

ABSTRACT

The Effects of Social Media on Public Relations

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Throughout its history, many things have sparked change in the public relations industry. The invention of the radio, television, and internet all had a profound impact on the public relations industry. Social media is next in that line of groundbreaking technology and perhaps the most influential. This thesis will provide a comprehensive review of how the affects social media have had on public relations and its practitioners. First, a brief review of public relations history will be given to provide the appropriate context for the main discussion of the thesis. Then, through applicable case studies, peer-reviewed literature, and analytics, modern public relations will be compared to the public relations industry before social media, and the distinct changes will be considered. These changes include an overall shift from a one-way style of communication to a two-way style of communication, new roles for practitioners, and an evolving relationship between practitioners and journalists, among many others. Finally, the thesis will conclude by discussing the future of public relations and how social media will continue to influence its development.

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INTRODUCTION

Social media has come to define the world and society that we live in today. Years of development, technological advances, and refinement have led to 4.48 billion social media users, over half of the world's population (56.8% to be exact) (Dean, 2021). Due to social media's remarkable ability to connect people, reach large groups of people, and build relationships, it has naturally been adopted by the public relations industry (Meredith, 2020).

But not only has social media been adopted by public relations, it has completely changed the public relations industry (Solis & Breakenridge, 2009). Some even go as far as to say that social media has fundamentally altered the defining characteristics of public relations (Wilcox et al., 2015). Everything, from how public relations teams operate and the goals they work towards to what skills and experience practitioners are expected to have, has changed due to social media. Social media has undeniably shifted the goalposts in the public relations industry.

The driving question that this thesis will seek to answer is how exactly social media has changed public relations. How specifically has social media changed the roles of practitioners? What skills do practitioners now need to succeed? How are public relations teams and organizations adapting their strategies to incorporate social media?

The questions are of incredible importance to the public relations industry. How practitioners have responded to these questions has decided their fate in the industry over the past decade. Those who have embraced social media have gained the ability to

connect with target publics directly in a powerful way, giving them a substantial advantage over those who have not embraced social media (Solis & Breakenridge, 2009).

This thesis will begin by giving a general history of public relations, including discussing key figures, such as Edward Bernays, Ivy Lee, and Arthur W. Page., who were influential in the formation of public relations. This chapter will also cover the tactics and styles of public relations that were heavily utilized before the invention of social media. Finally, the invention of the internet and how it served as a precursor for social media also will be considered. The purpose of this chapter is to establish how the public relations industry operated prior to social media, so one can see the full extent of changes that social media wrought.

The second chapter of this thesis will seek to specifically answer the question of how social media changed public relations. Changes in common public relations practices, tactics, and the new roles of public relations practitioners will all be topics of discussion. Additionally, the third chapter of this thesis will show these changes in action by reviewing relevant case studies that illustrate concrete examples of how public relations has changed because of the advent of social media.

Finally, the last chapter of this thesis will explore the future of public relations and how social media will continue to affect and change public relations. The section will examine recent trends, concerns, and technological advancements that have emerged in the realm of social media, and what repercussions these changes could have on the public relations industry.

CHAPTER ONE

The History of Public Relations

Public relations is an industry marked by change. Change in strategies and methodology, which can be seen when examining the history of public relations. However, the core goal of public relations has generally remained unchanged. Famed public relations practitioner Edward Bernays wrote as much in his book, *Public Relations* (1945). “The three main elements of public relations are practically as old as society: informing people, persuading people, or integrating people with people. Of course, the means and methods of accomplishing these ends have changed as society has changed” (p. 12).

When examining the history of public relations and its strategies and methods, it is important to understand it was guided by these core objectives, which are to inform people, persuade people, and integrate people with people. While the strategies and methods may have changed, these objectives, for the most part, have not.

Semblances of public relations can be traced back to ancient Greece and Rome, where philosophers and rulers used rhetoric to convince people of the legitimacy of their ideas and policies. A prime example lies with famed Roman leader Julius Caesar, who used *Commentaries* to persuade the Roman people.

The value and importance of public opinion in ancient Rome can be seen from the aphorism, ‘*Vox populi, vox Dei*’ (the voice of the people is the voice of God). When Julius Caesar wrote his *Commentaries*, he was not merely writing a report; he was also trying to convince the Roman citizen that he was a great leader (Grunewald, 2008, p. 2).

Other examples of rudimentary public relations can be found throughout history, including Paul the apostle, who traveled the Mediterranean disseminating the traditions and practices of the Christian faith to thousands and Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, which helped propel a nation to revolution. Paul and Paine, along with many others, tapped into the power of persuasion that public relations utilizes. But public relations as we know it today didn't begin until the 20th Century, with Ivy Lee and Edward Bernays.

Lee and Bernays

Ivy Lee, known by many as the father of modern public relations, is mostly recognized for his revolutionary work with the Rockefeller family and pioneering the use of news releases, a now common practice in the public relations industry.

The Pennsylvania Railroad tragedy on October 28th, 1906, characterizes both Lee's impact and philosophy as it pertains to modern public relations (Hiebert, 1966). More than 50 people died in the railway accident of a Pennsylvania Railroad train. Two days later, on October 30th, Lee sent the first news release to journalists, reporting the facts of the accident. The public and the media praised Lee and Pennsylvania Railroad's honesty and candor when dealing with the tragedy. Lee's anticipatory thinking saved the reputation of the Pennsylvania Railroad, and it serves as the first blueprint for modern crisis management in public relations.

Lee's most famous accomplishment was the rehabilitation of John D. Rockefeller's public image (Hiebert, 1966). Rockefeller was seen by the public as a selfish and wealthy robber baron, a human embodiment of the perceived greed that pervaded America's corporations at the time. An important fact to note is Rockefeller's reputation was well earned.

It took more than a decade, but Lee was able to transform Rockefeller's identity from a ruthless businessman to a philanthropic father figure. Knowing that he couldn't convince the public that Rockefeller's past actions were misunderstood, Lee instead decided to focus on both the present and future actions of Rockefeller's company and self. Lee called attention to Rockefeller's many philanthropic donations and encouraged him to consider his public image when making business decisions, a precursor to the influence that public relations have on businesses today. Rockefeller wrote a telling letter to Lee's widow, singing praises of Lee's mentality.

"From the early days of my contact with your husband it became clear to me that his point of view was the same as ours, that complete sincerity, honesty and integrity were the fundamental principles which regulated his daily life and upon which his every action was based" (Hiebert, 1966, p. 117).

Indeed, transparency and openness defined Lee's strategy, which in essence was to win the trust of the public. He was one of the first to prioritize open and consistent communication with the media, something that Lee often used to his advantage. This style of communication is now commonly seen in modern public relations. Lee described this public information model in his book *Declaration of Principles*.

"In brief, our plan is frankly, and openly, on behalf of business concerns and public institutions, to supply the press and public of the United States prompt and accurate information concerning subjects which it is of value and interest to the public to know about" (1906, p. 1).

Ivy Lee's impact on public relations cannot be overstated, specifically due to his commitment to establishing public relations as an industry rooted in honesty and

objectivity, not cheap trickery. Additionally, the popularization of the press release and a textbook model for crisis management serve as tangible evidence of Lee's influence that remains today.

Lee's more morally flimsy counterpart was Edward Bernays. Bernays' impact was similar to Lee's in scope but much different in regard to its content.

Bernays was one of the first public relations practitioners who realized the immense power that marketing, advertising and public relations could have over the public. A nephew of famed neurologist Sigmund Freud, Bernays frequently used Freud's philosophies in his own work. Bernays believed that propaganda, which he later attempted to rebrand as public relations, gave a select few power and influence over many. In his seminal work *Propaganda*, Bernays writes as much, deeming those few as an "invisible government."

The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country. We are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes formed, and our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of... It is they who pull the wires that control the public mind (1928, p. 9-10).

Beginning his career in public relations in the 1910s, Bernays quickly proved his prowess through his effective work during World War One for the Committee on Public Information, which spearheaded the United States propaganda efforts during the First World War (Mock, 1942). Bernays came to an important realization soon after his time with the Committee on Public Information that propaganda wasn't confined to wartime.

There was one basic lesson I learned in the CPI—that efforts comparable to those applied by the CPI to affect the attitudes of the enemy, of neutrals, and people of this country could be applied with equal facility to peacetime pursuits. In other

words, what could be done for a nation at war could be done for organizations and people in a nation at peace (Cutlip, 1994, p. 168).

Endowed with this new realization, Bernays set to work creating PR campaign after PR campaign, changing the nature of public relations as he did. The creativity and techniques that Bernays used is the stuff of legends and a product of a time when the public was not burdened by constant cynicism.

