



Vietnamese Students' Perceptions of Ladies' Roles in Public Relations

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ABSTRACT: PR plays a more important role than advertising in building and promoting brands (Marketing report in 1999). In the current market context, where goods and services are diverse and abundant, consumers have difficulties in distinguishing and evaluating products. Each business tries to create a style, an image, an impression, a separate reputation for its products in order to give the product its own image, easy to enter into the perception of customers. In other words, they want to put their brand into the mind of the customer. Businesses advertise their brands by many methods: through advertising, PR, pricing or by the product itself, with the common goal of how to bring the brand into the minds of customers. In particular, it can be said that PR activities have a positive impact on brand promotion with action programs that are meticulously and carefully designed and planned to gain public recognition. The paper makes a survey on Vietnamese students' perceptions of ladies roles in public relations. The findings show that although the students know the importance of public relations in any businesses, they don't think they can work in public relations because of challenges and risks in Vietnamese contexts.

KEYWORDS: Vietnamese students' perceptions, ladies' roles, public relations (PR)

INTRODUCTION

Two-thirds of marketing executives and brand managers in the US believe that PR plays a more important role than advertising in building and promoting brands (Marketing report in 1999). In the current market context, where goods and services are diverse and abundant, consumers have difficulties in distinguishing and evaluating products. Each business tries to create a style, an image, an impression, a separate reputation for its products in order to give the product its own image, easy to enter into the perception of customers. In other words, they want to put their brand into the mind of the customer. Businesses advertise their brands by many methods: through advertising, PR, pricing or by the product itself, with the common goal of how to bring the brand into the minds of customers. In particular, it can be said that PR activities have a positive impact on brand promotion with action programs that are meticulously and carefully designed and planned to gain public recognition.

The main role of PR is to help businesses convey messages to their customers and key public. When transmitting these messages, PR helps the product easily enter the perception of customers, or more specifically, helps customers easily associate with a brand. For example, Huggies diapers organized a widely advertised PR program "Active Huggies Baby" or Unilever campaigned the program "Send school uniforms that you don't use anymore for OMO laundry detergent" for girls in remote areas. This program is charitable, serving the community, so it has won the sympathy of the public.

Nowadays, we are living and working in the industrial revolution 4.0, so it is easy for businesses to promote their brand to the world. One of the best ways to boost market strategies and create a trustworthy internet reputation is through public relations (PR). Organizations realized that spending a lot of time and attention on maintaining their PR strategies are important. PR firms assist their clients in achieving this goal and promoting them within their respective industries. Firstly, the company's Public Relations division primarily focuses on raising awareness by helping consumers comprehend the features of the products and the company's core principles. Secondly, through the use of public relations techniques, the company has the opportunity to enhance its reputation and enhance its image with the public. Thirdly, because of a rigorous Public Relations strategy, the consumers produce a loyalty factor for the brand. They frequently make repeat purchases from the business. Long-term, public relations practices lay the groundwork for the company to build substantial goodwill. Lastly, a frequent brand promotion that harmonizes the company's goals with those of society and the target market develops public trust and credibility.

There are a lot of researches analyzing how public relations practitioners perceive the predominance of women in the industry (Aldoory & Toth, 2002; Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2001; Serini, Toth, Wright & Emig, 1997; Toth, Serini, Wright & Emig, 1998; Wright, Grunig, Springston & Toth, 1991). Public relations professionals describe gender disparities in hiring, pay, jobs, promotions, and career satisfaction in a field where the gender split has reached 70% females to 30% males. Public relations was



dubbed "the velvet ghetto" of affirmative action by Business Week: "When is affirmative action not so positive? In order to make up for the lack of women in other professional or managerial positions, businesses often over staff their public relations departments with women" ("PR: The Velvet Ghetto of Affirmative Action", 1987). The majority of theoretical study on women working in public relations has been on gender pay gaps. Studies and professional audits continue to reveal a sizable wage disparity between men and women, with males earning more on average each year. The phrase "glass ceiling" has been used for years to describe the imperceptible obstacles women encounter while applying for promotions. Even though women now hold 70% of public relations roles, they do not hold this percentage of the more senior positions.

In the field of public relations, men and women have differing perspectives on the significance of work-life balance issues such as jobs as possibilities (Aldoory & Toth, 2002), sexual harassment (Serini et al., 1997), and "family-friendly regulations for their careers. The human capitalists contend that as women are still relatively new to the sector, they do not yet have enough managerial experience. According to this view, anyone can access "capital." Education, years of experience, and opportunities for professional development all count as capital. Each person must decide whether to be a man or a woman.

