

Review Article

Conceptualizing the Management of Online Public Relations among Public Relations Practitioners

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Abstract: Modern technology has become a very researched area in PR. Nevertheless, the literature examining online PR still in its early levels. Internet has become essential and has initiated to revolutionize the PR industry. Despite the study of technology and its effect on PR, online PR remains a non-standardized concept used as the varied studies often rely on the specific conceptualization of the practitioners and his experience in this field. This paper intends to show the conceptualization of online public relations among public relation practitioners and illustrate the factors that led to the understanding or lack of understanding among the practitioners. The paper follows conventional structure to elaborate on the topic for future scholars through providing a critical insight. The paper offers insight on the management of online public relations among the public practitioners with a detailed review of prominent literature to encourage future scholars for empirical attention.

Keywords: *Conceptualization; Online PR; PR practitioners; Management; Online media*

1. Introduction

PR plays a vital role in any organization, and it aspires to maintain mutually beneficial and long-term relationships between an organization and its main publics by balancing the interests of each party (Ahmad & Ismail, 2015). As has become well known, the Internet has not only changed the world radically and but also PR practices (Brown, Sikes, & Willmott, 2013; McCorkindale, 2010; Wright & Hinson, 2013; Zerfass, Verhoeven, Tench, Moreno, & Verčič, 2011). The Internet has become a vital tool for PR because it is critical for most people (Petrovici, 2014). Therefore, PR has begun to manage the use of ICT quickly for various Internet sites with all their strengths and weaknesses.

Indeed, online PR has drastically reshaped PR practices (Alikilic & Atabek, 2012; DiStaso & Bortree, 2012; McCorkindale & DiStaso, 2012; Verhoeven et al., 2012). These practices differ among PR practitioners depending on their conceptualization. Because of the acceptance of any new concept by members of an organization often needs a great deal of time to understand, accept and then use this new concept (Arabi & Mansur, 2006). That because practitioners need to understand a system fully before accepting it for usage (Rahman, 2014). Therefore, PR in the online era require a comprehension of how to gather key components

and share information and then be able to affect them at crucial points. In turn, doing this requires understanding the concepts and the strategies embracing online age technology (Wright & Hinson, 2009). Kent and Suffer (2014) have argued that PR professionals should extend their comprehension of new technology and its applications to behold at relational and social issues successfully instead of just focusing on current practices.

Despite the study of technology and its impact on PR, online PR remains a non-standardized term used as the assorted studies often depend on the specific concept of the practitioner and his experience in this field.

2. Literature Review

According to the literature many scholars pointed out that a misunderstanding exists in the concept of online PR among the practitioners. While other scholars argued that there is an understanding in the concept of online PR among the practitioners. Therefore, there is a need for a substantial study to investigate the conceptualization of online PR among the practitioners. In addition, to know the factors that led to the understanding or lack of understanding among the practitioners.

According to the literature many scholars pointed out that a misunderstanding exists in the concept of online PR among the practitioners. While other scholars argued that there is an understanding in the concept of online PR among the practitioners. Therefore, there is a need for a substantial study to investigate the conceptualization of online PR among the practitioners. In addition to, the factors that led to the lack of understanding (Ahmed, Mozammel & Ahmed, 2018).

Research has been undertaken to understand the concept of online PR among PR practitioners; one such piece of research was carried out by Bhargava (2010). Bhargava (2010) found that PR practitioners in New Zealand do not have a fully understand the nature of the online PR concept and its concomitant tools and the scope of usage in practice. This lack of comprehension has led up to enormous differences in the use and application of several tools available on the online. The scope of practitioners' work and experience as well as their knowledge of the Internet and the organizational environment in which they operated was found to have influenced this discrepancy. This means that the lack of understanding of PR practitioners and lack of good use may be due to a lack of personal skills of practitioners in using and realizing the importance of these tools.

Moreover, Fitch (2009) research was conducted to determine the attitudes of Singaporean and Malaysian PR practitioners and how these attitudes impacted their use of social media. He found that experienced PR practitioners were afraid of a changeable communication environment, even as some adopted the opportunities created by the new media.. This fear was due to a lack of understanding of the meaning of new media and social media. Moreover, Fitch (2009) argued that the reason for not understanding social media was because of a lack of knowledge and technical skills in working with social media. This means that some of the practitioners were uncomfortable with the evolving communication patterns, and a few even suggested a strong sense of alienation from new media. None of the studied practitioners were active participants in social media, and while some monitored blogs, none of them had their own blogs or had incorporated blogs or other social media into their PR campaigns (Fitch, 2009). This study confirms that the lack of understanding of the concept of social media leads to the fear of PR practitioners in the use of social media, and that PR practitioners prefer using traditional methods.

