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**Professionalism in Public Relations & Corporate
Communications: An Empirical Analysis**

by

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Abstract

PR is in evolution stage in India and the profession is gaining acceptance and recognition. The present research is an attempt to measure extent of professionalism in PR in India and how much consensus, if any exists regarding professional standards among PR professionals working in agencies and those working with corporates in the corporate communication function. It also identifies the influence of demographic factors on the standards in profession. Such empirical studies are useful in identifying dimensions of low professional standards, which would enable enforcement of corrective action.

While current practices are healthy in areas of understanding roles and responsibilities; valuing research; training & development; and licensing & gender issues, they are evidently low in areas of ethics; social responsibility; management orientation; planning and rightful place in organizational structure. Corporates and PR agencies hold different perceptions regarding blind advocacy, access to top management and public service to community. Professionals having educational qualification in PR had broader and more strategic perspective of PR than those with qualification in mass communication or management. Those with PR degree gave more importance to research, PR planning, defining of objectives, measurement & evaluation, while those with management degree considered management as appropriate training for public relations. Professionals with mass communication background advocated licensing more strongly than others. Professional standards on issues of gender based equity and justices were found to be high and no discrepancies were found in the perceptions of men and women on these issues.

Key Words: Professional standards, Public Relations, Corporate Communications, Gender, Research, Planning

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Professionalism in Public Relations and Corporate Communication: An Empirical Analysis

Although public relations literature is full of articles on professionalism, they are mainly viewpoints in favor of or against PR being a profession, expressed by prominent PR practitioners. Few studies provide empirical data to estimate the presence or absence of professionalism among practitioners in the field. Public Relations must achieve professional status to gain acceptance of its social role as valuable to the society. Professions are based on core values and a body of knowledge that provides expertise on how to implement those values. Professionalism empowers public relations managers to negotiate with clients to change organizational behaviour, to consider the interests of publics as well as their own interests (Grunig, E. James, 2000). An awareness of the extent to which public relations is a profession and the areas where professional standards are low will help in taking the necessary steps for adopting high professional standards. Empirical studies play an important role in defining the extent of professionalism in public relations among different cultures, countries etc. across different time periods and trace the progress in the desired direction. Researches on professionalism in PR take more of topical focus, arguing for or against licensing, (Baxter, 1986; Bernays, 1983; Bernays, 1992; Bernays, 1993; Forbes, 1986; Lesly, 1986), accreditation and education, (Hainsworth, 1993; Wylie, 1994) ethics and social responsibility (Bivins, 1992; Judd, 1989; Ryan, 1986; Sharpe, 1986; Cameron, Sallot, Weaver-Lariscy, 1996). No research has been found on differences in professionalism between PR practitioners working with PR agencies and those working with corporates in corporate communications function. The work environment and also the roles and responsibilities are different for PR practitioners working with agencies and corporates. Agencies provide counsel to their clients for enhancing relations with different stakeholders whereas corporates manage their reputation by communicating with their stakeholders. Agencies are specialist in PR function whereas in corporates the PR professional may be reporting to CEO, Director who are generally non-PR professionals. This may lead to different contexts, values, priorities that may be operating in the two environments, which may induce different professional standards. The present study explores difference in professionalism between public relations agencies and corporate communication.

Professionalism in Public Relations/Corporate Communication

The idea of professionalism began in the 5th century B.C., when the Hippocratic oath of medical ethics was developed. At the end of the 19th century most discussions of professions were limited to medicine, law and religion. Today however it includes accountants, architects, artists, dentists, journalists, social scientists, teachers etc. Most of these professionalized occupations enjoy public respect, which gives them the autonomy to practice their profession with minimum interference from employers or clients. Professional criteria that are relevant for most of the occupations are: a) a set of professional values, b) membership in professional organizations, c) professional norms or code of ethics, d) technical skills acquired through professional training, and e) an intellectual tradition and an established body of knowledge (Grunig, 2000). Logan (1953) considers a professional's first duty to be altruistic service to the client. Flexner (1915)

the father of modern professional medicine maintains that the most important and indispensable criterion of a profession is devotion to the interests of others, and a denial of mercenary spirit. Wilensky (1964) believes any occupation wishing to exercise professional authority must find a technical basis for it, assert an exclusive jurisdiction, link both skill and jurisdiction to standards of training, and convince the public that its services are uniquely trustworthy. Other criteria include a self-governing body and an orientation on public service over self-interests like profits (Wright, 1981). The abstract nature of professional definition and indeed of public relations itself, leads to differences in interpreting where PR stands on this issue. Some, such as Seifert, contend that public relations people are “professionals” who function in “the court of public opinion” (Wright, K., 1978). Others, including Cutlip, say public relations is a “craft” and not a “profession” and that it functions in “public opinion arena.” The contention here is that no “court” of public opinion exists in legal sense because in public relations there is no guarantee that both sides of any issue will be heard, and that public relations “still has considerable distance to go before it matures into a profession” (Wright, K., 1978). A study contrasted differences between public relations professionals at various levels of professional orientation. The author based his study on the assumption that because of its uniqueness, public relations should not be examined as a profession or a non-profession, but individual news personnel should be placed on a continuum in accordance with their self-images of the basic criteria of professionalism and how they picture themselves on this continuum. In other words, professionalism in public relations should be examined in terms of the individual and not the practice. Different practitioners have different views on the desirability of professionalism in public relations. Raney argues that professional status is self serving and could stultify the creative thought necessary in public relations, but Fenton thinks professional status is essential, “to differentiate between the public relations professional, the publicist, the press agent, the public information officer, or the public affairs manager”(Wright, K., 1978). It is important to recognize, however, that the values and the body of knowledge of a profession must be constantly evaluated, researched and revised through scholarship and research.

