
DIGITAL MEDIA- A NEW FACE OF PR

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Abstract The history of Public relation has followed a traditional path (Above the Line techniques) up until the introduction of the Internet. As the internet grew, so did different forms of public relations, specifically social media. Social media includes any and all public relation tactics that are user-created and shared freely. Some of these outlets include Facebook, twitter, audio and video text, all of which are mostly shared and discussed digital. The web is an increasingly important component of public relation. Organizations use websites to build relationships with key publics and they can provide a variety of organizational information and services to a diverse group of stake holders. The web enables publics to be active and selective in their exposure to marketing, advertising and public relation messages. This paper explores the changes that have been brought about in the field of public relation with the advent and developments of the digital medium.

Keywords: Digital media, Above the line media, PR practices, Social media

Introduction

Public Relations (PR) is the practice of managing the spread of information between an individual and an organization. Public relations specialists establish and maintain relationships with an organization's target audience, the media, and other. Common activities include designing communications campaigns, writing news releases and other content for news and feature articles, working with the press, arranging interviews for company spokespeople, writing speeches for company leaders, acting as organization's spokesperson by speaking in public and public officials, preparing clients for press conferences, media interviews, and speeches, writing website and social media content, facilitating internal/employee communications, and managing company reputation and marketing activities like

brand awareness and event management.

Different mediums used by Public Relation includes the above the line(ATL) media and digital media. The old Media or Legacy Media are traditional means of communication that have existed since before the advent of the new medium of the Internet. Industries that are generally considered part of the old media are broadcast and cable television, radio, movie and music studios, newspapers, magazines, books and most print publications. On the other hand, the digital medium just consists of the internet which has changed the face of communication on this planet.

If the above two types of mediums are to be compared. Then above the line PR tactics involve getting strategic coverage in credible news sources by important thought leaders or other external sources that help to promote a company's reputation or its brand.

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Common forms of this PR-press releases, press conferences, news programs and speeches-convey information from the company to its intended audience without getting much feedback in return from the intended audience.

Digital PR methods focus on using digital methods of communication and distribution to convey important information or news about a company. Social platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Linked In are popular outlets for digital PR, but company blogs, direct emails and all digital news outlets are also great channels. This creates more of a two-way street with the audience since any information a company distributes digitally allows viewers to enter the conversation by commenting on the post, tweeting or sharing. The two types of PR are likely to reach different audiences. Above the line PR strategies include traditional media, like newspapers and magazines, which reach an extended readership beyond their digital counterparts. Digital PR coverage, which appears entirely digital, takes advantage of search rankings and links within coverage to connect readers to a company's website and product pages.

With the trend towards multimedia news releases, the demands to have multimedia elements available for inclusion in such releases have grown. Public relations practitioners are responsible for either coordinating production, or actually producing this material, and the budgets and skills bases of public relations units may need to be reviewed to accommodate these new demands. This trend may be setting up new expectations for content provision that smaller or non-profit organizations may not be able to easily meet and this has the potential to diminish the share of voice that less well-funded organizations

receive. There is also the need to consider whether target publics have access to new media technologies such as the Internet which becomes an issue when communication strategies target publics without such access due to geographic or socio-economic factors. All public relations practitioners are needed to keep abreast of emerging media and many may already be undertaking public relations planning, implementation and evaluation in unfamiliar media areas.

Significance of the Study

The main focus of this study is to find out the current scenario of Public relation in our country and what changes has been adopted by the public relation practitioners in respect to the media when they are reaching out to the audience. The study also focusses on the ratio of people inclined towards the above the line media to the ratio of people inclined towards the digital media. On a global level, the studies have shown that brands prefer digital PR over above the line PR because it has a wider reach as compared to the latter. Also, with the advancement in technology people have lesser time now to read news on a newspaper or use traditional methods to give views about a brand. A major portion of the population use digital media due to mobility of that medium and due to lack of time. So, the main objective of this study is to find out whether in India as well, the digital media has taken over the above the line media?

Research Methodology

The research design that was adopted during this research work was Exploratory. Primary data was collected and studied. Quantitative data was collected with the help of questionnaire.

