

ETHICS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

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***Summary:** One of the most important fields in the modern concept of marketing, which directly influences the formation of public opinion and attitudes, is the concept of public relations. As the academic and professional debate highlights the importance of establishing good relationships in the market, public relations are becoming increasingly important in terms of creating business strategies. In this context, it is important to reflect on the power of mass media and their impact on individuals and society today. In dealing with the importance of the media and the power of public relations, ethics and morality in reporting becomes even bigger issue. Truth telling becomes imperative for successful public relations, which implies a moral obligation dating criteria, but also the establishment of codes of ethics.*

***Key words:** ethics, public relations, communications, media, journalists*

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the implementation of ethics in public relations strategy, as well as the basic features that should have a PR expert should have. As a special topic within the public relations and communications stand the impact of media on society. Short presentation of the importance and role of media includes enumeration means of communication that provide plenty of opportunities thanks to the advancement of modern information and communication technologies. In this part is highlighted the importance of relations with media, but also refer to other activities that are discussed in the framework of public relations.

The ethics of any profession, including journalism, provides a miniature model of moral values. Every profession introduces the principles aimed at regulating the behavior of its members in accordance with the values of the community. These principles represent a microcosm of all moral rights and responsibilities. Consideration of ethics in public relations is present from the moment of the emergence of this practice. This paper highlights the most important moral criteria for the use of persuasion in the context of Public Relations, with which every expert must be familiar. Common to all is a concern for professional ethics, and the protection of all those who directly, or in every other way, participate in the activities of public relations. In this way it protects the status of the profession, but also increase the effects of the activities carried out within the activities of public relations.

The aim of this paper is to present the issues which are related to the ethical outcomes of implementation of the activities of public relations. The basic premise is that successful public relations include and respect the establishment of codes of ethics. The reason for this is the growing power of the media that are available today, and whose power is reflected in the large range of free access to information. Therefore, communication strategies and public relations

require great expertise and knowledge of those involved in their creation, otherwise it may have unintended outcomes.

2. THE POWER AND ROLE OF THE MEDIA

Harold Innis was one of the first researchers who studied the relationship between means of communication that one nation has and the way the communication tools contribute to shaping the character and scope of his society, the economy, politics and culture. In keeping with the legacy of ancient empires, the media have given their importance and their impact on individuals and society as a whole is growing with the advancement of technology. Today, the mass media are fully integrated with modern society and it can not be without them. Never in modern human history, All known media did not have a single distribution channel never in the modern human history, and this occurred for the first time when internet has provided easy access to the contents of television programs, radio programs, newspapers, magazines and a variety of published and unpublished databases and the like.[1] The Internet has marked the modern era in the field of communication, and also shortened the length of time, effort and cost of all those who are looking for information. In a very short period, this medium has emerged as a new advertising channel, completely equal to traditional media such as radio, television or press.[2] However, the opportunities offered by information and communication technologies can be interpreted in a negative context at a time when we are talking about ethics in reporting. Availability and ease of use, as the basic characteristics of the Internet in the role of the media, creates a challenge when it comes to the expression of professionalism and ethics of journalists in reporting. In this respect it is very important to adopt mechanisms to prevent unethical placement of content, and they can be defined through stronger legal regulation and by identifying additional ethical rules in reporting.

Media collect, analyze and spread the current information, and the individual, community organizations and businesses rely on the mass media to be informed about what is happening in the community, nation and the world in general. Government rely on media not only to inform his people and the world, but also to be informed of how different sectors of society perceive state and with what kind of expectations. From this we see that the mass media are a vital link in the information system, which includes all level of society and social administration.[3]

The mass media, for his role might have a powerful influence on public opinion and the public. According to Ljubomir Tadić word "public" means: the phenomenal world that everyone can perceive through our senses, world or space, which was detected with our senses and who was taken off the veil and removed the darkness.[4] Thus, those factors that affect the contents that come to our senses, are certainly a key players in the formation of perceived general "public". Philosophers like Immanuel Kant remind us that "the use of mind" must always be free, because only freedom can bring enlightenment to the people. Freedom of "reasoning" is the main factor to liberate man from nonage, that condition in which a person lacks the determination and courage to use their reason "without the guidance of someone else".[5]

