INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF INNOVATIVE RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

ISSN 2278 – 0211 (Online)

Liking Evaluation of Public Relations Programmes to Efficiency of Measurement Approaches Applied

John Mutugi Kabucua
Lecturer, Department of Human Resource, School of Business, Karatina University, Kenya
Dr. Silas Odongo Oriaso
Lecturer, Department of Communication, School of Journalism, University of Nairobi, Kenya
Dr. Kellen Kathuure Kiambati
Lecturer, Department of Human Resource, School of Business and Economics, Karatina University, Kenya

Abstract:
This study reviews the existing literature relevant to measurement approaches and evaluation of Public Relations programmes. The study examines and in brief explores efficiency of measurement approaches in evaluation of Public Relations. The key measurement approaches identified and discussed are Reach and Impression, Opinion and advocacy, Return on investment, and Advertising Value Equivalents.

Keywords: *Measurement approaches, evaluation of public relations, standards, efficiency, theoretical review of existing literature*

1. Introduction

According to Macnamara (2014) there is no standard approach for measuring Public Relations (PR) in the modern day practice. This claim from a senior PR scholar challenges the current state of PR evaluation since the discipline relies on continuous evaluation of planned programmes as indicated in the Institute of Public Relations definition of PR. PR is the art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counseling organizational leaders, and implementing planned programmes of action for mutually beneficial relationship between an organization and its publics (IPR, 2010). Consequently, PR practitioners both in-house and agency engage in planned communication programmes like corporate communication, employee relations, media relations, crisis and issue management, investor relations, corporate social responsibility, financial relations among others (Oriaso, 2009). All these programmes rely on efficient evaluation in ensuring that they are founded on the right inputs, and achieve the targeted outputs and outtakes.

Although research on evaluating PR has been carried out since 1960s, the area of evaluation of available measurement approaches has scarcely been ventured. Michaelson and Stacks (2011) affirm that standards are indispensable since they allow comparative evaluations. Macnamara (2014) further argues that it is now 30 years since Jim Grunig lamented about lack of standard measurement methods in PR in his infamous statement, *cri de Coeur* meaning cry from the heart. As a scholar in PR Grunig protested that PR practitioners continue to cry that there are no established standards for measurement yet they do not carry out standardization research. Grunig equated this to a church minister rallying after the very sins he or she condemns. Varied measurement approaches have been applied in PR for over a century making PR practice appear like an assumption discipline (Macnamara, 2014). Likely and Watson (2013) affirm that founding scholars of PR like Arthur Page, Ivy Lee and Edward Bernays struggled to measure and demonstrate impacts of PR programmes using methods like opinion polls and media clippings.

As a global problem, standardization of measurement in PR saw the teaming up of 16 international PR bodies in 2010 to develop principles of standard PR measurement. The Barcelona Declaration of Measurement Principle in 2010 brought together 200 PR delegates drawn from 33 countries across the world to set the pace for the current pressure for PR standardization (International Public Relations Association, 2010). According to Marklein and Paine (2012) there is an international cry for *March to standards* in PR practice.

Moreover, longitudinal study from 2006 to 2012 in Europe, found that 54% of PR professionals still use these rudimentary methods (opinion polls and media clippings) in measuring PR programmes (Wright & Hinson, 2012). According to Zerfass et al. (2012) research conducted in London, Europe in 2012 indicated that 75% of PR practitioners cited inability to demonstrate the value of communication activities on organizations goals as the major barrier to further professionalization of PR. Another survey in Chicago, U.S found that 66% of PR practitioners cited lack of standards as the biggest setback with PR measurement (Ragan/NASDAQ OMX

Corporate Solutions, 2013). PR practitioners in Australia have been fighting the use of assumptions in measuring PR (Macnamara, 2014). Boersman & Bowen (2012) affirm that Advertising Value Equivalents (AVEs) is the most common evaluation method applied by PR practitioners in Asia.

In Kenya the practice of PR has grown speedily in the last decade. Corporate organizations, Nongovernmental Organizations and political institutions have embraced PR due to its perceived value in establishing mutually beneficial relationships and image management (Kentice, 2011). She further observes that, Public Relations output has been measured on the basis of quantity and quality of media coverage for a period of more than four decades. In a 2010 survey of Public Relations status in Kenya commissioned by Public Relations Society of Kenya (PRSK) with 61 practitioners as respondents realized that the major method of evaluating Public Relation in Kenya is Advertising Value Equivalents (Kentice, 2011). This stagnates the practice of PR in Kenya at the dark days of press agentry. Kenya has approximately 64 registered PR agencies offering services both in the country and within the East African region (PRSK, 2015).

