

A Study on Emerging Trends in Public Relations Practices

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Abstract

The new PR industry is a blend of public relations, marketing and advertising. Since the year 2019, clients are becoming more and more aware of the services and benefits provided by these three branches and thus demand more integrated services. Today's Public Relation personnel are brand ambassadors, influencers, Social Media managers, content marketers, trend setters and trend spotters, as well. Social Media platforms like Instagram are the reasons for the upcoming and booming trend of Social Media Influencing. The 2020 pandemic has affected the PR industry like all the other industries, this has changed the working of the PR industry by incorporating new trends like influencer marketing. PR professionals build relationships with these social media influencers and starts networking. The aim of this networking is to build beneficial partnerships to access the targeted audience. This research has been conducted to study new trends in Public Relations and their prevalence. Apart from this it will also determine the effectiveness of modern PR practices in image building.

Keywords: Digital PR; Modern PR; PR Practices; Public Relations; Traditional PR; Trends in PR.

Introduction

Profession of Public Relation has a history which is century old. Most of the celebrities and famous organizations use PR to build their positive image, although they do not prefer to disclose the fact that they use PR practices to build, create or manage their public image. This is because public relations at times considered as an organized media build up for not so deserving and capable people, brands or causes.

"Efforts at persuading others and influencing public opinion, dates back to antiquity. The Greeks though did not use the word public relations or public opinion, but believed in the power of public opinion when they coined the maxim, "vox populi vox dei" - the voice of people is the voice of GOD" (Jethwaney, 2015).

Growth of Public Relations has been analyzed in different perspective and has been a topic of debate. Historical growth of PR can be categorized under publicity, propaganda, public information and also public relations.

Public Relations as a profession always acted as a launch pad for image building of brands and crisis management. Global organizations from the corporate sector engaged PR consultancy firms to have strategies to deal with difficult times, using them to influence the government policies to work in their favour. PR was or rather is used by all the sectors, be it corporate or private sector or be it the government sector to enforce or regulate the policies made by them. Certainly the tools, the techniques and the tactics were often different. Advocacy and lobbying worked well for private and multinational companies (not in India, as lobbying is not legal here), PR activities which were standard media, that had press releases/ media relations worked great for public sector. However, public sector is always criticized for not having planned strategies through PR communications to achieve public responses. Private sector PR looked forward to image building through 'not paid media'. For achieving this, various PR practices were in trend like: exhibition, outreach, journals, films and web sites, inter personal as well as intra personal communication.

"The technical definition of public relations is the art of crafting compelling press releases and distributing them to newsworthy sources with the goal of gaining coverage and exposure. Typically, PR's been reserved for product launches, events, and crisis communications"(Smith,2018).Traditional public relation has evolved into modern day PR. Though it has continued to launch companies, shape their growth, raising funds and planning strategies to market their services and products. PR agencies are catching up in time and evolving according to new PR needs to achieve their PR goals. New trends are being discovered or invented to reach out to the masses. Diverse media tactics falls under traditional PR such as event organizing, reputation building and reputation management, crisis management and communication, press releases, trade shows, etc. The most important of all is press outreach which focuses on traditional media such as print: Newspaper, magazines, etc.

Electronic media: Television and Radio. PR managers are equipped with loads of media contacts and familiar with the needs of their clients. Traditional PR is a work of great patience. Print Publications take a longer time to publish. Media outreach may not produce results early, which becomes challenging for the client and the Publicist. Though it s difficult to track exact media metrics in traditional PR, but it can prove to be very successful in creating brand awareness.

Review of Literature

Book:

Implementing Word of Mouth Marketing: Online Strategies to Identify Influencers, Craft Stories, and Draw Customers - Idil Mirium Cakim (2010)

Cakim(2010) believes that, "Information flows from one hub to another in a matter of clicks. We are learning to share knowledge and pool our resources. We can reach hundreds with one message posted online, seek guidance and get useful advice from people we have yet to meet face to face."

The technology is going to advance more and more in the future. Presently online social networking and blogging is popular , but in future other networking channels will be developed. Mode of communication will remain open, but tools of communication may get changed.

