

Challenges Of Public Relations Nowadays

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Abstract– The field of public relations (PR) has been undergoing major changes in recent years. First it was the advent of social media, the implementation of the PESO model and most recently the development of AI tools. This raises the question to what extent traditional PR tools are still relevant and have their place in the communication strategy of brands. The focus of the questionnaire survey was to find out the new challenges and trends that prevail in the field of PR nowadays. We focus on changes related to the emergence of social media, Generation Z, and artificial intelligence, or changes in the media environment. We explore how PR practitioners communicate with the media, and whether they are also using modern PR tools such as social media and influencer marketing. We are interested in how PR professionals feel about the importance of different PR tools, their hierarchical ranking in terms of relevance and effectiveness today.

Keywords– communication, public relations, strategy, trends

INTRODUCTION

Customers, vendors, staff members, investors, journalists and regulators may all significantly affect how an organization is seen. In today's cutthroat business environment, a company's reputation may be its most asset; it is what sets you apart from the competition and offers you an advantage. By engaging with and fostering positive connections with all an organization's stakeholders, effective public relations may assist in managing reputation [1]. Chudinová stresses the importance of PR as a communication tool that is used to promote the reputation of a company, an organization, and its aim is to build and maintain good relations, reputation, understanding, sympathy with target groups, the public, stakeholders. It is an activity that aims to bridge how the public perceives the company or organization and how the public would like to be perceived by the company or organisation itself [2]. Šuteková looks at PR more from a sales perspective and sees it as an indirect way of stimulating demand for products through the publication of positive information about the company, thus creating a favourable environment and conditions for their actual sale [3]. Olariu & Nichifor are equally inclined to argue that the primary role of public relations is to build a positive reputation for a company and help build goodwill about its actions through publicity [4]. From a practical point of view, Theaker offers an interesting view, according to which PR is aimed at building relationships that are essential for an organization to function. However, PR managers and practitioners do not only focus on the company's customers, but also on a wide range of other target audiences. A key element is the concept of the organization's reputation and values, which must be acceptable to all groups, both internal and external. PR practitioners pay as much attention to ensuring that an organization lives up to its values as they do to communicating those values effectively. PR is a key tool in reputation management, ensuring organizations control their narratives and proactively engage with stakeholders [5]. PR professionals influence public perception through media relations, crisis management, and digital strategies. Studies indicate that businesses investing in PR-driven reputation management experience greater consumer trust and stakeholder engagement [6]. The classification of Public Relations tools provides a structured approach to communication strategies, allowing organizations to manage their reputations effectively and engage with diverse audiences. PR tools are typically categorized into traditional, digital, event-based, and crisis management tools to reflect the different methods and channels used in corporate communication. This classification helps organizations choose the most effective PR strategies based on their target audience, objectives, and industry context [7]. Selecting the most suitable PR tools requires a thorough understanding of organizational goals, audience demographics, and financial restraints. Different tools serve different purposes, and their effectiveness depends on how well they work with specific communication goals. A comprehensive analysis by PR analytics experts highlights the importance of tailoring PR tools to match the preferences

and behaviours of the target audience (Cision, 2024). For instance, if an organization aims to increase brand awareness among younger demographics, leveraging digital tools such as social media platforms, influencer partnerships, and interactive content is often more effective than traditional media channels. Social media influencers play a significant role in enhancing brand engagement and directing followers to branded platforms [8]. Budget restrictions also influence the selection of PR tools. Digital tools, such as social media marketing and email newsletters, often offer cost-effective solutions with measurable results, allowing PR teams to track engagement and audience interaction in real time. In contrast, traditional PR tools, print media placements, and press conferences, may require more significant financial investments but can offer greater credibility and visibility, particularly for established organizations [9]. A successful PR strategy often involves seamlessly integrating traditional and digital tools. While traditional PR methods remain effective in establishing credibility and reaching specific audiences, digital tools have introduced new dimensions to audience engagement and message dissemination. A report on PR analytics highlights that combining media monitoring, a traditional PR technique, with social media analytics, a digital tool, provides a comprehensive view of a campaign's reach and effectiveness [10]. According to Inya, public relations is a special kind of management skill that aids in creating and sustaining channels of communication, mutual understanding, acceptance, and cooperation between an organisation and its audiences. It also involves managing issues or viewpoints, defining and highlighting the management's obligation to serve the public interest, assisting the management in keeping up with and making effective use of change, acting as a warning system to help predict trends, and using research and ethical communication techniques as its research tools [11].