The data was collected from a sample of 100 people within the age group of 20-25 years. The research area was Delhi-NCR for a duration of 3 months

Objectives

To find out,

- Whether the rise of digital media has affected the popularity of above the line media.
- Whether the target audience is happy with this transition in the medium.
- How effective is it to reach the audiences through digital media.
- What features of Digital media, are making it so popular.

Hypothesis

Till the advent and development of digital media, above the line media was used for public relation activities. But ever since, digital media has gained popularity among the audiences, PR professionals prefer to use this medium to reach out to their target audiences. The hypothesis of this study can be formulated as-

- H1- There is a change in the way public relation practices are conducted because of the rise and popularity of digital media among the audiences.
- H2- The transition in the type of medium, if there is, is because of the target audience. They now prefer to be reached digitally instead of the earlier methods.

Review of Literature

Galloway (2005) puts forward that conventional techniques of public relations are being undermined by the mobile nature of new media and that this requires public relations practitioners to rethink how they relate to publics. Internet news services are not just relying on the news wire services but turning Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal, Vol. 8 increasingly to other places for raw materials. Public relations practitioners would be aware that 'transcripts, reports and budgets are regularly being placed on the Web, either by organizations

themselves or by citizens trying to hold those organizations to account' (Stephens 2007, p. 35). Consumers expect instant updates in their inboxes when something happens. Public relations practitioners may be under more pressure to produce this instant content.

Several scholars have explored the use of social media in public relations. Eyrichetal (2008) surveyed 283 public relation practitioners and discovered that email was the most heavily relied form of social media. The authors found while public relation professions have adopted more established tools such as e-mail and internet, they have yet to fully embrace more advanced tools such as social marketing and virtual world.

PR news online started their PR digital report earlier this year and is now regularly covering stories on issues such as logging, online communities and podcasting. Only a few years back it would have seemed unlikely to many practitioners to have to plan a campaign components to embrace website possibilities such as YouTube and MySpace but it is evident that many organisations and now even election campaigns are doing just that.

Majority of the netizens are addicted to social media. With over 1.49 billion Facebook users, 850 million Facebook groups, 380 million LinkedIn users, 304 million Twitter users (Statista, 2015) it is evident that the future of social media is bright. Hence, companies have to utilize the valuable features of social media for corporate communication or else they will be left behind while their competitors are stealing the online limelight.

According to a study in Media watch, by Dr. Manish Verma, Public Relation professionals around the world today are exposed to a range of new

communication channels. Web-based media tools like blogs, podcasts, online videos and social networks have become a platform or voicing opinions for people around the globe. Although mainstream media is playing the main role in dissemination of information even then, the social or new media are influencing the traditional media. Innovation in technology has been influencing the public relation practitioners to do their work. One of the basic functions of Public Relation; press release, once typed on paper is now mostly sent via e-mail and fax.

In 2009, a survey by Donald Wright and Michelle Hinson findings revealed that there is a strong interest in social media by PR practitioners. Though, wright and Hinson also reported that meaningful gaps exist when measuring differences between what is happening and what should be happening in terms of all of the social media, especially when it comes to knowing what are considered the most important social media.

In 2003, Galushkin suggested that SMS text messaging should be considered by organisations a means to enhance internal communications given that spatial and temporal constraints had been weakened or removed and new communication structures and forms had developd. Less than three years later, during the 2006 Australian Census of Population and Housing, SMS was used extensively by the Australian Bureau of Statistics for communicating with tens of thousands of census employees

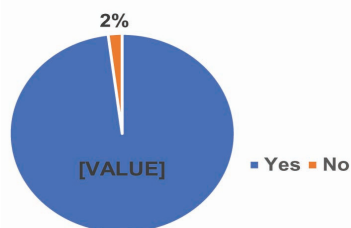
Preliminary data from the field suggests that social media is becoming a powerful addition to the communicator's toolkit. Although there is a great deal of interests in using social media as a tool for public relation, we cannot say that

traditional media has lost its effect on people. But since, a major population is inclined towards the new media, so spreading a message through internet becomes automatically ore effective.