This book is created to make readers understand: How a meaningful content is created and distributed through Social Media Channels as effective messages. Cakim(2010) elaborates on the fundamentals of Online Influencers, How to develop messages that can draw more attention and What web-based tools are to be chosen to drive offline and online conversations.

Research Paper:

"Reputation Management Using Online and Offline Communication Tools"- Drana Zrakova, Patrik Ferenc, Kristina Polackova, Milan Kubina (2018)

The authors analyzed an anonymous Slovak University which fought for its negative reputation. This analysis consisted of study of offline and Online tools of communication used by the stakeholders and the university to spread positive awareness about the university. Authors believed that reputation management is very important in higher educational institutions

Online Articles

"Where Public Relations is Headed in the Modern Era" - Ronn Torossian (2016)

Torossian (2016) states that: initially PR was about getting heard from the media and journalists about the brand's accomplishments, events and new products etc. That is still being done, a single press release is no more effective. All this is done through a more trusted source like a blogger making a mention or any other online article shared from a trusted source.

Social Media platforms like, face book, Instagram, twitter, You Tube , etc, have changed the way the PR world used to work.

Torossian (2016) also opines that, Good stories draw people's attention and similarly online influencers (who have audience's trust) influence the audience with their credibility for endorsing the particular brand. A company's growth into an international or global brand is all about building its reputation and repeatedly building, managing and preventing it from damage by building trust among the customers.

"The Modern Day Publicists: Traditional Public Relations (PR) Vs. Digital PR" - Stephanie Smith (2018)

Smith (2018) discusses the changing role of publicists after the transition of old PR into Digital PR and the tactics used by them to be in the top lead of news feed. Smith (2018) states that the days of reading a national daily at 6 am are gone by, as approximately 38% of adults get their news and information online. Smart phones are the new in thing and people have less interest in the primary mediums of media like television and Radio. Due to this transition the communication industry has to evolve and transform into digital communications.

Modern day publicists are concentrating more on digital media than on publishing in paper or making press releases. Their priorities are SEO, Hash tags, back links and keywords, etc. Trending organically on top of the news feed or SEO is the utmost priority of the publicists. Another big thing is influencer or the social media gurus build authentic relationships with audiences through their blogs & vlogs and other social networks like face book or Instagram. The core of the digital PR is the same as of the traditional PR, which is building trust, reputation and relationships for their clients. All this is attained by conducting press releases, effective content writing online, email copy etc.

Research Objectives

This research has been conducted to determine the effectiveness of PR practices with latest trends. Following objectives were addressed while conducting the study:

- To determine the prevalence of current trends in PR practices.
- To compare the old PR trends to new trends.
- To assess the effectiveness of the current PR practices.

Tentative assumptions

Following are the tentative assumptions for the above stated objectives:

- Modern day PR is all about digital trends.
- Old PR trends are non prevalent in the present scenario.
- Modern PR practices are more effective in image building and marketing of product and services.

PR in the Modern Scenario

PR is an industry which never sleeps. Undoubtedly it has seen changes over past few decades. Digital has become huge and print has taken a tiny existence. Though PR is still going under transformation from traditional to modern, the old age techniques have not yet completely vanished. People are aware of digital PR and a communication shift has already taken place and facing the challenges. Gurus of PR have agreed to that modern PR practices are to be looked as a function of management in an organization. They believe that PR is now evolving from a communication function or a technical one which focuses on creating, enhancing and distributing information to a communications managerial function whose key function is to build and maintain the relationship between the stakeholder and the organization.

