The Utilization of New Media in Online Public Relations Activities Among The Public Relations Practitioners

Nik Adzrieman Abd Rahman
{ adzrieman@uum.edu.my }

Universiti Utara Malaysia

Abstract. The Internet has become a vital tool for PR because it is critical for most people. The utilization of online PR especially social media has increasingly become an integration function of organizational communication and provides several communication platforms to reach an organization's publics and developing dialogs and increase the online presence of an organization. Moreover, the usage of social media comprises unique ways for boosting an organization and its products or services and for increasing its visibility in the virtual environment and Stakeholders can communicate among and between each other concerning an organization in very public, fast, cheap and effective ways. This paper intends to show that the usage of online PR tools through PR practitioners, especially social media tools. This paper is intended to understand value of social media for PR, the benefits of social media for publics and for organizations and the possible implications of current social media use for PR. The review of the literature suggests the dire research needs to empirical data exists on the ways in which PR practitioners are utilizing social media and how this utilization is influencing PR practices.

Keywords: New Media, Online Public Relations, Social Media, Public Relations Practitioners, Online Public Relations Tools, Utilizations, Activities.

1 Introduction

There is a commonly acceptable presumption that the Internet's importance as a medium for commerce and communication has grown progressively and has increased regarding corporate communication and marketing including advertising, market research, and retailing since the Internet first began operating for commercial activity in 1994 [1]. So, the Internet presents new opportunities and efficiencies that are unavailable by means other media and sales channels [2]. In addition, Internet technology and the tools accompanying that technology increase stakeholder strength by facilitating the communication between and among stakeholder groups [3], [4]. Thus, Stephens [5] believed that the information "pours out of digital spigots" and news now arrives "astoundingly fast from a surprising number of directions" (p. 35) and, furthermore, that information is often free.

According to Taylor and Kent [6], anyone with a computer connected to the Internet can publish information for potential global consumption and clearly the Internet is revolutionizing many features of PR research and practice. Internet technology provides PR with an unparalleled opportunity to collect information and data, monitor public opinion, and

engage in a direct dialogue with communities about a various of issues [6], [7]. In addition, Internet technologies allow PR professionals to achieve customization strategies by offering stakeholders, which include members of the news media, with online options for configuring information produced for PR aims [8].

The scholars unanimously agreed that the new media innovations have changed many aspects of PR practice [3], [9]–[15] were among the first to discover the utilization of new media in the practice of PR and in praising the virtue of the two-way interactive capacity of the World Wide Web [16]. In particular, social media are fast, cheap and interactive channels to reach targeted audiences. In PR, social media - those chat platforms that are reflected in asynchronous conversations and the sharing of user-generated materials using the Web 2.0 environment [17].

Meanwhile, Wright and Hinson [18] pointed out that PR practitioners strongly believe that social media are changing the way in which PR is practiced, and their utilization is positively correlated with the perceived strategic impacts of PR in organizations [19]. A pervasive discourse exists in the PR literature that using social media in PR has positive consequences [19]–[22]. Therefore, the practical rate of the utilization social media in Phase increased across the globe [16], [23]–[33].

Because of the profound influence of social media in the practice of PR, Valentini and Kruckeberg [17] have argued that social media should reside at the heart of PR activities because they can promote an organization's relationships by means of improving community relations. In addition, [34], [35] said that social media enable the development of a relationship between marketing and PR by enabling a greater capacity for interaction and the cultivation of relationships. Furthermore, the utilization of social media and interactive applications help in realizing the two-way symmetrical model of communication as explicated in excellence theory [36], [37]. In addition, social media promote, quick, fast, instant discussion and keep relationships at an additional superficial level [38].

Therefore, there is a need for a substantial study to investigate the usage of online PR tools through PR practitioners, especially social media tools and how these tools are properly employed to keep up with the huge technological development witnessed by all aspect the life Which automatically reflected in PR activities and practices, the understand value of social media for PR , the benefits of social media for publics and for organizations; and the possible implications of current social media use for PR.   This article offers the literature review that calls for research to undertake study on How PR practitioners use the tools of the social media in their practices, their importance, the challenges they face, the types of media tools used and How evolved the use of these means with the evolution of time.

