

**THE REPUTATION MANAGEMENT IN THE DIGITAL AGE:  
THE ROLE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN FRAMING PUBLIC OPINION AND ITS  
IMPACT ON BUSINESS CONSISTENCY****Oumaima Ben Farhat,  
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Turkey**ABSTRACT**

Studies have shown that public opinion can affect the bottom line of a company. It is a dynamic, fragile field that changes in accordance with circumstances and events. Customers might change their minds about where they buy their needs. Brands might adjust their futuristic plans, decisions, and goals based on the feedback they receive from their clients. Conversely, when public opinion is soured, companies are threatened with losing sales and even the loyalty of customers. For that reason, it is essential to follow the consumers' feedback on a product or service.

Companies developed a communication system that connected them to their public audiences to keep track of the public's opinion and their reactions to events occurring in the company or products and services delivered to the public. The public relations sector is one of the communication strategies used by businesses to interact with the general public. It is a strategic communication process where corporations speak and interact directly with their customers to build a reputation and image by using various techniques and methods to convey their messages. It builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their audiences. Public relations have been around for decades. It has been developing significantly since its inception. Corporations now conduct public relations primarily through social media and other digital venues. The digital era helped develop the communication process at different levels: quality, efficiency, credibility, and effectiveness.

This study goes through the historical line of communication development and its strategies over the years. It examines the impact of digital information on the efficiency of public relations in framing the image and reputation of corporations. It tests its accuracy and effectiveness in shaping public opinion during an age of digitalization and its impact on business development.

**Keywords;**

Public Relations, Public Opinion, Business Development, Stock Value, Digitalization.

**INTRODUCTION****A. Communication as an Essential Ingredient in Business Development**

The company's reputation can either break or boost the company's development. Back in prior years, companies would likely get away with their actions, such as squander dumping, with no consideration for environmental wellbeing, child labor, worker abuse, or racism. Now, their activity has limitations, restrictions, legitimate measures, and legal procedures to follow. The business community, as a whole, has become much more aware of what should and should not happen. Business practitioners are well aware of their rights and obligations and the rights of humanity, the environment, and animals. Some people would describe our era as an era of reputation due to the impact reputation management has on business development.

One of the critical factors that have a massive impact on reputation is public opinion. It can either help or hinder business growth. According to Insider magazine, many corporations faced scandalous events that caused public opinion to turn against them. In January 2018, H&M launched a sweatshirt line and promoted it with an image of a white boy with a sweatshirt saying "survival expert" and a black boy with a sweatshirt saying "the coolest monkey in the jungle". At first, it seemed like an innocent split of attention, yet caused a massive loss to the company (nytimes.com, 1.8.2018). Liam Stack, in his article in the New York Times Magazine, said that public opinion created virtual and live campaigns where they attacked the company. Susie Heller from Insider magazine said that the company lost its ambassadors and closed its stores in South Africa (businessinsider.com, 10.01.2018). It was not the first or last time something like this happened. Now companies are working on

laying the ground floor through which they create shared values with the public about the development of social life and economic states (Proter & Karmer 2007). To settle such a common ground, companies need to understand the priorities of their target society by establishing an effective communication system (Szczepańska-Woszczyzna & Kurowska-Pysz, 2016).

This research aims to study and monitor the concepts of public relations and public opinion and their relation to the consistency of business development during the digital era. Not until recent years have companies focused more on the communication field and given it much direct attention. Companies are now working on building strong relationships with the public. However, these relationships require feeding, nurturing, and protection, like babies, to survive. New management tools are needed to enhance communication between companies and the public. They set up tactical strategies and methods to survive in the market. Among these tactical strategies are the communication tools and how the receiver assimilates and understands the purpose of their existence. We see companies from different fields using different terms for labeling (eco-friendly, organic, friendly to the environment, chemical-free, not tested on animals, etc.). These short phrases have a significant impact on the receiver. There are even international certifications to prove the efficiency of these phrases. Companies are using this strategy as a way of communicating with clients. It is also holding and supporting specific concepts of life. Successful interaction with the public is essential to granting innovative development and a successful reputation in the clients' subconscious minds. How can communication impact the minds of the public?

Business managers face the biggest challenges in finding the right tools that help them understand and meet their customers' needs. Many techniques and methods used to collect the necessary data help them enhance their relationship with the customers by understanding them better and easing the communication between both parties. Companies are investing more in market research to achieve innovative development. Some techniques focus more on the intellectual behavior of the consumer that controls decision-making, preference, and motivation toward particular products and services. What do they prefer? Need? Want? All these are related to the neural system of the subject (consumer) (Fortunato et al., 2014).

