

ETHICS AND PR: RESEARCH ON THE ETHICAL ASPECTS OF USING PR FOR COMMERCIAL AND PUBLIC PURPOSES

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ABSTRACT	KEY WORDS
<p>The article examines the ethical side of PR as a tool for promoting goods and services, as well as forming public opinion. The author explores the basic principles of ethics in PR, such as honesty, transparency, respect for the audience and responsibility for one's actions.</p> <p>Particular attention is paid to the analysis of examples of ethical problems arising when using PR in various contexts, including the manipulation of information, violation of confidentiality and unethical promotion.</p> <p>The author also analyzes the impact of ethical principles on the effectiveness of PR and offers recommendations for observing ethical standards in PR.</p> <p>The study is of interest to specialists in the field of PR, marketing and advertising, as well as to anyone interested in the ethical aspects of communication and promotion.</p>	<p>PR, ethics, promotion, commercial goals, public goals, honesty, transparency.</p>

Introduction

In the modern world, PR is an important tool for promoting goods and services, as well as shaping public opinion. However, the use of PR can raise ethical issues related to honesty, objectivity, and respect for the audience. In this study, we will look at the ethical aspects of using PR for commercial and public purposes.

We assume that compliance with ethical principles in PR can have a positive impact on its effectiveness. To confirm this hypothesis, we will analyze scientific literature and publications on the topic of PR ethics, study examples of the use of PR from the point of view of ethical principles.

Ethical principles in PR are based on the following basic provisions:

- Honesty and transparency. PR should provide reliable information about the product or service, as well as the company that offers it.
- Respect for the audience. PR should take into account the interests and needs of the audience, as well as its right to freedom of choice.
- Responsibility for your actions. PR specialists must be aware of the consequences of their actions and be responsible for them.

- Adherence to these principles will help avoid information manipulation, privacy violations, and unethical promotion.

The purpose of the study is to analyze the ethical principles that must be observed when using PR, as well as to identify possible problems and contradictions related to the ethics of PR.

Methodology

Despite the fact that public relations was invented relatively recently and gained worldwide popularity less than 100 years ago, a huge number of studies have been done in this area, which in one way or another touched on the ethical aspects of using PR for commercial and public purposes. Such studies include the works of the following authors:

F. Kitchen, *Public Relations: Principles and Practice*. The book examines the ethical aspects of PR, as well as issues of social responsibility and transparency in the work of PR specialists.

A. D. Krivonosov, O. G. Filatova, M. Shishkina, *Fundamentals of the Theory of Public Relations*. The book discusses the ethical norms and principles that PR specialists should observe in their work.

I. Alyoshina, *Public Relations for Managers*. The book examines in detail the issues of ethics and social responsibility in PR.

Chumikov, A. N. "Public Relations and Media Communications". The book contains a section devoted to the ethical aspects of PR and their impact on the company's reputation.

Catlip S. M., Center A. H., Broome G. M. "Public Relations. Theory and Practice". The book also discusses the ethical issues of PR and their impact on a company's reputation.

M. Gundarin, *The Book of the Head of the PR Department*. The book discusses the issues of professional ethics of a PR specialist, as well as the ethical aspects of working with clients and partners.

V. Kuznetsov, *Public Relations. Theory and Technology*". The book discusses the ethics of PR activities and its impact on the formation of public opinion.

V. Korolko, *Fundamentals of Public Relations*. The book examines the ethical norms of PR and their role in the formation of the company's reputation.

G. Pocheptsov, *Public Relations for Professionals*. The book discusses the issues of professional ethics of PR and its role in creating a positive image of the company.

I. Sinyaeva, *Public Relations in Commercial Activity*. The book examines the ethics of PR in the context of commercial relations and its impact on the company's reputation.

M. Shishkina, *Public Relations in the System of Social Management*. The book is devoted to a comprehensive consideration of the phenomenon of public relations (PR) in the system of social management. The author defines the ontological status of PR, the goals, subject, content, and result of public relations. The paper attempts to interpret PR institutionally, to highlight its social functions, mechanisms for including public relations in the regulation of certain spheres of society.