Systems analysis and gender segregation examine the systems-level effects of occupational segregation (Reskin & Roos, 1990). Instead of entering all occupations equally, women seem to enter them at varying rates depending on the field. This implies that employers (men) allow women to work in professions that males are no longer interested in, or because it is considered that women have certain traits (stereotypes) that make them more effective at the tasks. Men advance to the highest-status and most profitable careers, leaving vacancies in some fields for women.

The structural requirements of companies and society are suggested as possible causes for gender differences by organizational and social theories (Canning, 1991; Haberfeld, 1992). For instance, Hersch (1991) examined the impact of work demands, working environment, and on-the-job training. The organizational barriers faced by female managers in traditionally feminine positions were identified by Maurme (1998). She discovered that compared to women working in traditionally masculine jobs, these women have fewer opportunities to advance. When a woman held the position of chief public relations officer, Lauzen (1992) discovered that there was a higher level of interference with the public relations function within organizations.

From these theories and practices of PR, the paper makes a survey on students studying at BVU to know how their perceptions of ladies' roles are in PR as well as whether they consider PR important to learn or not.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term Public Relations is no longer a foreign concept given that it is currently one of the topics that the global integration and development economy is most concerned with. It's normally defined as managing strategic relationships, managing communication, managing relationships with primary functions such as research, image making, counseling, managing, early warning, interpreting, communicating, negotiating. It's clear that communication is considered as a social process among stakeholders. They behave in different ways to get their own goals of communication.

Over time, various meanings have been developed. After reviewing books, periodicals, and magazines on Public Relations published between 1900 and 1976, lifelong Public Relations academic and industry pioneer Rex Harlow (1976) discovered 472 definitions of the term. He obtained definitions of Public Relations from about 83 Public Relations professionals, merged the key components of those definitions, and came up with some following definitions:

The unique management function involves managing problems or issues, assisting management in staying informed about and responsive to public opinion, defining and emphasizing management's duty to serve the public interest, keeping management current with and effectively utilizing change, and acting as an early warning system. It also assists management in establishing and maintaining mutual lines of communication, acceptance, and cooperation between an organization and its public.

According to Frank Jefkins (2004), Public Relations refers to all types of deliberate internal or external communication between an organization and its constituents with the aim of reaching predetermined goals involving understanding. Frank Jefkins emphasized that the purpose of PR is not only to create mutual understanding but also to achieve specific goals, such as solving communication problems, changing attitudes from negative to positive. Pat Jackson (2006) stated public relations as building relationships with stakeholder groups that the organization influences to change their attitudes and bring about desired actions. Howard Stefenson (2007) said that the public relation profession is the art of persuading people so that they have to adopt a certain attitude or pursue a certain action, usually involving management. Media is an effective tool in publishing messages and ideas to



people. Cutlip S. (2010) considered public relation performs the management function, to create and maintain a mutually beneficial relationship between an organization and the public that determines the success or failure of that organization. Rex Harlow (2016) discovered the public relation is a communication management process that aims to identify, establish and maintain useful relationships between an organization or individual and the relevant communities in order to directly or indirectly determine the success or failure of an organization or an individual.

From these definitions, firstly, the goal of Public Relations is not just to increase mutual understanding but also to achieve specific goals, many of which entail communication issues, including turning negative thoughts into good ones (Management by Objective, Management by crisis). Additionally, it means that the management by objectives (MBO) approach is used in Public Relations. When there are goals, results may be compared to them, making PR a measurable activity. Therefore, PR are activities with a clear objective: the content of PR activities is planned in advance, to influence, gain mutual understanding, or provide information and receive feedback. Secondly, PR are well-planned activities: activities organized specifically in a certain period to find solutions and satisfactory arrangements for the problems facing an organization or individual. or will have to cope. These are systematic activities that require careful study and analysis. Next, PR is the actual concrete actions: whether PR is effective or not based on the actual policies and activities of the organization. PR cannot bring goodwill and support to an organization if it does not anticipate issues of public concern. Also, PR is activities for the benefit of both the organization and the public: PR benefits both the organization and the public, is a link between the interests of the organization and the interests of the public as well as the interests of what concerns the public. In addition, PR is a two-way communication: PR is not just about disseminating information from one direction, but also seeking feedback. Finally, the most important of PR is to perform the management function: PR is most effective when it is an integral part of the decision-making process of organizational leaders. PR also involves higher-level consultation and problem-solving. This function is not merely disseminating information after the leadership has made a decision, but also assisting the organization in implementing that decision.