MOTIVATION AND OBJECTIVE

Public relations have been undergoing several changes recently. And it's not just the advent of AI, as is the case with other marketing communications tools. Other factors such as the emergence of Generation Z, higher levels of commercialisation of media, and the development of digital tools have also impacted PR significantly. While once the field relied heavily on media relations alone, with the rise of the online environment and other media, it is expanding more into other areas. This approach has been made possible by the emergence of the PESO model, which combines the different types of media available to companies today. They are thus no longer dependent on the quality of the subject matter and good media relations to get their message across but have enough tools to get their message across to their target audiences. Ledbetter and Mazer asserts that the advent of new media technologies provides professionals with diverse communication channels, including websites, apps, YouTube, blogs, podcasts, and social media. Public relations, as a type of communication, is said to benefit from this innovation in communication channels as PR professionals now have access to a variety of new media communication channels to engage with their target audience, comprising electronic media accessible through platforms like websites, online apps, YouTube, blogs, podcasts, and social media (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn). A defining characteristic of new media is its interactivity, allowing organizations to establish two-way communication with their intended audience. Integrating PR tactics with media websites such as YouTube opens up new avenues for interaction and connection with the target audience [12]. At the same time, the behaviour and expectations of the target audience are changing, so PR professionals must increasingly use different tools to reach the target group effectively while maintaining the company's reputation, image and reputation. Although it is still true that public relations is a two-way communication between a company and its stakeholders, we perceive that the audience has been gaining more say in recent years, and the brand must adapt to it in the market if it wants to retain it. Thus, more and more PR is starting to rely on other tools and techniques such as Employer branding, Influencer marketing or ESG, the emphasis is on authentic communication and sustainability, which in turn is linked to the demanding nature of Generation Z, thus in the online space is moving towards micro-influencers. For example, according to Shea, PR practitioners should pay attention to the growing impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on productivity and the intersection with digital marketing [13]. One of the important roles of AI in PR is its ability to process and analyse massive data quickly and accurately. With intelligent algorithms,

AI can identify trends, sentiments, and behavioural patterns in data, including social media, online surveys, and various other sources. This gives PR more profound insights into what their audience is thinking and expressing. In other words, PR can use AI to understand better how their stakeholders respond to specific news, campaigns, or products. With this deeper understanding, PR can design a more effective and relevant communication strategy. He explained that PR can utilize big data and AI technology to monitor media and obtain accurate and fast information. PR must also build a good relationship with the media and understand emerging media trends. PR must improve the quality of content presented to the media and optimize media profiling to strengthen relationships with the media and journalists [14]. AI also allows PRs to personalize their messages more effectively. Thanks to data analysis and artificial intelligence, PR can create messages that suit the preferences and needs of individuals or groups of audiences. This makes the message more engaging and increases the likelihood that the message will be received and responded to well by the target [15]. Measuring the effectiveness of PR is also a major challenge. Public relations were known in its early days as a complex field that required a combination of creative skills and innovative thinking, as it relied heavily on intuition and guesswork. Decisions were made based on personal experiences and undocumented observations. This approach made it difficult to measure the effectiveness of activities objectively, led to inconsistent results, and made it challenging to determine the extent of the impact of communication programs, media relations programs, and public relations programs in general. In the twentieth century, public relations practices developed and became based on scientific methods instead of randomness. In the first half of this century, institutions began to use scientific and systematic research methods such as opinion polls and media content analysis. These tools marked the beginning of the transformation of public relations from a mere art to a measurable science. Opinion polls provided data and information about the public's view of institutions, and media content analysis helped measure the impact of media coverage and the effectiveness of media messages. With the development and advancement of the media, it became necessary to adopt more scientific and systematic measurement methods. Practitioners focused more on media content as a primary tool for measuring impact. By utilizing analytical techniques to provide deeper insights into the methods of receiving media messages, despite the expansion in the use of these methods, there was a significant variation in the effectiveness of their implementation. Accordingly, many practitioners were content to talk about the importance of research and measurement without applying accurate methodologies, which led to a lack of theories that contribute to the development of this field. With the emergence of the Internet and social media, a major shift occurred in the field of public relations that added new dimensions to research and measurement, making it easier for practitioners to collect and analyse a lot of information and reach the desired results. Research and measurement are fundamental pillars in modern public relations, as practitioners are required to adopt accurate and data-based measurement methods that help achieve organizational goals by employing scientific methods and methodologies [16]. Finally, focus on value-based communication and crisis management. The public increasingly perceives companies through their values and social attitudes, which requires careful preparation for potential crisis situations. Crisis communications planning should include not only clear strategies for reaching key stakeholders, but also the ability to respond quickly and effectively in an online environment.

