



Growing Need and Impact of Research in Strategic PR Management: An Overview of the Opinion of PR Professionals

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Abstract

There is no second opinion on the fact that in today's highly digitalized communication world, PR has emerged as an indispensable function in almost every organization regardless of its size and nature and it is the most important requirement for securing the desired outcome for every business policy or business initiative. It is also true that this profession is evolving everyday at an accelerating rate ever since the advent of Digital PR and various new and innovative forms of content messaging. But one should not forget the fact that no matter how experienced you are or how much skills you possess, the core is that until and unless you take help of research in planning and executing PR plans or strategies either by being updated about the current trends in information distribution or having an analytical data of the demographic profile of public or by conducting content analysis or readership studies etc, you cannot expect a desired outcome of your PR Programmes and PR strategies.

The paper focuses on discussing the dire necessity of Research in PR profession taking into consideration the fact that in spite of its tremendous relevance and utility in increasing the quality of this profession, this still remains to be the most neglected area towards which the PR professionals are either indifferent or lacking in knowledge. The study highlights the various areas where research needs to be conducted in order to achieve the benchmark set in the profession and to get the desired results or ROI for every PR Programme or Strategy, finally leading to the building of a strong Corporate Image in the eyes of the organization's internal and external stakeholders. To substantiate the study, the paper employs Primary Research Method by seeking the opinion of PR professionals on the issue.

Key Words: Digitalized, Indispensable, Research, Information, Demographic, Content, Relevance, Neglected, Corporate Image

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INTRODUCTION

An organization has several important responsibilities towards its concerned stakeholders and building relationships with each one of them is of prime importance. PR is the profession which solely works for creating relationships based on trust and goodwill with the stakeholders. The professionals employ diverse strategies and tools which are aimed at identifying the needs and demands and expectations of the stakeholders finally leading towards the attainment of corporate goals and benchmarks. In today's times of intense competition and changing business scenario and market imperatives, understanding public opinion and conducting regular audit of corporate image becomes more important. In such circumstances every organization requires a trustworthy and credible liaison manager responsible for building strong ties between the organization and its stakeholders serving for the betterment of both. There remains no doubt that PR has become one of the key departments of an organization successfully playing the role of an efficient liaison manager who is strategic enough to understand public opinion and build up a strong relationship and mutual understanding between the organization and its concerned stakeholders but there are various questions which come to our mind when we think about how to make the profession more effective, contemporary and fact based. Any profession in order to become more effective has to have a sound base of in depth knowledge and research is the only tool which can generate a wide pool of information which can aid in the smooth functioning of the department and helping in good corporate governance.

In today's times of information revolution, fierce business competition and growing significance of stakeholder satisfaction, specially customers satisfaction and value co-creation, an organization's commitment towards the growth and well being of all its stakeholders becomes of prior concern and research is the only path towards understanding stakeholder's opinion and their needs and demands in a more better manner thus helping the organization in serving them more efficiently finally helping in the building of a strong positive corporate reputation.

PR Research is a major area in the field of improving the conduct of functions of this department and to ensure a guaranteed success of its plans and strategies as the number of PR Tools and Strategies are innumerable but it is actually on the basis of a well planned research work that one can select the best possible one which would serve for the betterment of the organization.

Accountability and Measurement has become a norm for the smooth and successful functioning of every organization, whether public or private. Management is in need of clear and well defined strategies and plans which guarantee the desired return of investment. In such circumstances one cannot plan or execute policies in vacuum. It requires proper research and evaluation to support every corporate decision taken or policy framed in order to satisfy the stakeholders thus leading towards the attainment of corporate goals and the building of a strong corporate identity.

The question which arises is why is research so important in the field of PR? The answer is simple as when you are working in PR profession, you often come across certain difficult questions like:

1. Why this PR Programme?
2. Which is the most important PR Activity required for Image Building?
3. Why would a PR Campaign be the most suitable PR Activity and not just a Press Release?
4. Should we go for organizing a Press Conference?

Research is the only means through which you can get the answer for all such types of questions one often comes across in the PR profession. There are times when you are in the horns of dilemma as to which tool or strategy to adopt as the profession offers you a wide array of tools and strategies to choose from. Research is the most important activity required in every stage of planning and executing a PR action plan to ensure its guaranteed success and a 100% return on investment as PR is always a two-way communication process where it is equally important to know the public opinion before introducing any programme or a campaign or launching a project. The very definition of PR justifies the significance of research as PR is the management



function which chiefly aims at establishing mutually cordial relations between an organization and its stakeholders, working for the betterment of all and finally resulting in the creation of a strong Corporate Image. However the basis of strong and trustworthy relations can always be laid on the foundation of an in depth research of the stakeholders, their likes and dislikes, their attitude and opinion and a proper environment scanning and information gathering about the surroundings, target audiences, business trends and the present media options.

Research is the process which helps the PR personnels to assess the values and beliefs of public, thus providing a platform for dialogue with them and helping them to develop an understanding about people's perception and their needs and expectations from an organization. This information acts as an asset for the management to frame its future course of action or to make programmes and policies which are at par with the expectations and the likes of the public.

Research makes PR strategic by ensuring that communication is specifically targeted to the right public. Without research PR would be just one-way communication or a purely subjective work guided by one's gut feelings or instincts instead of being based on finding out and assessing what people expect nowadays from an organization or what is the prevailing organizational image in their minds. The present trend of commercialization and intense competition and the growing need for a participatory management practice and value co-creation in an organization, securing positive public opinion has never been such a major factor behind the success of an organization.

REASONS BEHIND THE GROWING NEED FOR QUALITY RESEARCH IN PR

PR is a strategic management function which is aimed at relationship management with the stakeholders of the organization and research is a very specialized area which makes the profession more systematic, fact-based and public-centric and thus it is the need of the hour. Success in this industry is based on how well you know about your organization and your stakeholders and research whether qualitative or quantitative helps you to develop a firm understanding about the attitudes and opinion of your stakeholders and acts as a guiding tool throughout your entire PR programme right from its planning to implementation and evaluation. The profession requires a wonderful blending of knowledge, skills, experience and along with it great research acumen.