The present study aims at identifying areas where professional standards are low and areas where professional standards are high in the Indian context. PR is in evolution stage in India and the profession is gaining acceptance and recognition. The findings of this study would further facilitate the professionalization of this practice. The study would also identify how much consensus, if any exists regarding professional standards among PR professionals working in agencies and those working with corporates in the corporate communication function. It also aims at measuring the impact of gender, education, age and work experience on identification of professional standards.

Some empirical studies have been done in the past investigating professional standards in PR. Sallot, Cameron & Weaver-lariscy (1998) investigated whether educators in public relations accurately perceive how their peer educators and practitioners in the field view public relations using coorientational analysis. Findings indicate that educators strongly endorse standards for social responsibility, strategic planning and accountability grounded in research and assigned higher status to public relations than do practitioners. Both educators and practitioners hold their peers in comparatively poor esteem. Gitter

and Jaspers (1982) examined the degree of trust accorded to practitioners of four vocations namely public relations, accounting, social work and sales. Additionally the influence of the respondent's gender, year in college and program of study were tested. While respondents begin college with relatively undifferentiated trust in the four vocations tested, socialization during the school years results in their grouping the four vocations into two clusters: accountants and social workers whom they trust more and sales persons and public relations practitioners whom they trust less. Cameron, Sallot & Weaver-Lariscy (1996) investigated the perception of men and women regarding existence of uniform standards in gender equity issues. The study found that gender of practitioner is irrelevant to agreement or disagreement with existence of standard in accreditation, licensing, research, and accountability. Yet, when it comes to whether or not a standard of justice and equity is emerging, men and women differ significantly. Men perceive a universal standard much more than women. No study was found dealing with the difference in professional standards among PR professionals working with agencies and those working with corporates. This study advances the discussion of these issues by investigating this difference and is of special significance as it is done in developing economy like India, unlike previous studies, which were done mostly in U.S. & developed countries where PR is quite evolved.

Research Questions

The present study addresses three questions:

1. What areas/issues of Public Relations have low professional standards?
2. What areas/issues of PR have high professional standards?
3. How much consensus, if any, exists regarding professional standards among PR professionals working with agencies and with corporates in the field?
4. What is the influence of gender, education and work experience on identification of professional standards?

Method

Instrument- Drawing from literature and 200 hours of interview with 60 practitioners, Cameron, Sallot and Weaver-lariscy (1996) developed a battery of 45 items that operationalize professional behavior. Using this instrument, the authors conducted national surveys in the United States, of public relations practitioners and educators. From the 45 items identified by the researchers, in the present study 37 items that were found appropriate in the cultural context were taken. All the 37 items were classified into categories, which were broad based. For example, writing skills are the most important aspect of PR training, explores the more general topic training & development requirements in PR. All items were pretested with a sample of 18 faculty and graduate students to verify their categorical representation. When asked to sort cards (with one individual item per card) into categories that the items represent, 95% agreement on categories was reached across all items among 18 individuals. This sorting process positively validates the items, as well as strongly demonstrates their reliability. Another part of the survey elicited personal demographics and professional descriptive information. Instructions read:

For all statements below, please circle a number from 1 to 5 where 1 is “strongly disagree” and 5 is “strongly agree.” Remember there is no right or wrong answer. Your first thought is what we want.

Sample- The sample of 368 names was drawn from the 2003 national membership directories of Public Relations Society of India, Public Relations Council of India and Indian Society of Advertisers. Questionnaire was mailed online requesting participation. After 15 days questionnaire was sent again to those in the list who had not responded. Follow up was done with telephone and email. Usable responses received from 106 respondents yielded an effective response rate of 29%.

Profile of the Respondents: Of the 108 PR professionals participating in the survey, 61 percent (N=67) worked with PR agency, 33 percent (N=34) worked with corporates in corporate communication function and 6 percent (N=7) worked in other areas like marketing, event management etc. 61 percent (N=66) of the respondents were in the age group 20-30, 31 percent (N=34) were aged 30-45 and 8 percent (N=9) were in the oldest age group 45-60. The respondents were equally split between the two genders, with 54 males and same number of females. Nearly 73 percent (N=79) of the respondents had post graduation degree, about 25 percent (N=27) were graduates and 2 percent (N=2) had doctoral degree. Of all about 46 percent (N=50) had degree in business management, 38 percent (N=41) had degree in Mass Communication and 16 percent (N=17) had degree in Public Relations.

More than half of the respondents (N=62) had work experience of less than 5 years, 23 percent (N=25) had experience of 5-10 years, 5 percent (N=6) had experience of 11-20 years and 14 percent (N=15) had experience of 20-40 years. Two thirds (N=72) of the respondents described the nature of their job as managerial and about one third (N=33) as technical.