METHODS

The aim of our research was to find out how PR professionals view trends in this area and how their work is changing. We conducted the research using the CAWI method on a sample of 124 respondents - in cooperation with agencies associated in the Association of PR Agencies in Slovakia and the civic association Komunikační experti and B2B social network LinkedIn during February-March 2025. The focus of the survey was to identify new challenges and trends prevailing in the field of PR today. The questionnaire had 20 questions in which we went from a general view of trends and current challenges in PR to individual PR tools. Due to the scope of this paper, we will only present below the results related to trends and current tools in general. The largest group of respondents in our survey are PR managers,

accounting for 48 percent. The second largest category is PR specialists, who make up 46 percent of respondents, with freelancers accounting for the remaining 7 percent. Most respondents to our survey have more than 10 years of experience in PR, specifically 47 percent of all respondents. The number of years of experience decreases in direct proportion to the number of respondents, with respondents with 6-10 years of experience accounting for 26 percent of respondents, 15 percent of respondents with 3-5 years of experience, and the smallest group of respondents with a maximum of three years of experience in this field, at 13 percent. It is interesting to note that the same percentage, 47 percent of respondents, have been working in the field for more than 10 years, and at the same time, 47 percent of respondents are PR managers, which may indicate that these positions are mostly filled by people with considerable experience in the field. The highest number of respondents, 41 percent, work in a PR agency, 32 percent work in a corporation, 13 percent in public administration, 11 percent work independently as freelancers, and the smallest proportion, only 4 percent of respondents, work in the non-profit sector.

RESULTS

One of the main questions of our research was to find out how much importance PR workers nowadays attach to individual PR tools. Respondents were thus asked to hierarchically rank individual PR tools in order of importance on a scale of 1 to 8, where the higher the number on the scale they assigned to them, the more important the tool is from their point of view. In this question, each respondent had to hierarchically arrange the tools because it allowed each number to be used only once. We used the arithmetic mean to evaluate the final ordering. Analysis of the responses to this question shows that respondents consider online PR to be the most important PR tool. At the other end of the ranking is sponsorship, which was rated as the least important PR tool. Online PR ($A=6.18$) was followed by media relations ($A=5.22$) in second place and crisis communications ($A=4.87$) in third place, followed by CSR ($A=4.03$), employer branding ($A=3.98$) and event marketing ($A=2.97$). Given that media relations as a traditional tool ranked second in terms of importance in our survey, we were interested in the views of PR professionals on whether they felt there had been a change in the importance of media relations in PR practice. As many as 49 percent of respondents agreed that they rather agree with the statement that media relations have changed, 28 percent agree fully, 13 percent of respondents rather disagree, and only 3 percent of respondents disagree with this statement. From these responses, we can conclude that PR professionals feel a change in the importance of this tool and perceive it differently than before. We investigated how this tool has changed in the following questions. According to most respondents (57 percent), the importance of media relations has declined, but it still makes sense at certain moments. This means at times when a company or brand has new, interesting, important, or groundbreaking information that affects either a large group of people or is so interesting to the public that journalists will cover the topic themselves. A company can use this moment to its advantage, for example, by organizing a press conference or sending out an official press release with statements from important people in the company. Interestingly, 21 percent of respondents chose the option that the importance of media relations has declined significantly, and paid outputs are used more often, while the same percentage, 21 percent of respondents, chose the option that the importance of media relations has not changed. Only 2 percent of respondents believe that the importance of media relations has increased, and that the media have no problem publishing spontaneous outputs. This points to a difference in opinion among respondents regarding this tool, which may be due to the fact that 13 percent of respondents work in the public sector, which is naturally of much greater interest to the media and may therefore perceive this tool in the same way, i.e. without any change. When asked how often respondents use traditional PR techniques – media relations – more than half of respondents, 68 percent, chose the option "on a regular basis", 17 percent of respondents implement these techniques only occasionally, 13 percent rarely, and 3 percent of respondents do not use them at all. These answers may be directly linked to the type of organization the respondents work for, as it is natural that, for example, the non-profit sector will not regularly organize press conferences or issue press releases about its activities, whereas in government, press conferences are held on an almost weekly basis. Nevertheless, we see that traditional PR techniques are still very popular