Research Offers the Following Benefits to the PR Industry

1. PR is all about keeping the clients happy and satisfied and research helps them to know what is going on in the minds of clients and public about the organization which helps them to frame their programmes and activities as per their wishes and expectations.
2. It reconfirms and strengthens the decisions taken by the PR officials
3. Research helps the PR professionals to conduct a perfect audit of their communication functions and to gather information about the surrounding environment and community
4. It helps in building confidence amongst the professionals when they plan out new strategies and campaigns as it provides a good amount of background information about the public, their likes and dislikes and above all the prevailing market scenario.
5. Research is also the best means to evaluate the return on investment for every PR Activity during the post event evaluation so that any errors could be identified, then analyzed and its future occurrence can be prevented.
6. It also helps the practitioners to be well informed about all the facts and figures about their organization and its stakeholders which helps them in addressing all queries posed by the media, clients and public with a lot more confidence and accuracy, thus leading towards the creation of a better and a strong image of the organization in the eyes of its external stakeholders.
7. Research helps in the direction of revisiting the corporate policies and resources of an organization, making them more people-centric which goes a long way in the direction of value co-creation and building a strong corporate reputation.



8. Research provides factual and unbiased information which is highly useful in PR profession as one has to serve not just the organization as an employee but he is also equally responsible to the publics of an organization acting as the advocate and guardian of their needs and demands and counseling the management of the organization about it.
9. For a PR person an organization is a beat area and he is entrusted with the responsibility of doing a thorough SWOT analysis of his organization which would give him an adequate idea about the mission, vision, objectives and resources of his organization enabling him to plan out a successful and well researched PR plan which would contribute in the achievement of the organizational objectives.
10. A very important function of PR professionals is to create a good image of the organization in the eyes of public by portraying a true picture of its services and products through cordial media relations. The success of the PR message too depends on the selection of the right media channel to disseminate it and this requires a good amount of research on the part of PR professionals to select the right media depending upon the objective and nature of the message and the target audience for whom it is meant as there are innumerable media options but one has to choose the best media which can appeal to the people in the strongest and most convincing manner and this creates sufficient room for research.
11. Media Pitching is also a very technical and specialized area as every business organization is competing to secure with each other to secure time and space in media which requires great amount of skills, experience as well as research to pitch the right media and to acquire complete information about which media person to contact or to assess the reputations of the various media.

Lack of emphasis given to research and measurement has resulted in great loss to PR industry in terms of budget, time, failure of PR action plan, loss of reputation and acceptance finally resulting in an overall loss to the organization. A number of reasons have been cited behind this negative trend. As said by Macnamara, "Despite clear demand by management for accountability, numerous threats to PR budget and a continuing search by PR professionals for status and recognition, PR practitioners give three major reasons behind it - lack of budget, lack of time and measurement not wanted.

Macnamara further cites three significant barriers to the process of communication.

1. Output vs Outcome - PR professionals emphasize more and more on output, i.e. number of press releases issued, number of meetings organized or number of campaigns planned and implemented but rarely do they evaluate the outcome of their plans and messages and has the organization benefitted from them. Output is a means to an end but what matters most is the final outcome and PR and Corporate Communication should emphasize more on evaluating outcome as output is just an assessment of the results of a specific PR activity in short term whereas PR should focus more on the final overall image and reputation building of the organization and its long term benefits.
2. Lack of emphasis on SMART objective- Objectives should always be measurable and specific instead of being vague and unachievable. Besides the SMART objective, research also has to be done regarding whether the PR objectives are aligned with overall organizational objectives. There is also a great need to emphasize on micro-measuring (analyzing and measuring specific objectives of each PR programme and events) rather than macro-measuring (measuring overall organizational objectives) so as to evaluate the effectiveness of each PR activity and ensure its future successful implementation.
3. Numeric vs Rhetoric- There is more need for presenting the outcome of PR activities in numeric terms as the management mainly understands and appreciates the results in terms of measurable numbers, frequencies, charts and sales whereas on the contrary the reality is that most of the PR professional's work is based on words, visuals and images which may not impress the management a lot.
4. Post-programme measurement- PR professionals emphasize more on evaluating the final results of their programme but there is also a need to conduct formative research as there is a lot of scope for incorporating changes on the basis of the close monitoring and vigilance of the staff members during the implementation phase of the PR plan.



Thinkers like Cutlip, Centre and Broom, Macnamara, Walter Lindenmann, Tom Watson have suggested important models like PII Model, Pyramid Model of PR Research, PR Effectiveness Yardstick Model, Continuing Model of Evaluation which explains about the importance of research in PR and how it results in the successful implementation of every PR initiative.

Areas of Research

Every PR Plan or Programme first and foremost requires a detail research on the attitude and opinion of the public about the organization, an assessment of what the public expects from an organization, what are their priorities and demands and above all in case of planning a PR Campaign it is very important to have a complete understanding about the present problems existing in the socio-economic market, what are the people's expectations from an organization in terms of quality of products and services. The more one gives emphasis to research, the more stronger one can strike on the opinion and attitude of the public by exhibiting "Here's what we can do" for you and such planned and pre-researched PR Strategies and Programmes are at par with people's expectations and needs finally resulting in securing an 100% return on investment for the organization.

Every PR process should begin with an exhaustive fact-finding research focusing on the background study of the organization and its causes, precedents, the allies and opponents of the organization, the surrounding competitive market. According to Palamiappan N. & Ramachandraiah A.M., Research in the field of Public Relations consists of working on certain core areas related with finding out what is the public opinion about the organization, what can be the various tools and strategies to influence public opinion and researching on the possible advantages, consequences as well as the risks associated with the employment of each one of them.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A number of studies have been done in the direction of studying the need and relevance of research in the field of PR and how quality research can make a great deal of difference in efficient planning and execution of PR strategies and programmes.