Data Analysis

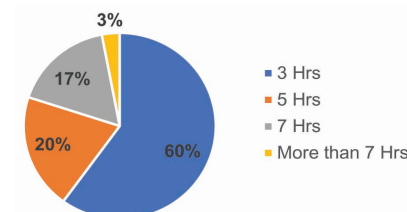
- **Internet Access**

When the respondents were asked if they have an access to internet, 98% of them said Yes



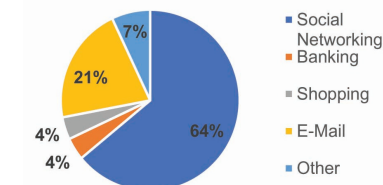
- **Hours spent using Internet**

On asking about how much time on an average they spend using internet, approximately 60% of the sample selected uses Internet for 3 Hrs. while 20% of them used for 5 Hrs.



- **Purpose of Use**

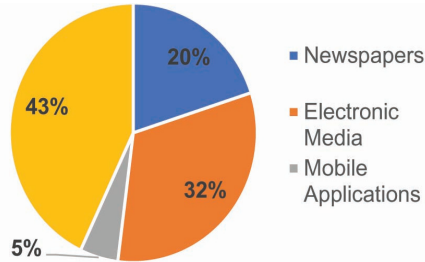
Out of the sample that was surveyed, 64% of them used the internet for social networking. That is they used facebook, twitter etc the most.



- **Widely used Media**

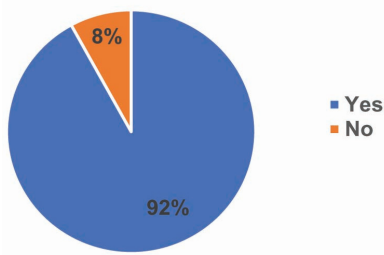
When the respondents were asked,

what medium they use the most to keep themselves updated, 43% said they used the digital media while 32% said they used the electronic media.



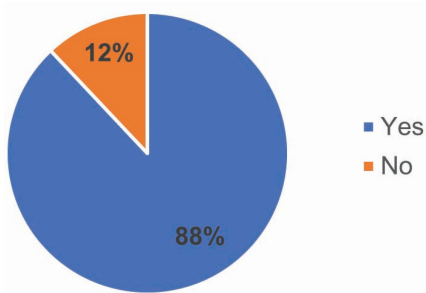
- **Market Dominance**

92% of the respondents felt that Yes, Digital media has taken over the market.



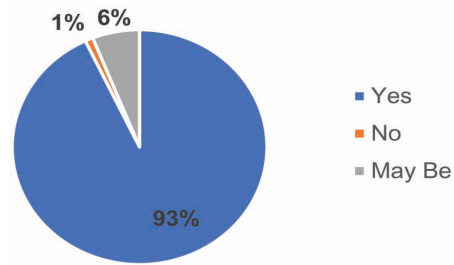
- **Influence**

According to the data collected, around 88% of the respondents felt that they are influenced as a consumer by the digital media.



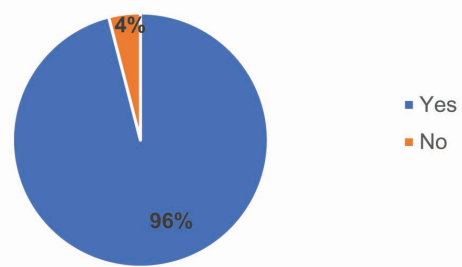
- **Online Media**

When asked about, whether the digital media is an important part of their lives, 93% of the samples said yes.



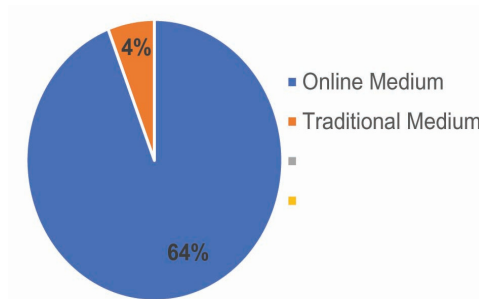
- **Public Relation**

96% sample also believed that Public relation has a major role to play in publicizing a product in the market.



