

*The Strategic Positioning of Digital Public Relations Management in Modern Organizations
A Study on the New Challenges of Digital Public Relations Management*

التموقع الإستراتيجي لإدارة العلاقات العامة الرقمية في المنظمات المعاصرة

بحث في تحديات إدارة العلاقات العامة الرقمية

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Article abstract:

This study falls within the realm of theoretical research, aiming primarily to highlight the strategic rôle and position of digital public relations management in modern organizations. This focus comes particularly as these organizations increasingly digitize their practices and communication relations to expand their visibility, attract the attention of their audiences, and gain a deeper understanding of their needs and concerns. This shift aligns with the influx of new media technologies, which have transformed media and communication concepts. These technologies, with their appeal and potential, enhance the value and interactivity of organizations in a more structured manner based on well-planned strategies.

Keys words:Public Relations, Digital Public Relations, Digital Public Relations Management, Modern Organizations.

ملخص المقال:

تندرج هذه الدراسة ضمن الدراسات النظرية، التي تهدف أساسا إلى إبراز المكانة والدور الاستراتيجيين لإدارة العلاقات العامة الرقمية في التنظيمات الحديثة، خاصة مع تزايد إقبال هذه الأخيرة على رقمته ممارساتها وعلاقاتها الاتصالية، بهدف توسيع مرئيتها واستقطاب اهتمام جماهيرها، وبهدف فهم أكثر لحاجاتها وانشغالها، ويأتي هذا تزامنا مع تدفق التقنيات الإعلامية الجديدة التي غيرت من المفاهيم الإعلامية والاتصالية، بالإضافة إلى قدرتها الجاذبية، التي تعزز من قيمة المؤسسات وتفاعليتها بصورة أكثر تنظيما وفق استراتيجيات مدروسة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: العلاقات العامة، العلاقات العامة الرقمية، إدارة العلاقات العامة الرقمية، المنظمات الحديثة.

Introduction

The scientific and technological advancements in communication tools, along with the widespread use of modern technologies and innovations across various segments of society, have forced organizations and institutions, regardless of their size and activity level, to take advantage of these modern technologies to develop their work and communicate with their diverse audiences. These organizations must also train their staff in different departments on how to use these tools in a way that meets the needs and requirements of each department and achieves its objectives (Haider, 2001, p. 52).

Additionally, institutions today are looking for ways and methods that enhance their presence, expand their visibility, and improve their image among their audiences. This focus is particularly associated with the digital transformation and the significant growth of information and communication technologies in societies in general, and among institutions specifically. The trend of most institutions and organizations moving towards digitalizing their activities, particularly their communication practices and relationships with their audiences, is a strong and decisive indicator of the strategic rôle of public relations in the new digital environment.

After analyzing the main references and literature discussing the topic of digital public relations, it is clear that the goal of digital public relations is to improve the organizational image. This topic has been continuously discussed for about four to five years, focusing on defining the concept of digital public relations, its rôles and tasks, and the current state of digital public relations. This study primarily aims to answer the central question: **What strategic rôle can digital public relations management play in contemporary organizations? And what challenges does it face?**

2. Study Objectives:

- _ Define the concept of digital and interactive public relations and public relations management.
- _ Reveal the historical context of the evolution of the digital public relations concept.
- _ Explore the context of strategic digital transformation in public relations departments and units in various organizations.
- _ Highlight the most important tools and techniques used by digital public relations management.
- _ Identify the main challenges faced by digital public relations management in light of artificial intelligence applications, media convergence, and creative media.

3. Importance of the Study:

This theoretical study is of great significance, especially with the growing interest in the activities of digital public relations in modern organizations. This has been accompanied by the rapid development of new technologies that have brought about transformations in the roles of media, communication, and public relations in contemporary institutions and organizations. These changes focus on reshaping the organizations' image and reengineering their various communication relationships based on new standards and values, primarily open communication, positive dialogue, participation, and effective interaction with different audiences across various communication and media channels.

4.Digital Public Relations... A Conceptual Theoretical Vision:

Digital public relations is considered one of the most important aspects of scientific progress in the field of communication, which has contributed to diversifying the working methods of public relations management. In addition to its direct engagement with the surrounding environment of the institution, it also involves interacting with the new and evolving communication environment via the internet.(Bafazidan, 2003, p. 473).

