Unit - 1: CONCEPT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

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1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- describe the nature of public relations as a process
- explain the definition of public relations
- analyse the scope of public relations industry
- list the various objectives of public relations.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

Information moves around the world instantly now, and people are more aware about how to consume it and what to consume. Efficient communicators shape their messages to reflect these facts, knowing that openness, directness, and transparency are the qualities that earn respect and build trust.The best communicators make people feel that the message is meant for them and that the communicator "gets" what it is they care about. It is the ability to touch hearts as well as minds.

Public relations is as old as the human race. Public relations have been practiced long enough and anyone can obtain information about the discipline; observe how it operates in different industries; and experiment with basic strategies and tactics. The incentive to do just that frequently

comes as a result of a crisis. Today, public relations has become an integral institution of society as government, education, commerce, and medicine are.

In this unit, the fundamental concepts of public relations will be stressed upon. Specifically, the definitions, nature, objectives, and scope of public relations will be discussed.

1.3 NATURE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

What is public relations? For some, the most recurring answers are getting their name (organisation, client or self) into print, broadcast or online media. For many, public relations might be publicity that attracts response through brand recognition or rising sales. Government may see it as a tool for disseminating information. Measuring the results of such process is usually done by a collection of press cuttings and broadcast transcripts and giving a value to advertising column inches and airtime. These may be descriptions of some everyday public relations activities, but they do not define the public relations process, nor explain the meaning of the term 'public relations'.

Public relations is a process that involves far-reaching aspects. It includes research and analysis, policy formation, communication, strategy development and feedback from numerous publics. The sole purpose of public relations practice is to establish a two-way communication to resolve conflicts of interest by seeking common ground or areas of mutual interest, and to establish understanding based on truth, knowledge and full information.The scale of activity to promote good public relations may vary considerably according to the size and nature of the stakeholders, but the strategy and the methods remain very similar, whether the public relations programme is designed to influence international understanding or to improve relations between an organisation and its respective stakeholders which comprises of customers,agents and employees. It, therefore, is both an art and science of managing communication and its key constituents is to build and manage a long lasting positive image.

The public relations practitioner serves as a mediator between the organisation that he or she represents and all of that organisation's publics. They act as advisers to their clients or their organisation's management and all stakeholders and disseminate messages through multiple media. The distribution of such information enables the organisation's publics to understand its policies.

Thus, the nature of proactive public relations explains that it is a practice that tries to establish goodwill and rapport between an organisation and its stakeholders. This process is undertaken through the dissemination of information. Also, the practitioner provides feedback of the stakeholders to its clients. Any public relations activity is an attempt to persuade its stakeholders to advocate or favour for the message the public relations practitioner is executing. A two way communication is required and implemented in dealing with public opinion.

1.3.1PUBLIC RELATIONS AS A PROCESS

However, to understand the nature of public relations, one must understand that public relations is a process- i.e. a series of planned actions, activities or alterations that bring about a desired result. John Marston, in his book, The Nature of Public Relations mentioned an acronym RACE. The acronym states that any public relations activity consists of four key elements:

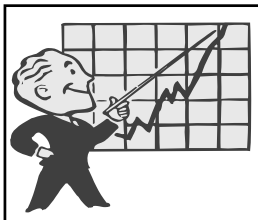
- **Research:** What is the problem and the existing situation that needs to be addressed
- **Action:** What can be done about the existing problem? It requires programme planning so that the right message can be delivered to the targeted audience.
- **Communication:** How will the message be told to the public? Execution of the planned programme is carried out in this step
- **Evaluation:** Did the message reach to the audience? What was the effect of the message?

This process explains public relations practitioners first try to understand and gain insights into a problem related to a client or its organisation from numerous sources. This input determines the nature of the problem. They analyse these observations, establish the objectives and make certain recommendations to the management or the client. The management of an organisation or the client then develops the necessary policy and action decisions. The public relations practitioner executes a programme of the action plan and evaluates the effectiveness of the same.