S. Black, *Public Relations. What is it?*" The book discusses the issues of professional ethics of a PR specialist, as well as the ethical aspects of working with clients and partners.

These books are authoritative sources of information on the topic of "Ethics in PR". They can be useful for studying the theoretical foundations of ethics in PR, as well as for understanding the practical aspects of the application of ethical standards in PR activities.

The following methods were selected for the study: analysis, induction, comparison.

Research and Analysis

In the modern world, when competition in the market is becoming more aggressive every day, PR technologies that resort to both ethical and unethical methods and tools are of great importance in promoting goods or services. Someone uses them intentionally in order to get the attention of the audience through deception or misinformation, while others do not notice their mistakes, thereby not deliberately violating ethical standards. In one case or another, the PR specialist needs to analyze the company's status in the market to make sure what impact the use of ethical or unethical PR strategies has on the company.

Sam Black, one of the founders of modern PR, defined it as the art and science of achieving harmony with the external environment through mutual understanding based on truth and full information. (Sam Black, 1989)

In his opinion, PR involves establishing and maintaining communications with key audiences such as customers, employees, shareholders, the media and the public at large. However, some experts believe that this definition has already lost its relevance and has nothing to do with practice, although Sam Black remains one of the first to describe the theory of PR by a specialist.

And the emergence of the practice of classical PR is usually attributed to 1902 and associated with the name of Ivy Lee, a native of Georgia and a graduate of Princeton University.

Ivy Lee began his career as a reporter for the New York World. In 1904, he, together with the journalist J. Parker founded an independent company, Parker & Lee. This event was a significant milestone in the history of PR development, as Ivy Lee became the first professional public relations consultant.

In 1906, Ivy Lee published the "Declaration of Principles," which was the first moral code of the profession. Reporter Ivy Lee was the first to establish the relationship between positive press coverage of a firm or politicians and their subsequent successes. (Korolko V.G., 2000)

Scott M. Cutlip wrote the book "Public Relations. Theory and Practice". And he gave the following definition of PR: "This is a management function that contributes to the establishment or maintenance of mutually beneficial relations between the organization and the public, on which its success or failure depends." (Scott Cutlip, 2016)

In countries with a market economy, the use of PR in most cases does not violate ethical standards, unless we are talking about projects aimed at making a profit by deceiving consumers. (Sinyaeva M, 2015)

This is due to the fact that the market economy is based on commodity turnover: the manufacturer sells his goods on the market, making a profit. From these profits, he pays taxes and often creates new jobs. Thus, the market is the basis of the state system, and most efforts are aimed at its development.¹

In such conditions, the main task of companies in the market is to increase competitiveness and increase sales, and PR plays an important role in achieving these goals.

If we refer to the classic PR used by Ivy Lee to improve the image of Rockefeller, we can clearly see that PR in commerce is aimed primarily at obtaining benefits by establishing relationships with the audience. (Kuznetsov F, 2009)

American journalist Isa Tarbel published a series of articles entitled "The History of Standard Oil", which criticized the oil monopoly of J. Rockefeller for corruption and dishonest business practices, as

¹ "How a Market Economy Works: Principles, What the Concept Includes" RIA Novosti / electronic source: <https://ria.ru/20220217/ekonomika-1773317937.html> (accessed 02.05.2024)

well as for the unethical methods of competition used by the company.² Ivy Lee showed J. Rockefeller from the other side - as an exemplary family man and a good man, which restored his reputation.

Thus, PR can be compared to another great invention of mankind - dynamite. It can be used for good and creation, but if it falls into the wrong hands, it will be used for evil. The same applies to public relations, if it is used for its intended purpose, that is, to maintain a positive image, good communication and informing the public, it will play a big role in the development of the company, organization and even the country, but if PR promotes the consumption of tobacco, alcohol and drugs among the public as something useful or necessary, then it will naturally lead to the decline of a certain segment of the public.