Cutlip details a famous example that came in 1929, when Bernays was hired by the American Tobacco Company to increase the sales of cigarettes (Cutlip, 1994). During that time, it was socially unacceptable for women to smoke. However, seeing the untapped female market as the key to increasing sales, Bernays and the American Tobacco Company decided to attempt to remove the taboo that surrounded women and smoking.

To do this, Bernays ingeniously decided to align smoking with the growing women's rights movement that had emerged in the 1900s (Cutlip, 1994). Bernays hired psychoanalyst A. A. Brill as a reputable source to say that smoking was natural for women. Branding the cigarettes as "torches of freedom," Bernays then hired a group of women to smoke these "torches" during an Easter Sunday Parade in New York. The stunt worked and cigarette sales among women skyrocketed, while simultaneously becoming a critical symbol for the gender equality movement.

While Bernays' legacy may be tainted due to the questionable strategies he utilized to get results, it's impossible to ignore Bernays' impact on public relations. He pushed the capabilities of public relations to its limit and fully realized the capabilities of the emerging industry.

Both Lee and Bernays' techniques created the foundation for future public relations strategies and techniques. While their methods were not informed or guided by statistics analytics like most of public relations today, they were still undoubtedly effective. Lee and Bernays were the surrogate fathers of public relations, starting it on its path to the 21st Century and the age of social media.

The Age of Mass Media

Lee and Bernays created the foundation which allowed for the growth in public relations that occurred in the Age of Mass Media. As public relations grew in relevance and importance, especially in the business world, PR practitioners found greater stability and the industry's reputation improved dramatically. The introduction of new technology created new media such as television and radio, which also helped progress public relations' strategies and increase its importance. The introduction of television permanently changed public relations and its practitioners, much like the introduction of social media, which we will explore later.

The world's first public relations agency is said to be the Publicity Bureau, which was founded in 1900 by three Bostonian journalists (Bates, 2002). Three years later, Ivy Lee began his own press agency in 1903, Parker & Lee. The rise of agencies, paired with innovation in strategy from the likes of Lee and Bernays, increased public relations' viability as a legitimate profession.

Public relations also found a home internally in many major corporations and organizations. Initially, many prominent businessmen did not care about the public perception of their business ventures, (Bates, 2002). Many thought it didn't matter.

However, upon seeing the impact that PR practitioners could have, many organizations created permanent positions for public relations practitioners. AT&T was one of the companies to lead the charge in implementing public relations. Theodore Vail first implemented public relations at AT&T in 1907 when he became president of the organization.

““He was the first major business leader in America to recognize that good public relations will build the proper climate in which to build a successful business”” (Bates, 2002, p. 14).

But it was Arthur W. Page who fully established public relations at AT&T, serving as vice-president of public relations for AT&T for 20 years. His influence over decision-making at AT&T signaled the rise in credibility that public relations had in corporate circles, especially considering AT&T’s stature.

Public relations strategy embedded itself into the core of major businesses across the world. CEOs and leaders quickly realized that businesses whose decision making was driven by public relations strategy were primed to be more profitable and successful (Bates, 2002). That, paired with the economic boom that took place in America following World War Two, allowed for an explosion of available public relations positions in companies. Speech writing, press releases and strategic messaging all became tasks integral to an organization’s success. The business world had finally left the mindset of “The public be damned!” behind.

Up until the 1940s, public relations had operated in the paper, telegraph, and radio mediums. Public relations had already adapted to certain technological advancements. For example, the Marconi Company in Great Britain, which specialized in wireless

telegraphy, established a department solely focused on distributing its news releases in 1910 (Wilcox et al., 2015). The British Government utilized radio as well, forming the British Broadcasting Corporation, now commonly known as the BBC, to communicate with its citizens. But along came television, which was arguably the first technological advancement to truly revolutionize the industry.

Television changed everything. People consumed media in a fundamentally different way. Newspaper circulation dipped and radio sales diminished. Television was king.

“By the mid-1950s most of the older mass media accepted the obvious: TV had won the war for the largest share of time Americans spent consuming mass media” (Baughman, 2006, p. 59).

The sheer size of the audience that television commanded forced public relations practitioners to adapt fast. Practitioners were no longer confined to print and radio. The medium of television opened countless new possibilities, but it also opened new considerations.

The written word was no longer the only thing public relations practitioners needed to consider. While copywriting for television became a fundamental skill for many practitioners to have, so did learning how to light, frame and film (Nkana, 2005). The visual aspect of public relations instantly became vital.

In *Public Relations in Television (2005)*, Nsikan-Abasi Sam Nkana describes the multitude of considerations that public relations must be attentive to in television, including lighting, music, credits, sound, dressage and overall presentation.

The existing news cycle, as well as the public's consumption habits, were also upended by television. Gone were the days of waiting for tomorrow morning's paper. It wouldn't be until 1980 that the world truly experienced the 24-hour news cycle, but in the four decades leading up to it, the effects were still visible and profound.

Television quickly became the crown jewel when it came to media coverage because of the versatility it allowed and the captive audience it held (Wilcox et al., 2015). Unlike print or radio, television's reach wasn't segmented. Placement in newspapers remained important but was increasingly superseded by the benefits television placement produced. Practitioners were quickly tasked with figuring out ways to reach their publics through television. In many ways, the introduction of television to the public relations industry mirrors the introduction of social media. Both brought about radical change to the industry and required new skills from its practitioners.

Television upended the "norm" in public relations during the 40s and 50s, but stability was maintained in the PR industry through agency and in-house positions. Public relations' status as a reputable profession was further cemented in the late 1940s and 1950s with the creation of trade associations. The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) was the first American trade association and was followed a year later by the Institute of Public Relations in London, bringing PR trade associations to a global scale (Whitman & Guthrie, 2018). Other associations formed around the world in similar fashion, finally leading to the creation of the International Association of Public Relations (IPRA) in 1955.

An important result of the creation of trade associations was the uniform regulation of public relations as an industry. Ironically, public relations suffered from a

well-earned negative reputation. Many early practitioners followed the example of Bernays, resorting to deception and trickery to achieve their goals.

“Early PR practitioners relied on bribes, gifts, and stunts to gain attention and gradually refined their techniques. These methods were often successful but were generally viewed by journalists as deceptive, unethical, or foolish” (DeLorne, Fedler, 2003, p. 105).

The PRSA and IPRA helped fix the negative stigma that surrounded the industry with the creation of a code of ethics. In 1950, the PRSA published the PRSA Code of Ethics, the first of its kind in the public relations industry (Whitman & Guthrie, 2018). In 1961, the IPRA created the IPRA Code of Conduct (IPRA). These two codes established an industry-wide standard for ethics and behavior.

Agencies, in-house positions and increased regulation pushed the public relations industry to finally peak in its growth in the 1960s.

By the late 1960s, public relations had matured into a full-blown professional enterprise, comprising, in the United States, several hundred public relations agencies, large and small, and more than 100,000 individual practitioners whose ranks mushroomed to double that number by the year 2000. Public relations specialists became an integral part of top management, often reporting directly to the president or CEO of the institutions they served (Wilcox et al., 2015, p. 16).

The public relations industry was not done changing, however. The creation of the internet once again flipped the status quo, changing the entire industry.

The Internet, a Precursor to Social Media

Public relations continued its progression during the 1980s and 1990s. In the 1980s, the concept of management by objective (MBO) became popular amongst practitioners who sought to prove their direct effect on the company’s profit margin

(Wilcox et al., 2015). MBO was a driving factor in public relations ascension to a management function in many companies and businesses.

The 1990s were defined by perception management (Bates, 2002, p. 83). The increased emphasis on perception and reputation meant most practitioners had to be experts in “issues management, crisis communications, environmental monitoring to build credibility and trust among internal and external audiences and enhance the organization’s reputation for corporate responsibility” (Bates, 2002, p. 83).

But it was the invention and popularization of the internet that sparked the next major revolution in the public relations industry. The internet tore down the barriers between practitioners and publics and eviscerated the old method of one-way communication, paving the way for a feedback loop and creating a new method of communication that went two-ways (Wilcox et al., 2015). While one-way communication, which was led by the likes of P.T. Barnum and Ivy Lee and manifested itself through press agency and news releases, was successful during the 20th century, times have changed. Previous buzzwords like “reputation” and “strategic” faded, replaced by “dialogue” and “analytics.”

The one-way style of communication is linear and incredibly limiting, only featuring a message sent from the sender to the receiver (Wilcox et al., 2015). This style of communication does not allow for consistent feedback, constraining the effectiveness of public relations strategies.

