Scientific research in public relations domain

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Abstract: - PR research has somehow remained behind after the explosive growth of the diversity of practical activities and an analysis is required, a fundamental work on the origins and development of PR, the outlining of a uniform image and the definition of professional identity of those working in the field. Regional and even national peculiarities revealed by researchers in PR can help decrease the deficit of modernity in the definition of public relations in Eastern Europe.

Key-Words: - public relations, fundamental research, development, confusion, strategic planning, image, professional identity

1 Introduction
Don Bates, a specialist in Public Relations Society of American (PRSA) and honorary member of the Institute for Public Relations said in 2002:
"If we think at the power and importance of communication, at the impact that public relations activities are having for a company, is somewhat paradoxical that we don't have so far a fundamental book on the origins and development of public relations. We have, indeed, valuable contributions to the scientific validity of field, the work of Bernays, Cutlip and Newsom are essential for any future specialist”[1].

Scientific research of public relations is a phenomenon characteristic of the twentieth century, but the roots of this activity spread to the oldest historical periods, seemed to be as old as it is human communication.

At the beginning of XXI century, the definition of public relations, impose a uniform social image and setting professional identity of those who practice public relations were only partially met objectives. Increase in number and in variety of types of activities that are subsumed to "public relations” sphere as well as numerous dedicated research, especially in recent decades because of the theoretical aspects of public relations, led to the proliferation of ways to design and define this domain.

2 Public relations or relations with the public?
Definitions of public relations are numerous. Latest approaches to public relations are built under the auspices of marketing. Marketing uses combined four instruments of managerial policy known as marketing-mix: product policy, pricing policy, distribution policy and communication or promotion policy.

Public relations represent a component of communication policy with advertising, direct advertising, sales promotion and personal selling. All these tools form the promotional mix.

Philip Kotler shows that public relations occur especially in the setting of "good relations” between firms and various public groups, for those to not hinder the company in achieving its objectives. Public relations remain as a technique of promotional mix, along with advertising, direct advertising (by mail, tele-shopping or e-shopping), sales promotion and personal selling [2].

Public relations involve the research of all audience: receiving information from them, warning the leadership in connection with their attitudes and reactions, aid in establishing policies that demonstrate increased attention towards the audience and constant evaluation of the efficiency of all public relations programs.

As a function of management, public relations mean responsibility and understanding in establishing policies and information, to achieve the most mobile interests of the organization and its publics.

It should be highlighted the fact that public
relations should not be confused with customer relations.

Dumitru Bortun, president of the Romanian Association of Professionals in Public Relations (ARRP) said the modernity deficit is due to confusion. When Western societies became modern, appeared so-called “public sphere” that Jürgen Habermas defines as “zone between civil society and state where are guaranteed institutional critical discussion on matters of general interest”.

In close connection with the public sphere we talk about public interest, public institution, public official, public information, public communication and Public Relations.

But in their historical experience, “Romanian and Moldavian society have not known public sphere, making that in the present political culture of the Romanians and Moldavians to not exist mental categories that we have listed above. In these conditions, the adjective “public” in the phrase “Public Relations” is readable as a noun – one audience, two audiences. That’s why it is believed, usually, that it is about “relations with the public”.

In fact, “relations with the public are a part of public relations - with press relations, institutional protocol or imaging” [3].

In terms of Caesar Tabarcea and Alexandra Crăciun, confusion is made especially in Romania and is largely due to language, the preposition “with” indicating itself a “relationship”, but selective (relationships can be, so, with others different from the public).

An office of “public relations” is a simple public information office, especially with the organization structure and the way ahead in responding to a request ("This problem will be solved by Mrs. X, second floor, room 15").

Communication is done in one direction, from the organization to the public, the public relations office is not interested in public preferences and does not want to seduce him, but only, in optimal conditions, to satisfy his wishes. You might even say that, unlike PR, a Relations WITH Public Office wants to have as less demanders as possible. [4].

Public relations are part of external communication policy of the company and packs non-publicity actions to establish the direct contacts, systematic with influential people in winning sympathy to the general public [5].

Public Relations Consultants Association in Britain believes that: “public relations are the method of defining the messages and communicating those to the determinate audiences to influence a response in the desired direction”.

Specialized literature mentions public relations among communication channels (Figure. 2.1.).

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3 The evolution of public relations

The evolution of public relations for the purposes of their individualization and legitimacy as independent professional activity is almost entirely an American phenomenon.

The term public relations was first used in 1882 by Professor Verdier at New York University. Americans experience in what they call PR (public relations) is deep and covers everything related to this area.

Thus, in 1990, in America there were approximately 162,000 practitioners of public relations and it is estimated that their number reached around 197,000 at the end of the century. The most important
professional organization is the Public Relations Society of America, which counts about 20,000 members [6].

From a report by the U.S. Department of Labor, published in 1996 we find that: it is expected that employment of specialists in PR to grow faster than average employment in all other areas until 2006; the 1996 PR specialists kept about 110,000 jobs, in 1996 more than 200 colleges and about 100 high schools offer courses for specialization in public relations, usually in departments of journalism and communication; and for the first time the number of PR students beat the number of advertising students (15,352 to 14,607 students)

The concerns of specialists to bring to a common denominator the essential elements of public relations led to a typology of existing definitions. Depending on how they answer the question What is public relations?, we can distinguish three categories of definitions [7].

a) **Standard definition**, that answer to the question above by describing the most visible types of public relations activities and by using some elements of operational nature (writing and editing of messages, media relations, research, management activities, counseling, organizing special events, training in public speaking, production of audio, video or printed materials, training, networking with other people/organizations, etc.); either by describing the functions performed by public relations, and by using some conceptual elements (the role of social glue, creator of an atmosphere of understanding between the organization and individuals, etc.)

