



**The Role of Public Relations in NGO's
institute
PCOM as a case study**

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Abstract

Modern organisations seek to identify the needs of the public, and look forward to gaining the confidence and support of their audience, and that is one of the fundamental duties of public relations and evidence of its success. Hence, the value of public relations to exists in the relationships developed with strategic public, and building a respectable reputation of the organisation in the public's minds. The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper knowledge about the role of public relations in the NGO's to explore whether PCOM's PR success in achieve good reputation with its audience. And to take benefits from their experience in this field. The study has used a quantitative survey method where the purpose will be achieved by questionnaire that used to gather data from the respondents. The results of the study indicated that PCOM had achieved an acceptable part of its goals, and that was able to create kind of positive reputation with its audience, despite the fact of lack access of PCOM messages and services to all segments of the public. The result has noticed a clear confusion between public relations and advertising functions, and there is a kind of unfamiliarity with the PR strategies. The study recommend PCOM PR to consider evaluating their strategies and its means to determine if the audience are learning and understanding what they recommend, as PCOM has to activate the role of the organization in the establishment of cultural and social activities and taking into account the good planning and pre-provided programs.

Key words: Public Relations, PR, media, Reputation, NGO's, PCOM

Introduction

There is no doubt that humans do not naturally live in isolation from other people, so they require communication and cooperation with them. The same applies for any organisation; they do not exist in isolation from the public and the neighbouring community. There is a mutual need between them, thus, there must exist some kind of pleasant relationship, so without decent links between organisations and the public, or the surrounding community, these organisations cannot ensure success and stability for themselves. However, as we know, whenever institutions become larger, the distance between them and their audience also becomes larger, and there arises an urgent need to know the views of thousands or millions of individuals and groups, in order to create policy that is useful to them, and to gain their trust, respect and support.

Furthermore, modern organisations seek to identify the needs of the public, and look forward to gaining the confidence and support of their audience who will fulfil the policies laid down, as on them depends the failure or the survival of the organisation Grunig (2002). Audience interest in organisations has increased, and thus the power of public opinion has also increased. Therefore it has become essential to be able to understand the motives and demands of individuals and groups, and to gain the support, cooperation and trust of others through conviction. This has become a part of the daily work of managers in all kinds of organisations, whether social, religious, political or economic, since these institutions have realised that they cannot achieve success if they exist isolated from the public (Bartlett, 2011).

This is what motivates officials of organisations in many developed countries to pay Public Relations close attention, and delegate authorities and powers which enable them to create their programmes and activities, and market them to their internal and external audiences (Johnson, 1997).

In the same side, Ajwa (2003) said the importance of PR is not to understand its functions except to publish, either in editorial or advertising, Indeed these are considered only as tools and means used by PR to transmit media messages and influence the masses.

Similarly, Juliet Roper (2005) stated that an excellent public relations programme will show evidence that it has improved the relationship of the organisation with its public. They described the value of relationship building and how relationships with strategic sections of the public should be managed: because the value of public relations to an organisation and society exists in the relationships developed with strategic public, objectives should consist of strategies to develop, maintain, and enhance relationships and the relationship outcomes that the organisation strives to achieve with these strategies. While actually, both types of relational objectives are important in creating a successful public relations programme that will help achieve organisational goals.

Hence, the most important institutions that have become dependent upon the application of Public Relations are non-governmental organisations (NGO's). However, according to Wishart & Mannathukaren, (2008) if PR has become necessary to the government and private organisations, it is even more crucial for the NGO as civil society organisations. No organisation needs an effective public relations function more than the NGO, as the nature of the work of these organisations is based upon the principle of participation and the inclination towards voluntary work and non-profit.

The importance of public relations in NGO management is now accepted worldwide as NGOs need healthy relationships with the public to meet their goals. Foundations and charities use sophisticated public relations campaigns to raise funds and employ standard lobbying techniques with governments. Interest groups may be of political importance because of their ability to influence social and political outcomes. At times NGOs seek to mobilize public support. PR professionals therefore use various strategies to conjure funds and to create awareness about the organization's aims and objectives (Abualsaud & Abed, 2008). Furthermore, the NGO interested in the function of public relations more than others to create a mental image with the audiences involved, such that a respectable mental image is the basis of the success of these organisations.

