

An Exploratory Study on Usage of Social Media by PR Practitioners for Media Relations

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ABSTRACT: Over the last few years, it has become apparent that social media has captured the fancy of most people. The extensive use of social media has drastically changed the way people communicate and share information. PR practitioners use social media every single day to get the word out about clients, to communicate with customers and to respond to questions or problems. Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and other social sites have quickly become important tools in a PR practitioner's overall toolkit. However, this study explores how PR practitioners (n=146) use the power of social media to connect, and develop relationships with the journalists as against the traditional method of face-to-face meetings and telephonic conversations with the journalists to develop relationships with them. The findings of the study revealed that Some of the platforms used by PR practitioners to engage with the journalists include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, various PR groups that exists on various social platforms etc.

Design/Methodology/Approach – the data for this study was collected from 146 public relations and corporate communications practitioners working in various PR consultancies and corporate entities respectively across the country.

Research limitations/implications – The main limitations of this study are related to the audience selection, given that the authors just relied on the usage of social media platforms by Indian PR practitioners and did not take into consideration how media reacts to this behaviour of PR practitioners.

Practical implications – The paper includes implications for the need of hour for PR practitioners to use social media platforms to connect with journalists and develop relationships with them, this would form an extension of real world connect into the virtual world.

Originality/value – This paper helps to identify how Indian PR practitioners are making use of social media platforms to develop media relations

Keywords: Social Media, Public Relations, Corporate Communications, Media Relations, Social Media Platforms, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, PR Groups, Quora, Instagram, Google+, Blogs

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I. INTRODUCTION

According to Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics. (PRSA 2009). Simply put, this definition explains the role of public relations as a strategic communication conduit between an organization and its stakeholders and emphasizes the need for 'mutually beneficial' relationships. Public Relations (PR) helps organizations and individuals to communicate its key messages with the external public through media.

A PR practitioner on his part, plays a vital role to build a positive imagery about an organization by crafting effective communication strategies that reach out to the target audience directly or through third party influencers. Some of the PR tools often used include press releases, opinion articles, public forums, events and many more. Increasingly, PR practitioners are also focusing on a company's reputation online by utilising digital and online media.

In today's age, maintaining proper media relations is a make or break proposition. If you do not have a knack of reaching the public with just the right message, conveyed in just the right manner, you could be turning your back on millions of dollars in revenue, as well as countless opportunities for growth and public branding. Good media relationships are based on trust and value. The more helpful you can be in providing sources and spokespeople when you do not have an agenda, the more receptive a reporter will be to your story ideas when

your company has something to say (MIA Pearson, 2012). The above still holds true for PR practitioners and building strong media relationships is quintessential as journalists play an important role to take the company's messages to the masses. The evolution of technology is facilitating faster communication, thus making the news cycles instantaneous/almost real-time. This has encouraged many traditional journalists to join some of the new age media portals or become bloggers and use their own social media channels to share stories and opinion pieces. With such revolutionary changes, it has completely changed the way companies and PR practitioners engage with media. Moreover, the emergence of interactive web (or Web 2.0), social media applications have gained enormous popularity among internet users, compelling businesses to engage with stakeholders through social media and also include it in the marketing toolbox. (Horn. Et. al., Jan 2015). The new age media is also presenting a platform to the trade/B2B media journalists to become bloggers, analysts, consultants and online influencers. However these writers/bloggers are bombarded with dozens of story pitches and press releases everyday thus creating clutter or online noise.

With the emergence of new age media, there are four types of modern media that can be classified as: 1). Mainstream: Traditional mode of communication i.e: print or broadcast; 2) Hybrid: Digital version of the traditional media like Livemint.com; Economic Times online; 3) Social outlets: Social media platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and YouTube and; 4) Owned: A company's owned properties such as website, blog, app that can be used to promote updates pertaining to new product launches, milestones etc.

Social media is a revolutionary communications tool that has quickly changed the ways in which public relations is practiced, becoming an integral part of public relations practitioner's toolkit. Social media offers public relations practitioner's new options for every aspect of public relations. From research to evaluation, social media tools can be utilized to create and distribute meaningful content to wider audiences than traditional media allows Ehtesham Rahman, (September 2015).

According to the Cision's report, there is an evolution of new type of journalists called multimedia journalist, who are skilful storytellers, capable of communicating not only in words, but also in images, video, and emerging multimedia formats (GIFs and 360-degree video come to mind). In other words, a multimedia journalist is capable of reporting in multimedia formats – go figure (State of the media report, 2016). Media houses are training journalists to become multimedia format experts who are expected to produce or adapt content for an increasingly wider-range of platforms, including traditional broadcast, print and web formats, as well as blogging, podcasting (audio and video), social media, and live content platforms (Periscope or Facebook Live for example).

These multimedia journalists have the capabilities of producing content in interesting formats like videos, GIF images, listicles, charticles and more. This is also encouraging hybrid media to produce real-time content through different formats such as interview through Periscope, Google Hangout, and Facebook Live etc. Cision, explored social media usage by journalists, in its report and confirmed that 71.3% of journalists use social media to build relationships – and 51.8% of journalists use social media to find and build stories. A whopping 64% of journalists use social media to monitor public opinion and 20% of journalists use social media to source stories and receive pitches. The above report analyzes how journalists are using social media to build relationships, source information, check pulse on public opinion about government policies and initiatives while very few of them use it to get story pitches.