Traditional PR is more offline centric, with very minimalistic conversations. Interactions are often one way. Firstly, all the important information is gathered from the stakeholders through press releases or the interviews. Then this information is put into a very attractive 'write up', to appeal the print journalists. This write up helps in promoting the product/brand/client or the company. All the stakeholders and the audiences are conveyed with message through these write ups. This type of content needs a lot of writing creativity to allure the potential customers or to engage the attention of the audience. Traditional PR is more about generating positive media stories, sending newsletters, publishing brochures and hosting events. It is a way of communicating with media proactively. (Fortney, 2014)

In a broad sense we can say that traditional PR has all those communication methods which do not require any digital platform or internet service. All types of activities before the era of nineties can be considered as traditional public relations. In today's world where everything is measured with great accuracy, the only challenge faced by traditional PR is that, it is difficult to evaluate the PR efforts, track the exact metrics or the PR outreach because of the out dated metric methods. Traditional media works

with great results but not instantly. Traditional PR and Digital PR deals in similar issues like crisis management, reputation management, creating brand awareness, but their working approach is entirely different. Now Public Relation has a totally new approach of relating to the audience and getting directly engaged with them.

A good publicist needs to generate great media stories, create proactive strategies to get the audience engaged and drive the internet traffic to their client's websites. Companies at large are implementing digital strategies by using social media. These social media campaigns are built on very proactive traditional media pitching and considered as the basic foundations of these and communication on the internet with the Social Media. Modern PR is not characterized as self obsessed marketing any more for creating buzz for your event, brand or product. Planning promotions using any media means. Today's PR is more of building trust and foundation for the product and creating highly creative digital content. Its aim is to build great relationships with influencers, content creators, and contributors to promote the brand and prove its authenticity. Modern PR has come a long way, from simple press releases to creative digital content. PR agencies are using all sorts of digital strategies to design various activities on social media platforms to promote the brands organically.

Emerging Trends in PR Practices

PR companies are in continuous process to shape the companies/brands, they have as their clients. It's their primary object to launch the new products, increase the company's growth, raise funds and market their products and services. It's very essential for the PR teams to have secure media coverage and right publicity for their clients. There are noticeable changes in the PR trends in the recent years. These trends are affected by the changing metrics, big budgets of marketing and growing demands of digital content and channels. Public Relations has evolved into an unrecognizable form. The industry of banners, intelligent marketing and advertising, print and electronic media like radio and television has completely transformed into a more complex, more dynamic and more digital content centric PR.

Digital content and digital channels plays a great role in any company's success. These trends are difficult to master, but still help in the growth of companies bright future.(Wendy Marx,2018) Spending big on PR campaigns definitely pays well for the companies/brands. This is the latest development in recent years, where PR has equal importance as marketing and advertising. Another major trend is the digital communications, and PR does the job well. For any business in today's age ,is very im-

portant to have social media presence to survive in the game. PR firms, provides full social media coverage with their content and strategies and amplify the presence of the brand on the social media platforms. Digital storytelling and social monitoring are the major strategic steps which are followed to gain social media attention. The new trends focuses more on metrics and measurements. Another one is impact -and-outcome based results of PR. There are various new platforms to implement various strategies through different technologies. Some of the very effective PR trends are mentioned below:

Data

With the great amount of digital data produced worldwide every day , it's important for the PR firms to produce smart and engaging data. The present scenario will be more focused on digitalized campaigns, which should be designed keeping a niche audience in mind. It's important for the business to be visible online and get good traffic attracted towards them.

Specialized & Customized PR firms

In future corporate or the organizations will approach to more specific PR firms which are customized to their industry. Looking for more specialized PR, putting great pressure on PR professionals and consultants to have deep understanding of their business.

Artificial Intelligence

Digital world is mostly run by Artificial Intelligence(AI). AI can attract millions and billions of audience with in fraction of seconds. We have the opportunity to connect with the audience spread worldwide. The entire world has come closer and AI is one of the essential tools to maintain effective PR. Society is going through positive changes and so has to the business strategies.

Rich Content Strategy

Content is something which represents the brand or company to its audience/clients. With the new emerging social media platforms with specific word limits, it's a great need to have very specific and very effective high quality content. An elaborate plan with great content strategy will set the product and brand apart.

Influencers

Modern PR is constantly evolving, it is no longer controlled only by the media. With improved technology and internet intervention world has become closer. Earlier news papers dictated the brand promotions, where

as now a school boy having some thousands followers can promote your brand. Yes, they are called influencers. A blogger or an instagram influencer has the ability to make an impact of a product on his constant followers. Influencers have direct connection to their followers and are considered to be more credible than other mediums. An influencer is a powerful medium to brand any product or service. Modern PR is about developing great relationship with influencers and getting engaged with them for their relevant industry.