Consider this brief case study to understand public relations and how it is a long term sustainable process. Indian Tobacco Company Limited (ITC) has an Agri business division and as part of corporate social responsibility conducted a pan India public relations exercise. ITC started an initiative called e-Choupal in 2000 to link directly with rural farmers via the Internet for procurement of agricultural and aquaculture products. e-Choupal tackles the challenges posed by Indian agriculture, characterised by fragmented farms, weak infrastructure and the involvement of middle men. The programme installs computers with Internet access in rural areas of India to offer farmers up-to-date marketing and agricultural information.ITC Limited has provided computers and Internet access in rural areas across several agricultural regions of the country, where the farmers can directly negotiate the sale of their produce with ITC Limited. Online access enables farmers to obtain information on mandi prices, and good farming practices, and to place orders for agricultural inputs like seeds and fertilizers. This helps farmers improve the quality of their products, and helps in obtaining a better price.

ITC Limited kiosk with Internet access is run by a sanchalak - a trained farmer. The computer is housed in the sanchalak's house and is linked to the Internet via phone lines or by a VSAT connection. Since the introduction of e-Choupal services, farmers have seen a rise in their income levels because of a rise in yields, improvement in quality of output, and a fall in transaction costs. The system saves

procurement costs for ITC Limited. The farmers do not pay for the information and knowledge they get from e-Choupals; the principle is to inform, empower and compete. The initiative continues to spread across most states in India.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1. In your own words, explain the nature of public relations.

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Q2. Is public relations a process? Describe briefly

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1.4 DEFINITION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

Over the decades, numerous definitions have been developed to understand what exactly does public relations mean and what does it really indicates. By now, one may have understood that the best public relations involves in confrontation of any problem transparently, factually, accurately and honestly and then taking the necessary steps in solving it. Therefore, the best public relations is the definite proof of an active social conscience.

The inclusive role that public relations embraces suggest public relations practice to be a management function and communication function and its association with reputation and relationship management. Let us see some of the most well recognised and accepted definitions of public relations.

In the newsletter *PR News,* public relations have been defined as the "Public relations is the management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual or an

organization with the public interest, and plans and executes a program of action to earn public understanding and patience."

According to Scott Cutlip and Allen Center, in the book *Effective Public Relations,* "Public relations is the management function that identifies, establishes, and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the various publics on whom its success or failure depends." The management function was also emphasized in Managing Public Relations by James E. Grunig and Todd Hunt. They said, "Public relations is the management of communication between an organization and its publics."

"Public relations practice is the art and social science of analysing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organization leaders, and implementing planned programs of action which serve both the organization's and the public's interest," was stated in the 1978 World Assembly of Public Relations in Mexico City and endorsed by 34 national public relations organizations.

In 2012, the The Public Relations Society of America came up with a definition, "Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and their publics."

However, one of the most widely used public relations definition is the one as provided by the British Institute of Public Opinion. It says, "Public relations is the deliberate, planned, and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics."

All the definitions indicate the process of public relations and its practice is a two way communication that is intentional, persuasive, organised, systematic, collects information and feedback, is based on effective policies, respond to the public's concerns and is in sync with organisation's self-interests along with publics interests.

1.4.1 PUBLIC RELATIONS AS A MANAGEMENT FUNCTION

The above mentioned definitions also assert that public relations is a management function. After all, a public relations professional represents an organisation and works for the interest of its respective

organisation and stakeholders. The stakeholders are the various publics. The International Association of Business Communicators' (IABC) (1987) study of excellence in public relations and communication management found that effective practitioners are those who are part of the dominant coalition in any organization. Indicating the group of people who are able to give direction to the organization. This stresses the need for public relations staff to have a direct reporting relationship with the most senior level management.It is the public relations function which introduces the human factor into the management. Till the top level management doesn't consider public relations as an essential part of the organisation, the goals of public relations will not be fulfilled.

In fact the father of public relations Edward Bernays stated, "Public relations is a management function, which tabulates public attitudes, defines the policies, procedures and interests of an organization followed by executing a program of action to earn public understanding and acceptance."