The Palestinian Cultural Organization Malaysia (PCOM) has indicated a list of goals to achieve in order to introduce Malaysian society to Palestine, Jerusalem and the developments of the Palestinian Issue, and to raise awareness of the dangers threatening Al-Aqsa Mosque and Jerusalem. Moreover, PCOM seeks to increase the cultural interaction between the Malaysian people and the Palestinian people, and to communicate with the Malaysian public and officials, as well as local media and journalists with regard to the Palestinian issue; not forgetting its goal to encourage members of Malaysian society to grant their support and aid to the Palestinian people to help protect their national rights.

Therefore, PCOM will need a broad range of programmes and activities such as: forums, scientific and intellectual conferences, cultural, artistic and traditional carnivals, informative and educational publications, collaboration with media, NGOs and officials as well as other feasible activities.

However, PCOM has completed many activities since its launch in 2010 and has encouraged the participation of Malaysians in the Palestinian issue in many events. Hence, the aim of this study is to identify the role of PCOM's public relations and explore whether they reach their target audience; to obtain information about the efficiency of programmes and activities; to measure its impact on the audience; and to compare its performance in order to achieve results that benefit the organisation, and workers in the field of public relations. Moreover, it is desirable to clarify the strategies applied by PCOM's public relations to manage their mental image and reputation.

Research Problem

The study investigates the role of Public Relations in PCOM, and explores the nature of the relationships that it has woven with the audience, in order to explore whether PCOM's public relations succeed in their role in terms of instilling a sense of belonging in the audience themselves, And during that the study would identify whether there are differences in the public relations strategies in PCOM, when divided by sex, position, religion and citizenship.

Research Questions

This research was designed to answer the following research questions:

1. Are PCOM's Public Relations based on solid foundations, such as media activities and the staff?
2. In PCOM's Public Relations are there impediments to the implementation of their programmes which reduce their ability to communicate with the public?
3. Do PCOM's Public Relations succeed in their Social Responsibility to the community?

4. Which is the best strategic model of public relations for PCOM to use when carrying out their media relations?

5. What is the extent of the link between PCOM's Public Relations and their audience and Do PCOM's Public Relations reach all levels of the target audience?

Research Objectives

1. To discover the extent of the audience's sense of belonging to PCOM, and acceptance of their message.

2. To identify the extent of audience satisfaction with the role of PCOM's public relations.

3. To present illustrative results of the extent of PCOM's public relations success in the performance of its role.

Research Scope

The scope of the study is to identify the effectiveness of PCOM's Public Relations in attracting audiences and communicating with them and to explore the best strategies used for this purpose. Furthermore it will examine its role in building a positive mental image for the organisation, and how to maintain and improve it to achieve a positive reputation.

Public Relations (PR)

The concepts of public relations

According to Johnson (1997) PR is a science in itself but this independent modern function did not present itself as we know it in the 'present time' until the nineteen fifties. PR at its simplest can be defined as the establishment of good connections between the organisation and the audience, and the maintenance of these links to ensure satisfaction and achieve understanding and trust between them.

The universally accepted definition of PR as per Edward Burney's popularly known as the father of PR that it is a planned & sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organization & its publics(Theaker, 2001).

The concept of PR does not differ among the diversity of organisations; the difference occurs only in practice, when reflecting the objectives of PR and the philosophy of the organisation. However, goals set by the department of PR in an organisation that seeks to create profit are different from the goals that are set by the department of PR in other organisations, those who do not seek to make profit, although there are some common goals between them (Kitchen, 1997).

PR is a management function that establishes and maintains two-way, mutual relationships and communications between an organisation and its publics and stakeholders (i.e. those who have a stake, such as employees, shareholders, etc.) and that often determines their success or failure. PR management includes on-going research, analysis, planning, and evaluation to understand, develop, and nurture strategic relationships. Areas of PR specialization include Investor Relations, Lobbying, Public Affairs (Government & Community), Publicity & Media/Blogger Relations, Employee Relations, International Relations, and Crisis Management. Often, PR and Publicity are used synonymously, which leads to a misunderstanding of the field of PR(Oliver, 2010)

The following points can be drawn from the definitions of public relations:

- i. PR is a science; it uses the scientific method, and is based on scientific theories, experiences, and skills.
- ii. PR is an art; it depends on applications of social science, and relies on special skills through the application of different theories.
- iii. PR need specialists at different levels, they will be able to identify and assess public opinion from the angle of the organisation's interest, as they offer advice to managers on ways to deal with public opinion.
- iv. PR considers ways to prepare the masses to accept new ideas and opinions, or to carry out the responsibilities required.
- v. PR includes the mutual understanding between the institutions and their audiences, and works to achieve cohesion and cooperation among them.
- vi. PR use communication tools, media, and scientific research to achieve its purposes.
- vii. PR has become essential, and must exist in all institutions; at all levels, It is found in developed societies and developing countries alike, and among the public in various communities.

The status of PR in the organisation:

Ali Ajwa(2000) mentioned that Public Relations aims to achieve broad objectives which revolve around improving the relationship between the organisation and its audience. It works to build mutual understanding, cooperation and continuous adjustment, because the public relations managerial functions are exercised at all administrative levels of the organisation, and seek to achieve many goals. The objectives may differ from one organisation to another, but they will not differ, in essence, from the main objective of each organisation, which is gaining the support and trust of the audience in order to achieve its goals.

PR section of the organisation is the link between the organisation and its audiences(Bargoot, 2001). It is the window through which the organisation looks to their internal and external audiences, to inform them about their activities and programmes through whatever media they have available, and by which they aim to build a good reputation for the organisation. In addition it is a window through which the masses look to the organisation when they desire any information or answers for any enquiry regarding activities and programmes.

Importance of PR for contemporary organisations

Public relations takes its position within the organisational structure of departments in many modern organisations, despite the disparity of interest between different types of organisations, because it has been recognized that there is an urgent need for it, and that agreement on its activities and programmes is not a luxury but a justified objective. Growing awareness of the importance of public relations is reflected in the form of specialized departments within organisations and bodies to perform the functions of public relations (Jabouri, 2001).

In the opinion of experts and practitioners, regular and systematic exploration is the foundation of successful public relations, and its mission is to reduce the degree of uncertainty when making decisions. This task is not the first step in the process of public relations, but the most difficult step for several reasons including: the variety of stakeholders that are related to the organisation's interest. Moreover, searches conducted on the audience are an on-going process that can hardly

stop. Besides, the concept of research is not confined to the study of internal and external audiences, but extends to the surrounding environment.

It could be argued that the process of two-way communication is the cornerstone of the work of public relations with all the requirements of this process bound up with the need for research on all types of audiences, Where the relationship with the media has great importance for the public relations worker, as the media controls the flow of information to the masses in a specific social system. It is not logical to devote all members of the organisation to deal with the media, but the public relations manager can take care of this relationship, putting all data and necessary information at their disposal, and responding to the media criticism and questions, as well as following up on how published media relates to the performance of the organisation, especially if it includes criticism or allegations. There are two methods to deal with the content of mass media: firstly to ignore it, and secondly to recognise the importance of it (Young, 2008).

Organisational social responsibility is another factor that explains the need for the presence of a public relations department. It is important for an organisation to keep in mind the community that it lives with, and this responsibility must be a function of public relations, as it is inevitable that an organisation will develop a social character by adopting a role which benefits the community and provides services and activities which confirm its association with this society and its interaction with its people and its organisations. ”(Doh & Guay, 2006)

NGO's definition

Basically NGO is an abbreviation for non-governmental organisation and is defined as a private, non-profitable, and non-partisan establishment that usually performs humanitarian functions. They often impact the social, economic and political activities of communities and the country as a whole. NGOs address a host of issues, so they seek to cultivate public awareness, support, and involvement in their activities. As a result, NGO public relations tend to engage heavily in relationship-building activities. With the help of various activities like community outreach programmes, participation in public events or hosting special public functions, NGOs try to enhance their social capital and distribute information about their activities within society(Gioia, et al., 2000).

NGOs are mainly PR in themselves; however, the most important social role of NGOs is in monitoring and forcing local and world leaders to take care of others and championing worthy causes such as democracy, cultural appreciation, universal education and the preservation of ecology. NGOs are also helping reshape global politics by playing two distinct roles. One is to put pressure on decision-makers through campaigns. This role provides a voice to different groups but does not place any responsibility on these organisations to engage with formal processes of change(khanna, 2010).