Ever heard of "neuromarketing" or "consumer neuroscience"? It is the study of the neural movement of the human brain using physiological measurements and neural signals to clarify the subject's neural activity when making preferences, motivations, and decisions. Managers study consumers' behavior through consumer neuroscience to be one step ahead when launching their campaigns. Being able to read the consumer's mind and behavior for decision-making gives a chance for potential implicit manipulation by the managers in advertising, marketing, branding, communicating, pricing, and developing the business (Harrell, 2019–2021). The "cross-school" collaboration between neuroscience and the business department applies neuroimaging techniques for market research (Lee et al., 2007). According to Joseph LeDoux, actions and decision-making are related to emotion. In his book, *The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life*, he explained that human behavior is related to emotional states. Understanding the emotions of the customers leads to understanding their behavior. Companies would have the upper hand in the communication process by having predictions and estimations of consumer behavior and needs. How do customers make their decisions? What are their motives? Is the consumer infected subconsciously by emotions and feelings, which are affected by non-direct information given by companies? Or are they affected by facts and reasons?

Dr. Terry Wu is a doctor of neuroscience. He studied the relationship between eye movement and the brain—"how the brain controls eye movement." He is the owner of [neuromarketingservice.com](http://neuromarketingservice.com). During the TEDxTALK event, Dr. Wu stated that the unremarkable things we encounter in our daily lives impact decision-making indirectly. The human brain subconsciously looks for a shortcut to make a decision. (Wu, 2019) It will look for signs stored somewhere, in that person's thoughts and memories, to make the decision easier and to provide quality. When a person goes to the grocery store and sees different brands of the same product, even if they contain the same ingredients, the brain subconsciously makes distinctions based on previous events in the person's life. It could be someone else's take on the brand. It can be a billboard outside the store or a color that reflects a particular emotion. These factors affect the decision-making process. Dr. Wu gave the example of the Energy Companies in the US, Minnesota, and Iowa, which printed emoticons over the energy bill. The emoticons reflected the amount of energy usage compared between neighbors.

- Happy emoticon means lower consumption than the neighbors.
- Sad emoticon means higher consumption than the neighbors.

This small gesture gave a hidden motive to the consumers to be better and more responsible for energy consumption. It worked well and decreased energy consumption by 3%. The printing of emoticons is a communication tool between companies and customers. This gesture impacted the sub-conscience of the clients.

Each consumer wanted the happy emoticon on their bill. This example shows how powerful and effective communication with customers is. However, communicating can backfire if it focuses on the client's emotions more than is necessary or appropriate. When clients build a strong emotional relationship with the product, they even relate the brand to a specific product. The case of Coca-Cola back in 1985 is the best case that reflects this issue. Coca-Cola changed the classical Coke and launched the new Coke in a blind test against Pepsi. Two thousand people preferred the new Coke over Pepsi. Therefore, Coca-Cola went through with the launch of the new Coke. After the launch, Coca-Cola received 8,000 calls a day requesting the old Coke back, and millions of dollars went to waste. Dr. Wu explained this case as one where the consumers had a solid emotional connection with the classic Coke. (Wu, 2019) "Have a Coke and Smile"; "Things Go Better with Coke" These slogans created a strong relationship between the consumer and the product. It provided the feeling and the reason for happiness and well-being. Coke is the reason for being happy. Classical Coke gives consumers a sense of security and pleasure. According to a 2014 study, classical Coke is imprinted in the brain with emotions and memories.

The previous examples reflect the importance of direct and indirect communication in the neural system. It has a tangible effect when it communicates with the eye and the logical part of the brain, and it has a profound impact on the limbic system, the one responsible for the emotional part of the brain. Every campaign, advertisement, billboard, image, and brochure leaves a hidden impact on the viewer's brain. (Wu, 2019). The communication field developed over the years, shaping the company's and clients' requests and demands. It facilitates the transmission of information between them, making it easy to communicate and understand their needs. When communicating with the public, companies rely on different strategies that help them build a reputation and image in the receiver's mind. At the early stage of building a business, most entrepreneurs will start by deciding on branding, advertising, and marketing. However, when framing this relationship with their target clients, they need to work on its growth and continuity. To maintain direct communication with the public, business owners rely on public relations and propaganda when facing crises.

In the following papers, we will explore the reason for the emergence of the previously mentioned methods of communication and their development while highlighting the challenges over time, especially in the digitalized era. Practitioners and researchers approached the definition and concept of public relations from various angles. This situation caused a difference in understanding of the term. Until today, when people ask about public relations, some would not even know how to answer, and they still mix up the meaning. I was one of these people who did not know how to define or justify it or the difference between it and propaganda. Therefore, I decided to go through this research to discover more about these fields and their relation to business development.

#### **B. Notion of Public Relations: Practices and theories**

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the general use of the word "public relations" is maintaining a good relationship between organizations and the public. In the business field, both Cambridge and Oxford define it as an act of providing information to the public. This information influences the receiver's perspective to create a positive reputation or impression of the organization or individuals. "Organizations hire PR agencies to help build a better image" (Cambridge Dictionary). For the Longman Business English Dictionary, "public relations" is "the work of telling the public what it does so that they will understand and approve of it." In public relations, the term "public" can refer to a variety of meanings or specific groups of people. It can be a client, an opponent, or the public. The last refers to the people who may or may not know about the existence of the company. Therefore, public relations have the purpose of delivering information to people that can be related or not to the business field of the organization. Keith Butterick, in his book *Introducing Public Relations: Theory and Practice*, described public relations as the "new discipline" created based on its different definitions. Public relations practitioners have used various names and interpretations over the years, including communication management, public affairs, and business communication.