Results

The data collected was analyzed using SPSS 10.0. For each of the performance standard variable, mean scores were computed for the entire sample in aggregate as well as for practitioners in agencies and corporates separately. The impact of independent variables like gender, education, type of qualification and number of years of experience were also investigated using pairwise t-test and one-way analysis of variance.

Table1 lists the 37 items characterizing professional standards in the field of public relations and the mean scores for each. These 37 items have been categorized into 12 fields that the items represent. The findings have been analyzed with respect to these categories to be able to draw meaningful inferences.

Roles and Responsibilities in PR- Respondents strongly agreed that a PR practitioner should help an organization respond to its constituents (General Mean or GM=4.46) and also that he has a responsibility to serve as a liaison between an organization and its publics (GM=4.51), but they do not agree to the same extent that PR practitioners have a very strong influence over constituency satisfaction (GM=3.41).

Research Skills-PR practitioners realize that research skills are essential for them (GM=4.03).

How strategic is the field? - Professionals strongly believed that PR department should strategically set goals and objectives prior to implementing a campaign (GM=4.58), they should have direct contact with the company president or CEO (GM=4.31) and their activities are instrumental to the success of their organization (GM=4.03). Similar to the symbolic beliefs about access to top management, the personally experienced beliefs (I have direct access to top management) are also in favor (GM=4.01). Professionals disagreed that management perceives the public relations role as more of a technician than a manager (GM=2.65) and that a PR department is too busy putting out fires to develop a long term strategic plan (GM=2.69). With respect to whether the role is more of a technician than a manager, consistency was found between symbolic beliefs and personally experienced beliefs. However when it comes to getting the support of management for performing PR responsibilities strategically, respondents did not agree that PR planning is supported by most organizations (GM=2.95) and also disagreed that PR in most organizations is part of the decision making team (GM=2.92). Hence public relations is considered an operational function by most organizations, which is a roadblock to it becoming strategic and long term.

Gender Issues in PR- Respondents disagreed that predominance of women in PR leads to lower salaries for everyone (GM=1.99) and believed that there are no restrictions on the professional advancement of women (GM=4.07). There was agreement that women and men are being paid equally (GM=3.70). Hence practitioners reported no gender discrimination overall. However means by gender would throw light on difference of opinion in this regard, which has been discussed in later part of the paper.

Ethics in PR- Though there is much talk of ethics in PR, but a lot remains to be practiced. Although the practitioners realize that professional ethics codes lead to more socially responsible actions by practitioners (GM=3.81), they only marginally agree that the professional organizations' codes of ethics are appropriate (GM=3.19). They disagree that ethics committees of the professional organizations properly enforce the ethics codes (GM=2.75). Practitioners marginally disagreed that in some instances their organization has found it necessary to deceive its publics (GM=2.72).

Education requirements in PR- PR practitioners do not think that marketing or business degree is appropriate training for the field (GM= about 2.57 for both). They also disagree that most practitioners have had formal instruction in management skills and techniques (GM=2.57).

Training & Development-Practitioners agree but not very strongly that writing skills are the most important part of PR training. This is a reflection of the evolution of PR, which is more than journalistic writing. Practitioners strongly believe that they should continue to enhance their skills through training (GM=4.25) but do not favor strongly that it should be left up to the individual to seek training that updates him about new technology in the

field (GM=3.05). Hence they expect organizations to undertake some responsibility for providing opportunities for development and training.

Measurement & Evaluation- Practitioners agree strongly that an effective PR department sets measurable objectives (GM=4.14) and establishes methods to measure the success or failure of its objectives (GM=3.93). They only marginally agree that evaluation research is supported by most organizations (GM=3.05).

PR professionals do not think that they should advocate the client's perspective, no matter what it is (GM=2.60) and believe that PR should be a licensed profession (GM=3.68) and agree only marginally that intuition plays a major part in decision making in PR (GM=3.03).

Areas of high professional standards: Professional standards have been found to be high in PR for 28 items (76%). Broadly speaking standards are thought to be high for importance of strategic planning; roles and responsibilities of PR practitioner; importance of research; measurement & evaluation; gender equality; licensing; intuition; training & development; advocacy and social responsibility.

Areas of low professional standards: For 9 items (24%), professional standards were found to be inadequate. Broadly classifying, standards were found to be low in areas of ethics in the field; planning in PR; measurement of effectiveness of PR campaign and management education among professionals. Neither the professional organization's (PRSI, PRCI) codes of ethics were found to be appropriate, nor were organizations believed to be properly enforcing them. Standards do not exist with regard to the support of public relations planning by most organizations and PR is not part of decision-making team in most organizations. Similarly standards are low with respect to the support of evaluation research by most organizations. Most practitioners do not have formal instruction in management skills & techniques. A business and marketing degree are not considered appropriate training for public relations indicating low professionalism in PR education.