The objects of PR activities are public groups including individuals or groups of people both inside and outside the enterprise that have a relationship with it such as: customers, investors, government offices, public, competitors, suppliers, contributors, banks, medias, employers, employees, etc. PR duties include: Communication: proposing or exchanging ideas, opinions or messages through various means such as images, texts or face-to-face dialogue; Press: planned messages with a clear purpose, selectively published in mass media to enhance the benefit of the organization; Promotion: activities designed to create and stimulate interest in an individual, product, organization or issue; Media: create news stories that reflect lifestyles, soft information genres, often related to entertainment news; Combine with marketing: PR has the same purpose as other activities marketing or promotional activities to serve the interests of the organization; Managing: identifying, tracking and implementing policies related to the public for the benefit of the organization.

PR is increasingly being used in combination with many different trade promotion tools to ensure optimal effectiveness in achieving the organization's business goals and to build and promote the brand. They are included:

Communication: Communication has always been an effective tool of PR activities in connecting organizations, businesses and target groups that organizations and businesses are aiming for. Communication includes many important activities, including holding press conferences, press releases, articles in newspapers and magazines, and interviews in the mass media.

Publications: Enterprises, especially large enterprises often issue their own publications, which can be internal publications such as newsletters, magazines, etc., which bring connections between members. and leadership; Publications can also be leaflets, posters, catalogs that provide information to external audiences that the business is targeting such as partners, journalists or consumers... This is a highly effective tool in supporting PR activities inside and outside the business.

Self-introduction film: A self-introduction film about a business is a lively and effective PR tool, often used in customer conferences, new product introductions, training sessions, welcoming new important persons to visit the business... This tool helps to increase the public's persuasion for the business.

Speeches: Speeches also play an important role in creating a reputation for businesses, making an impression on potential customers about their products, and thereby the competitiveness of businesses is enhanced. Therefore, when choosing a spokesperson for your business, businesses need to be very careful because speaking in front of a crowd or at customer conferences can create a beautiful image for the business, but it is also very important to break the existing good impression of the business on customers and investors.



Community sponsorship activities: Sponsorship and charity activities firstly need to come from the purpose of bringing benefits to the community, besides promoting the brand. Programs for this activity need to be practical, appropriate to the actual situation and not too overused in advertising because it is likely to create the opposite effect for the audience being propagated. Sponsorship and charity activities for the community are often used in the process of promoting brands and corporate images because in this case, the image of a business is easier to accept than the image of a specific product. This is an opportunity for businesses to gain the sympathy of the public, attract attention, impress and create prestige for the business as well as its products to potential customers. However, if not skillful, the promotion of business image in charity activities, it is easy for the sponsors and propagandists to have a wrong view of the intentions and goodwill of the business.

Event organization: Participating in events, businesses need to prepare well for advertising and propaganda programs. It is also important to note that widespread participation in events often costs businesses too much, while the brand's impression of the business can be overlooked. Therefore, it is necessary to select events that have relevant and attached to the brand, to propagate and have appropriate investment when participating in order to attract public attention.

Customer conferences: are organized through seminars, customer conferences and collecting opinions from consumers. This method is not expensive but very effective. This is an opportunity for businesses to gather a lot of feedback from customers and partners about their products. This is also an opportunity for businesses to attract a lot of attention from the community, the press and make plans to deploy in the near future or announce new products and services. Since then, the business relationship is more cohesive, the reputation of the business with consumers and investors increases and the new products and services will be known to more and more people.

Collaboration with celebrities: is a fairly popular method in PR activities, used by most brands. Celebrities are also known as public figures, they can be singers, actors, models, ice players, sports athletes or experts in a particular field. These people have influence over certain groups of customers, and using them in PR activities is a way to outline the image of the audience that the product wants to target. Celebrities talk about their lives, work, hobbies, and finally, emphasize their ties to the products that are around them.

Different approaches have been taken to classify the roles of public relations practitioners. Our understanding of the roles of the PR professional has improved as a result of these efforts (DeSanto & Moss, 2004; DeSanto et al., 2007; Hogg & Doolan, 1999; Moss et al., 2005; PRSA, 1993; Toth, Serine, Wright, & Emig, 1998). One crucial characteristic unifies a lot of these classifications. As a result, practitioners typically play the roles of technician, management, or a combination of the two (Hogg & Doolan, 1999). The manager works as a problem-solver and go-between, occasionally switching from internal to external audiences. The manager scans and gathers data from the external environment or stakeholders, which is then used in planning. The technician concentrates on developing and spreading communications.

