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Revisiting Some Special Topics in Public Relations: A Narrative Review

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Abstract

This paper explicates some special topics in public relations such as public relations manager, in-house public relations, and public relation agencies. A narrative literature review was adopted as the design. Data sources included Google Scholar, Google, and the Web of science. The narrative review was conducted from August to December 2017. The study demonstrates that public relation is the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the public on whom its success or failure depends. The paper also revealed that in-house public relations are the full-time employee of an organization that uses their expertise to promote and maintain an organizational image while PR agencies are an independent, functioning unit designed to serve multiple businesses by helping them to bridge the gap between the business and the public. Disadvantages and advantages, duties and roles of PR manager, in-house public relation and agencies were also reiterated.

Keywords: Public relations, public relations manager, in-house public relations, public relations agency.

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Introduction and background

Public relation is “the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the public on whom its success or failure depends” (Cutlip et al., 1994). This definition clearly underlines the fact that public relation is a two-way process between an organization and its identified publics that is meant to benefit both parties. The term relationship in public relations scholarship is defined as “the state which exists between an organization and its key publics in which the actions of either entity impact the economic, social, political and/or cultural well-being of the other entity” (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998: 62).

Although the current trend studies of public relations have addressed various research areas such as online public relations (Ye & Ki, 2012), OPR (Ki & Shin, 2006), and crisis communication (An & Cheng, 2007), researchers have paid little attention to the explication of who a public relations manager is, what constitutes an in-house public relation as well as what public relation agencies are meant for. Therefore, addressing this aspect will add to the existing body of public relations knowledge. Additionally, this study’s adoption of literature analysis is innovative because most previous public relations investigation have predominantly utilized the quantitative methods such as content analysis (Saxton & Waters, 2014; Wang & Zhou, 2015; Khang, Ki, & Ye, 2012; Lovejoy et al., 2012), case study (Himmelboim, Golan, Moon, & Suto, 2014), survey (Diga & Kelleher, 2009), experiment (Schultz et. al., 2011), and interview (Briones et al., 2011) with an exemption of (Bor, 2014) who adopted a literature analysis approach. Wang (2015) reported that there is the dominance of quantitative method in public relations investigations. Therefore, this paper will take a different dimension by extending public relations scholarship through a narrative review.

Article aim and structure

This paper aims at revisiting some special topics in public relations such as public relations manager, in-house public relations, and public relations agencies. It stimulates literature that explicates the strengths and weaknesses of the public relations manager, the essence of in-house public relations and the benefits and disadvantages of contacting public relations agencies. As set out in (Fig. 1), this paper is divided into four main sections describing the introduction and background, methodology, discussion, and conclusion.

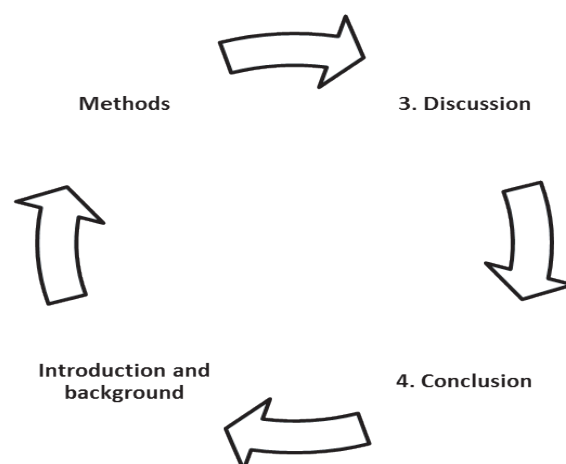


Figure 1: Study structure and themes that form the literature

Methods

Design, search strategy, and keywords

This study adopts a literature analysis method. A review of the literature was conducted from August to December 2017. A systematically searched format was used to access literature from the following database sources: Web of Science, Google, and Google Scholar. Search words and phrases included public relations, public relations manager, advantages of public relations manager, disadvantages of public relations manager, in-house public relations, advantages and disadvantages of in-house public relations, public relations agency, advantages and disadvantages of public relations agencies.

