

Practitioners' Roles Obligations and Preferences in Public Relations Industry in Pakistan: A Quantitative Assessment

*Dr. Mudassir Mukhtar

**Dr. Muhammad Shabbir Sarwar

**Mr. Khurram Shahzad

***Dr. Waqal ul Haq

Abstract

Intensity of different roles obligations as performed by a PR department not only explains its preferences about pursuing and targeting its publics but also unearths the level of its professionalism in practice. This paper evaluates the adoption patterns of two major (manager and technician) and two minor (media relations and communication liaison) public relations roles among practitioners in Pakistan. A survey was randomly distributed among 101 public relations practitioners heading PR departments selecting 51 PR departments from public sector strata and 50 PR departments from private sector strata. The results of this quantitative study confirm that all four roles are employed by PR practitioners in Pakistan with fluctuating ratios. Majority of the practitioner (96%) are performing media relations role as their foremost preference. Manager role obligation is second preference and 83% practitioner are performing it. Communication Liaison role is performed by 82% of practitioners. Technician role is the least employed role in comparison to others although it is performed by 81% of practitioners. These roles employment results indicate that although roles adoption patterns are divided into preferences as per their statistically significant differences, but they differ slightly on a scale of their employment proportions in Pakistan.

Key words: Public Relations roles, PR in Pakistan, PR in South Asia

**Dr. Mudassir Mukhtar is an Assistant Professor at the department of Mass Communication, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad. mmukhtar@numl.edu.pk*

***Dr Muhammad Shabbir Sarwar is an Assistant Professor at the Institute of Communication Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore. Email: shabbier.ics@pu.edu.pk*

*** Mr. Khurram Shahzad is Public Relations Officer at University of the Punjab, Lahore.*

***Dr Waqar Ul Haq is an Assistant Professor at the Institute of Communication Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore.*

Introduction

Katz and Khan (1978) put forth the conceptions of public relations roles for the first time in classical public relations research. Glem, M. Broom and Smith (1978-1979) conducted the early research on practitioners' roles in public relations and explored role obligations as performed by public relations professionals. Having an in-depth analysis of the adoption patterns of different public relations roles, Broom and Smith (1979) and Dozier (1992) proposed two categories of role patterns as performed by most public relations practitioners. These categories included major roles and minor roles. The practitioners when involved in major roles were performing their obligations either as a "manager" or as a "technician". Similarly, minor roles category comprised roles of "media relations" and "communication liaison" (Dozier, 1982; Dozier, 1995; Broom & Dozier, 1986; Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2000).

The involvement in "manager role" by a practitioner of public relations is defined by the contribution of a practitioner in the communication policymaking process of the organization. Contrary to this, professionals of public relations performing technician role are never involved in the communication policymaking procedure of

organizations. Participation in media relations role is reflected by the connection of a practitioners with media industry to securing beneficial media relations for his/her organization. The contribution in communication liaison role is described by the efforts of a practitioner in management and supervision of communication-oriented relationships between an organization and its standard audience (Publics) involved internally and externally (Dozier, 1992). Public relations literature on roles has confirmed that minor roles have demonstrated irregular involvement of practitioners' contrary to constant employment patterns of dominant roles across organizations (Grunig et al., 2002).

Research results also confirmed the application of these four roles across the globe. Public relations professionals/practitioners working in both public and private sector organizations in Asia, Europe, United States of America, South America and in Africa were found involved performing these roles with varying tendencies. Public relations roles research revolves round comparative role tendencies in government institutions and private organizations, the relationship between practitioners' roles adoptions and the news-making and agenda-construction processes of media, relationship between role applications and public relations models' usage, practitioners' roles contribution to cultural and political processes in totalitarian and democratic societies, roles adoption in sports public relations and education sector, interrelations between organizational structures and public relations practitioners' roles, practitioners' roles contribution in producing corporate social responsibility codes and roles interrelations with the elements of the power control theory (Castelli, 2007; Shin & Cameron, 2005; Karadjov, Kim & Karavasilev, 2000; Lin, 2007; Stokes, 2005; Antunes, 2002; Ross, 2006; Wu & Baah-Boakye, 2007; Alanazi, 1993; Lim, Goh & Sriramesh; 2005; Oksitycz & Enombo, 2011; Yudarwati, 2013).