Beginning with the work of Broom and Smith, Dozier (1992) reviewed prior literature and empirical findings on the roles of public relations. The expert prescriber, communication facilitator, problem-solving process facilitator, and communication technician are the four roles that have emerged. The public relations experts that top management seeks out for treatment of public relations issues are referred to as the expert prescriber. As a "go-between" for an organization and its audiences, the communication facilitator works to ensure smooth communication and accurate mutual interpretation. To handle public relations issues in a methodical, process-oriented manner, the problem-solving process facilitator closely works with senior management. Lastly, the public relations professionals who primarily provide technical services, including press release authoring, event planning, and graphic design, are referred to as communication technicians.

Dozier (1992) advised future researchers to use a simpler, two-factor paradigm by criticizing both the theoretical understanding of these four roles and the empirical tests used to develop the roles operationally. He concluded that it was more useful to make a clear distinction between managers and technicians, saying that "Managers make policy decisions and are held accountable for the outcomes of public relations programs," whereas "technicians carry out the low-level mechanics of generating communication products that implement policy decisions made by others." (p. 333) Toth, Serini, Wright, and Emig (1998) discovered a "agency profile" among a national sample of PRSA members in addition to these two roles. Counseling, research, programming, interacting with clients and coworkers, and addressing media correspondence were all part of Toth et al.'s agency job.

The role is a set of culturally expected behaviors (Dicaprio, 1974, p. 14). People in a certain culture have both life and work roles, which typically conform to cultural norms for certain types of behavior (Betz, in press). Early childhood socialization



frequently presents these life roles and vocational responsibilities in terms of sex role stereotypes, reinforced by parents, teachers, religion, the media, and other factors. For instance, Betz (in press) discussed data suggesting that toddlers as young as 2.5 years are able to discern between masculine and feminine jobs and that these preconceptions are extremely difficult to change. She further argued that while attempts have been made to argue that certain job content is more compatible with the skills of men, while other job content is more compatible with the abilities of women, there is strong and consistent evidence that the proportion of men and women in a profession is the best indicator of that profession's sex-type.

In the latter half of the 1970s, formal research on public relations occupational roles started. First, at the association for education in journalism (AEJ) convention in Seattle in 1978, Glen Broom and George Smith conceptualized and reported on five distinct role concepts (expert prescriber, technical service provider, communication process facilitator, problem solving/task facilitator, and acceptant legitimizer). These "roles were theoretical and came from the practitioner and consultant literature," according to Wetherell (1989). (p. 45).

In a report presented to the public relations section of AEJ in Boston in 1980, Broom (1982) combined the five jobs into four categories (the expert prescriber, communication facilitator, problem-solving process facilitator, and communication technician) and compared the roles held by men and women. Additionally, he made the argument that certain roles in his schema overlap because people engage in behaviors common to numerous roles, but he insisted that eventually a dominant role develops. Others have since claimed that the scale Broom and Smith (1979) employed to distinguish distinct job functions may be unclear (Reagan, Anderson, Sumner, & Hill, 1989).

David Dozier started working with Broom in the early 1980s by tying his four role concepts to things like sex, pay, education, and experience (Broom & Dozier, 1986). The manager and the technician were the two main role typologies that Dozier's factor analysis of Broom's data base uncovered, along with two other minor categories (media relations and communication liaison).

Research into the functions of public relations was quickly gaining prominence by the middle of the 1980s. In 1985, the Public Relations Review published a theme issue on role research (Brody, 1985; Cottone, Wakefield, Cottone, & North, 1985; Culbertson, 1985; Selnow & Wilson, 1985), and several other researchers—including a few who had studied with Broom—continued to look at public relations roles on their own.

It's interesting to note that, despite the fact that these female researchers also found convincing evidence of distinct manager and technician typologies in their work, they each identified a role category (referred to as researchers by Childers, problem solvers by Ferguson, and monitors by Dayrit) that had not been identified as a distinct role category in either Broom's or Dozier's work. Their findings regarding the role category Dozier referred to as communication liaison are more pertinent to this paper. The communication liaison in Dozier's model serves as a decision-counsel maker's but is not held accountable for program success.

In Viet Nam, currently, many people think that the PR is very suitable for females because it is observed that women are occupying the majority of businesses in healthcare, education, services, and commerce, etc. Therefore, women possess for themselves outstanding advantages over males.

Summarizing through a number of studies, it is found that there are 6 prominent roles of Vietnamese females in the field of PR: skillful in communication, careful and delicate in work, good teamwork ability, careful writing, persistent in work, and attractive in appearance.

METHODS

Finding patterns in public relations are done through qualitative methodology. In using this method, the study focuses on understanding the PR in the Vietnamese environment, especially ladies' roles in this field. Also, it is used to describe clearly the participants, the questionnaire. If the quantitative method is used, it only shows the picture of the parameters but cannot reveal the causes, reasons, or cultural characteristics of the Vietnamese people, so the qualitative method is the suitable method for explaining the origin of problems in PR in Vietnam as well as in some other countries around the world.

