IMPACT OF ON-LINE AND OFF-LINE PUBLIC RELATIONS TOOLS IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF HARYANA AND HIMACHAL PRADESH GOVERNMENTS

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ABSTRACT

The new digital media have dialogical, interactive, relational, and global properties that make them perfectly suited for a strategic management paradigm of public relations properties that one would think would force public relations practitioners to abandon their traditional one-way, message-oriented, asymmetrical and ethnocentric paradigm of practice. Due to the heightened exposure of organizations to natural and human catastrophes, crisis management is an expanding area of interest. It is one of the dominant areas in Public Relations research and a crucial organizational function. Crisis management is a tool designed to fight crisis, minimize the inflicted damage and protect the organization, stakeholders and industry from harm.

The current study is to know the "Impact of On-line and Off-line Public Relations tools in Crisis Communication Management in Government Public Relations departments of Haryana and HP. The Festinger and Ketz' model of research process has been followed. The results shows that this on-line approach is a paradigm shift in the mode of the communication and interaction resulting in the qualitatively change in the society in general and PR professionals in particular. It has not only improved the speed of communication but has also effectively addressed very large audience across large catchment across even in remotest parts. On-line PR can be an effective toll in crisis communication situation and informing the citizenry about the government vision, policy and practices with in fraction of time. The present study implies that On-line model used by Department of Information & Public Relations, Himachal Pradesh and Department of Information, Public Relations & Cultural Affairs, Haryana can be used as an effective guide for e-governance, information sharing, transparency and addressing public grievance in speedy manner.

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KEY WORDS: ON-line Public Relations, Crisis Communication, E-PR, PR

1. INTRODUCTION

A huge proportion of the world's population now has access to and is using digital media, and usage in developing countries is catching up to that in developing countries. In addition, digital media have made most public relations global and force organizations to think globally about their public relations practice. Public relations departments of organizations are moving rapidly to adjust to this change in media. *According to a report from i-Pressroom, Trend stream, PRSA, and Korn/Ferry International, as reported in PR News online (2009), 51% of public relations departments in the United States are responsible for digital communication, 49% for blogging, 48% for social networking, and 52% for micro blogging (such as text messaging, instant messaging, and Twittering).*

The new digital media have dialogical, interactive, relational, and global properties that make them perfectly suited for a strategic management paradigm of public relations properties that one would think would force public relations practitioners to abandon their traditional one-way, message-oriented, asymmetrical and ethnocentric paradigm of practice.

Public relations practitioners first used online media as an information dump, in the same way that they used traditional media, newsletters, and publications. Websites were used to disseminate information and to post publications and news releases. Employee intranets largely have been online newsletters. E-mail has been used to push promotional messages to the extent that they have been named spam. Social media are being used to disseminate marketing messages through such techniques as viral marketing. Digital media also are being used extensively for media relations, customer relations, financial relations, community relations, member relations for non-profits, donor relations, alumni relations for colleges and universities, public affairs and political public relations, and many other programmes designed to cultivate relationships with Public.

Due to the heightened exposure of organizations to natural and human catastrophes, crisis management is an expanding area of interest. It is one of the dominant areas in Public Relations research and a crucial organizational function. Crisis management is a tool designed to fight crisis, minimize the inflicted damage and protect the organization, stakeholders and industry from harm. Crisis management processes include preventative measures, crisis management plans, and post-crisis evaluations (Coombs, 2010a; 2007b).

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Coombs (2007b) and Heath (2010) divided crisis management into three main work categories: Pre-crisis (is concerned with prevention/preparation – what can be said or done to reduce the chance of crisis and moderate its harm if it occurs), Crisis (actual response to a crisis) and Post-crisis (revision, follow-up information, lessons learned, and preparation for next crisis). Pearson and Mitroff's (1993) more detailed classification divided crisis management into the five phases: Signal Detection, Preparation and Prevention, Containment and Damage Limitation, Recovery and Learning.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Objective

The general objective of current study is to know the "Impact of On-line and Off-line Public Relations tools in Crisis Communication Management in Government Public Relations departments."

B. Model of Research

The researcher has followed the *Festinger* and *Ketz'* model of research process that involves eight steps as: Formulation of a research problem, Conceptualizing a research design, Constructing the instrument for data collection, Writing the Research Proposal, Data Collection, Processing the Data, Sampling & Writing a Research report.

C. The Sample at a glance

In the present Study, Directors (Additional, Joint & Deputy Directors), District Public Relation officers (DPROs) and Assistant Public Relation officers (APROs) serving the Department of Information, Public Relations & Cultural Affairs, Haryana and Department of Information & Public Relations, Himachal Pradesh are taken as the sample. The total 96 Public Relation officers were available from the Haryana and, 80 from Himachal Pradesh. The sample size (176) is very small and specific, so census method is adopted.