Media relations are the most interesting field of activity, considering the strength of the mass media in modern societies, and the estimated growth of their influence. Beside media relations, public relations include the activities at the fields of community relations with investors, market/public research, publicity, lobbying activities by various government and independent institutions, consulting and management problems and others. Public relations also exists in

practice as a separate control function but are more often part of the functions of marketing management, especially in the Serbian economy. [6]

3. PUBLIC RELATIONS

Public relations can be analyzed as a separate management function, but they are usually present as part of an overall marketing strategy and promotions. Most authors define public relations as a management of communication and relationships in order to build a good image of the organization, as well as mutual understanding between an organization and its public. By Anthony Davis, the main goal of public relations is to influence the behavior of individuals and groups of people in their mutual relations through dialogue with all those whose perceptions, attitudes and opinions can be important for achieving success.[7] Under public, we often mean the environment of the organization. However, some authors include the employees of a company, and in this case, depending on the specific needs of the analysis of this issue, we talk about the external and internal public.

When we think about the concept of public opinion, we can see that it evolves through time from the "subject of police curiosity to subject of advertising operations", as once was remarked by academician Ljubomir Tadić.[5] Public relations focuses its activities, especially in times of crisis, on part of public opinion which makes the "target public", which is segmented from the larger and wider community of interest groups of the public, but is usually wider than the ordinary company stakeholders. In cases of crisis that brought the organization into conflict with the general public interests and attitudes, it is impossible to separate the "target public" from the general public which creates above mentioned public opinion.

PR should be oriented towards the audience in order to influence him, but at the same time to accept the response and shape its future steps towards the needs of the public. In other words, public opinion should have an impact on the development of relations with the public, resulting in the creation of an interactive relationship. Like all good communications, a successful PR requires as much listening as much as talking. It requires just as much of understanding and explaining how, and open relations and proactivity, rather than defensiveness and reactivity.[8] Elements of the public relations process can be most easily described by acronym RACE, which was formulated by John Marston:[9]

- Research - What's wrong, what's the situation?
- Action - Planning PR programs, or the answer to the question: What to do about perceived problem?
- Communication - Execution of a defined program of activities and answer the question: What will be accessible to the public?
- Evaluation - Measuring the results that followed the end of each of the management process and answers the question: Have we reached the public, and what effect it made?

Ethical dilemmas in public relations are very present in everyday practice. On the other hand, PR experts are convinced that they are able to follow the ethical requirements as the "PR relies on common content where it is not able to hide certain inefficiencies, inadequacies, faulty products and services, lazy management and so on.[7] Questionable of ethical conduct in public relations exists from the moment of creation of this science and practice. Pioneers in this field Ivy Lee and John V. Hill maintained that the PR should be "ethical conscience" of an organization and that kind of role of PR services many people now consider optimal.[9]

We remind that as one of the three basic characteristics of the narrators of PR message, in the role of speaker, spokesperson or expert commentator, honesty stands out (in addition to expertise and charisma). Professor Richard L. Johansen from the University of Northern Illinois in his book "Persuasion, Reception and Responsibility" quotes eleven states of moral criteria for the use of persuasion with which each expert in Public Relations must be aware of them, and we note following:[9]

1. Do not use false, fabricated, misrepresented or irrelevant evidence to support your arguments or claims;
2. Do not use unsupported and illogical reasoning;
3. Do not present yourself to be an expert on a particular topic if you have not;
4. Do not ask the audience to connect your idea or suggestion with emotionally colored values, motives or purposes which they are not associated with;
5. Do not speak for something that you do not believe it yourself;
6. Do not present wrong and do not hide number, scope, intensity or undesirable features of consequences.

Concern for professional ethics and conduct ethical code of conduct comes from the need to protect those who want to entrust their well-being to professionals. Also, there is a need to protect the profession itself, which includes professional privilege, status and collegiality.