According to a post written by a professional working in Weber Shandwick Agency, research is one such area of PR which is often neglected or not anticipated by entry level practitioners although it is a function which is very necessary to maximize the outcome of every PR action plan and to minimize the costs. According to the employee, research helps to gain an insight about the right target audience, their profile and their needs, to make the right media selection or to find out the best search tools. Such valuable information enables the practitioners to devise a very cost-effective project. One of the major objective of PR is convincing the clients about the feasibility, reliability and utility of their PR strategies and plans and research is the only tool which provides sufficient facts to strongly support their plan in front of the clients and it also prepares them to face any of their queries. The employee has stated three major reasons behind the significance of research in the field of PR. They are:

1. Research helps you to strategize
2. Research helps substantiate your claims
3. Research allows you to make informed decisions

A study done by Mitchell Communication Group (2013) has described the importance of PR research by focusing on the various levels of research required in the discipline. Firstly, Basic Research aimed at gathering basic information about the clients, social media sites as well as stakeholder information. Secondly, level two research which is intermediate research aimed at analyzing which media placement would be the best for placing stories about clients, for studying community demographics or data about the success of campaigns and lastly level three research which is advanced and the deepest form of research. It is aimed at analyzing the data collected from previous campaigns or evaluating the return on investment for every PR campaign or



activity or assessment of consumer and stakeholder data as it is equally important to evaluate and analyze the effectiveness of every PR programme after its implementation in order to incorporate the findings during the planning of future PR activities and events.

According to a blog post by Taylor, A. (2014), communicating strategically is the key to achieve success in PR profession but the only tool which provides the background data on whose basis the PR professionals can establish a credible, timely and successful communication system is research. The author has also pointed out towards certain factors which justify the significance of research in PR and how it is creating an impact in the process of formulating PR strategies and plans. Firstly, research helps the professionals to find out and collect information about niche market. Secondly, it helps in the selection of right media and making a successful pitch. Thirdly, it helps in building relationships as it provides sufficient background information about stakeholders, specially in regard to whom to approach and why and how to approach. Lastly, the author mentions that research is an ongoing process in PR and whenever one aspires to excel in this profession, one has to take the help of it to be awakened about the industry trends and during every phase of PR planning.

Brown, S.A, Martin, T. & Rawlins, B.(2000) have also uncovered the growing demand of research in PR industry and how it can make a difference in terms of efficiency level of practitioners. The authors have emphasized that research is the only process which makes communication two-way by collecting all kinds of information about surroundings and people. It also makes the profession more strategic as a well researched PR plan is never based on instincts or experience but rather it is based on hard hitting facts and evidences which helps in targeting the right audiences and above all to make a proper assessment of ROI. Lastly, it is very important to evaluate and measure the effectiveness of PR programmes and activities in the post implementation phase.

A very significant study which describes about the reasons behind the growing importance of research in PR and the various areas of PR research is the one done by Macnamara, J.C.(2002). The author has stressed that in the present times of intense corporate competition, increasing role of two-way communication and accountability and measurability and the immense requirement of post event/project evaluation, research is that area which helps in the attainment of all these objectives and thus its role and significance cannot be neglected or underestimated. The author while expressing his regret towards the lack of emphasis and attention given to research has pointed out towards the types of research required in the field and has also discussed about some of the barriers in the field. A very useful exploration of the chapter is that it suggests the best Research Methodology and practices which can help the PR professionals to assess the efficiency of the functions in the best possible manner.

Grunig J.E.(2006) explained about the present status of research in PR profession and focused on the issue of how research should be conducted in the field of PR. He also commented on the role and significance of academic as well as professional research in the field of PR and to strengthen his viewpoint he described some programmes of academic research that provides room for improving the PR profession.

Garg, D.(2015) while expressing his point of view on the Impact Blog writes about the development research from traditional preparative to the modern one. The author comments that traditional pattern of measurement in PR mainly consisted of maintaining a dossier with all media clippings in it along with media reports or stories about the concerned organization just meant for satisfying the client about a perfect ROI. The author critically analyses the Barcelona Principles 2.0 launched in 2010 as guiding principles defining the process and method of measurement in PR along with the rules to be followed while developing programmes for clients. The author also discusses about the revised Barcelona Principles of measurement which needs to be adhered to by every communication professional in the present era where the pattern of communication has become more integrated and participatory.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY



1. To understand in detail the reasons behind the need to conduct research in PR profession and to develop an overview about how quality research can lead to the performance of more effective PR functions.
2. To explore the various dimensions and areas of PR research.
3. To develop a deeper insight on the issue of significance of PR Research by seeking the perspective and opinion of PR professionals regarding the issue.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The most important function of PR professionals is to establish a process of two-way communication between the organization and its publics finally resulting in the building of a strong relationship based on trust and honesty. The two-way communication function highlights the significance of research as it enables the practitioners to engage in dialogue with their stakeholders and to know about their point of view regarding the image of an organization, its policies and programmes and to develop an idea about their needs and demands. Research also helps in knowing and assessing the outcome of PR activities. Research is fundamental to various models of PR practice. Two-way symmetrical PR model devised by James E. Grunig & Hunt lays great emphasis on the significance of research in PR. The model emphasizes on the fact that it is not always "inside-out" approach which is important in PR but it is the "outside-in" approach which makes PR a truly two-way communication practice. By establishing a strong channel of dialogue and interaction with stakeholders, PR professionals can be aware about their opinion, beliefs and concerns and the resulting information can prove out to be an asset for the key policy making personnel of the organization and help them in the formulation of such strategies and programmes which are liked and accepted by the stakeholders. (Gronstedt, p. 39). In the midst of this two-way communication practice, research is very important for facilitating this exchange of information and to achieve well-planned and targeted results. Research uncovers potential areas of concern so that the organization can build relationships, develop programmes and take corrective action to prevent small problems from becoming major issues. (Broom & Dozier, 1990; Cutlip, Centre & Broom, 2000). Thus research is the core area or task which cannot be neglected both at the time of planning any PR programme and as well as while evaluating and assessing the impact of any PR strategy or action plan.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employs both secondary as well as primary research methods to acquire knowledge on the issue. As a part of secondary data collection, the paper makes an exhaustive study of the existing literature related to the growing need of research in PR taking into consideration the fact that PR has become an indispensable department in almost every organization and the time has come to improve its efficiency level and to generate a full return on investment and research is the only means which keeps the PR professionals updated with complete knowledge about their organization, its stakeholders and the clients resulting in giving them sufficient information before framing a strategy or a plan.

