promotion needs, greatly improving promotion pertinence. Southwest University carries out order-based training for professional master students with Changan Automobile, selecting candidates meeting job requirements through internal enterprise recommendation channels to form a closed loop of "enrollment-training-employment".

Second, integrate resources to build a powerful promotion matrix and expand communication coverage. With official new media as the core, a promotion media matrix should be established to improve promotion quality and efficiency ^[17]. For example, China Jiliang University takes its postgraduate enrollment WeChat official account as the carrier, links official accounts of secondary colleges to push enrollment updates and major characteristics in real time, and simultaneously cooperates with mainstream platforms such as the National Postgraduate Enrollment Network and China Education Online for retransmission and communication. It integrates and promotes QR codes of official accounts, video accounts, official websites and consultation groups, integrating them into university brand building to achieve multi-channel coordinated efforts and effectively improve promotion accuracy.

Finally, promote in-depth integration of online and offline promotion to strengthen practical implementation. Offline, trust is built through interaction, and face-to-face communication with candidates is realized through lectures, course trials and other activities. For example, Shandong University of Finance and Economics conducts offline lectures in cities and enterprises with high-quality student sources to enhance candidates' intuitive experience. Online, coverage is broadened through live broadcasts, cloud consultations and other forms to bridge information gaps. Through the linkage of online live lectures and offline promotion meetings, Shandong University of Finance and Economics replays highlights of offline activities online and guides online consultations to offline participation, forming a linkage mode of "offline as the foundation, online as the wing", injecting sustained impetus into enrollment work.

4.4 Accurately Positioning the Audience, Formulating Candidate Portraits, and Implementing Targeted Enrollment

To accurately identify the needs of professional degree postgraduate candidates, from the audience perspective, enrollment universities need to conduct in-depth group and individual analyses. Group analysis is used to grasp overall trends, such as the age, professional background, educational level and industry distribution of target candidates, helping us understand

their main demands such as career development bottlenecks, management ability improvement or academic background optimization. Individual analysis focuses on exploring each candidate's personalized needs, including application doubts such as university selection, curriculum setting and employment prospects, as well as exam preparation difficulties such as time management, knowledge mastery and interview skills.

By collecting and analyzing data of registered candidates, we can customize audience portraits based on analytical results. Portrait technology, from the specific perspective of marketing needs, outlines users' behavioral characteristics and consumption intentions to present clearer and more intuitive user needs^[18]. For example, a typical portrait of an in-service candidate is a 30-year-old male programmer with 5 years of work experience, pursuing a professional degree to improve technical management capabilities. Such candidates have core demands for mastering knowledge and skills and improving management levels, as well as pain points such as work-study conflicts. This strategy precisely connects university advantages with candidates' demands, enhancing the attractiveness and recognition of enrollment information among target groups through differentiated and customized promotional content.

Through accurate portrait analysis, enrollment promotion can tap into candidates' potential needs, realize efficient resource allocation in the selection of promotion channels, writing of promotional copy and planning of enrollment activities, improve the input-output ratio of enrollment promotion, promote the refinement and scientization of enrollment work, and help universities expand the scale and improve the quality of student sources in the fiercely competitive professional master enrollment market.

4.5 Establishing an Enrollment Effect Feedback Mechanism to Promote Innovation in Enrollment Promotion

From the effect perspective, professional degree postgraduate enrollment promotion should establish a horizontal and vertical comparative feedback mechanism to timely analyze, compare and summarize annual enrollment promotion work. Horizontally, compare the enrollment promotion practices of similar universities, face up to the university's brand competitiveness, analyze the quality of student sources, and identify its competitive position in student recruitment. Vertically, compare the effectiveness of promotion channels and candidate conversion rates over the years. With the help of background data of integrated media platforms, statistics and summaries of reading volume of WeChat official account articles and click volume of video accounts for enrollment promotion should be conducted, continuously tracking and analyzing the promotion effects of different channels and adjusting delivery strategies timely based on data feedback. For example, if the interaction rate of promotional content on a social media platform is low, it may be necessary to re-examine the content form or delivery time, or consider switching to other channels more suitable for the target audience. Meanwhile, flexibly adjust channel combinations according to different stages of the enrollment cycle. In the early stage of enrollment, a wide range of channels can be used to increase visibility; in the sprint stage of registration, focus on several key channels where target audiences are most active for precise push and reminders.

In addition, a closed loop should be formed from top-level design, plan formulation, teacher and student selection, training, activity implementation to assessment and evaluation, establishing a sound assessment mechanism to enhance the stability of the enrollment promotion team.^[19] Qingdao Agricultural University has accumulated mature experience in this regard, deeply integrating the enrollment promotion feedback mechanism with the assessment mechanism to form a virtuous cycle of "data feedback-strategy adjustment-assessment and evaluation-optimization and improvement". The university regularly summarizes and analyzes effect data of various promotion channels to form feedback reports, timely adjusts inefficient promotion strategies, and directly links promotion performance with the performance assessment of the promotion team, commending and rewarding outstanding teachers and students, and conducting interviews and guidance for underperforming personnel, continuously improving the work quality of the promotion team.

5. Conclusion

This paper analyzes the application of Lasswell's "5W" model in enrollment promotion strategies for professional degree postgraduate students, and creatively proposes a series of strategies and methods aimed at improving the efficiency and quality of enrollment promotion. By constructing a four-dimensional promotion framework covering "Admissions Office, supervi-

sors, current students and alumni”, the composition of the enrollment team is optimized, ensuring the comprehensiveness and depth of promotion forces. In terms of content strategy, focusing on highlighting practical and professional advantages and closely centering on candidates’ concerns, it stimulates a “phenomenal” communication effect, achieving precise reach and wide resonance of promotional content. In terms of communication channels, a three-dimensional and diversified enrollment channel system is constructed, and a multi-dimensional promotion media matrix is built to broaden the breadth and depth of promotion. For the audience, precise marketing and targeted enrollment are realized through accurately portraying portraits of target candidates. In addition, the establishment and implementation of horizontal and vertical enrollment promotion feedback mechanisms continuously drive the innovation and upgrading of enrollment promotion, attract outstanding student sources, and further promote the high-quality and connotative development of professional degree postgraduate education in universities.

In summary, to improve the enrollment quality of professional degree postgraduate students, universities should make full use of their own teaching and research advantages, gain an in-depth insight into candidates’ needs and market dynamics, actively integrate internal and external resources, and form an efficient, coordinated and precisely implemented enrollment promotion system.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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