In today's world, even large companies often abuse the trust of the public, trying to increase their capital, thereby leaving thousands of people deceived. One of these scandals is associated with the automaker (Volkswagen Aktiengesellschaft), which owns 12 car brands around the world, the most famous among them are: Volkswagen, Porsche, Audi, Bentley, Bugatti.³

In 2015, a scandal broke out around Volkswagen diesel cars, related to the company's manipulation of software responsible for controlling emissions of harmful substances. This event was called the "diesel scandal" and became one of the most high-profile in the history of the automotive industry.

The essence of the scandal was that Volkswagen used special software that in normal conditions of car operation ensured compliance with environmental standards, and when tested on the bench, significantly underestimated the indicators of emissions of harmful substances. In this way, the company was able to get approval from environmental regulators and sell its cars as environmentally friendly.

The scandal was uncovered as a result of an investigation by the US Environmental Protection Agency. After that, Volkswagen pleaded guilty and agreed to pay a fine of \$4.3 billion.

The Volkswagen diesel scandal was a serious blow to the reputation of the company and the automotive industry as a whole. It has also led to stricter environmental standards and increased control over compliance with these standards by car manufacturers.⁴

A guilty plea, a fine and a recall of cars with manipulating software allowed Volkswagen to avoid a complete loss of reputation. In the event that the company continued to uphold its integrity and hide the truth from the public, it would lead to even greater losses.

Thanks to the prompt work of PR specialists, the company managed to minimize losses, as well as improve its reputation after the news about the fraud ceased to be relevant to the media.

Transparency and honesty play a key role in business development, while information manipulation and misrepresentation can lead to scandals and reputational damage. (Chumikov A., 2024)

Everything that was considered above concerns the commercial goals of using PR, they differ from public ones in that they are aimed at making a profit, while public ones are aimed at achieving any specific goals, such as:

² "Contribution to the Formation of PR by S. Black, A. Lee, E. Bernays, S. Cutlip" Analytical Information and Cognitive Portal neuroplus.ru / electronic source: <https://neuroplus.ru/sem-blek-chto-takoe-pr.html> (accessed 02.05.2024)

³ "Interpretation of the designation. car brands for 2024" Infoshina / electronic source: <https://infoshiny.ru/stati/chto-takoe-> (accessed 02.05.2024)

⁴ VW management apologized for the "diesel scandal" of Deutsche Welle / electronic source: <https://www.dw.com/ru/> (accessed 02.05.2024)

- Drawing attention to certain social problems. PR can be used to draw attention to problems such as poverty, unemployment, pollution, etc.⁵
- Formation of public opinion on certain issues. PR can be used to shape public opinion on issues such as health care reform, climate change, etc.
- Support for charitable and social projects. PR can help draw attention to charitable and social projects, as well as raise funds for their implementation.
- Promotion of ideas and values. PR can be used to promote ideas and values, such as freedom, equality, justice, etc.

In general, the public goals of PR are aimed at making the world a better place and contributing to the solution of social problems.

One example of the use of PR for public purposes in Uzbekistan is a campaign to raise awareness of the problem of air pollution. This campaign can include the following elements:

Creating informational materials such as brochures, posters, and videos that explain how changing air quality affects our lives and what we can do to reduce its effects.

Organising events such as lectures, seminars and conferences that provide information on changing air quality and its effects.

Cooperating with the media to ensure widespread coverage of the pollution problem and to draw public attention to the problem.

Supporting scientific research that examines change and its consequences.

This campaign aims to raise public awareness of air pollution and encourage people to take action to reduce its effects. It can be organized by the government, non-governmental organizations or private companies.⁶

In addition, in Uzbekistan, PR is implemented in all state organizations of the country, each structure of public administration has an information service subordinate to it, which performs the tasks specified in the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, dated 15.02.2018 No 125 "On measures to further improve the activities of information services of state and economic management bodies of the Republic of Uzbekistan".