Public relations provide a positive image of the company. It works on formulating positive information to be delivered to the public to create a positive impression. However, the era we are living in is quite competitive. These kinds of market competitions make companies take advantage of whatever is available to survive. That is when public relations are most needed. The people working in this field need to be ready, always, to back up their stories. They need to have quick and convenient reactions to certain events. Dr. Burson describes public relations as a heritage that we need to appreciate. It has developed to become more mature. Public relations have a legitimate role in society, a duty of a philosophical and authentic basis. It interferes with every part of our lives, whether we are aware of it or not. He further elaborates that it is a strategic communication method that aims to:

- To create an image to build on it a point of view that serves its need
- To boost and reinforce an already existing opinion that supports this idea.
- To break and eliminate an opinion that doesn't support its goal.

He continued that "the aim is public behavior" and the method used is public relations as a strategic communication tool (O'Reilly, 1990). Public opinion has a massive role in shaping life ideas, beliefs, politics, and even the business market. It is not always true, as it can be misleading, manipulated, or wrong. It can cause arbitrary decision-making. Public opinion is meant to unite the point of view of the "one" and the "many" (Price, 1997). It is a reaction to the problem of collective judgment and decision-making, all in favor of the common welfare. The quality of the course of action and decision-making depends on the modality of public thinking and how well they apprehend the received information. The public supposition depends on how much they are educated and well-nurtured mentally (O'Reilly, 1990). Abraham Lincoln said that "the government rests in public opinion" (...) and that the PO "formed on the wrong basis" yet still incorporated a "sense of justice". These quotations prove the power of public opinion. Public opinion influences general judgment along with governmental regimes and the business world. How can companies influence public opinion?

PR is one of the strategies used to interfere with public opinion. Its role in the business world has matured over time. It became part of the decision-making process. Now it has an extended impact on business development. It monitors the reputation and image of the company and its relationship with the public. The interdependence of the public, organizations, corporations, political figures and media has undergone radical changes over the years. Some people explain it as the result of the development and maturity of public opinion, while others attribute it to the nature of the audience for the issue. Media is one of the primary factors in shaping public opinion. It is the tool used for strategic public relations operations.

### C. Notion of Public Opinion

Public opinion is a notion that has been around for centuries. It is the concept of people expressing their opinions about certain things. It is the shared opinion on an issue, person, or object in a society or organization. Business development depends on public opinion as one of its key factors. Public opinion research helps managers understand their clients and avoid unfavorable consequences. They consider these viewpoints when making judgments and decisions. The first thing to study in order to understand public opinion is what influences it.

This study looks at some of the most significant factors that shape public opinion and how they might affect the business development. In any democracy, public opinion is one of the most influential factors. With social media being available to all, it has become accessible to express points of view on various topics and share them with others with similar interests. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have affected public opinion, throughout the years, along with digital blogs, articles, and news channels. The digital era has made it easier for people to exchange information. It has also created a society where people want to be informed and know what is happening around them. It altered communication and interaction between people, communities, organizations, and corporations, which changed public opinion's form. According to Simon Kemp's article on datareportal.com, "Digital 2020: October Global Statshot," in cooperation with "Hootsuite" and "We Are Social", the number of social media users per month is over 4 billion. Around 2 million users are joining daily (Kemp, 2021). Social media interactions are vital for business marketing and development. It is a two-edged sword. News, including fake news, can spread widely in a few minutes as the world becomes a small village. The risk with digital information is that anyone can have access to it. Fake news and social media can easily manipulate public opinion.

### D. Notion of Digitalization

We take for granted whatever we receive from the technological field. We became dependent on the facilities that technology provided for us. These facilities interfere with our daily lives. They changed the shape of our daily activities, from education to transportation, house chores, medical care, shopping, and even having a virtual life. All of it is one click away. It gets us whatever we want and whatever we need. Over the years, we transformed almost everything into digital information: reports, books, state statistics, programs, and every aspect of our lives. A compilation of the CIO agent industry insider statistics for 2018 explained statistics and studies that reflected the stages of digital transformation within the business field. The survey was designed to explore the priorities, opportunities, and threats facing CIOs around the world. The survey revealed that business digitalization is among the top three priorities for business development.

Digitization is the status of companies changing all their documents into digital information. The shift from handwritten to digital data represents a cultural shift. The digital transformation of the business process made it easier for corporations to keep track of and follow through with the information system, communication,

and management. When flipping the coin, you get to see the other side of the coin. Having confidential information, reports, statistics, and business plans on the web would trigger the risk of cyber-attacks, which would mean being exposed to the public (DiNardo, 2022).

The digitalization of data made it easier for the public to gain access to information. This situation puts companies under much pressure. They are at high risk of cyber-attacks, information leaks, or an error within the system that may put the company in a risky position in the market (Howard et al., 2017) (Gabrys et al., 2017) (Gensch et al., 2017) (Mentsiev et al., 2020).