PR consultancy is the provision of specialized PR services contracted for and provided to organizations by persons qualified to do so by reasons of experience and/or training (Michaelson& Stacks, 2011). In a 2013 case study research on measurement and evaluation interventions by PR agencies in Kenya, Wambua realized that media monitoring was the most applied measurement approach in PR consultancies (Wambua, 2013). This makes PR practice in Kenya synonymous with publicity (Kentice, 2011). In addition, a case study on measurement and evaluation approaches at Gina Din Corporate Communications in Kenya found that media monitoring was the most adopted method of evaluation in Kenyan PR consultancies (Wambua, 2013).

Variation in measurement approaches in Public Relations continues to complicate the issue of standardization. For instance, while some in-house and consultancy PR practitioners rely heavily on methods like Returns on Investment, cost per Thousand, Reach and Impressions, and Tone and sentiments, others concentrate their measurement on outlawed methods like AVEs. In the modern two-way symmetrical practice of PR, there is need to evaluate both output and outtakes of strategic PR (Oriaso, 2009). It therefore follows that there is need to develop common, efficient and replicable measurement methods in PR (Macnamara, 2014).

2. Efficiency of Measurement Approaches

2.1. Need for Efficient Measurement Approaches in Evaluation of Public Relations

Efficiency in this study can be regarded as the ability of a measurement approach to measure what it is intended to without wastage of resources. The problem of application of varied measurement approaches in PR that do not yield replicable results makes it difficult for practitioners to prove the independent value of PR programmes on organizations' goals. Scholars like Michaelson and Stacks (2011) affirm that standards are vital in *comparative evaluations*. In fact, the major problem facing PR practitioners today is proving value of their work on organizational goals (Michaelson& Stacks, 2011).

Following the increased demand for more accountability and prove of value of PR activities by clients and employers, there has been a fast move towards standardization of PR measurement in the recent past (Marklein & Paine, 2012). During the second European summit at Barcelona 200 delegates from 33 countries worldwide agreed on normative principles for measurement and evaluation in PR. There are seven principles adopted in PR during the Barcelona declaration of 2010; that goal setting and measurement are essential in all PR programmes, it is preferable to measure effects on outcomes than outputs, effects of PR programmes on business outcomes should be measured, in media measurement both quality and quantity should be measured, AVEs should not be used as measures for PR, Social media can and should be measured, and measurement should be transparent and replicable (Institute for Public Relations, 2010).

It is in the same endeavor that the Coalition for Public Relations Research Standards (CPRRS) was born in 2011 (Marklein & Paine, 2012). This coalition was developed by the coming together of Institute of Public Relations (IPR), International Association for Measurement and Evaluating Communication (IAMEC), and the Council for Public Relations Firms (CPRF). The major objective of (CPRRS) was to come up with measurement and Evaluation standards that were in line with the Principles of PR measurement agreed on during the Barcelona declaration of 2010. (CPRRS) identified six areas of standardization; content sourcing and methods, reach and impressions or opportunity to see, influence and relevance, engagement, opinion and advocacy, and impact and value (Marklein & Paine, 2012). These guided the indicators of measurement approaches in this study.

2.2. Key Measurement Approaches Are Discussed Below

2.2.1. Return on Investment (ROI)

In the modern day business practice best practice demands that every function in a business system must show separable value. In efforts to show economic and financial value, PR practitioners have relied on Return on Investment (ROI) as a parameter for showing the financial gains resulting from their programmes (Meng & Berger, 2012). However, claims from various scholars that PR goes beyond financial to behavioral aspect of business have resulted to debates on whether ROI is an appropriate tool for measuring PR (Michaelson & Stacks, 2011). In contrast, earlier PR scholars found that (ROI) can be used in judging the effectiveness of PR (Gaunt & Wright, 2004).

ROI is the most debated PR metrics and is used extensively as prove of financial value by many practitioners (Michaelson & Stacks, 2011). It is for the same reason that Zefass et al., (2012) argue that ROI cannot be used as a wholesome measurement approach in PR. According to these PR scholars, ROI is the ratio of the financial gains divided by cost then multiplied by 100 (Meng & Berger, 2012).

The third edition Dictionary of PR measurement and research ROI is defined as; Net financial returns divided by Financial investment multiplied by 100 (Stacks & Bowen, 2013). On his part Watson (2013) defines ROI as a ratio of monetary value made divided by Cost multiplied by 100. Key indicators of efficiency of ROI are therefore cost/investment and gains/net financial returns (Stacks & Bowen, 2013). Absence of these indicators results in variation of results.

