

Jerzy Ołędzki

Public relations and media marketing: the communication and image management in the science of media

KEY WORDS

public relations, communication logistics, public relations management models, community PR, media marketing, media promotion, PR research methods

ABSTRACT

The article presents arguments for including research conducted in Poland on public relations within the field of media studies. The author assumes that public relations should be treated as a new discipline of both knowledge and communication practice between all organizations/institutions and their environment. He analyses the evolution of terms defining public relations in the entire 20th century and focuses on the currently identifiable stage of PR development, in which the two-way method is the basic form of communication, by means of which the organization/institution wants to listen to the expectations of its audience groups with even greater detail. Rules regulating such a broad media market, cooperation between PR specialists and media people, the ethics of their actions, legal and technical aspects of existing media entities, the efficiency and social consequences of PR specialist's actions, as well as the reception of all media content are current research tasks, which should belong to the field of interest of media studies.

Public relations are the communication logistics of every institution

The management of the communication and image of an institution or an organization is the fundamental aspect which led to establishment of public relations in the 20th century as a new field of knowledge and practice of communicating with the environment.

The definition of public relations depends on the context in which the research is carried out: on the time, place, and professional group it concerns. PR is seen differently by economists, politicians, social activists, as well as the activists of charity organisations, ecological movements, ethnic minorities, and religious groups. The education of the PR technicians and strategists, as well as the education of the researchers studying the theory and practice of public relations is not without influence on the understanding and defining of this term and activity. As a result, we are facing the incoherent, eclectic, and heterogeneous character of both the research into PR and the understanding of the needs and requirements of this most practical discipline. Therefore, economic, psychological, sociological, historical, political, and even journalistic approaches can be distinguished. What I would like to suggest

here is the perspective of social sciences, which is perhaps the closest to the nature and philosophy of the birth of public relations.

It is worth to begin these considerations with a definition of public relations (PR) as a term, which is understood here as: purposeful management of a social image for the benefit of an organisation, involving all communicational activities (obligatorily internal and external) of the institutions which aim at achieving positive relations with their environment. Thus, public relations is the communication logistics of every organisation, every institution, as it consists of planning, implementing, and monitoring the efficiency of information flow. PR is also the name of a branch of knowledge about professional communication skills, style and art of shaping the image and brand of an institution or social organisation in building up reputation within the institution and strengthening the relations with environment.

Therefore, public relations is a kind of social communication between an institution and its environment. It is not merely a message transfer but also the creation of a community during and as a result of communication. PR is meant to aid those who need information. The in-depth studies into the history and development of public relations lead to the conclusion that the growing interest and popularity of PR is a consequence of the evolutionary character of social communication, a proof of the constant search of information useful to oneself by humans.

Countless numbers of mostly nameless people were involved in the writing of the encyclopaedia of the art of winning people to one's cause and using them to one's own benefit. This is how our heritage was shaped, passed by each generation to the next, enriched by its experiences. It can be said, in relation to previous opinions, that public relations specialists make use of the achievements of generations in propaganda and advertising, eristic and rhetoric, the art of persuasion, politics and sales techniques, sociology, psychology, economy, and, more recently, marketing, management studies, engineering sciences, and the still unfathomed possibilities of the Internet. This is why it is not difficult to find advocates of the thesis that public relations has existed for as long as the humans have been living on our planet. I would advise, however, a critical evaluation of such a statement, for we should apply the label of public relation to that which we want to consciously do in the conditions of the freedom of speech, free market, and media pluralism, which are the conditions of the freedom of social communication. This was not possible until the 20th century.

Communicating is the process of transferring and disseminating content available to the prospective recipient. The fundamental property of the act of communicating itself, which aims to establish a connection between its participants, should be its bilateralism (symmetry).

This connection is established via direct or indirect contact—through a certain medium. Therefore, considering PR as a process of communicating, we always assume the participation of two parties, the sender and the receiver, exchanging roles during the communicating. It is thus bilateral, interactive communication, directed at reaching an agreement. Such a method of communicating is characteristic of democratic systems, whose foundation and font of development is the free flow of information and unlimited access to various information sources. These are the basic catalysts of PR, without which it does not exist. Thus, public relations cannot have appeared earlier, before the abovementioned conditions for unhindered development of communication among people existed.

