



Contents list available <http://www.kinnaird.edu.pk/>

Journal of Research & Reviews in Social Sciences Pakistan

Journal homepage: <http://journal.kinnaird.edu.pk>



EXPLORING THE ROLE OF WEB-BASED APPLICATION IN THE PUBLIC RELATIONS PROCESS

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Abstract

As social media support public relations' professionals to connect with media organizations. This is effective in good governance and the general welfare. This research study is designed in such a way to explore the role of web-based applications in the public relation process through directorate general information and the PROs of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, Pakistan. The main reason for the study is to find out which web-based application is more effective while sharing information with media by the Public Relation Officer (PRO) and Regional Information Officer (RIO). We used Hodder Entanglement Theory to design the scales of our research questions. In this study, the researcher used the quantitative method, to fill out the survey from the data gained to understand the main purposes of public awareness through media channels. The designed questionnaire has been sent to Public Relations Officers and Regional Information Officers of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Government via Press Information Department Peshawar. Currently, in total 39 PROs/RIOs are working in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Twenty-nine PROs/RIOs participated in our study. The Survey was conducted in two months, from January to the end of February in the year 2020. The researchers put all the data of the online questionnaires in SPSS and then used the descriptive analyses method to find out possible outcomes of the research questions. The findings of this research show how web-based application such as Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp is used in public relation process But WhatsApp is commonly used and is an effective Web-based Application for interacting with the national and international media tools. An average of 15 to 20 different public relations items i.e., pictures, video, images and press releases were shared in one week through WhatsApp.

Keywords

Web-based Application, Public Relation, Press/Media, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa



1. Introduction

Communication plays an important role in the survival of any media organization. It is a must that one should know how to communicate with others and how to relay a message. Thus, when we wish to achieve the desired outcome, especially, communication is need-based and a target to meet particular needs within the media organization. This required the essential to create content by organization members. To communicate with others and to collaborate with people, any organization should look at the content as well as the requirement to accelerate consumption. According to the statement by Mahmood and Yasin (2019), the current Pakistani government have taken several initiatives to promote Information Technology (IT) based governance in the country. Moreover, Mahmood and Yasin stated that various governmental departments at federal and provincial levels in Pakistan are using social media tools. However, the use of social media is also on the growth among populations for information pursuing. Possession of social media growth is deliberation in Pakistan and it creates debates around its practice online. It has been an extraordinary period that academia should initiate an investigation into this area from various perspectives. Public Relations is an important expanse, the use of social media has effective evidence. Various government departments are already using it for their PR activities but there is little literature available to provide an insight into their usage, motives and effectiveness. Therefore, here we found a research gap that this important

domain should investigate. Moreover, in Public Relation the attitude formation of targeted audiences is also very significant (Kariuki, 2017). The process of communication changes globally. People used different mediums of communication, included social media. They interact with each other through different social media channels like Facebook, IMO, WhatsApp, WeChat and YouTube. In the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, there are twenty-nine regional and central Public Relations departments. The Public Relation Officers routinely use different applications to connected to the Press (Ullah, Baber, & Rehman, 2020). In the modern age, social media has adopted the advancement and growth of media/press in Pakistan. Hence, the electronic media has played intensively an effective and informative role since the coming of the internet and social media (PR Smith, 2011). This study has been based on Public Relation departments and their operation through social media platform in KP province. The researcher's main theme and concern of wailing are to share the content with media organizations through the different tools of social media. The Public Relations department has used different channels for communications and they know that how to share information with the press. WhatsApp is one of the social media tools that are used by the departments of communication concerned. Our research study aims to bring understanding in how communication takes place between employees and organizational employees. It also sees how social media in general and WhatsApp precisely have

used in the organization based on prior studies and literature. Therefore, we tried to dig out the possible outcomes in such a communication process.

1.1 Significance of the study

The social media revolution has created a new path for Public Relations and media/press around the world. Media workers get information easily about the different acts and decisions of Public Relation departments/ organizations. This research analyzed the use and awareness of social media in the Public Relation process in Pakistan. This research will help the media/press channels that how to make their work faster and collect info effortlessly from them.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

We have three objectives that we want to find out in this research study. First, to treasure out which major web-based applications are commonly used by PRO/RIO in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during their communication process with media organizations. The second objective of our research is that how often the PRO/RIO do send the message i.e., Images, Videos, Audios and Press Releases to the Media/Press by using the different social media applications. The third objective is to analyze the opinion of the PRO staff and to check their satisfaction while using web-based Apps as a communication tool for Public Relation.

