

The Evolving Landscape of Public Relations: Media Influence and The Power of Social Media Platforms

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Abstract. This article offers a thorough examination of the relationship between media and public relations by reviewing previous literature. It introduces theories and models in the field of media including a two-way symmetrical model of communication, uses and gratifications theory and corporate social responsibility, highlights the significance of social media which has been rapidly evolving and argues for the strategic incorporation of both conventional and digital platforms. Simultaneously, this paper offers a critique of the excessive integration and commercialization of media and public relations. It contends that news pertaining to public relations may exhibit a limited scope and may mislead audiences. Furthermore, the study proposes recommendations for future research and growth in this field. Through a comprehensive comprehension and strategic utilization of media impact, professionals in the field of public relations are able to adeptly traverse the ever-changing terrain, successfully engage a wide range of audiences, and effectively address a multitude of practical challenges.

Keywords: Public relations, media, social media.

1. Introduction

Public relations (PR) are a dynamic field that constantly evolves with societal changes, and one significant factor contributing to this evolution is the role of media. As we move further into the digital age, this article will discuss how the advent of social media platforms has introduced new dimensions to the field of public relations, presenting both challenges and opportunities.

Previous studies have compared the impact of using social media vs. traditional media in crisis communication, suggesting that compared to traditional media, social media was significantly more negative for preventable crises than for accidental crises [1]. However, the rise of social media platforms that have revolutionised communication channels in recent years is overwhelming. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have become integral tools for public relations practitioners to engage with their audiences directly, creating new challenges and opportunities for effective communication [2]. Therefore, it is essential to investigate the intricate interplay between traditional media and social media in the realm of public relations, in order to understand how media nowadays can enhance or damage an organisation's reputation and how public relations professionals navigate media landscapes.

2. Media Influence on Public Relations

2.1. Two-way Symmetrical Model of Communication

The two-way symmetrical model of communication was first presented by Grunig and Hunt [1]. This paradigm significantly altered the conventional, one-way approach to public relations. This strategy departs from the prior one-way broadcast of information by emphasizing the value of establishing a conversation between organizations and their public.

The foundation of the two-way symmetrical model is the notion that meaningful conversations between companies and their audiences should be the basis of communication. Grunig and Hunt contend that in addition to disseminating the organization's message to the general public, this conversation ought to encourage a free flow of thoughts, viewpoints, and suggestions. Building mutual understanding and trust between the company and its stakeholders requires this reciprocal

relationship. The idea of symmetry, which suggests a balance in the communication process, is fundamental to this concept. The two-way symmetrical model aims for a more fair and mutually beneficial interaction, in contrast to the asymmetrical model, which sees communication as a persuasive instrument to change public opinion. It acknowledges that while organizations aim to enlighten the public, they may also learn from them.

Grunig and Hunt emphasize the use of communication as a tactical instrument for efficient public relations management [1]. Organizations may obtain important insights into public views, issues, and expectations by holding discussions with stakeholders. As a result, decisions can be made with more knowledge and communication strategies that are in line with the interests and values of the general public may be developed. The two-way symmetrical model, in its simplest form, promotes relationships based on openness, mutual respect, and trust through a dynamic and participatory communication process. This paradigm, which emphasizes the ongoing significance of conversation in establishing and preserving positive connections between businesses and their public, continues to be a fundamental idea in public relations theory even as the communication landscape changes.

2.2. Uses and Gratifications Theory

The field of PR can benefit from the use of the Uses and Gratifications Theory, a fundamental idea in media studies, which clarifies how strategic communicators can use media consumption patterns to accomplish their goals.

According to Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch's 1973 Uses and Gratifications Theory, audiences are active consumers who choose media material depending on their wants and motives [3]. This idea promotes a change in public relations strategy toward an audience-centric approach. McGuire highlights the significance of comprehending the requirements and inclinations of the audience, contending that successful communication tactics need to be customized to satisfy these particular demands [4]. Public relations professionals may create messages and campaigns that connect with the motivations of their target audience by utilizing the Uses and Gratifications Theory. This will increase the probability of engagement and favorable response.