Both the forms of activity and the knowledge about public relations have been undergoing evolution ever since the conscious birth of PR in the early 20th century—in other words, since its first stage of development that was publicity, based on the activity of press agents, who through their fetching promotional and propaganda materials participated in unilateral communication. In the second phase—of public information (we are referring here to J. Grunig and T. Hunt's model theory of the development of PR)—public relations consultants understood how important for winning the public's approval is the dissemination of true and complete information. In the third stage (of asymmetrical bilateral communication), public opinion surveys were recognised as valuable for the preparation of messages which would be more understandable and persuasive to the public, and thus more efficient in changing the attitudes.

In the final decades of the 20th century, the idea of symmetrical bilateral communication was formed, recognising dialogue and the need to achieve consensus as the most desirable outcome of public relations activities. At present, PR consultants face greater expectations than what was expected so far from specialists for promotion and image. They must be experts in mediation, negotiating with stakeholders, serve as intermediaries in the communication between the organisation and its environment. Dialogue becomes the essential operating method, which makes it possible to speak of bilateral communication, where symmetry stems not only from listening to the stakeholders but, what is more innovative and difficult, adapting the organisation to the expectations of the environment. This models, which shows new challenges faced by PR specialists in the strategic management of every organisation is shown in figure 1 (p. 29).

The dialog achieved by symmetrical communication may become the seed of partnership based on relation, reputation, and cooperation. Professor Joylene Chia from the Monash University in Australia, who observed the activities in the realm of PR in Australia

and Canada, believes that a fifth model of PR is being formed. It is a community PR model, that is, a public relations model oriented at dialogue and cooperation with environment. The aim of this dialog should be to create an atmosphere of partnership, conducive to innovative solution in business and social spheres¹. An organisation acting thus strengthens its competitive advantage by creating value for all. The role of public relations in this case is aiding the effective partnership and cooperation by creating an efficient dialogue with identified recipient groups.