In order to make the study primary data- based, it seeks the opinion of some of the leading PR professionals who have been in this industry for quite a long time both through interview and questionnaire. Questionnaire was administered to 20 PR respondents and 10 respondents were interviewed as per their choice and convenience. Respondents selected for the study were those acquainted with the topic of the research, thus employing Purposive Sampling Method

SAMPLE DESIGN:

As a part of the Purposive Sampling Method, questionnaire was mailed to some of the leading and highly experienced PR professionals holding key positions in different private and government sector organizations, PR firms, hospitals and banks. Out of total 30 respondents, questionnaire was mailed to 20 respondents and 10 were interviewed on phone. Leading PR professionals who have been working as PR practitioners in their



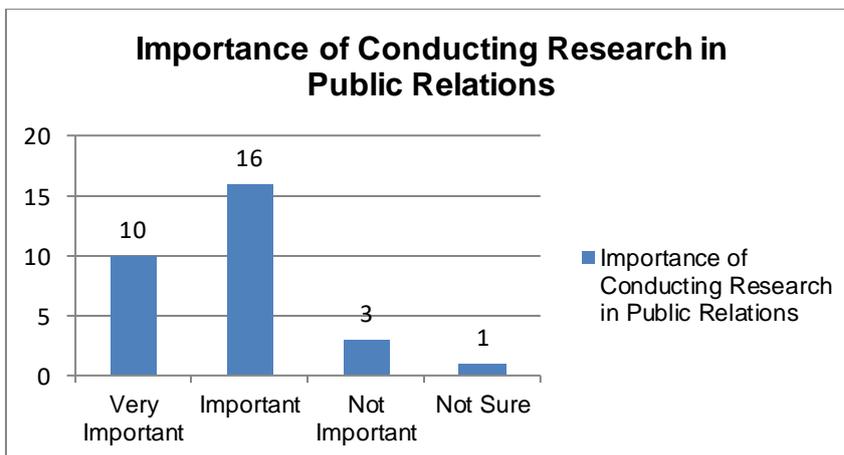
own organizations for a long time and who are also active members of Public Relations Society of India were selected.

The designation of the respondents varied from PRO of Rajasthan State Road Transport Corporation (RSRTC), Assistant Director, Department of Information and Public Relations(DIPR), Retired PRO, Rajasthan Vidyut Utpadan Nigam Ltd (JVVNL), Communication Manager, ICICI Bank, PRO, Nagar Nigam, PR Consultants of leading PR Agencies, MUSK and PERFECT RELATIONS, Retired Director, DIPR, Chairman PRSI, Jaipur Chapter, AGM, PRO, The Rajasthan State Cooperative Bank Ltd., , Director, Star CPWEBHOSTING Pvt. Ltd., Retired AGM,(PR), Rajasthan State Cooperative Bank, Director Marketing & PR, Mahatma Gandhi University of Medical Sciences & Technology. The responses of the respondents proved to be instrumental in realizing the significance of research in PR profession and to gain an understanding about the perception of some PR professionals who have been in the field for decades.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Importance of conducting Research in Public Relations

Response to the question, "According to you how important it is to conduct research in the field of Public Relations?"

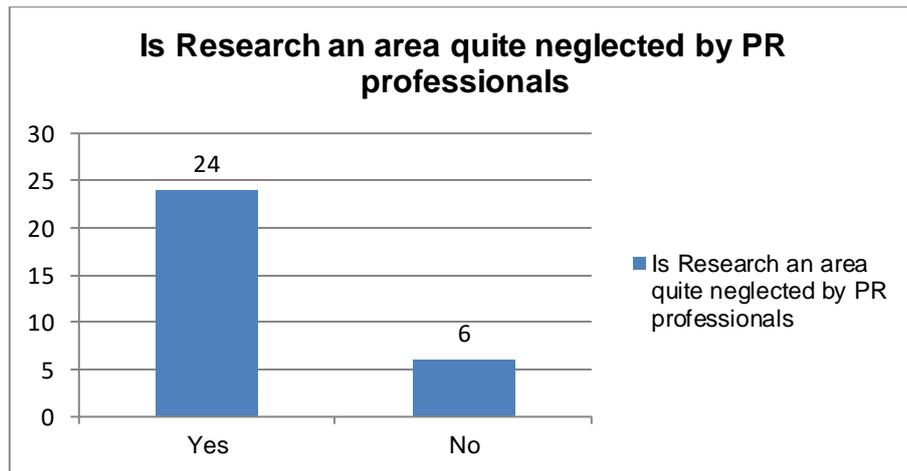


Key Findings

When the respondents were asked to indicate their degree of importance given to research in PR profession, 26 out of 30 respondents(86.66%) were of the strong opinion that research is either very important or important to excel in the profession of Public Relations as it provides a firm basis behind the planning and execution as well as post-event evaluation of every PR strategy or programme. Rest 4 respondents(13.33%) of the respondents opined that they considered this function to be not so important or they were not sure about it.

