

## *Original Paper*

# How Public Relation Exist and Operate in the Organisation?

Jian Wu<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lecturer at Hubei Business College, Wu Han, China

Received: January 9, 2023      Accepted: February 16, 2023      Online Published: October 14, 2024

doi:10.22158/ibes.v6n5p138

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/ibes.v6n5p138>

*2021 School-level scientific research project of Hubei Business College (KY202117)*

### **Abstract**

*With the development of technology and the change of life style, organisations are seeking more effectiveness and efficient way to practice the public relations. How public relation works in the organisations has been studies extensively. This essay will focus on how public relation exist and operate in the organisation from three different aspects which are traditional media, social media and stakeholder engagement which link one-way or two-way Grunig and Hunt's models. The one-way or two-way Grunig and Hunt's models will be explained in the essay as well. Moreover, the essay will take M&M's chocolate, Brisbane City Council and Manila Water Company as three examples to testify how the three approaches working in the public relations in society. Finally, it is recommended that the organisations are better to choose the suitable method basing on the organisations' strategy and which ethical framework they applied.*

### **Keywords**

*Public relation, traditional media, Social media, stakeholder engagement, feedback*

## **1. Introduction**

Nowadays, public relation is essential for business government and the public to engage with each other about the decision making and social issues. Different parities use different approaches to practice the public relations around the world. This essay is aim to analyse three approaches that organisations used to communicate with the public. They are traditional media, social media and stakeholder engagement which link one-way or two-way Grunig and Hunt's models. Some researches about the three approaches and how organisations engage with the public by using them will be analysed in the essay. Meanwhile, three different real world organisations' behaviour will be discussed and explained to make further classifications about how public relation exist and operate in these organisations and the ethical perspective view about their behaviour.

## 2. Traditional Media

Traditional mass media is an economical, effective method for organisations to communicate with large and widely dispersed publics. Skills in using newspapers, magazines, trade publications, AM and FM radio, television, cable, books, and so on are required when working in public relations (Broom, Cutlip, & Center, 2009). For profit organisation, practitioners of public relations use these channels to promote the products or publish business relevant information for organisations to create brand awareness. Thus, the organisations are connected with the public. The contents are usually some information about the new products, the applications and the prices of the products, as well as the new services. However, there are some weaknesses about the traditional media, which is related to the characteristics of the traditional media. The first characteristic of traditional media is centralised/top down. Since the time and length of the advertisement is limited, practitioners have to put the essential information ahead the advertisement. Because customers are usually read the title firstly to find some information that they may interest. Otherwise, the message will not reach to the public. Secondly, the traditional media is costly to publish. Organisations have to pay much to issue their messages on traditional media. Moreover, whether something is reported or not, what will be reported, how, when and to whom it is reported is decided by the media gatekeepers (Broom, Cutlip, & Center, 2009). The traditional media is not only controlled by the professional gatekeepers, but also a one-way communication with limited feedback channels. Customers can not response to the organisations through the traditional media. They can only receive the information which showed on the traditional media. When the organisations' targets are widely, the method may be useful. However, it is not easy for organisations to collect the feedbacks of their targets, when they try to delivery some information to the society.

Traditional media is one-way communication method and it links to the earliest form of Grunig and Hunt's public relations model – press agency and the public information model. Firstly, Organisations promote their products or publish the information about their business through newspapers, magazines, radio, television, cable and books. Moreover, the truth of the information is also depends on the media gatekeepers' decision. Therefore, organisations use traditional media method is aim to build brand awareness and get publicity at any cost and the truth of the information to the public are not ensured. Many researches and reports show that the news on the traditional media channels such as newspaper, TV, radio, magazines and so on are not always right and true. They may be forged by the editors or reporters. Press agency is a one-sided pattern that rarely uses research to disseminate emotional messages that may be used manipulatively (Waters & Jamal, 2011). It is all about getting publicity through the media at almost any cost. Therefore, using traditional media may be costly. Nevertheless, sometimes organisations' strategy only need to focus on specific targets. If they use traditional media, the cost may over the benefits. "The press agency model describes public relations programs with the sole purpose of attracting favorable publicity for an organization using mass media" (Matthews, 2010). When public relation practitioners deliver message to other party or governments publish some information to the society by traditional media, the information has to be truthful. The public

information model is a one-way communication model that uses “journalists-in-residence” to disseminate information to the media (Jackson & Lilleker, 2004). Public information depends on transferring the truthful messages (Matthews, 2010). Thus, press agency and public information are models that organisations used to engage with publics by using traditional media.