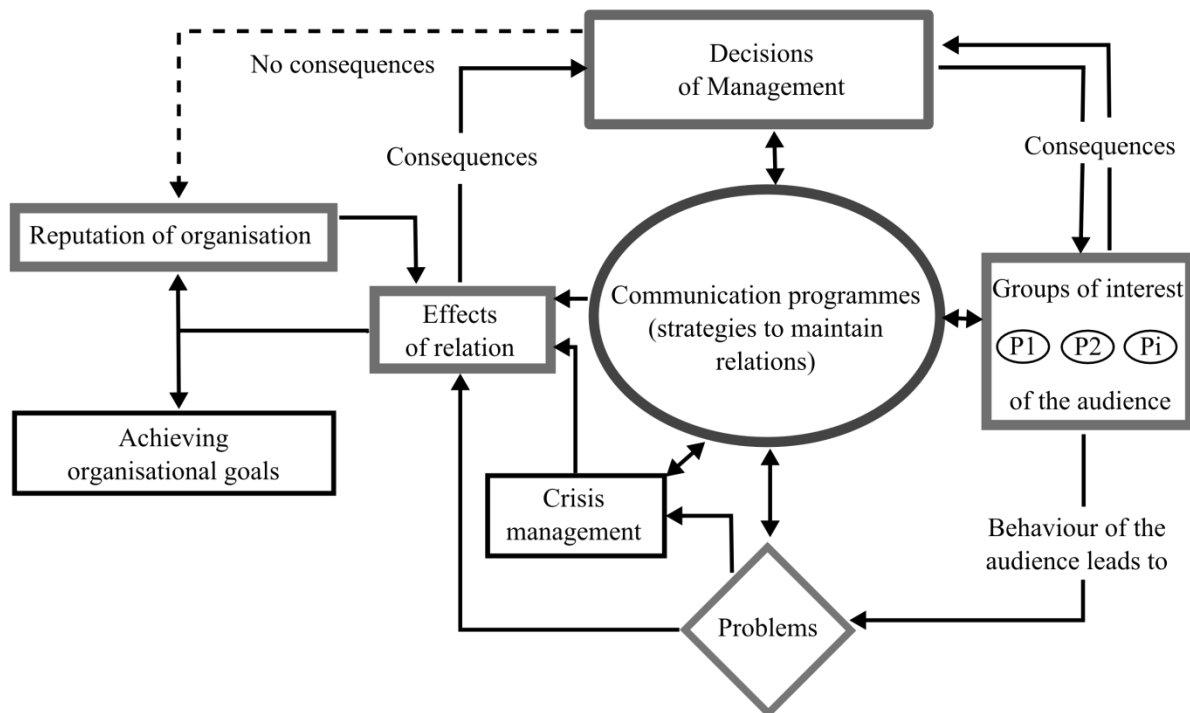


Figure 1. Model of strategic management of public relations

Source: J. Grunig, 2011.

In the 21st century, organisations and companies are expected to show a greater sense of responsibility towards the society—a certain degree of integration with the expectations, behaviour, and attitudes. This analysis of the development of public relations requires one more clarification. The abovementioned models refer to the public relations between an organisation and its external environment. The same developmental stages should, however, occur within each organisation in the relations between the management and all employees of said institution, where in a great majority of cases we face public relations in its initial stage

¹ See: I. Kuraszko, *Nowa komunikacja społeczna wyzwaniem odpowiedzialnego biznesu* [New social communication as the challenge for responsible business], Warszawa 2010.

of development (publicity and propaganda). This style of communication is still present in many Polish enterprises, which practice an internal propaganda of success and inform the staff only about favourable facts, fearing that too much information may disturb the efficient management of business.

The media as the main PR partner

Public relations specialists have influence on the shaping of public opinion, which makes them particularly responsible not only to the organisation–client but also to the society. Their activities are addressed to particular social groups, which public relations specialists should be able to reach, after a segmentation stage, using all available methods of communication. A public relations specialist working for such an enterprise (institution) or organisation not only fulfils the aims of that business but also performs his or her duties with respect to social values. These activities are quite clearly meant to serve the public interest, and such are our expectations and the criterion of evaluation of each institution, enterprise, or social group.

Should we examine the basic functions of social communication, which include informative, motivational, control, and emotive functions², we may distinguish similar tasks in public relations as well. This thesis is not contrary to the broadly discussed in literature three functions of PR in an organisation, e.g. informative function, also called communication function, as well as marketing and management functions³, and also integration, coordination, and communication functions⁴. In my opinion, the functions of marketing and management, as well as integration and coordination, are derivatively dependent on the communication (informative) function, without which they could not be independently fulfilled.

Returning to the paradigm of basic communication functions, one may notice that in the case of PR informative function is expressed in transferring to the recipients a message about certain events, opinions, and processes to enable the shaping of relations with the environment. Motivational function consists in providing recipients with arguments which influence their attitudes, behaviour, and conduct. The control function of PR helps in directing the behaviour of groups of people, while the emotive one enables the expression of emotions, frustration, happiness, or dissatisfaction. All these functions are present in, applying F. Balle's

² Cf. S.P. Robbins, *Zachowania w organizacji* [Organizational behavior], Warszawa 1998.

³ Cf. e.g.: A. Szymańska, *Public relations w systemie zintegrowanej komunikacji marketingowej* [Public relations in an integrated marketing communication system], Wrocław 2004.

⁴ Cf. e.g.: W. Budzyński, *Public relations: Zarządzanie reputacją firmy* [Public relations: Managing the company reputation], Warszawa 2001.

typology⁵, four main types of social communication: 1) interpersonal, 2) institutional, 3) local, and 4) mass communication. The individual types of communication are not closed systems; rather, they function on all levels of a social organisation, maintaining its cultural and civilisational continuity by mobilising to action. It is possible through developing mechanisms which ensure the peaceful cooperation of all social partners in their development.

All the types of social communication listed above do not constitute separate social spaces but function complementarily and on all levels of every organisation simultaneously. With a pluralistic public opinion which is a mosaic of different, even divergent interests, needs, and values, with looking for ways to achieve social consensus, and with the acceptance of the need of dialogue and respect for the rights of all the participants, the fundamental long-term goal of communication activities is communicating and building of trust between institutions and their social environment. Thus, public relations becomes a more developed form of social communicating since it makes use of all types and forms of communicating. On this basis, it becomes increasingly popular to include public relations among the disciplines of communication science, or as a form of communication management⁶.

