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Repositioning of PR Field in Developing Countries

Anil Kemal Kaya and Umut Ayman

Abstract

There is a big question in the market whether companies are giving a real equity for public relations (PR) field in developing countries. In developing countries, unfortunately, managers are not giving full support for PR professional in their institutions. Companies apply some of the marketing communication (MC) elements while trying to reach their target market and focus on the elements that can show performance in a short term, mostly because they want to return their investment in a short term. Advertising and sales promotion activities are measurable in a short run, and PR and sales force performance are measured in a long run; hence, companies prefer to allocate their budget more for their shortterm activities than long-term activities because they perceive all as extra cost, which is not true. Thus, managers have to believe that MC campaign is not an extra cost and that it is a type of communication investment for good corporate image and reputation for the public. This chapter is emphasizing what PR professionals are doing in their fields will be discussed in detail. Thus, this chapter is important because it is guiding the companies that have operations in developing countries about what they will expect from their PR professional when they build on their strategic communication.

Keywords: public relations, strategic communication, backbone, developing countries

1. Introduction

In many PR books, PR is defined as a backbone for the companies that create mutual understanding with stakeholders; if so why are companies in developing countries not seeing PR as a backbone in their institutions? One of the reasons is that there is a confusion or misunderstanding about PR field. The main confusion is that managers think that PR only care about customer relationship and receive the customers with smiling faces so there is no need to get specialized in that field as it only depends on personal skills. However they are doing more things than that. PR professionals are the ones that plan the whole strategic communication of the company while trying to communicate to the public in the long run. They are the ones who solve crises; they are the ones who create corporate reputation and brand image in correspondence with their strategic communication plan. For this context, the PR's primary roles, functions, and tactics help to understand the field of PR.

2. A hierarchy of PR’s primary roles, functions, and tactics

Hutton [1] pointed out the hierarchical strategy and tactics of PR with its roles and functions for managing strategic relationships in the context of framework. PR is defined as managing strategic relationships and building communicative bridge with the company and not only customers but also stakeholders. PR professionals have some situational roles to affect, persuade, advocate, educate, and crusade people and be highly responsible to give the right information as well as manage the reputation of the company.

The primary functions of PR cover research, image and communication, interpreting and negotiating, counseling aspects and managerial functions, and seeing and interpreting the threats for the company. PR professionals are responsible for these functions, and they create a mutual understanding and communication with stakeholders by using the tactical tools of the company as shown in **Table 1**.

Therefore, public relations must be discussed under managerial level. There is so much discussion about what PR professionals are doing in the market and what sort of background knowledge they must have. Anybody can act as PR professional without having specialization in the PR field. If companies need an effective and efficient company image, company reputation, and good corporate communication no matter in which sector they are in, they must hire at least one PR professional in their company.

Definition	“Managing strategic relationships”
Situational roles	Persuader, advocate, educator, crusader, information provider, reputation manager.
Primary functions performed	Research, image making, counseling, managing, early warning, interpreting, communicating, negotiating.
Tactics/tools utilized	Publicity, product placements, news releases, speeches, interpersonal communications, web sites, publications, trade shows, corporate identity programs, corporate advertising programs, etc.

Source: Hutton [1], p. 211.

Table 1.
Primary roles, functions, and tactics of PR.

3. PR professional importance in the sector

PR professionals are the ones who act as intermediary between the company that they work and the public, and they are also preparing the company strategic communication plan under nine steps as follows:

- Step 1: Examine the situation analysis.
- Step 2: Evaluate the organization.
- Step 3: Investigate the publics.
- Step 4: Set up goals and objectives.
- Step 5: Put into word the action and response strategies.
- Step 6: Use effective communication.
- Step 7: Choose communication tactics.
- Step 8: Apply the strategic plan.
- Step 9: Measure the performance of the strategic plan [2].