1.3 Research Question

This study contains different research questions that have been given below:

RQ1: What is the major web-based application used by PRO/RIO of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

in their communication process with media?

RQ2: How often PRO/RIO do send messages like Images, Videos, Audios and Press Releases to the Media/Press by using the different social media Apps?

RQ3: Which web-based App has been more effectively used in sharing information with the media by the PRO/RIO?

2. Literature Review

Social media has a significant role in the relationship between Public Relation and Media/Press. Many scholars like (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Henslowe, 2003; Mezzera & Sial, 2010; Motschall & Cao, 2002; Sallot & Johnson, 2006) have worked over it and they are agreed that media personnel receive info from the PR's through WhatsApp channel. The majority of the communication needs that exist have been met through digital communication platforms. Users already know somewhat how to use these for the good of the organization and these platforms have become significant (Kariuki, 2017). According to Mishaal and Abu-Shanab (2015), Public Relations is an important expanse where social media use can be demonstrated very effectively. Various governmental departments are already using it for their Public Relation activities but there is only limited literature accessible to provide an insight into their usage, motives and effectiveness. Which important domain has usually been neglected by them? Moreover, in Public Relation the attitude formation of the target audience is also very important nowadays (Mishaal & Abu-Shanab,

2015) Kariuki (2017) added more than smartphones have seen to accelerate people's conversations within the working environment Worldwide. There are different reasons included portable, easy to use and come with applications that enable people to connect virtually regardless of their location. Diga and Kelleher (2009) found in their research that public relations experts who have used social networking sites find themselves better positioned to perform their duties as PR experts because social media enabled them to remain engaged with the clients and audiences. Similarly, the prospect to achieve higher positions in their organizations also increases if they have more ability to use social media as a Public Relation tool. They must observe the role that new communication technologies could play in their job including social media (Theaker, 2020). In different countries around the world, social media has become the main channel of communication in governance. In the United States, especially the Obama administration relied heavily on the use of this medium. The impact of social media in other countries may vary depending upon governance culture and availability of information technology to the grass root level (Mahmood & Yasin, 2019; Martin, Rice, & Arthur, 2020). Smartphone's technology comes with the capability of Apps installation and the owners install it according to their needs. Some of these Apps are communication mediums such as Telegram and WhatsApp that are designs specifically for smartphones. Both offer mobile instant messaging and WhatsApp has more users than Telegram (Freier, 2016). WhatsApp platform

offers a wide array of opportunities for the users. It provides a stage for entertainment, education, collaboration and instantaneous sharing of information as well as maintenance of a community (Shridevi & Govindaraju, 2018). It is unlike the network operator's short message service (SMS) where the message is delivered to the recipient with or without their consent. WhatsApp gives the message recipient the flexibility to accept or reject messages from different receivers. In addition, WhatsApp has the capability of group formation where a message can reach different beneficiaries. The maximum number of group members that WhatsApp can accommodate currently stands at 256 (Ali, Bali, Raja, Khalid, & Irfan, 2019). WhatsApp is a mobile phone messaging service that operates via the use of smartphones. The service which began in 2009 by Brian Acton and Jan Koum enables users to send text messages, photos, videos and documents. WhatsApp's appeal amongst its users to attribute its capability and features. According to Sultan (2014), in an investigation related to mobile text, it has commonly been suggested by him that users of WhatsApp turn to it as a medium that enables them to keep in contact with family members and friends. In addition, it is a tool for entertainment and acquiring information online. As a part of its uses, WhatsApp has the capability of sending locations to the recipients (Church & De Oliveira, 2013). In the same study, it was found that one of the benefits of using WhatsApp includes its affordability. The cost has been perceived as a factor that influences people's behaviour when choosing which medium

to use in distribution communications. Secondly, WhatsApp has been seen to give them a sense of connection to the operators. Social networking sites remain an important medium for maintaining social connections i.e., WhatsApp leftovers a key platform for creating and upholding social connections amongst staff inside any organization (Ledbetter *et al.*, 2011).