Paper selection procedure

Priority was given to online peer-reviewed journals; however, relying solely on simple electronic searches of databases was not that easy, thus, the reference lists of relevant sources such as books/book chapters, and print journals were also consulted. There was no restriction on article publication dates. Additionally, earlier studies were included in this review to help establish certain definitions. The “snowball” method was equally utilized which involves scanning the references of retrieved articles for additional relevant material and earlier studies. The selection was based on careful consideration of the title and the abstract that are related to the subject matter. All the articles that were not related to the subject matter were excluded. Therefore, at the initial search, results yielded about 230 references, which is related to the work on a closer look, but 27 was found more related and used for this narrative review. The main reason for using the included references was because they covered the exact subject matter. The study made use of thematic analysis which entails grouping the literature found usable into themes concerning public relations manager, advantages of public relations manager, disadvantages of public relations manager, in-house public relations, advantages and disadvantages of in-house public relations, public relations agency, advantages and disadvantages of public relations agencies.

Discussion

Public Relations Manager

The Public relations (PR) manager is the overall boss in the public relations department of an organization. He is in charge of all other personnel under the PR department (See Figure 2). Basically, the PR manager is responsible for coordinating different personnel in the public relations department, as well as other departments that form the organization (Rubel, 2007). For example, He manages the spread of information between an individual or an organization such as a business, government agency, or a non-profit organization) and the public. That is the information from every section of the organization, such as the marketing and advertising section.

The PR manager through the various personnel under him informs the public, prospective customers, investors, partners, employees, and other stakeholders and ultimately persuades them to maintain a positive or favourable view about the organization, its leadership, products, or political decisions (Shoemaker, 1989). Accordingly, Breakenridge (2008) remarked that the PR manager has a deep understanding of the interests and concerns of each of the company's many stakeholders. He knows how to effectively address those concerns using the most powerful tool of the public relations trade, which is publicity.

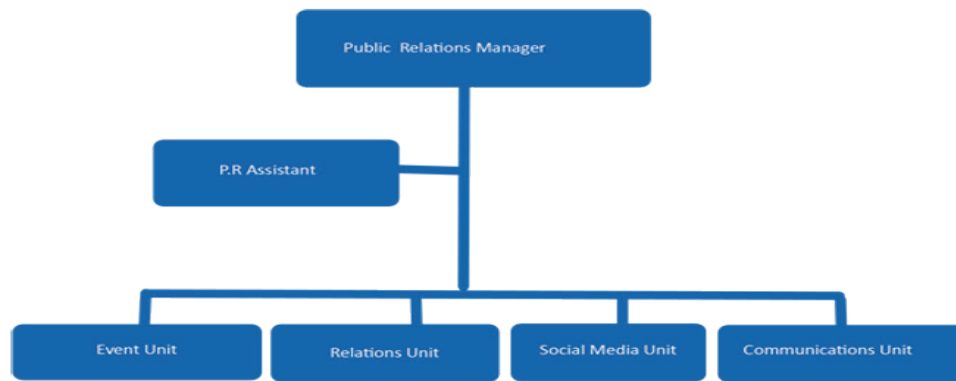


Figure 2: Public Relations Unit: Source: Southern African development community As documented in (Baine & Jefkins, 2007; Jefkins, 1983) public relations manager advantages and disadvantages are as follows:

Advantages of public relations manager

Improved Public Relations: One of the key advantages of a public relations manager is the ability to improve a business's public profile.

Hiring a full-time PR manager allows a business to act quickly when controversies occur and respond to incidents that may harm the business's reputation.

Source of Information: Public relations managers also act as sources of information for the public, directing them toward alternative viewpoints and resources, albeit with the goal of improving an employer's image.

Disadvantages of Public relations manager

The PR manager can be so close to the organization that he/she can be biased, which sometimes reflected in his or her writings to the media.

He/she is not properly trained or qualified.

The PR manager may lack sufficient executive status to enjoy the respect of the management and the media.

The PR manager may simply be given the title by the management as a good way to promote a senior person, and so thus he/she neither having experiences or liability will have to dabble in this profession.

The management may not agree on the job specification which enables the PR manager to take responsibilities.