The internet, however, allowed for an easier stream of feedback to reach the senders from the receivers. The two-way style of communication is like the one-way style of communication, featuring a message sent by a sender to a receiver, but differs in that

the receiver sends feedback to the messenger as well (Wilcox et al., 2015). Consistent feedback allowed PR practitioners to refine their strategies and processes. With the ability to know what did and did not work, PR campaigns became much more effective, efficient, and powerful. It also allowed for more personal relationships between practitioners and publics to develop.

The two-way style of communication can be further broken up into two models, the two-way symmetrical model and the two-way asymmetrical model (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Both were identified by James Grunig and Todd Hunt in the 1984 book *Managing Public Relations*, as part of what they described as the four models of PR. It is important to note that these models were developed by some of the most important figures in public relations' history. The asymmetrical model, which was first pioneered by Edward Bernays in the 1920s, focuses on persuasive communication, seeking a short-term attitude change from the publics (Wilcox et al., 2015). More scientific in its approach, the model prioritizes feedback but does not adapt its views to align with the publics', merely adapting its strategies.

The symmetrical model, which was championed by practitioner Arthur W. Page, is structured more like a negotiation, willing to compromise and change with the publics (Wilcox et al., 2015). This model of communication prioritizes building and cultivating relationships with its publics to achieve a lasting understanding between the two parties.

By allowing practitioners and publics to easily communicate with each other, the primary goal of public relations changed (Scott, 2020, p. 23). In its past iterations, press clips and coverage was the goal for most PR professionals. Now practitioners can speak

to their publics directly and the value of media coverage has decreased. Media placement is no longer the primary goal.

Public relations work has changed. PR is no longer just an esoteric discipline where companies make great efforts to communicate exclusively to a handful of reporters who then tell the company's story, generating a clip for the PR people to show their bosses. These days, great PR includes programs to reach buyers directly. The web allows direct access to information about your products, and smart companies understand and use this phenomenal resource to great advantage (Scott, 2020, p. 23).

Once again, technology and innovation have shifted the goalposts in the public relations field. And now that the goal and methods of public relations have changed, its practitioners must change as well. But if history has shown us anything, it is that the public relations industry is readily adaptable.

CHAPTER TWO

Social Media's Influence

Six Degrees, considered by most to be the first social media site, was created in 1997. A mere six years later, social media took the world by storm, creating one of the largest sensations in human history. Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok hold the attention of the entire world, creating unprecedented platforms for public relations practitioners to operate on. The USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism lists an understanding of social media as one of the five skills every public relations specialist needs (n.d.). The new platforms have radically changed the public relations industry and left practitioners with a choice, adapt or die.

According to Backlinko, a staggering 4.48 billion people use social media worldwide (Dean, 2021). Facebook predictably leads the way with 2.9 billion monthly active users, followed by YouTube and WhatsApp. What's unpredictable and unprecedented is the growth that social media is continuing to undergo. Social media only had 2.07 billion users worldwide in 2015, with media platform's userbases growing an unheard of 116% over six years.

Friendster, founded in 2002, was the first social media site to eclipse a million users, showing the potential that social networks possessed. Other sites followed soon after, but the social media revolution truly began with the creation of MySpace and Facebook.

During the mid-2000s, MySpace and Facebook battled it out for the world's attention. Both sites were the first to truly demonstrate the platform social media could

have. Facebook eventually superseded MySpace for good in 2008. Mark Zuckerberg's social media empire has since grown with Facebook's purchase of Instagram. The two sites have a combined 4.239 million monthly average users, per Statista.com (Statista Research Department, 2021).

According to those same Statista numbers, Facebook leads all social media sites in monthly average users, followed by YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram (Statista Research Department, 2021). While sites like WhatsApp are certainly popular, including Facebook Messenger and WeChat, they lack relevance in the world of public relations. For this reason, this thesis will focus on other sites that are more relevant to modern PR.

The relevance of social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, among others, in the realm of public relations, stems from users' ability to connect directly with organizations and companies, as well as communicate with them. This makes social media sites uniquely important for public relations practitioners, opening a medium that utilizes an instantaneous one-to-one or one-to-many style of communication, something that was not common before the invention of the internet. Traversing this new medium has brought about many changes in the PR world, fundamentally altering how the industry works.

Changes in Public Relations: Common Practices

Since the inception of modern public relations in the early 1900s, the industry has been characterized by four defining characteristics which have dictated the way practitioners have done PR (Wilcox et al., 2015, p. 357). Prior to the internet and social media, PR materials could commonly be characterized as:

1. Centralized/top down.
2. Costly in terms of being published.
3. Staffed by professional gatekeepers known as editors and publishers.
4. Mostly one-way communication with limited feedback channels.

The invention of the internet, and subsequently social media, has effectively invalidated these characteristics (Wilcox et al., 2015). PR materials are no longer centralized and can be created by anyone, using technology and platforms that are accessible to all. This accessibility means that there is no longer a cost-barrier surrounding the creation of PR materials and mass media, and the existence of social media has, of course, created a feedback loop for practitioners to utilize.

Social media is now completely ingrained into the heart of public relations. Wilcox et al. write, “Social media is now fully integrated as a major tactic in almost every public relations program or campaign. Public relations firms and departments are now hiring individuals who are specialists in social media and digital media management” (2015, p. 370).

While social media would eventually become integral in public relations efforts, some companies were slow to react. Certain organizations’ overreliance on the oldest practice in public relations, the news release, was exposed by social media. Practitioners could no longer get away with sending news releases to journalists in hopes of gaining placement. First, placement in the media is no longer as valuable as it once was, as the media is often bypassed by avenues created via social media. Second, news releases are no longer the most effective way to get the media’s attention (Muck Rack, 2021). Public relations practitioners are no longer only tasked with handling media relations, they must

be content creators, relationship builders and social media managers as well (CGPR, 2020).

One important trend is the shift in the nature of the PR campaign cycle. Events and press releases are no longer the only or main solutions to provide the clients with. The increasing interactivity of and relationship building with the target audience across social media are becoming the winning formula to gain attention and response among members of today's audiences (Allagui & Breslow, 2016, p. 28)

News releases, the most fundamental aspect of the previous regime of PR, were forced to change because of this shift in the nature of the PR campaign cycle. Over 100 years old, the previous format of new releases has become outdated. According to a study conducted by Muck Rack, 61 percent of journalists believe that the current way companies share information to journalists via news releases is outdated (2021). Journalists no longer want a lead paragraph and a quote.

Journalists also do not want a long, convoluted, and confusing document.

According to the same study conducted by Muck Rack, 47 percent of journalists receive at least six pitches a day, with many receiving 20 pitches or more (2021). Journalists simply do not have the time to wade through an outdated news release. Journalists want and need clear and concise writing that leads with the important information and quickly gets to the point.

This is not to say that journalism and public relations no longer have the symbiotic relationship that defined the two industries for much of the 20th Century. That relationship still exists, just in a different form. Kirat points this out, explaining the new facets of the relationship.

Online journalism needs and use online public relations: Press releases, reports, Company and managers' profiles, latest news and events, press clippings, video news items, etc. Public relations departments use online newspapers and

publications to monitor the organization's corporate image, news coverage and public opinion (2007, p. 168)

These methods and materials are what have become the bread and butter of both public relations and journalism, and it has pushed their relationship into the 21st century.

With the advent of the internet and social media, different types of new releases have emerged. It is now becoming more and more commonplace for companies to post news releases or information that would usually be placed in a news release on their website or social media platforms, meaning that search engine optimization has come to the forefront of public relations.

Search engine optimization is the process of increasing a webpage's visibility on the web by appealing to search engines' algorithms. This often means including specific keywords and utilizing certain formatting techniques (e.g. bullet points, quotes, or links) to get the attention of search engines like Google or Bing so they will display your webpage higher on web searches. As the main goal of news releases is to spread news, high placement on web searches is important and can dictate the success of a news release. Social media uses a similar algorithm, promoting posts that have higher quality images, appropriate hashtags, and keyword-laden captions (Ledfold, 2015).

Search engine optimization is a relatively new concept that is still shrouded in mystery. Companies like Google or Facebook are unwilling to share their algorithms, making some of search engine optimization less scientific and more guesswork. Nevertheless, search engine optimization has become an important consideration with news releases.

Social media releases have been the newest type of news release to emerge. Since it is commonplace for part of a company's audience to only be accessible via a social

media platform, social media releases allow for practitioners to feed pertinent information to this audience. Breakenridge and Solis write that social media releases are built for the modern age, allowing, and even encouraging, journalists and bloggers to share and tell stories on social media (Solis & Breakenridge, 2009). But social media releases also allow for companies to communicate directly, via releases, to their audience, cutting out journalists from the process if desired. Another important characteristic of social media releases is how they are specifically catered towards the specific platform they are being posted on.