3. Theoretical Framework

The researchers used Hodder's entanglement theory in this study. It has been based on three 'axioms': humans depend on things; effects depend on other things and possessions depend on humans. The relationship between humans and things is of a dialectic kind, humans and things, this is too colloquial constantly moving closer and further away from each other (Hodder, 2012). However, this transition is not only a transition between two entities, yet still entails the existence of a third entity. Objects and entities have been recognized in this system, but it is also, what defines possession, an important term in social archaeology. When someone walks away from an item, going closer to an item connects me with it and defines me as an individual object. Hodder provides an extensive array of examples of how things have connected to other things. Although he never refers to any authors of the so-called object-oriented philosophies, his approach clearly shows some of the same characteristics. The list of things, something like Ian Bogost (2012, p. 38) has labelled the term 'Latour litanies', is an effective way to remind the readers of how things are surrounded by other things. It is known that

intimately things depend on other things even in such a simple operation as fire making, not to mention the up to 20,000 parts needed for a modern car to function, both Hodder's examples of entanglement. Things have connected in various ways. In fact, Hodder uses the term 'thing' as synonymous with 'drawing together'. Things not only draw together people but other things as well. Hodder discusses the word 'network' in describing the ways objects have linked. In the view of Hodder, 'network' means so much dependency (as in 'it depends'), the public relations process in KP province also strongly depended on WhatsApp because PR's processing the content, news information through WhatsApp to media/press. Dodds (2019) has used in his research study and analyses the Hodder entanglement theory to examines the role of WhatsApp in reporting. In this revision, the researchers also suggested that Hodder entanglement theory also adores the current study.

4. Methodology

The scholars have used the Quantitative research method in this study. It focused on survey and questionnaire has distributed thoroughly to the participants of Directorate General Information and PROs of KP province. To understand the feasibility of web-based Apps and to allow them to use them for their main purposes of public awareness through media/press. The researcher's focus is the WhatsApp tool and to investigate that how much beneficial this App is in the activity and practices of the competent departments of public information. In addition, to know that how much advantage

social media is to them in the accessibility of easily availing information to media/press.

4.1 Data collection tool

The scholars used an online questionnaire for data collection. The designed questionnaire has been sent to all the Public Relation Officers and Regional Information Officers of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Government and we assemble the statistics with help of the Press Information Department, Peshawar. Currently total there are eight RIOs and thirty-one PROs working in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. We fill out the survey from 29 out of 39 who participated in the study.

4.2 Time zone

The Survey has conducted in the two months from January to February in 2020.

4.3 Descriptive analyses

The researcher put all the data of the online questionnaires in SPSS and then used descriptive

analyses to find out possible answers to the research questions of this study.

4.4 Data Analyses

Total 35 PROs and RIOs has been contacted for the study; only 29 participants agreed and filled out the online questionnaire. Data has been gathered through a designed online questionnaire and it has been subjected to frequency counts. In other words, the subjects' responses for each individual question were added together to find the highest frequency of occurrence i.e., the number of times that a particular response occurs. These responses to the questions, which has been quantified, and then they have been presented in percentage forms. This analysis has been presented in tabular form. The researcher uses tables containing a variable and, in some cases, combines two or more variables that have been put together in a single table.

Table 1: Total Event reported in a week as a PRO/RIO

| Events Reported Per week | Frequency | Per cent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|--------------------------|-----------|----------|---------------|--------------------|
| 4.00 | 2 | 6.9 | 6.9 | 6.9 |
| 5.00 | 4 | 13.8 | 13.8 | 20.7 |
| 6.00 | 2 | 6.9 | 6.9 | 27.6 |
| 7.00 | 2 | 6.9 | 6.9 | 34.5 |
| 9.00 | 3 | 10.3 | 10.3 | 44.8 |
| 10.00 | 7 | 24.1 | 24.1 | 69.0 |
| 10.15 | 2 | 6.9 | 6.9 | 75.9 |
| 12.00 | 2 | 6.9 | 6.9 | 82.8 |
| 18.00 | 2 | 6.9 | 6.9 | 89.7 |
| 20.00 | 3 | 10.3 | 10.3 | 100.0 |
| Total | 29 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Table 1 shows that the majority (24) of the respondents share 10 stories/ Press items with media on a weekly basis, 4 items per week is the

lowest number, and 20 items per week are the highest number of news items shared in one week. The average number of news items share with

media/ press is 10 items per week. The press information departments of KP province, their works to cover different events and share press conferences, press releases, hand-outs and press

notes with media. All the participants have agreed that they share pictures and written press releases. The remaining contents are an average share by the information departments.