Palestinien Cultural Organisation Malaysia (PCOM)

The Palestinian Cultural Organisation Malaysia “PCOM” is an independent NGO that aims to spread awareness about the Palestinian Cause and concentrates on Malaysian support to the Palestinians at all public and official levels, and its Vision to become the Malaysian gateway to the Palestinian Cause, and the Palestinian gateway to Malaysia. Furthermore it aims to present

the true picture of the Palestinian Cause to the Malaysian government, society, and media so that it becomes a recognized reference for the developments of the Cause, and the suffering and hopes of the Palestinian people.

With regard to the nature of the organization; it was formed by a group of Palestinians with experience and qualifications in institutional work which lead them to form the Administrative Council. It was the political awareness of the Malaysian elite and their attachment to the Palestinian cause which was a major motivation in the founding of the organization as a symbol of increasing interdependence between the two nations.

With the launch of the organization through its three divisions Public Relations, Media and Charity work, PCOM has in its first year developed a powerful annual plan, the main objective of which is to strengthen the bridges of communication with the Malaysian Organization Society, human rights organizations and civil society organizations, besides the public as a whole, in an attempt to introduce itself and its goals to them, reinforcing the status of the organization in the community.

Despite the obvious confusion between the concepts of public relations and advertising in the programmer of the organization's work in the first year, the evaluations that take place every 6 months showed results reaped by the organization which indicate its phenomenal success in achieving the goals set. In spite of that result, the organization is working on the separation of the two sections, Public Relations and Advertising, and clarifying the framework within each of them based on clear scientific programmers and accepted communication strategies.

In the same way, when talking about PCOM technological dimension, the organization has worked to keep up with technological development and progress in the means of communication and social networks. It has managed to gain a good position in the field of social networks through its pages on Facebook and Twitter, where it gathers large audience numbers. Working through its Public Relations Department it weaves channels of communication and interaction with them to provide them with relevant information regarding events in the Palestinian arena. Meanwhile, the Public Relations Department sends periodic messages to the list of subscribers with PCOM, containing all brochures, advertisements and news about the organization in particular and the Palestinian cause in general.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this study is based on Hovland's Source Credibility Theory(1957), Source Credibility states that people are more likely to be persuaded when the source presents itself as credible. The theory is broken into three models that can be used to more aptly apply the theory. The names of those models are: the factor model, the functional model, and the constructivist model (Giffin, K., 1967).

Source credibility is the believability of a communicator, as perceived by the recipient of the message. Academic studies of this topic began in the 20th century and were given a special emphasis during World War II, when the US government sought to use propaganda to influence public opinion in support of the war effort. Psychologist Carl Hovland and his colleagues worked on this at the War Department during the 1940s and then continued experimental studies at Yale University.

The source credibility model suggests that the effectiveness of a message depends on the "expertness" and "trustworthiness" of the source (Hovland, 1953). In general, a message source with higher credibility tends to be more effective than one with less credibility. Higher levels of source credibility tend to be associated with more positive attitudes toward the message and lead to behavioural changes. There are different elements that may comprise a person's credibility but, according to source credibility theory, the two elements most commonly identified are perceived expertise, and trustworthiness of the source. Source credibility theory research also indicates that the ability to internalize the message is influenced by the potential impact the message has upon the receiver.

The basis of the model is that the effectiveness of the message depends on the consumers' perceived level of expertise and trustworthiness of the celebrity endorser (Hovland, 1953). If a source is perceived to be credible, a consumer will probably accept the influence (information) as truthful and use it. It is accepted because it is "demanded" by one's own values.

Besides that in the Conspiracy theory, Effie Lee (July 1877- November 1934) said you must inform the audience, Tell the truth, where he expressed his philosophy of public relations which was based on the argument that it is not enough for man just to do good, but that people should learn of the good that he does; that the image of the human individual is reflected through social participation with those around him (Elayyan, 2005) p 229).