According to Wilson &Supa (2013), social media platforms are currently not being explored for media relations. Infact, there is very less literature and research around social media as a public relations tool as it is still considered as an emerging trend. According to Cision, in USA only 20% are open to receiving story ideas via social media. Which means that public relations practitioners while focusing on their usual practice, should also adopted to new age pitching techniques and customize pitches to suit the social media platforms, for instance practitioners should learn to condense their pitch to 140-characters when pitching on Twitter and so on to suit individual social platforms. The Wilson &Supa (2013) study showcases that PR practitioners have not yet explored social media platforms as a communication tool to build media relations. It also indicates that practitioners will have to customize their pitches to suit the social media platform. For instance, while pitching on Twitter, the pitch should be limited to 140-characters only.

This particular study explores the extent to which Indian PR practitioners use social media tools for media relations and the future of PR in the context of new age media. It extends previous work in the area of media relations (Aronoff, 1975; Kopenhaver, Martinson & Ryan, 1984; Supa&Zoch, 2009; Wilson &Supa, 2013; Zoch&Supa, 2014) that examines how public relations practitioners and journalists relate to each other, and also work that has examined the impact of social media on public relations practice (Lariscy, Avery, Sweetser&Howes, 2009; Taylor & Kent, 2010).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

With the evolution of media and emergence of world wide web the power of publishing or broadcasting news now rests in the hands of public as much as the mighty media. In the public relations parlance, it is now easier for public relations practitioners to directly interact with their stakeholders bypassing the gate-keeping function of traditional media. As Samsup Jo (2005) states, "Public Relations practitioners can communicate with audiences directly without the traditional channels". While this may hold true to India as well but it is a reality in the western parts of the world. India is completely a different market for media. There is no doubt there has been tremendous growth in the social media space, allowing companies and public relations practitioners to directly communicate with their stakeholders, however, India is the only market where traditional media is still growing and will continue to grow in the coming years as well, which means the traditional gate-keeping function is still equally dominant as much as the power of social media. According to a report by India Ratings and Research, India's Rs. 30,000-crore (\$4.48 billion) print media industry is set to grow by 8% annually for the next three years. Vernacular or local language print media will grow at 10-12% in the upcoming fiscal year 2017 (MadhuraKarnik, March 2016). This clearly indicates that traditional media and the gatekeepers – the journalists, will continue to remain an important element for corporates and public relations practitioners to take their messages across to the stakeholders. As mentioned by JoonasRokka, 2014, existing researches have primarily focused on exploring how the emerging social-media landscape is currently changing brand communications and management. However, usage of social media by public relations practitioners is an under researched topic. (Samsup Jo; Jung, Jaemin, 2005;).

Infact, even fewer researchers have focussed on how social media tools can be leveraged to enhance media relations (Hachigian and Hallahan, 2003; Hill and White, 2000; Johnson, 1997; Taylor and Perry, 2005; Briones, et al, 2011; Diga& Kelleher, 2009; Eyrich, Padman&Sweetser, 2008; Steyn, et al, 2010; Waters, Tindall& Morton, 2010; 2011). Also very small subsets of researches have focused on how public relations practitioners and journalists perceive each other (Aronoff, 1975; Kopenhaver, Martinson & Ryan, 1984; Larsson, 2009; Supa&Zoch, 2009, Wilson &Supa, 2013). There is only study that focuses on the relation between media relation and usage of social media tools for media relations, focussing on the Indian market. (Rousseau S, 2014). This study will deep dive on how public relations practitioners in India are using new age/social media tools to engage and build stronger media relations. According to Grunig (1992), the practice of public relations is the effective management of relations with all of its stakeholders and communicating in a manner consistent with the best interests of the organization. In another study researchers Grunig and Hunts (1984) state that four models of public relations have provided much of public relations' theoretical framework – press agency/publicity, public information, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical communication. Within which press agency/publicity is described as a propaganda function of public relations, one whose primary goal is to obtain media attention in almost any way possible.

The relationship between practitioners as source and journalists as reporter can be traced to a conceptual model of communication by Westley and MacLean. Giber and Johnson applied the model to source and reporter relationships and defined the interdependent roles of source and reporter. Public relations practitioners serve as one of the most influential sources of news through their ability to subsidise information for journalists. (Shin et. al., 2003). The statement hold true especially in the Indian context where public relations practitioners form one of the key sources of information for the media.

EhsanKhodarahmi (2009), states that media looks for all sources of information to find out about an event that is newsworthy. Therefore, it is critical for public relations practitioners to become a credible, genuine and important source to the media. This will help to collaborate with the media and provide them with first-handed news, which inevitably strengthens media relations.

According to Bardhan et.al (2006) in their study mentioned that media relations through the use of the personal influence models turned out to be the most common public relations activity. The human and interpersonal aspects of the relationship between public relations professional and journalists are accorded high value. Frequent press visits, get-togethers and even interactions that may cross the professional line are considered appropriate in Indian public relations.

Considering the business environment in the twenty-first century, online and offline media are considered to be at par and infact complement each other. It is vital to know how to combine traditional communication techniques with a successful social media strategy, if the firm hopes to gain competitive advantage. Social media has recently become one of the hottest public relations avenue to use when attempting to reach out to the community and to the media. Social media tools, such as a Blogs, Twitter and Facebook, give firms the opportunity to directly connect with the consumer and media simultaneously and on a real time basis. (Joan E. Ubeda, Clara Gieure, Carlos de-la-Cruz, Olga Sastre, 2013). However, despite the fast emerging social media and the rampant use of social media platforms, India's mainstream media still holds prominence and has the power to greatly influence the mind-set of general public. This is the key reason that media relationship is still a predominant function of public relations practitioners.