Roles and qualities of a PR manager

Advocate

The public relations manager is the chief advocate for the company. He must focus all energy on building an organization that will be deemed a good corporate citizen. He is the mouthpiece for management and in political circles known as the press secretary (Elliott, 2012).

Communicator

The public relations manager crafts communications policies and oversees the development of all statements and news releases for the company. Sociology, psychology

and good journalism are requisite talents for the manager and staff. Communications must be clear, concise and relevant to the audience (Franklin et al., 2009).

Problem Solver

The public relations manager is the ultimate spin doctor. It is his job to put the best face on news and information that could embarrass or malign the company's reputation. Often, she will be called upon to polish mundane information into platinum data that gives the company more credit than would ordinarily be due for routine accomplishments (Franklin et al., 2009).

Opinion Maestro

The public relations manager directs all outreach efforts. He is responsible for media placements and coordinating organizational functions and the efforts of executives. It is his responsibility to determine the executive appropriate for each situation and ensure that person has approved information and statements in hand (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003).

Qualities of a P.R Manager

As documented in (Franklin et al., 2009), Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003) and (Elliott, 2012) the qualities of public relations manager are:

Leadership

Good managers should be able to lead the employees they manage. Leadership traits include emotional stability, enthusiasm, and self-assurance. Managers display emotional stability by not letting frustration and stress become overwhelming. Enthusiasm means the manager is energetic and engaged. Managers display self-assurance by not being overly affected.

Accountability

Accountability is critical and matters more than simply getting the job done. A PR manager with strong accountability qualities will take action and responsibility for their goals and objectives. They report why something didn't go according to plan and work toward solutions. Most of all, this quality will rub off on the rest of the team and they too will be accountable for their role and results.

Clarity

A good PR manager is an excellent writer and speaker who know how to get ideas across in a variety of media. Clear writing is clear thinking. A great public relations representative also keeps these clearly voiced ideas in mind when interviewed. The ability to reframe an answer with the key message in mind is prized by politicians. It also serves PR clients well.

Honesty

PR, frequently misrepresented as "spin," is about putting the best light on a situation and portraying issues, companies, and organizations, in a positive way. That doesn't mean lying. A good PR person never lies, and in fact, helps a client tell the truth even when it's not so pleasant.

Thoroughness

A good PR manager does his homework and has a healthy scepticism. They check and double-check the facts and veracity of any statement and makes sure it can be properly sourced—even when the fact is provided by the client.

Creativity

A good PR manager creatively connects the company's product, idea, cause, and key message to the audiences they seek to reach.

Awareness

A good PR manager is engaged in the world and keeps up with the news about a company, as well as current events and trends and developments within the company. That means understanding social media and its implications. PR's job is to bring the outside in as well as the inside out. The PR manager and his workers help a company understand how their work fits into a larger context so that they can participate effectively in the bigger conversations that are taking place about their issues, causes or products.

In-House Public Relations Department

When a company says they handle their public relations “in-house,” it means that they have at least one public relations practitioner on staff, or a department consisting of public relations practitioners headed by a Manager/CEO. The in-house public relations are the full-time employee of an organization that uses their expertise to promote and maintains an organizational image (Van Ruler & Vercic, 2004). This department is made up of savvy individuals who are experienced in dealing with top management, media, the public, consumers, and other stakeholders to ensure continuing communications (Bredenkamp, 2000). In other words, it is a unit that functions as a part of an organization and is not independent. Simply stated, this means that the PR department is housed right there in the business facility and is only in place to assist that particular organization's PR needs. Let's look at some of the advantages and disadvantages of in-house PR departments (See Figure 3).

