



Public Relations and the Social Media

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Abstract

Public relations can be defined in many ways. Public relations, basically are the action of any organization focused on promoting goodwill between the organization and the internal or external publics. One of the widely accepted definition of public relation was formulated by the newsletter PR News “Public Relations is the management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual or an organization with the public interest, and plans and executes a program of action to earn public understanding and patience” (Simon, 1980, p.20). This research will discover the social media uses in the PR in the UAE PR offices and kind of social media tools that are used by the PR offices. The researchers find that Facebook, twitter are highly used by PR people in the UAE.

Key words: Social media; UAE; PR people; Offices of PR; Twitter; Facebook

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INTROCUION

PR is basically a planned persuasive communication that targets to influence important publics. It is to be noted that public relations is not “accidental” it is “planned” (Simon, 1980, p.50). It is called persuasive because, in

public relations, they want to make others do, or believe in something than we are emphasizing on. It does not communicate to scatter individuals, instead communicates to specific groups of people (Simon, 1980).

There are some points that discuss about what public relation is NOT. It is not just about being a pleasant person and having glad-handing only. Being friendly is no doubt an important part of public relations, but to be easy to talk to is too limited when it comes to how its influence would reach to the people, unless, it is being projected to the larger groups through television, stage etc. (Simon, 1980, Al-Jenaibi, 2013)

People involved with public relation work for many causes in various ways. Public relations every act is focused on influencing the people. The most important part of the nature of the company, people, its policies and its history is the public relation (Simon, 1980).

Public Relations is the action undertaken by organizations, be it government or private in order to promote the goodwill between them and their public. Basically it manages communication between the organization and its publics (Public Relations, n.d.).

1. EXPANTION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

Public Relations is widely emphasized in organizations, institutes for education, government bodies, also by individuals like celebrities and much more. The seeds of public relations are all time ready to sprout under the perfect circumstances of availability of media in order to communicate with their audiences. People working in public relations are widely spread in countries around the world. Public relations struggle to reach out to the peoples mind with all methods available for communications (Simon, 1980).

The reason for a drastic increase or rise of public relations around the globe is the immense revolution in the living and communication. Because public relations fills

up the new modern social needs, it is found everywhere there are changes occurring (Simon, 1980).

2. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

This research, apart from the brief introduction, will enlighten the reader about the Qualitative research method, which will include the characteristics of this method, the advantages and also will give a comparison of the qualitative method with that of the quantitative method of research. This will be followed by giving details about the social media. The section of social media will emphasize on its use in UAE, which will make an attempt to give an outline about the development, acceptance and challenges faced social media in UAE.

The research also comprises of a “literature review”. This will include a theory related to the topic of the research. The theory will be defined and described for a better and clear understanding for the reader. The main concept and critical parts of the theory will be explained in this section.

Before reaching the conclusion, the research will illustrate the answers of the interviewees, which then will be analyzed so that, elaborate information is given out on the use of social media in the UAE according to their perspective.

Last comes the conclusion part. Here the critic will be given about various aspects of the research done.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This research report has used the qualitative method of research to get the desired results. In this method small focused samples are needed, rather than larger samples. Apart from the what, when, and where, this method also aims at investigating the why and how of judgment making. Questionnaires were passed around the public relations officers of certain chosen companies of UAE. This was the best preferred way of interaction, than a face to face communication due to their busy schedule and time conflicts.

The purpose of this research was to get an in depth information on how social media is being used by public relations practitioners of the various organizations. The aim was to figure out the various challenges faced, in using the social media, and how the problems are tackled. It also focused onto knowing how social media is accepted by the nationals of UAE. Do they readily get persuaded by communications through social media? Or does it take time for them to absorb it? To put it in a nutshell, the main aim was to know about the effectiveness of using social media. The research has covered various factors of the use of social media in public relations from every possible angle.