Dozier et al., (1995);Waters et al., (2010), helps to understand media relations and explains the types of initiatives that constitute it: maintaining and updating media contacts, disseminating news releases, organizing press conferences, sharing content and responding to media queries. Carroll and McCombs (2003) applied the agenda-setting theory to examine how first and second level agenda setting affected stakeholders' perception of the organization. They suggested that more coverage would lead to more awareness of the organization; and the more coverage of particular attributes of the organization would lead to stakeholders' defining and perceiving the organization by these attributes. The more the organization communicates its agenda, the more there will be discussion and media coverage of the organization and its attributes, they argued. Thus, regular communication and co-operation with the media is vital in establishing as well as maintaining relationships with the media.

Augustine Pang, a researcher from Singapore (2010) Mediating the Media model, inspired by Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) theory of influence, is based on three assumptions. A) Practitioners must recognize the need to engage in proactive media relations. B) Consider it their responsibility to cultivate good media relations (Sallot and Johnson, 2006a) and C) understand how journalists work and the environment they operate in. Journalists' background and characteristics such as gender, ethnicity and education (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996) also influence what they perceive to be news and relevant content for their audiences. This determined how journalists select news (Sinaga and Wu, 2007). Practitioners therefore need to understand what makes news and how journalists write as the knowledge can help practitioners get better media coverage (Sallot and Johnson, 2006a). Even before contacting the media, having an idea about what type of journalists and or reporters you are going to talk to is incredibly important. (EhsanKhodarahmi, 2009) Additionally, PR practitioners are expected to share updates on behalf of the organizations, discuss industry trends and share interesting story ideas with the media wherein the organizations can share a viewpoint.

However thankfully, there are various social networks today that help public relations practitioners to easily connect with the media, understand their current activities accordingly decide on the approach that needs to be taken to develop and build sustained relationship. Communication is an art and a science. It is art because a human being creates and delivers its purpose. It is a science, because we learn and experiment stuff; where we can give solutions to complexities. (EhsanKhodarahmi, 2009) Elaborating on the above theory, communication with the media should be humane and not robotic, sending pitch emails, press releases etc. will not help public relations practitioners to enhance media relationships, they will have to meet the journalists personally to build this rapport. This is about innovativity and creativity as basic principles of gathering attention of the media for what organisations may have to say to their public. One way of maintaining good media relations is to keep updating available data and evaluate the organisation's performance constantly. Therefore, enhancing effective communications is essential (EhsanKhodarahmi, 2009).

Pang (2010), says that public relations practitioners must adopt a proactive approach while dealing with the media. It means that the onus of knowing the journalists, the environment in which they operate and their interest levels lies with the public relations practitioner. Journalists believe that it is the practitioner's responsibility to make all efforts in building and maintaining relationships with the journalist. It is argued that by understanding how journalists and journalism work, practitioners would be better equipped to reach out to them and shape the conduct of media relations in a strategic manner (Yoon, 2005a).

Pang (2010) further adds that media relations can be strengthened by proactively sharing useful information with journalists on a timely basis, for instance sharing of industry reports, whitepapers, policy updates is very beneficial for journalists to cull out story ideas. In the research done by Sallot and Johnson's (2006a), have shared a five point framework for practitioners to establish better media relationships. First, understand the writing style of the journalist and know his interests. Second, know the beat. Third, improve on their quality of writing. Four, be present and available to share information (Richards, 1998). Five, draft information that is simple and will appeal to the journalist, for example contextualizing information that will signify the importance of the news. Technological innovations and convergence have revolutionized existing media relations tools like press kits, newsletters, news releases, facility visits just to mention but a few; thereby leading to the emergence of new and contemporary tools of media relations. These contemporary tools have not replaced the 'old' tools but in fact complement each other for building effective media relations. (VineetKaul, 2013). Public relations practitioners today have the digital edge wherein they can explore pitching to bloggers, new age portals and hybrid media through creative pitches in the form of listicles, infographics, HTML GIFs etc. According to a 2007 PRSA Wired for Change Survey, the majority of public relations practitioners state that communication technology has immensely helped to expedite the circulation of information to reach the masses. Social media not only allows public relations practitioners to reach out to and engage their publics in real-time conversation, but also provides an avenue to strengthen media relations. Open two-way communication immensely helps to build effective media relationships (Richard D. Waters, 2010). Howard and Matthews (2006) encouraged practitioners to go even further by asking journalists how they prefer to receive media relations pitches.

There are not many Indian studies in this area of research, only few generic PR studies with a minor part of the research focusing on media relations were found. Currently in India, most public relations practitioners use social media to be updated about journalist contact details, media movements, read stories by journalists and wish them on occasions. However, it is not being effectively used for pitching story ideas, commenting on their stories to share a different perspective. Infact, very few trade or niche publication journalists share details of the stories on select Facebook pages and Whatsapp groups but the mainstream media is still restricted to traditional email/calls. Social media is valuable in media relations because it has enhanced traditional media, newsrooms-via social media-and social media (Bajkiewicz, Kraus, & Hong, 2011). Although there are benefits to use social media as a communication channel with journalists, poor usability practices can result in a reduction of positive press coverage (Nielsen Norman Group, 2001). Even though social media has created a new means of communication in media relations practices, the core of media relations remains to build relationships and retrieve accurate and solid information (Bajkiewicz, Kraus, & Hong, 2011). According to Greer (2003), “The problem for social media comes when public struggles to distinguish information produced by trained journalists from information placed online by groups or individuals with lower standards” (p. 12). Many organizations and companies have adopted social media as a media relations tool, but due to the previously mentioned credibility concerns, public relations practitioners still think that the traditional media practices are more reliable, credible, and accurate (Write & Hinson, 2010). Yes this is very true in the Indian context where information shared on social media is informal and therefore lacks credibility; this is the prime reason that public relations practitioners still continue to rely on communicating through traditional media. This study seeks to pick up where the previous left off, increasing the number of practitioner interviews.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research was carried out using a questionnaire survey which was sent to 4850+ PR practitioners working in various companies and PR agencies in India in the month of December 2016. Out of the total respondents only 146 responded to the questionnaire.

