



UNIT-8 Media Relations

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Explain what media relation is and what is its purpose
- ✓ Explore the structure of a typical media organisation

Unit 8

What is Media Relations?

Media relations are relationships existing between the PR practitioner and the media. It is obvious that a good media relation will undoubtedly make for effective PR campaign since it is the media that currently set the public agenda and shape public opinion to a large extent. Such influence is of exceeding value to PR practitioners. One expert on media relations, Scot H. Cutlip, puts it like this: “Good media relations are earned through honest and helpful news service provided in an atmosphere of mutual respect and candour”.

Public Relations of organisations view the media as a tool or weapon to accomplishing their goals. As in every war, PR also needs different types of weapons to be effective; PR needs to transmit messages to people as well as to persuade them to accept an idea or product. Therefore, the media has become an indispensable tool for PR to function effectively in reaching its intended audiences. There is also the need to answer the following questions in order to choose the most suitable medium when seeking to communicate with various publics:

- What is the content of the message?
- Who are the recipients of the message?
- Where are these recipients located?
- What are the backgrounds of the recipients?
- Which medium is best for sending the message?
- What budget is available to you?

It is important to appreciate that the media and the message cannot be considered separate entities: one cannot operate without the other: that is, they both exhibit a high interdependency. This interdependency can be likened to having a cassette player which can only operate when a cassette is available; the cassette cannot function unless there is a cassette player available. Also, there are factors such as the audience who will determine the type of medium to use and the message to transmit to them. Different types of media is accessed by a large group of people for information, therefore the media has influence in informing as well as persuading many people. The media also set the agenda by influencing the opinion of people towards an organisation, a phenomenon that can be tapped by PR to project a positive image and win the people’s goodwill toward an organisation.

Media Classification

The media can be classified depending on how they appeal to the human sensory organs:

- Media which appeals to the eyes
- Media which appeals to the ears
- Media which appeals to both the eyes and ears

Visual Media

This type of media makes use of visual components to deliver information when communicating to the public. In other words they use vision to instigate thought. These include magazines, pictures, books, newspapers, and photographs.

Audio Media

These involve media communication that use audio or the voice to deliver information. The recipients receive the message through the ear. Examples of this type of media include the radio and audio tapes.

Audio-Visual Media

Examples include TV and video player. They use both sound and visual aspects to deliver information.

Each medium has its own advantages and disadvantages but all share the same purpose of transmitting information. Below, we illustrate the importance of each type of medium described above:

- Message sent via audio or oral mediums will only be partially retained
- Messages sent visually will be retained more than those sent orally
- Messages sent to someone using visual and oral means will be fully understood and retained compare to the two modes above.

Each medium is important in its own right and none is more important than another. But one particular type may be more useful in specific scenarios than the others and their usefulness or suitability is determined by the type of message to be delivered. Situations requiring nationwide broadcast would best be served by radio. For situations in which messages have to be delivered to multicultural and multilingual audiences, it would be ideal to use several media to do so. Usually, PR practitioners are required to make use of several media in carrying out their duties; a situation which is aptly referred to as multimedia PR.

Mass Media

Classification of communication

There are three categories of communication:

- Person-to-person communication (which is also known as oral communication)
- Group communication
- Mass communication

Visual Media:

- a) **Press:** Newspapers, Magazines
- b) **Photographs:** Pictures, drawings, cartoons, and diagrams
- c) **Publications:** Books, folders, pamphlets, house journals, manuals, information bulletins, annual reports, direct mail, and newsletters
- d) **Bulletin Boards:** 3-dimensional models, exhibitions, hoardings displays, posters, bus panels, and neon signs
- e) **Special Events:** Open House

Audio-Media:

- a) **Radio:** Audio-tapes/cassettes
- b) **Direct Communication:** Spoken word, talks, public meetings, conferences, seminars, symposia, and annual meetings
- c) **Audio-Visual Media:** Television, video cassettes, films, documentaries, news reels, film strips, and cinema slides
- d) **Traditional Media:** Folk songs, folk dance, folk music, and puppet shows

A Typical Media Organization Structure

A public relations person must understand the structure and functioning of media organisations in order to be effective in building good rapport with the media personnel. Print media may be divided into three categories:

- Editorial
- Business
- Administrative

Editorial section includes the reporting section and comprises of the following people:

- The editor, who writes editorials, which express views about a particular subject of national importance.
- Assistant Editor
- Resident Editor who heads the newspaper's local edition.
- News Editor who controls the entire news department
- Chief of Bureau
- Sub-Editor who edits the copy, writes the headlines and checks for any inaccuracies in the newspaper
- Sports Editor, who handles the sports news.