with companies. In the next question, we looked at the issue of media relations in depth and found out what type of outputs PR professionals publish most often in the media. In this case, we found that 50 percent of respondents indicated the option of paid PR articles, which is contrary to one of the basic pillars of PR, namely that it is about gaining media space. Only 23 percent of respondents selected the option of spontaneous outputs, which are, of course, more difficult to obtain because they require a very strong demand for a topic that is so attractive and interesting to the media outlet that it does not mind if the name of the company that brought it up is mentioned in the text, unless it is to a very high degree and could be categorized as paid content. The remaining 28 percent of respondents selected the option "I don't know." More than 75 percent of respondents agreed that informal meetings are the most effective tool for building relationships with journalists, with 56 percent choosing breakfasts with journalists, almost 50 percent choosing events, 40 percent choosing press trips with journalists, and some respondents also used the option to add their own formats, such as phone calls, press conferences and briefings, social networks, or personal meetings. From this question, we can deduce that, according to respondents, informal relationships are the most effective way of maintaining mutually beneficial relationships with journalists. We also explored which tools or channels PR professionals consider to be the most significant trend, with multiple choice options. Respondents clearly consider social media to be the biggest trend in PR, chosen by up to 79 percent of all respondents, followed by influencer marketing linked to it, cited by 66 percent of respondents. In third place was the use of artificial intelligence, chosen as a trend by 59 percent of respondents. The fourth biggest trend, according to the experts, is employer branding, i.e. strengthening the employer brand, which is particularly influential in recruitment campaigns. 35 percent of respondents also chose paid collaboration with the media as a trend, 30 percent chose internal communications, and 24 percent chose reputation management. Since PR experts consider social networks to be the biggest trend in PR, in the next question we asked how often they use them in their PR campaigns. More than three-quarters of respondents said that they always include social networks in their PR communication strategies. Only 11 percent of respondents chose the option occasionally, and 4 percent of respondents chose the option rarely. Interestingly, not a single respondent chose the option never, which suggests that social media is an integral part of PR strategy in today's digital age. Another trend identified was influencer marketing, which we followed up on in our next question: Is it necessary for brands to use influencers in their communication today? Almost half of all respondents, 49 percent, agreed that it is essential for brands to use influencers in their communication today, as according to the surveys we analysed in the theoretical part of our work, their followers have a high level of trust in them, which helps them build a positive image for the brand they promote. A slightly smaller proportion – 45 percent of respondents – do not think that influencers are essential for brand promotion, while 6 percent of respondents were unable to express an opinion. One of the important factors in choosing an influencer is the size of their audience. In following question, it was important for us to find out which type of influencer respondents use most often in their PR strategy. Since PR is about building trusting relationships with the public, this is doubly true when choosing an influencer. Macro-influencers with up to 100,000 followers were the most represented in the responses, chosen by 39 percent of respondents. These influencers are relatively widespread on the Slovak market and, thanks to their relatively high number of followers, are able to generate significant engagement and reach. The second most sought-after type of influencer is the micro-influencer, who has up to 10,000 followers and was chosen by 23 percent of respondents. However, while micro-influencers excel at building close relationships with their audience, macro-influencers, on the other hand, offer a broader target group and therefore greater visibility. The decision between them depends on the brand's goals—whether it prioritizes engagement and authenticity or broad reach. Only 7 percent of respondents use nano-influencers with up to 1,000 followers, who may not have a large reach. As many as 29 percent of respondents said they do not use influencers at all. In the following questions, we focused on artificial intelligence as another identified trend in PR. The questionnaire responses showed that up to 80 percent of respondents view the integration of AI into PR positively because it makes their work easier and opens new possibilities. 17.5 percent of respondents agreed that AI has no significant impact on their work and therefore view it neutrally. Only 2.5 percent