The increasing use of the term "digital public relations" in recent years reflects the development of digital communication practices that connect public relations practitioners in organizations with their audiences, within the framework of a communication strategy built by the organization. This involves selecting persuasive promotional methods, identifying suitable electronic communication tools, adopting electronic dialogue models, and mastering listening skills in communication with the target audience. Advanced technological developments in the field of communication have also had a significant impact on the public relations sector, influencing it substantially. It has become one of the most important factors driving the restructuring of communication in this vital sector.

Various definitions of digital public relations have emerged, reflecting the differing views and approaches of researchers, scholars, and public relations practitioners. This divergence is particularly noticeable with the advancements in new communication and media technologies, as well as the increasing use and expansion of these technologies, and the fierce competition among organizations and institutions to enter the digital space. The goal is to strengthen their presence, visibility, and improve their image with different audiences. Public relations is a strategic communication tool used by various organizations to establish strong, close relationships with their audiences, as described by Krishna Murthy Sreeramish.(Bouza, 2021, p. 79).

Digital public relations is known in English as "**Digital ONLINE**" or "**Public Relations 2.0**" in reference to **Web 2.0**.(4) It is the mechanism through which different media available on the internet are used to create and share content about an organization or person, as well as to reach and engage with the target audience through electronic media. In other words, it is the building and managing of the organization's reputation electronically. The process of forming the correct image of the organization in the minds of customers requires delivering a unique identity or leading brand to the organization, especially in light of the abundance of information and the challenges it imposes. This drives brands to increase their presence in the virtual space, not only to build and maintain relationships with audiences and potential clients but also to gain their trust through testimonials to attract more loyal users (Bouza, 2021).Digital public relations can be defined as "the use of modern communication technologies to carry out some or all public relations activities within an organization to help achieve both general and specific goals for clients." Therefore, the concept of digital public relations has gone through several stages and taken on different names. According to "**Summer Feld**," three terms have been used to describe research that studies the digital practices of public relations: "**PR Web-Based**," "**Online PR**," and "**Internet-Related PR**." Thus, digital public relations can be categorized into two types that clarify its development and areas of application: public relations that use web applications (web01), referred to as (**PR_1**), where digital public relations depend on using the website and email (Bouza, 2021, p. 21).

Interactive Public Relations:

The principle of interactivity reflects the presence of at least two elements in the communication process, where the sender and the receiver exchange messages in real time and directly. In public relations, the concept of interactive public relations refers to all activities, processes, and communication forms that use internet tools and techniques such as search engines, blogs, and social media platforms to disseminate and exchange information and messages with the audience. Interactive public relations also facilitate direct dialogue and interaction with clients and

the target audience. Furthermore, a range of interactive techniques and applications have manifested the interactive dimensions of the public relations function in various organizations, such as websites and social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, etc.).

5. The Historical Context of the Emergence of Digital Public Relations:

Digital public relations is considered a newly emerged art, which appeared as an inevitable result of the technological changes and developments associated with shifts in the mechanisms of transmission and reception in the contemporary digital environment. Its purpose is to improve the communication process between organizations and their clients in the smart society, aiming to achieve greater gains by investing in the digital opportunities available (Bouza, 2021, p. 21)

A historical review of the trajectory of public relations reveals several key meanings that define the rôle of this essential function, which have varied according to time, culture, and the evolution of the communication field, culminating in the emergence of the internet. This development was accompanied by the rapid growth of websites. Statistical evidence indicates that the number of websites did not exceed **50** in **1991**, then rose to **3,000** by **1994**. By **1997**, the rate of development accelerated, with nearly **200** million websites. When the Google site appeared, there were over **2** million websites. Today, there are **1.71** billion websites according to Internet Live Stats.

The emergence of digital public relations is primarily linked to several factors, including (Amer, 2021, p. 108):

- The growing importance of the internet, both in terms of its technical characteristics as a communication tool and the increasing number of users, as well as the rise in the number of websites, which reached **200** million by **1997**. In **2016**, the number of internet users surpassed a significant milestone. Hence, it became essential for public relations to evolve and begin utilizing the internet as a tool to reach people and meet the needs of its clients.
- The widespread use of smartphones and laptops, whose numbers now surpass the global population. Some recent initiatives have been launched to promote the concept of digital public relations. One of the most notable of these initiatives is by **SPRK**, a public relations company that is considered one of the first to focus on digital public relations.