The qualitative research method will later be discussed more in details by giving its comparisons with quantitative research method. It will also include the advantages and basic characteristics of the research.

4. SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media stands for the use of web-based technologies and also mobile based technologies in order to switch to an interactive communication dialogues. It is basically refers to an internet based applications. It is a media for social interaction. This kind of media is widely being used in this 21st century. There are a several springs (revolution) taking place in many countries with the help of this media. It gets to interact globally with any person be it living in a corner of the next side of the globe. It makes the communication all the more easy, and could be very effective if used in the right way. It is widely available. Most of the companies in this modern era prefer using social media as a means of effective communication with their publics so that an action could be taken immediately over the public’s responses. (Social Media, n.d.; Al-Jenaibi, 2014)

Social media takes up different forms, for example: weblogs, internet forum, posting any form of photographs or videos, it also includes social blogs and ratings. Common instances are the very popular networking websites, which are highly used by the people around the world like, twitter, Facebook, Netlog etc.. It also includes the well-known sites like, YouTube, Flickr etc. sites such as Digg and Wikipedia, also fall under the cadre of social networking sites. Those sites like Wikipedia and Digg are examples of news aggregation and online reference sources (Al-Jenaibi, 2011). There are different types of social media. Many different types of technologies used fall under social media communications, for example: instant messaging, emailing, wall postings, blogs and so on (Social Media, n.d.).

Social media could be a cheaper resource for a company to convey its message than using the traditional media, i.e. television, print media etc.. Social media is also easily accessible by the public as compared to the other media. Nowadays, people are so busy with their super-fast lives, that they barely get to sit back, relax and check out for the latest updates (Al-Jenaibi, 2011). In such situations, one of the most effective ways a company could communicate to their customers is by using the social media as it is a better way than the traditional way of communication (Social Media, n.d.).

5. SOME FACTS

- MySpace is owned by News Corporation (NWS), it is the most viewed website all over the world. A photo sharing website named Photo bucket was purchased by it.

- Yahoo has 360 social networking sites and has Flickr photo sharing website, which are an example that it trying its best to enter the social media sector.
- A top online video sharing website was purchased by Google.
- AOL on march 2008 purchased Bebo, which was the third largest networking website ranked after MySpace and Facebook when it came to the number of page views and exceptional monthly visitors (Social Media, n.d.).



Figure 1
 Social Media Tools



Figure 2
 Social Media Landscape

6. CHALLENGES FACED BY SOCIAL MEDIA

It's a fact that most of us are aware of, that the social media has been around now for several years. But until now the social media is in its evolving stage. Day by day it is heading towards being a more developed form of media. However, adopting social media by organizations is no piece of cake. They have to have a keen look on how they could capitalize over the opportunities and deal with the challenges (Idugboe, 2011; Al-Jenaibi, 2014).

There are a couple of most probable challenges listed below, which could be faced by individuals or companies:

- PRIVACY
- TRANSPARANCY
- SOCIAL CONVERGANCE
- MOBILE
- DIVERSITY
- RELATIONSHIP
- SOCIAL ANALYTICS (Idugboe, 2011)
- The diagram below puts forward some more examples on the challenges faced by the social media:

7. DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN UAE

According to a survey revealed by YouGovSiraj poll, in the year 2010, approximately 80% of consumers in UAE use social media in order to make their purchase decisions. This is a large majority of consumers that are actively participating in getting purchase information through the platform provided by social media (United Arab Emirates, 2010).

Many companies are actively using social media to get the audience responses, but there are still some companies that haven't used social media to it best. Most of the government based companies also are managing their presence on websites (United Arab Emirates, 2010).

According to a study help by Dubai school of Government (DSG), UAE ranks among the top ten countries when it comes to the use of Facebook, and with 45% of the population having accounts on the some of the popular social websites. In such a social networking based society, the companies don't seem to overlook social media. Hence, the growth of social media is becoming vital and is no less than a sky rocket in UAE (United Arab Emirates, 2010).