IV. SAMPLING

A convenience sample of public relations practitioners were used to study how Indian public relations practitioners are using social media to connect and build relationships with the media. Online survey links were emailed to respondents using a web-based survey tool. This method yielded 146 respondents from the Indian public relations fraternity. The respondents were asked standardized questions which comprised both open and close-ended questions.

The breakdown of respondents by gender was 50 per cent female and 50 percent male. 25.34 per cent of the respondents were younger than 30 years of age, 51.36 per cent were between 30 and 39, 13.01 per cent were 40 to 49 years of age. It is important to note that more number of experienced public relations practitioners were available and only 1/4th younger professional contributed to the study due to their work busy schedule despite several attempts to include them.

V. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: Do Indian public relations practitioners significantly use social media platforms for media relations? And why?

RQ2: Which are the most frequently used social media platforms they frequent for connect and building relations with the journalists?

RQ3:What is the future of social media – media relations?

VI. RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

The demographics of respondents varied across age groups (23-62 years). The participants varied from different gamut’s of PR Agency – 89n (60per cent), Corporate Communications – 48n (33per cent) and Freelancers – 10n (7per cent). The hierarchy of the sample was from Account Executive level to CEO, VPs and Head of Corp Comms.

Table 1

Designation	Job Type	Nos
Professors	Academic	3
Founders	Agency	6
CEOs /MD	Agency	6
Account Director / Sr. Account Director	Agency	16

Assistant Account Manager	Agency	2
Associate Director	Agency	3
Account Executive	Agency	4
Associate Partner	Agency	1
Vice President / Associate Vice President	Agency	3
Branch Head	Agency	1
Co-Founder	Agency	2
Group Head	Agency	1
Sr. Account Executive	Agency	7
Sr. Account Manager	Agency	5
Director PR / Additional / Deputy Director	Corporate	5
Assistant Manager	Corporate	9
Vice President / Associate Vice President	Corporate	4
Manager / Sr. Corp. Comm / Marketing	Corporate	31
Head of Corp Comm / Mar. Comm	Corporate	9
Executive Corp Comm	Corporate	2
General Manager	Corporate	2
Freelancer	Independent	2
Others	Other	12
Did not mention designation	Other	10

Location: Locations wise the participants were majorly from Mumbai – 52n (39per cent), Bangalore – 24n (18per cent), Delhi – 21n(16per cent), Gurgaon – 10n (8per cent), Hyderabad – 6n (5per cent), Chennai, Kolkatta& Pune – 2n (2per cent) each, Goa, Gujarat, Jaipur, Jalgaon, Jhansi, Kanpur, Kolkapur, Lucknow&Varnasi – 1n (1per cent) each, Internationally USA – 2n (2per cent), Dubai, Kuala Lumpur, Italy – 1n (1per cent) each.

Usage of social media for media relations: The results showed that vast majority of the participants are using social media platforms for Media Relations today. Around 138n (94.52per cent) are using Social Media for Media Relations while 8n (5.48per cent) denied the use for this purpose. The participants who said No were the Faculty, CEOs and Founders in the organization and they do not really have a day to day interaction with the media. Hence we can come up with the inference that, every hand’s on PR Practitioner today, uses Social Media for Media Relations.

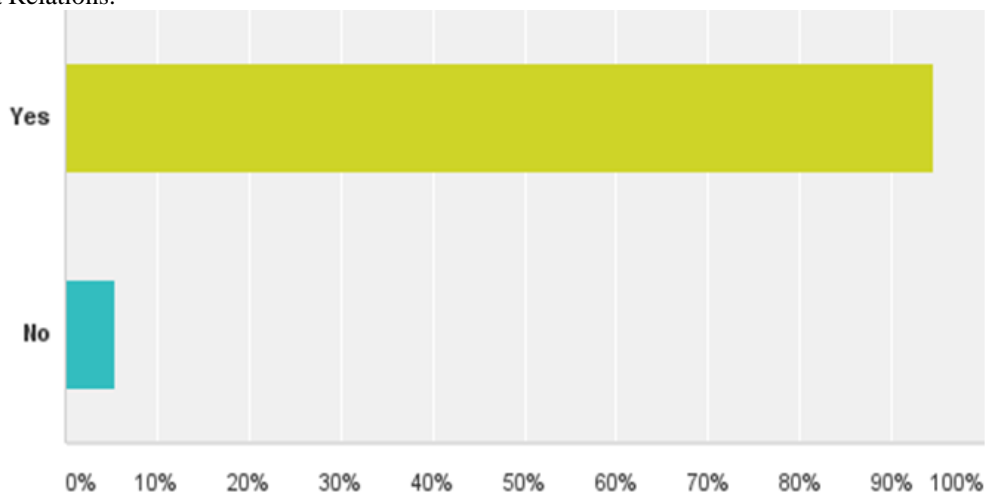


Figure 1: Usage of social media for media relations

Most frequently used social network: Of all the social networks used to communicate with the media, LinkedIn emerged as the largest used social network to build connections with the journalists (LinkedIn – 120n - 83.33per cent), while Facebook stood at No.2 (118n -81.94per cent), followed –Whatsapp at No. 3(112n - 77.78per cent) and Twitter at No. 4 (98n -68.06per cent). This was in stark contrast with other international studies as Twitter ranks as No.1, networking platforms for public relations practitioners for media relations.

Frequency of using the social networks for media relations: PR practitioners do not really keep track of the times they connect with the journalist as it is need based. Whenever they have something to share with the journalist they connect with them through their preferred platforms. Daily – (55n - 39.86per cent), Once a week

– (33n - 23.91per cent), More than once a month – (24n -17.39per cent), Twice a week – (21n -15.22per cent) and Others – (15n -10.87per cent). Answered by 138 and Skipped by 8 participants.