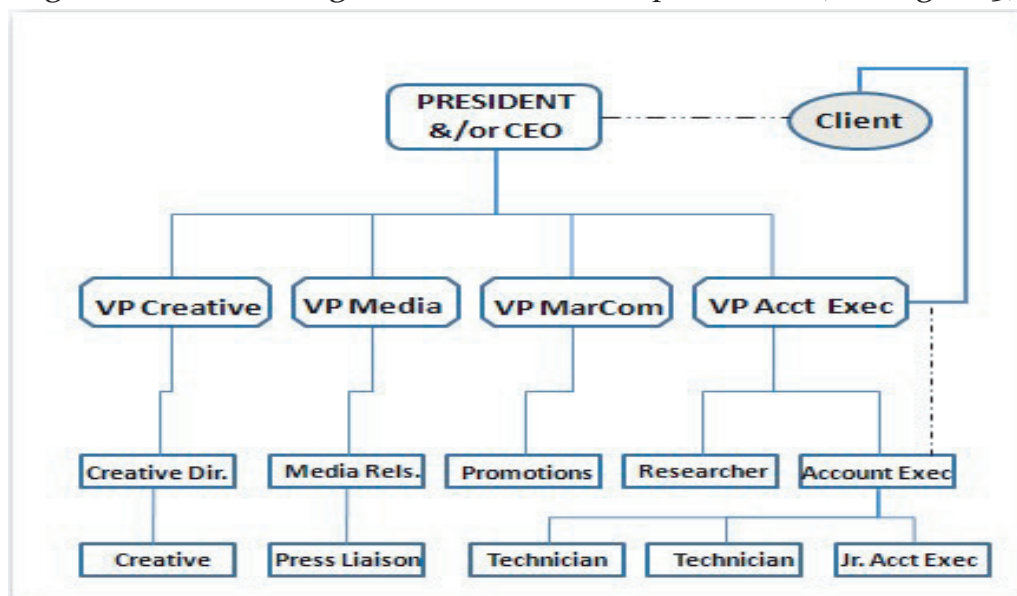


Figure 3: In-House Public Relations Organizational Chart (https://saylordotorg.github.io/text_mastering-public-relations/so6-03-organizational-structure.html)

Members of the in-house PR

The member of the PR department varies from organization to organization. Small organizations have smaller staff strength while larger organizations have more staff that controls their operations.

This paper will discuss the members based on Figure 2 which is as follows:

President/CEO

This is the overall boss in the public relations department. He presides and oversees all other members that form the public relations department unit. Basically, the president is responsible for coordinating different personnel in the public relations department, as well as other departments that form the organization (Rubel, 2007).

Vice president creative: He is the overall boss of the creative unit in an organization's public relations department. He coordinates the creative team headed by the creative director. The Vice president creative works along with the creative director to achieve good reputation and integrity for the organization.

Creative director: The creative director develops organizations creative ideas. He oversees a creative team, which includes art directors, copywriters, and designers, to ensure the success of an innovative product. Creative directors are known for running public relations campaigns and are responsible for conceptualizing and executing a unique campaign. Directing organizational creative ideas is vital to a product's success because creativity acts as a means for a company to connect with its consumers, convey a company's professional ethos, and communicate an aesthetically pleasing message to the public. Most importantly, the success of public relations campaign always correlates with the image making of an organization and its product making the creative directors vital to the industry.

Creative personnel/team: These are the art directors, copywriters, and designers saddle with the responsibilities of creating communication design, interactive design, and concept forward in any organization. They work with the creative director to achieve this. The creative team are skilful and experience graphic designers, fine arts, motion graphics, and other creative industry fields.

Vice president Media: He is the mediator between a company and the media. He works with the media for the purpose of informing the public of an organization's mission, policies, and practices in a positive, consistent and credible manner. Typically, this means coordinating directly with the people responsible for producing the news and features in the mass media.' The goal of the vice president media is to maximize positive coverage in the mass media without paying for it directly through advertising. As noted in (Johnston, 2008) the Vice-president extends the relationship beyond the media to the general public.

Media relation team: These are the personnel that works directly with the vice president media. They work with the Vice-president media in order to inform the public of an organization's mission, policies, and practices in a positive, consistent and credible manner.

Press liaison officer: This personnel who are also under the vice president media liaise with the media outlets on behalf of an organization in order to create awareness of a product or company. By so doing, the creation of impact with a chosen audience through press releases is attained.

Vice president marketing communicating: He is the overall boss in charge of the marketing communication in a public relations department of an organization. The Marketing [communication channels](#) focus on anyway a business communi-

cates a message to its desired market, or the market in general (Tomše & Snoj, 2014).