In public relations, "the imperative of trust" must be respected. When a client seeks the services of PR professionals, he puts himself and his property in a potentially risky situation. Then his well-being becomes the object of evaluation and actions of a particular professional. Professional confidentiality maintains confidentiality of data and information even in situations where the client must disclose certain aspects of their personality that normally remain private. When professionals corrupt relations and links which are built on trust, or in any other way misuse their client or provide poor quality customer service, they are jeopardizing not only the welfare of his client, but also their entire profession. Professional privileges are based on the grounds that the public has confidence in the expertise of a professional, but also in its correct behavior.

4. ETHICS IN REPORTING

The obligation of journalists and the media is to ensure the free flow of information to the public and thereby inform the target groups or citizens. In the process of expression an opinion and transmission of information, the journalists and the media should be independent, but at the same time their reporting must be in accordance with the professional ethics of journalism. In a detailed analysis of these issues we can separate the two areas, the first of which relates to the ethics of journalists and another on ethics of informing. Ethics in informing requires that responsibility for journalistic work is not only related to journalists, but also to (1) legislators that form the legal basis of the media system, (2) media owners, whose interest in the economic success can have negative effects on journalistic ethics, and (3) editorial board hierarchy, and all co-responsible editors in the media who participate in decision-making, and colleagues according to which journalists can be oriented.[10] Thus, the ethics of informing implies the existence of the responsibility of journalists, but also includes the definition of clear and comprehensive legislation in this field, as well as the responsibility of the owner of the media and all stakeholders in the process of creating and placing information to public.

In order to protect clients and their privileged position in society, the profession establish codes of ethics and standards of their practice. These codes often carry legal weight and strength of civil sanctions. The arguments which justify the existence of the codes and their rigorous imposition rests on the belief that professional work requires special and very valuable knowledge and skills.[9] Norms that regulate the ethical conduct of journalists and defining ethics in reporting can be found in the relevant documents of national and international associations and publishers, journalists' unions, the media and others.

It is clear that because of their role in society and the power that the mass media have, questions of journalistic ethics are increasingly coming to the fore. Moral issues begins with deciding what topics to report and how to report on them. There are conflicts and moral dilemmas associated with the public's right to know versus the individual's right to privacy. Issues related to national security and other social pressures to withhold certain information to the public are also present. Dilemmas associated with protection of confidential sources and setting limits to censorship, and many other difficulties, also appear.[11]

The imperative of telling the truth in the public interest is the center of journalistic ethics. In 1801. Tunis Wortman was among the first to articulate the obligation of the media to always convey the truth: Any deviation from the truth is fatal. Impartiality should be a persistent feature of the press. Not even the fear on the one hand or the hope of reward on the other, should not intimidate or interfere press on her research. It should not be bribed to impose excessive undeserved compliments, or to force her to be at imposed silence. [11]

Wortman's message about "no hope of reward" becomes threatened when, in the nature of work, managers of public relations meet the press. Interests of PR managers and journalists are generally opposed. PR managers want to push the news to the public, often at any cost, and reporters and editors want to publish news only if it is of general importance, and if they are convinced of its truth. In order to gain the favor of the media, public relations officers often tend to organize entertainment for journalists and journalistic tours where the guests receive some gifts.

Such a reality required from journalism profession to determine the ethical issues of paying the costs of these activities. Today, policy of a large number of newspapers forbids to their staff to accept any kind of gifts, lodging or transportation. Newspapers pay all costs to their staff which is involved in a media tour. On the other hand professional associations of public relations have taken the position that it is unethical to offer journalists expensive travel and gifts. Especially controversial, regarding the market value and the nature of the tour, are the "Fam-trips", when travel agencies organize tour for travel writers and editors of the journal.

Although both parties, through their associations Declaration, distanced themselves from this kind of bribery, the reality is that small dailies, weeklies and trade journals often accept offers of expensive paid trip. Their managers say they do not have the resources, as large newspaper companies have, to offset the costs to touristic organization, and such travel is justified when it comes to reporting on activities that may be worth writing.