“...the SMR (social media release) represents a new socially rooted format that complements traditional and SEO news releases by combining news facts and social assets in one easy-to-digest and improved tool.” (Solis & Breakenridge, 2009, p. 115).

This type of release has led to increased integration of multimedia elements into news releases (Solis & Breakenridge, 2009). The presence of detailed and thorough multi-media elements gives practitioners and companies a distinct advantage. They can create a unified message, and over time, eventually a unified brand and reputation throughout all the pertinent social media platforms. It also further highlights the practitioners' role as content creators.

Social media releases are just one example of situations where public relations practitioners need extensive knowledge on how to create multimedia elements and utilize them in the correct manner. Practitioners can no longer just rely on their writing skills. More is required.

As social media allows corporations and businesses to communicate directly with publics, the personification of social media pages has become an increasingly effective

strategy to increase audience engagement (Men et al., 2018). Creating a personal feel on a social media page can serve to not only increase engagement but also increase the amount of dialogue and feedback from the target publics.

There are many ways to personify or humanize a social media page. Some companies have resorted to snarky social media managers or dedicated spokespersons. Others have utilized their CEOs, allowing them to give a personal touch to the social media page.

Due to the growing trend of corporate transparency and authenticity on social media (Men & Tsai, 2014), online publics now expect and applaud CEOs who engage in direct, open conversations with them and acknowledge their opinions, ideas, and suggestions for the organization. By giving publics such direct access to the most powerful figure of the organization, CEOs' social media pages constitute an empowerment tool, allowing publics to directly converse with and influence the organization, thus facilitating the organization's dialogic communication practice (Men & Tsai, 2016) (Men et al., 2018, pp. 22-23)

As Men et al. note, CEOs are powerful representatives of a company because of how they are usually viewed by many as authoritative figures. Being prevalent on social media can also be beneficial for CEOs. CEOs can often be seen as impersonal and distant by publics (Men et al., 2018). Social media can reduce this image, bringing CEOs closer to publics, helping build their company's social media pages while also cultivating a personal brand in some instances.

Having a CEO that is knowledgeable and well-versed in social media can bring benefits beyond social media engagement as well. Research suggests that it is important for CEOs to understand social media and how it works so they can be better leaders in the digital age (Men et al., 2018).

Industry reports emphasize that CEOs who can engage with their publics openly tend to be more successful in empowering others, making compelling arguments, building networks, and thus are deemed as better leaders overall (Neal, 2017).

Additionally, social CEOs are believed to personify their companies and showcase innovation and transparency, which can yield such positive outcomes as improved company reputation and business performances (Weber Shandwick, 2012) (Men et al. 2018, p. 2)

The impact that a CEO's knowledge, or lack thereof, regarding social media can have only shows how important social media is, not only in the public relations industry but in the entirety of the business world. Considering the influence that both public relations and social media have on business decisions, it is not surprising the two are now joined at the hip.

Social media has afforded public relations practitioners the ability to respond quickly and efficiently to the public, specifically in times of crisis. Kirat says as much, stating public relations professionals can use "the wired global village for immediate, effective, and persuasive communications" (2007, p. 167). One can refer to the model of crisis communication that was first laid out by Ivy Lee to see how far public relations has come as an industry.

Publics now flock to social media during a crisis, voicing their opinions, grievances, and complaints (Jin et al., 2011). Because of this, social media is now a primary focus of effective crisis management strategies.

Traditional crisis management strategies that were formulated in the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s focused on prevention and tailored communication (Lambret & Barki, 2017). These strategies came with the implicit belief that companies and practitioners can control the environment their audience exists in. But social media has complicated crisis management, fracturing the environment in which audiences voice their opinions and lessening the amount of control that practitioners can exert over crisis situations. Furthermore, previous crisis management strategies have worked off the

assumption that publics are rational when irrationality and emotional biases are common drivers of crises that originate or gain traction on social media (Lambret & Barki, 2017, p. 303). The crisis management strategies of the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s are no longer effective in the age of social media.

The new many-to-many style of communication has allowed social media to accelerate or even create crises (Lambret & Barki, 2017). A simple tweet can now trigger a crisis that endangers a company's whole reputation and brand.

...the development of the Internet (and by extension, social media) has made the risks faced by companies as well as the types of crises they can experience more complex and threatening: "anyone can instantly have a megaphone and access to millions of people" (Wigley & Zhang, 2011:3). This unpredictable and worldwide exposure may result in "negative mainstream media coverage, a change in business process, or financial loss" (Owyang, 2011). As such, crisis management in a social media context cannot merely focus on predicting the development of the crisis, as social media crises are, by nature, unpredictable (Bloch, 2012). It requires new tools that add to and go beyond classical prevention plans (Lambret & Barki, 2017, p. 297)

New strategies have emerged to better combat crises that emerged or take place on social media. Lambret and Barki established a matrix that dictates the company's response strategy to the crises based on the origin of the crisis (internal or external), the emotional effect on the stakeholders (sympathy, sadness, fright, or anger), and the strength of the attribution of responsibility to the crisis (2017, p. 298). Placed on a chart, Lambret and Barki's matrix identifies the level of reputational threat the crisis poses to an organization and thus the type of response strategy practitioners should employ.

The two types of response strategies suggested by Lambret and Barki are accommodative and defensive (2017). An accommodative strategy seeks to "generate, improve, or develop reputational assets by offering symbolic or material aid to stakeholders", while a defensive strategy seeks to "either detach the organization from

the crisis or to minimize the responsibility of the organization in the crisis” (Lambret & Barki, 2017, p. 299). Practitioners should respond to crises with an external origin and a weak attribution of responsibility that elicit responses of sympathy or sadness from stakeholders with a defensive response strategy. On the other hand, an accommodative response strategy should be utilized on crises with an internal origin and strong attribution of responsibility that elicit responses of fear or anger from stakeholders. The later type of crisis usually poses the greatest reputational threat to an organization due to the type of emotions it evokes from relevant publics. While Lambret and Barki acknowledge that their matrix is not perfect, it can help public relations practitioners better adapt and react to crises that take place on social media (2017). It also embodies a steady movement of practitioners to update older crisis management strategies that have been found inadequate in an age of social media.

Changes in Public Relations: Roles

The role of a public relations practitioner has drastically changed with the popularization of social media. The biggest change comes in the ability of PR practitioners to be content creators. Wolf and Archer (2018) write, “Changes in technology, increased user-friendliness, lower price points and accessibility are enabling communicators to generate content in-house, without having to draw on the expertise of external specialists...” (p. 502). In a way, public relations practitioners have always been content creators, generating press releases and pitching story ideas that focused on the company that employed them. Social media, however, now dictates that they be

multimedia content creators, making it a requirement for most public relations practitioners.

The USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism lists multimedia skills as one of the five characteristics each PR practitioner must-have, alongside basic skills such as writing, communication, creativity, and an understanding of social media (n.d.).

The ability to create multimedia content is now integral in the public relations industry, given the pervasiveness of social media. James (2007) writes, “With the trend towards multimedia news releases, the demands to have multimedia elements available for inclusion in such releases will grow. Public relations practitioners will be responsible for either coordinating production, or actually producing this material” (p. 143). The ability to create multimedia content for news releases and other materials, whether it be videos, graphics, or something else, is now an important tool in a practitioner’s toolbox.

The instant and ever-changing nature of social media has also dictated the need for around-the-clock monitoring for PR professionals, whose only focus is often social media. This need has created altogether new positions for practitioners. These newly founded roles are called a myriad of things, from community manager to social media specialist.

Breakenridge (2012) identifies eight different public relations practitioner roles that have emerged in the social media age. Neill and Moody (2015) expanded on those roles, identifying two more, while combining one.

Whatever they may be called, these roles are vital to a company's public relations efforts in a world driven by social media. Breakenridge and Solis describe the specific role a community manager plays in the domain of a company.

A community manager is the voice of the company externally and the voice of the customers internally. The value lies in the community manager serving as a hub and having the ability to personally connect with the customers (humanize the company) and providing feedback to many departments internally (Solis Breakenridge, 2009, p. 207)

The creation of the community manager role is in reaction to other changes that have been brought about by social media and the internet in public relations (Solis Breakenridge, 2009). The new 24-hour nature of public relations meant a constant eye and hand is needed for specific social media platforms, always ready for any situation, be it a crisis, marketing campaign, or otherwise. In addition, due to the vast number of people social media allows organizations to interact with, community managers sift through the masses, identifying problems, analyzing feedback, and having meaningful interactions with publics.

