

Integration of Social Media Platforms in Public Relations Practices: A Study of the Indian PR Industry

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Abstract: In recent years, social media has completely disrupted established modes of communication, making it an essential tool for both professional and personal use on a global scale. In public relations (PR), the advent of social media has reshaped the landscape, forcing practitioners to adapt their strategies and practices to capitalize on its potential. This study examines the extent to which social media platforms have been adopted by PR professionals in the Indian PR industry and examines their usage patterns. Traditionally, PR activities have relied on traditional media channels for client service, media relations, and communications. However, the advent of social media has prompted a significant shift in PR practices. This study examines the adoption of social media platforms among Indian PR professionals and aims to identify the most used platforms. This research uses an exploratory approach and draws on existing literature. Moreover, this article uses primary research to examine how public relations practitioners in India utilize and perceive social media, including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, as part of their PR strategies and practices. This research examines the rising role of online platforms in India's public relations sector by surveying professionals in the field and reviewing additional data. The findings of this study underscore the widespread adoption of social media platforms by PR practitioners in India and highlight their integration into PR activities. In addition, the research reveals the different roles that social media platforms play in facilitating internal and external communication within PR organizations. Finally, the results indicate that PR tactics in India's PR business now heavily use online platforms. By embracing social media platforms, PR professionals can increase their effectiveness in engaging with stakeholders and navigating the evolving media landscape.

Keywords: Online platforms, Public relations, media professionals, social networks, internal and external communications, media usage, social media platforms.

Introduction

In today's world, social media has taken society by storm. The way people work and live has been transformed by it. Moreover, it has become an indispensable part of the life of each of us. Social media leaves no profession or industry untouched, yet communication professionals have the maximum impact. The term "social media" refers to a broad category of online tools that enable users to build and participate in online communities while also sharing and curating information on topics of interest to them. The rise of online platforms has changed everything

for public relations experts, who must now adjust their methods and approaches to make the most of these new platforms. This study examines the extent to which social media platforms have been adopted by PR professionals in the Indian PR industry and explores their usage patterns. Traditionally, PR activities relied on traditional media channels for client service, media relations, communication, and other PR activities. However, the advent of social media has prompted a significant shift in PR practices.

This study examines the adoption of social media platforms among Indian PR professionals and aims to identify the most used platforms. This research uses an exploratory approach and draws on existing literature. Additionally, this article utilizes primary data to examine how PR professionals in the Indian context use and perceive online platforms, including Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook, as part of their PR strategies and practices. This research examines the increasing role and penetration of social networks in India's public relations sector by means of a survey for primary data and an examination of additional information.

The findings of this study underscore the widespread adoption of social media platforms by PR practitioners in India and highlight their integration into PR activities. In addition, the research reveals the different roles that social media platforms play in facilitating internal and external communication within PR organizations in the Indian PR industry. By embracing social media platforms, PR professionals have been increasing their effectiveness in engaging stakeholders and navigating the evolving media landscape.

The influence of social media

A new social architecture has emerged as a result of social media. It influenced people's daily lives and careers. Although the rise of social media has affected every sector of society, those working in the field of communication have felt its effects the most acutely. Using Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook as case studies, this article examined how public relations experts utilize and perceive these platforms. Answering the following research questions was the major focus of this paper:

- (i) Has the rise of online platforms altered the role of public relations experts?

- (ii) Does public relations use only one online networking site?
- (iii) Determine whether public relations professionals benefit from or suffer from online platforms.

This article aimed to address these three problems by delving into novel social media PR features. The study's participants were public relations experts from big agencies in the Delhi and NCR areas.

From the dawn of recorded history till the present day, anthropologists claim that the dynamics among rulers and their followers have played a pivotal role in shaping historical events. In the past, these connections were crucial to major developments. The significance of these connections was quickly realized by leaders, who sought to strengthen them by establishing stronger ties with their followers. Since an open society requires no barriers to the open exchange of knowledge, these principles formed the basis of politics (Kellner, 1995). A subfield of journalists and mass media, or public relations developed throughout time to methodically meet this need in democracies. Bernays (1952) covered every single of the ground rules of PR:

Informing, convincing, and integrating people are the three pillars of public relations that have been around for almost as long as civilization itself. Of course, as society evolved, so were the ways in which these aims were to be accomplished. Ideas are disseminated in today's technologically evolved society by various media such as daily newspapers, weekly magazines, films, radio, and broadcast (pp. 11-17).