2. Whether Research is an area neglected by PR professional?

Response of the question, "Do you think research is an area which is quite often neglected by PR professionals?"



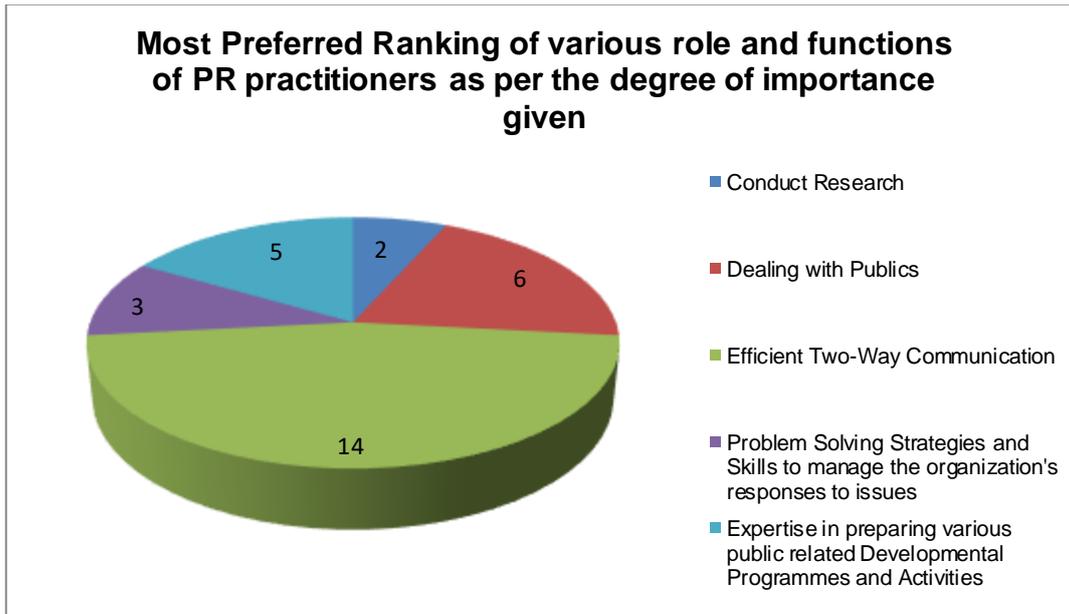
Key Findings

- The responses of the PR professionals regarding the question that do they think that research is an area which is quite often neglected by PR professionals was an eye opener as most of the PRO's were of the opinion that research is an area which is very often neglected by the PR practitioners, specially in public sector organizations and this becomes one of the leading cause of failure of many PR initiatives as lack of understanding of public, their likes and dislikes and their opinion about the organization can lead to the formulation of ineffective PR plans which in no way influences the perception or attitude of the stakeholders.
 - Out of total 30 respondents, 24 of the respondents (80%) were of the strong opinion that PR Research is not given its due importance in the execution of the PR Activities of an organization. A very nominal number of respondents, 6 out of 30 (20%) stated that PR professionals considered research and evaluation to be a very important exercise before as well as after the execution of every PR Activity of theirs and they don't support the statement that it is a very neglected area in the PR profession.
 - The responses of the practitioners made it very clear that if PR professionals want to excel in their profession, want to build up a strong relationship with the stakeholders based on trust and goodwill and above all if one wants to keep the clients happy, an ideal environment of dialogue and mutual interaction with the stakeholders is a must.
3. The questionnaire tried to find out the opinion of the PR professionals regarding the various ways they thought research can influence the quality of performance of PR functions. The answers amply demonstrated the multi-dimensional advantages of quality research in the field of Public Relations. The question was an open-ended one and the respondents were free to express their point of view on it and each one of them pointed out towards one or the other advantage of conducting a regular and timely PR Research. Their responses revealed that research and fact-finding helps to make informed decisions about major plans and policies, it helps to authenticate every claim or PR programme as it is based on hard-hitting facts and data and finally research enables the PR professionals to make well-planned strategies with greater chances of return on investment giving them more confidence behind their every work or decision, thus finally contributing in the creation of a strong organizational reputation. They opined that it is only through research that PR professionals can identify the right target public for any PR programme or event thus making the function more strategic and well-planned. The opinion expressed was that research is the only means which helps in gathering background information on every topic or issue or before arriving at a decision and helps in shaping it in the right manner thus utilizing it very constructively in the making of right communication strategy which can influence the opinion of public and clients in a more satisfactory manner and win their support for the organization. Some expressed that through research PR professionals can have a better idea on the new trends and requirements of the available media, it helps the professionals to

be updated about the surrounding environment, new technology and this greatly helps in making any PR plan more effective. According to some of the respondents, PR is basically a research activity and it helps the professionals to touch new horizons in their work area.

4. Ranking of various Role and Functions of PR Practitioner as per the degree of importance attached by the respondents

Response to the question, "What ranking would you give to the following role and functions of PR Practitioners as per the degree of importance given by you.(Rank your preference from 1-5, Rank 1 for most preferred)