Public relations domain is very important to the public institutions because enables them to communicate with the public [8]. Also, the public relations can by sent information about the types of activities for the benefit of individuals and communities, provided by public institutions. Great specialized associations in public relations give more definition to this area:

“Public Relations Practice is the social art and science to analyze trends, to predict their consequences, to advise leaders of organizations, to introduce planned action programs that serve both the organization and the public interest” (World Assembly of Public Relations, Mexico City, 1978).

“Public relations is a conscious and systematic effort, based on research, dedicated to winning the understanding and establishing and maintaining the confidence among the public (German Association of Public Relations)

“Public relations are the deliberated effort, sustained and planned to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organization and its audience” (British Institute of Public Opinion). Both definitions are limited because the field cannot be regarded only as a whole in which the techniques are used in communication strategies, it aimed at achieving certain objectives through function performance.

b) **Keywords type definitions.** Some authors consider that much more effective for understanding the phenomenon of public relations is to identify keywords from the definitions set out over time and not to adopt a standard statement. In this way, D.L. Wilcox and his associates detained six words that appear in most definitions. These together could respond better to the question What is public relations?, balancing the conceptual and operational elements of conceptual and operational order:

- **deliberate** - public relations require a deliberate action;
- **planning** – the activity of public relations is organized; after the research and analysis are staggered in time the actions to be take,
- **performance** - public relations activities should be a performance, that should lead to improved relations between the organization and its audience;
- **public interest** – in the practice of public relations must take into account the public interest;
- **two-way communication** - a balancing of interests of the two players, organization and public, can only be made by maintaining open an interactive communication channel, bidirectional;
- **management function** - public relations policies can be targeted with success only if integrated into the overall policies of the organization, that if public relations contributes to exercise management functions of the organization.

c) **Statement definitions.** In November 1982, general meeting of the Public Relations Society of America adopted a *Formal Declaration* that, to the detriment of traditional definitions, tries to explain the role that public relations play in society, but also the necessary activities, results and knowledge for public relations practice.

### 4 Public Relations in Romania

In Romania public relations is a relatively new profession. In a survey of Hungarian public relations magazine PR Herald found that more than 50% of companies do not know what is public relations, don’t have professional advisers and think that they don’t even need them. However, in Romania there is the Romanian Association of Public Relations, based in Bucharest.
Public relations of a company regard the organization and management of the complex system of commercial, economic, political, administrative, social, media, cultural relations, etc. in which the company is “caught”, to make it work for himself or to prevent it to work against him.

Public Relations are responsible for organizing the global and institutional communication of the organization. They conceive the strategy and policies of communication, create messages and events, choose communication channels and select spokesmen. In the public communication of a company we cannot have full transparency, but controlled transparency.

Public relations are a filter of company communication, filter that leaves through and even increase the flow of favorable messages and also prevent or alleviate the impact of unfavorable messages.

Public Relations make a strategic and controlled compromise between the need for communication and the need for transparency on one hand and the need for discretion and privacy on the other.

The role and services of public relations is to build the image of the institution identity to defend and improve it wherever possible, to create and maintain good relations and indirectly profitable with the most influential audiences.

The public is a term which shall mean any organization, group of interests or individual who by attitudes, opinions or his behavior may conduct an impact how small on the life and interests of the institution. The public may be an accelerator of the actions of the organization, but also a brake or an obstacle to his actions and interests.

Categories of audiences, which are targets of public relations actions:
- the media (written press and audiovisual groups) and Internet environment
- public opinion or external audiences
- internal audiences (employees, directors, various committees and internal organizations)
- financial institutions and funds, banks, stock exchanges, companies rating and insurance;
- shareholders, bondholders, institutions and bodies of state power and public administration
- the political parties and other political interest groups and civil associations, cultural foundations, groups etc.

No organization has a public “generally”, homogeneous and unique, but always audiences that can be individualized and ranked according to the degree of involvement in processes of communication, support or brake and constraint of its actions. Different audiences are not equally active. Typically, some remain passive or apathetic as long as the actions and interests of the institution do not affect them in any way (non-public).

5 Conclusions

➢ In the past 50 years, researchers in public relations, first in the U.S. and now worldwide, have made remarkable progress in developing a complex theory to put public relations on an equal footing with the recognized professions such as law, medicine or education. At first, public relations researchers from borrowed many tools from other disciplines, such as communication and other social sciences. However, today they have developed their own theoretical body of research.

➢ organizations employing public relations practitioners or using agency services began to see public relations as an important management function. They recognize that the public relations have value as they helps to ensure a balance between the interests of the organization on the one hand and interests of people affected by the organization or have the power to affect the organization - people that called “publics” - on the other hand.

➢ In addition to the value they have for the organization, public relations must also have value for society to be accepted as a legitimate profession.

➢ academic research, university and further studies and professional practice are all increasingly focusing on ethical issues. Public relations function is in a so-called crossroads. What is the role of public relations practitioner in the organization? Should he become the ethical advisor of top management or would be preferable not to engage in strategic decision making? How we choose to respond to this crisis of confidence among the public will draw the lines for future development of public relations.

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