According to these sequential steps, the first three steps, examining the situation analysis, evaluating the organization, and investigating the publics, are related with research. Situation analysis is one of the important steps in scanning internal and external environment to examine what is going on in the sector. Research about the internal environment is the evaluation of the organization and investigating publics is to understand the stakeholders' point of views with research. Steps 4, 5, and 6 are about strategy, which are setting up goals and objectives and then determining the action and response strategies with the use of effective communication. So, steps 7 and 8 are about tactics which the company selects, then put into action, and which the company use to transfer their communication to reach various stakeholder groups. The last step is about evaluation of strategic communication campaign. Every company has to have their own strategic plan to reflect accurately their corporate identity to the public. With the effective strategic plan and with a good corporate communication, the company can create good company image and reputation among public. In other words corporate identity can be defined as, "the reality and uniqueness of an organization which is integrally related to its external and internal image and reputation through corporate communication" [3, 4]. Having a good image and reputation helps company to differentiate themselves from their competitors by gaining a competitive advantage. As seen in the figure below, PR professionals have a chance to get a feedback from the target audience group about what they think about the company, what the company position is in the stakeholders' mind, and how stakeholder group perceives the company, and if there is any need for modification for their strategy, they may have a chance to modify or reshape it. In other words, according to the strategic communication evaluation, if PR professionals are aware of the fact that there is any negative image or bad reputation, they have to take actions to rebuild the company image. While managing corporate communication, PR professional has to build an accurate strategic communication by caring about the company's identity. Since every company has a different identity, that makes them different from the other companies, and identity comes into existence with the combination of company's mission(s), vision(s), value(s), and organization culture elements (**Figure 1**).

Stakeholders can be defined as public as well. Then public is categorized under four main headlines such as:

- a. Customer: the people that have a chance to get the company's products or services. Customers can be current, potential, secondary, and shadow constituencies.
- b. Producers: the people that provide any inputs for the companies to produce their products or services. Suppliers, personnel (employees, volunteers), and financiers (donors, stockholders) can be categorized as producers.
- c. Limiters: the people that reduce or weaken the company's success such as competitors, opponents, and hostile forces.
- d. Enablers: the people that influence company's success in the market such as media, allies, opinion leaders, and regulators ([2], p. 59).

While preparing for an effective strategic communication campaign, the PR professional has to perfectly define the key (strategic) to appeal to the public perfectly. These people are named as target audience whom PR professionals try to create an effective and efficient communication with. As they are so important, PR professional has to know these groups perfectly (**Table 2**).

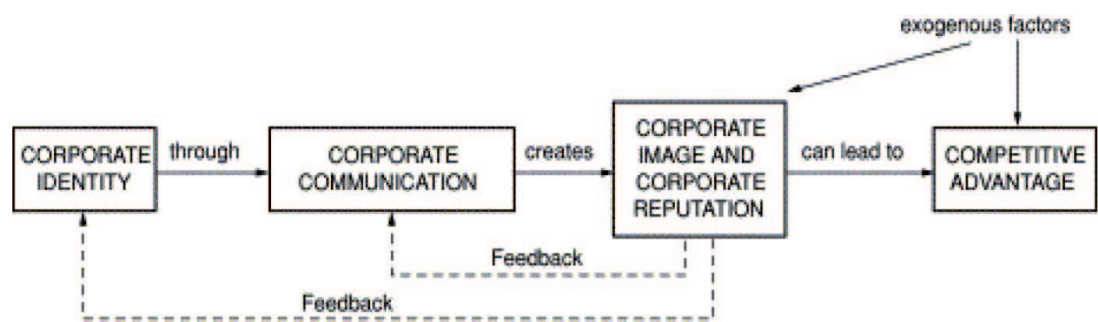


Figure 1.
Stages for company’s competitive advantage [3–5].

To define an accurate key (strategic) public, follow the process	
Customers	<div>1. Define your company’s primary customers (who use the company’s product/service mainly?)</div> <div>2. Define your secondary customers</div> <div>3. What sort of changes you saw from your customer within the past years?</div> <div>4. What sort of changes may happen from your customers within the coming years?</div>
Producers	<div>1. Define your supplier that produces some services/products for your company</div> <div>2. Categorize your employees and define them perfectly</div> <div>3. Define your volunteers if you have any</div> <div>4. Who provides money for your company? Categorize these providers</div> <div>5. What sort of changes you saw from your producers within the past years?</div> <div>6. What sort of changes may happen from your producers within the coming years?</div>
Enablers	<div>1. Define who are the opinion leaders among your customers</div> <div>2. Define who are the allies among your company</div> <div>3. Define the regulators for your company</div> <div>4. How have regulators helped you within the last 3 years?</div> <div>5. Identify for whom are the contracts or agreements in your company</div> <div>6. Define the media channels that your company uses mostly</div> <div>7. What sort of changes you saw from your enablers within the past years?</div> <div>8. What sort of changes may happen from your enablers within the coming years?</div>
Limiters	<div>1. Define your company’s competitors</div> <div>2. Define your company’s opponents and categorize them</div> <div>3. Define which limiters group either stops or slows down your company success mostly</div> <div>5. What sort of changes you saw from your limiters within the past years?</div> <div>6. What sort of changes may happen from your limiters within the coming years?</div>

Source: Smith [2], pp. 64–65.