Marriott hotels discovered a cyberattack that began in 2014 in September 2018. It is considered one of the most severe cyberattacks. 4 years of a data breach infected 339 million guesses. The attacker had non-limited access to the names, numbers, emails, passports, and banking information. The United Kingdom data privacy watchdog sentenced a penalty of £18.4 million over Marriott hotels (23 million USD). According to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), the attack started in 2014 with the Starwood Hotels group. During that time, the Starwood Hotels group was not part of the Marriott Group yet. In 2016, Marriott acquired Starwood hotels. However, the new management did not discover the issue until 2018. According to ICO, the Marriott group did not check what they were buying, which exacerbated the situation. They failed to provide the personal data protection required by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (Tidy & BBC News, 2020). Following the data breach, 24 sold on the darknet for \$7,500 each. The data was named "Marriott Customers Database—1M entries." Luckily, there were no sales on them (cyjax.com, 2019). Kate Fazzini, a reporter at CNBC, wrote that Marriott had insurance against cyberattacks, so the incident only partially affected its financial status. Its stock value dropped by 5% in the mixed market and 8.7% in the share price; however, public opinion had concerns about the time the company took to discover the breach (Fazzini, 2018).

### OBJECTIVES

This study goes through the historical line of communication development and its strategies over the years. It focuses on public relations as a communication strategy, its theories, and practices by answering whether public relations is a method of communication or a tool of manipulation. How do corporations use public relations to exert authority over their audience? It investigates the credibility of public relations and examines what kind of impact it has on public opinion. It aims to test its accuracy and effectiveness in framing public opinion in an age of digitalization and its effect on business development, the company's market position, and stock value.

### METHODOLOGY

This study investigates the role of public relations practitioners in reputation management by framing public opinion and whether it impacts business consistency. The research includes two surveys and a study case. The purpose is to measure the efficiency of the research's hypothesis and the questions.

- Survey One: It investigates the adaptation of digital media within the public relations field. How do practitioners choose the appropriate tool for the communication process within different sectors? The survey targeted 742 public relations professionals from various countries based on information collected from This survey was conducted in cooperation with IPRA International (55 practitioners), the TUHID Association (177 practitioners), MAG Construction (10 practitioners), and LinkedIn groups (an additional 500 practitioners). This survey targeted 742 public relations professionals over four weeks (8 December 2022–1 January 2023), 315 practitioners responded. According to the sampling equation, the recommended sample size is 273 because, according to IBIS World statistics, the total number of public relations practitioners in 2022 will be around 500,000. The survey consisted of 28 questions related to gender, age, origin, experience, favorite digital media tools depending on their performance and personal utility, and their futuristic vision for the relationship between today's public relations and digital media. Occupational segmentation is applied in the sampling of this survey, as it targets only public relations professionals.
- The case study is a brief examination of Facebook's communication in crisis management and how it affected its business. The study case includes the historical background of Facebook, its substantial investments, massive challenges, and some of its scandals. How did the public relations team of Facebook respond to these events and determine if it was effective?
  - Survey two: It is a survey based on random sampling to reach a larger population of Facebook users to ensure that all categories and levels of Facebook users have an equal chance of being selected or represented in this survey. The survey was designed to reach 1,000 practitioners over a month, beginning December 18, 2022, and ending January 18, 2023. The results obtained are from 345 users.

- It investigates and measures the type, quality, and strength of the relationship between Facebook and its users from the users' perspective. The survey is taken from the 3rd booklet series of the Institute of Public Relations. Dr. James Grunig and Dr. Linda Hon created the research and the questionnaire to set guidelines for measuring the relationships within public relations and investigating their efficiency.

In the following papers the main parts of the research will be given, the rest of the details are in thesis writing research.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A. Public Relations Adapting to Digital Media

Over the decades, public relations have had to rapidly adapt to the emergence of digital media and social networks by incorporating them into its plans and strategies. Social networking platforms, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, email, and the virtual world, provide new opportunities for public relations professionals to reach and engage with their target audiences. It allows them to monitor events and provide fast responses to conversations about their brand. Additionally, PR practitioners become dependent on these digital media tools in their communication process, creating and sharing content to promote their brand. PR professionals are also using social media to monitor and measure the effectiveness of their campaigns and to gather insights about their target audience. Digital media, compared to traditional communication tools, provides faster services to a larger audience. It guarantees maximum coverage.

Gender: The survey revealed that the public relations field is still dominated by females; out of 315 respondents; 70.2% were female and 29.5% were male. These results confirm the latest research by zippia.com on the demographic statistics of public relations practitioners, which showed that 63.9% of their target sample was females.

Age: Among our targeted sample, 29.5% are aged 25 to 33 years old, 27.9% are aged between 35 and 45 years old, 22% are aged over 55 or older, and 20.3% are aged 45 to 55 years old.

		Age				Total
		55	25-35	35-45	45-55	
Gender	Female	14,90%	21,90%	21,30%	12,10%	70,20%
	Male	7,30%	7,30%	6,70%	8,30%	29,50%
	Other		0,30%			0,30%
Total		22,20%	29,50%	27,90%	20,30%	1

Type of the institutions: Public relations practitioners are part of every institution, regardless of its nature or type. Public, private, and governmental institutions rely on public relations to conduct their business. The private sector employs the majority of public relations practitioners (67.3%), followed by the public sector (22.2%) and government (10.5%). Depending on the type and nature of the organization, we asked the participants if they had open access to the internet, especially to social media. There is a rough consensus on internet accessibility for the public relations department within various institutions, with at least 90% having open access to the internet and social media and 1% having partially open access.