Reputation Management & Crisis Communication

Companies lose approximately a quarter of their business when their potential clients find a negative feedback on their search results. Approximately 50% of their company's reputation is attributed to their company heads like CEO, etc. The rising trends may find reputation management and crisis communication having a stronger role in PR strategies for the organizations. Companies are paying more and more attention towards their brand reputation. "In this era of enhanced inter connectivity, reputation management and PR go hand in hand. Many companies monitor their online reputation every day -over-one-fifth of those surveyed revealed that they check social channels each hour to ensure that they are on top of any developing story." (Spilka, 2019)

Publicity is not the ultimate result

A customer's happiness is not guaranteed by publicity. Publicity alone, cannot take the product to the customer's satisfaction, it is just the start. The end game is quality of the product or the service. Customer satisfaction is built with reliable products and services. Unsatisfied client will leave negative feedbacks, and word of mouth can build or destroy the credibility of the product. It's very important for the companies to provide genuine products which brings loyal customers.

How effective PR trends could be?

Public Relations is a technique through which organizations/ companies or individuals interact or communicate with the media. PR professionals speak to the targeted audience directly or indirectly with the help of the media professionals to create a positive image for their companies or brands by building a strong relationship or bond, so as to maintain that positive image further.

Corporate world has a cut throat competition. PR organizations constantly work to keep up in this competition, to make new customers and retain the current ones. To do this up keep, they require a positive image of their client. This positive image is very hard to achieve. For this they follow cer-

tain trends which helps the companies /brands or individuals to get success in their business. A PR professional is required to have great relations with the people in the media , they need to provide the news about their clients to the journalist to be in the news. To enhance the clients image in the eyes of the targeted audience, they need to have many contacts in the media. Media can be TV, Radio, Print or Social Media, etc.

Public Relations has witnessed important changes in its working in the last one decade. These changes have their roots in the internet and the social media. Now a day's people prefer watching visual content instead of reading a text. These visual contents are hassle free, less time consuming and at times entertaining. Most of the population of the country is mobile or smart phone friendly, specially the youth. Today's youth is extremely dependant on smart phone, it helps them get connected, informed, entertained and let them also pay their bills. Social media platforms which are mobile friendly paved into the lives of the phone users and have a very dominant impact. Not only this, social media influencing is another latest trend. Everyone is influenced by something or the other as per their interests, tastes or choices in life. Social media influencers provide best content to the targeted audience and create an effective impact on the purchase choices of the consumers. Influencing is getting huge on PR scales as the time is passing by.

PR is changing not only in technology ,but also in business. There are no freebees now, no free publicities, all are paid promotions. Clients are charged for maintaining their PR. It's costly to advertise on social media and even the influencers charge to promote a product. Public Relations organizations, companies and individuals are paying to get famous. There are software which helps the PR professionals to maintain companies image by updating their websites, which needs to be done very carefully. It's very easy to put a company's reputation at stake. Updating websites, and website blogging are the trends which helps a company/ organization or an individual to maintain their reputation in the market.

It has become easy for a PR professional to create and maintain a positive image for its clients through Social Media presence. Increased use of internet has allowed Public Relations to explore new trends, methods, techniques and technology. Communication has improved with the target audience through paid social media and has increased the returns in the business.

Analysis and Findings

"Modern day PR is all about digital PR." Public Relations is experiencing

changes like never before. These changes are more integral and these are also integrated with the marketing and advertising teams. The traditional PR was more about building relationships with journalists and sending out press releases, where as now it's more about managing relationships with various groups of influencers. Starting from traditional media to micro bloggers or influencers, it's all about understanding the audience and the industry. It's about putting across the right message through a variety of channels, keeping updated with the latest digital media trends. It is to create effective pitches with the help of technology. The digitalization has helped in measuring the outcome of the communication process, using real time data and creating the understanding of how messages are received. Which helps in adjusting and optimizing the messages accordingly.