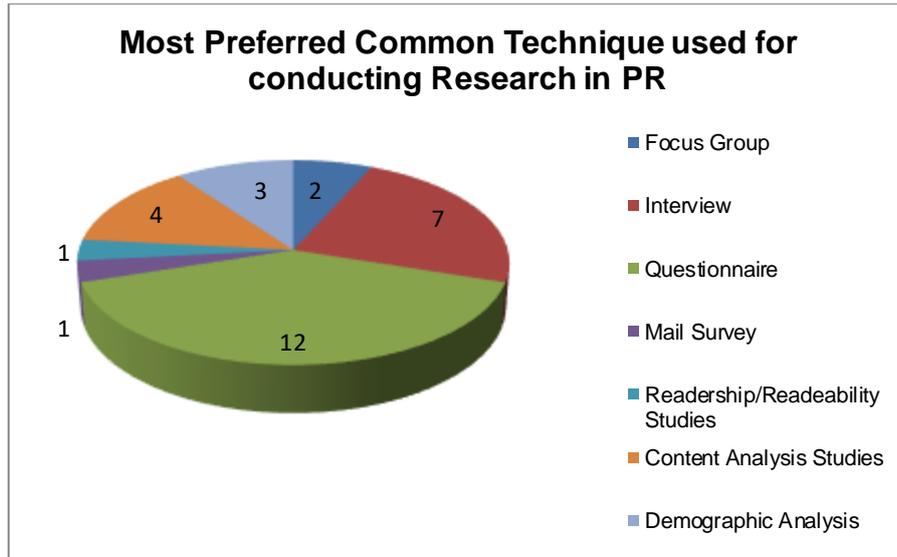


Key Findings

- A significant question which revealed the degree of importance attached to research in PR was the one where the PR professionals were asked to express their opinion by ranking the various role and functions of PR practitioners according to the degree of importance attached to it.
- The results of the study demonstrated that majority of the respondents considered establishing Two-Way Communication as the most important function of PR practitioners. There were almost an equal number of respondents who gave highest number of second most preferred ranking to Expertise in preparing various public related Developmental Programmes and Activities and Dealing with Public. Problem Solving Strategies and Skills to manage the organization's responses to issues secured third place in the highest preferred ranking of PR role and functions as per the degree of importance.
- Very few respondents gave the most preferred ranking to conducting research in the field of PR. The findings made it very clear that research in the field of PR is either very much neglected or it is not considered as very important.

5. Most Preferred Common Technique used for conducting Research in PR

Response to the question, "According to you which is the most common technique used for conducting Research in PR? (Rank your preference from 1-7. Rank 1 for most preferred)

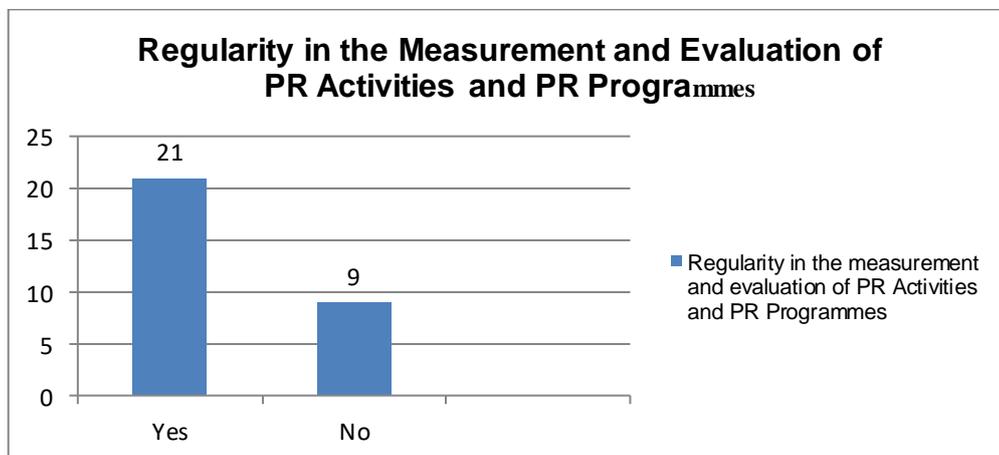


Key Findings

- As a part of the study it was very important to know what are the most commonly used technique for conducting research in PR. The professionals were asked to indicate their preference of technique on the basis of ranking them as per their degree of preference for it.
- Majority of the PR professionals seemed to be in favor of employing questionnaire method as the most effective research technique followed by interview. One respondent in interview expressed that Content Analysis followed by Demographic Analysis is the most common technique employed for PR Research.
- Most of the government department PRO’s expressed that their function chiefly consists of making the masses aware of government policies and programmes and to publicise them and therefore as such they don’t conduct any research before the framing of any programme and strategy. Thus most of the government organization PRO’s were very reluctant in commenting about the research tools employed by them.

6. Regularity in the Measurement and Evaluation of PR Activities and PR Programmes on a routine basis

Response to the question, “Have you been regular in the Measurement and Evaluation of PR Activities and PR Programmes on a routine basis?”

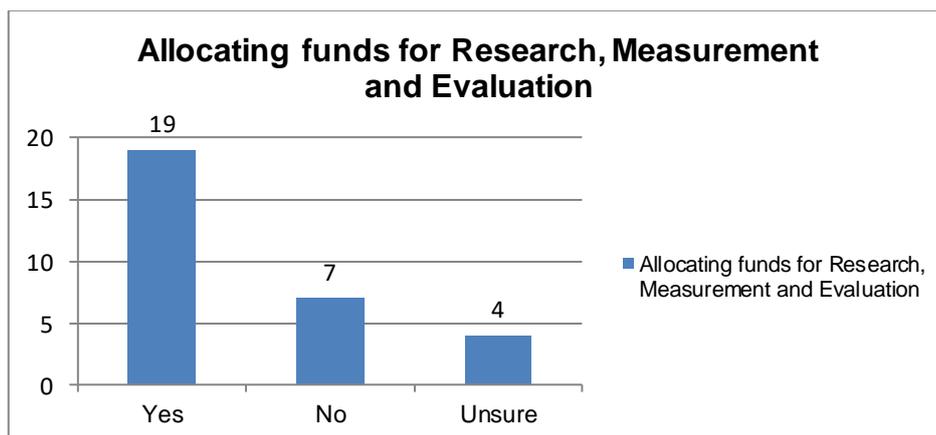


Key Findings

- To further explore the reality regarding the amount of importance given by PR professionals to research at the personal level, they were asked to respond to the question of how regular they have been in the measurement and evaluation of PR activities and PR programmes on a routine basis. Majority of respondents were of the firm opinion that they have been regular in the evaluation and measurement of their PR activities and PR programmes on a routine basis clearly indicating the fact that research had a very important place in their profession and they have been evaluating the outcome and impact of each of their PR activities to assess its success factor.
- Whereas there were very few who expressed with honesty that they have not been regular in conducting research in their day to day PR activities or programmes as they have been busy in carrying out hard core PR functions day and night or PR research is not considered so important in their organization.
- The findings of the study made it very evident that the situation was alarming as still there was sufficient scope for conducting extensive research, specially in PR Departments of government organizations in the pre-production as well as during implementation and post production phase of every PR programme to ensure its guaranteed success.