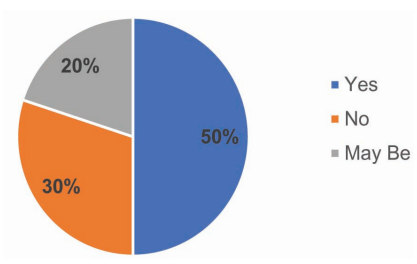
- **Preferred Medium**

64% of the sample selected preferred digital medium over above the line medium as a consumer.

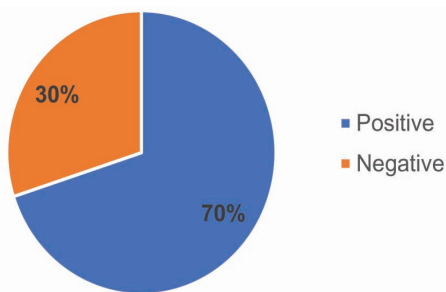


- **Impact of Media**

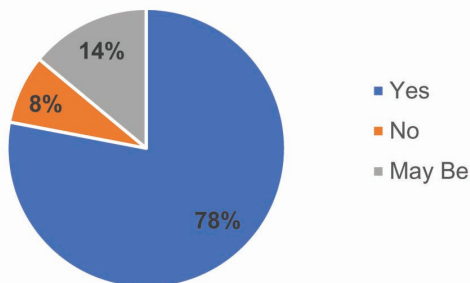
Half of the sample selected believed that yes, traditional media has lost its impact because of the digital media.



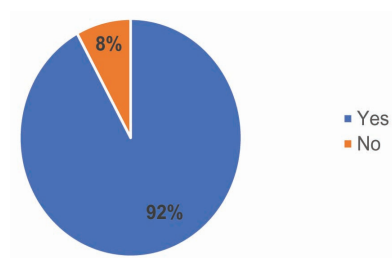
- Change**
 70% of these 50% people who believed that traditional media has lost its impact, also believed that this change is a positive change.



- Convenient**
 78% of the selected sample also believed that the new media has made our lives convenient.



- Perception**
 When asked about if they feel that Public Relation activities across the social media has something to do with what or how they perceive a situation, 92% of people responded with a Yes.



- When the respondents were asked, what makes them chose digital media over the above the line media, 87 of the 100 respondents believed it is more convenient than the other forms of media. Also, respondents feel that digital media is very user friendly and can be used on the go.

Findings and Interpretation

According to the data collected, Out of the sample that was selected, 98% of people have access to the internet and they spend nearly 3 hrs. on internet daily and mostly surfing through the social networking sites. 43% of them, prefer digital media to keep themselves updated.

Since, majority of people have an access to digital media and even prefer it over other forms of media, thus, the first hypothesis (H1) that says, there is a change in the way to public relation practices are conducted because of the rise and popularity of digital media is accepted. According to the data collected, there is a transition in the type of medium selected and 70% of the sample selected believes that this change is positive and they prefer digital media now. With this, the second hypothesis (H2); The transition in the type of medium, if there is, is because of the target audience. They now prefer to be reached digitally can be accepted too.

Also,

- 50% of the sample selected believe that above the line media has lost its impact because of the digital media while 92% of people believe that digital media dominates the market now
- 70% of the sample believed that it's a positive change that all the Public Relation activities are shifting from above the line to digital.
- 96% of people prefer digital media over above the line media because it is more convenient, easy to use, has great influential powers and makes communication a two-way process.

Conclusion

Digital Media has become a widely used media across the world. It has a wide reach and is easily accessible which has made it so popular in such less time. Since it has a really wide reach, public relation professionals prefer this media over the above the line medium. While using above the line methods was a one-way communication, with the help of

digital media, feedback can be achieved more effectively and efficiently.

With the study, we can conclude that digital media has changed the face of Public Relation because of its popularity among the consumers and the target audience is the reason of this change because they feel that digital media is more convenient, more interactive and easily accessible medium.

So with this, it can be concluded that both the hypothesis stand accurate and digital digital media has changed the face of Public Relation.

Limitations

The data collection was confined to only one city and the results might vary if the study is conducted in a city other than a metropolitan city. The sample size of this paper is 200 people which is a very small proportion of the entire population. Therefore, research studies with much larger sample size would be required to ensure appropriate generalization of the findings of the study. Also, there were time constraints because of which not all variables were included in the city.

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