Research Methodology

This study is considered kind of a descriptive studies that aim to describe, interpret, analyse and evaluate the role of public relations in the civil- organizations, in order to obtain sufficient and accurate information about, without going into the reasons, or control. In this basis the study have resorted to the use of survey method To answer the research questions, as were proposed before, a quantitative survey method was employed.

The study has adopted in the preparation of this questionnaire the closed type, which defines the possible responses for each question. And it has been using stepwise Likert scale with five points to measure phrases.

However, it was also used the interview as an secondary instrument for the study where the researcher interviewed the head of PCOM who communicate in the organization, and held him dialogue and debate about the role of public relations they have, and the strategies work in the organization, so as to learn and collect data from them, and to use the information that has been reached in the analysis and interpretation of the study results.

The sample of PCOM's audience was drawn from the general public of PCOM, so the study has chosen a sample of 350 of those who communicate with the organization, most of them from the students' community, besides the pattern of the Malaysians those was joined PCOM activities.

Findings and Results

The highlights findings of the study, that in demographic data show that the most common age group in the sample was between 21 to 30 years at 48.3 %; 46.9% of respondents are Malay; 50.7% hold a Bachelor's Degree; and only 26 % are working in governmental fields.

63% think that PCOM Logo succeeds in explaining the organization and its objectives, although 51% of respondents never or rarely visit PCOM, more than half of the sample agrees that the

PCOM location is convenient for the provision of its services. At the same time 41.8% expressed confidence in these services, and 45.3% have a positive attitude towards the efficiency of the services provided by PCOM.

The positive rating of the efficiency of the individual services provided by PCOM (Financial, Social, Technical, Cultural, Religious, Political and Sports) was almost 50%. The most efficient of PCOM's communication strategies, was the electronic communication (Facebook and Emails) followed by courses then visits.

Merely 39% see that PCOM plays a valuable role for community services within the social responsibility framework, and 51.4% think that the work of PCOM is limited to students only. An acceptable proportion of 39.7% find that PCOM'S PR department is effective in times of crisis.

However, 60.9% of respondents rate the level of commitment for PCOM's members as a match with the intellectual framework of the organisation. And 53.1% have a positive opinion of the members of PR department of PCOM. Meanwhile, 41.1% believe that the PR team members at PCOM are always available for immediate contact. While, 78.8% of the sample characterizes the work of PCOM as Creative; however, the sample would describe the work of the members as Nationalism more than Partisan.

Only 30.1% of the sample are aware that the organization has a website page and e-social web. Conversely, 68.9% of them interact with the web page and what is published there, even though 31.5% of them have never received any on-going notifications through PCOM's social page.

While, 40.1% know who the current president of PCOM is. The results also show that 48.6 % take PCOM as a trusted source of information about the Palestinian issue. Besides, 65% consider PCOM's PR is a valuable source of information and 71.3% think that the information provided PCOM's PR is worthwhile. While if there was another organization providing the same service as PCOM only 29.5% of the sample admit that they would take the service provided by the other. The research findings indicate that PCOM's media activities achieve mixed results. While two-thirds of respondents were already familiar with the organisation's logo, slightly fewer thought that they would pay attention to it in printed materials or advertisements, while only one-quarter felt that the logo could be described as very successful in explaining the purpose of the organisation. Generally, only a third or less of the respondents had awareness of or regular interaction with the organisation through its website and social media channels. However, the respondents' level of confidence in the PR team at PCOM was high judged on their reactions to the questionnaire. This team is perceived as a reliable source of information, and to be reasonably available and well-informed. However, there is a general assessment that the work of the organisation is aimed primarily at students which may reduce the effectiveness of their message within the wider community, and is an area that the organisation may wish to address in future.

There were mixed feelings among the respondents as to whether PCOM achieves an acceptable level of Social Responsibility, with slightly more of the audience who believe it does, and almost equal numbers who disagree or who are undecided. There is scope here for improvement, which would require a better understanding of why these different opinions are held. It may be that communication in general needs to be improved, or that specific messages relating to social responsibility need to be reinforced.

The most highly rated communication channels were electronic communication (Facebook and email), delivery of courses, and then visits. However while ratings for all channels were more positive than negative, the least effective method would appear to be the camps, making this is

an area for the organisation to reconsider. On the other hand, separate investigation of the awareness of, and regular interaction with PCOM, through internet-based channels showed that even in this area there is continuing room for improvement. Generally the audience has a high level of awareness of the organization, and its aims. It is held in positive esteem, judged by the ratings for its services, the commitment and reliability of the staff and their communications, and its overall effectiveness.