Table 2.
Knowing public.

Then PR professionals perfectly define the key public in detail; this helps PR professionals to put the accurate strategy and tactics to reach their short-term and long-term objectives. No matter either short- or long-term objectives, objectives have to be specific, measurable, accurate, achievable, and time specific.

In order to put effective and accurate objectives, PR professional has to do SWOT analysis of the company in a realistic way. In developing countries the main problem for the companies is that they do not realistically analyze their weak point; therefore while building strategic communication, their plan may not be effective. After accurate objective setting, PR professional has to put accurate strategy.

Strategy is the guideline that shows the plan of action that has to be applied to achieve the objectives. According to the objectives and situations, PR professional has a role; they do both proactive PR and reactive PR in the company.

Proactive PR is focusing more on brand, company image, and reputation. The main aim of proactive PR is to build trustworthy reputation of the company’s brand among the public. On the other hand, reactive PR is focusing more on crisis-based issues either to minimize it or to stop it. While applying reactive PR, PR professional tries to minimize the damage to the company image by applying the right plan, and then if crises happen, they solve them and they concentrate on rebuilding trust. Building a good company image and reputation takes many years, but losing it takes seconds especially in this new age. Thus companies have to do the right thing, in the right time with both proactive PR and reactive PR, not to lose their competitive advantage.

As shown in **Table 3**, proactive PR and reactive PR have different purposes and are applied by the companies’ PR professional. Also just applying the right strategies and tactics are not enough; PR professional has to evaluate the outcomes during the strategic plan communication. Using different methodologies, PR professional may have a chance to measure the outcomes of that strategic communication (**Figure 2**).

As seen in the above figure, Macnamara model shows three stages as inputs-outputs and outcomes. The input stage focuses on formative research that evaluates the organization and the public, and the situation analysis is done by using different methods such as expert analysis, case studies, and observation. In formative research, PR professionals establish the communication goals and objectives by using SMART technique, and then in accordance with these objectives, strategies and tactics are applied using both quantitative and qualitative methodology results. As that type of strategic communication plans is costly, just applying it is not enough for the companies. In developing countries, mostly they implement the tactics somehow, but during the evaluation of outcomes, either they do not know how to apply it or they are not aware of the importance of the measurement of the campaign.

<i>Proactive public relation strategies</i>	<i>Reactive public relations strategies</i>
Action strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational performance • Audience participation • Special events • Alliances and coalitions • Sponsorships • Activism Communication strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsworthy information • Transparent communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preemptive action strategy: prebuttal • Offensive response strategies: attack, embarrassment, threat • Defensive response strategies: denial, excuse, justification • Diversionary response strategies: concession, ingratiation, disassociation, relabeling • Vocal commiseration strategies: concern, condolence, regret, apology • Rectifying behavior strategies: investigation, corrective action, restitution, repentance • Strategic inaction: silence

Source: Smith [2], p. 83 and 98.

Table 3.
Proactive-reactive PR strategies.

