

Explicating the Concept of Public Relations Public: A Synoptic Review

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ABSTRACT

This paper explicates public relations public as well as demonstrates reasons why public relations public should be defined. This paper reveals that "Public" is a professional term to public relations people. It doesn't mean the mob or the masses. It means "a type of audience." According to this paper's findings, the public relations public is divided into internal and external public. This paper also reveals that a person applying public relations needs to define and group the audience because each public has different interests. Therefore promotion must be designed for each type of public.

Keywords: *Public relations, internal and external public, organization, audience.*

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Public Relations Public: Why Define It?

You look in the dictionary and you find "public" which means an organized or general body of people. A public is any group whose members have a common interest or common values in a particular situation. However, there is a specialized definition of the word "public" which is not in the dictionary but which is used in the field of public relations. "Public" is a professional term to public relations people. It doesn't mean the mob or the masses. It means "a type of audience" (Grunig & Dozier, 2003). According to Botan and Hazleton (2010) the broad population to PR professionals is divided up into separate *publics*. Possibly the early pioneers in public relations should have begun to use "audiences" back in 1911 when some of the first texts on PR were written. But they didn't. They used the word "publics" to mean different types of audiences for their communications. In PRese (public relations slang) use "public" along with another word always.

There is no single word form for "public" in public relations. A public relations professional never says THE public. There is the "community public," meaning people in the town not personally grouped into any other special public. There is the "employee public," meaning the people who work for the firm. There's the "shareholder public," meaning the

people who own shares in the company. There's the "teenage public," meaning the under-twenty people. There's the "doctor public," meaning the MD audience one is trying to reach.. Therefore, a person applying public relations needs this grouping as he can expect each different type of public to have different interests. Therefore his promotion to them must be designed especially for each type of public.

Someone using public relations does not think in huge masses (Ledingham, 2006). He thinks in group types within the masses. Public relations is an activity concerned with *presentation* and *audience* (Grunig, 2013). Even when he writes a news release, he "slants" it for a publication that reaches a type of audience and he writes it *for* that audience. In order to do this, he first has to have an idea of the opinions or reality of that public or audience. Simply put, he has to define the public he wants to reach. This is done through conducting a survey.

A *survey* is a sampling, or partial collection, of facts, figures or opinions taken and used to approximate or indicate what a complete collection and analysis might reveal. For example, if there is a group of four thousand lectures in European University of Lefke, North Cyprus and you want to find out what they want from the school board. By asking two hundred of those teachers, selected at random, you can get a good idea of where the whole group of lecturers stands on that particular question. Thus

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a user of PR techniques *surveys* in terms of special publics. Then he presents his material so as to influence *that* particular public. As such Defining public relations public is very essential in getting the job done successfully.

PUBLIC RELATIONS PUBLIC: INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL

Internal Publics

Internal publics are people employed by a firm or members of an organization and they are intimately related with the functioning of the organisation. Internal public relations is a special PR discipline which concentrates on enhancing companies relationships with the employees by facilitating good communication among the management and the employees, boosting their morale and giving them the right information at the right time. Example of

internal public as outlined in Ellingham, (2006) and Grunig & Dozier, (2003) are:

- Shareholders/owners relations
- Employees
- Suppliers
- Distributors/Dealers/Retailers Relations
- Other Associate Relations
- Shareholders/owners relations

Shareholder is the legal owner of the company. Shareholders deserve fair treatment, get statutory information, transfer of shares to them, information on change of address or non-receipt of dividend. Most of the time the Company's PR function seems to be performed only in rebuttal or quick requital after the complaint appears in newspapers.



Fig1. Stakeholders: (Wikipedia, 2017)

Employees

They are the workers of the company. An individual who works part-time or full-time under a contract of employment, whether oral or written, express or implied, and has recognized rights and duties (Botan & Hazleton, 2010). They are the hands and feet of the company. The principle of self-respect, self-determination and self-judgment are to be applied when dealing with employees.

Suppliers

Suppliers are the business associates of the company who provide all types of raw material for the business activities of the company. Suppliers need the company and the company need the suppliers.

Distributors/Dealers/Retailers Relations

Distributors are the face of the company. Retailer/Distributors/ Traders are the friend, philosopher, and guide of the customers or clients. In order to build up the company

relationship Internal PR needs to announce the various schemes available for them like prizes, discount, and provide them alternatives both monetary and non-monetary benefits (Botan & Hazleton, 2010).

Other Associate Relations

It comprises of promoters, Management consultants, lawyers, solicitors, auditors, friends and family members of the directors of the company and the advisers of the company. Copies of company publications, annual reports, new issues, preferential issues etc., should be regularly sent to them to give them special feeling that they matter to the company and they are eligible for these privileges. Congratulatory letters on their birthdays, marriage anniversary, and special achievement is a good gesture.