Roles adaptation pattern were qualitatively explored in Pakistan using a convenience sample from twin cities (Rawalpindi and Islamabad). Although application of all four roles was confirmed in different organizations in the twin cities but generalization of these results across the country was not viable (Mukhtar, 2011). Therefore, a quantitative assessment of role adoption patterns with a national sample was needed. The objective of this research is to quantitatively explore practitioners' roles adoption patterns in this part of the world with a comparative picture of government, non-government and corporate sector organizations.

Research Questions

RQ 1: What are the general practice patterns of public relations professional roles in public relations industry in Pakistan (Mukhtar, M., 2019)?

RQ2: What are the comparative professional patterns of practice of public relations roles in public and private sectors organizations in public relations industry in Pakistan (Mukhtar, M., 2019)?

Methodology

This study is based on survey method. A stratified random sample of 101 national organization was taken by considering fifty-one organizations from public-sector strata and fifty organizations from private-sector strata. Public-sector strata comprised of organizations including federal and provincial government ministries, universities, corporations and autonomous bodies. The organizations of private-sector strata comprised of non-government organizations, industry, private universities, telecom sector, hotels, banks and real estate sector. The Qualtrics was used to formulate and distribute survey questionnaire to the highest rank public relations practitioners heading these organizations. The survey questionnaire used a set of fifteen questions to explore roles patterns among practitioners. "Five-point Likert Scale" was employed to measure all fifteen questions. Demographic questions were measured on a categorical scale (Mukhtar, M., 2019).

Results and Analysis

The major constructs of this research are four professional roles of public relations. Employment of these four roles not only explains the communication objectives of a PR department but also justifies its professional strength. The involvement in "technician role" was measured by observing PR assignments including generation and distribution of PR materials related to writing, publication, photography and editing projects. The employment in "manager role" was measured observing practitioners' obligation and accountability related to PR campaigns, practitioners' involvement in decisions about communication-policy and practitioners' prestige as experts. The employment in "communication liaison role" was observed on the basis practitioners' enactment with liaison tasks for internally and externally involved standard publics and practitioners' status as a council within top hierarchy of organizations. The employment in "media relations role" was measured based on cultivating positive media relations, responsibilities related to media tracking and efforts for securing better placement of organizational favorable material in media (Mukhtar, M., 2019).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for PR Roles items

| Roles | N | Mean | SD |
|---|------------|-------------|------------|
| Item of "Technician Role" $\alpha = .908$ | 101 | 3.58 | .86 |
| 1. "I produce brochures, pamphlets and other publications". | 101 | 3.59 | .90 |
| 2. "I am the person who writes communication materials". | 101 | 3.73 | 1.04 |
| 3. "I do photography and graphics for communications materials". | 101 | 3.41 | .98 |
| 4. "I edit or review grammar and spelling in materials written by other departments". | 101 | 3.60 | .97 |
| Items of "Manager Role" $\alpha = .897$ | 101 | 3.88 | .87 |
| 1. "I take responsibility for the success or failure of my organization's communication or public relations programs". | 101 | 4.09 | .88 |
| 2. "I make communication policy decisions for my organization". | 101 | 3.59 | 1.15 |
| 3. "I observe that others in the organization hold me accountable for the success or failure of communication or public relations programs". | 101 | 3.83 | 1.05 |
| 4. "Because of my experience and training, others consider me the organization's expert in solving communication or public relations problems". | 101 | 3.99 | .89 |
| Items of "Communication Liaison Role" $\alpha = .678$ | 101 | 3.75 | .86 |
| 1. "I create opportunities for management to hear the views of internal and external publics". | 101 | 3.76 | 1.12 |
| 2. "Although I don't make communication policy decisions, I provide decision makers with suggestions, recommendation, and plans". | 101 | 3.70 | 1.16 |
| 3. "I am a senior counsel to top decision makers when communication or public relations issues are involved". | 101 | 3.79 | 1.00 |
| Items of "Media relations Role" $\alpha = .787$ | 101 | 4.33 | .65 |
| 1. "I maintain media contacts for my organization". | 101 | 4.52 | .73 |
| 2. "I keep others in the organization informed of what the media reports about our organization and important industry issues". | 101 | 4.18 | .90 |
| 3. "I am responsible for placing news releases". | 101 | 4.39 | .84 |
| 4. "I use my journalistic skills to figure out what the media will consider newsworthy about our organization". | 101 | 4.22 | .86 |