Consumers of UAE embrace social networking and the blogs, with a strong support for the sites that are focused on the local community. Many companies of UAE are

actively using the social media for promotional activities, but most of the companies haven't yet started using social media to its possible (Social media in UAE, n.d.).

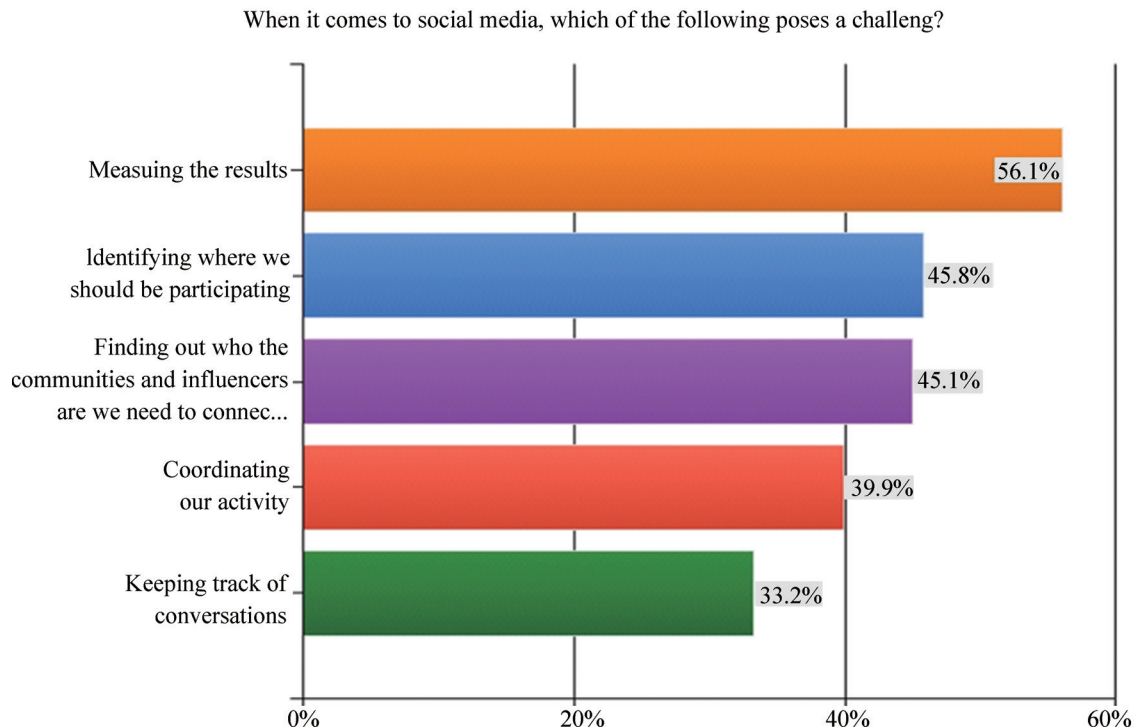


Figure 3
Challenges Faced Social Media

In the middle east organizations are increasingly choosing to be a part of the online communication with the customer (Faraidooni, 2011).

8. WHY USE SOCIAL MEDIA?

There are many reasons to use social media in our life. It helps us to find whomever you want to do business with somewhere online, and knowledge you need about any market or any person online. Through Social Media we can reach the market by simply engaging in the right conversations with the right people. This is more effective than advertising. Social media is the new communications system widespread in the entire world. And Social media saves time and money if you use it right for the right things (Roeder, n.d.).

9. SOME OF THE USES OF SOCIAL MEDIA

- Helps access old departed friends.
- Passing information about your group and yourself rapidly.
- A way through which people can express their emotions, ideas and viewpoints.
- A place to meet and make new friends.

- A communication tool that helps connects with family, relative abroad.
- Update close ones with photo gallery.
- An entertainment package.
- Most importantly, a way through which a major role in revolutions could be played.
- A place to have leisure time, just sit back and relax (Colling, n.d.).