7. Allocating funds for Research, Measurement and Evaluation on a regular basis

Response to the question, " Does your department or organization specifically allocate funds for Research, Measurement and Evaluation on a regular basis as part of its total annual budget for Public Relations Programs and Activities?"



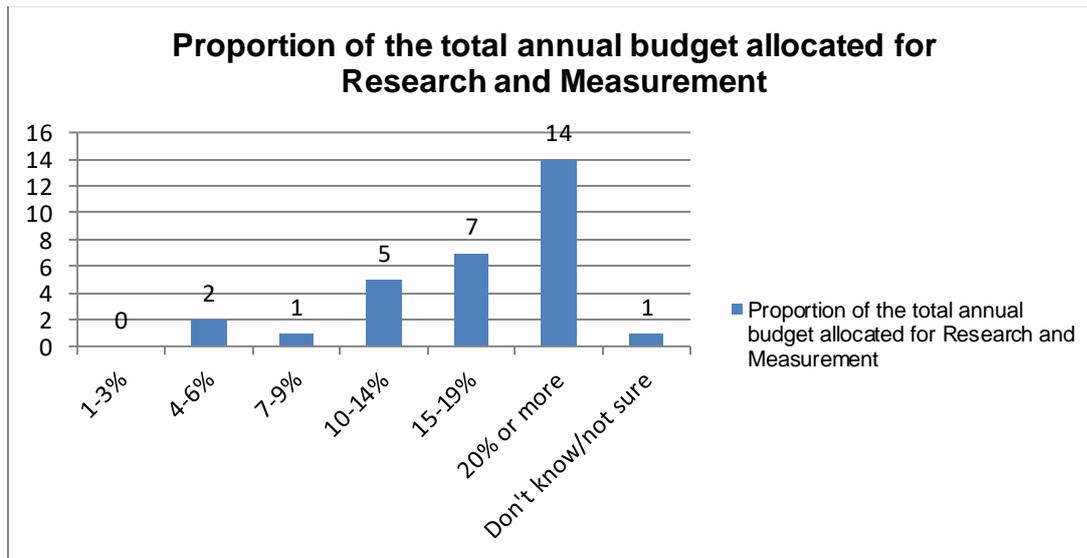
Key Findings

- A very critical and significant question which reflected the degree of importance given to research in PR field was related to finding out the responses of the respondents regarding whether their department has been regular in specifically allocating funds for research, measurement and evaluation as a part of its total annual budget for PR programmes and activities.
- The responses were very shocking revealing that there is still a lot of need for realizing the utility and significance of conducting research in the field of PR and a lot more requirement of a positive support from the management of the organization towards conducting research in the form of allocating funds specially for conducting various research activities in the PR field. Majority of the respondents opined that their department or organization does not separately allocate funds for conducting research and evaluation of PR activities. Lesser number of respondents were of the opinion that research is greatly valued in their organization and they allocate funds specially for carrying out different PR related research activities. One respondent refused to give an answer to the question. Some were of the opinion that they regularly evaluate and measure the effectiveness of PR programmes and strategies, however their PR department does not have funds specially allocated for conducting PR research.

- The responses revealed that the time is such that PR professionals have started realizing that research before and after executing PR programmes or taking PR decision is equally important rather than just merely planning and executing them blindly without any environment scanning and information searching or auditing. They also expressed that there is still a lot of room for exploring more on the need, utility and impact of research in the profession and to allocate separate funds to conduct it.

8. Proportion of the total annual budget allocated for Research and Measurement

Response to the question, "What proportion of the total annual PR budget should be allotted for Research and Measurement?"