Furthermore, according to Katz et al., the Uses and Gratifications Theory emphasizes the notion that people deliberately select media material to satisfy particular needs, including knowledge, amusement, personal identity, and social integration [3]. The emphasis on customized gratifications becomes a strategic requirement in the context of public relations. Relationship building and maintenance depend on messages being customized to audiences' varied demands, according to Kim and Ruggiero [5]. Public relations practitioners may enhance the efficacy of their campaigns by personalizing their communication techniques and developing a closer connection with their target audiences by utilizing the insights gleaned from the Uses and Gratifications Theory.

The Benefits and Applications According to Katz et al., the theory also emphasizes how media may satisfy a range of psychological and social requirements, such as monitoring, personal interactions, distraction, and identity [3]. In the digital era, public relations initiatives heavily depend on the thoughtful production and dissemination of information. Dürager and Schoenbach examine the idea of "content congruence," stressing how crucial it is to match the audience's desires with the material [6]. This knowledge may be used by public relations professionals to provide entertaining and educational material that also satisfies the audience's desire for identity expression, encouraging interaction and a sense of connection.

Through the Uses and Gratifications Theory, public relations practitioners may gain a beneficial perspective on media consumption habits and effectively leverage their authority. Through the use of an audience-centric strategy, customized messaging to meet particular requirements, and deliberate content creation and distribution, public relations practitioners may augment their efficacy in connecting with and involving target audiences. The theory's observations provide a framework for creating communication tactics that appeal to people's varied motives, which in turn helps public relations campaigns succeed in the ever-changing world of modern media consumption.

2.3. Corporate Social Responsibility

The complexity of corporate social responsibility (CSR) is examined in Smith's research [2]. Smith also highlights the role of the media in shaping public perception of an organization's social responsibility initiatives. Through the media, information on CSR efforts is distributed, functioning as a vital middleman between businesses and the general public. According to Smith, media coverage actively participates in the creation of an organization's social identity rather than just reflecting organizational conduct.

Jones et al. expand on this concept by delving into the particular mechanisms that corporate social performance uses to draw in job candidates [7]. Their research explores signal-based mechanisms, highlighting the ways in which media portrayals of a company's CSR efforts shape the opinions of prospective employees. A favorable perception of the company as socially conscious is created by favorable media coverage of CSR initiatives, such as charity giving or environmentally friendly operations, which attracts more candidates to work for the company.

Both studies emphasize how media coverage of CSR has a dual effect on public views, helping or hurting an organization's reputation. An organization's reputation is improved by good media coverage of its CSR efforts, which portrays it as morally upright, socially conscious, and dedicated to improving society. On the other hand, unfavorable media coverage can damage an organization's reputation and undermine public confidence, whether it focuses on uncovering unethical behavior or emphasizing a lack of commitment to social responsibility.

Thus, the significance of traditional media in molding the public-organization interaction becomes paramount. In addition to taking part in worthwhile CSR activities, organizations need to actively control how these initiatives are perceived in the media. Building and sustaining a strong relationship with the public requires crafting a positive story and successfully promoting CSR initiatives through traditional media channels. According to research by Smith and Jones et al., media coverage has a significant impact on how the general public views corporate social responsibility, which in turn shapes how businesses interact with their stakeholders [2,7].

3. Social Media in Public Relations

Undoubtedly, the emergence of social media has changed the communication environment and brought with it new possibilities, problems, and dynamics for businesses in a variety of industries. A study conducted by Waters et al., examined the utilization of Twitter as a means of crisis communication in local government, highlighting the dynamic nature of social media and the necessity of swift reaction tactics [8]. The study highlights social media platforms' accessibility and immediate nature, highlighting their potency as effective instruments for information dissemination in times of crisis. In municipal government, Twitter's real-time features have proven to be a useful tool for successful communication, which is essential for public safety and confidence.