However, some studies have emphasized that practitioners are aware of the concept of online PR and its authentic uses. For example, Saka and Genco (2017) found that practitioners in Turkey, Although the cumbersome start, began to recognize the possibilities of digital communication and took significative steps in recognizing and using suitable digital tools and platforms for suitable PR practices. furthermore, PR professionals in Turkey are conscious of the possibility of providing digital communications and have accepted changes resulting from digital developments in public relations

In contrast, Liptak (2012) demonstrated that the PR practitioners are laggards in the use of social media principally because of their lack of understanding of the concept of social media and how to utilize social media effectively. Liptak (2012) found that older practitioners are prone to using traditional tactics rather than more technologically advanced tactics, like social media (Pahi, Umrani, Hamid & Ahmed, 2016). This is mainly because practitioners do not understand the online PR concept, which is problematic, especially among older practitioners. This created a gap in understanding and usage. Furthermore, practitioners believed that brand recognition provided the main benefit for practicing PR through social media.

Additionally, the most frequently listed drawback among practitioners was responding to negativity in social media. The findings of this research are consistent with Fitch's (2009) study, which pointed out that the lack of understanding of the practitioners and their fear of using the social media was due to the lack of experience, skills and an understanding of the advantages of these tools and how to use them. In addition, this study drew attention to the age factor. Indeed, differences certainly exist between the old practitioners who do not use the technology, and the young practitioners who use technology in all areas of their lives and not just for work. In other words, this resulted in a knowledge gap due to the tremendous development of technology.

On other hand, Avery, Lariscy, and Sweetser (2010) compared journalists and practitioners in terms of their comprehension and use of social media. The reporters indicated that they were more willing to work with practitioners who used social media tools because of their comprehension of social media. Thus, while the usage gaps have stand out, journalists and practitioners appear to have shown general concurrence and common directions in their comprehension of the other's use of social media, and these trends have had major impacts on the strategic visions of organizations (Avery, Lariscy, & Sweetser, 2010). On the other hand, Robson and James (2013) confirmed that despite PR practitioners in their studies had engaged in social media as a function of their public relations practice, the plurality did not have sufficient comprehension of the notion of social media or the strategic approach to its use Or plans for future use. In addition, it seems that none of the practitioners interviewed was a member of the dominant coalition of the organization and quickly blamed the administration for restricting their organizations' adoption of social media.

Robson and James (2013) illustrated that these practitioners may not have the ability to embrace social media or accomplish a strategic approach. If the dominant coalition in an organization is inexperienced in two-way symmetrical communication, Then they are unlikely to be restful opening the organization to dialogue and commentary over social media This study shows that a lack of understanding of the online PR concept exists among practitioners, and a main reason for the inability of practitioners to adopt and understand the concept of online PR in their work is the absence of a clear and defined strategy by the institution. This confirms that the absence of the role of the organization in developing specific strategies leads to the failure of participants to understand and apply these tools in their work.

Furthermore, Toledano and Avidar (2016) conducted a study examining the comprehension of practical moral challenges in the use of public relations practitioners for social media. They found a lack of comprehension of the notion of online PR among practitioners who was either because of the scarcity knowledge or absence of care. This lack of comprehension has led to significant challenges to public relations morals in social media. These challenges tend to circumvent the issues of transparency, the use of spurious identities in comments, the use of payments to bloggers, and the use of payments to social media experts to conduct distortion campaigns. They found that in both New Zealand and Israel, a group of practitioners accepted these practices as a function of the current actuality of the industry. Not all practitioners have accepted the eviction of message sponsors as a universal moral tool (Toledano & Avidar, 2016).

Inya (2017) concluded that most PR managers in higher education Social media are used only sometimes because they do not know that social media can be utilized to create backlinks to their websites, which are highly valued in their rankings of universities. The implication is that many of the managers use

the social media as convenient channels of communication, not as an integral part of their global visibility strategy (Inya, 2017). This study also emphasizes that there is no real realization of the notion and importance of online PR has led to the low usage of practitioners in institutions of higher education, which is a basic interface for any country that wants to attract students.

3. Conclusion

Most studies agree that the PR practitioners are unclear about the concept of online PR. The lack of understanding of the concept of online PR among practitioners has several reasons, and these reasons can be split into two categories. The first category is specific to the organization itself and includes strategies, policy, future plans, training and rehabilitation programs that the organization must provide to practitioners. The second category concerns the practitioners themselves. Little knowledge and lack of skills, awareness and training, old practitioners has led to a lack of understanding and sometimes misuse. This misuse sometimes leads to ethical problems. In contrast, few studies have found that practitioners either understand or are aware of the concept of online PR. Additionally, journalists tend to deal with practitioners who use the Internet, and unmistakable evidence exists that these practitioners use the social media properly due to their understanding of the correct usage.

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