The promotions personnel: They work directly under the vice president marketing communication. They are in charge of describing all the messages and media deploy to communicate with the market. They are responsible for sales presentations, sponsorships, trade show appearances, and other public relations strategies.

The technicians: A public relations technician is someone that should be responsible for anything that has a more technical side. For example, organizing and managing internal and external communications for the company district or specific site, including designing and managing production of publications, advertising and promotion plans; overseeing functions of the public relations team; planning special functions and activities; maintaining the content of the appropriate website(s) by working with the site or district webmaster; preparing and coordinating media releases; assisting with facilitating communication advisory committee meetings; and maintaining the Public Relations team budget throughout fiscal year.

Vice president account executive: He is the overall boss of the public relations account executive unit which is charged with the responsibility of managing the information between organizations (business-to-business), or individuals and the general public. He does this by promoting clients to their intended audiences through news items, press releases and product placements. Some of the basic responsibilities of a public relations account executive are: liaise on a daily basis with clients and the media, often via telephone; email build strong relationships and networks with colleagues, clients, and the media; monitor the media, including newspapers, magazines, journals, broadcasts, newswires, social media sites and blogs, for opportunities for clients; work as part of an account team to develop client proposals and implement the PR activity; prepare regular client reports and attend client meetings; research, write and distribute press releases to targeted media; promote news stories and features to the media, known as 'selling in' collate, analyse and evaluate media coverage.

Account executive: He works with the vice president account executive to manage the information between organizations (business-to-business), or individuals and the general public.

Junior account executive: He assists the account executive by generating positive news coverage, achieving product placement without payment in broadcast, print, and new media. He also assists with the production of company's publications, such as in-house magazines commission market research, coordinate studio or location photography, undertakes research for new business proposals and presents them to potential new clients, manage the PR aspect of a possible crisis situation.

In-House PR advantages

The main advantage of setting up an internal PR department is that the team will focus only on the company products and its markets. They will act as effective spokespersons for building the reputation of the company. In other words, they have a company-centric focus. Since the in-house PR department only works for a specific organization or one client, they are able to give their full, undivided attention to PR matters and create unique solutions. In-house PR departments also provide a stable

environment (Baines, Egan, & Jefkins, 2007).

With serving only one client, in-house PR departments are faced with much more job stability in comparison to their PR agency cousins. Other advantages of the in-house public relations as outlined by Botan and Hazleton (2010) are:

An in-house PR team has access to historical and confidential information about a company, making it easier for them to develop appropriate communication strategies.

Another advantage is that in-house PR departments are cost-efficient. Again, having only one client typically eliminates many of the elevated costs found with PR agencies.

An additional benefit is a time. In-house PR departments enjoy the luxury of having all the time needed to fix the problem of PR.

In-House PR disadvantages

First, they tend to have fewer contacts. Unlike independent PR agencies, there will not be as many media contacts, which could ultimately hurt in-house PR departments trying to build relationships with the public.

In-house PR departments may also spur less creativity. This rule is rather simple: the fewer people there are, the lesser the chance for new and innovative ideas.

In some cases, most especially smaller organization, the main disadvantage is that one person should do all the work due to non-availability of additional manpower that involves the cost factor to it. Therefore, the lack of resources limits the visibility of the company and product awareness in the marketplace.

There is lack of impartiality which partly arises due to their loyalty to the company. They usually give a blind eye and a deaf ear to the outsiders in favor of insiders, which is unethical and unfair.

Duties of In-house PR

Some key PR tasks for in-house teams include writing, media relations, event planning, researching public attitudes, and crisis communications. In-house teams will often work with a PR agency for major projects such as a new product release, product recalls, or special events (Rubel, 2007).

Public Relations Consultants/Agencies

The way that people perceive businesses and organizations affect their decisions when choosing to frequent a business or use its services. Because an organization's image can affect its bottom line, many employ or hire out public relations consultants to improve public perception of the company during bad times.