Corporation's Nature			Access to Social Media		Total
			Partially Open	Open	
Public	Access to Internet access	Open		100,0%	100,0%
		Total		100,0%	100,0%
Private	Access to Internet access	Partially Open	0,5%		0,5%
		Open		99,5%	99,5%
		Total	0,5%	99,5%	100,0%
Governmental	Access to Internet access	Partially Open	6,1%	9,1%	15,2%
		Open		84,8%	84,8%
		Total	6,1%	93,9%	100,0%
Total	Access to Internet access	Partially Open	1,0%	1,0%	1,9%
		Open		98,1%	98,1%
		Total	1,0%	99,0%	100,0%

Tasks of public relations practitioners: According to the obtained results, public relations practitioners interfere in more than one field, yet they are all involved in the communication process of the corporation, whether it is internal or external. 77.14% of the target populations are involved in media relations, 49.21% work on crisis management, 45.08% work on internal communication, 41.9% work on community relations, 27.94% work on governmental relations, 26.03% work on social responsibilities, 18.41% work on investor relations, and finally 17.78% work on customer service.

		Responses		Percentage of Observations
		N	Percentage	
Conducted Jobs	Media Relations	243	19,97	77,14
	Internal Communication	142	11,67	45,08
	Customer Services	56	4,6	17,78
	Investors Relation	58	4,77	18,41
	Social Responsibilities	82	6,74	26,03
	Crisis Management	155	12,74	49,21
	Community Relations	132	10,85	41,9
	Government Relations	88	7,23	27,94
	International Relations	59	4,85	18,73
	Corporate Communications	202	16,6	64,13
Total		1217	100	386,3

The question was a multiple-choice question with the chance of having more than one option. Please see below for the same answers related to the extracted results. Out of 77.1% of the sample that is working on media relations, 46.3% are working on crisis management, while 20% of practitioners who are not working on media relations are working on crisis management. These results confirm that there is a strong relationship between the practices of media relations and crisis management, which explains that crisis management, is part of public relations activities and that it is, somehow related to the team working on media relations.

		Crisis Management		Total
		NO	YES	
Media Relations	NO	20,0%	2,9%	22,9%
	YES	30,8%	46,3%	77,1%
Total		50,8%	49,2%	100,0%

The following example illustrates the relationship between social responsibilities and government relations: The results reveal that there is no significant correlation between the public relations team working on social responsibilities and the one working on governmental relations.

		Government Relations		Total
		NO	YES	
Social Responsibilities	NO	59,4%	14,6%	74,0%
	YES	12,7%	13,3%	26,0%
Total		72,1%	27,9%	100,0%

**Question 1- According to public relations practitioners which tools and channels are the most effective in communicating with the public and has better impact on business consistency?**

This survey aimed to test the most commonly applied media tools by public relations practitioners based on their tasks (Question 1 from the hypothesis of the study). The survey revealed the task affected the choice of the digital tool used in the communication process. Expl:

- Electronic mail is used by 94.9% of public relations practitioners involved in international relations communications, social network platforms by 88.1%, and forums and newsgroups by 3.4%.
- For the internal communication team, practitioners depend 92.3% on electronic mail, 45.1% on instant messaging, 33.2% on the intranet, and 4.2% on smartphone applications and newsgroups.
- Electronic mail remains the dominant digital media tool for communication, followed by social networks, corporate websites, and video and photo sharing as the fifth.

