ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКИЕ НАУКИ

PUBLIC RELATIONS EXPERTS' USES OF THE NEW MEDIA IN THEIR COMMUNICATION WORK

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary technologies have made qualitative leaps for human life in the field of information, digitization and communication. The social networks produced by the new media are characterized by several features that cast a shadow and imposed their impact on human communication with its modern means, the most important of which are interactive, non-public, asynchronous, prevalence and spread.

This study aimed to evaluate the experts' use of the new media in their communication work. Furthermore, it sought to identify the most important gratifications obtained by the experts' use of this new form of media.

Keywords: Experts of Public Relations/ New Media/ Digitization/ Communication.

Technological development in its various fields has led to the emergence of the new media era, which is based on social networking platforms [3]. The new media is the communication process resulting from the merging of three components: computers, networks, and multimedia [2]. This new development has created a state of interaction and easy and comfortable communication between the recipient and the sender in any place of the world [1]. These modern methods have helped the experts of public relations to express themselves and identify publics who share or disagree with the same interests and tendencies in the scope of their communication work [4]. Furthermore, it gave them the opportunity to create private pages and design them appropriately as they want. It also found an arena of participation among the different publics of their organizations away from the restrictions imposed by the traditional media [3].

The problem of this study lies in identifying the public relations experts' uses of the new media in their communication work, through exploring their motives for using this media, the degree of their confidence in using it while fulfilling their communication work, the topics that these experts publish through this media in the course of their work, as well as highlighting the obstacles they face while using this new form of media.

The main objective of this study is to identify *the experts' use of the new media in their communication work*. From this objective stem other sub-objectives that are:

- To recognize the experts' use of new media and the degree of their trust in it.
- To monitor the most important social networks used by the experts, as well as their use degree.
- To identify the most important gratifications obtained by the experts' use of new media.
- To specify how the experts use the new media to fulfill their communication work, as well as to name their motives for using it.
- To get to know the most important issues that the experts publish on the new media.
- To know the degree of contribution of the new media to the performance of the communication work from the point of view of the experts.
- To monitor the obstacles that limit the optimal use of the experts for the new media, and the most important proposals to overcome them.

The study problem can be formulated in answering the following main question:

What are the uses of public relations experts' for the new media in their communication work?

A number of sub-questions emerge from this main question:

- Do the experts use the new media effectively while fulfilling their communication work?
- To what degree do the experts trust this new media?
- Which networks of new media do the experts use the most?
- What are the gratifications obtained from experts' use of the new media?
- How do the experts use the new media to fulfill their communication work? (discussion groups, responses, dialogues)?
- What are the motives of these experts for using the new media?
- Which issues do the experts publish on the new media?
- To which degree does the new media contribute to facilitate the communication work of these experts from their point of view?
- What are the suggestions to exploit the most advantage of the new media in order to enhance the communication work of the experts?

In his study, the researcher relied on the *theory of Uses and Gratifications* in order to search for the main reasons that motivate the experts of public relations to use the new media. The theory of uses and gratifications depends on the role and functions of the media in meeting the needs of the public [5]. Based on the approach of variant differences in the uses and gratifications, the receiving publics choose the communication materials that satisfy their needs, and

then select the media messages that meet their demands [6].

This study is a *descriptive research* that aims to collect the necessary information in order to give an accurate description of the dimensions or the variables of the studied phenomenon, which is concerned with studying the use of the new media by the experts of public relations, in addition to its role in fulfilling their communication work.

This study used the *survey method* which is one of the most important methods for the descriptive researches.

Within the framework of this method, the researcher used the survey of the media public, which enabled him to study the extent to which the experts of public relations use the new media and its role in fulfilling their communication work.

In his study, the researcher used a *survey questionnaire* that consisted of five main axes:

- The first axis is about the personal and general characteristics of the experts of public relations, including their gender, educational qualification, age, years of experience and place of residence.
- The second axis is about their use of the new media.
- The third axis is about their activities on the new media.
- The fourth axis is about the their use for the new media to fulfill their communication work.
- The fifth axis is about the obstacles and suggestions.

In order to measure the validity of the survey questionnaire to measure the variables of this study, the researcher presented it to eight experts and professionals specialized in the field of media, communication and technology.

The results were analyzed through the use of the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS).

The study's *community* consisted of forty experts of public relations in four Syrian governorates: Damascus, Aleppo, Homs and Lattakia who are officially registered in the Syrian Association of Experts of Public Relations in the period from the first to the thirteenth of November 2021. These experts work in twenty different organizations (governmental and non-governmental).

A *random quota sample* was used with equal distribution, as forty questionnaires were distributed to every expert at a rate of (8.4%) of the original community, through giving equal quotas for each of the four governorates, with ten survey questionnaire for each governorate.