A PR agency is an independent, functioning unit designed to serve multiple businesses by helping them to bridge the gap between the business and the public (See Figure 5). PR agencies are in place to not only promote their clients but to help the public gain a positive perception of the organization. Since these agencies are independent, they must typically have several employees that are able to spearhead PR initiatives for different organizations at the same time (Elliott, 2012). Example of PR agencies is depicted in Figure 4.



Figure 4: PR agencies (Wikipedia, 2017)

As such, PR consultant is special external public relations organizations hired by a company to assist the company to establish and maintain its relationships with the target [audience](#), the [media](#), relevant trade media, and other [opinion leaders](#) (Guth & Marsh, 2016). Basically, the consultants are hired by contract to work for a company for a predetermined period of time. They are typically responsible for creating broad communications plans, for raising awareness associated with a new product or service that an organization wants to promote on a large scale (Black, 2013).

PR Departments & Agencies

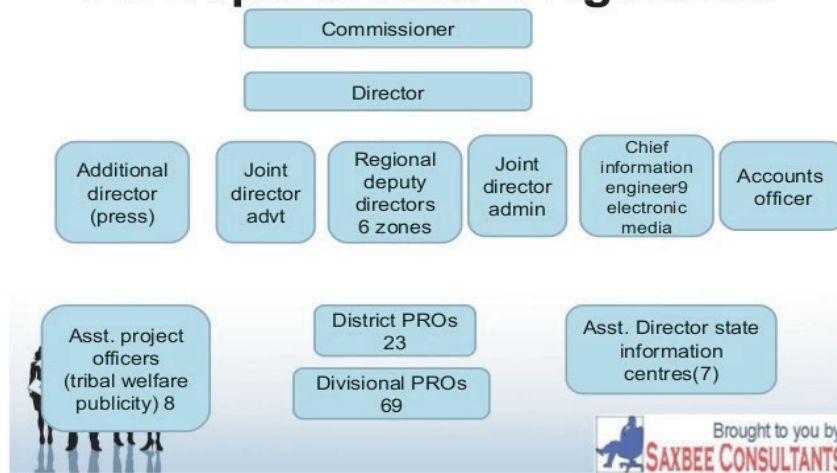


Figure 5: Public relations agency (Wikipedia, 2017)

PR Agency advantages

One advantage to a PR agency is that they have more people. Since PR agencies have an expansive number of employees, it allows them to have multiple perspectives on how to improve their clients' relationship with the public.

PR agencies also have a strong list of contacts. A successful PR agency has the power to contact many influential members of the media, which can only be beneficial for organizations seeking to improve relations with the public.

Another advantage is knowledge of the industry. A reputable PR agency will have extensive knowledge and expertise in knowing how to get the job done for their cli-

ents. Put simply, the benefits of PR is summarised in Figure 6.