D. Analysis of data

Descriptive Group Statistics (Means and Standard Deviations) and dependent "t" statistics of all the occupational groups i.e. Directors, District Public Relation Officers' (DPROs), Assistant Public Relation Officers(APROs) were computed through SPSS-17 software. In it all the instructional/ operational instructions and commands of Prof. Andy Field (2005) were followed to find out the significant mean difference between the above mentioned three groups of Public Relations Officers in context Impact of On-line and Off-line Public Relations tools on Performance and Crisis Management.

3. IMPACT OF ON-LINE AND OFF-LINE PR TOOLS IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT

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A Major Public Relations' tools used to handle the crisis

Various 'tools of Public Relations' used to handle the crisis communication by Officers of PR departments of Haryana and Himachal Pradesh has been described in Table 1. 'traditional press release (Offline)' tops the list (80.66 %), followed by 'Online press release' (51.70 %), 'radio bulletin' (27.27 %), 'press conference' (23.86 %), 'television bulletin' (22.72 %), 'online press conference' (17.04 %) and 'online media centre' (11.36). Across the states, 'offline/traditional press releases' have been used by all the respondents (100 %) of H.P and it is also the most liked PR tool of Haryana respondents as well (78.12 %). Second most preferred tool is 'Online press releases' of respondents of both the states (65.00 % of H.P. and 40.62 % of Haryana).The use of various tools in handling crisis found statistically significant (P-0.021) across the states.

Table 1: Major Public Relations' tools used to handle the crisis

Response	States				Combined (N= 176)		Chi-square	P-Value
	Haryana (N= 96)		H.P. (N= 80)					
	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Press releases	75	78.12	80	100.00	155	80.06		
Press conference	22	22.91	20	25.00	42	23.86		
Radio bulletin	31	32.29	17	21.25	48	27.27		
TV bulletin	21	21.87	19	23.75	40	22.72	14.934	0.021
Online press releases	39	40.62	52	65.00	91	51.70		
Online press conference	08	08.33	22	27.50	30	17.04		
Setting up of online media centre	06	06.25	14	17.50	20	11.36		

B. Effectiveness of various on-line and off-line tools of Public Relations applied in crisis communication

The 'opinions' of the respondents of both the states regarding effectiveness of various online and offline tools of crisis communication have been given in Table 2. The data explain that among offline tools (press release, press conference, radio and TV bulletin); 'traditional press release' has been considered as most effective crisis communication tool (26.13 %) by total respondents, followed by 'TV bulletin' (18.18 %), 'radio bulletin' (17.04 %) and 'traditional press conference' (14.20).

Table 2: Effectiveness of various on-line and off-line tools of PR

Response	States				Combined (N= 176)		Chi-square	P-Value
	Haryana (N= 96)		H.P. (N= 80)					
	N	%	N	%	N	%		
A. Offline Press Releases								
Very Effective	22	22.91	24	30.00	46	26.13	0.567	2.893

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Effective	33	34.37	27	33.75	60	34.09		
Somewhat Effective	15	15.62	15	18.75	30	17.04		
Not Effective	12	12.50	06	07.50	18	10.23		
Uncertain	14	14.58	08	10.00	22	12.50		
B. Traditional Press conference								
Very Effective	15	15.62	10	12.50	25	14.20		
Effective	35	36.45	29	36.25	64	36.36	7.836	0.986
Somewhat Effective	12	12.50	22	27.50	34	19.31		
Not Effective	18	18.75	12	15.00	30	17.04		
Uncertain	16	16.66	07	08.75	23	13.06		
C. Radio Bulletin								
Very Effective	12	12.50	18	22.50	30	17.04		
Effective	12	12.50	18	22.50	30	17.04	10.398*	0.034
Somewhat Effective	33	34.37	14	17.50	47	26.70		
Not Effective	20	20.83	18	22.50	38	21.60		
Uncertain	19	19.80	12	15.00	31	17.62		
D. T.V Bulletin								
Very Effective	14	14.59	18	22.50	32	18.18		
Effective	10	10.41	20	25.00	30	17.04	11.106*	0.025
Somewhat Effective	30	31.25	18	22.50	48	27.27		
Not Effective	18	18.75	13	16.25	31	17.61		
Uncertain	24	25.00	11	13.75	35	19.88		
E. Online Press Releases								
Very Effective	22	22.91	20	25.00	42	23.86		
Effective	32	33.33	34	42.50	66	37.50	1.488	0.828
Somewhat Effective	18	18.75	12	15.00	30	17.04		
Not Effective	06	06.25	03	03.75	09	05.11		
Uncertain	18	18.75	11	13.75	29	16.47		
F. Online Press conference								
Very Effective	18	18.75	22	27.50	40	22.71		
Effective	22	22.91	24	30.00	46	26.14	8.443	0.076
Somewhat Effective	32	33.33	12	15.00	44	25.00		
Not Effective	09	09.37	07	08.75	16	09.09		
Uncertain	15	15.62	15	18.75	30	17.04		
G. Online media centre								
Very Effective	12	12.50	22	27.50	34	19.31		
Effective	10	10.41	31	38.75	41	23.29	33.319**	0.000
Somewhat Effective	22	22.91	11	13.75	33	18.75		
Not Effective	26	27.08	04	05.00	30	17.04		
Uncertain	26	27.08	12	15.00	38	21.53		
H. Any other tool, If any								
Very Effective	10	10.41	20	25.00	30	17.04		
Effective	22	22.91	21	26.25	43	24.43	10.204	0.037
Somewhat Effective	34	35.41	13	16.25	47	269.70		
Not Effective	07	07.29	04	05.00	11	069.25		
Uncertain	23	23.96	22	27.50	45	25.57		