Table 2: On average, how often do they send items to the Media/Press in a week?

| | Not Shared | 1-5 Items | 6-10 items | 11-15 items | 16-20 items | 21-25 Items | 26-30 Items | 30 and more | Total |
|----------------------|-------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| Pictures | 0.0% | 2 6.9% | 13 44.8% | 8 27.6% | 3 10.3% | 1 3.4% | 1 3.4% | 1 3.4% | 29 100.0% |
| Press Releases | 0.0% | 1 3.4% | 11 37.9% | 14 48.3% | 3 10.3% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 29 100.0% |
| News Tickers | 0.0% | 3 10.3% | 10 34.5% | 8 27.6% | 2 6.9% | 4 13.8% | 1 3.4% | 1 3.4% | 29 100.0% |
| Audios | 20 69.0% | 7 24.1% | 2 6.9% | 0 0.0% | 0 0.0% | 0 0.0% | 0 0.0% | 0 0.0% | 29 100.0% |
| Videos | 5 17.2% | 9 31.0% | 11 37.9% | 3 10.3% | 1 3.4% | 0 0.0% | 0 0.0% | 0 0.0% | 29 100.0% |
| Social Media Posters | 4 13.8% | 4 13.8% | 10 34.5% | 3 10.3% | 3 10.3% | 3 10.3% | 1 3.4% | 1 3.4% | 29 100.0% |

Table 2, shows that the majority of participants shared 6-15 pictures per week to media/press. On average, 10 pictures per week are shared with the media/press. The same table further stated that on average 10 written press releases were shared with media/press a week. The ticker includes a highlight of the News that consists of the dateline, body and sources. Moreover, the news items have been properly completed and then shared by the PROs/RIOs with the media/press. However, the participants of the studies did not share audio items with the press. This Table also showed that the majority (20) of the respondents did not Share the audio news items, thus the majority is not agreed to segment the audio news with media/press. It is a voice of the prominent to share on voice tools

option like WhatsApp. The visual content of any event is covered by the information departments; the Public Relation Officers give planning and guide the agenda according to the purpose of the event. However, the majority of the respondents share visuals with the media/press. The majority of the participants (24) share the video content, with an average of 10 videos with media/press items in a week. About 19 of the respondents share social media posters and the regular 10 of social media picture has shared by PROs/RIOs with the media/press. Social media image poster i.e. means to make them aware to the public regarding the event. Sometimes the Public Information Department wants people to know about the current situation in welfare societies. Social media banners

and posters are playing a vital and important role in these conditions. The researchers tried to find which social media application is more effective and used during the sharing of information with

media/press. Social media is a large and dynamic platform for sharing information within a second with media.

Table 3: illustrates which social media application is more effective and is commonly used during the sharing of information with media.

| | Not Answer | Not Used | lass Effective | Neutral | Effective | Most Effective | Total |
|-------------------|------------|----------|----------------|---------|-----------|----------------|--------|
| Facebook | 2 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 17 | 2 | 29 |
| | 6.9% | 13.8% | 6.9% | 6.9% | 58.6% | 6.9% | 100.0% |
| Twitter | 7 | | 4 | 7 | 11 | | 29 |
| | 24.1% | 0.0% | 13.8% | 24.1% | 37.9% | 0.0% | 100.0% |
| WhatsApp | | | | | 12 | 17 | 29 |
| | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 41.4% | 58.6% | 100.0% |
| Podcasting | 7 | 15 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 29 |
| | 24.1% | 51.7% | 6.9% | 10.3% | 6.9% | 0.0% | 100.0% |
| YouTube | 5 | 6 | 2 | 3 | 11 | 2 | 29 |
| | 17.2% | 20.7% | 6.9% | 10.3% | 37.9% | 6.9% | 100.0% |
| Podcasting | 2 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 12 | 6 | 29 |
| | 6.9% | 13.8% | 6.9% | 10.3% | 41.4% | 20.7% | 100.0% |
| Official Websites | 5 | 11 | 2 | 2 | 9 | 0 | 29 |
| | 17.2% | 37.9% | 6.9% | 6.9% | 31.0% | 0.0% | 100.0% |