A brand-new social networking site seems to pop up every other day, taking over some of the more established ones. Social networking sites like LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, Google Plus, and many more have seen meteoric rises in popularity in recent years. Many other instant messaging apps have emerged in response to WhatsApp, which has recently been popular among social media users. These include Line, Viber, WeChat, Kik, Kakao, and many more. This is a difficult situation that puts a strain on public relations and communications experts. Finding out how many public relations experts use various social media platforms is

the main goal of this research.

One of a public relations practitioner's functions is to relay information from upper management to lower-level staff, as described by Clear and Weideman (2001). "The public relations worker should always communicate with employees through appropriate internal communication channels and not through mass communication media aimed at a wide and diverse audience" was part of their discussion on the process's channel relevance (Annette Clear, 1997).

These days, no public relations professional can afford to spend even a single hour without any kind of electronic device. Be online at all times. A great number of PR firms have jumped on the bandwagon for the newest online networking sites (Eyrich, 2008).

More than 62 million Indians use online platforms, with the figure projected to reach 80 million, according to a research released by The Hindu on 11 April 2013 and performed jointly by the Mobile and Internet Association of India (IAMAI) and the IRIS Knowledge Foundation. It was just before the 2014 legislative elections. The most crucial fact is that 97% of them are Instagram users. Results from a longitudinal trend analysis that followed PR pros from 2009 to 2012 indicated that while "Facebook the most important new communication medium for public relations messages" (Wright, Hinson 2011).

As a general rule, communicators mediate disputes by relaying information from one party to another. On the part of consumers, groups, or companies, they are required to communicate promptly and openly at all times. They are expanding their toolbox to include social media in order to fulfill these expectations and demands. Depending on factors such as the other party's traits and choices, the reason for the communication, the kind of message, etc., they use a certain instrument or communicating platform to reach out to a particular interested topic.

If we want to keep unforeseen crises at bay, we need to be very thorough and precise while selecting a communication platform or tool. With an emphasis on the aforementioned process, this research sought to investigate the most popular social media networks. Also covered was the present status of the shift from conventional to social media marketing, with an emphasis on public relations experts. Additionally, the media mix that these experts had created was studied.

Public relations and online platforms researchers have already spent a lot of time discussing the many parts of this issue, so it's not as novel or difficult as it seems. The goal was to go further into topics where digital platforms and other forms of ICT have had a big impact. The PR industry isn't the only one that gets a lot of criticism; still, the stakes, level of engagement, and time pressure are far higher.

Objectives

- To study the impact of social media platforms on Indian PR practitioners.
- To study the usefulness of social media platforms among PR professionals in India.
- To compare the functioning before and after the emergence of social media in the Indian PR industry.

Research questions

In order to make the initial study topics more targeted, they are further separated.

RQ1: Is public relations now different because of online platforms?

- (i) Is it anything they're thinking about doing to utilize online platforms for work?
- (ii) Is it true that they utilize every tool simultaneously?

RQ2: Does public relations use a preferred networking platform?

- (i) Is there a particular online platforms tool or platform that they prefer?
- (ii) How do they decide which technologies to use for various audiences?

RQ3: For public relations experts, is online platforms more of a boon or a bane?

- (i) Has their toolbox been enriched by online platforms?
- (ii) Does their perception of their audience's faith in online platforms outweigh that of conventional media?

The viewpoints of public relations practitioners on the role of online platforms in the field were also an aim of this study. Additionally, it inquired as to whether or not they saw a danger to conventional media as a result of the transition to online platforms.

Method

A questionnaire with a Likert scale with five points was developed to serve as the main instrument for the research. Almost every public relations firm or PR wing in India has either its headquarters in Delhi or an office there, making the national capital region (NCR) a prime location for business. We looked at public relations firms and individuals in the Delhi/National Capital Region area to ensure that our sample was as representative as possible.

A total of seventy-five public relations experts from respectable PR firms and divisions in the Delhi and NCR areas were contacted via email and in-person visits to gather data for the study. Out of the 75 people that took the poll, 63 actually finished it.