M&M’s chocolate candies conducted a national contest to name a new color for M&M’s candies. Public relations activities generated 1.06 billion impressions from 10,000 TV, radio and print placement (Wilcox, Cameron, & Reber, 2015). In order to promote their products, they use the Spokescandies, Red and Yellow, along with others from time to time. That still can be seen on the street nowadays. By using relatively the same format in promoting their product makes the consumer more aware that the product advertised is M&Ms and will be more likely to buy it because of that brand awareness (M&M’s History timeline, 2015). What M&M did was using press agency model on the traditional media including advertisement, personal appearances and product placement. By spending a lot of money on TV advertisement, radio and print placement, as well as sponsor race competitions to publish their brand to the publics. The purpose of M&M is attracting more consumers and also informing the public about their brand to get competitive advantages. The big-budget TV advertisement starring M&M’s animated duo has jumped in at number two in the week’s Adwatch chart. The advertisement shows Mr Red and Mr Yellow taken hostage, with the kidnapper threatening to eat one of them. (Top 10 ads of the week: M&M’s hostage ad misses out on top spot, 2015). According to the ethical framework of Aristotle’s Golden Mean, organisation’s behaviour is ethical when it is best for the majority. Therefore, M&M posted this advertisement on the TV is ethical. The reason is because it will benefit the company by effectively attracting consumers, and the main target of M&M is children. Moreover, even though people know the advertisement is not real in the world, but it creates fun for the public, regardless the age and gender. Therefore, despite the cost of traditional media method, it is good for the majority.

### **3. Social Media**

In the 21st century, with the technological advances, social media has been used by organisations to communicate with the publics. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, most people prefer to communicate through social media rather than face to face. Many companies have spotted the potential opportunity in social media, then use it to replace the traditional way of promoting and selling products. Hence, it brings the rapid growth in the use of social media. Social media tools offer practitioners new ways to implement the traditional elements of public relations practices (Matthews, 2010). Social media applications such as social network sites, blogs, microblogs, and location-based services were on the verge of becoming mainstream, led by sites such as Facebook and YouTube, and Blog (Vestergaard, 2014). Due to sustainable growing internet users and the raising of the advanced mobile device, social media becomes widespread broad. Especially, the emergence of we-media era, there are plenty of users started to get information or online shopping through applications such as Tik Tok or AAuto Quicker.

Therefore, organisations found it is the most efficient way to reach customers and communicate with the society, they can easily publish the video through mobile devices instead of advertising on TV or newspaper. More and more organisations have started to use social media to replace the traditional media because they are able to promote their products with a lower price or free and sell the products through the social media platforms. A lot of money will be saved for the organisations by using social media. Moreover, the social media provides more new distribution channels and advertising paradigms for the organisations. Now, organisations can promote their products and inform messages on the internet or mobile devices. By using social media to engage with public, it is more effective and efficient. The messages on the internet will easily spread to the world. It is a better way to attract customers by comparing with the traditional media. With the access to the large user group, organisations can still increase their sales during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using Facebook, blogs or we-media is a two-way method to communicate with publics for organisations. Organisations can receive feedbacks from public and improve their persuasion with the feedbacks. However, the large flowing information may not be all true and some of them may be useless or worthless. Therefore, the public relation practitioners need to filter the feedbacks before using them.