P<0.05, **P<0.01, # Frequency in one or more column/row is less than five (< 5), so Yates' chi-square and Yates' P-values have been taken into consideration.

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On the other hand 21.60 % of total respondents rate 'radio bulletin' as most ineffective traditional PR tool of crisis communication, followed by 'TV bulletin' (17.61 %) and 'traditional press conference' (17.04 %). Across the states, PR-Officers of H.P. (30.00 %) and Haryana (20.835) rate press release as most effective tool of crisis communication and radio bulletin as 'least effective'. The rating of various Offline tools across the states is statically insignificant in case of press release (P-0.567) and traditional press conference (P-0.986) and statistically significant in case of radio bulletin (P-0.034) and TV bulletin (P-0.025). The detailed description of effectiveness of these PR tools has been depicted is Figs. 3.9 to 3.12.

Table 2 also depicts the effectiveness of 'online tools of crisis communication' in both the states. It explains that 'online press release' has been rated as 'very effective (23.86 %) and 'effective' (37.50 %) E-PR tool of crisis communication, followed by 'online press conference' (effective 26.13 % and very effective 22.12 %) and 'online media centre' (effective 23.29 % and very effective 19.31 %). When compared state wise H.P. Officers of PR department 'online press conference' and 'online media centre' have been rated as number one (27.50 % each), 'online press release'(25 %) as number two as online PR tool of crisis communication. But, on the other hand Officers from Haryana rates 'Online press release' as number one PR tool (22.91 %), followed by 'Online press conference' (18.75), 'on line media centre' (12.50 %) and 'other tools' (10.41 %).The rating of various online tools of crisis communication across the states is statistically highly insignificant in case of 'online press conference' (P-0.0766) and 'online press release, (Yates'P-0.0828), whereas significant in case of other tools (Yates'P-0.037) and highly significant in case of Online media centre (Yates'P-0.000).

C. Future challenges of Public Relations

Table 3 depicts that 31.25 % of total respondents are of the views that future challenges of Public Relations and crisis communication will be meet out by the 'E-PR/ Online Public Relations as main toll supported by Offline/ traditional PR', whereas, 22.72 % fell that on line Public Relations will meet out all the challenges of future alone, 20.45 % look on both (Online and Offline) having equal role in meeting out future challenges, 20.72 % again are of the view that 'Offline PR as main tool supported by E-PR will meet out future challenges'. Only 05.43 % look at 'Offline PR' alone as capable of meeting out all future challenges.

Table 3: Future challenges of Public Relations and Crisis Communication

Response	States				Combined (N= 176)		Chi-square	P-Value
	Haryana (N= 96)		H.P. (N= 80)					
	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Offline PR alone	05	05.20	04	05.00	09	05.43	4.025	0.403
Online E-PR alone	20	20.83	20	25.00	40	22.72		

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Offline PR as main toll, supported by Online/E-PR	24	25.00	12	15.00	36	20.45	
E-PR as main toll, supported by Offline PR	31	32.29	24	30.00	55	31.25	
Both equal role	16	16.66	20	15.00	36	20.45	

In comparison of both states, respondents from H.P gives weightage to "Online PR as main tool support by Offline PR' (30 %), this Fig. is slightly higher in case of Haryana (32.29 %), 25 % respondents of H.P. are of the view that 'Online PR above will meet out future challenges' and 20.83 % respondents of Haryana also think the same. The equal number of respondent (almost 5 %) from Haryana and HP think that 'Offline PR allows will meet out the challenges of future'. The correct knowledge about meeting out the future challenges by various tools of PR (On-line and Off-line) is statistically insignificant (P-0.403).

CONCLUSION

This on-line approach is a paradigm shift in the mode of the communication and interaction resulting in the qualitatively change in the society in general and PR professionals in particular. It has not only improved the speed of communication but has also effectively addressed very large audience across large catchment across even in remotest parts. On-line PR can be an effective toll in crisis communication situation and informing the citizenry about the government vision, policy and practices with in fraction of time. The present study implies that e-PR model used by Department of Information & Public Relations, Himachal Pradesh and Department of Information, Public Relations & Cultural Affairs, Haryana can be used as an effective guide for e-governance, information sharing, transparency and addressing public grievance in speedy manner.

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