Table 1. displays mean scores of all item for public relations roles. The highest mean score (M=4.33) is gained by "media relations role" and the lowest mean score (M=3.58) is reflected against technician role. Similarly, the uppermost average mean score (M=4.52) is placed against "media relations role item no.1" and the lowermost mean score (M=3.41) is reflected by "technician role item no. 3".

Table 1.1 Comparative Descriptive Statistics for PR Roles items

| Sector | | N | Mean | SD. |
|--------------|---|-----------|-------------|------------|
| Public | Items of "Technician role" | 51 | 4.20 | .56 |
| Organization | 1. "I produce brochures, pamphlets and other publications". | 51 | 4.10 | .73 |
| | 2. "I am the person who writes communication materials". | 51 | 4.43 | .73 |
| | 3. "I do photography and graphics for communications materials". | 51 | 4.00 | .75 |
| | 4. "I edit or review grammar and spelling in materials written by other departments". | 51 | 4.25 | .72 |
| | Items of "Manager role" | 51 | 3.50 | .91 |
| | 1. "I take responsibility for the success or failure of my organization's communication or public relations programs". | 51 | 3.57 | .88 |
| | 2. "I make communication policy decisions for my organization". | 51 | 3.20 | 1.20 |
| | 3. "I observe that others in the organization hold me accountable for the success or failure of communication or public relations programs". | 51 | 3.59 | 1.08 |
| | 4. "Because of my experience and training, others consider me the organization's expert in solving communication or public relations problems". | 51 | 3.63 | .92 |
| | Items of "Communication Liaison Role" | 51 | 3.68 | .83 |
| | 1. "I create opportunities for management to hear the views of internal and external publics". | 51 | 3.63 | 1.18 |

| | | | | |
|----------------------|---|-----------|-------------|------------|
| | 2. "Although I don't make communication policy decisions, I provide decision makers with suggestions, recommendation, and plans". | 51 | 3.59 | 1.24 |
| | 3. "I am a senior counsel to top decision makers when communication or public relations issues are involved". | 51 | 3.82 | .97 |
| | Items of "Media Relations Role" | 51 | 4.57 | .39 |
| | 1. "I maintain media contacts for my organization". | 51 | 4.73 | .45 |
| | 2. "I keep others in the organization informed of what the media reports about our organization and important industry issues". | 51 | 4.43 | .70 |
| | 3. "I am responsible for placing news releases". | 51 | 4.71 | .46 |
| | 4. "I use my journalistic skills to figure out what the media will consider newsworthy about our organization". | 51 | 4.43 | .64 |
| Private Organization | Items of "Technician Role" | 50 | 2.96 | .64 |
| | 1. "I produce brochures, pamphlets and other publications". | 50 | 3.08 | .75 |
| | 2. "I am the person who writes communication materials". | 50 | 3.02 | .80 |
| | 3. "I do photography and graphics for communications materials". | 50 | 2.80 | .81 |
| | 4. "I edit or review grammar and spelling in materials written by other departments". | 50 | 2.94 | .71 |
| | Items of "Manager Role" | 50 | 4.26 | .64 |
| | 1. "I take responsibility for the success or failure of my organization's communication or public relations programs". | 50 | 4.62 | .49 |
| | 2. "I make communication policy decisions for my organization". | 50 | 4.00 | .95 |
| | 3. "I observe that others in the organization hold me accountable for the success or failure of communication or public relations programs". | 50 | 4.08 | .97 |
| | 4. "Because of my experience and training, others consider me the organization's expert in solving communication or public relations problems". | 50 | 4.36 | .69 |
| | Items of "Communication Liaison Role" | 50 | 3.83 | .89 |
| | 1. "I create opportunities for management to hear the views of internal and external publics". | 50 | 3.90 | 1.05 |
| | 2. "Although I don't make communication policy decisions, I provide decision makers with suggestions, recommendation, and plans". | 50 | 3.82 | 1.08 |
| | 3. "I am a senior counsel to top decision makers when communication or public relations issues are involved". | 50 | 3.76 | 1.04 |
| | Items of "Media Relations Role" | 50 | 4.08 | .76 |
| | 1. "I maintain media contacts for my organization". | 50 | 4.32 | .89 |
| | 2. "I keep others in the organization informed of what the media reports about our organization and important industry issues". | 50 | 3.92 | 1.01 |
| | 3. "I am responsible for placing news releases". | 50 | 4.06 | 1.00 |
| | 4. "I use my journalistic skills to figure out what the media will consider newsworthy about our organization". | 50 | 4.00 | .99 |