According to the characteristics of the social media, it is relevant to the two-way asymmetric model. Two-way asymmetric model attempts “scientific persuasion” rather than the crude and sometimes manipulative techniques used by publicists (Butterick, 2011). Organisations still use social media as one way communication to their target audience. The social media is just a tool for the organisations to persuade those on the receiving end of public relation campaigns to take a form of action, whether to buy a product or in the case of a charity to support its campaigns. By using Facebook, blogs and also posting advertisement on the YouTube is aimed at changing customers’ behaviour or opinion about the product. There is no actually dialogue between organisations and the public, or if there is it is only in order to improve the sales message. In the two-way asymmetric model, the communicator gets feedback from the public and then applies it the latest communication and persuasion theories to persuade that audience to accept the organisation’s point of view (Butterick, 2011). Social media to the organisations is more like to be free or easy accessed channel to find out the public opinion in order to improve their messages delivering. Practitioners of public relation will not actually communicate with the public through this channel. The public opinion or feedback will not be taken by the practitioners. For example, Brisbane City Council is planning an upgrade of the skate facility located in Neal Macrossan Park at the intersection of Hale and Caxton Streets, Paddington. Council announced that they will fund the upgrade of the Paddington Skate Park for the current and future generations of skate facility users (Paddington Skate Park Upgrade Project - Neal Macrossan Park, 2015). The city council has posted the information on different channels of social media to announce the public about the park facility upgrade. They pointed out that they need the public’s helps to shape the design. However, they have worked with the experienced designers for the concept designs preparation about the facility upgrade, and the design of the upgrade works is currently being finalised. They also indicated that the

final decision on the skate park design will be made by the council. Which means the public feedback is not really necessarily important for them and the decision is all on them. They used social media such as Facebook to inform the public about the project. They received many feedbacks from the public, but they did not actually consider all the public feedbacks. It shows that this is a kind of two-way asymmetric model by using social media.

From the ethical perspective, Brisbane City Council post the information on the Facebook, YouTube and other social media channels is trying to widely spread the message of park facility upgrade project. Therefore, the public can immediately receive the news about what will happen around them. Even though the council will not go along with all the feedbacks, but they asked the public's opinions about the project at least. The public gets benefits from the council's behaviour and the projects. The consequence can justify their behaviour. Thus, their behaviour conforms to the ethical framework of teleology.

#### **4. Stakeholder Engagement**

As social awareness increased, government, public and organisations started to engage with each other to make decision or find out solutions on different issues that may affect the involved stakeholders. Therefore, stakeholder engagement is aim to provide balanced, objective, accurate and consistent information to assist stakeholders to understand the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions. In order to ensure the stakeholders' concerns and needs are consistently understood and considered, practitioners of public relations need to work directly with stakeholders throughout the process and obtain feedback from stakeholders on analysis, alternatives and/or outcomes (Bolt, 2011). Organisations and stakeholders associate with each other and give feedback or opinions to each other are two-way communication. All parties engage in the dialogue to share information, ideas and different perspective views on the same issue. Therefore, the feedbacks will be more directly and easily to obtain. Therefore, two-way symmetric model fits the situation when stakeholder engagement occurs in the business. Two-way symmetric model of Grunig and Hunt's Models can be explained as the views of the public are sought, and are given as much importance as the views of the organisation. Either the organisation or the public may change its mind, or they might just end up understanding one another better (Wilcox, Cameron, Reber, & Shin, 2013). The model advocates a free and equal flow of information between organisations and the public, leading to a pattern of mutual understanding and response distinguishes this pattern from the concept of asymmetry (Grunig & Grunig, 1992). The model combines two-way communication and research-based methods to delivery information. Practitioners of public relation prefer to increase the the understanding between the organisation and its public by using this approach. The communication needs of both the organisation and the public are realised through this model, and they have the balanced effects to each other. By using this model to negotiate with publics, it can encourage the understanding. Practitioners of public relation need to associate with different stakeholders such as public, employees, competitors, suppliers and

communities. In order to effectively giving and receiving messages or useful information, practitioners need to choose the suitable method of engagement and determine the key messages to communicate. In order to improve decision-making and accountability, organisations need to engage with their stakeholders to find out what social and environmental issues matter most to both parties and the issues will influence their performance. Thus, two-way symmetric model is the best model for organisations to engage with its stakeholders, especially when organisation has a specific target group.