The role of community managers now embodies the change in communication styles from one-way to two-way communication (Solis & Breakenridge, 2009). They are, in fact, integral to the existence of two-way communication between organizations and publics, gathering community input and feedback and advocating for the community, thus facilitating the feedback loop that exists in the two-way communication style. Because of this, community managers have become integral in public relations.

Another role that has accompanied the rise of social media is the role of social media manager. A decade ago, most companies probably did not have a social media manager, usually pawning it off to a worker as a secondary task. Now, in almost every

company worldwide, you can find a social media manager present (Wilcox et al., 2015, p. 370).

The role of a social media manager goes hand in hand with the role of a community manager. A lot of overlap can be found in the responsibilities of both roles, but differences do exist. Both community managers and social media managers act as spokespersons for the company they represent. However, social media managers are expected to be entrepreneurs, adding value to the company via social media (Meske, Stieglitz, 2013, p. 349). And while community managers serve as liaisons for the community to the company, social media managers often serve as liaisons internally in the company between upper-management and corporate divisions.

But, reductively speaking, social media managers' chief role circles back to adding value. Social media managers are expected to successfully manage a company's social media page or pages in a way that cultivates a positive return on investment (ROI) (Wilcox et al., 2015).

ROI, called by some as the "Holy Grail" of social media, is measured by the financial profit the social media post or campaign brings to the company (Fisher, 2009, p. 189). Traditionally used as a tool to measure the success of paid advertisements, ROI can also be applied to social media posts and pages. Other social media analytics, like engagement or views, do not always directly contribute to ROI, as they may not result in immediate financial gain (Gilfoil & Jobs, 2012). However, these analytics can be added to the ROI formula later if it brings tangible financial currency.

Social media ROI can be hard and complex to measure. Often it is hard to directly link the positive effects of a campaign and many of the positive effects are not tangible or

easily calculable. Still, social media ROI remains one of the chief concerns of a social media manager and companies.

Social media ROI informs many of public relations' newfound strategies when it comes to utilizing social media successfully. According to research conducted by David Gilfoil and Charles Jobs of DeSales University (2012), ROI suggests that social media pages and campaigns should: Align with corporate goals, have a clear goal, achieve transparency, and be monitored by predetermined metrics, among other things. Advanced research and planning are imperative to a successful social media page or campaign. Gilfoil and Jobs state that knowing one's audience is vital as well, which is a byproduct of research.

When you're blogging, tweeting, connecting on LinkedIn or otherwise engaged in SM channels, remember that your readers include current clients, potential clients, as well as current/past/future employees. You must clearly understand what your audience wants, engage them, and then be careful not to alienate or antagonize them along the way (Gilfoil & Jobs, 2012, p. 645)

Thankfully, social media sites have made it easier than ever to tell what a page's demographic is, due to advanced insights and analytics that are made available to the page's owner. This serves to empower public relations practitioners and social media managers, allowing them to be more effective.

While social media managers can have a profound impact on the exterior brand of a company, they can also impact the company from the interior. Meske and Stieglitz write,

Our interviews show that social media managers have a greater impact on the internal development of a company than other managers on the same hierarchical level, and also than originally anticipated by the higher management. The reason for this lies in the profound change possibilities which the social media manager has on the communication and collaboration in the company, through which e.g.

knowledge management, collaboration, search for experts, creation of social capital, and a common corporate culture are reinforced (2013, p. 349)

Issues management is another essential task that both social media and community managers perform. Jahng et al. (2020) describe issues management as the “strategic core of PR” (2020, p. 2).

It (issues management) includes efforts to monitor, analyze, and communicate with the public about disputes (Hallahan, 2001). Other scholars have defined issues as socially constructed and debated topics that an individual identifies as posing negative consequences to one or more people (Hallahan, 2001), and the role of issues management is to help organizations identify trends, select courses of action, and guide external communication with a variety of publics regarding the topic (Taylor, Vasquez, & Doorley, 2003) (Jahng et al., 2020, p. 2)

Issues management seeks to proactively analyze trends amongst publics to anticipate organizational risks, threats, and challenges (Jahng et al., 2020). It helps organizations make decisions, form strategies, and predict potential crises. Social media has only increased the importance of diligent issue management from both social media and community managers. Social media’s wide breadth of users, topics, and interconnectivity makes it nearly impossible for practitioners to monitor every potential issue, but it has forced practitioners to learn how to connect “information from various sources that are not restricted to the direct environment of the organization” (Jahng et al., 2020, p. 2).

One particular type of issue that practitioners have dealt with in recent times is misinformation or “fake news” (Jahng et al., 2020, p. 1). Particularly in the heightened sociopolitical climate that exists in today’s society as well as social media, fake news poses a legitimate reputational danger to organizations.

Fake news about organizations frequently involves accusations about organizations’ behavior toward sociopolitical issues (Bennett & Livingston, 2018; Southwell, Thorson, & Sheble, 2018). Increased public scrutiny of organizations in the current turbulent sociopolitical environment (Chatterji & Toffel, 2016; Chatterji & Toffel, 2016; Edelman, 2017; Edelman, 2018) suggests that PR

practitioners should understand fake news in order to effectively monitor it as part of issues management (Strauß & Jonkman, 2017); (Jahng et al., 2020, pp. 2-3).

Practitioners must actively monitor social media platforms for misleading content or misinformation being spread about their company (Jahng et al., 2020). They should organically monitor and manage misinformation so their strategies can evolve with its nature and scope as well. Finally, they should also employ both internal and external verification strategies to effectively determine what is fake news and what is not. The ability to determine fake news on the spot only illustrates the need for practitioners who are experts on the organization and the industry that they reside in.

It is undeniable that social media has been a complete gamechanger for the public relations industry. From social media news releases to new crisis management matrixes, public relations practitioners have a wealth of new tactics, materials, and avenues to utilize. Furthermore, social media has also brought about new responsibilities and roles for practitioners as well, changing the skills and experience needed to be an effective public relations practitioner. All these changes combine to create an industry-defining shift in public relations, to which organizations and practitioners are still adapting.

CHAPTER THREE

Case Studies

Social media brought sweeping changes to public relations, as discussed in the previous chapter. By examining case studies and examples of recent public relations campaigns, we can see the previously discussed changes in real-world, applicable scenarios. It is important to understand what made each specific campaign successful, or what kept it from being successful.

Typical characteristics of successful campaigns include consistent branding, catered messaging, and opportunities for publics to participate and engage (Allagui & Breslow, 2016). These characteristics can be found in effective social media campaigns such as No Rights, No Women and the 2008 Obama Presidential Campaign. Specifically, the PARC principles for success, as indicated in *Social Media Marketing: A Strategic Approach* by Barker et al., is perhaps one of the best frameworks to judge public relations campaigns by.

As we previously stated, above, Barker et al. (2013) found that successful social media strategies typically meet one (or more) of the PARC principles for success: participatory (interact with community), authentic (engaging in conversations without forced attitudes or a false demeanor), resourceful (provide audience with helpful information), and credible (Allagui & Breslow, 2016, p. 22).

We will frequently refer to the PARC principles for success to evaluate why each specific case was or was not successful, as well as which components of the case contributed to the result.

Examples of Successful Social Media Campaigns

The earliest, and perhaps most unique case that we will study, is Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign. Obama's 2008 campaign was revolutionary, in that it was the first major American political campaign to heavily utilize social media (Aaker & Chang, 2009, p. 1). Obama was able to garner 5 million followers across 15 different social media platforms, vastly outperforming his Republican opponent, John McCain, on key social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook.

Obama's campaign worked. The senator from Chicago amassed 200 electoral votes and nearly 8.5 million popular votes (Aaker & Chang, 2009). The campaign remains an excellent example of successful image management and audience interaction in the social media sphere. And sure enough, the social media side of the campaign met the PARC principles.

Obama's social media activity fostered interactions between the presidential candidate and potential supporters, as well as interactions between supporters and other supporters. Obama's social media team utilized social media sites to ask questions and gain feedback from American voters (Aaker & Chang, 2009). The Obama campaign also made sure to customize the content of their interactions with supporters based on their occupation, interests, or even race by being active on niche social media sites. Obama was the first presidential candidate to have accounts on AsianAve.com, MiGente.com, and BlackPlanet.com.

We got really well-thought-out answers and had a really interesting conversation and dialogue. Then we had President Obama address a couple of the really thought-out suggestions and just engaged in a conversation and dialogue with people that he wouldn't have necessarily met any other way (Aaker & Chang, 2009, p. 7).

