

The Fundamental Skilfulness for Online Public Relations Practice

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ABSTRACT: Nowadays, online public relations provide a target audience the opportunity to interact and communicate with an organization and to receive a direct response. Also, online public relations provide a great opportunity for organization to stay in Competition arena, besides, to deliver messages quickly and effectively and resolve and control crises. But to achieve this is missions, public relations practitioners need to modern skills to fit in with this ever-changing industry. Public Relations scholars struggled to determine the skills needed to online public relations practice. Most scholars agreed that public relations practitioners have to possess digital and technological skills to be able to perform their duties effectively. This paper intends to show what the fundamental skilfulness for online public relations practice.

Keywords: fundamental, skilfulness, online public relations, practice, public relations practitioners.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The skills and capabilities that were required from people to accomplish their work in the 20th century are different from those required in the 21st century. This difference is due to the development of technologies in communication field as well as the emergence of developed information. Such technologies became able to accomplish tasks which were done by humans only in the previous century. Types of work that people used to do in opposition to work done by machines is continuously changing (Dede, 2010). In all aspects of life, people have become familiar with communication technologies and information. Besides, using ICT has contributed in changing the procedures and practices of activities in governance and work (Oliver, 2003). Nevertheless, the absence of basic skills required for using technology is considered an obstacle that stands in the way of completing the work. Laurenceau and Sloman (2015) said that 44% of people stated that the absence of technology and digital skills prevented them for accomplishing their work.

The huge development in the technology has changed the public relations practice, and new skills were imposed in the practitioners for them to be able to use the online public relations and to keep up with the new changes. Many researchers believed that people may not be able to use and to take advantage of online public relations if they don't have enough technical skills (Badran, 2014; Elkarhili, 2014; Kirat, 2016). Furthermore, Bashir and Aldaihani (2017) argued that the practitioners of public relations do not have technical skills that enable them to use the social media. Such absence of skills can be a barrier to those practitioners and can result in unwillingness to use the social media. Also, practitioners may lose their interest and passion to use it.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In general, it was discovered by studies that the practitioners of public relations are required to acquire skills to improve their performance. Most studies have stressed that if practitioners of public relations have acquired and enhanced their e-skills, they will be able to use the internet applications such as the tools of social media effectively. An example of this is a study conducted by Nowland (2006) in which he concluded that if new media is adopted, the practitioners of public relations should acquire additional technical skills in online security, operation of new software, publishing on web, optimization of search engine, web trend analysis software operation and web analytics. Moreover, PR practitioners should improve their skills of online information architecture in addition to skills of increasing and managing complex information digitally (as cited in James, 2007, p.142).

Also, Alexander (2016) conducted a study that showed that if graduates of public relations desire to have a job, they are required to have a great level of information about digital communication basics. Furthermore, he added that the recent research has confirmed that employers expects the PR graduates to know the digital concepts that help in enhancing the productivity, enhancing relationships with main investors, customers, community, employees, suppliers and government, deliver cost efficiencies and increase innovation .

The significance of learning ICT skills of PR practitioners as well as its role in effectively completing the work was emphasized by many scholars such as (Breakenridge, 2012; Kirat 2005; 2006;2016; Sha, 2011; Wilcox, Cameron, Reber& Shin, 2013). Also, for the entry-level practitioners to have a successful job, they should be proficient in handling the huge data and information that confront them by using the ICTs. Flynn, (2014). Moreover, some scholars claimed that if an organization lacks clear regulatory frameworks, its PR practitioners will not use the ICT skills. However, the importance of offering training and support for PR practitioners is ignored by the policies. The delay in accomplishing the public relations objectives is caused by the absence of programs development that is needed for upgrading the ICT skills for the public relations employees (Macnamara, 2010; Zerfass, Fink, &Linke, 2011). Also, using the skills of social media has an important role in practising the online PR. (Wilcox, Cameron, Reber& Shin, 2013).

In a related context, Kirat (2005; 2006;2016) recommended the professional practitioner of public relations to obtain many skills such as planning, management, integrated marketing communication image building, writing, reputation management and research. While, Cernicova, Dragomir and Palea (2011) and Flynn (2014) found that communication skills are considered the most effective skills to practice online PR. Flynn (2014) states that such skills include oral, written and non-verbal skills. He affirms that well-organized research requires these skills to rank at the top of the desired skills for such research. Since public relations are communicative discipline, PR educational programs require mastering and developing the communication skills. This, of course, demands paying more attention to the professional writing through different communication channels and communication platforms. It also demands the focusing on the oral presentation skills, which can be gained through participating in group or individual activities, to promote the performance skills. Finally, mastering and developing the communication skills requires to pay more attention to the effect of the non-verbal communication on the credibility of a communicator and his/her trust relation with the recipients.

Holmes Report (2015) reveals that the online PR practice industry has different skills with different percentages. The report finds out that the skills are as flowing: 40% social media community management, 39% multimedia content creation, 39% insight and planning, 39% creativity, 31% measurement and analytics and 23% digital build and production. Due to the accelerated development of technology which affects the online PR, Watson and Sreedharan (2010) believe that the future skills of the PR practitioners and communicators should include mastering the skills and dynamics of the new media, interpreting changes and trends of the communication practices and technology, and guiding the implementations. They also believe that to obtain these skills, practitioners should have the skills of analyzing and criticizing data. In addition to the vital role of other skills such as being closer to trends especially on CSR/sustainability, having an active participation in the discourse, possessing a wider inter-disciplinary set of competencies that may help them to be equal to other senior practitioners to act as an advisor. Finally, they should have the skills of negotiation, management, relationship-building principles that can help them to communicate, manage relationships and react to the new demands.

Paskin (2013) conducts a study that raises the question of whether college students should learn public relations based on the traditional skills or according to the new demands of technology skills. The study is conducted as a survey among 113 PR specialists and professionals. The result of the study shows that despite the important increase of the technical skills, the traditional skills such as writing, communication and strategic thinking, are still valuable. The survey also reveals that PR professionals still expect graduating students to receive a solid education of the basic skills, then move to practice these skills based on the technical skills. They believe that teaching the students the skills of writing, research and planning can be conducted by using Facebook and Twitter, explaining the skills of newsletters through using graphic design and photoshop programs, and explaining crisis management skills through publishing a blog.

III. CONCLUSION

During reviewing previous Literature, most scholars focus on the importance of digital and technological skills, particularly those related to social media skills. This is because the success of public relations practice depends on the ability to communicate with the public and reach the largest possible number of them, in addition to the delivery of messages quickly and effectively, all this can happen if the practitioners have digital and ICT skills. Scholars also pointed that public relations practitioner need to have the traditional skills; these traditional skills are very necessary and complementary to online PR skills.

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