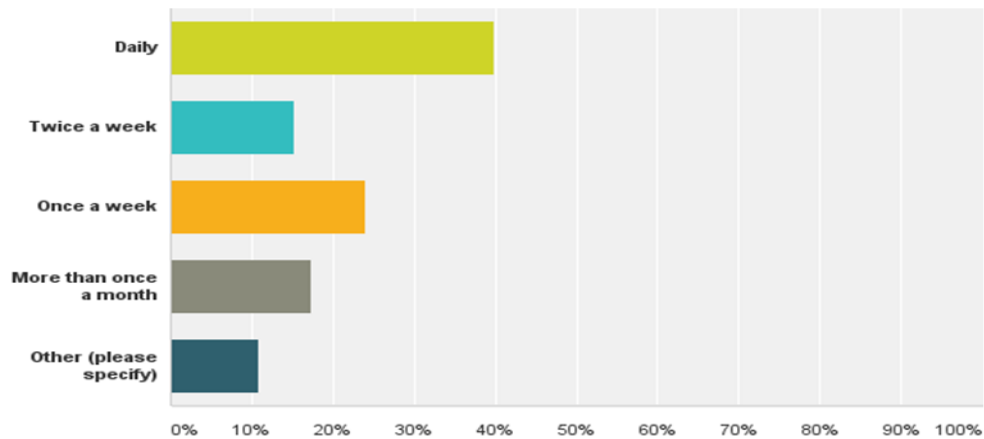


Figure 2:Frequency of using social networks for media relations

Most preferred group or communities across social networks for media relations: Facebook Groups was ranked 1st(52n -36.11per cent), while it stood 5th on the overall ranking of social networks. LinkedIn Groups was ranked 2nd amongst groups (34n - 23.61per cent), but stood at No.6 in comparison to all social networks. Whatsapp Groups took the No.3 position amongst groups and communities and ranked 3rd in the overall comparison on the preference of social networks. While rest of the social platforms were used by smaller number of practitioners such as Instagram – 23n (15.97per cent); Google Plus – 19n (13.19per cent); Google Groups – 17n (11.81per cent);Quora – 5n (3.47per cent); Periscope – 2n (1.39per cent);Others 6n (4.17per cent).

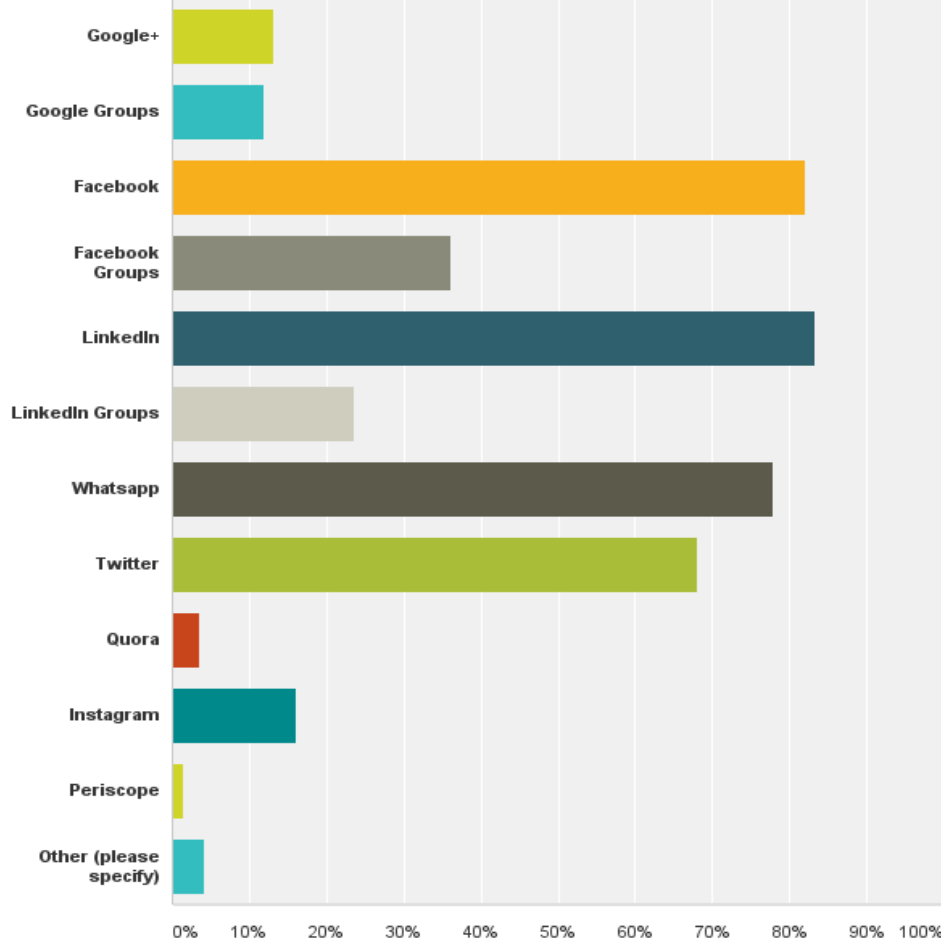


Figure 3: Most preferred group or communities across social networks for media relations

How Facebook is used for media relations? 72.26 per cent said that they use Facebook to become Friends with journalists, while 71.53 per cent said that it helped to stay updated about the journalists by reading their status updates. 51.82 per cent use Facebook to like/comment on the posts posted by journalists to increase their own visibility in the eyes of the journalists, while 50.3 per cent use the platform to know the birthdays and anniversaries of media personnel so that they can use the opportunity to connect and wish them. Only 22.63 per cent public relations practitioners use Facebook to pitch stories to journalists using Facebook Messenger. Others used the platform for Subscribing for the updates of the journalists etc. Maximum number of participants says they befriend the media personnel on Facebook and stay updated about them, after which they participate in conversations and share greetings with the journalist on special occasions. Doing this gives both of them the comfort to later share and discuss work updates like pitching story ideas etc...