The study reached a number of ***results***, the most important of which are:

- 85.5% of public relations' experts in the study sample use the new media, while 14.2% do not use it at all.
- The absent of having accounts on the new media is primarily due to the fact that the experts do not have enough time (38.9%), while 36.1% do not trust the new media, while a percentage of 30.6% do not trust its feasibility and importance. Those who do not have accounts for social reasons are 27.8%, and those who do not have them for economic reasons are 22.2%. The last reason is that these experts do not have adequate skills to use the new media (16.7%).
- The majority of experts who use the new media have a medium level of confidence in it (58.60%).
- Facebook is ranked first as the most used new media by the respondents (76.40%), followed by WhatsApp (74.20%), followed then by YouTube (71.8%), while Snapchat application got the sixth place (48.20%), while other applications and networks come in the seventh place with the lowest degree (50.40%).
- 70.3% of the study sample use the new media for four years or more, while 18.4% use it from two to less than four years.
- 55.2% of the respondents of the study sample use the new media daily from one hour to less than three hours, while 26.9% use it for less than an hour a day.
- There is no specific time for 44.8% of the study sample to use the new media, while 39.2% use it in the evening, 7.5% in the morning, 7.1% in the evening, and finally 1.4% in the afternoon.
- The work office is the most used place for the new media by experts, with a percentage of 91.5%, followed by the home with 14.2%, and finally the public places with 7.5%.
- 84.4% of the experts use mobile phones to access the new media, while 28.8% of them use personal computer to do this, and finally 12.3% use iPad.
- 81.2% of the study sample use the real name on the new media, while 9.4% use their nicknames, and finally 9.1% of them use their family names.
- More than half of the respondent experts in the study sample have less than 100 friends and followers on their pages from their publics, while 24.5% of them have from 100 to less than 200 followers, and 14.6% have 500 or more friends.
- The degree of interaction of 50% of publics with the experts' publications is very high, while 30.2% of them have medium interaction, and13.7% have a low degree of interaction.
- The most important gratifications that the experts achieve from their use of the new media is following-up and commenting on new services (in the first place with a percentage of 76.9%), followed secondly by reviewing the activities of the organizations (60.8%), then the entertainment and leisure in the third place (53.3%). Self-expression is ranked seventh with a percentage of 18.9%, while searching for friends is in the last place (8%).
- 72.6% of the respondents employ the use of the new media to enhance the communication interaction with their different publics.
- 53.75% of the experts in the study sample respond to their publics comments through the new media in a medium degree, while 31.1% of them rarely respond to these publics.

- The most important methods used in the new media in communicating with the publics are: first: pictures (56.5%), followed secondly by discussions and comments (55.2%), then video clips thirdly (50.0%). Opinion polls rank sixth (12.3%), and other methods rank seventh (2.6%).
- The publics interact with the posts by liking (61.7%), followed by commenting (58.4%), then by sharing (29.2%).
- The lack of confidence in the contents of the new media is one of the biggest obstacles to use this kind of media by the experts of public relations (61%), followed by the lack of the sufficient time to browse it (41.6%), then not giving preference to the utilization of corporate communication networks within the general strategy with a percentage of 39% while not keeping pace with the rapid technological developments of the communication networks rank sixth (17.5%). Other obstacles come last at a percentage of 1.3%
- The most important suggestions of the experts to increase the effective use of the new media is to customize several pages and special groups for the new content of the organizations (61.7%), followed by motivating the publics to constructively participate with these pages with a percentage of 87.8%, then by conducting competitions that urge the users to write on the topics related to the organizations (55.2%) .The suggestion to use professional experts who are specialized in the field of new media to support and succeed these pages ranks last (41.6%).

In light of the results of the field study, these following ***recommendations*** are advised to enhance the public relations experts' uses of the new media in their communication work:

- To make more use of the new media in the service of the organizations, in addition to promote its various dimensions, activities and profits.
- To effectively use different new media such as YouTube, because of its reliance on the interactive technologies that support audio and video together.
- To enroll the experts of public relations in training courses with the aim to learn more about the new media and its diversified uses,
- in order to direct them to enhance the communication work of the organizations.
- To urge the experts to employ more dialogue, discussion and comments on the publications of their publics in the networks of the new media, as this technique is considered a catalyst for the publics to increase their interaction with the organizations.
- To promote the experts to create special and diversified groups and pages for their organizations that support and enhance the demand of their publics to deal with them according to the annual plans set by them within their systematic activities.
- To stimulate the experts to create accounts on the social networks, as well as to keep a steady pace with latest technological developments of the current digital century.
- To enhance the awareness of experts about the policies and instructions for posting on the new media.
- To diverse in the use of various technics in the new media (images, likes, comments, debates and dialogues).
- To provide sufficient time to the effective use of the new media, as well as to activate the pages and groups of the organizations as a mean to enhance the communication activities with the publics.

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