There is no doubt that all public relations operations form a public communication system and belong to social activity. In the light of these considerations, public relations can be regarded as a form of social communicating in a democratic country with the principles of free flow of information in force, free media, and free market. It is a higher developmental stage of interpersonal communication in a society moving towards a civic state. The primary accelerator of the emergence and development of public relation was the arrival of new participants of communicating: business owners and workers, managers and consumers, politicians and voters. Each of these groups desired its own share in communicating, thus contributing to the evolutionary development of social communication.

However, the activity of PR specialists has to be distinguished from journalism. Krystyna Wójcik formulated this difference as follows: "Journalism is a public service which fulfils the citizen's right to information. PR is a social activity which, although it takes into consideration the interests and welfare of society, is above all an activity caused by the interest of the organisation undertaking to carry out PR"⁷.

⁵ Cf.: F. Balle, *Formy komunikowania społecznego: próba typologii* [Forms of social communication: Attempt at typology], „Przekazy i opinie” 1979, No. 1.

⁶ T. Goban-Klas, *Teoria komunikowania jako fundament public relations* [Theory of communicating as the foundation of public relations], „Marketing i rynek” 1997, No. 4.

⁷ K. Wójcik, *Wiarygodny dialog z otoczeniem* [Reliable dialogue with the environment], Warszawa 2009, p. 159.

In creating communication messages, both PR and journalism should follow the same assumptions: the pursuit of truth, objectivism, and the good of the whole society. Obviously, it is not always the case. The reason is that journalists aspire to be and often are the moderators of public discussion or even advocates of one of the parties. Whereas PR persons treat the media as a message carrier of sorts. Their aim is that the organisation which employs them should become the leader in its field. At the same time, in the era of fast digital information, journalists are flooded with news they receive. Therefore, when they want to write on a subject suggested by PR people, they often make indiscriminate use of received materials. Fortunately, it is not a mass phenomenon; so, in order to achieve their goals, which is successful communication, PR circles use various techniques to gain the trust of journalists. Carefully devised press materials, using figures, or referring to authorities in a given field are just some of them. And even though journalists are aware of these tricks, they still find them attractive. Every organisation, as part of the public relations activities it carries out, communicates (through a PR specialist) with recipient groups known as audience. It can be understood as any social collectivity formed when a certain group of people is in a situation it finds problematic to itself and is potentially prepared to solve this problem. It is important for every institution which manages communication to recognise the formation stage of such an audience (consequently, we are facing a latent audience at the first stage, a conscious audience at the second, and at the third an active audience, that is, a collectivity already organised to solve a given problem).

As a sender, organisation includes in its audience employees, clients, media, competition, authorities, residents, investors, etc. Speaking normatively, the number of this audience is infinite, whereas in practice it may be limited by the time and space in which the organisation functions.

The media are the key audience for a PR specialist, therefore the proper understanding of their complexity, and their needs in particular, can often determine the success of communication activities. Moreover, they serve a dichotomous role in the external public relations strategy—being the direct recipient of information and the intermediary to reach the other recipient groups with information. This characteristic places the media in a privileged position in the communication strategy of an organisation. What should be stressed at this point is that the organisation can carry out communication with its environment also by itself (without the media as intermediaries) by, for instance, creating its own media, sending mailing to its customers, holding meetings for investors or trainings for residents. Such a communication can and often does work as a feedback loop, with a two-way flow of

information. It allows the organisation to better understand the needs of individual audience groups and communicate according to their expectations. However, independent communication activities can only be carried out to the necessary, basic extent. If it wants to reach a broad group of recipients (audience) in a relatively short time, it becomes necessary to employ the mass media, independent from the organisation. What we are facing is then media relations.