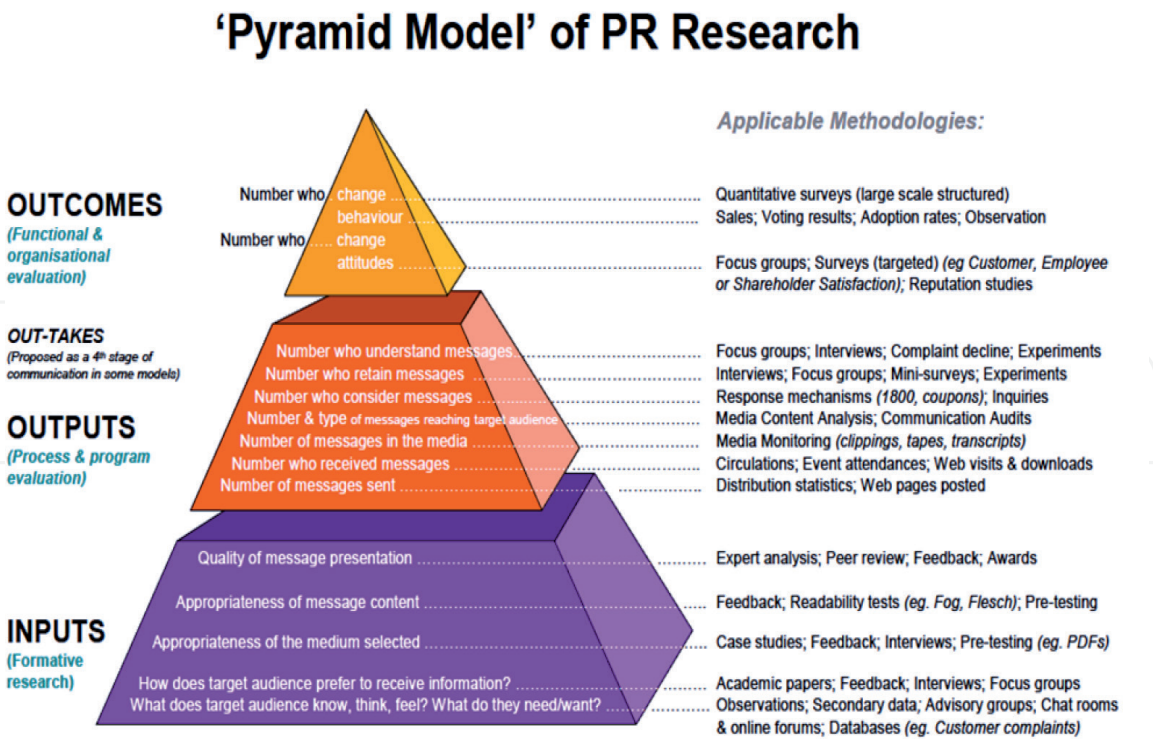


Figure 2.
Macnamara model ([6], p. 304) ([7], p. 85).

4. Four models of PR called as Grunig and hunt model

Four models of PR by Grunig and Hunt (1984) have explained the role of PR in management with its functions. Grunig and Hunt (1984) are the scholars who firstly explained the four characteristics of PR into practices in the model [8].

1. Press agent/publicity: the purpose is propaganda, which is used for persuasion. It is half trust and manipulation to influence audience to behave as the organization desires as there is little research done in this field. It is complete truth but not essential, and while reaching audience they use one-way communication which means they just send their message without getting any feedback mostly practiced in sports, theater, and product promotion field.
2. Public information: the purpose is dissemination of information, and it uses press release and other types of one-way communication channel techniques that send organizational information. Here PR professionals act as journalist in the company. Like press agent model, in this model, there is little and informal research done as well, and while communicating to their audience, they use one-way communication but the message is true and important; therefore it is readership and readable. It is practiced generally in governmental institutions and nonprofit associations.
3. Two-way asymmetric: the purpose is scientific persuasion which uses persuasion and manipulation to influence audience to behave as the organization desires. It conducts formal research and incorporates audience feedback that focuses on the evaluation of attitudes; therefore there is a two-way communication but in an imbalanced way in the nature of communication. This model does not use research to find out how stakeholders feel about the organization. Mostly competitive market profit-oriented companies apply that model to compete with other companies.

4. Two-way symmetric: the purpose is mutual understanding which is used for communication to negotiate with the public. It seeks to resolve conflict and promote mutual benefits, understanding, and respect between the organization and key publics. It conducts formal research as two-way asymmetric, but in this model there is a balanced way in the nature of communication, and message focuses on the evaluation of the understanding of the audience. It is mostly practiced in corporate company in both developed and developing countries.

The developing countries use PR as press agent/publicity and public information in the context of Grunig and Hunt model. The developed countries use two-way asymmetric in the context of the model. The managerial people have a decision-making authority to establish a kind of PR in the context and frame it according to the expectations of the organization.

5. Conclusion


As a conclusion, the companies in developing countries have to focus on PR which is considered as a backbone of the company. The profit and nonprofit organizations have to understand the importance of PR for their stakeholders' communication process and future survival of the company. The companies have to understand PR and then create a positive PR professional perception which also affects the overall credibility of the companies' communication planning. The use of PR and PR professionals is valuable for stakeholders and for the society.

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