It is important to note that these assessments rely on value judgments based on the premise that the items have valences, from lesser to greater professionalism. In making these assessments, the author is making assumptions, for example, that blind advocacy is unprofessional, that it is better to have formal instruction in management, and that grounding public relations program in research is a sound approach (Sallot, Cameron, Lariscy, 1998)

Corporates and PR agencies opinions on professional standards: As table 1 shows on 32 items (86.5%) consensus was found among PR professionals working with corporates and PR agencies, and only on 5 items (13.5%) difference among them was found significant in One-way ANOVA. PR professionals working with corporates have less direct access to the company president or CEO as compared to agency people who are enjoying more direct access. This may be because agencies are in consulting business, which is people driven, and are relatively small in size and hence the structure of

organization is flatter whereas corporates may be big organizations, having many layers and hence direct access to top management may not be so feasible. Practitioners' with corporates more strongly believe than their counterparts in agencies that their function is not just a job but also a public service to the community. The reason may be that agencies by themselves do not indulge in any community activity or corporate social responsibility and hence do not feel so. Corporate professionals are more in favor of the PR professional advocating the client's perspective, no matter what it is than the agency counterparts.

Impact of Education on professional standards: On 4 items the opinion of graduates and postgraduates were significantly different. Graduates agree more strongly than post-graduates that research skills are essential for PR practitioners. Similarly graduates have more direct access to the top management of their organization than post-graduates. Graduates agree that a PR practitioner should advocate the client's perspective, no matter what it is, whereas post graduates do not believe so (Table 1).

Impact of type of degree on professional standards: As table 2 clearly shows for 31 items (84%) uniformity was found between respondents' view of professionalism in PR, irrespective of the type of academic qualification they had. For 6 items (16%), differences among groups having different qualifications were found significant. For items, "an effective PR department sets measurable objectives" and "an effective PR department establishes methods to measure the success or failure of its objectives", the groups opinions were significantly different. Professionals with degree in public relations were more in agreement with the above items as compared to those having degree in management and mass communication. Though all the groups considered research skills to be important for PR practitioner yet there were significant differences in their ratings. While professionals with management background gave least importance to it, those with qualification in PR gave most importance to it of the three groups. Significant differences were also found for the item, "a marketing degree is appropriate training for PR". Though all the groups disagreed with it, but professionals with management background agreed with it more and mass communication people the least of the three groups. Similarly for the item, "most professionals have had formal instruction in management skills and techniques", the opinion was significantly different. While respondents with management background agreed most with it, those with mass communication agreed the least. The groups had significant differences as to whether PR should be a licensed profession or not. While all were in favor, mass communication professionals agreed with it the most.

Impact of work experience on professional standards: For 4 items (11%) differences were found in professional standards on the basis of work experience of respondents. For the items, "A PR department should strategically set goals and objectives prior to implementing a campaign" and "an effective PR department sets measurable objectives" the respondents with more work experience have given lower ratings as compared to respondents with less work experience. Significant differences were also found for the items, "a practitioner's function is not just a job but a public service to the community" and "women and men are being paid equally" (Table 2).

Impact of gender on professional standards: On only 2 items, differences among men and women were found to be significantly different. Although both believed that marketing degree is not appropriate training for PR, but women believed so more strongly than men. Similarly though both groups believed that a PR practitioner should not advocate the client's perspective no matter what it is, but women believed it more strongly than men. Other than these 2 items there was no difference of opinion among the two genders (Table 2).

No relation was found between independent variables like age, nature of job-managerial or technical and professional standards.

Differences between professional standards in India and United States:

Results of the present study were compared with a prior study done by Sallot, Cameron & Weaver-Lariscy (1998) in 1998 in United States using same items of professional standards. Level of professionalism in India and America has been found to be similar in issues of training & development; research skills; roles & responsibilities and strategic nature. In all these areas standards have been found to be high in both the countries.

In both the countries there was lack of organizational support for PR planning & evaluation research. Practitioners perceive evaluation research to be even less supported in U.S. than in India. Standards were found to be low with regard to the place of PR in organizational chart, as in both the countries PR is not considered part of the decision making team. In both the countries business degree was not considered appropriate training for PR.

In areas of ethics, intuition, gender equity, licensing and advocacy differences were found in the professional standards in two studies. In the present study professional organizations' code of ethics were not found to be appropriate whereas in U.S. they were given high mean rating of 4.2. The reason could be attributed to the relatively low profile of these organizations in India and lack of awareness about the codes. In the earlier research in U.S., intuition was found to play a more important role in decision-making in PR than in the present study. Surprisingly, the research in U.S. found grave discrepancies in salary & promotion on the basis of gender whereas in the present study no such inequity was found. Indian professionals agreed that PR should be a licensed profession whereas American professionals disagreed with it. In U.S., management perceived the role of public relations manager as more of a technician than a manager as compared to India.