Table 1.1 construes comparative mean scores of all item for public relations roles in both sectors. The uppermost average mean score (M=4.20) is gained by technician role within public sector PR departments while the uppermost average mean score (M=4.26) is reflected by manager role within private sector PR departments. Similarly, the lowermost average mean score (M=3.50) is gained by manager role within public sector public relations department and the lowest mean score (M=2.96) is reflected by technician role within private sector PR departments.

RQ1: What are the general practice patterns of public relations professional roles in public relations industry Pakistan?

The involvement of PR practitioners in four roles is described in terms of their mean scores' calculation. The differences among their mean scores interprets the variations in their employment level by different practitioners and PR departments.

Table 2. PR Roles Adoption Patterns in PR industry in Pakistan

| Roles variables/Constructs | N | Mean | SD |
|------------------------------|-----|------|-----|
| "Technician Role" | 101 | 3.58 | .86 |
| "Manager Role" | 101 | 3.88 | .87 |
| "Media Relations Role" | 101 | 4.33 | .65 |
| "Communication Liaison Role" | 101 | 3.75 | .86 |

Table 2. interprets that media relations is a highly practiced role in PR departments in Pakistan as it scored highest mean average (M=4.33), while the technician is low practiced role as it scored lowest mean average (M=3.58). The descriptive results reflect a reasonable practice of all four roles as all professional four roles scored an average mean value above 3.5.

RQ 2: What are the comparative professional patterns of practice of public relations roles in public and private sectors organizations in public relations industry in Pakistan?

The differential practice patterns of role adoption patterns in public-sector and private-sector public relations departments in Pakistani PR industry are mirrored by their mean scores variations.

Table 2.1. Comparative PR Roles Adoption Patterns in PR Industry in Pakistan

| Sector | | N | Mean | SD |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|----|------|-----|
| Public Organizations | "Technician Role" | 51 | 4.20 | .56 |
| | "Manager Role" | 51 | 3.50 | .91 |
| | "Communication Liaison Role" | 51 | 3.68 | .83 |
| | "Media Relations Role" | 51 | 4.57 | .39 |
| Private Organizations | "Technician Role" | 50 | 2.96 | .64 |
| | "Manager Role" | 50 | 4.26 | .64 |
| | "Communication Liaison Role" | 50 | 3.83 | .89 |
| | "Media Relations Role" | 50 | 4.08 | .76 |

Table 2.1 displays that media relations (M=4.57) is the highest practiced role in public sector PR departments and Manger (=4.26) is the most practiced role in private sector public relations departments in Pakistan. Similarly, the manager role (M=3.50) is the lowermost practiced in public sector PR departments while technician role (M=2.96) is the bottommost practiced role among private sector PR departments.

Descriptive analysis of these roles portrayed a picture of their mean differences between public and private sector PR departments. But to ensure that either these difference in mean scores are also statistically significant differences or not, independent sample T-Tests were processed. PR roles were loaded as dependent variables with continuous computed scores. The sector (1. Public 2. Private) of the PR department was taken independent (grouping) variable on a categorical scale. The results reflecting statistically significant differences are the following;

Table 3. Independent Sample T-Test for Technician Role and Nature of Organization

| | | N | Mean | SD | t | df | Sig (2-tailed) |
|------------------|-----------|-----|------|-----|--------|----|----------------|
| Equal assumed | Variances | 101 | 1.24 | .12 | 10.341 | 99 | .000 |

Table 3. interprets the result of independent sample T-test to observe the statistically significant differences of mean scores of technician role for sector of the organization. Significant differences were found in scores for organizations in public sector (M=4.20, SD=.56) and organizations in private-sector (M=2.96, SD=.64.; t (99) =10.341, p=.000 (two-tailed). It was found that the magnitude of the differences in mean scores (mean difference=1.24, 95% CI: 1.00 to 1.47) was very small (eta squared=.01). The higher mean score for organization of

public sector in descriptive analysis quantified that technician role was more practiced by public sector PR departments and practitioners in Pakistan.