Social media's capacity to spread information quickly and allow organizations to engage directly with the public during catastrophes is an example of its real-time nature. According to Waters et al. local government organizations were able to efficiently use Twitter during emergencies to address public concerns, disseminate important information, and give timely updates [8]. In addition to improving openness, this real-time communication makes it easier for enterprises to communicate directly and quickly with their stakeholders.

Rapid reaction tactics are necessary because of the issues presented by social media's immediacy. In order to stop the spread of false information and preserve public confidence, organizations need to be flexible in their communication strategies and act quickly to resolve difficulties. The study conducted by Waters et al. emphasizes the need of communication protocols and readiness in order to help enterprises effectively traverse the fast-paced social media landscape in times of crisis [8].

Kaplan and Haenlein's study explores the influence of social media on brand management in a more comprehensive manner [9]. The research looks at the benefits and problems that social media presents, with a special emphasis on how user-generated material affects how people perceive brands.

User-generated content, which includes social media posts and online reviews, has grown to be a powerful factor in shaping public perception of businesses.

According to Kaplan and Haenlein, social media's interactive features provide users the capacity to actively create brand narratives [9]. For brand management, this transition from a one-way communication approach to a more dynamic and engaging interchange presents both possibilities and problems. Organizations must, on the one hand, accept the difficulty of letting go of some control over their brand image as consumers participate in the conversation. However, this interactive aspect creates new opportunities for interaction and enables companies to establish a more intimate connection with their audience.

Brand impressions are greatly influenced by user-generated information on social media sites, including reviews, testimonials, and social endorsements. While bad user-generated material might jeopardize a brand's reputation, positive user-generated content can increase credibility and repute. In order to favorably influence brand narratives, Kaplan and Haenlein emphasize the significance of actively controlling and engaging in social media conversations [9]. Thus, organizations are supposed to actively interact with user-generated content to positively impact brand views and understand the necessity for quick reaction tactics during crises as they traverse the always-changing social media landscape. In the digital age, strategic communication and agility are crucial due to the benefits and difficulties posed by social media.

4. Integration of Traditional and Social Media in PR

When it comes to crisis communication, conventional and social media differ greatly from one another. Xu offers insightful information about how modern social media differs from old media, especially when it comes to crisis communication [10]. The study looks at a number of factors, illuminating how well these channels work to provide vital information in emergency situations. The research identifies the speed at which information is disseminated as one significant distinction. Information may take longer to spread through traditional media as they frequently adhere to a set editorial procedure, such as newspapers and television. On the other hand, social media platforms allow businesses to quickly disseminate information since they are immediate and available in real-time. In times of crisis, this promptness can be vital since it enables companies to rapidly handle new challenges and educate the public.

The study also highlights how interactive social media is. Social media platforms allow for two-way contact, in contrast to conventional media, which usually only allows for one-way communication. The general population is able to actively interact with the material, express their opinions, and even add to the story. Because it's interactive, it encourages a feeling of community and participation, which helps organizations determine public opinion and adjust their approach appropriately.

The research does, however, also recognize certain drawbacks of social media, such as the potential for false information to spread quickly. Because of its well-established editorial standards, traditional media has long been seen as a more trustworthy source of news. On the other side, unreliable or inaccurate information may spread through social media. For companies trying to be accurate and credible in their crisis communication, this presents a problem. It highlights the demographic distinctions between the audiences that conventional media and social media reach as well. Social media platforms tend to draw in particular audiences, especially younger ones, but conventional media could appeal to a wider range of people. When designing crisis communication strategies, firms must take this demographic difference into account in order to effectively reach and engage their target audience.

In such cases, public relations expertise in comprehending the mechanics of information flow across many communication platforms and effectively controlling communication may be crucial. According to Grunig's Excellence Theory, symmetrical communication—in which corporations converse with their audiences to foster mutual respect and understanding—is the key to achieving

communication excellence [11]. This calls for a sophisticated grasp of the mechanics of information flow across many platforms in the digital age. Organizations must therefore modify their communication methods to conform to the attributes of various media. Sustaining consistency in messaging requires a thorough grasp of the distinctive characteristics of corporate communication channels, social media, and traditional media.