The author invited 40 female students. They are final-year students majoring in English Studies at BVU. They agreed to answer the questionnaire through Google Form. The questionnaire is focused on 13 questions, we use a five point Likert type scale questions, a form of closed question and one of the most widely used tools in researching popular opinion. They use psychometric testing to measure beliefs, emotions and cognition. The questions use statements and a respondent then indicates how much they agree or disagree with that statement (completely agree; agree; neutral; disagree; completely disagree).



For ease of data collection, we used Vietnamese to interview and design questionnaire. First, the author designed the questionnaire via Google Form to collect data as quickly as possible, then we analyzed percentage (%) of the answer choices.

The aim of the paper focuses on: What the perceptions of ladies' roles are in PR. What the opportunities and challenges are for ladies in aspects of PR.

RESULTS

No.	Questions	Percentages (%)				
		CA	A	N	D	CD
1	I understand the role of PR in businesses very well.	82	18	0	0	0
2	I learned about PR.	87	13	0	0	0
3	I have a goal to work in PR.	10	15	25	25	25
4	I like working in PR.	10	15	25	25	25
5	I like working with different people.	17	32	28	23	0
6	PR gives me many promotion opportunities.	7	28	30	25	0
7	PR career brings me many risks and dangers.	15	20	27	25	13
8	PR career is only suitable for men.	30	22	22	23	3
9	I am good at solving problem.	12	20	45	23	0
10	I am good at organizational skills.	5	10	32	38	15
11	I am good at persuading people.	3	20	37	20	20
12	I am good at technology.	5	22	22	38	13
13	I am good at communication skills.	12	17	48	15	8

CA (Completely agree); A (Agree); N (Neutral); D (Disagree); CD (Completely disagree)

In question 1 and 2, 100% students agree that they understand the role of PR and they have learned about PR. However, 25% students agree that they have a goal to work in PR (questions 3) and like working in PR (question 4) because only 35% of the students think PR gives them many promotion opportunities, risks and dangers (question 6,7). Also, 49% students like working with different people (question 5) and 52% students think that PR career is only suitable for men (question 8). 32% students agree that they are good at solving problem (question 9), and 15% of them agree they are good at organizational skills (question 10). 27% students agree that they are good at technology (question 12) and 29% of them agree they are good at communication skills (question 13), and 23% of them agree they are good at persuading people (question 11).

DISCUSSION

Although they have some commercial courses at university, most of them do not like or choose PR as a job because they think that PR is more difficult and suitable job for men. This may also be the reason why they do not learn and get much knowledge and skills in PR. In addition, they think that there are many risks affecting their health and time. Sometimes, they have to go on business trips, welcome guests with their leaders.

If we look at the Vietnamese cultural background, we see that eating and drinking is an inevitable part of community activities and especially in business activities in Vietnam. Dinners with local representatives or clients help the business develop strong relationships with the government and customers. In addition, the culture of gratitude has turned into the culture of envelopes and gifts that have been used by Vietnamese people for a long time in all aspects of life and work. Especially, the term of "lobby" has become an art in business, the key to help businesses succeed. Lobby is not a new activity that has been around for quite a while, but it is in many forms and is perceived in many different ways. It can be said that lobby is occurred by many different methods from kind to unkind, from legal to illegal, from using money to relationship, etc. to achieve the goal.

CONCLUSION

There are new prospects for both men and women to enter the field of public relations in today's contemporary media landscape. Vietnamese people yet continue to believe that men predominate at the top levels of the industry as well as in the business-



to-business technology, new media, and digital sectors of public relations. Therefore, career roles have been a significant contributor to inequality, with women frequently being assigned to technical rather than managerial responsibilities according to stereotypes.

From the survey results, the author comes to the conclusion that the role of ladies is more important than men in the field of PR, but it seems that ladies still do not dare or are hesitant to choose this profession, so they have not invested in this career to have better knowledge in PR.

Businesses believe that PR gives ladies more job opportunities than men because they have more strengths than men, from appearance, knowledge to using soft skills in problem solving. However, they also face many risks and challenges with their time and health because sometimes they are forced to welcome guests with parties and drinkings.

Although there are some challenges and risks for ladies in PR, the university should include PR in teaching programs for English language students to help them gain more knowledge and professional skills in this area because based on the opinion of businesses, PR is more suitable for women than men with many different reasons.

Female students should also strongly study PR because of its many advantages such as creating trust, building strong relationships, persuading others and communication skills and PR can help ladies to have more opportunities for promotion.

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