The logistics of communicating, media relations, and media marketing

According to the *Lexicon of public relations*⁸, media relations is a “term used to describe building good and mutually beneficial relations between the firm and the media. The aim of media relations (or else, relations with the media) is to shape the ties with the journalists in such a way that it become possible to successfully transfer information through them to the target groups.” Successful, that is, effective communicating can be understood in this case as the most adequate (in terms of time, function, and social range) transfer of information from the sender to the recipient⁹. An essential component of public relations is thus maintaining permanent, positive ties to the media, which yield the ability to effective communication through them with designated recipient groups. Whereas one of the chief assumptions in media relations is the mutual benefit which, in the case of a PR specialist, may boil down to a press note about the given institution and, at the same time, a ready press article for the journalist. Media relations belong to the broad spectrum of public relation tools and are often used erroneously as the synonym of the overall PR activities. It is so because many people (especially in the business and political circles) identify PR only with media relations, aimed at obtaining a certain number of press articles about the given organisation in the mass media.

The issues associated with media relations and the functions and goals of public relations activities find a concrete reflection in media marketing studies. In her pioneering work on this subject, Anna Jupowicz–Ginalska presents a model of communicating in which the media are both senders and recipients of information. The primary distinguishing feature of media marketing is a characteristic activity of the media company. In other words, when a media organisation carries out communication activities on its own behalf, we are dealing with the public relations and media marketing of this organisation. Therefore, research and studies in this area focus on the activity and functioning of media organisations (just as any

⁸ J. Olędzki and D. Tworzydło (eds), *Leksykon public relations*, Rzeszów 2010, p. 106.

⁹ See: M. Golka, *Barriery i zakłócenia w komunikowaniu – przegląd zagadnień* [Barriers and disruptions in communicating: An overview], in: M. Golka (ed.), *Bariery w komunikowaniu* [Barriers in communicating], Poznań 2000, p. 9.

other firm or institution communicating with its environment) and surveys of the media market. Thus, attention is paid to the principles regulating the media market, ethics of conduct, legal and technical aspects of the existence of media entities, mutual relations between parties on the market, and their promotion. Also, the analysis of viewership, audience, and readership ratings, the popularity of websites, surveying market trends and their influence on the shape and structure of the media industry. These are the research topics which can be included in the modern science of media.

In answer to my question, Jupowicz–Ginalska listed a number of additional arguments for the inclusion of the research and studies on media marketing (MM) to the science of media:

- MM is not the border setting the limits of media studies but rather its centre. It is the very essence of modern means of communicating, mostly due to the constantly growing role of marketing in general.
- In the times of an economic crisis, which usually strikes the media first, MM becomes a kind of compass which leads the publishers and senders out of trouble (the broadly understood idea/mission becomes then dominated the efficient marketing strategy which, while not as grandiloquent, provides means of subsistence to the media and their employees).
- MM is necessary not only to the media but also to their clients who buy broadcasting time or advertising space (see the advertising price lists they are offered). This is reflected in the practical and beneficial use of media studies (regarding MM) in modern business relations.
- Today all goods and services are subject to the principles of marketing, which means that the virtually everything is mercantilised, including the media. Because of the specific nature of the media industry, however, MM differs significantly from other types of marketing. These differences, which at the same time stress the uniqueness of media marketing, relate to all Four Ps of marketing.
- The media product is characterised by the coexistence of opposing traits; it also includes such important for the media components as program schedules or media brands (with all their colours, nomenclature, and emotion). It is also a customised brand, which often has a greater frequency and strength of influence than regular *celebrity endorsement*.
- The price of the media is also unique: media can, for instance, consciously give up personal cost and rely only on the institutional one. The price, while it makes the means of communicating dependent on external clients, simultaneously is the strengthening

element (because enterprises will never completely renounce advertising and other promotional measures, e.g. sponsored articles).

- The distribution of media is inseparably linked with the induction of innovativeness in marketing, beginning with the adaptation of technological novelties (such as iPhone, iPad), web-based programs and applications (from old-fashioned RSS to podcasts), to the efficient use of the “new new media”.
- The promotion of media is unprecedented on the scale of marketing as a whole, and no other good has a similarly great own promotional potential (self-promotion) and external as well. The great number and effectiveness of techniques is reflected in the financial soundness of media enterprises which – as the economic conditions become increasingly difficult – is invaluable for the media industry.
- MM is, like no other, close to its recipients – therefore in its case the principle “from 4 P to 4 C” works best¹⁰.