2.2.2. Advertising Value Equivalents (AVEs)

Advertising value Equivalents (AVEs) is the most controversial measurement approach in PR. The Barcelona principles of 2010 ruled AVEs out of the standard PR measurement approaches (Marklein and Paine, 2012). However, despite much criticism in the recent past AVEs remains one of the most applied measurement approach in PR. In fact, it is the second most applied measurement approach in Kenyan PR industry (Kentice, 2010), the third most applied measurement approach in Europe in 2009 (Wright et al., 2009), and the most common measurement approach in PR in Asia (Boersma & Bowen, 2012).

The question of why PR practitioners will tend to cling on AVEs despite professional criticism remains unanswered. Macnamara (2014) argues that AVEs are not the values of PR. Kentice (2011) also argue that use of AVEs in measuring PR takes the PR profession back to the dark days of press gently. AVE is calculated by measuring the space for example the inches of print media coverage, and the airtime in audio and audio visual media, and multiplying the time or space by advertising rates (Boersma & Bowen, 2012). The total amount in time and space earned in that month is assumed to be the cost of advertising that company could have incurred in advertising. Advocates of this approach argue that although AVEs is borrowed from advertising it can show rough figures that prove value of PR activities; it results in a dollar value.

However, scholars like Macnamara (2014) argue that earned publicity is more expensive than paid publicity. It is also not possible to know whether the target audience was reached through AVEs. In addition, most PR practitioners use AVEs since it allows the use the boardroom language of figures and values (Marklein & Paine, 2012). However, PR scholars advocate for the replacement of AVEs with metrics like reach and Impressions which account for frequency of exposure and the number reached (Weiner, 2013). However, efficient use of AVE will depend on presence of Key indicators of efficiency of AVEs like space/airtime and current advertising rates (Boersma & Bowen, 2012). AVEs are effective in evaluating publicity.

2.2.3. Reach and Impressions/Opportunity to See (OTS)

Measurement of audience reach and impressions is one of the Barcelona 2010 principles of PR standardization. Eisenmann et al. (2012) measurement of Opportunity to see (OTS) enhances replicability and transparency of PR evaluation since a two-way symmetrical communication environment is evaluated. Impression refers to the number of people that are exposed to a media story also OTS or total audited circulation of a publication or broadcast media or views of an online news story (Eisenmann et al., 2012). This implies that reach and impression in this case refers to a similar thing. However, some scholars have contested the idea of equating reach and impressions; the argument is that reach targets the number of people while impression refers to frequency of exposure. Opposing this view Eisenmann et al. (2012) argue that confusion of definitions of reach and impressions occurs since the terms impression is absent in the proposed interim standards for metrics in traditional media analysis. Impression can be calculated by multiplying Reach by frequency (Paine, 2007; Stacks &Bowen, 2013). The indicators of efficiency of Reach and impression are therefore circulation/number of people that receive the message and frequency absence or variation of the two indicators result in non-replicable results (Eisenmann et al., 2012).

2.2.4. Opinion and Advocacy

Opinion and advocacy in PR are measured using tone and sentiments metrics (Eisenmann et al., 2012). Opinions and advocacy are expressed and also measured depending on how they feature in public forums like speeches, newspapers, radio, magazines, television, online commentaries like on YouTube, blogs and wikis. Tone has an aspect of speaking hence voice for example media while sentiments denote human feelings. It therefore follows that tone is more appropriate in content evaluation while sentiments are more appropriate for measuring the feelings of the publics towards a program, brand, or organization. In addition, tone is a measure of output while sentiment is a measure of outcome (Weiner, 2013).

In PR evaluation tone is measured using rating scales for example positive, neutral, negative or favorability rating for example size or length of an item, position or placement on a page, and audience reach. The tone and sentiments of the target publics can inform the PR practitioner on the likelihood of advocacy (Eisenmann, 2012). Consequently, tone and sentiments are the indicators of efficiency of Opinion and advocacy and absence or miscomputation of each or both results in varying results (Eisenmann et al., 2012).

2.3. Critical Review of Efficiency of Measurement Approaches

Development of varied method metrics for measuring PR has only served to widen the gap in standardization making replication of evaluations impossible (Michaelson& Stacks, 2011). Continued use of multiple evaluations that use different indicators and approaches cannot indicate value change since they cannot be replicated (Weiner, 2013). Practitioners continue to experience difficulties in proving the separable value of their work in organization as other professionals do, without hiding under integrated communication. The above review also revealed that budgetary allocation is pegged on demonstration of value for money in meeting organizations goals (Michaelson& Stacks, 2011). It was also clear that variation in measurement approaches made it difficult for PR to develop further towards professionalization. It was therefore important that replicable and reliable measurement approaches that can indicate cost effectiveness, return on cost, and achievement of goals be developed. It was also evident that there exists a gap between theory and practice of PR. These gaps needed to be filled.