Manila Water Company in the Philippines has sought to have a proactive and open relationship with its stakeholders, including customers, local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and government. Providing clean, safe water and sewage services to about half of Manila's population is about building good stakeholder relationship, which is the fundamental to the company (Manila Water Story, 2015). When Manila Water acquired the East concession from the government operator, it launched a "Walk the Line" program in which all employees visit their customers, including residents of informal settlements, to consult with community on the delivery of these essential services. As a result, Manila Water has significantly improved its service delivery. The percentage of households who can have 24-hour water supply increased from 26% in 2004 to 95% in 2006. Meanwhile, there is a significant drop on the water losses from 63% to 35.5%. The population which is supplied by the company's water system is still increasing. Local communities, including the housing reconstruction have been benefited from the company's proactive stakeholder engagement strategy, and this strategy leads to some partnerships. Manila Water has also established Engagement Plans for key NGO stakeholders, the media, and investors that include quarterly dialogues and visits to the company's sustainable development and community projects (Sequeira & Warner, 2007). The company is improving their water services to the society and reducing the water waste by engaging with the stakeholders and cooperating with them on different projects or issues. Therefore, according to Aristotle's Golden Mean ethical framework, Manila Water's behaviours can be treated as the contribution to the majority.

## 6. Summary

To conclude, the purpose of this essay is aim to demonstrate that traditional media, social media and stakeholder engagement are three different approaches for organisations engage with the public. The practitioners of public relation need to decide which approach should be applied in different situation or stages. Traditional media is one-way model that used to get publicity for the organisations. However, organisations send out the information but not really care about the feedbacks or difficult to get responses from the public. Social media is imbalanced two-way communication model. If the organisations aim to gain sales or profits, it is recommended to use social media, which is the best way to obtain large number of customers. Besides, organisations can quickly acquire feedbacks about their services and products. Stakeholder engagement is mainstream approach that organisations associate with stakeholders to make better decision for the involved parties. Thus, The approach used by organisations is mainly depending on the final purpose of the organisations' strategy. The ethics in

practices of M&M, Brisbane City Council and Manila Water Company depends on which ethical framework applied to the three parties.

## References

- Bolt, R. (2011). *Stakeholder Engagement Framework*. Melbourne, VIC: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.
- Broom, G. M., Cutlip, S. M., & Center, A. H. (2009). *Effective public relations* (10th ed.). Upper Saddle River, N.J: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Butterick, K. (2011). *Introducing public relations: Theory and practice*. Sage.
- Grunig, J. E., & Grunig, L. (1992). Models of public relations and communications. In J. E. Grunig, *Excellence in public relations and communication management* (pp. 40-47). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Jackson, N. A., & Lilleker, D. G. (2004). Just public relations or an attempt at interaction? British MPs in the press, on the web and 'in your face'. *European Journal of Communication*, 19(4), 507-533. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323104047671>
- Manila Water. (n.d.). *Manila Water Story*. Retrieved May 25, 2015, from <http://www.manilawater.com/Pages/ManilaWaterStory.aspx>
- Matthews, L. (2010). Social media and the evolution of corporate communications. *The Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications*, 1(1), 17-23.
- M&M. (n.d.). *M&M's History timeline*. Retrieved May 25, 2015, from <http://www.mars.com/global/about-mars/history.aspx>
- Paddington Skate Park Upgrade Project - Neal Macrossan Park. (2015). Retrieved May 25, 2015, from <http://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/facilities-recreation/parks-venues/parks/parks-suburb/paddington-parks/paddington-skate-park-upgrade-project-neal-macrossan-park>
- Sequeira, D., & Warner, M. (2007). *Stakeholder Engagement: A Good Practice Handbook for Companies Doing Business in Emerging Markets*. International Finance Corporation, Washington DC, USA.
- Top 10 ads of the week: M&M's hostage ad misses out on top spot. (2015). Retrieved May 25, 2015, from <http://www.marketingmagazine.co.uk/article/1231058/top-10-ads-week-m-ms-hostage-ad-misses-top-spot>
- Vestergaard Kjeldsen, M. (2014). Social media--social genres. *NORDICOM Review: Nordic Research on Media and Communication*, 35(1), 155.
- Waters, R. D., & Jamal, J. Y. (2011). Tweet, tweet, tweet: A content analysis of nonprofit organizations' Twitter updates. *Public Relations Review*, 37(3), 321-324. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2011.03.002>

- Wilcox, D. L., Cameron, G. T., & Reber, B. H. (2015). *Public relations: Strategies and tactics*. Harlow, Essex: Pearson.
- Wilcox, D., Cameron, G., Reber, B., & Shin, J. (2013). *Think public relations* (2nd ed). Boston, Mass.: Allyn and Bacon.