Discussion

Advocacy though not favored in the present study, has relation with whether the respondent was working with corporate or with PR agency. Interestingly corporates have been more in favor of advocacy than PR agencies, indicating that they still have their self interest at the core of PR. Significant differences have also been found in professionals' views on advocacy on the basis of gender and level of education-graduation/post

graduation. Males have supported blind advocacy more than their female counterparts. Degree of professionalism in terms of 'advocacy but not blindly' has been increasing over the years. In the present study, professionals clearly denigrate "blind advocacy". In two earlier studies relatively positive response was given for the view of public relations as advocacy (Cameron, Sallot & Weaver-Lariscy, 1996, 1997). Public Relations involves advocacy: Organizations hire public relations professionals to promote their self interest and PR must rise above pure advocacy to value a symmetrical form of PR in which collaboration from PR practitioners helps organizations rise above the market wrangle (Grunig, 2000). Mixed motive model (Murphy, 1991) and Two-way symmetrical model (Grunig, 2000) maintain that organizations try to satisfy their own interests while trying to help a public satisfy its interests. Some scholars have reacted negatively to above models as they believe that advocacy is the essence of public relations (Cancel, Cameron, Sallot & Mitrook, 1997; Leichty, Springston, 1993; Miller 1989; Van der Meiden, 1993). Other scholars have argued that symmetrical public relations is a utopian ideal that cannot be practiced in reality (Kersten, 1994; L'Etang, 1995; Pieczka, 1996). These critics have failed to understand that PR should go beyond advocacy of self-interest without concern for the consequences of organization's behavior on others to a balance between self-interest and concern for the interests of others. This is a give and take process that can waver between advocacy and collaboration, what Spicer (1997) called collaborative advocacy or Raiffa (1982) called cooperative antagonism.

In the present study management and marketing degree has not been considered appropriate training for PR, nor have many practitioners had formal instruction in them. If public relations have to become strategic and be integrated with top management function, then the professionals need to have grounding in general management. There is a need to raise the level of management skills among practitioners, and more needs to be done to encourage public relations and corporate communication practitioners to take part in general management education and to develop their professional qualifications. Business schools could make explicit the extent to which management education already covers areas of interests to PR practitioners and collaborate with the profession to develop qualifications, teaching materials and programs (Murray, 2002). Moreover the emerging concept of "Marketing PR" wherein PR is increasingly being used for marketing goods and services, necessitates that PR professionals be well equipped with management & marketing fundamentals.

Results of the study relating to gender discrepancies items have been surprising. The respondents do not feel that there is discrimination against women on issues of salary, promotion etc. Professional standards in the field with respect to fairness, justice and equity in gender are very high as is evident from the findings of the study. Moreover no differences were found in the perception of male and female professionals on these items. In some of the previous studies differences were found in male and female practitioners' salaries and status (Aldoory, Toth, 2002; Broom, 1982; Broom, Dozier, 1986; Cline, 1989; Turk, 1986). Cameron, Sallot & Weaver-Lariscy (1996) found that regarding "justice and equity" items, female and male practitioners disagree. Male practitioners see more justice and equity existing than women is experiencing; female practitioners do not perceive a just and equitable standard in the field because for them it does not exist. It is

possible that since PR as a profession in India is relatively new; hence discrimination based on gender has not yet crept in. Otherwise also salaries in PR in general are low as compared to other areas like marketing, sales, finance etc.

Licensing of public relations has been an issue of keen debate since years. Public Relations should be defined by law, with licensing and registration of practitioners, as is the case with lawyers, medical doctors and other professions. Today the term “public relations” is in the public domain and anyone without training, education or ethical behavior, is welcome to use it to describe what he or she professes to do (Bernays, 1993). Licensure is a governmental function and is a one-time event. It can confer exclusive use of a title descriptive of the profession. Where practice is restricted to those licensed, and where licenses are subject to revocation by issuing bodies in cases of misconduct, licensure also may provide greater public assurance of competency than is the case for certification (Brody, 1984). Need for Licensing was given low ratings in earlier studies (Cameron, Sallot, Weaver-Lariscy, 1996; 1997; 1998). However in the present study, it has been rated as very high, which may be the result of increasing professionalism in the field over the years, as earlier studies were done some 6-8 years ago.

Location of public relations on the organizational chart was viewed in earlier studies as having low standards of professionalism and in the present study also it has been found that public relations is not considered part of the decision making team. This is really sad for the field, which is so strategic and important for enhancing relations with different stakeholders. Another significant finding from the study is the existence of low professional standards in the support of public relations planning and evaluation research by most organizations. It indicates that PR is still considered a tactical function and hence its planning is not supported by management. As much importance is not given to measuring the attainment of PR objectives and evaluating its effectiveness as should be. In modern times when accountability in all the aspects be it finance or marketing or production is well established, public relations should also have measurable objectives and organizations be willing to invest resources to assess the return on investment in the field.

One of the major requirements of a profession is the existence of code of ethics. Public Relations also have code of ethics founded by professional bodies. The professionals have considered ethical guidelines in PR appropriate, but the enforcement of these guidelines has been found lacking in the present study. To some extent organizations have found it necessary to deceive its publics in some instances. In an earlier study (Cameron, Sallot, Lariscy, 1998) ethical norms were found to enjoy well-established performance standards but the enforcement of these codes by professional bodies was found to be of low standards. Hence findings of the present study are similar to the findings of previous research with regard to ethics in PR.

Professional standards with regard to public relations being viewed not just a job but also a public service to the community have been found to be high in this study. Corporates are more in agreement with this than agencies and also relation was found between the perception of public service and number of years of experience. Professionals with more

work experience tended to view PR as public service to the community more than professionals with less work experience. This is a healthy sign for taking PR away from spin doctoring to promoting mutual interest of client organization as well as its stakeholders.