3. Conclusion

From the above literature, it is evident that there are gaps and cracks in measurement and evaluation of PR programmes. The problem of lack of standardized measurement metrics and language in PR is not only depicted as cutting across the globe but also across the age of the profession. The above review confirmed the observation of Michaelson & Stacks (2011) that PR practitioners continue to apply varying measurement approaches regardless of increased call for universal measurement standards. Also it is clear that efficiency of measurement approach adopted influences the accuracy of evaluation. The study also concludes that PR practitioners and scholars should ensure proper use of key indicators of Reach and Impression, Opinion and Advocacy, Return on Investment, and AVEs measurement approaches as variation in indicators result in variation in results hence non-replicability. Despite major criticism by scholars and PR bodies, practitioners continue to apply AVEs in evaluation. AVEs should not be applied as measures of PR since they measure publicity only and the resultant dollar value is not the value of PR. There is need to study the efficiency of other measurement approaches applied in evaluation of PR.

4. References

i. Boersma, F. & Bowen, S. (2012). Insight: Public Relations- metrics- Speak the language of the boardroom. Campaign Asia-Pacific , 30-31.
ii. Elsenmann,M., Geddes, D., Paine, K., Pestena, R., Walton, F. & Weiner, M. (2012). Proposed Interim Standards for metrics in traditional media analysis. Gainesville, FL: Institute of Public Relations.
iii. Gaunt, R. & Wright, K. (2004). Examining International Difference in Communications measurement. Bench Point Global Measurement Study, 2004.
iv. Institute of Public Relations. (2010). Barcelona declaration of measurement principles. Gainesville, FL: Institute of Public Relations.
v. Likely, F. & Watson, T. (2013). Measuring The Edifice: Public Relations measurement and Evaluation Practices over the Course of 40 years. In: Sroramesh K, Zefass, A and Kim, J (eds), Current Trends and Emerging Topics in Public Relations and Communication Management. New York: Routledge.
vi. Macnamara, J. (2014). Emerging International Standards for measurement and Evaluation of Public relations: A critical Analysis Knowledge, Reflexivity and Power. Public Relations Inquiry , 3-6.
vii. Macnamara, J. (2014). The Development of International Standards for measurement and Evaluation of Public Relations and Corporate Commubication. A review. Sydney, NSW: Australian centre for Public Communication, University of technology Sydney.
viii. Marklein, T. & Paine, K . (2012). The march to Standards. presentation to the 4th European Summit on Measurement. Dublin, Ireland.
ix. Meng, J. & Berger, B. (2012). Measuring Return on Investment (ROI) Organisations' Internal Communication Effort. Journal of Communication Management , 332-54.
x. Michaelson, D. & Stacks, D. (2011). Standardization in Public relations Measurement and Evaluation. Public Relations Journal , 1-22.
xi. Oriaso, S. (2009). Trends in Public Relations Practice in Education Sector in Kenya: A comparative Study of Private and Public tertiary Colleges. Nairobi: Nairobi University.
xii. Paine, K. (2007). Measuring Public Relationships: The data Driven Communicator's guide to Success. Paarlberg Bed. Berlin, NH: KD Paine & Partners.
xiii. Ragan/NASDAQ OMX Corporate Solutions. (2013). PR Measurement. Chicago: IL.
xiv. Stacks, D. & Bowen, S. (2013). Dictionary of Public Relations Research, 2nd end. New York: NY: The Guildford Press.
xv. Tikolo, K. (2011). Public relations Society of kenya Survey Report: The Practice of Public Relations in Kenya: Future growth Propspects. Nairobi: Public Relations Society of Kenya.
xvi. Wambua, M. (2013). Measurement and evaluation of Interventions by Public Relations Agencies in kenya: A case Study of Gina Din Corporate Communications. Masters Project. Nairobi: Nairobi University.
xvii. Weiner, M. (2013). Public Relations Research and Measurement: Are CPMs a Way Forward? research Conversations. Gainnesville, FL: Institute for PUblic Relations.
xviii. Wright, D. & Hinson, M. (2012). Examining how Social and Emerging media have been used in Public relations between 2006 and 2012: A longitudinal analysis. Public Relations Journal , 1-40.
xix. Zerfass, A., Vercic, D., Verhoeven, P., Moreno, A. & Tecnch, R. (2012). European Communication Monitor 2012: Challenges and Competencies for Strategic Communication. Helios media, Brussels : EACD/EUPRERA.