The end goal of these social media interactions was not to garner donations (Aaker & Chang, 2009). Instead, the Obama campaign used them to build relationships between the candidate and the community with targeted voter groups. Joe Rospars, head of the New Media Department for the Obama campaign, echoed this sentiment. "...The external social networks were never a driver of fundraising. They were really more about starting the relationships" (Aaker & Chang, 2009, p. 7). In creating these personal relationships with voters, the campaign also successfully personified Barack Obama by having him personally respond to comments or suggestions via video or comment, as well as by showing Obama outside of a political context.

One thing that really strikes me about Obama's Facebook page is how authentic he is. He has his favorite music up there, his interests, basketball, spending time with kids, Godfather I and II are his favorite movies, etc. I think that really sums up what Obama did on the web that was so effective is that you really felt like you were connecting to him and to his campaign (Aaker & Chang, 2009, p. 7).

A common strategy utilized by public relations practitioners with CEO's, allowing Obama's personality to show in the social media content not only created stronger connections between the candidate and his supporters and thus increasing engagement, but it also lent increased authenticity and credibility to the social media campaign (Aaker & Chang, 2009). Above all, Obama's social media campaign was resourceful, readily providing prospective voters relevant information about the candidate through social media channels and giving Obama's supporters numerous ways to volunteer and support the campaign. One of the chief ways the campaign accomplished this, particularly in garnering volunteer support and donations, was through the creation of www.my.barackobama.com (MyBO). In many ways, MyBO operated as its own social

media platform, connecting supporters. The connections helped create a groundswell of grassroots volunteer support for the Obama campaign (Aaker & Chang, 2009).

The Obama campaign understood that it needed to provide a variety of ways for people to be involved. On MyBO, registered users could create a profile, connect and chat with other registered users, create offline events in their local areas, raise funds, download tools, and find local events. MyBO housed a plethora of materials and user-generated content such as videos, speeches, photos, and how-to guides that allowed users to create their own content, similar to a digital toolbox (Aaker & Chang, 2009, p. 6).

There were 2 million users registered profiles on the site, with volunteers planning more than 200,000 offline events, writing 400,000 blog posts, and creating 35,000 volunteer groups on MyBO (Aaker & Chang, 2009). The Obama social media campaign's ability to convert online engagement into offline engagement via volunteering was integral to the success of the campaign and is a characteristic of many successful social media campaigns (Allagui & Breslow, 2016, p. 23). Offline engagement can spread engagement from a target audience to a more general audience via word-of-mouth, as well as increase engagement across multiple different social media platforms. Additionally, offline engagement increases the potential for a campaign to go viral.

It is important to acknowledge the differences between Obama's social media campaign and a stereotypical social media campaign. A stereotypical social media campaign is a targeted series of posts and other social media elements that, in conjunction, sell or raise awareness for a company, brand, or product. The end goal of a social media campaign is to engage with the target publics and convert them from a passive audience to active participants in the brand or product (Ketter & Avraham, 2012). In essence, this is what the Obama social media campaign also aimed to do, but due to the nature of political campaigns, subtle differences exist. One of the main differences

lies in that the Obama campaign was not trying to market a product or company, they were trying to market a person (Allagui & Breslow, 2016). Furthermore, as Obama's social media campaign was part of a larger political campaign, its end goal was slightly different. Obama's social media campaign emphasized converting online activity to not just offline action, but specifically to offline activism and volunteerism, which is harder to obtain. And obviously, garnering votes was another priority for the Obama campaign. While these goals are usually not present in most companies' social media campaigns, the tactics utilized by the Obama campaign to achieve their goals are. Coordinated multimedia elements, authenticity, and unified messaging across social media platforms can be found in both political and corporate social media campaigns, once again showing the prevalence of these new strategies.

Case studies on successful, non-politically based social media campaigns illustrate the same principles of modern public relations in action. Chipotle, for example, utilized a unified campaign across multiple social media platforms, converting engagement into virality and offline sales at restaurant locations (Allagui & Breslow, 2016).

In an effort to create an image as healthy and environmentally conscious, Chipotle, an American restaurant chain, launched a social media campaign highlighting the negative effects of processed food while showing the positives of Chipotle's organic menu items (Allagui & Breslow, 2016). The image of a scarecrow was used throughout the entire campaign as the predominant imagery and theme, creating a unified feel across social media platforms. A short film and mobile game were also created, using the scarecrow imagery, to generate offline engagement. When completing the game, players

were rewarded with Chipotle coupons that they could share with a friend, encouraging word-of-mouth advertisement about Chipotle and the campaign while also generating revenue and increasing the campaign's virality. The video served as the emotional anchor of the campaign, creating a connection between the campaign and the audience.

Chipotle's campaign ticks all the boxes of the PARC principles, particularly in the authenticity of its emotional message. All facets of the campaign are emotionally consistent, further emphasizing the importance of being environmentally conscious and eating organically, which can be done by eating at Chipotle.

These characteristics are what helped turn the campaign into a massive success for Chipotle. In just one month, the campaign tallied 614 million PR impressions and 18.4 million conversations across 17 different social media platforms (Allagui & Breslow, 2016). Furthermore, the campaign allowed Chipotle to jump to the top of the Social Brand Index, a ranking system that measures the strength of a brand's social media presence.

The Melbourne Metro system also utilized multiple multimedia campaign elements, including a short film, mobile game, book, toys, and even a song, to boost the virality of its campaign, which raised awareness for metro safety (Allagui & Breslow, 2016). Titled *Dumb Ways to Die* (DWTD), the campaign featured distinct and recognizable animated characters dying in metro-related accidents. Like Chipotle, DWTD established an emotional connection between the campaign and the audience, using comedy and laughter. The charming and playful public service announcement was perfect for social media, spreading rapidly across platforms. The catchy song that

accompanied the video and mobile game only served to boost the virality of the campaign.

DWTD excelled in being participatory, authentic, and credible as part of the PARC system for success. The campaign continually engaged with its target audience on multiple social media platforms while maintaining a consistent, albeit mainly comedic, tone to advertise metro safety (Allagui & Breslow, 2016). This was accomplished online through posing interactive challenges and memes on social media platforms, as well as other techniques. And due to the campaign being run by the Melbourne Metro system, the campaign was seen as trustworthy and credible by the target audience.

A major factor in the success of both the Chipotle and DWTD campaigns was the use of consistent and memorable imagery and icons (Allagui & Breslow, 2016). Both campaigns frequently used a specific icon that the target audience associated with the campaign, resulting in the campaign being easily recognizable on social media platforms, especially for younger audiences. For Chipotle, the icon was the Scarecrow, while DWTD leaned on its animated characters from the mobile game and video. Allagui and Breslow (2016) point out that the consistency in branding and imagery allowed for the DWTD campaign to be easily shared across social media.

The content across all media is exceptionally consistent, consisting almost solely of images, along with excerpts from the video and the theme song placed in a variety of online and offline environments. The tagline, “Dumb Ways to Die,” along with excerpted lyrics from the song, is often the only visible text found on social media shares, out of home displays, and the video. This reliance on the use of image-based memes across all social media and other communication platforms and channels, ensures the highest level of attention and engagement on the part of members of the Generation Z target audience (p. 26).

As discussed earlier in this thesis, consistent branding and imagery are integral for success in social media. Consistent branding, an emotional connection with the target

audience, the utilization of current technology, and the use of multiple platforms to drive offline engagement all characterized the success of both Chipotle's and the Melbourne Metro's social media campaigns (Allagui & Breslow, 2016).

No Rights, No Women was a 2012 campaign created to protest the treatment of Lebanese women by the Lebanese government (Allagui & Breslow, 2016). Again, like each of the campaigns that have been discussed thus far, No Rights, No Women expertly leveraged social media to create offline engagement and participation. In fact, offline engagement and participation are exactly what made No Rights, No Women a successful and powerful campaign. In response to the discrimination against women by the Lebanese government, Lebanese women were encouraged to wear fake mustaches, change their gender status to male on social media platforms, and sign a petition. As No Rights, No Women had a very specific target audience, the campaign wisely utilized both Twitter and Facebook, the two social media platforms that were primarily used by Lebanese women in 2012, to spread its message. Excerpts of discriminatory laws were simplified and posted onto Twitter and Facebook to raise awareness.

The campaign's focus on making content accessible to its target audience paid off, as the campaign managed to hold a successful, peaceful protest on International Women's Day, where Lebanese women dressed as men marched to the Lebanese parliamentary building (Allagui & Breslow, 2016).

"Both national and regional broadcast media covered the march to the parliament event, which garnered millions of media impressions as a result. The quantitative metrics included USD 1.2 million in free media coverage" (Allagui & Breslow, 2016, p. 27).