Interestingly, this study raises question on the widely accepted stereotype that women are more intuitive than men. Findings indicate that women do not consider intuition to be a major part of decision making in PR whereas men believe so. This finding is also similar to that of previous research.

A very positive revelation for the field is that the professional standards have been found high regarding understanding of the roles and responsibilities of PR professionals for all items. Also significance is attached to research in PR and continuous development through training. Professionals have shown maturity in understanding the strategic nature of public relations. These positives will go a long way in enhancing professionalism in the field in times to come.

Conclusion

Standards of a profession ultimately aggregate from individual opinions and practices. While current practices are healthy in areas of understanding roles and responsibilities; valuing research; training & development; and licensing & gender issues, they are evidently low in areas of ethics; social responsibility; management orientation; planning and rightful place in organizational structure. Corporates and PR agencies hold different perceptions regarding blind advocacy, access to top management and public service to community. Professionals having educational qualification in PR had broader and more strategic perspective of PR than those with qualification in mass communication or management. Those with PR degree gave more importance to research, PR planning, defining of objectives, measurement & evaluation, while those with management degree considered it as appropriate training for public relations. Professionals with mass communication background advocated licensing more strongly than others. Professional standards on issues of gender based equity and justices were found to be high and no discrepancies were found in the perceptions of men and women on these issues.

Public Relations professionals need to integrate their functions in a holistic manner and undertake responsibility for the performance or non-performance of them, if they wish to get increased recognition in the organization. They should move upwards in the hierarchy of roles and responsibilities, by not just managing organization's relations with various publics, but by managing reputation of the organization. Reputation involves the assessments that multiple stakeholders make about the company's ability to fulfill their expectations. Reputation increases the likelihood of supportive behaviors from all stakeholders. A good reputation encourages customers to make repeat purchases and builds market share. It influences the decisions of employees about which company to work for, by making jobs more attractive and motivating hard work. It generates more favorable coverage from media journalists and financial analysts. Reputation affects the decisions of investors about which company's shares to accumulate and lowers capital

costs and attracts new investment. PR agencies should strive for building reputation of their clients among various stakeholders and periodically review changes in it by doing reputational audits (Fombrun, van Riel, 2004).

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Table 1

<i>Professional Standard</i>	General Mean (GM)	Std. dev.	Mean for Corporates /PR Agency	F value/ Significance	Mean for Graduate s/Post Graduate s	T value/Significance (2-tailed)
A PR practitioner should help an organization respond to its constituents	4.46	.77	4.34 4.50	.477 .622	4.43 4.46	-.168 .867
A PR practitioner has a responsibility to serve as a liaison between an organization and its publics	4.51	.70	4.59 4.47	.313 .732	4.61 4.48	.806 .425
Writing skills are the most important part of PR training	3.63	.98	3.41 3.70	1.055 .352	3.96 3.52	1.926 .061
A PR department/unit should strategically set goals and objectives prior to implementing a campaign	4.58	.74	4.62 4.55	.207 .814	4.52 4.63	-.650 .520
A practitioner's activities are instrumental to the success of his or her organization	4.03	.86	3.83 4.10	1.308 .275	4.26 3.97	1.457 .153
Without reservation, a practitioner should have direct contact with the company president or CEO	4.31	.90	4.28 4.42	4.248 .017*	4.23 4.32	-.376 .709
An effective PR department /unit sets measurable objectives	4.14	.92	4.10 4.17	.115 .891	3.96 4.17	-.934 .357
A practitioner is personally accountable for his/her productivity	3.93	.93	3.90 3.93	.038 .963	4.00 3.92	.384 .703
An effective PR department/unit establishes methods to measure the success or failure of its objectives	4.25	.76	4.24 4.29	.452 .638	4.09 4.31	-1.215 .232
A practitioner should continue his or her education in public relations through training	4.25	.95	4.59 4.10	2.693 .073	4.17 4.28	-.461 .648
A PR practitioner has a strong influence over constituency satisfaction	3.41	.84	3.38 3.40	.148 .863	3.43 3.40	.162 .872
The professional organizations' (PRSI, PRCI) codes of ethics are appropriate	3.19	.87	3.17 3.10	3.975 .023*	3.37 3.10	1.377 .176
Intuition is a major part of decision making in PR	3.03	1.04	3.28 2.98	2.085 .130	2.87 3.10	-.819 .419
Management perceives the public relations role as more of a technician than a manager	2.65	1.17	2.93 2.55	1.354 .263	2.74 2.60	.480 .634
Research skills are essential for the PR practitioner	4.03	.89	3.86 4.13	1.059 .351	4.35 3.92	2.340 .024*
Professional ethics codes lead to more socially responsible actions by practitioners	3.81	.90	3.79 3.80	.162 .850	3.70 3.83	-.638 .527
A practitioner's function is not just a job but a public service to the community	3.40	1.12	3.79 3.13	4.865 .010**	3.26 3.42	-.534 .597
It should be left to the individual to seek training that updates him/her about new technology in the field	3.05	1.32	2.97 3.05	.344 .710	3.13 3.03	.315 .754
A marketing degree is appropriate training for public relations	2.59	1.08	2.90 2.44	1.772 .176	2.27 2.66	-1.528 .135
A predominance of women in public relations leads to lower salaries for everyone	1.99	1.17	1.86 2.05	.247 .782	1.78 2.01	-.921 .362
A public relations department/unit is too busy putting out fires to develop a long term strategic plan	2.69	1.29	2.72 2.60	.897 .411	2.57 2.75	-.590 .559
A business degree is appropriate training for public relations	2.56	1.01	2.72 2.52	.686 .506	2.26 2.66	-1.764 .085
In some instances the practitioner's organization has found it necessary to deceive its publics	2.72	1.23	2.96 2.61	.792 .456	2.68 2.70	-.048 .962
Public relations planning is supported by most organizations	2.95	.95	3.00 2.93	.082 .921	2.74 3.00	-1.131 .265
Social scientific research is an accurate evaluation of the effectiveness of PR campaign	2.99	.96	3.22 2.84	1.831 .166	2.91 3.00	-.347 .731