Table 3 demonstrate that common participants use Facebook for sharing news items, and the data displays that the PROs/RIOs practice WhatsApp as an effective tool in sharing news items with media/press. It also disclosed that respondents (11) used Twitter to share information, and data confirmation proved that the Twitter is effectively used by PROs/RIOs for sharing news items with media/press. WhatsApp tool has been used as an effective application for Public relations. The data displays that WhatsApp Application is useful in sharing news items. The members (29) of the data have agreed that WhatsApp is an actual and the most well used by the PROs/RIOs to share news

information with the media/press. The PROs/RIOs did not use Podcasting in the Public Relations process. According to the data indications, the majority of data respondents (22) have neither answered nor used Podcasting to share news items with media/press. Only 11 contributors used YouTube for sharing news items, the data displays that the PROs/RIOs has used YouTube for the distribution of news information efficiently with the media/press. The statistics show that the majority of respondents (12) use the official websites for allocation news items with media/press. The majority (16) of the participants did not use personal blogs for sharing material with media/press.

Table 4: The contributor usually uses WhatsApp for Public Relations, scale its effectiveness.

| Scale of Effectiveness | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| 1-6 | 0 | 00 | 0 | 00 |
| 7 | 5 | 17.2 | 17.2 | 17.2 |
| 8 | 6 | 20.7 | 20.7 | 37.9 |
| 9 | 10 | 34.5 | 34.5 | 72.4 |
| 10 | 8 | 27.6 | 27.6 | 100.0 |
| Total | 29 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Table 4, expresses that either WhatsApp has been used less successfully or more meritoriously and the scale of the table for less active operators for distribution news items is 1-5 and for more active operators for distribution news items is 6-10. Thus, the data displays that all participants use WhatsApp to share news items with media/press, it further shows that WhatsApp is an effective as well as a well-used tool considered by the Public Information Departments for allocation information to media/press. All of the participants state that the social media tool WhatsApp is more dominantly used than the other tools. Facebook is informative for receiving local public sphere data and twitter is used for official information and news to share views and opinions.

5. Discussion

The findings of this research include the types of contents of information Public Relations Departments share how they learn to connect with media/press, and how to plan to post for their social media platforms. Social media help operators to receive data faster and by keeping reliable media content from PR's. When it comes to detailed discussion, these all-public relations participants have used the social media Apps for sharing information press releases with media/press. They

are interconnected through social apps and the advantage of WhatsApp is to make in groups of contacts; a message is received at the same time. They also make sure to give feedback questions of the receiver, concerns, and complaints. In this way, build a positive relationship between the PR's and media/press. The purpose is potentially improving the reputation of the content and credibility of the PR's professionals. The main social media apps that public relations professionals used were Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, official websites, YouTube and personal blogs.

5.1 Practical implication

As the world has become a global village, the technology developed day by day in communication is processing more effectively in the digital media. Public Relations offices used social media tools as a medium of communication to share News information content with the media/press. This study is based on the relationship between public relations and WhatsApp usages. The result of this study shows a positive relationship between WhatsApp and public relations, and the social media application (WhatsApp) is used more effectively by public relations government departments in KP with media/press.

5.2 Theoretical implications

The researcher Thomas (2019) used Hodder's entanglement theory in the study in "reporting with WhatsApp". He suggests that WhatsApp is effectively used in the Journalistic process. The results of this study also show that WhatsApp is also more effective use in the public relations process in KP. This study will also contribute to the literature because this theory uses the first time in PR's process.

5.3 Limitation of the study

In our research, we have examined the press releases of public information departments distributed to the media/press. The press releases have been sent in several ways before the social media apps and media/press received through specific sources or before they have been used by special reporters who collect the press releases and news from public relations departments. In the era of digitalization, people have connected with each other from across borders through social media applications. PRO used WhatsApp for sharing press releases and News with media/press. According to the collection of data, WhatsApp has been more effectively used between PR's and media/press in KP.

5.4 Future direction for research

The study contributes to a better understanding of the new environment of communication of the success of social media, the importance of social media used as a channel in media and the reasons why PR is to adopt social media usage. The researcher examined how the WhatsApp tool has more effectively been used in PR's of KP. Whenever in the future researchers want to

investigate the same tool, which is WhatsApp in other provinces. This research will assist them in their direction of work and will help them design their questionnaire as well as offers a methodology.

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