FIELDS OF ACTIVITIES		MEDIA TOOLS											Total	
		Electronic Mail	Corporate Websites	Social Networks	Video and Photo Sharing	Blogs	Forum News group	Instant Messaging	Intranet	Smartphone applications (PDAs)	Virtual world	Game Applications		Podcast
Media Relations	Effective	226	145	212	121	87	8	105	53	5	18	4	58	243
	% in Field of Activities	93,0%	59,7%	87,2%	49,8%	35,8%	3,3%	43,2%	21,8%	2,1%	7,4%	1,6%	23,9%	
Internal Communication	Effective	131	89	129	74	44	6	64	47	6	5	3	29	142
	% in Field of Activities	92,3%	62,7%	90,8%	52,1%	31,0%	4,2%	45,1%	33,1%	4,2%	3,5%	2,1%	20,4%	
Customer Services	Effective	53	40	49	35	24	7	26	9	4	14	2	12	56
	% in Field of Activities	94,6%	71,4%	87,3%	62,5%	42,9%	12,5%	46,4%	16,1%	7,1%	25,0%	3,6%	21,4%	
Investors Relation	Effective	57	41	48	24	26	1	31	15	6	6	2	13	58
	% in Field of Activities	98,3%	70,7%	82,8%	41,4%	44,8%	1,7%	53,4%	25,9%	10,3%	10,3%	3,4%	22,4%	
Social Responsibilities	Effective	74	55	75	45	28	3	40	25	3	6	4	18	82
	% in Field of Activities	90,2%	67,1%	91,3%	52,4%	34,1%	3,7%	48,8%	30,5%	3,7%	7,3%	4,9%	22,0%	
Crisis Management	Effective	146	101	138	76	53	4	73	46	6	11	3	42	155
	% in Field of Activities	94,2%	65,2%	89,0%	49,0%	34,2%	2,6%	47,1%	29,7%	3,9%	7,1%	1,9%	27,1%	
Community Relations	Effective	127	86	120	73	48	5	55	38	4	11	3	35	132
	% in Field of Activities	96,2%	65,2%	90,9%	55,3%	36,4%	3,8%	41,7%	28,8%	3,0%	8,3%	2,3%	26,5%	
Government Relations	Effective	79	49	77	48	29	1	41	32	3	5	2	22	88
	% in Field of Activities	89,8%	55,7%	87,3%	54,5%	33,0%	1,1%	46,6%	36,4%	3,4%	5,7%	2,3%	25,0%	
International Relations	Effective	56	40	52	27	27	2	30	10	3	14	2	17	59
	% in Field of Activities	94,9%	67,8%	88,1%	45,8%	45,8%	3,4%	50,8%	16,9%	5,1%	23,7%	3,4%	28,8%	
Corporate Communications	Effective	184	133	176	100	71	8	91	54	6	11	4	43	202
	% in Field of Activities	91,1%	65,8%	87,1%	49,5%	35,1%	4,0%	45,0%	26,7%	3,0%	5,4%	2,0%	21,3%	
Total		287	185	270	151	108	14	132	78	9	19	4	66	315

The last part of this survey was to investigate the futuristic views of public relations practitioners on the impact of digital media on their practices. Over 90% of the target sample agreed media would have an impact on shaping the future of public relations, from its administrative structure to its ethical understanding..

The development of digital tools and technologies may have significant impacts on the future of public relations. The rise of social media and other digital communication channels has changed the interaction between organizations and their audiences and shifted the concept of reputation management. Digital tools and technology have enabled companies to gather and analyze large amounts of data, which can be used to inform public relations strategies and tactics. Additionally, virtual reality technology can be used to enhance public relations campaigns and events. Overall, digital and technological advancements will continue to shape the way public relations is practiced in the future.

#### A. Impact of the Public Opinion on Business Consistency: Facebook Case Study

"Public opinion is a sword with two edges." It has significant effects on the consistency of a business (it can be positive or negative). It can lead to increased demand for particular products or services or force changes in policies and practices to adapt to the public's perspective. If a business is perceived negatively, it leads to decreased consumer trust and confidence in the company, which may cause a loss of customers and revenue. Negative public perception also can lead to increased scrutiny from regulators and legal action. A negative PO can put the company at risk of reputational tarnishing and a decrease in the company's stock value. Businesses that are consistently viewed positively are more stable and have a greater capacity to weather market downturns and other difficulties.

On the other hand, positive public opinion can boost trust and faith in the company, leading respectively to improved customer loyalty and a rise in revenue. Positive public perception can also lead to increased investment and support from stakeholders. It is essential for decision-makers to be aware of, follow, and respond to public statements to maintain consistency and balance. The best example is Facebook. Despite all the chaos it lived through, from a data breach to boycotts and others, it still preserved its spot in the digital world.

Facebook has faced considerable controversies regarding data privacy, misleading information, and political bias. These issues led to negative public perception and a call for increased regulation. As a result, Facebook has had to change its policies and practices to address these concerns and maintain its user base.

One main area where this has been clear is in the realm of data privacy. Following the revelation that third-party apps had mishandled the data of millions of Facebook users, the company faced intense public backlash and called for increased regulation. In response, Facebook has changed its policies and practices related to data privacy, such as implementing stricter data controls for third-party apps and increasing transparency about how user data is collected and used. This case was part of the Cambridge Analytica scandal, in which Facebook was charged with allowing a third party to steal data from the users who downloaded an application and all their Facebook connections. These people had access to the user's private messages. For over two years, they hacked over 80 million accounts. This scandal was one of the worst that Facebook had to go through. Apart from tarnishing its reputation and losing users' trust, the company faced legal charges and financial fines..

After over 1 million UK users' information was compromised, the UK's Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) fined Facebook \$645,000 in July 2018 for data protection violations related to the Cambridge Analytica scandal. ICO gave the maximum fine allowed under the previous data protection legislation, the Data Protection Act of 1998. The watchdog stated Facebook failed to safeguard users' information as Facebook was not honest and straightforward when asked about how the third party succeeded in harvesting all this data. The fine was issued after it was revealed that data from millions of Facebook users had been obtained without their consent by Cambridge Analytica, a political consulting firm, and used for political advertising. After a while, the Federal Trade Commission called the company's CEO to testify in an antitrust case. The news caused the company to lose 5% of its share price and \$32 billion of its market capitalization. Apart from paying, Facebook suffered a 19% decline in its share price, a loss of \$119 billion out of its market value. The owner himself lost \$17 billion. Along with all of that, it also lost over 3 million European users (theguardian.com, July 2018).