This question was answered by 137 participants and skipped by 9 participants.

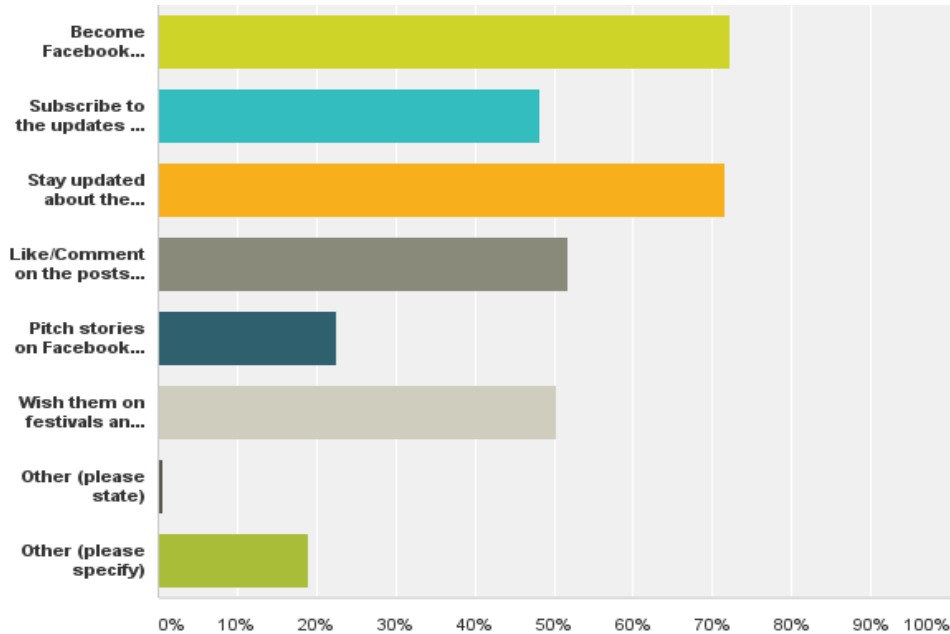


Figure 4: How Facebook is used for media relations?

Participants mentioned that ‘Media Movements’ and ‘Indian PR Forum’ came up as a top of the mind recall when asked about the top PR Groups on Facebook. While some did refer to other groups such as Media Updates, Media List, Media and communication practitioner of India and PR4You.

LinkedIn: When asked how the participants used LinkedIn for media relations, the majority 88.57 per cent said they use LinkedIn to stay connected with the journalist, while 80.71 per cent said that they use the platform to stay updated on their job changes and career movements, while 57.14 used it to read the status updates or their articles posted on LinkedIn Pulse. Other used to wish them on festivals and birthdays – 39n (27.86 per cent), Pitch stories using LinkedIn mail – 24n (17.14per cent).

Answered by 140 participants and skipped by 6 participants.

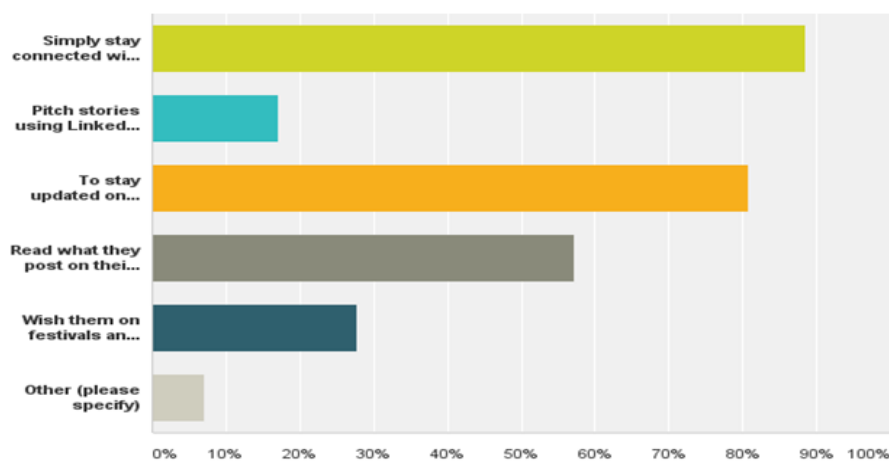


Figure 5: How is LinkedIn used for media relations?

Among the top three PR groups on LinkedIn that got the top of mind recall were Indian PR Forum (IPRF), Corporate Communications, Marketing Communication and PR Practitioner. This shows that LinkedIn is mainly used for one on one interaction with the journalist and not as discussion or knowledge sharing groups.

Whatsapp

Participants used Whatsapp, an instant mobile messaging platform primarily for following up the journalists on their stories pitched - 101n (76.52 per cent), 50.85 per cent (79n) used to wish the media personnel on their birthdays and festive. 50.76 per cent public relations professionals used this platform for pitching stories to the media, which was surprising as they used a messaging platform to pitch stories rather than any social network.

Few also used the platform to to appreciate their display pictures (21.97 per cent) and status messages, acknowledge a good story done by them, send Media Invite for Press Conferences & Events and various reminders etc.132 participants answered and 14 skipped.