Respondents were provided with explicit instructions prior to completing the survey. There was a singular emphasis across the fifteen questions on professional social media use, user perceptions and experiences with the tools, and the value of these platforms to the public relations industry.

Analysis and findings

Statistics was examined with the help of SPSS. Of the 63 people who filled out the survey, 42 were male and 21 were female. The bulk of responders belonged to one of three age brackets spanning 30–44, while there were few outliers. The survey consisted of fifteen questions; the initial eight probed respondents' views on the PR industry's usage, function, and trustworthiness of online platforms. Seven more inquiries focused on how respondents put social media platforms like Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook to use in their work lives. A Likert scale with five points was used to develop the survey. From the list of five alternatives, please choose the one that best describes you. Additionally, participants were informed that if they checked more than one item, their responses would not be included in the final results. Tables containing respondent demographics are provided below:

Table 1. Gender

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid percent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Male	42	66.7	66.7	66.7
	Female	21	33.3	33.3	100.0
	Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Table 2. Age Group

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	25-29	11	17.5	17.5	17.5
	30-34	14	22.2	22.2	39.7
	35-39	23	36.5	36.5	76.2
	40-44	10	15.9	15.9	92.1
	45 and above	5	7.9	7.9	100.0
	Total	63	100.0	100.0	

RQ 1. *Was the way public relations experts used to work changed by online platforms?*

A total of two surveys on the survey that sought to gauge public relations experts' thoughts on the subject of whether or not online platforms has altered their work processes. One inquiry probed specifically for this, while the other probed for general information about how the company's various divisions work. The majority of those who took the survey think that the online platform has altered public relations practices. Table 3 shows that the percentage of respondents who disagree with the declaration was quite small. Table 4 shows that 87.3% of respondents agreed, with no one objecting, that digital platforms has altered the workflow of all company's divisions. A small percentage (12.7%) were unsure. While 63.5% of people who took the survey admit to using all three platforms simultaneously, 36.5% claim they've never done so in order to reach their demographic (Table 5).

Table 3. Do you agree or disagree that social media has changed the way PR industry worked?

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	1	1.6	1.6	1.6
	Disagree	4	6.3	6.3	7.9
	Neutral	19	30.2	30.2	38.1
	Agree	20	31.7	31.7	69.8
	Strongly Agree	19	30.2	30.2	100.0
	Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Table 4. What are your thoughts on the idea that online platforms has revolutionized the way : company's many divisions operate?

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Neutral	8	12.7	12.7	12.7
	Agree	30	47.6	47.6	60.3
	Strongly Agree	25	39.7	39.7	100.0
	Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Table 5. Are you a Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook user who uses all three for work related conversations?

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Never	23	36.5	36.5	36.5

Rarely	29	46.0	46.0	82.5
Sometimes	11	17.5	17.5	100.0
Total	63	100.0	100.0	

RQ 2: *Is there a preferred online platforms tool or platform among public relations professionals?*

Given the difficulty of determining the best means of reaching a certain demographic, this study surveyed public relations professionals for their thoughts on the matter. On the other hand, 38% of people said that diverse demographics should be engaged using tailored social networking channels that address their individual requirements for communication. Table 6 shows that although 35.4% were in agreement, 25.4% were ambivalent.

Table 6. What are your thoughts on the idea that various demographics should be reached via tailored social networking channels to meet their distinct information needs?

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	4	6.3	6.3	6.3
	Disagree	20	31.7	31.7	38.1
	Neutral	23	36.5	36.5	74.6
	Agree	14	22.2	22.2	96.8
	Strongly Agree	2	3.2	3.2	100.0
	Total	63	100.0	100.0	

RQ 3: *When it comes to public relations, do you see online platforms as a help or a hindrance?*

Even seasoned experts are finding it challenging to keep up with the rapid evolution of social media and related information and communication technologies (ICT). According to Table 7, 69.8% of those who took the survey agreed that social media had helped advance the field. According to Table 8, over 90% of respondents believed that online platforms had simplified the work of public relations professionals, while 0% disagreed. According to 66.7% of those who took the survey, public relations professionals should prioritize using social media platforms like Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook above more conventional forms of communication. Table 9 shows that not a single one of them refuted the claim. According to Table 10, 68.3% of persons who were surveyed did not feel that social media is more trustworthy than conventional media. In response to the question of whether their target audience trusts Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook, 84.1% of respondents said that's the case (Table 11). While 20.6% of respondents agreed and 36.5% objected, 42.9% were undecided or indifferent when asked whether online platforms may overtake conventional mainstream media (Table 12).