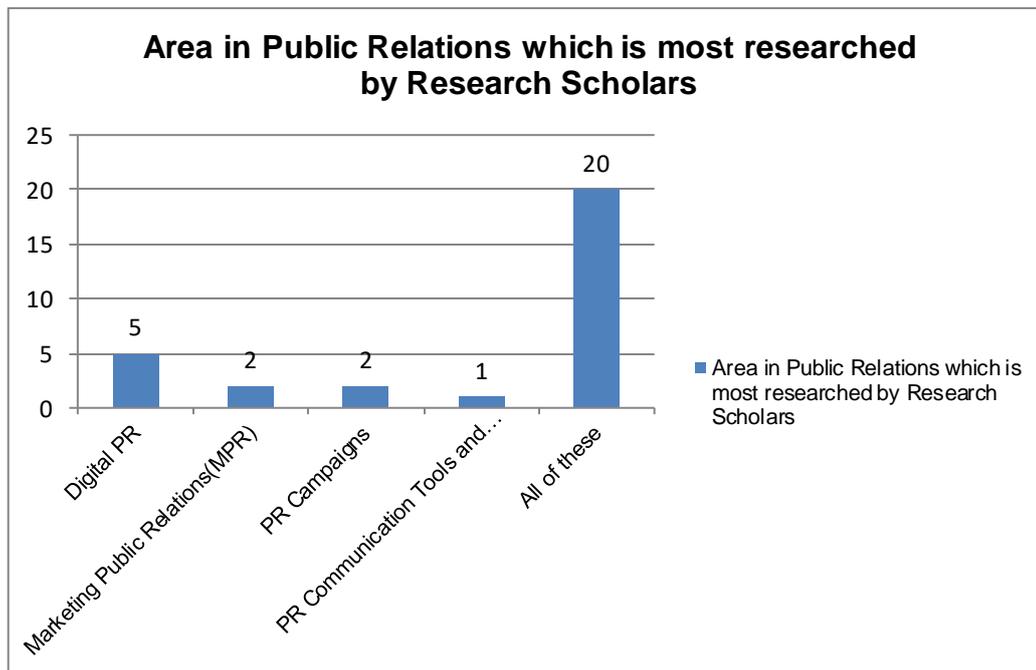


Key Findings

- The objective of the study was to find out the degree of importance PR professionals gave to the function of research in their field and what was their opinion regarding how important it is to do a thorough research in order to ensure the smooth and successful performance of PR functions no matter whether it is media selection and media placement, or writing a news story or launching a new PR campaign or taking any decision regarding any PR action plan or programme.
- The PRO's were asked to indicate their preference regarding the proportion of the total annual PR budget to be allocated for research and measurement. The findings were crucial as most of the respondents were of the opinion that 20% or more or 15-19% of the annual PR budget should be devoted for conducting research and evaluation work in the PR profession, clearly reflecting that although it's a fact that presently many PR professionals are not into the habit of routinely conducting research either because of lack of resources or lack of time or understanding or less significance attached to it, but they all were of the strong opinion that research needs to be given more importance and the time has come to give it a serious thought in the form of dedicating a certain fixed percentage of PR budget specifically for conducting research by employing various research techniques and evaluation methods.
- Less than one-third of the sample were of the opinion that 10-14% of the total annual PR budget should be kept for planning and implementing various research activities in the PR profession.

9. Area in Public Relations which is most researched by Research Scholars

Response to the question, "According to you which is the area in Public Relations in which most of the researches are being done by Research Scholars?"



Key Findings

- Along with the rapid growth and development of PR profession, we find an increasing number of research scholars who are doing in depth research on the various areas of PR practice which have unveiled the facts and the realities associated with the profession, its present trend of functioning and the various aspects of its growth and prospects. On being asked as to which area in PR the researchers conduct maximum research work, most of the respondents (66.66%) expressed that nowadays researches are being equally done in the area of Digital PR, Marketing PR, PR Campaigns and PR Communication Tools and Strategies. Second highest number of respondents (16.66%) were of the opinion that Digital PR is also an area which greatly interests research scholars as in the present times PR professionals mostly employ Digital PR Strategies and Tools to stay connected with the masses and to immediately reach out to the maximum number in an interesting and interactive manner. Rest of the areas in PR like Marketing PR(MPR), PR Campaigns and PR Communication Tools and Strategies individually secured a very less, 6.6% or less of the preferences in terms of area most researched on by the research scholars.
- The findings amply demonstrate that nowadays a lot of research work is going on related with the different areas of PR practice, strongly pointing out towards the fact that the time has come to give PR Research its due importance in order to excel in the ever competitive field of Public Relations.

CONCLUSION

The study has made it very clear that if PR professionals want to excel in their field, research is that tool which they would require in every walk of their life, whether it is the question of launching a new project or whether it is evaluating the impact of a particular campaign or studying the perception and attitude of stakeholders or selecting a particular media. Research provides sufficient background information which is very helpful in every phase of the conduct of a PR programme. The study by analyzing the opinion of PR professionals on the issue, has tried to explore the present reality regarding how much importance do they give to research in their profession and what is their viewpoint regarding the benefits that research offers in their field. The study makes it very clear that no doubt research is a very important requirement for PR professionals. However there is a lot of scope for conducting quality research in the field as the survey demonstrated that most PR



professionals thought that research is important for them but the reality is just contrary and very depressing as it was found that most of the PR practitioners were not so serious about doing research before planning and after every programme of theirs and their department hardly allocates separate fund for conducting research. As a result many PR programmes become unsuccessful in influencing the mindset of stakeholders towards the organization finally leading to wastage of time, money and resources. Thus the time has come to realize the potential of research in the field of PR and give it its due importance. As rightly said by English, L. ABC, **“Public Relations Research has the potential to build the foundation not only for better public relations, but better organizations in general.”**

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The Research Paper deals with a very significant area concerning the role and functions of PR professionals highlighting the role of research in making the profession more efficient and effective. The study needed to secure the opinion of working PR professionals regarding the role of research in PR profession and to find out their perception regarding the areas where they thought research plays a very effective and differentiating role. However the study couldn't have been possible firstly without securing the cooperation and support of members of Public Relations Society of India, Jaipur Chapter as they helped me in securing the list and contact numbers of some of the very experienced and senior PR professionals working in different designations in both government and private sector organizations. Secondly I would like to acknowledge the cooperation given by the sample respondents of the study who are the PR professionals and would like to thank them for devoting their precious time in filling up the questionnaire or responding to the questions asked during interview, which made the study more credible and the findings more exploratory and significant.

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Prof. Manish Verma is currently working as Director of School of Communication at Amity University Jaipur . Prof. Verma did his Masters from Panjab University Chandigarh and completed his PhD from HPU Shimla after getting award of Junior Research Fellowship (JRF) by University Grants Commission of India. He also did a post graduate program in Media Arts & Production from University of Technology Sydney Australia and a professional program in Leadership in Management and Education (MLE) from Graduate School of Education, Harvard University.

In 2011 Prof. Verma organized India's first International Conference in the area of media studies where more than 300 scholars from all over the world participated, since then he has organized two more International conferences in 2015 and 2017 respectively. He is the founder editor of Amity Journal of Media & Communication Studies (2231-1033), a reputed international biannual journal in the area of media and communication studies . His area of research includes New Media, Advertising & PR and Indian Media Landscape. Prof. Verma has published articles in top journal including Scopus listed international journal.

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