Facebook and data breach cases have a long history dating back millions of years. Just after the Cambridge Analytica scandal, Facebook went on trial for serious data protection law violations as the company failed to protect users' personal information from being collected by a third-party quiz app. In December 2019, the Irish Data Protection Commission fined Facebook £175,000 as the ICO found Facebook failed to make suitable checks on apps and developers using its platform and had not done enough to protect users' data. The fine was imposed under the new data protection regulation, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which came into effect in May 2018. The amount was calculated based on the GDPR rules (reuters.com, March 15, 2012). The question is how Facebook can continue to exist with these privacy concerns for its users. How did Facebook deal with public opinion during these crises?

**Question 2: Digital information plays a massive role in framing the public opinion through strategic public relations?**

Facebook has dealt with crises related to privacy, misinformation, and political interference through a combination of public relations strategies. These include issuing statements, holding press conferences, taking part in interviews, and launching public awareness campaigns. The company has also made efforts to be more transparent and responsive to public concerns, like providing more information about its content moderation policies and processes. However, some critics have argued that Facebook's public relations efforts have not always been effective enough in addressing public concerns and rebuilding trust in the company.

Despite the crises, Facebook remained a massive digital media platform. It has been under the spotlight for years. The company suffered reputational damage, financial loss, and share loss. The general image of the company has been shaken to the core. People suspected the capability of the company to protect them and their privacy. Facebook's credibility was at risk. In an attempt to regain control, composure, and reputation, Facebook worked on changing policies, adjusting more IT software to support their privacy protection and fact-checking, and launching campaigns in which they addressed the public by saying that they heard them and stood by them.

The CEO shared a post on social media addressing the issue. The company admitted that it was aware of the problem in 2015 and took significant steps, including banning the app and demanding that Cambridge Analytica delete all data. In April, Facebook launched a campaign based on a video that reminded users of how Facebook began and helped people get closer. The second part of the video admitted the data breach and the inconvenience of what happened, followed by the statement "That's going to change." Facebook promised to work more on keeping people safe and protecting their privacy. The PR team used emotional attachments as a

key figure in their campaign, in which they emphasized memories and attachments to friends and family, saying that Facebook is a place built to bring family and friends together (socialmediatoday.com, 27.02.2018).

The following survey will measure the effectiveness of Facebook relations with its public.

### B. Measuring Relationship Shared Between Facebook and Its Users from The Prospective of the Users

#### • Question 3: How effective can public relations be in framing public opinion?

To investigate how Facebook still resists the market with all the crises the company has been going through, we have to check and evaluate its relationship with its users. The following survey will help investigate the relationship from different users' perspectives. It follows the trust, satisfaction, and commitment levels; it also measures the communal relationship of the mutually beneficial relationship and the rate of control mutuality in the shared relationship. A sample of 345 randomly selected Facebook users were selected, with 209 (61%) females and 139 (39%) males of various ages. The dominant age range was 18–30 with 32.75%, followed by people 50 years old and older with 24.06%. People aged 40 to 50 made up 22.32% of the target sample, while those aged 30 to 40 made up 18.55%, and those aged less than 18 made up only 2.32%. The results confirm Statista's demographic statistical results related to Facebook, which revealed that 23.7% of the users in the Facebook community in the USA were aged between 25 and 34, followed by people aged 35 to 44, who represent 18.1% of the Facebook user community. The age range between 25 and 34 ranked first in all the following countries: 34.1% in Nigeria<sup>2</sup>, 36.3% in Ghana<sup>3</sup>, over 28% in Turkey<sup>4</sup>, 23.2% in the Netherlands, 20.3% in Germany, 31% in Morocco, and 8 in Russia (Statista.com, 2022).

Facebook was launched in 2004 for students at Harvard University; by 2005, it became open to the public. Our sample consisted of 33.3% of those who started back in 2004. 53.91 percent of the sample started using Facebook 10 years ago, 8.7 percent started around 5 years ago or more, and 4.06 percent started 1 to 4 years ago..

Q5 asked respondents to describe their experience with Facebook:

The results, as shown below, revealed that Facebook users enjoy using it at a medium level, as the question showed that they could live without it at 70.1%. While only 10% said their experience with Facebook was terrible as they do not recommend it.

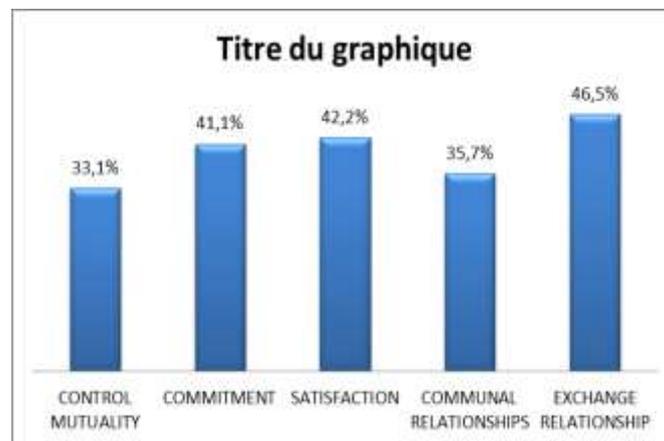
- Q1 to Q11 measure the confidence level and willingness to be part of the corporation. These questions were divided into three categories; Q1 to Q4 reflect integrity; Q5 to Q8 reflect dependability; and Q9 to Q11 reflect the faith users have in the corporation's competence.
  - Integrity: 37.9% of the sample believed in the integrity of Facebook, compared to 20.1% who did not believe in it and 10.9 who were neutral. The rest were between totally disagreeing and totally agreeing.
  - Dependability: There was not much difference between agreeing and disagreeing, as the first represented 27.5% of the sample, and the second represented 25.7%. Finally, 9.3% were neutral.
  - Competence: 49.3% of the sample believed in the competence of Facebook and its ability to accomplish what it said it would do.