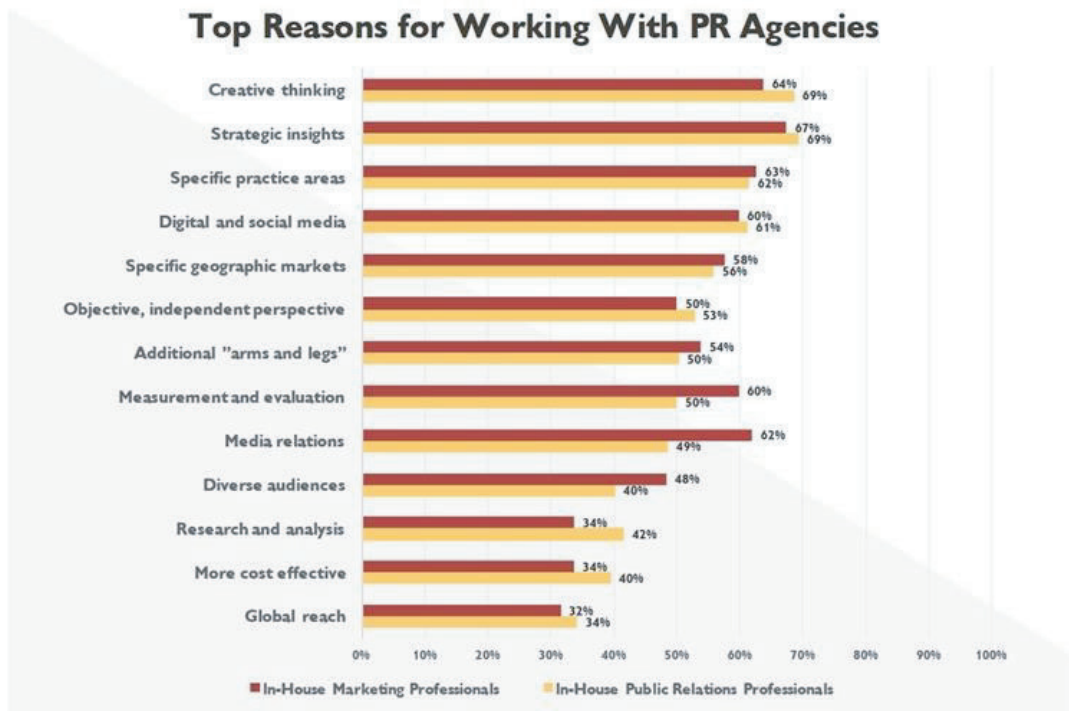


Figure 6: Benefits of public relations source (Holmes, 2017)

PR agency disadvantages

First is the price. Since PR agencies are independent of multiple employees, it can be costly to obtain their services.

They also tend to provide only a generalized, or non-specific, understanding of the problem because they deal with many clients at once, PR agencies may only understand the general problem that their individual clients are facing without knowing the entire scope of the problem, which could lead to unsatisfied consumers and the public.

Another disadvantage is a PR agency's investment of time. PR agencies often charge clients according to their time worked. If PR agencies are unable to fix the problem quickly, then there is the possibility that more time is needed, which equals more money paid.

Duties of PR agencies

As outlined in (Shoemaker, 1989; Rubel, 2007; Botan & Hazleton, 2010; Baines et al., 2007; Black, 2013) the duties of PR agencies are the following:

Plan Events

PR consultants are responsible for planning events that will promote an organization or a product. In some instances, this means the consultant plans an event sponsored by the organization. However, a consultant also might work with an already established event to raise awareness for her company. For example, if a trade show is already organized, a consultant might work with its planners to find ways to promote her organization's products or services at the show.

Work with Media

Many PR consultants begin as journalists or in other mass media-associated careers. Consultants must understand what kinds of information members of the media want. They must work on the media members' deadlines to see that the message is effectively delivered. A consultant might write press releases and de-

velop video press clips, or he may simply oversee the work being done by writers and videographers. Consultants must make themselves available to speak to media members in person, through email or over the phone.

Coach Speakers

In some instances, consultants better serve the organization for which they work by preparing company's presidents, city council members, board members or other high-profile leaders in the organization to speak to the media. The consultant might provide a leader in the company with a list of talking points before an interview or a statement. They also may write speeches and prepare the leaders for the types of questions that might come their way in an interview.

Other common responsibilities of a PR consultant are:

- Designing communications campaigns
- Writing news releases and other content for news
- Working with the press
- Arranging interviews for company spokespeople
- Writing speeches for company leaders
- Acting as an organization's spokesperson
- Preparing clients for press conferences
- Media interviews and speeches
- Writing website and social media content
- Managing company reputation (crisis management).

Conclusion

Public relations are the art and social science that link inside and outside the organization together. Public relations assist the organization management in achieving organizational goals. They are a trusted advisor to the general manager and all personnel in the organization. This paper established that the public relations (PR) manager is the overall boss in the public relations department of an organization. He is in charge of all other personnel under the PR department. He manages the spread of information between an individual or an organization (such as a business, government agency, or a non-profit organization) and the public. That is the information from every section of the organization, such as the marketing and advertising section.

This paper also revealed that the in-house public relations are the full-time employee of an organization that uses their expertise to promote and maintain an organizational image. This department is made up of savvy individuals who are experienced at dealing with top management, media, the public, consumers, and other stakeholders to ensure continuous communications. On the other hand, PR agencies are an independent, functioning unit designed to serve multiple businesses by helping them to bridge the gap between the business and the public. They have several employees that are able to spearhead PR initiatives for different organizations at the same time.

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