Agencies use intelligent media contact, data bases and various digital tools to manage relationships. They also have alerts and notifications to track very easily, about how much traffic is attracted to their website. Search Engine Optimization has given rise to content marketing and hashtag PR. Citizen journalists and well aware consumers had made a profound effect on today's PR trends, with an effective PR trend a client get viral publicity or even can get fall victim to bad reputation #badservice. Today's PR trends are not about managing crisis, they are about managing chaos. This research was conducted by unstructured sample observation, 30 samples were studied in their natural environment. Finding revealed seven major and emerging trends in today's Public Relations. These includes digital trends like influencer PR with integrated marketing and advertising. Reputation management and crisis communication also has a major share in trending as many brands dedicate a large share of their investment in Reputation Management and Crisis Management. Below is the graphical representation of these major trends in PR which helps us understand them easily:

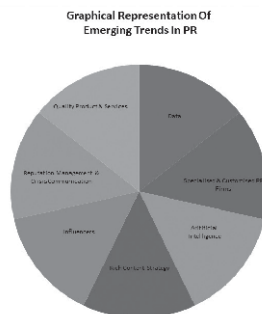


Fig:1.1

Figure 1.2 explains the effectiveness of the above stated PR trends in terms of maintaining an effective PR and managing effective businesses for the brands and celebrities. The most effective trend is the Influencer and micro blogging PR on social media, the whole world is globally connected with internet. Earlier it was all press controlled brand awareness but now the scene has changed dramatically. A young lad with a rich media content and 100k followers on instagram can create great impact for your brand. Creating content for micro blogging with not much investment in terms of recording, digital effects or backdrops, etc. makes it affordable and less costly. Influencers do these campaigns for free or sometimes they get free goodies from the brands, but they do get paid from the social media platforms for the amount of advertisements they generate or the viewership on their channel or account. The only drawback is that , there is no way of measuring the return of investment(ROI) for the companies when they invest on influencers. Some companies do consider dropping them as potential PR campaigns.

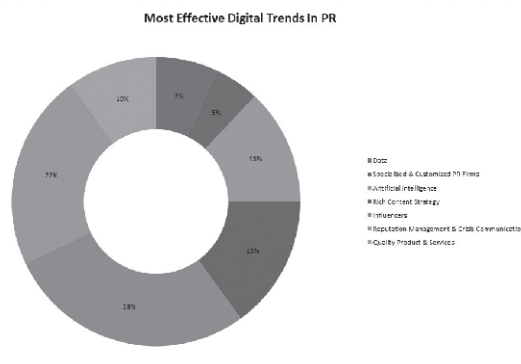


Fig:1.2

The second most effective trend is Reputation Management and Crisis Communication. Online Reputation Management is a very important tool to maintain and manage any brand's or individual's reputation on social media platform. ORM is actually helping companies and brands increase their business and they are understanding the value and importance of it. Companies are investing more and more in ORM as they are going more digital in marketing and advertising. Some companies pays more attention to great product and services, where as some companies are more focused on creating an effective and elaborate content strategy to promote their product and services. In the current PR scenario no company can survive without having an effective content strategy. This comes third in the race of effectiveness, almost near to artificial intelligence which also

plays a crucial role in having great PR online. The only way to be visible on the social media is by having a great media content. A media content can include videos, audios, Podcasts, articles or blogs, graphics or info graphics and others. The other trends like Data Analytics, Quality product and service and specialized & customized PR firms are some other emerging trends which are quite effective in conducting PR campaigns.

Conclusion:

Contemporary Public Relations has transformed and still under transformation. A wide variety of digital platforms are available, and to maintain their status these PR agencies need to be updated with the latest trends in PR. These various trends are almost digital and relate to social media. Through this research it can be concluded that the traditional media trends still have their place, but their effectiveness is compromised. The PR campaigns depend on Data and Research for planning strategies which can be planned by focusing on digital activities. Modern PR trends are more image building and all about integrated marketing. There are many online tools available to achieve PR goals, but media monitoring tools can be included as it helps in measuring important PR metrics.

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