10. INDEPTH FACTS ABOUT THE METHOD USED

10.1 Questionnaire & Interview: Qualitative Method of Research

A qualitative research method focuses on investigating issues, understanding criteria, and giving answers to the questions asked. This kind of method is used almost everywhere, nearly in every company and institutions, almost every day. It's a qualitative research when you are engaged in analyzing documents, pictures or surveys. Going through the interview process is an essential part of investigation (Key, 1997).

10.2 Characteristics of the Qualitative Method

- Its main purpose is to recognize people's interpretation.

- What people perceive is the viewpoint of the method.
- Because values have an impact, it is taken into consideration when such a research is reported.
- The focus is to give a complete picture or information that is required.
- Theory is discovered from the collected data.
- The data collected is one sided as it is based on the people's perception.
- The instrument used it the human beings.
- The study is carried out under normal conditions. Very much natural.
- The results of the study are real and deep in data (Key, 1997).

10.3 Advantages

- It gives deep, broad and detailed information.
- The context is described based on the subjective information, observing the variables.
- Enables aspects of people's experience to be studied.
- Individual's experiences are studied in depth.
- The participants are given the freedom to give the information in their own words (Key, 1997).

11. COMPARISON BETWEEN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHOD & QUANTITATIVE METHOD

11.1 Quantitative Method

- This method aims at giving out a detailed description from the data collected.
- This kind of research is preferred when performed in the beginning of the research project.
- The design appears once the study starts unfolding itself.
- In this research method the information is in the form of words, or objects etc..
- This method includes: Questionnaires, interviews are held etc. (Neil, 2007).

11.2 Qualitative Method

- This method aims at organizing, counting and finally make statistics out of the data in order to give the explanation of the observation.
- This research is advised to be carried out in the latter stage of the research project.
- In this case, before the data is collected all the aspects are designed.
- The data collected in quantitative research method is numerical.
- This method includes: surveys, questionnaires etc. (Neil, 2007).

12. LITERATURE REVIEW

12.1 Uses & Gratification Theory

The uses and gratification theory were developed in the year 1974 by the theorists Blumler J. G. and Katz, E. (Uses & Gratification theory, n.d.).

This theory focuses on understanding the mass media. It discusses how the receivers are responsible for selecting the media that helps improve knowledge, social communications and meet their needs at the same time. It believes that the audience actively incorporates media into their lives. The theory states how the receivers use the media in order to satisfy their specific gratification. Uses and gratification theory have limited effects (the second standard set among the three standards in the media effects) (Uses & Gratification theory, n.d.).

12.2 Basic Concept of the Theory

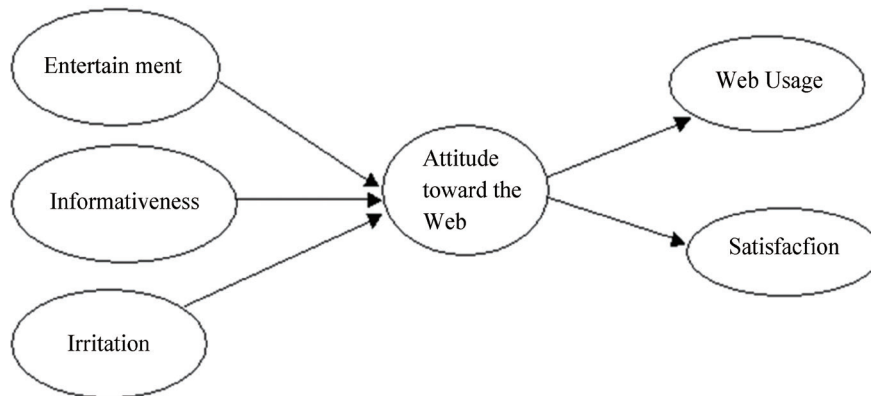
The uses and gratification theory revolves around the audience, which means that it carries out an audience-centered approach. When an audience looks for a media they are looking for a specific need which is to be satisfied, be it entertainment, business or any new information. A good example is the high use of twitter, Facebook or many other social networking sites. People chat, update statuses, tweet, re-tweet, and much more. There is just a lot happening on these sites (AlJenaibi, 2015). There is an expectation attached to the people while they are using these sites. The gratification is not met if these various expectations of the people are not met. Many people in the whole world use the social media that they trust and are familiar with in order to get inputs that satisfy them. If by any chance it does not satisfy them, then it gratification is not obtained (Hypodermic Needle Theory, n.d.).