Audience rating of Facebook and email communication was high. However, there was a mixed level of awareness of the website, and even among those respondents who are aware of the site; there was a poor level of interaction and awareness of updates. This is an area of PR that could be targeted for significant improvement. The research sample was significantly weighted in terms of age, gender, educational level, and religion, in relation to the population of the wider community. It is unclear as to how closely the demographic of the sample matches PCOM's target audience or whether the target is to reach all of the local community. Within the sample, awareness of the organisation, its aims, services and programmes is high, and all these aspects are generally viewed very favourably by the audience. Nevertheless there is still scope for improvement, both in terms of awareness-raising and in increasing the level of esteem in which PCOM is held.

Achieving research goals

This study aims to provide knowledge about the role of PR in NGO's, Hence, it was encouraging to find that more than the half of the respondents thought that PCOM PR could be very effective and serve as an important element in the success of the organization's communication strategy although there is still room for improvement.

However, we can clearly see from the results that the respondents who have experience of the activities and programs of PCOM, have been able to form a good reputation of the organization, a sharp contrast with respondents who were not reached by the organization's activities and its messages, where results showed the inverse image and dissatisfaction with the organization. This provides the organization with early warning to attempt to cover this gap and try to change the communication styles that it uses to communicate with the audience.

In addition, there is a clear divergence in the respondents' answers about their opinion of the organization's activities; most of them believe that the organization focuses on the political field at the expense of other aspects. While the results show that the most successful means of PCOM to communicate are the electronic communication" Facebook and Emails" followed with the courses then the visits, which are considered as means of communication styles in PR work.

Furthermore, the results provide knowledge-based solutions for NGO's, assisting them in developing PR strategies to build their mental image.

Achieving research objectives

What can be deduced from this study, as dealt with a field of areas of PR in NGOs, it was clear its great importance to each organization, the importance of communication and its effectiveness for the organization has emerged clearly. Thus, it must be given appropriate status because each organization strives to create a good reputation with their audience, and create a kind of trust and effective communication, and this can only be achieved through active arrangements and good planning.

PCOM despite its limited success so far, is still working in order to satisfy its audience and expand its activities to include large areas and spread its messages widely, which it is fully aware that through good communication and effective it can achieve its goals in the long term.

From the findings it can extract that more than the half of the respondents thought that PCOM is trust source of information so they don't think to replace it even if there is same source. That's seems to be kind of success for the PR of PCOM, and serve as an important element in the success of the organization communication strategy.

However, it is clear that the respondents who have interact with the activities and programs of PCOM, have been able to form a good reputation for the organization, despite the others where the results showed inverse reputation and unsatisfactory about the organization.

While the results show that the most successful means of PCOM to communicate the public is the social pages, besides its courses and the visits, which is considered as means of communication styles in PR.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The study recommends working on activating the role of PR in "PCOM" to be better, that the work may associated with the nature of life in the community. And keep in mind trust your own PR first so that it can win the confidence of the public.

However, the PR department has to keep work in turn, to keep pace with the sharp rise in the level of education, culture and technology. And it has to achieve a balance between the objectives of the organization and objectives of the audience. Besides, it's not advisable to PCOM to rely on the individual efforts of the staff in the performance of the role of PR.

This research has shown that the PR practitioner's agreed about the importance of the knowledge and skills that should learn and the knowledge they should gain. The data from the research suggests that PCOM somehow made good commendations, and ones that people agreed will help their PR in to achieve its goals and objectives.

PCOM PR programs may want to consider evaluating their strategies and its means to determine if the audience are learning and understanding what they recommend.

The PR department has to be more interesting with the organized media visits to the organization to get a closer relationship and strengthen ties with the press and media representatives. Moreover, PCOM has to activate the role of the organization in the establishment of cultural and social activities and taking into account the good planning and pre-provided programs and identify its objectives. Finally, through this study it hope that he has been able to provide a brief explanation of the importance of the role of PR in NGOs in formatting a good reputation.

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