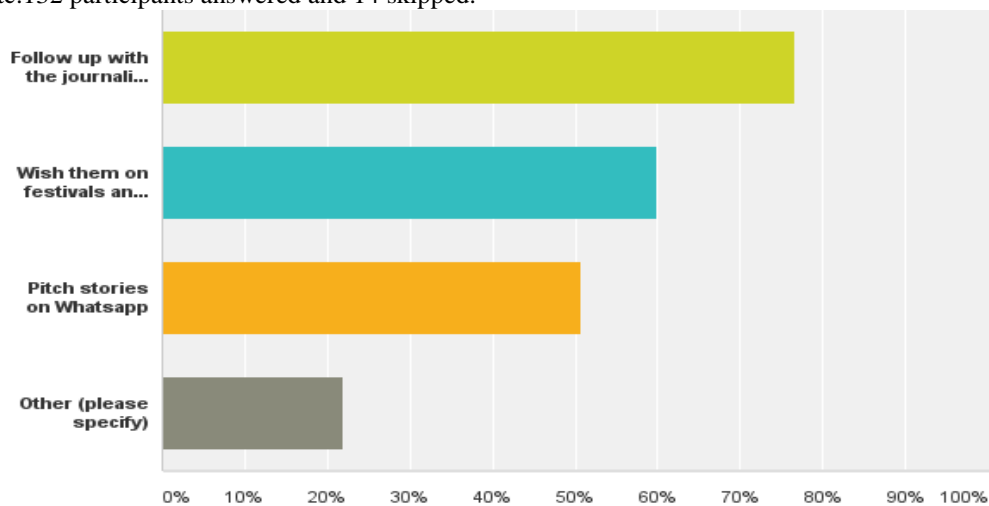


Figure 6: How is Whatsapp used for media relations

Apart from Whatsapp, which is used by 103n (75per cent) of participants, 25 per cent of the participants also used other instant mobile messaging platforms but did not specific which platforms they use.

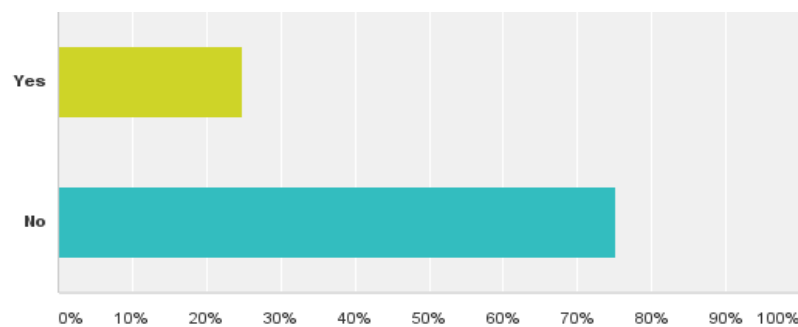


Figure 7: Instant mobile messaging platforms used for media relations

Why do participants use PR Groups on social platforms?

Maximum participants use all the available PR Groups to stay updated on the overall media and PR industry – 126n (90per cent), or to exchange knowledge and information with the peer group – 112n (80per cent), To get media contacts – 105n (75per cent), To know about story opportunities for my clients/company – 103n (73.57per cent) and Other – 12n (8.57per cent). Basically 90per cent participants use PR groups on Social Media to stay updated with the industry. The others like exchanging knowledge and information, many use it for media list. Apart from this, these groups serve as a good platform to for hiring PR practitioners and references. Participants answered the question 140 and 6 skipped.

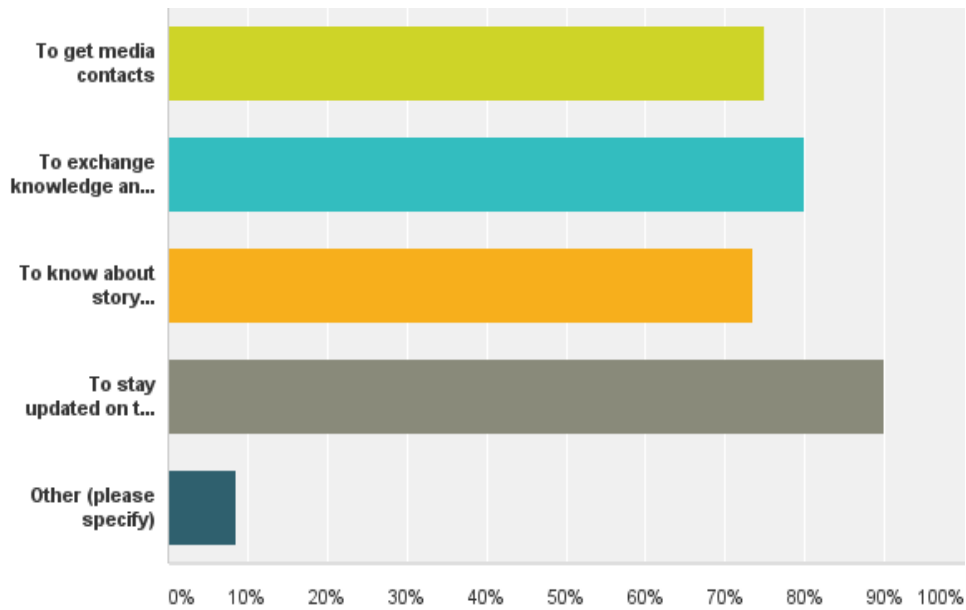


Figure 8: How PR practitioners use social media for media relations

Twitter

Internationally Twitter is the most used social media platform for media relations, however in India, the statistics were quite different as – 113n (85.61per cent) used Twitter only to Like/Retweet/ Comment on tweets posted by the journalists. While only 27n (20.45per cent) used Twitter to pitch story ideas through tweets. Others find it a medium to know the likes and dislikes of journalist and keeping a track of the stories filed by the journalist lately etc.