All the tasks and functions specified in the resolution should ensure the transparency and openness of the work of government agencies, help to obtain information and services for the public, which in turn will increase the trust and loyalty of the audience to these structures. However, PR can be used by such structures during any crisis situations, so as not to undermine public confidence and not to cause a wave of indignation, the information service can resort to manipulating information, passing off false information as true, which in the end will not allow the public to find out the truth, which is a violation of ethical standards.

For example, on April 1, 2024, the Anti-Corruption Agency held the 2nd meeting of the Commission for Assessing the Effectiveness and Efficiency of the Work Carried Out in the Field of Ensuring Openness.

⁵ "What is" PR UP Business / electronic source: <https://upinc.ru/blog/stati/pr-svyazi-s-obshchestvennostyu-prostymi-slovami/> (accessed 02.05.2024)

⁶ "What pollutes the air in Tashkent and how to fix it. Statement of the Ministry of Ecology" Gazeta.uz / electronic source: <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2024/01/12/air/> (accessed 02.05.2024)

The calculation of the "Openness Index" was carried out on the basis of 8 indicators consisting of 84 assessment criteria. Performance indicators were divided into categories - "green" category from 71 to 100 points, "yellow" category from 55 to 71 points, less than 55 points "red" category.⁷

The assessment included 103 ministries, departments and institutions, according to the results, 31 state bodies entered the "green" category (71-100 points), 43 organizations were assigned to the "yellow" category (55-71 points) and 29 state institutions were included in the "red" category (below 55 points). (See Figure 1.)



Figure 1. "Openness Index - 2023"

All these data emphasize the importance of using PR to increase the openness of state and economic management bodies, because the well-being of the people depends on their decisions, and the people, in turn, being the main source of power, have every right to know about everything that happens within these structures. Decisions should be made taking into account public opinion, that is, public relations will play the role of a bridge between the leadership of government bodies and the people.

Elections and other public votes also play an important role in a democratic society, which must be advertised and promoted to achieve social and political goals.

For example, in 2023, during the elections for the post of President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the turnout, according to official data, was the lowest since 2016 and amounted to only 79.88%. However, these figures are still higher than in more developed countries, so in the United States, as of the morning of November 4, 2020, 160 million people took part in the US presidential election, which is 66.9%. This is the highest turnout in the last 120 years. In 1900, the turnout reached 73.7%.

⁷ "According to the results of the "Openness Index", the Agency of Statistics under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan has achieved the highest result" / electronic source: <https://stat.uz/ru/press-tsentr/novosti-goskomstata/52474-ochiqlik-indeksi-da-o-zbekiston-respublikasi-prezidenti-huzuridagi-statistika-agentligi-eng-yuqori-natijaga-erishdi-266> (accessed 02.05.2024)

This proves that the public agitation for political activism that the Uzbek government has been conducting over the years actually influences public behavior.

Conclusion

Based on the study, a number of conclusions can be drawn about the ethical aspects of the use of PR for commercial and public purposes.

In the commercial sphere, PR is used to increase profits, since the business is focused on generating income. In most cases, PR helps consumers learn about the history of the company, its products and the quality standards applied, which does not contradict ethical norms and benefits consumers.

However, there are cases when PR is used to manipulate information and public opinion in order to sell low-quality goods, which leads to scandals and loss of reputation in the market.

Timely recognition of mistakes, taking responsibility and correcting them help to preserve the company's reputation in the market. If all these actions are aimed at satisfying the needs of consumers, then they also do not contradict ethical standards.

In modern society, PR plays an important role in shaping public opinion and promoting various ideas and projects. However, the use of PR for public purposes can raise ethical questions and concerns.

The proper use of PR for public purposes not only does not violate ethical standards, but also helps to draw public attention to various problems, such as environmental degradation, tree felling, a large number of construction sites that do not comply with safety standards, and much more.

PR for public purposes is also aimed at achieving public awareness of the work of state structures, which allows the people to be the main source of power and play a key role in political decisions.

However, everything has negative sides, PR is no exception. The use of PR to promote evil can lead to bad consequences, such as terrorism, alcoholism, fanaticism, etc.

The use of PR that does not violate its basic concepts, such as honesty, openness, respect for the audience, does not violate ethical standards.

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