1.4.2 PUBLICS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

In public relations, a public is any group whose members have a common interest in a given situation. A stakeholder has a stake in an organisation or issue that potentially involves the organisation. Therefore, all stakeholders are publics, but not all publics are stakeholders.Categorisation of these publics helps in making the best use of resources in managing sustainable relationships with numerous publics. In public relations, generally the publics are divided mainly into two categories: internal and external. Internal publics are the publics that are directly associated with the organisation, for example: employees, union, board members, managers, shareholders etc. While, external employees will comprise the government, community, media and other agencies etc. Proper research is the key to understand and identify the priority publics. The mere assumption of who can be prospective target

publics can lead to serious damages in reputation building. The public relations practitioner has a great responsibility in developing sensitivity and empathy towards the attitudes of each publics.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q3. Define public relations

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Q4. Is public relations a 'management function'? Explain.

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1.5 OBJECTIVES OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

The primary objective of the existence of a department of public relations in any organisation is to identify the key publics, both internal and external, with whom the organisation must operate effectively, and alongside this, to strategically develop and maintain a relationship with these publics for the benefit of both the organisation and the identified publics.

Some specific objectives of public relations are as follows:

- **Establish sustainable relationship and branding:** Public relations on behalf of organization handles the communications activities and most of its efforts are aimed at promoting good image of the organization and to establish a sustainable relationship between an organisation and its public.
- **Mobilise internal and external publics support:** Public Relations help in mobilising publics towards favouring organisational goals.

Also, it attempts to bridge the communication gap between the organisation and its publics. By creating informed publics it cultivates motivated support and helps in smooth functioning of the organisation. Public Relations help in educating the different publics on the use of the product and service of a brand.

- **Analysis of public attitudes:** To establish any good relationship between an organisation and its publics, it is important for the PR practitioner to understand the attitudes or thought process of the publics. To resolve a crisis or an issue, for establishing positive image building, or reinforcement of positive attitudes, the PR professional needs to do a thorough situation analysis and then develop necessary actions or remedies to solve any situation.
- **Disseminate accurate information:** For publics to support and have a good image of an organisation, the public relations professional needs to give valuable information. This will help the publics to learn about the organisation and its goals, body of work and achievements. It serves as an information source for new members, visitors, interested consumers, and media and thus the image of active and functional organization is depicted.
- **Fecilitate internal communications:** For any organisation to function steadily, the internal communications need to be great and exceptional. The public relations practitioner coordinates in strategic designing of PR programmes, gives advices, and conduct procedural modules for internal communications. Meeting with top management, employee-employer communication, media interaction are some of the activities of PR within an organisation.
- **Development of PR tools:** To disseminate information among the various publics, different tools are used. A major objective of public relations is to choose the right tools and develop them in order for the message to reach out to the targeted publics. In case of communication with external publics such as media, public relations practitioners work with press conferences, press releases, backgrounders, developing information brochure, press kits,

publication of newsletters and house journals. These tools serve the basic information needs of the new members

- **Foster integration:** Public relations despite being a standalone department at times needs to integrate with fields such as advertising and marketing and support one another. Such understanding has given rise to terms as integrated marketing communications. If PR practitioners need to establish credibility among their publics, they will have to acknowledge the roles that are played by other fields. Integration leads to consistency in messages. The communications efforts should project a singular voice. The right message should be delivered through the right medium that generate the right result.

1.6 SCOPE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

Today, public relations play a crucial role in the image and reputation management of an organisation in any field. Moreover, it is not just limited to organisations it can also be an individual or individuals who have been contributing significantly in their respective field. Public relations are present in government or public departments as well. These factors establish that the scope of public relations is wide and challenging.

Public Relations have also created scope for more specialised functions in different industries. For example, major corporations have their in-house public relations department, which may offer different designations such as internal communication officers, public affairs officers, public relations officers, account manager, communication managers, external communication managers, media relations officers, publicity and information officers, community relations officer,management counsellors etc. This indicates that these roles are under the broader umbrella term of public relations, but is limited to specific functions of public relations. There are also organisations where one has to undertake and carry out all the tasks of a public relations.

Some of the components that public relations practitioners engage in their professional sphere are listed out by PRSA Foundation. These

components will help any public relations aspirant or beginner to decide what suits them best. However, one needs to keep in mind if these departments are available in organisations in their respective cities.

The components are:

- Counselling
- Research
- Media Relations & Publicity
- Internal Relations (Employees & Members)
- Community Relations
- External Communications
- Government Affairs & Public Affairs
- Lobbying
- Issues Management
- Financial & Industrial Relations
- Marketing Communication & Corporate Communications
- Advocacy & Development

Apart from having an in-house public relations department in respective organisations, there are standalone public relations globally that have been taking care of different organisations or individual public relations. Some of the public relations organisations worldwide are Edelman, MSLGroup, Burson Cohn & Wolfe, DDB Worldwide,Publicis Groupe, Ogilvy PR, Ketchum among many others.