Evidently, there have been very little empirical data exists on the ways in which PR practitioners are utilizing online PR and how this utilization is influencing PR practices [39]. Despite the popularity of social media studies related to PR, Macnamara and Zerfass [40] noted that significant gaps remain in the knowledge related to how organizations are using social media and how these valuable new communication channels either can or should be utilized in the context of PR .in addition, Several case studies have suggested that reasonable bases for concern exist because some organizations are trying to engage in public communication in the Web 2.0 environment utilizing one-way information transmission and a control paradigm of communication reminiscent of the characteristics of mass media and Web 1.0 [41]. Furthermore, in some instances, case studies have shown social media and social networks are adopting either inappropriate or unethical practices. This paper believes that without reliable measurement of how PR practitioners can use online PR tools and know how

to use them optimally, their use of these tools indiscriminately and without knowledge and awareness will be hardly feasible and may have a negative impact.

2 Results

2.1 The Impact of The Utilization Online PR in Organizations

Online PR is an extremely crucial new stage in PR development. It has completely altered the way of working and the content of work in PR and has permeated the PR work of almost every organization [41]. Furthermore, online PR helps to solve many problems quickly and efficiently especially in time of crises. In addition, online PR helps in data gathering and research and in monitoring a corporate image through online newspapers and all types of electronic publications. Also, suggestion boxes and comments and questions of visitors gathered through an organization's website are major sources for research and data gathering and provide feedback for PR activities, for PR planning and for PR programming and are a good source for decision making [10].

Generally, online PR has altered the speed, efficiency and ease with which organizations and institutions deal with the public as online PR has allowed an organization to remain informed about the public's views and reactions. This means that they can manage any crisis that they face quickly. Kirat [10] noted that online communication serves all varieties of tasks and types of content in organizational communication. Online has become the closest that an organization can come to one channel carrying plain text through multimedia. For example, email is a primary internal and external communications tool and to national media. PR departments can send images and text through email so online newsrooms are essential for companies [10], [42]. Also, web pages have shown a great progress for better design possibilities, the integration of multimedia elements and a larger interaction between a user and an organization [42].

Moreover, Naude, Froneman, and Atwood [43] have pointed out that many companies and organizations already were devoting particular sections of their websites typically called "online press rooms," for communicating with the media. From this specific area, a company can provide any sort of news to the press, making it easy for journalists to gather information about a company and simultaneously serving as a channel for information requests. This clearly offers advantages for organizations having limited resources. Bortree and Seltzer [46], Cooley [44], and Grunig [35] all noted many benefits existed for using online PR by organizations, especially in increasing interactions with publics. These led to improving the corporate image, setting corporate agendas reflecting the needs of the public, and ease in collecting and analysing public opinion and increasing corporate accountability (Cooley, 1999). McAllister and Taylor [7] added that other advantages existed like collecting information, monitoring public opinion on issues, and engaging in direct dialogues with publics about various issues.

2.2 The Utilization of Online PR Tools Among Practitioners

Research has been undertaken to understand the utilization of online PR. For example, Macnamara [41] found that PR units in organizations and consultancies are using social media (social networks, LinkedIn, Facebook, and YouTube) in approaches exploiting their

interactive two-way communication capabilities and realizing best practices as dialogic models in ways that the excellence theory of PR has described. Kelleher and Sweetser [45] agreed with Macnamara [41] that the utilization of social media is essential to the practice of PR itself because of 2-way communication, interactivity, dialogue, and engagement.

Similarly, in a study of Malaysian PR practitioners, Gabriel and Koh [46] found that 84.6% of the surveyed PR practitioners were using social media to communicate directly with their stakeholders about their organizations, and that such communication included announcements, mission statements, the latest business news, value statements, and updates. Social networking sites were the most used social media as 26 (100%) of respondents utilized them. Of the respondents 16 (72.7%) agreed that social media communication with their stakeholders produced the preferred results. These desired results included growth in awareness, in branding and in the popularity of the organization as well as an increase in sales [46]. In general, research has indicated that the primary purpose of using online PR is to communicate with internal and external public and customers, to establish two-way communication capabilities, and to achieve brand awareness and stimulate sales. The results of which are improved reputation and increased loyalty to these organizations.

However, other research has found the poor use and effectiveness of social media as a dialogic tool so far by practitioners and that obstacles prevent them from using social media [47]–[50]. Scholars have found that several factors affect the non-utilization of social media. Gordon [51], Joo and Teng [52].