No Rights, No Women's ability to earn free media coverage was vital for the campaign to work and for change to come in Lebanon (Allagui & Breslow, 2016). Free media coverage, also known as earned coverage, is generally considered the most valuable type of media coverage (Demrici et al., 2014, p. 1). While other types of media coverage exist, including paid media coverage and owned media coverage, earned media is seen as more trustworthy than other types of media coverage. Social media has made it increasingly easier to gain earned media coverage, as almost all news organizations extensively cover social media platforms. In the case of No Rights, No Women, the campaign was able to procure earned media coverage through its virality on social media, which attracted the attention of news organizations and lent the movement authority and credibility (Allagui & Breslow, 2016, p. 27).

The No Rights, No Women campaign excelled in its participatory and resource elements. The campaign's ability to distill complex legislation into easily digestible social media content allowed for the campaign to spread with ease (Allagui & Breslow, 2016). Furthermore, No Rights, No Women emphasized interaction, both on social media and in real life, to support the cause the campaign was raising awareness for, which was women's rights in Lebanon.

Nestlé: An Example of a Failed Social Media Campaign

While successful campaigns are a good way to see the change that social media has brought, value also can be found in studying campaigns that failed. In the ever-changing digital world that PR exists in, some practitioners and companies have yet to catch up.

A major example of this came from Nestlé in 2010 (Edwards, 2021). Greenpeace, an environmental campaigning corporation, posted a YouTube video parodying Nestlé's popular KitKat slogan and accusing Nestlé of endangering orangutangs in Indonesia through their production of the popular candy. The video quickly went viral and social media exploded into a flurry of negative comments about Nestlé.

Nestlé's response, if you can call it that, was less than adequate and demonstrated a lack of knowledge regarding social media and how their target audience used it (Edwards, 2021). In short, Nestlé did everything but respond. The company's initial reaction to the YouTube video was to not release a statement or apology but to have the video taken down for copyright infringement. Furthermore, Nestlé deleted any and all negative comments that were posted on their social media pages in a futile attempt to silence criticism of the company.

We can look back to the crisis management matrix that Lambret and Barki developed to see where Nestlé erred in its response (Lambret & Barki, 2017). Nestlé undeniably took a defensive approach when responding to Greenpeace's YouTube video. However, due to the nature of the video and the response it elicited on social media, Nestlé should have used an accommodative strategy, which seeks to, "generate, improve, or develop reputational assets by offering symbolic or material aid to stakeholders" (Lambret, Barki, 2017, p. 299). By using a defensive approach, Nestlé only worsened the problem, further damaging their brand's reputation. Nestlé's error was costly and can still serve as a cautionary tale to companies as to why having designated crisis management personnel and a crisis management plan is a good idea.

Through examining these case studies, a correlation between specific social media campaign's characteristics and the success of the campaign can be found. For example, the Melbourne Metro System and Chipotle's respective campaigns illustrated the power of cohesive, uniform brand imagery and messaging across multiple social media platforms. Identifying strategies, tactics, and characteristics that lead to the success or failure of social media campaigns is vital for public relations practitioners going forward if they are to replicate and sustain success on social media platforms.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Future of Social Media and Public Relations

The future of public relations, like any industry, is uncertain. As difficult as it is already to predict the future of an industry, the rapid progression of technology and social media have made it nearly impossible in the case of public relations. However, public relations practitioners cannot afford to ignore the future. As Judy VanSlyke Turk (1986) wrote in “Forecasting Tomorrow’s Public Relations”, “The future is not something today’s institution or organization can afford to ignore, or something that can be left to chance. From a need and desire to intervene in the future come the necessity of futures research” (Turk, 1986, p. 12). While Turk’s predictions in “Forecasting Tomorrow’s Public Relations” were not particularly accurate, her point remains, particularly when it comes to new technology. Public relations practitioners must push to embrace the future, not turn away from it.

It is integral that public relations practitioners continue to analyze trends, especially with the importance and volatility of social media platforms today (Kent & Saffer, 2014). One of the world’s largest and most revolutionary social media platforms, Tik Tok, only had 65 million annual users in 2017 (Iqbal, 2022). Just five years later and that number has risen to more than one billion. Many practitioners are still learning how to use newly popularized social media platforms, such as Tik Tok. The rise of social media influencers, virtual and augmented reality, privacy concerns, and society’s

growing dependence on social media further illustrate how the roles of public relations practitioners, and public relations as a whole, will continue to shift and change.

Subtle changes in the professional practice of public relations occur on an almost daily basis. As public relations agencies and professional associations struggle to remain relevant (cf., Elliot, 2013), the field has seen a gradual shift in the profession from the organizational counselors and relationship managers Turk wrote of, to social media specialists and a return to technical “communication managers” and marketers, rather than strategic thinkers (Taylor & Kent, 2010); (Kent & Safffer, 2014, p. 568).

Practitioners must become multifaceted communicators and faster at adapting to new platforms and media if they are going to thrive in a world dominated by social media and technology.

In this chapter, three topics that have the potential to effect public relations from a social media standpoint will be discussed. These include social media and virtual influencers, privacy on social media platforms, and augmented and virtual reality. While these topics already play some role in the public relations industry, their influence and importance will only grow as technology and social media do as well. It is possible that these will be the defining tactics, technology, or issues of the public relations industry in the coming years.

Omni-Social Presence and the Rise of Influencers

As social media has grown in popularity, so has its pervasiveness throughout people’s lives (Appel et al., 2019). Part of this includes social media drifting out of just its dedicated medium or platform and into more segments of publics’ lives.

...Consumers live in a world in which social media intersects with most aspects of their lives through digitally enabled social interactivity in such domains as travel (e.g., TripAdvisor), work (e.g., LinkedIn), food (e.g., Yelp), music (e.g., Spotify), and more (Appel et al., 2019, p. 82).

This trend has already begun and will only continue as social media-related technology advances. Appel et al. (2019) have termed this as an “omni-social world,” which refers to a world in which social media influences all aspects (p. 82). Appel et al. point toward the influence that social media holds culturally over the western world as evidence of this shift in cultural influence. An example is social media influencers’ newfound status as celebrities, now appearing in movies, late-night television, and red carpets; mediums and places usually reserved for the highest echelon of public figures. The growing trend of an “omni-social world” makes social media more important to society in general and thus public relations practitioners.

An emerging new weapon for public relations practitioners is social media influencers (SMIs). While the idea of using celebrities or public figures to achieve public relations-related goals is not new, social media’s vast reach has made the approach more effective and lowered the bar of entry to become an effective influencer (Appel et al., 2019).

The appeal of using SMIs for a public relations platform is easy to see. Influencers possess a direct line of communication to a specific segment of people that otherwise may be hard to target on social media (Borchers, 2019). Influencers possess a valuable space on social media platforms, as publics choose to follow them and tune in to what they have to say. SMIs as a whole possess very captive audiences, in holding with the concept of an “omni-social world” that revolves around social media. They are able to cut through the constant noise and clutter that exists on a social media platform and deliver a message directly to the desired audience. Another sought-after trait that social media influencers have is their versatility.

For example, SMIs [social media influencers] can serve the roles of intermediary, content distributor, creative content producer, community manager, testimonial, strategic counsellor, and event host. The combination of these roles in just one actor opens new opportunities for strategic communication and can produce appreciated synergy effects (Borchers, 2019, p. 255).

This versatility that SMIs possess mean they can be involved in many different types of social media campaigns and perform different functions in those campaigns. This also means that practitioners' creativity is not hampered by using SMIs.

Additionally, promotional campaigns that utilize SMIs boast high acceptance rates, particularly amongst teenagers and young adults, who are an incredibly difficult demographic to reach, especially on social media (Borchers, 2019). SMIs are already utilized heavily by marketing and public relations departments that are social media savvy. In 2018 alone, the SMI industry made a combined \$4.6 billion. But that number will continue to grow as more companies and organizations turn towards SMIs.

Virtual influencers are currently on the cutting edge of social media influencing (Appel et al., 2019). Similar in function to regular SMIs, virtual influencers are CGI versions of influencers, appearing to be human but completely fake. Virtual influencers are controlled by a content creator, whether that be a public relations practitioner or marketing professional (Mosley, 2022). An advantage to using virtual influencers is the convenience they offer to organizations that utilize them. Logistically speaking, they are always ready to work and do not require sleep, food, or salary. Furthermore, virtual influencers can be made to wear, say, or promote whatever the organization or public relations practitioner wishes.

Virtual influencers are already working. The most popular virtual influencer is called "Lil Miquela," and run by Brud, a startup based in Los Angeles (Mosely, 2022).