132 Answered and 14 Skipped.

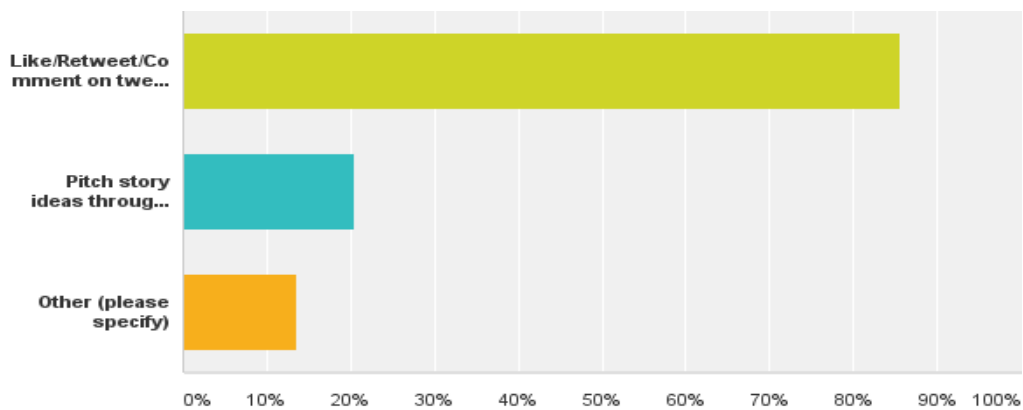


Figure 9: How Twitter is used for media relations

Social media platforms like Quora, Instagram andGoogle Plus are not used by Indian PR practitioners for media relations. Some of them follow journalist on these platforms just to keep themselves updated but do not use it to communicate with them. A few of them feel these platforms quite complex compared to Facebook, LinkedIn and Whatsapp.

Most favourite social media platform of Indian public relations practitioners: The most favourite social media platform of PR Practitioners is Facebook, followed by Whatsapp and LinkedIn, while Twitter is a little less preferred. Around 22per cent (47n) like to use Facebook, 22per cent each (24n each) favour Whatsapp and LinkedIn respectively. Currently only 13per cent (14n) prefer Twitter over the other platforms.

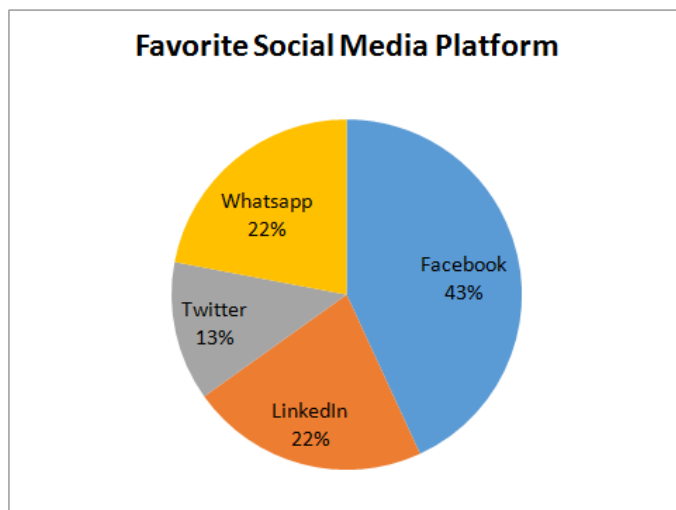


Figure 10: Favourite social media platform for media relations

Future of media relations through the use of social media

As on date, apart from Facebook, LinkedIn, its respective groups, Whatsapp and Twitter have being used to simply to know about the status updates of Journalists or to get their media contacts. In future, public relations practitioners would make use of Twitter more as more and more journalists will make use of this platform to popularize their own stories. Platforms like Snapchat and Instant messaging platforms like Slack will also be used to connect and communicate with media professionals.

VII. CONCLUSION

Indian public relations practitioners have come a long way from meeting the journalists in their office while distributing hard copies of the type written press releases to shooting out a digital press release link over a Twitter link. However back in those days the relationships were more personal and real, the mutual respect for each other had fallen to the standards that is existing today. There used to be intelligent discussions over the cup of tea leisurely as both had enough amount of time to nurture the relationship as back then there were not many PR professionals and not many clients seeking PR either to keep the practitioners busy. However as time progressed and with technological innovations, computers and its foster child email started taking prominence over personal relationships with the media. Most work started to happen over email and even journalists preferred that as interactions with every public relations practitioner face-to-face would was unimaginable. Yet till date media remained a dominant gate-keeper and managing relationship with them was a no brainer. With the advent of social media and proliferation of social media tools, it was expected that while practitioners would venture out to directly connect with their stakeholders but will also make use of these tools for media relations as well. Several international studies have spoken about this in their own countries but since in India traditional media has few more years of growth, it was naturally that the pitching process would move from email to more personalised social platform. However our study does not say so as Indian public relations practitioners use social media platforms to connect with the journalists and mostly restrict their engagement to either liking/retweeting or wishing them on their birthdays or festives. Many also use it as a mode of database updation, but very insignificant number of Indian practitioners use social media to pitch stories or share details about their clients. Few do use to keep themselves updated on the current stories the journalist is posting or to know their status updates and comment on their posts. None in this study said they use social media to share relevant info about their client or share story themes or ideas. This type of media relations may take time to build in the over noisy environment but as you continue to pursue journalists will sooner or later take notice and mark you as a credible source.

VIII. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was limited in scope as we surveyed only 146 PR practitioners and largely they were from top Indian metros. We also could have surveyed the media fraternity as well to understand their willingness to receive pitches over social platforms and checked how open they were to build relationships with public relations practitioners using social media platforms. The future study and be conducted with larger sample size and even journalist could be part of the future studies

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