The need for media is motivated by social circumstances and psychological reasons. This then leads to motivation of certain expectation from that media. The individuals then search for media that satisfies or fulfills their expectations. For instance, for people new in a region would want to go out for a good dinner, or visit a good and famous place. To get information on these, they would look out for social media or other sources in order to get the best information on their queries. Uses and gratification theory transfer the focus of the research from the purpose of the communicator to the needs of the audience (Hypodermic Needle Theory, n.d.).

The main idea or the theme of the theory is very much agreeable. From a personal experience of the researchers, it many a times happens that we tend to choose a channel or medium that fits our need best. Selecting a medium that satisfies the multi requirements are usually much preferred. The researchers usually browse on the internet to get the desired details. Ones if this aim or desire of ours is not fulfilled, the result is a feeling dissatisfaction. So basically as receivers the power lies in our hand.

The interview questionnaire that was handed out to the Public Relation Officers contained of 13 questions. They were distributed to different organizations namely: Al Ain Municipality, Emirates Identity Authority, Abu Dhabi Food Control Authority, Police headquarters, Alain Hospital, Daman insurance and Abu Dhabi municipality. The main attempt of the research was to get a general idea on the kinds of social sites preferred by the PR practitioners, the reasons behind using the same and also what basically are their goals aimed at when using the social media. They were also inquired about the various difficulties they came across while using the different social networking sites and were asked to provide solutions in order to overcome the difficulties or

challenges. Since one of the main themes of the research is to understand how the public in UAE reacts to the social media, we placed a query that would let us know how the interactions are carried out by the public of UAE through these sites. The questionnaire also included some queries which helped provide an accurate picture on how is the social media being utilized in these companies and under what situations. We also succeeded in gathering some essential information through the questionnaire, on their plans concerning the development of the social media, their strategies on tracking the customer feedback and much more. The research questionnaire on the whole established an elaborate understanding regarding the aspects of the social media.



Diagrammatic explanation

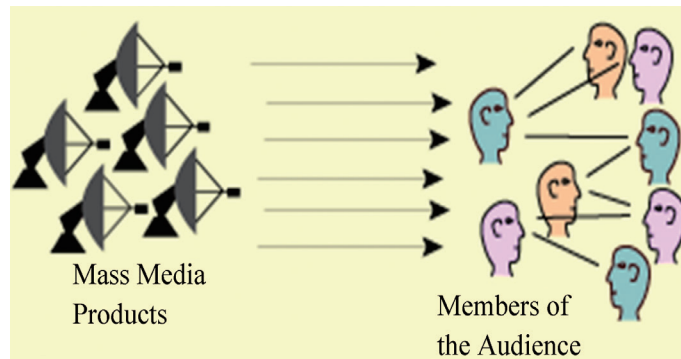


Figure 4
Social Media Interaction

SUMMARY

The researchers, after analyzing the various responses of the interviewees have come to a conclusion that Social Media is widely being utilized by many companies and it is actively considered as the most important tool. The companies who yet did not actively commence the use of social media should look forward to gearing up. It’s a kind of media that has to be taken advantage of.

Based on the interviewees’ responses, it is observed that they believe customers are one of the most important means or put it is as “ladder” that can lead the companies towards success.

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