Lil Miquela's Instagram page has amassed 1.6 million followers, and the virtual influencer, under the guidance of Brud, has released several singles on major music streaming platforms. The audience that Lil Miquela has accumulated is impressive, as is the influence Brud holds over her following. Appel et al. (2019) believe that virtual influencers may be the future of influencing on social media.

...we believe that in coming years, along with stronger computing power and artificial intelligence algorithms, virtual influencers will become much more prominent on social media, being able to invariably represent and act on brand values and engage with followers anytime (2019, p. 83).

Despite the newfound success of Lil Miquela and other virtual influencers, it is impossible to tell if the concept will become mainstream across social media public relations. Some target publics may be turned off by the 'uncanny valley' aspect of the virtual influencers. Regardless, virtual influencers could potentially be an interesting opportunity for public relations practitioners in the future.

Privacy Concerns and Social Media

Personal privacy is one of the most pressing topics in the social media age. News of major companies such as Google and Facebook selling users' private information has shattered many publics' faith in social media platforms. Companies have been exposed for selling user data to companies, justifying it as enhancing the user experience by creating personalized ads, content, and interfaces (Appel et al., 2019). Research shows privacy violations decrease publics' trust in a company, therefore decreasing the site's integrity, performance, and publics' willingness to use the platform (Martin, 2018). Further complicating privacy concerns in the context of social media are the many different types of privacy violations that can occur on the platform, including the leaking

or sales of personal information, search histories, and personal data. Publics have differing reactions depending on the type of privacy violation, the manner in which the violation occurred, and what it was being used for. For example, some users may see the leaking of their search history as a major breach of privacy, while others may see it as a perk, as it allows for social media sites to personalize ads and feeds to them based on their interests and recent searches.

Privacy violations pose a major problem to PR practitioners. In the wake of social media, which has opened up new avenues for connecting with publics in efficient and effective ways, privacy violations by major social media platforms have caused publics to recoil, even to the point of deleting their social media accounts (Appel et al., 2019).

Consumers are deleting their social media presence, where research has shown that nearly 40% of digitally connected individuals admitted to deleting at least one social media account due to fears of their personal data being mishandled (Edelman 2018); (Appel et al., 2019, p. 84).

Research also suggests that publics have begun to see companies as complicit, or at least benefactors of the privacy violations, creating another worrying trend for practitioners. With many companies becoming dependent on social media to reach target publics, it will become important for both social media platforms and practitioners to restore publics' trust in social media platforms.

Considering that social media has become one of the best places for brands to engage with consumers, build relationships, and provide customer service, it's not only in the best interest of social media platforms to do better in terms of policing content, but the onus of responsibility has been placed on brands to advocate for privacy, trust, and the removal of fake or hateful content (Appel et al., 2019, p. 84).

Both PR practitioners and social media platforms rely on publics for a multitude of uses and reasons. But as Appel et al. (2019) say, the PR practitioners cannot stand to wait for

social media platforms to alleviate publics' concerns over privacy on social media platforms. They must be proactive in reducing publics' concerns over privacy on social media platforms in the future or risk losing a valuable method of direct communication with target publics.

When embroiled in a situation where publics are questioning the safety of using a social media platform or page, practitioners must be wary not to simply apologize and promise to do better. Research by Ayaburi and Treku (2020) suggests that while this approach may increase a person's belief in the integrity of the company, it does not truly answer their concerns about privacy. The pair write, "...the estimation results show that although the persuasiveness or appeal of apology could lead to increase behavioral integrity, it does not influence users' concerns about access, misuse and dissemination of their personal information on the social platform" (2020, p. 179). Instead, organizations must simply act better and prove to publics that they are worthy of their trust. On this topic, the actions of organizations will speak much louder than words.

Virtual and Augmented Reality in Social Media

A current and growing example of integrated technology in social media is virtual and augmented reality (Williamson, 2020). Facebook's recent dip into the virtual reality world with Horizon Worlds, a virtual reality metaverse app, as well as its \$2 billion purchase of Oculus in 2014, signals serious intent by the social media giant to push virtual reality to the forefront of the company's services (Rodriguez, 2021). Furthermore, in October of 2021, Facebook pledged \$10 billion to fund and build Horizon Worlds. Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook and Meta Platforms, himself said, "Our hope is that

within the next decade, the metaverse will reach a billion people, host hundreds of billions of dollars of digital commerce, and support jobs for millions of creators and developers” (Rodriguez, 2021).

But Facebook is not the only social media platform to utilize virtual and augmented reality. Snapchat, Instagram, and Tik Tok have all made use of the new technology, each in different ways (Williamson, 2020). Snapchat utilizes augmented reality for lenses, which can be corporately sponsored. Facebook also has begun to introduce virtual reality advertisements. Across all platforms, virtual and augmented reality can be used for location and campaign-based advertisements and lenses that affect the user’s environment through their device’s screen. A further breakdown of augmented reality lenses leads to entertainment-based lenses and technology-based lenses, each with separate effects on the user’s experience and feelings toward the brand that accompanies the lenses (Sanchez et al., 2021). Research suggests that users’ enjoyment of lenses lies in its entertainment value, tying its usefulness to PR practitioners to their ability to create entertaining lenses. Snapchat introduced and pioneered augmented reality technology on their platform. In 2018, more than 29 million social media users were making use of augmented reality, primarily on Snapchat. That number grew to 43.7 million in 2020, which is 20.8% of all social media users.

Substantial funding from social media giants and a growing user base has transformed virtual and augmented reality from fringe technology to an increasingly important part of social media platforms. As when other new features and technologies are implemented into social media platforms, public relations practitioners will have to adapt to virtual and augmented reality, while finding a way to effectively utilize it.

Location and campaign-based lenses that utilize augmented reality have already proven they can serve as a powerful tool (Liu et al., 2019).

Sanchez et al. (2021) aptly pointed out that a key aim of social media platforms is to foster interactions. Virtual and augmented reality allow for public relations practitioners to insert their brand or message directly into those interactions, making them invaluable and potentially the future of public relations in social media.

The future of public relations might be unpredictable, but current trends in both social media and technology can provide valuable insight into the path that the industry is heading. Technology and its integration into social media are primed to dictate the future of public relations. Augmented reality, virtual influencers, and privacy concerns continue to mount in importance in the social media world, and as social media's sphere of influence continues to grow in society, these issues and topics will be incredibly important for public relations practitioners as well.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has thoroughly demonstrated the ways in which social media has changed public relations as an industry. This includes the introduction of new methods, tactics, technology, and roles for practitioners in the industry. This has been accomplished by reviewing relevant research, literature, and case studies. Furthermore, by examining the practices and tactics of public relations during the 20th and early 21st century, one can easily compare public relations as in industry before and after the invention, popularization, and integration of social media into society. Finally, the potential topics and issues that public relations may face in the near future were also discussed, including virtual reality and privacy concerns on social media platforms.

The change that social media has brought to the public relations industry is akin to that of television, internet, and perhaps even the printing press (Solis & Breakenridge, 2009). Just like the major technological advancements that came before it, social media has fundamentally changed the way public relations practitioners and organizations operate. Gone are the days of old news releases, which were written with newspapers and traditional media in mind. Now social media and multimedia releases dominate the public relations landscape, optimized specifically for online use (Solis & Breakenridge, 2009, p. 116). One-way communication channels are also a thing of the past (Wilcox et al., 2015). Now practitioners are able to utilize two-way communication channels, giving them direct access to their target publics.

These changes have advanced the public relations, giving practitioners unprecedented access to analytics, trends, and their publics, allowing them to create more informed strategies and tactics (Gilfoil & Jobs, 2012). They have also created new positions and roles for public relations practitioners to occupy, as well as increased their voice in organizations (Wilcox et al., 2015).

To be frank, social media has allowed public relations practitioners to be better at their jobs. Not only has it made their jobs easier but it has given them more ways to do their job. Practitioners are no longer held captive by journalists and members of the media to receive placement. Social media has given them a platform to directly spread their message to a captive audience. It has allowed practitioners greater accessibility, while affording them the opportunity to utilize advanced technology and their creativity, something that, the press releases of old, for example, did not allow.

Overall, it is an exciting time in the public relations industry. For practitioners who are unfamiliar with social media and new technology, adapting to a new reality may be, at times, difficult, daunting, or even scary. Additionally, not every practitioner has or will survive the rapid changes that public relations is undergoing (Solis & Breakenridge, 2009, p. 156). And while this is unfortunate for those practitioners, ultimately change is good for the public relations industry. In fact, change is necessary if public relations is to stay true to its intended purpose: to inform people, persuade people, and integrate people with people (Bernays, 1945).

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