of all respondents perceive AI negatively and believe that the use of AI in PR threatens creative work. Most respondents—81 percent—use AI for content creation. 42 percent of respondents use AI for media monitoring, and 41 percent use it for data analysis. 30 percent of respondents use chatbots, and only 4 percent of respondents in our survey do not use artificial intelligence at all. Under "other," some respondents chose their own options, such as presentations, email responses, consultations, press release drafts, and various summaries of articles or studies. In the next part of the research, we looked at the challenges that PR practitioners currently face in their practice. The responses revealed that the biggest challenge for 28 percent of PR professionals participating in the survey is the use of AI. The second most frequently identified challenge is authentic content marketing, chosen by 26 percent of respondents, which is related to communication and content creation on social media, followed by the commercialisation of media, which is seen as a challenge by up to 23 percent of respondents. For 12 percent of the survey respondents, social media and influencer marketing are a challenge. For 6.5 percent of respondents, it is strengthening employer branding and only 4 percent of respondents perceive the biggest challenge as moving from social responsibility to sustainability. One of the research questions was also directed at the degree of influence of each trend on the development of PR in the coming years. In this question, respondents were allowed to rate each tool independently. Most respondents agreed that the most significant impact on the development of PR will be the increased use of AI, which was identified by more than half of all respondents (56 percent). The second most significant trend, according to 49 percent of respondents, is the rise in importance of social media at the expense of traditional media. Moderately significant will be the decline of media relations, according to 36 percent of respondents. A rather significant trend that will affect the PR sector is a greater emphasis on employer branding and employees, and a strengthening of reputation management (31 percent of respondents), according to 32 percent of respondents.

DISCUSSION

PR is changing from a traditional model focused mainly on media relations to a broader discipline that uses media relations as a complement to online communication. Survey respondents confirm the decline in the importance of media relations in favour of digital communication tools and online platforms. This shift requires an adaptation of both work practices and competencies of PR practitioners. The role of employer branding is being significantly strengthened in the context of changes in the PR industry. Brands consider employees as important ambassadors and are aware of the need for targeted communications to build positive company culture, loyalty and employee retention. Communication of authentic corporate values, and an emphasis on internal communication and employee experience are coming to the fore. PR experts stress that the development of artificial intelligence is influencing the way PR works. AI tools bring automation to media monitoring, content creation and data analysis, allowing for more effective campaign evaluation. In turn, this creates new challenges, particularly the need to learn new technologies and the ability to maintain the authenticity of communications in an era of mass content production. The findings show that current trends in PR require new competencies from professionals, in particular digital literacy, analytical skills, mastery of crisis communication and a creative approach to employer branding. PR professionals need to be ready to respond quickly to dynamic changes and continuously educate themselves in new areas in order to be able to respond effectively to market demands.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of our research provide a clear picture of the current direction of PR, the new priorities, and the areas in which PR practitioners will need to develop. The survey highlighted the need for a flexible and ethical approach to new technologies, for strengthening content and credibility in communications, and for changes in the direction of content creation and approach to both traditional and online media. At the same time, we must point out that the field of PR is so dynamic that it is essential to examine trends in this area on a regular basis to see shifts in perceptions as well as in the use of different tools. While Employer branding or ESG, for example, are now seen as new trends, they may soon become classic

PR tools. At the same time, traditional PR tools also evolve over time and their relevance increases or decreases according to the current market situation, not only on the local but also on the global one. We could see this also in the pandemic, when internal communication came to the fore, especially to the detriment of other PR tools. The evolution of public relations (PR) theory from 1964 to 2024 mirrors broader societal shifts and technological advancements, with each phase reflecting changes in communication dynamics and organizational needs. Beginning as a largely one-way communication tool, PR has transformed into a multifaceted, interactive, and strategic management function deeply embedded within the digital landscape and responsive to evolving societal expectations. With the advent of the AI era, PR is becoming increasingly data-driven and precise, leveraging AI and big data to craft more targeted and impactful communications. However, this shift also introduces new ethical concerns, particularly around issues of privacy and the risk of diminishing the human element essential to genuine relationship-building. The integration of AI in PR practices makes the field more scientific, but maintaining authenticity and ethical standards remains crucial. Future PR professionals will face the challenge of balancing the advantages of advanced technology with the need for transparent, empathetic, and genuine interactions with their audiences [17].

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