Table 3.1. Independent Sample T-Test for Manager Role and Nature Organization

| | N | Mean | SD | t | Df | Sig (2-tailed) |
|-----------------------------|-----|------|-----|--------|--------|----------------|
| Equal Variances not assumed | 101 | -.77 | .16 | -4.926 | 89.370 | .000 |

Table 3.1 interprets the result of independent sample T-test to observe the statistically significant differences of mean scores of manager role for sector of the organization. Significant differences were found in scores for organizations of public sector (M=3.50, SD=.91) and organizations in private-sector (M=4.27, SD=.64; t (89.370) =-4.926, p=.000 (two-tailed). It was found that the magnitude of the differences in mean scores (mean difference=-.77, 95% CI: -1.08 to -.46) was very small (eta squared=.01). The higher mean value for private sector in descriptive analysis quantified that manager role was more practiced by private sector PR departments and practitioners in Pakistan.

Table 3.2. Independent Sample T-Test for Media Relations Role and Nature of Organization

| | N | Mean | SD | T | Df | Sig (2-tailed) |
|-----------------------------|-----|------|-----|-------|--------|----------------|
| Equal Variances not assumed | 101 | .50 | .12 | 4.126 | 72.890 | .000 |

Table 3.2 interprets the result of independent sample T-test to observe the statistically significant differences of mean scores of media relations role for sector of the organization. Significant differences were found in scores for public-sector organizations (M=4.57, SD=.39) and private-sector organizations (M=4.08, SD=.76; t (72.890) =4.126, p=.000 (two-tailed). It was found that the magnitude of the differences in mean scores (mean difference=.50, 95% CI: .26 to .74) was very small (eta squared=.01). The higher mean value for public sector in descriptive analysis quantified that "media relations role" was more practiced by public sector PR departments and practitioners in Pakistan.

Table 3.3. Independent Sample T-Test for Communication Liaison Role and Nature of Organization

| | N | Mean | SD | T | df | Sig (2-tailed) |
|-------------------------|-----|------|-----|-------|----|----------------|
| Equal variances assumed | 101 | -.15 | .17 | -.860 | 99 | .392 |

Table 3.3 interprets the result of independent sample T-test to observe the statistically significant differences of mean scores of communication liaison role for sector of the organization. No significant differences were found in scores for public-sector organizations (M=3.68, SD=.83) and private-sector organizations (M=3.83, SD=.89; t (99) =-.860, p=.392 (two-tailed). It is reflected that the adoption of communication liaison role is statistically same across public and private sector organizations in Pakistan.

Conclusion

The results quantify that public relations practitioners in PR industry in Pakistan are practicing all four professional roles with significant differences between public and private sector public relations departments. Media relations role is practiced by an enormous majority (96%) of the practitioners. Almost a good majority (83% and 82%) of practitioners are involved in manager and communication liaison roles obligations respectively. Although Technician role is least practiced when compared to the other three roles but even then, a reasonably close percentage (81%) of practitioners are involved in this role. The results indicate that although there are statistical differences among the practice of these roles, but adoption patterns of these role differ slightly when it comes to their employment percentages.

Technician role is dominant among public sector practitioners while manger role is dominant among practitioners in private organizations. Media relation role is consumed more by practitioners of public sector organizations as compare to its comparatively less practice among private-sector practitioners. The employment patterns of Communication liaison role are confirmed similar among practitioners of both sectors in Pakistan.