Hakeas and Komodromos [53] suggested that PR and marketing practitioners utilize blogs, forums, social networks more often today in marketing PR because blogs allow them to respond to online opinions or criticisms regarding their organizations or their clients. Also, the use of social media in the marketing PR campaigns can help to build and maintain relationships between an organization and its various publics [54]. Another study conduct by Shahid, Akram, Zulqarnain & Hashmi [55] showed that majority of PRO professionals use social media which increase PR of institutions and improve the positive image building and good will of the institute. By contrast, Waters, Burnett, Lamp, and Lucas [56] found that, even though non-profits are transparent in their Facebook profiles, they do not use these sites to their full potential to inform others, and have these people become more involved with organizational activities. The findings indicated that non-profits must do more to enhance their information dissemination and involvement strategies.

El-Kasim and Idid [57] affirmed the utilization of social media in PR practice in developed countries and in developing countries. Thus, it has become an imperative for PR practitioners to utilize online PR in their organizations to provide and shape cordial relationships with their strategic constituents. Kang and Norton [58] and Curtis et al. [59] concluded that online PR was an important PR tool and an organization could follow the views of the public, the reactions of action and criticism more easily through its use.

Additionally, Wigley and Zhang [60] surveyed members of the PR Society of American. Their results confirmed that utilizing online PR was seen as a useful tool especially in a crisis. Almost half of the respondents of the 251 respondents (48%) reported that they had incorporated the social media into their crisis plans and most said that they had included Twitter in their crisis planning, mostly for distribution.

Organizations today are forced to utilize online PR in their strategic plans in the management of crises because of the change in the methods of practicing PR when the spread of social media. A successful organization is one that can reach the masses in a fast, effective, and integrated way, and social media is among the easiest and most effective ways, especially with respect to the young who use the media frequently.

Furthermore, Porter, Sweetser, Trammell, Chung, and Kim [25] asserted that PR practitioners who utilize new technologies such as blogging are perceived as having more power in organizations because these users are prepared to be industry leaders and to use new tools to contact target publics better. In addition, Dornyo [61] found that PR practitioners in Ghana utilize Facebook pages for their organizations because they consider Facebook to be an effective tool to communicate with their target audiences. Furthermore, the utilization of Facebook pages of most organizations that were studied were very interactive, and feedback was used to enhance relationship between the organizations and their publics. Despite all its problems, all respondents endorsed Facebook as an effective communication tool and highly recommended it for PR practitioners who were not utilizing it.

With respect to higher education, Moyo and Moqasa [62] who studied a university in Cape Town South Africa, argued that the utilization of ICTs as a PR tools has become a vital instrument in institutions of higher learning. They found that ICTs played a significant role for the communication division at the university because they enabled the department to be in touch with its publics and work efficiently. When used competently, Moyo and Moqasa [62] argued that these ICTs would create well organized, reputable communication, and intensify the division's efficiency.

2.3 Online PR Tools

Different views exist concerning which online PR tools work best. Prescott [63] said that the best tools for online PR are corporate websites, online services and multimedia, electronic mail, and the World Wide Web. Dumitru, Negricea and Gogonea [64] said online PR tools include websites, email, forums, banners and newsletters. While Kisiołek, Kolmasiak and Budzik, [65] insisted that the online PR tools are the www sites, electronic mail, email and discussion groups, Internet conference newsletters and services sponsoring. In addition, Start [66] said that online PR includes the Internet, the World Wide Web, email, chats and instant messaging, Internet forums, intranets and extranets, content management systems and Wikis, and blogs, feeds and really simple syndication (RSS). As well, Ewing, Juba and Garden, (2008) asserted that blogs, e-newsletters, online media room, podcasts, webcasts, and wikis and are the most popular online PR tools. Du Plessis, [67] argued that the World Wide Web, corporate websites, email and online services are the most important tools. Holtz [68] pointed to e-mail, the World Wide Web and Permission-Driven Communication were online PR tools. Furthermore, Kirat [10] focused on electronic newspapers, newsrooms, online publications, press releases and web sites as essential online PR tools.

These various lists mean that the meaning of essential online PR tools differs from one researcher to another. In considering these enumerations, the time period in which these studies were conducted has a great relationship with the evolution of the tools. Recently, for example, Bashir and Aldaihani [69] argued that twitter and Instagram were the new online PR tools. In addition, several theorists and scholars have insisted that these tools have offer the most advantages for corporate online communication [70]–[75]. Table 1 Shows online PR tools based on the studies under title online PR.