External publics

External publics are people and organizations that are clients doing business with a firm or agency or company (Wilcox, Ault, & Agee, 2006). External publics concentrate on issues

pertaining the values, policies, procedures and attitude of the company towards various groups of people in society (subject matter of external publics). Examples of external public include:

- Consumers/Customers
- Community
- Mass Media
- Government
- Financial Institutions
- Action Groups
- General Publics
- Consumers/Customers

Customer is the centre of today's business activity. "A customer or consumer is not a means of business, but he is the purpose of business. He is not an intruder on a premises, he is a guest. He is the last inspector of the quality and he is always right. Customer education, Market research, public opinion polls, customer satisfaction level, after sales services and constant relations is a must for company to public.

Community

There is the "community public," meaning people in the town not personally grouped into any other special public. These are the host community of a company or organization. Keeping mutual understanding with such group is very important.

Mass media

Mass media gives mass exposure to company's activity. It includes Print Media and Electronic Media (Manohar, 2011). The wining, dining, or gifting image of public relations practitioners is greatly due to how they interact with media. Thus media relations with involves working with the mass media in seeking publicity or responding to their interest in the organisation (Daramola, 2003). This involves working with the members of the press to maximize the free publicity that can be obtained for a newsworthy corporate event so as to create public knowledge and understanding and respond to press enquiries as it relates to their organization.

Government Relations

A government is the system to govern a state or community. In other words, a government is the system or group of people governing an organized community, often a state. In the case

of its broad associative definition, government normally consists of legislators, administrators, and arbitrators (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000). Government is a means by which state policies are enforced, as well as a mechanism for determining the policy (Etzkowitz, 2003). Although the purpose of the relationship with government seems to be disappearing because of vested interest of Individual or corporate. However, government and its machinery can be divided into two categories depending on their characteristics. i.e. Politicians and bureaucrats which is still a vital part that sustains and supports an organization. If the government of the day do not support a particular company the company might fold up. Thus, lobbying government agencies such as the legislature and regulatory agency on behalf of the organization is paramount.

Ex. Sugar and cement industry as a whole make substantial donations to political parties to seek favours after elections

Financial Institutions

"Finance is the life blood of business." Financial institutions are corporations which provide services as intermediaries of financial markets. Broadly speaking, there are three major types of financial institutions (Wright, 2012; Pierre, 2001). Examples are depository institutions; deposit-taking institutions that accept and manage deposits and make loans, including banks, building societies, credit unions, trust companies, and mortgage loan companies; contractual institutions – insurance companies and pension funds; Investment institutions – investment banks, underwriters, brokerage firms.

Giving details of company's projects, technical and financial collaboration and market projection helps the financial institutions to understand the company's plan better and thus gain more confidence. This involves creating and maintaining investor confidence and building good relationships with the financial community. Additionally, timely submission of progress reports, payment of principal and interest amount and keeping financial institution abreast with the latest relevant information further helps the company to strengthen its credibility and goodwill with financial institution.

Action Group

Action Group is a group of people that work together to try to achieve changes relating to a

particular situation or in order to help a particular group of people (Soderbaum & Tavares 2013). In other words, action group is a group of people joined temporarily to accomplish some task or take part in some organized collective action. Although small in number but very high in terms of their potential in building or harming the company. They have high ego and esteem profile because of power, credibility and ability to influence masses.



Action Groups are often formed by many shareholders when they disagree with actions by the Board of Directors of a Public Company or the Government (Grunig, 2013). For example, the Nigerian 2013/14 hike in price of fuel generated a lot of action groups. Put simply, actions group is a body formed to campaign politically on a particular issue, example, Rotarian action group for peace and BRFC action group (See Fig 2).



Fig2. Examples of Action group: (<https://www.google.com/search?q=action+group&client>)

General Public

Those members of the public who have no special role in a specific public area (Ledingham, 2003). They are ordinary people in society, rather than people who are considered to be important or who belong to a particular group. General public is the ultimate judge of all the activities of the company, based on which it will survive or die (Grunig, 2013). Companies need to show interest on social issues such as illiteracy, environment protection, pollution control to improve the quality of life of public and not just their 'Product or Brand'

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- Anyone using PR has to figure out his precise publics. There may be several distinct types.
- Then he has to survey and look over the reactions of each different type.
- He then plans and designs his communication and offerings for each one.
- He sends the right message to the right public in each case. There may be a dozen different messages if there are a dozen different publics. Each one is right for that public.
- Someone using public relations is after a result, a call-in, a reply, a response.

- The right message in the right form to the right public gets the result.
- A wrong message to the wrong public simply costs lots of money and gets no result.
- Knowing the right public, one can then survey them and communicate to them with reality.
- If you want to obtain results, know who your publics are.

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