

Social Media Research, Measurement, and Evaluation in the Public Relations Industry

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Quoting Harold Burson

- ***”The successful public relations program starts with baseline research, which facilitates measuring the results of future public relations initiatives. You learn quickly whether you spent funds wisely.”***
 - Harold Burson (2017, p. 127) – Founder & Chairman,
Burson-Marsteller Burson Cohn & Wolfe

An Important Subject

- **The importance of research, measurement, and evaluation in public relations has been addressed by many, including:**
- **Walter Lippman (1922)**
- **Edward L. Bernays (1923)**
- **Scott Cutlip & Allen Center (1952)**
- **Newsom & Scott (1976)**
- **Arnoff & Baskin (1983)**
- **Harold Burson (2017)**

Not Just an American Problem

- **Problems re: research, measurement, and evaluation of PR exist in many other countries aside from the United States.**
- **Robert Leaf (2012) & Tom Watson (2017) UK**
- **Fraser Likely (2013) Canada**
- **Jim Macnamara (2017) Australia**
- **Takasha Inoue (2018) Japan**
- **Dejan Verčič (2009) Slovenia**
- **Katarina Tsetsura (2009) Russia**
- **K. Sriramesh (2004) Asia**
- **Ronel Rensburg (2009) South Africa**

Can't Be PR Without Research

- **For a number of years, we have addressed the importance of research, measurement and evaluation in PR by saying:**
- **If Research is not involved then it's not PR.**
- **It might be Publicity.**
- **It might be Press Agency.**
- **It might be Communications Consulting.**
- **But without Research it's not PR.**

Purpose of the Study

- **Examining how research, measurement, and evaluation actually are being used in contemporary public relations practice.**

Methodology

- **Ten-year trend analysis**
- **Web-based survey questionnaires**
- **Cooperation with PRSA**
- **Sampling was largely judgmental or purposive**
- **Not possible to generalize results**
- **However, the larger than usual number of respondents (n=4,586) sets it apart from most of the other research examining those who actually work full-time in the PR industry.**

Number of Usable Responses

- **2009 n=574**
- **2010 n=563**
- **2011 n=479**
- **2012 n=622**
- **2013 n=378**
- **2014 n=393**
- **2015 n=329**
- **2016 n=412**
- **2017 n=556**
- **2018 n=284**
- **TOTAL = 4,586**

Demographics

- **27% from PR Agencies**
- **14% from Corporate**
- **15% from Universities (non teaching)**
- **19% from Non-Profit Organizations**
- **9% from Government**
- **7% from Hospitals and Health Care**
- **2% from Research Provider Companies**
- **4% “Other”**
- **4% No Response**

Demographics

- **Average age was 38.3**
- **68% Female 32% Male**

Results

- **Fewer than half of the respondents represent organizations or clients that have conducted research, measurement, or evaluation analyzing what members of various strategic publics have communicated about them via social or digital media.**

Results

- When asked what kinds of measurement PR people think should be taking place, the strongest support was for content analysis measures.
- Simplistic output measures scored the lowest
- Impact on influencers and opinion leaders fell at mid-point along with the impact on attitudes, opinions, and behavior.

Results

- **When asked what kinds of research PR people actually are using to measure and evaluate social/digital media . . .**
- **Output measures are slightly more likely to be conducted than content analysis**
- **Also, these output measures are considerably more likely to be used than measures studying impact on opinion leaders and/or attitudes, opinions, and behavior.**

Results

- **There appear to be three major reasons why social/digital media are not measured in a more comprehensive manner.**
- **First is budget and the reality most organizations do not set aside sufficient research budgets to measure and evaluate effectively.**
- **Second is the lack of PR practitioners trained and skilled in the more comprehensive research and measurement techniques, especially those that could effectively measure attitudes, opinions, and behaviors.**

Results

- **Third is the reality most of the companies that provide content analysis services are highly successful and the majority of their employees are not able to conduct research that measures attitude, opinion, and behavior formation or change.**

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