The social network perspective by Lee, Hong, and Kwon emphasizes how intertwined communication routes are [12]. As nodes in this network, corporate blogs—a type of owned media that gives businesses a direct platform for communication—can act as links between social media, traditional media, and other avenues of communication. Organizations can promote consistency and coherence in their overall communication strategy by effectively utilizing blogs to spread important ideas. Organizations also need to regularly monitor input on all platforms and respond to it. In particular, social media offers instantaneous feedback that has the power to shape public opinion. Organizations are encouraged by Grunig's symmetrical communication model to listen to their audience's issues and feedback in addition to sharing information [11]. By using a responsive strategy, communication is kept flexible and in line with popular opinion.

In summary, attaining coherence in communication across many platforms necessitates a thorough comprehension of information flow dynamics and strategic management. According to Grunig's Excellence Theory, symmetrical communication is encouraged and meaningful engagement with the audience is emphasized [11]. The social network view on corporate blog use by Lee, Hong, and Kwon emphasizes the function of owned media in bridging various communication channels [12]. Through the integration of these insights, organizations may adeptly maneuver through the intricacies of the digital communication terrain, deliberately regulating the flow of information to uphold coherence and consistency in their messaging.

5. Implications for the Application of Public Relations

Although there is no denying the mutually beneficial relationship between PR and the media, a critical analysis of the literature in the field reveals a range of viewpoints and critiques.

A prevalent critique is to the alleged excessive focus on strategic messaging in the context of the media-PR relationship. Academics contend that skillfully constructed messaging are frequently given less weight in public relations strategies than unbiased reporting. Grunig and Hunt noted in their study that public relations practitioners often use strategic communication to sway public opinion, making it difficult to distinguish between persuasion and information distribution [1]. The public's access to objective information may be jeopardized by this intentional manipulation, which may also damage the credibility of media organizations.

The possible commercialization and conflict of interest that are present in the interaction between public relations and the media are the subject of another well-known complaint. Academics contend that there is a chance that journalistic integrity may be sacrificed in favor of commercial reasons as media outlets depend more and more on PR sources for news material. The commercialization of the media sector was called out by McChesney, who also claimed that this trend might result in a loss of journalistic independence and the influencing of news items by corporate interests and public relations professionals [13].

Furthermore, a common topic in the criticism of their relationship is the decline in public faith in the media and public institutions. The intimate relationship between PR and the media, according to academics, may be a factor in the public's loss of confidence as viewers may believe that news reports are influenced by special interests rather than the general welfare. In his discussion of the idea of "manufacturing consent" in the media, Tuchman raised the possibility that when PR objectives and media aims coincide, material may be provided selectively in order to support a specific narrative, so undermining public confidence in the veracity of news reports [14].

A critical viewpoint also tackles the standardization of data that arises from the interdependence of public relations and media. Academics contend that depending too much on PR sources might

result in a narrowing of perspectives, with a small number of voices and opinions controlling the media landscape. Couldry examined the idea of "media rituals" and how PR strategies-influenced, recurrent communication patterns might lead to the homogeneity of information and reduce the range of viewpoints that are available to the public [15].

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the evolving landscape of media and the advent of social media platforms have significantly impacted the field of public relations. As we move forward, it is crucial for future research to delve deeper into the synergies between traditional and social media, exploring how organizations can strategically navigate these channels for effective communication. Additionally, the criticisms discussed in this article draw attention to issues with homogenizing information, conflicts of interest, strategic messaging, and trust loss. To maintain the independence and integrity of public relations and the media in advancing the public interest, it is crucial to acknowledge and respond to these complaints. The future of this dynamic interaction will be significantly shaped by continued scholarly investigation and critical analysis as the media environment continues to change.

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