Table 7. Is the idea that online networking has improved PR services something you agree with or disagree with?

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Disagree	5	7.9	7.9	7.9
	Neutral	14	22.2	22.2	30.2
	Agree	23	36.5	36.5	66.7

Strongly Agree	21	33.3	33.3	100.0
Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Table 8. To what extent do you think online platforms has simplified the work of public relations experts?

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Neutral	6	9.5	9.5	9.5
	Agree	25	39.7	39.7	49.2
	Strongly Agree	32	50.8	50.8	100.0
	Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Table 9. In your opinion, conventional media techniques still have their place, but social media platforms like Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook have become indispensable for public relations professionals?

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Rarely	21	33.3	33.3	33.3
	Sometimes	19	30.2	30.2	63.5
	Often	23	36.5	36.5	100.0
	Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Table 10. Do you think that online platforms has a higher level of trust than more conventional forms of media?

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	16	25.4	25.4	25.4
	Disagree	27	42.9	42.9	68.3
	Neutral	15	23.8	23.8	92.1
	Agree	5	7.9	7.9	100.0
	Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Table 11. In your opinion, how reliable are social media platforms like Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook in reaching YOUR demographic?

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Rarely	1	1.6	1.6	1.6
	Sometimes	9	14.3	14.3	15.9
	Often	13	20.6	20.6	36.5
	Always	40	63.5	63.5	100.0
	Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Table 12. In your opinion, does digital platforms pose a threat to the dominance of more conventional forms of current news coverage?

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	4	6.3	6.3	6.3
	Disagree	19	30.2	30.2	36.5
	Neutral	27	42.9	42.9	79.4

Agree	13	20.6	20.6	100.0
Total	63	100.0	100.0	

Discussion

Researchers in this research set out to learn how PR pros use various social media platforms. Since the field of public relations and related technologies are developing at a dizzying rate, it is crucial to gauge PR pros' attitudes and usage of social media right now. It is more pertinent to examine the online platform use and adoption of public relations professionals as they are in the communication field. Insights about the present and future of online platforms and public relations may be gained from this research, which also helps to comprehend the present condition of the two. The survey was concise, easy to understand, and accurately measured using a Likert scale with five points. The result was a reasonable response rate.

The study addressed all of the research topics and touched on a few more. The investigation yielded some intriguing results. People have less faith in online platforms than they have in more conventional forms of news reporting, according to the majority of respondents. Despite the fact that conventional news outlets are often consulted after online platforms for confirmation. Because online platforms has become an essential component of the success or failure of any brand, business, or organization in the modern day, the third research question sought to identify whether or not PR professionals find digital network to be an asset to their work. Nevertheless, the main objective was to gain insight into how PR practitioners use and perceive social media. Based on the responses to RQ 1, it is evident that PR professionals acknowledge the ways in which the internet has transformed their job. It seems like they also reached a consensus that it has revolutionized every function in any firm, not simply public relations. It would be fascinating to see how other sectors, like production or healthcare, are being impacted by social media. The majority of those polled also held the opinion that different target populations should be targeted using tailored social media platforms to meet their individual communication requirements, which is an opposing viewpoint. But if you followed the previous sentence, it would all make a lot more sense. Everyone involved—the communicator, the group, and the receiver—would benefit more if they used the right instrument for the job.

Conclusion

This study's results show that PR pros utilize online platforms for work-related purposes. The public relations industry may require some time to adjust to the new medium and make it work for their purposes. Although many organizations and corporations are still hesitant to embrace and use digital platforms, it has become an integral aspect of business plans for multinationals and major enterprises. The social media phenomena is fraught with mystery because of all the unknowns—its hidden components, probabilities, expectations, and potential outcomes. The study's three research questions probed public relations experts' perspectives on the use and acceptance of digital platforms. In conclusion, public relations experts are making excellent use of online platforms, and the medium's future is bright thanks to the numerous new applications and platforms it will inevitably bring.

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