Figure 1: Total Level of Trust

- Q12 to Q19 measured control mutuality: the degree of control both parties have on each other. 28,6% agreed that both parties mutually controlled each other, as the questions were related if the users felt Facebook considered its public opinion in setting decisions. 26% disagreed, and 16% were neutral..

- Q19 to Q28 measured the commitment and loyalty of the users to the platform and the extent to which extent they were willing to spend energy on Facebook. 29.7% admitted they were loyal to Facebook and its services, 19.8% disagreed, and 21.7% were neutral.
- Q29 to Q35 measure the satisfaction of Facebook users with the company's performance and services. 29.8% expressed satisfaction with the corporation, while 25.3% were not satisfied, and 21.2% kept neutral.
- Q35 to Q42 measured the communal relationship to investigate if people believed Facebook was looking out for their welfare. 22.2% stated they trusted the company to look out for their welfare, while 23.3% did not believe in it. The difference in the results is not broad, as 27.4% were neutral. The total agreement and disagreement also had very close results. Facebook users had little information about whether the company was sincerely concerned about their well-being, which may be related to the rumors and scandals the company has been dealing with..
- Q42 to Q46 measured the exchanged relationship between both parties and mainly investigated how the public sees Facebook. If it is a corporation that cares about its users or if it acts upon the benefits, it will receive from the users. The results showed that 30.3% agreed that Facebook provided these services because it expected something in return from its users, 16% disagreed, and 33% were neutral.



#### **Question 4: What kind of relationship is built between companies/organization and their public due to public relations management?**

The chart above shows the features of the shared relationship between Facebook and a sample of his followers. The sample was composed of 345 users, but they were randomly selected, hoping to cover as many users as possible.

- The results showed that the public still somehow trusted Facebook, as 45% of the sample believed in its integrity, 40% in its dependability, and 60.3% in its competence.
- 33.1% of the sample believed they had mutual control over their relationship with Facebook.
- 35.7% of the sample believed they had a communal relationship based on caring for the welfare of both parties.
- 41.1% of the sample stated they were committed to the company.
- 42.2% of the sample expressed satisfaction with the company's services.
- 46.5% of the sample said there was an exchange relationship between them and Facebook as both parties were concerned about the welfare of the other

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I like to express my sincere gratitude to whoever contributed to this project. Your valuable input, hard work, and support have been greatly appreciated. Colleagues and friends, Thank you for your encouragement and support along the way. Without your assistance, this achievement would not have been possible. Istanbul Aydin University, thank you for the chance to make this project a reality. Finally, a special thank you to Prof. Dr. Akin Masap for his guidance and support throughout the project.

**CONCLUSION**

The public relations (PR) department handles the strategic communication process used to build and sustain relationships with stakeholders, create a positive public image, and influence public opinion. It involves communicating with the media, conducting public relations campaigns, and engaging in activities, community outreach, crisis communication, and reputation management. PR professionals' lives have become inextricably linked to digital media in communicating with their target. It helped mature the communication relationship and elevate its quality. Corporations became able to have direct interaction with the public with a chance to receive immediate feedback without the interference of a third medium such as journalists, TV, or radio. The statistical report of Muck Rack for 2021 revealed that 59% of 1618 public relations practitioners said that the biggest issue they had in conducting their task was getting answers from journalists.

As the second party related to the corporation's activities, the public plays a massive role in its success and consistency. For corporations, public opinion can be the judge in its own court, ruling in their favor or against them. It can be very damaging for corporations if they do not take the necessary and appropriate actions to contain the public. Here comes the role of public relations; The team is the one that addresses the public directly or the decision-maker in addressing them. Public relations practitioners must understand how to create content that resonates with the target audience and how to track and measure the success of their efforts.

Additionally, they must be aware of the potential risks and ethical issues that can arise from using social media and know how to handle them. With the rapid changes in digital technologies, the corporation must have a reliable public relations team adapted to the new concept of digital PR, or E-PR. With the emergence of Web 3.0, not only the PR team needs to be ready, as this stage of the internet will bring a shift in users' interactions. Technologies such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, and the Internet of Things are all part of Web 3.0, with a difference in the level of utility and interaction with the web in a much more intelligent and personalized way. The good news is that there is greater hope for Web 3.0, which will provide more secure, and private data sharing and development of new digital currencies, smart contracts, and other financial technologies.

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