Public Relations Consultants Association of India published a detailed report in 2018 estimating the public relations industry to be valued at INR 2,100 Cr by 2020, nearly doubling its current market size. PR campaigns and activities will elicit future growth, but convergence with social media, digital, and content-driven campaigns are going to be credited for nearly 25 per cent of the revenues. The report also states that the Information & Communication Technology sector will contribute over 20% to the overall revenues that will be accumulated by the PR Industry. Financial services will contribute up to 12% and the fast moving consumer goods sector will

provide nearly 9% for the PR sector. In India, PR agencies like Adfactors, Perfect Relations, PRactice, Waggener Edstorm, Ketchum Sampark, Golin Opinion among others are dominating the sector.



ACTIVITY 1.1

Find out more PR agenices and the line of work they are engaged in. Check the international PR agencies that collaborate with Indian PR agencies or have Indian divisions.

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1.7 LET US SUM UP

Let us summarise some of the important points of this unit in the following ways:

- The nature of public relations is a two way communication that is deliberate, planned and sustainable that tries to bring mutual value to a relationship between an organisation and its publics.
- Public relations is a process that involves four core elements: RACE - Research, Action, Communication, Evaluation.
- Public relations can be defined as a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationship between an organization and their publics.
- Public relations is a management function as it helps in directing the organisations to achieve its goals.
- In public relations, a public is any group whose members have a common interest in a given situation. A stakeholder has a stake in an organisation or issue that potentially involves the organisation. Therefore, all stakeholders are publics, but not all publics are stakeholders. There are two broad categories of publics: Internal and External.

- Internal publics are directly associated with the organisation. Whereas, external publics aren't, yet, they can be affected by the decision and actions of an organisation. Hence, they are still considered as an important aspect of the organisation.
- The objectives of public relations are analysis of public attitudes, dissemination of accurate information, mobilising internal and external public support, establishing a sustainable relationship and branding, facilitating internal communications, development of PR tools and fostering integration.
- The scope of public relations is vast where every organisation is in need of a proficient and proactive PR professional to handle their image, brand and reputation management. The diversity of public relations work can be observed in its various components listed by the PRSA.



1.8 FURTHER READING

1. Newsom, Doug, Turk V, Judy, Kruckeberg, Dean (2000). This is PR: The Realities of Public Relations. Seventh Edition. Singapore: Wadsworth Thomson Learning.

2. Wilcox, Dennis, Cameron, Glen, Reber, Bryan (2015). Public Relations: Strategies and Tactics. Eleventh Edition. Essex: Pearson.



1.9 ANSWERS TO YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q. No 1: The nature of public relations explains that it is a practice that tries to establish goodwill and rapport between an organisation and its stakeholders. This process is undertaken through the dissemination of information. Also, the practitioner provides feedback of the stakeholders to its clients. Any public relations activity is an attempt to persuade its stakeholders to advocate or favour for the message the

public relations practitioner is executing. A two way communication is required and implemented in dealing with public opinion.

Ans to Q. No 1: John Marston, in his book, The Nature of Public Relations mentioned an acronym RACE. The acronym states that any public relations activity consists of four key elements: **Research, Action, Communication, Evaluation**

Ans to Q. No 3: Public relations is the deliberate, planned, and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics

Ans to Q. No 4: Public relations is a management function, which tabulates public attitudes, defines the policies, procedures and interests of an organization followed by executing a program of action to earn public understanding and acceptance.



1.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

A. Very Short Questions

Q1. What is the main function of an e-choupal?

Q2. What are the four core elements of Public Relations?

B. Short Questions (answer each question in 150-200 words)

Q1. What is meant by public relations? Explain the PR Process.

Q2. Explain any two definitions of public relations?

Q3. Who are the publics in public relations? Describe.

C. Long Questions (answer each question in 300-500 words)

Q1. Explain the various objectives of public relations.

Q2. Elucidate the scope of public relations in the context of India.

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