Public Relations in most organizations is part of the decision making team	2.92	1.09	2.69 3.02	.900 .410	3.18 2.83	1.190 .243
I have direct access to the top management of my organization	4.01	1.17	3.41 4.35	7.851 .001**	4.52 3.81	3.325 .001**
Evaluation research is supported by most organizations	3.05	.98	2.97 3.09	.176 .839	3.05 3.04	.010 .992
Ethics committees of the professional organizations properly enforce the ethics codes	2.75	1.03	2.79 2.70	.290 .749	2.81 2.74	.259 .797
A PR practitioner should advocate the client's perspectives, no matter what it is	2.60	1.28	2.86 2.37	3.123 0.049*	3.23 2.42	2.728 .010**
Social scientific research is necessary for excellence in PR	3.34	.90	3.29 3.32	.667 .516	3.52 3.28	1.022 .315
There are no restrictions on the professional advancement of women	4.07	.98	3.93 4.14	.436 .648	4.09 4.06	.122 .904
Social scientific research is cost effective in PR campaigns	3.22	.86	3.15 3.21	.662 .518	3.55 3.11	2.065 .047*
Most practitioners have had formal instruction in management skills and techniques	2.57	1.09	2.72 2.49	.439 .646	2.73 2.54	.708 .483
My role in my organization is more of a technician than a manager	2.04	1.12	2.34 1.93	1.701 .188	2.18 2.03	.456 .652
Women and men are being paid equally	3.70	1.30	3.62 3.76	.144 .866	3.62 3.75	-.376 .709
PR should be a licensed profession	3.68	1.21	3.54 3.71	.458 .634	4.00 3.59	1.380 .177

N=108, PR agency N=67, Corporates N=34, Others N=7

* Oneway ANOVA significant at $p < .05$, ** Oneway ANOVA significant at $p < .01$

GM=General mean

Two-tailed significance for t-values; ** ($P < 0.01$), * ($P < 0.05$)

Table 2

<i>Professional Standard</i>	Mean Mgmt/ Mass Comm /PR	F value/ Significance	Mean Experience->5/5-10/11-20/21-40	F value /Significance	Mean Men/Women	t-value/ Significance (2-tailed)
A PR practitioner should help an organization respond to its constituents	4.45 4.50 4.36	.291 .883	4.37 4.57 4.40 4.69	.819 .487	4.46 4.46	.000 1.000
A PR practitioner has a responsibility to serve as a liaison between an organization and its publics	4.45 4.56 4.50	.348 .845	4.44 4.62 4.20 4.69	.981 .406	4.52 4.50	.146 .884
Writing skills are the most important part of PR training	3.40 3.68 3.93	1.909 .116	3.50 3.57 3.60 4.15	1.573 .202	3.69 3.56	.625 .533
A PR department/unit should strategically set goals and objectives prior to implementing a campaign	4.50 4.65 4.64	1.412 .237	4.65 4.71 3.80 4.23	3.374 .022*	4.54 4.63	-.553 .581
A practitioner's activities are instrumental to the success of his or her organization	3.90 4.06 4.29	1.930 .113	4.06 4.05 4.20 3.69	.706 .551	4.13 3.94	1.064 .290
Without reservation, a practitioner should have direct contact with the company president or CEO	4.22 4.29 4.43	.305 .874	4.22 4.38 4.60 4.38	.416 .742	4.31 4.30	.079 .937
An effective PR department /unit sets measurable objectives	4.20 4.00 4.36	4.118 .004**	4.17 4.43 3.40 3.69	2.925 .038*	4.06 4.21	-.795 .429
A practitioner is personally accountable for his/her productivity	4.03 3.71 4.07	1.260 .292	3.92 3.95 3.80 4.23	.452 .717	3.88 3.98	-.546 .587
An effective PR department/unit establishes methods to measure the success or failure of its objectives	4.20 4.27 4.50	3.176 .018*	4.27 4.40 3.60 4.08	1.718 .169	4.25 4.26	-.034 .973
A practitioner should continue his or her education in public relations through training	4.18 4.24 4.14	.360 .837	4.17 4.33 3.60 4.77	2.322 .081	4.29 4.21	.427 .670
A PR practitioner has a strong influence over constituency satisfaction	3.37 3.39 3.38	1.036 .394	3.44 3.11 3.40 3.62	1.102 .353	3.53 3.27	1.474 .144
The professional organizations' (PRSI, PRCI) codes of ethics are appropriate	3.12 3.11 3.33	2.110 .089	3.02 3.44 2.80 3.38	1.571 .204	3.26 3.10	.827 .410
Intuition is a major part of decision making in PR	3.10 2.76 3.43	2.233 .072	3.04 3.10 3.20 3.23	.140 .936	3.21 2.85	1.683 .096
Management perceives the public relations role as	2.58	1.858	2.60	.663	2.77	1.076