5. TRUTH, UNTRUTH AND DECEPTION

Since the beginning of philosophy, the philosophers were interested in the problem of truth. This problem arises in front of every branch of knowledge, and also in front of the news media.

Fortunately, for speaking the truth in the news report, the same standards are applied as for other areas of daily life, and it is not necessary to enter into the deeper philosophical issues about the nature of truth.

A true statement is a statement that positively corresponds to the facts that the sentence expresses or shows. It declares that a certain state of affairs exists, and if it is the fact that this situation really exists, then the statement is true. False statement, according to this conception, is a statement that does not correspond with the positive facts which they allegedly present. [11]

In the vast majority of cases in which journalists inform about the events, they convey information about things that they observed or discussed by other reliable witnesses. Thereby, the content of the report is a set of facts which other people can also discover, confirming or denying the report.

It should be expected that the majority of journalists, if they hold on to professional ethical obligations, are always aware that the truth or falsity of their statements can be independently verified. Therefore, they should welcome the fact that their work must constantly be subjected to verification to the test of positive correspondence with the facts.

To clarify the issue of truth in advertising, Richard T. De George suggests several distinctions.[12] When asked what stands against truth in advertising, he notes that it may be either a untruth or lie. According to T. De George, important ethical difference exists: lying is immoral, while presenting untruth does not have to be. This, at first glance, confusing difference, he convincingly explains with an example in which someone tells a story. Factual falsity of these stories would not mean that the narrator is lying. Lying does not consist of giving false testimony: someone is lying to the other person when expresses something he knows that is not true, and for what the other person, according to the expectations of the speaker, believe that is true. Richard T. De George argues that in the case of advertising, and we could say that the same applies in the case of testimony given in the context of public relations, it is possible to deceive without giving false testimony. [12]

Paternalism is generally defined as an action that someone carried over others in their own interests and against their will. A debate has been developed in recent years about a kind of paternalism that consists of paternalistic remarks or comments that do not necessary produce the consequences in reducing one's freedom. [13, 14, 15] It is clear that we have it in mind when we talk about paternalism in advertising or public relations. Of course, content which was created in this way requires careful preparation, especially when it comes to crisis communications.

Communication errors that often result in the placement of lies and deceitfulness of public are in practice around the world, in countries with a long market and PR tradition and in countries in transition. Errors occur due to lack of information, incompetence or lack of acceptance but also because of the influence of emotional relations of PR manager.[3] When the emotions master the concentration, mental capacity, which cognitive psychologists call "working memory" as a skill to memorize all the information relevant to the task, is defeated.[16] So we can say that the crisis situations are particularly risky when talking about possible errors that can have the placement of lies in front of the public as a consequence. Among others, a strong emotional impulse might be a special danger for making a wrong decisions and reactions.

However, regardless of whether it is a regular or emergency communications, public relations strategy must be based on accurate and complete information in the public interest.

6. CONCLUSION

Successful public relations, as one of the basic conditions of achieving the competitive advantage, imply respect for ethical and moral aspects in the defining and implementation of activities between the company and the public. This especially applies to entities that are in the role of transmitters of PR message. Honesty, competence and charisma are emphasized as desirable characteristics of these transmitters, because the mood and the filing of the public towards the company that they represent depend directly of them. One of the moral criteria that each Public Relations expert must respect is not to present himself as an expert on a particular topic if he is not. Also, the literature emphasizes the importance of honesty, which means that it does not hide the real needs and interests of the group that the narrator of PR message represents.

The power of mass media today is very high, which is why ethics in activities involved in public relations is increasingly coming to the fore. In journalism ethical and moral issues starting when deciding on what topics should be reported. Between the public's right to know all, and respect for individual's privacy, significant differences exists in the amount and type of information that should be placed in the public, which is why the issue of ethics in reporting should be prioritized. However, regardless of the profession, it is necessary to adhere to business ethical principles that should provide at least a minimum of moral values. Only in this way it is possible to regulate the behavior of companies and individuals in accordance with the values of the community.

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