Table 1. Online PR tools based on the studies under title online PR

Online PR tools	Author(s)	Year
Multimedia electronic mail	Prescott	**1997**
Online services		
Website		
World Wide Web		

E-mail	Holtz	**2002**
Permission-Driven Communication		
World Wide Web		
Discussion groups	Kisiołek, Kolmasiak,	**2003**
E-mail	& Budzik,	
Internet conference		
Newsletters and services sponsoring		
www site		
Corporate website	Du Plessis	**2005**
E-mail		
Online services		
World Wide Web		
E-mail	Start	**2006**
FTP or file transfer protocol		
Internet		
World Wide Web		
Chats and instant messaging		
Internet forums		
Intranets and extranets		
Content management systems		
Wikis, Blogs, Tracking and pings		
Feeds and really simple syndication (RSS)		
Electronic newspapers	Kirat	**2007**
News rooms		
Online publications		
Web site and Press releases		
Blogs	Ewing, Juba & Garden	**2008**
E-newsletters		
Online media room		
Podcasts		
Search Engine Optimization		
Webcasts		
Wikis and Web site design and content development		
Banners and Newsletter	Dumitru, Negricea &	**2011**
E-mail	Gogonea	
Forum		
Website		
Instagram	Bashir & Aldaihani,	**2017**
Twitter		

Thus, in general, after reviewing the literature, no clear and explicit definition of online PR and no identification of the tools or forms used to achieve the objectives of the organization through online PR exist. The literature shows that each study has named its own set of tools. This disparity may be due to the constant and rapid change of these tools over time because modern technology allows for constant innovation and renewal, which means that examinations must be forward looking to see what is new in the world of technology and what changes will occur in the practice of PR and communication.

Thus, based on what has been mentioned previously, this current article defines online PR in this research context as professional and technical services that depend on Internet technology and take advantage of all its characteristic such as speed, spread, low cost and ease of use to help an organization to improve, strengthen, develop and deepen the

relationship between the internal and external audiences of the organization and enhance the image of this organization as well as the well-known traditional tools of PR, to become the interaction between the organization and the masses in two way communications and in order for this interaction to succeed, the optimal utilization must be known for these means and their suitability to the public and the environment in which PR are practiced.

Moreover, the current article observed that online PR studies include everything that applies and uses the Internet and its tools including the present social media in all its forms (blogs, forums, websites and email, etc.) and those that will emerge in the future by means of new technological developments.

2.4   The Challenges Face PR Practitioners When Using Online PR Tools

PR practitioners faces many challenges in employing these digital tools. Practitioners must keep abreast of technological developments to quickly disseminate information and to be able to respond quickly, effectively and accurately. The first challenge of utilizing these tools was discovering how to eliminate time-intensive, repetitive tasks such as stuffing envelopes with press releases or faxing them to hundreds of media outlets one at a time [2], [76]. Aronson, Spetner, and Ames [76] added that additional challenge the PR revolution faced was discovering how to go beyond mere time and money savings to develop new methods of communicating effectively with customers, employees, investors, media, and the public. Aronson, Spetner, and Ames (2010) noted that applied creativity and PR training, combined with skills and computer know-how, have facilitated new ways of communicating a company's image, the benefits of a product, or the community objectives of an organization. Consequently, the demands of this stage are related to the harnessing of the potentialities of e-mail, interactive communication, and handheld devices linked to the convergence of computers with digital media players, telephones, and television, to communicate personally with hundreds, thousands, or potentially even millions simultaneously [76]. According to Karim and Ghareb [77], other challenges like credibility, multiple channels, measuring the impact of social media and two-way communications exist.

3   Conclusion

In recent years, the revolution of Internet and new media especially social media changed the PR practices around the world to enter a new transitional phase despite all the challenges faced PR practitioners.

Generally, a PR practitioner utilizes online PR because the Internet is valuable to people, and PR is a competitive field. and there are many advantages of the utilization online PR include message accuracy, precision, low cost, improving the positive image of the institution, maintaining relations with the public and crisis management, etc. Moreover, a PR practitioner who does not communicate effectively with online communities can no longer shape or maintain the desired public image effectively results from many factors, including fear of taking responsibility, official reprimands, and criticism from the public and the inability to deal with rapid developments in the social media. Also, organizational policy organization, which is often the reflection of state policy, play an essential role in allowing freedom to expression and participation. Also, the studies have focused on the utilization of certain tools of the social media that been instrumental in providing the connections between PR

practitioners and the public, and the most important of these tools are blogs, forums, Facebook, and Twitter. Eventually, the democracy of the Internet has forced these specialists to compete with the entire world.

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