6. Public Relations Management in Organizations... Contexts of Strategic Digital Transformation:

The growing developments in new media and communication technologies have had a significant impact on the practice of public relations as an administrative and communicative function for various organizations and institutions that now have websites on the internet. Public relations practitioners have had to rethink their communication strategies in light of these developments. The public relations function is one of the most affected administrative functions by the internet as a communication tool. The impact of the internet on this function extends beyond the administrative and marketing functions to include the field of academic research and studies in public relations, as confirmed by many studies and research (Hiebert_R, 2005, p. 9)

Philips noted that the presence of the internet in public relations work provides greater transparency to the audience, as the dynamics of the internet require public relations practitioners to take the initiative. Dealing with performance requires making immediate decisions that leave no room for delay. Organizations need public relations practitioners who have a full understanding and awareness of public relations, procedures, and the products and services available to the audience (Ayad, 2019).

Communication via various internet applications is one of the pillars of public relations departments' work, as it is connected with the different audiences targeted by public relations. With the development of communication tools in today's age, where we live in the information age, the

roles and tasks of public relations have expanded. The internet has become an integral part of public relations work, and its primary tool for achieving its goals is communication, which helps build and maintain the organization's reputation. The internet has helped elevate public relations to a broader level and has created a new model in public relations activities, including the electronic market and e-commerce, which, along with the endless array of digital public relations tools and programs available, can make it overwhelming when trying to identify the best tools for public relations needs.

For effective performance of digital public relations, it must be positioned appropriately within the organization's structure under top management. The rôle of the senior management member responsible for public relations varies from one organization to another depending on the overall organizational structure. Often, the person responsible for this function, in some cases, oversees it alongside other roles, such as the board of directors, or the executive vice president takes on this rôle in addition to other functions related to public interactions. This function is often referred to as the "public relations management," though other names like "public affairs," "corporate communications," or "organizational relations" may also be used.

Digital public relations has become more than just a necessity. It represents a powerful communication practice for engaging with audiences and organizations through the internet. Stakeholders can now easily communicate with each other about the organization. In addition to the conveniences that come with rapid technological developments, the global trend toward digitization and its impact on corporate communication processes have led to an increasing shift toward adopting digital mechanisms in public relations. This shift is particularly significant for larger organizations with a broad reach and increasing numbers of stakeholders (Ayad, 2019) These digital tools have eliminated the constraints of time and space, facilitating communication, dialogue, and relationship-building between organizations and their audiences. Therefore, the direction of public relations practitioners towards using digital and interactive tools has become a necessary step to adapt to the changes brought about by the accelerating digital transformations, which have intensified with the successive crises the world is facing (Decision Center for Media Studies, 2023).

7. Tools and Techniques of Digital Public Relations in Modern Organizations

Traditional public relations relies on a range of personal, collective, and mass communication tools to convey messages to the target audience. Similarly, digital public relations has its own set of digital tools and techniques used to transfer information, disseminate news, and share activities of organizations with the public. These modern digital tools combine characteristics of personal, collective, and mass communication in their features.

The internet is one of the key communication technologies that has emerged globally in the past two decades. With its unique communication and technological features, the internet has revolutionized the spatial and temporal concepts of media production and applications, allowing users to freely choose the communication services that best meet their needs. Some of the best digital public relations techniques for marketers and digital public relations professionals include (communication_ Digital Marketing and Media Forum, 2023).

A. BuzzSumo:

BuzzSumo is a social media engagement data index that helps identify new opportunities for media coverage, analyze customer keywords, and address specific questions raised by the audience online. It also allows competitive analysis, access to influencers, and the ability to monitor backlinks.

B. HARO (Help a Reporter Out):

HARO is a tool that provides your brand with a list of opportunities to gain coverage from some of the world's most popular publishers. It also facilitates public relations contact by providing direct access to journalists who are already covering online news on topics related to your business. HARO



sends an email filled with opportunities from journalists based on preferences set during registration. The sectors covered by HARO include (communication_ Digital Marketing and Media Forum, 2023):

-Biotechnology and healthcare.

-Business and finance.