more of a technician than a manager	2.44 3.08	.126	2.65 2.20 3.00	.577	2.51	.285
Research skills are essential for the PR practitioner	3.65 4.21 4.50	4.183 .004**	3.90 4.24 3.80 4.08	.807 .494	4.15 3.92	1.268 .208
Professional ethics codes lead to more socially responsible actions by practitioners	3.93 3.76 3.57	.456 .767	3.81 3.86 3.40 3.69	.394 .758	3.92 3.71	1.138 .258
A practitioner's function is not just a job but a public service to the community	3.53 3.09 3.29	1.933 .112	3.19 3.52 2.60 4.00	3.012 .034*	3.46 3.33	.545 .587
It should be left to the individual to seek training that updates him/her about new technology in the field	2.90 3.12 3.07	.795 .532	2.94 2.86 3.40 3.54	.982 .405	2.92 3.19	-1.008 .316
A marketing degree is appropriate training for public relations	2.93 2.09 2.77	3.338 .014*	2.65 2.65 3.00 2.08	1.262 .292	2.81 2.36	2.081 .040*
A predominance of women in public relations leads to lower salaries for everyone	1.93 2.09 2.77	.442 .778	2.02 2.05 2.00 1.77	.183 .907	1.92 2.06	-.606 .546
A public relations department/unit is too busy putting out fires to develop a long term strategic plan	2.63 2.74 2.64	1.236 .302	2.73 2.43 2.60 3.00	.527 .665	2.94 2.44	1.922 .058
A business degree is appropriate training for public relations	2.80 2.29 2.57	1.754 .146	2.65 2.57 2.80 2.23	.666 .575	2.42 2.71	-1.417 .160
In some instances the practitioner's organization has found it necessary to deceive its publics	2.75 2.70 2.46	.608 .658	2.60 2.85 2.60 2.77	.233 .873	2.94 2.49	1.781 .078
Public relations planning is supported by most organizations	3.03 2.73 3.21	1.300 .277	2.98 2.95 3.20 2.69	.463 .709	2.83 3.06	-1.186 .239
Social scientific research is an accurate evaluation of the effectiveness of PR campaign	3.13 2.87 2.92	.322 .863	2.88 3.05 3.80 3.15	1.704 .173	2.98 3.00	-.105 .917
Public Relations in most organizations is part of the decision making team	2.70 2.85 3.31	1.247 .297	2.85 3.00 3.40 2.77	.511 .676	2.98 2.85	.572 .569
I have direct access to the top management of my organization	3.83 4.12 4.00	.625 .646	4.04 3.52 4.80 4.23	2.175 .097	3.92 4.11	-.789 .432
Evaluation research is supported by most organizations	3.05 2.94 3.15	.695 .597	3.08 3.05 2.40 2.85	.903 .443	3.06 3.04	.094 .925
Ethics committees of the professional organizations properly enforce the ethics codes	2.80 2.81	2.069 .092	2.64 2.90	.337 .798	2.68 2.83	-.678 .499

	2.23		2.60 2.77			
A PR practitioner should advocate the client's perspectives, no matter what it is	2.50 2.59 2.23	1.472 .218	2.42 2.80 2.80 2.62	.476 .700	2.88 2.32	2.154 .034*
Social scientific research is necessary for excellence in PR	3.23 3.38 3.58	.525 .718	3.27 3.16 4.00 3.46	1.433 .239	3.34 3.34	-.003 .998
There are no restrictions on the professional advancement of women	4.10 3.88 4.46	1.368 .252	4.19 3.85 4.00 4.08	.597 .619	4.25 3.89	1.787 .077
Social scientific research is cost effective in PR campaigns	3.05 3.29 3.33	.410 .810	3.27 3.22 3.00 3.00	.411 .745	3.20 3.25	-.287 .775
Most practitioners have had formal instruction in management skills and techniques	2.60 2.38 2.46	3.042 .022*	2.62 2.35 2.40 3.00	.976 .408	2.44 2.70	-1.191 .237
My role in my organization is more of a technician than a manager	1.93 2.03 2.00	1.172 .329	1.98 2.10 1.60 2.23	.462 .710	2.21 1.87	1.487 .141
Women and men are being paid equally	3.43 3.64 4.31	1.667 .165	3.61 3.65 2.40 4.31	2.764 .047*	3.83 3.57	.995 .322
PR should be a licensed profession	3.65 3.91 3.50	3.001 .023*	3.73 3.79 3.20 3.31	.724 .540	3.48 3.89	-1.680 .097

N=108, PR agency N=67, Corporates N=34, Others N=7

* Oneway ANOVA significant at p<.05, ** Oneway ANOVA significant at p<.01

Two-tailed significance for t-values; ** (P<0.01), * (P<0.05)