As already mentioned, public relations makes use of the knowledge and experience of many scientific disciplines, therefore in the research on public relations we do not have a unique set of methods. So it is not surprising that another Polish expert in public relations efficiency, Anna Miotk, states that there are no original research techniques, since they could be created only if PR developed as a scientific discipline. The methods most often employed in PR include:

- content analysis and data analysis (analysis of data regarding the viewership/audience of media messages, analysis of website traffic data, analysis of data concerning online communities, e.g. Facebook);
- survey (here mostly the brand awareness polls, borrowed from marketing);
- experiment, focus group;
- in-depth interview, participating observation;
- historical comparative method and case study.

According to Anna Miotk, public relations should also be included in the science of media, as PR is a discipline of knowledge about communicating with great opportunities for development and a growing influence on the development of democratic societies. And also because, in view of the prognoses mentioned during a recent conference of the Society of

¹⁰ “From 4 P to 4 C”, that is, according to McCarthy and Lauterborn’s marketing theories, from Product, Price, Place, Promotion to Consumer, Cost, Convenience, Communication. Cf. also Ph. Kotler’s works on marketing.

Polish Journalists¹¹, the journalism in its classical form is on the decline (which is related to a crisis on the traditional media market), and most graduates in this field are more likely to seek employment as public relations specialists. It will enable the universities to educate with regard to the newest trends on the job market, and the graduates to find jobs in the profession they wanted when they began their studies.

We should also name other important reasons why the knowledge of the social range of PR activities should be included among media sciences and into university studies on media and social communication:

- The environment of PR specialists sets up communication systems in organisations, enterprises (online communication, own printed and electronic media).
- PR specialists/consultants are the first information source for all journalists.
- PR persons create a significant part of the content of the mass media (PR influences media agenda-setting).
- PR agencies organise great cultural projects and social campaigns with the participation of all media able to communicate.
- Public agenda-setting: PR consultants direct the public discussion towards socially important subjects, which are then taken up by politicians, social activists, and the media.
- Community PR: social expectations about all senders will require professional monitoring of behaviour of both parties of the communication act (sender–receiver) as well as education of specialists in the studies of social behaviour (emergence and behaviour of various audience groups) and changing attitudes.

Another important argument for the inclusion of public relations in the science of media is also the need to set professional standards in public relations as a practical, applied discipline. Such an external function regarding this discipline is perhaps currently served by its academic stream, which contributes to the self-regulation of the field, fostering discussion about such phenomena as dark public relations and considering paid articles as a form of public relations. Only scientists stand a chance of playing the role of independent experts in a professional discussion. On the other hand, they may assist in the development of the practical discipline by taking up and resolving the problems it presents, as well as setting further trends of its development.

¹¹ R. Stępowski, *Koniec dziennikarstwa* [End of journalism], “Wirtualnemedi.pl” 27 Apr 2012, <http://www.wirtualnemedi.pl/artykul/koniec-dziennikarstwa> [accessed: 23 Jun 2014].

As a theoretical discipline, public relations remains at a permanent developmental stage throughout the world. Its achievements in Poland are quite slim due to the relatively short time it has been practiced (since 1991, when the first firm providing public relations services was established). The first doctoral dissertation dedicated to this branch of communication was defended at the University of Warsaw in 1996 (Jacek Barlik, *Public relations w Stanach Zjednoczonych i w Polsce* [Public relations in the United States and in Poland]. Dissertation presented at the Faculty of Journalism and Political Science, University of Warsaw). More began to appear in the last decade. Their authors were given the scientific degree of Doctor of Humanities in Political Sciences, however, even though their theses contain hardly any citations from scientific works related to political sciences. The majority of defended dissertations fit comfortably in the area of knowledge of the sciences of communicating through media, as described here. Their authors publish further scientific works, mostly dedicated to the means of social communication, assuming rightly, in my opinion, that every means of communicating becomes a medium worthy of a (media science) researcher's attention when it is used in communication between people. For many people the press is still synonymous with reliability, yet nowadays it is just one of many components of the communication offer available on the market. In the consequence of the digitalisation of the media, fast-paced as well, not only the traditionally understood journalism but, in more general terms, the meaning and content of all the media (both traditional and new ones, present in the Internet or mobile network) should be included among the interests of the researchers in the science of media, as well as the animators of new specialties of the university studies in journalism and social communication.