-Education. HARO starts at \$79, and new BuzzSumo users can try the service for free for 30 days.

C. Semrush:

Semrush is a widely-used and useful digital public relations tool. It is a platform for search engine optimization (SEO), pay-per-click (PPC) campaigns, and digital marketing that can be used for various actions, such as:

-Conducting keyword research.

-Analyzing competitors.

Reviewing on-page SEO improvements. Semrush starts at \$99.95 per month and includes more than 40 tools and features, making it suitable for any digital marketing entity focusing on public relations. The platform also offers tools for digital link-building, content promotion, contact management, and reporting.

D. BuzzStream:

BuzzStream is another tool idéal for any digital marketing entity focusing on digital public relations, link-building, or content promotion. The platform allows easy search, promotion, contact management, and reporting. BuzzStream offers a user-friendly experience and includes automatic list creation, the ability to identify contact information, website statistics, and social media metrics from a URL list. Subscriptions to BuzzStream start at \$24 per month.

8. Challenges of Digital Public Relations Management in Light of Artificial Intelligence Applications and Media Integration in Creative Media

The digital public relations industry is one of the fields that has experienced significant growth and change in terms of professional practices and is the most widely spread function across various countries. The advancements in digital technologies have led to a fundamental shift in the way individuals access media and consume content, resulting in a new communication culture. This has emerged due to the complex and multi-layered media landscape, where the boundaries between traditional, new, social, digital, and formal media used by clients have become blurred (Thabet, 2022, p. 236)

These technologies have also transformed content production methods in media, advertising, and public relations, as well as the management of digital platforms and social media, thanks to artificial intelligence applications. This transformation significantly enhances the quality of the public relations function in a fundamental and distinct way.

One of the challenges of digital public relations management today is adapting to the various changes in the work environment. The extent and scope of response from academics and practitioners depend on several factors, including the availability of appropriate infrastructure, administration, and scientific support. Digital public relations departments in different organizations aim to achieve a strategic and influential rôle, supported by qualified capabilities and modern management.

Another challenge is the ability to direct and manage information, especially with the changing roles of the audience, the emergence of media convergence, and the development of creative freedom through artificial intelligence applications, particularly during crises. These applications allow for managing information, speeding up responses, and influencing clients. This aligns with the vision of employing media convergence during crises, which leads to faster response, communication in both directions, and the prioritization of public relations personnel during crises,

especially in terms of uncertainty, the multiple meanings of information, and information management. This is critical, given the spread of fake news across modern technological platforms and the audience's inability to distinguish between true and false information (Thabet, 2022, p. 236).

9. Study Results:

Based on the above, the study reached the following conclusions:

_The increasing use of new media and communication technologies by various institutions in the field of digital public relations, all aimed at keeping pace with current transformations and changes.

_The strategic digital transformation of public relations management contributes to achieving the overall objectives of the organization and enhancing its position in the economic and social environment.

_Digital public relations departments, through various applications, websites, and social media platforms, help improve the organization's image and enhance its visibility.

_The growing trend of institutions adopting the latest digital tools and techniques for public relations activities helps improve the interactivity between organizations and their internal and external audiences, in addition to attracting attention and gaining loyalty support.

_Those responsible in institutions, especially public relations departments, must address the challenges faced by digital public relations, especially those related to artificial intelligence applications, media convergence, and creative media.

Conclusion:

The digitization of public relations has become an inevitable necessity, driven by the advancements in modern communication technologies such as websites, email, social networking sites, photo and video-sharing platforms, and others. With the growing impact of these technologies on the practice of public relations, they have provided the field with a new advantage and a fresh perspective compared to what it was before. Modern digital tools have given public relations greater opportunities to reach their audiences more quickly and precisely, both internally within organizations and externally with the public. These tools have also provided public relations practitioners with significant opportunities to employ their creative skills by using new communication channels and tools.

Today, digital public relations represent a crucial entry point and strategic function for organizing and managing modern organizations. It is also one of the core pillars of communication and media studies. This field has witnessed significant developments throughout the 20th century, based on numerous scientific theories, professional practices, and ethical standards. Furthermore, the field of media has undergone major transformations in both theory and practice since the beginning of the 21st century, directly affecting how communication practitioners perceive and manage digital public relations.



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