Further, the results of this research paper support the generalizations of public relations professional roles in Bulgaria made by Karadjov, Kim and Karavasilev (2000), generalizations about PR roles in Saudi Arabia put forth

by Alanazi, A. (1993) and results of PR roles adoption patterns in Singapore presented by Lim, Goh and Sriramesh (2005). Similarly, Wu and Baah-Boakye (2007) and Oksiutycz and Enombo (2011) described similar conclusions of public relations roles adoption patterns in Ghana and in Gabon respectively.

References:

- Alanazi, A. (1993). *Public relations role models in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* (Doctoral dissertation, Ohio University).
- Antunes, L. M. (2002). The roles and responsibilities of public school public relations practitioner. Doctoral thesis, Seton Hall University. Retrieved July, 2015 from ABI database.
- Broom, G. M., & Smith, G.D. (1979). Testing the practitioners impact on clients. *Public Relations Review*, 5, 47-59.
- Broom, G. M., & Dozier, D. M. (1986). Advancement for public relations role models. *Public relations review*, 12(1), 37-56.
- Broom, G. M., & Smith, G. D. (1978). Towards an understanding of public relations roles: An empirical test of role models impact on clients. Paper presented at the meeting of Public Relations Division, association for education in Journalism, Seattle.
- Broom, G. M., & Smith, G. D. (1979). Testing the practitioner's impact on clients. *Public Relations Review*, 5(3), 47-59.
- Castelli, J. W. (2007). Government public relations: A quantitative assessment of government public relations practitioner roles and public relations model usage. Master's thesis, University of South Florida, Florida, USA. Retrieved on July12, 2016 from ProQuest ABI database.
- Cutlip, S. M., Center, A. H., & Broom, G. M. (2000). *Effective public relations* (8th ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Dozier, D. M. (1984). Program evaluation and roles of practitioners. *Public Relations Review*, 10(2), 13-21.
- Dozier, D. M., & Broom, G. M. (1995). Evolution of the manager role in public relations practice. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 7(1), 3-26.
- Dozier, D. M. (1992). The organizational roles of communication and public relation practitioners. In J. E. Grunig (Ed.) *Excellence in public relations and communications management* (pp. 327-352). Hilldale, NJ: Lawrence Earlbaum.
- Fowler Jr, F. J. (2013). *Survey research methods*. Sage publications.
- Grunig, L.A., Grunig, J.E. and Dozier, D.M. (2002), *Excellent Public Relations and Effective Organizations*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, NJ.
- Karadjov, C., Kim, Y., & Karavasilev, L. (2000). Models of public relations in Bulgaria and job satisfaction among its practitioners. *Public relations review*, 26(2), 209-218.
- Lim, S., Goh, J., & Sriramesh, K. (2005). Applicability of the generic principles of excellent public relations in a different cultural context: The case study of Singapore. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 17(4), 315-340.
- Mukhtar, M. (2011). The status of public relations in Pakistan: Exploring Grunig and Hunt Models. An unpublished Masters dissertation. AIOU Islamabad, Pakistan.
- Mukhtar, M. (2019). A comparative analysis of public relations models and roles adaptation patterns among practitioners in public and private sector: A case of Pakistan (Doctoral dissertation, University of the Punjab, Lahore).
- Oksiutycz, A., & Enombo, M. P. (2011). Public relations practice in private sector companies in Gabon. *Public Relations Review*, 37(3), 274-280.
- Ross, J. L. (2006). The role of public relations practitioners in the creation and implementation of corporate social responsibility codes. *Bachelor*, University of South Alabama.
- Shin, J. & Cameron, G. T. (2005). Different sides of the same coin: Mixed view of public relations practitioners and journalism for strategic conflict management. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 82, 318-338. Retrieved from august 12, 2016 from ProQuest ABI database.
- Stokes, A. (2005). A Study of the Relationships Between Organizational Structures and public relations practitioners' roles. Master's thesis, University of South Florida. Retrieved on July 12, 2016, from ABI database.
- Wu, M-Y. & Baah-Boakye, K. (2007). A profile of public relations practitioners in Ghana: Practitioners' roles, most important skills for practitioners, relationship to marketing and gender equality. *Public Relations Quarterly* 52(1), 30-36.
- Yudarwati, G. A. (2013). Personal Influence Model of Public Relations: A Case Study in Indonesia's Mining Industry. *Jurnal ILMU KOMUNIKASI*, 7(2).