- Art critics who write review on various subjects like books, films, TV and radio programmes, plays, and music/dance routines, etc.
- Magazine Editors who deal with the feature articles written for the magazine section of a newspaper

The reporting section comprises of the following personalities:

- Special correspondents
- Chief reporters
- Staff reporters

Photo journalists Business section consists of:

- Advertising
- Circulation

The advertising manager, who leads the advertising section, is responsible for selling newspaper space for all types of advertisements. The circulation manager is responsible for dispatching newspaper copies throughout the city as well as providing day editions.

The administrative department takes care of administrative issues of different departments, as well as, the electronic media for a newspaper organisation and helps to build its image and reputation.

Opinion Writing and Public Relations

The various aspects of newspaper reportage, such as, editorials, letters, and feature articles are created by personnel of the editorial department. The editorial section of a newspaper conveys the philosophy and views of the newspaper and is considered to be very important. Securing space in the editorial section does not come easy. One has to be quite creative and persuasive with a strong storyline to get the editor to publish a piece for publicity. PR practitioners have to develop informal media relation with the editor and elaborate on all aspects of the work they wish to publish in the editorial section. Organisational profiles or work culture are best to publish in columns with the help of a columnist and could mean using features on beneficiaries of organisational philanthropic gestures to highlight the type of things the organisations has been doing for the community.

Sound Media Relations

Although media and PR personnel have different interest in terms of what message to transmit and indeed their interests may at times be in conflict, the PR department should make effort to develop long-term cordial relationship with media persons by understanding how they operate.

To develop a cordial relationship with the media, PR practitioners need to have:

- Critical appreciation of media requirements
- Knowledge of journalistic standards and ethics
- Understanding the role and responsibility of journalists.
- Media Relations: Press and Electronic Media

Requirements for dealing with the media include the following:

- Unambiguous and prompt in your communication
- Accommodating to media enquiries
- Being co-operative with the media
- Maintaining absolute clarity of purpose

Understanding and credibility are two key factors that determine your reputation in the eyes of the media personnel. The media personnel need firm assurance that you will be able to deliver exclusive and unbiased information on time and in a clear and consistent tone. To do this, you need to really understand everything about your organisation, as well as, how media houses function.

Table 8.2

Dos and Don'ts of Media Relation

	Do's	Don'ts
1	Know your organisation very well	Do not exaggerate
2	Always be available to answer questions	Do not suppress stories
3	Keep media list updated	Do not mislead reporters
4	Answer queries promptly	Do not play favourites
5	Understand the working of the media	Do not argue with reporters
6	Have sound judgement	Do not be rude
7	Tell the truth	Do not pressurize
8	Develop writing skills	Do not combine advertising with publicity
9	Obtain access to sources of reference	Do not complain if your story is omitted
10	Abide by deadline rules	Do not put up patronising attitude towards media personnel

How to Cultivate the Media

Cultivating the media means building a good relationship with them using diverse means. The techniques to cultivate the media include:

- i. Getting to know the reporters/editors informally
- ii. Meeting them as often as possible with a specific purpose
- iii. Discussing matters of mutual interest

You, as a PR practitioner, need to get the media to have a good perception about the organisation you represent. This can be achieved by having frequent informal conversations with them about your organisation's vision, policies, and culture, etc. The goal is to build ties and get them better and they also get to know you as an honest, credible, and valuable person to work with and to earn a good reputation amongst them.

As the PR personnel, you should do the following:

- Identify and anticipate newsworthy event
- Supply the media with the right information in the right format
- Avoid making strong demands to have your articles published and do not suppress stories the media want to publish
- Provide just enough material and within the stipulated limits of interest and not bombard the media with extraneous materials
- Communicate with the medial personnel by stating your facts unambiguously
- Provide all necessary materials needed for publication
- Positive speech is important when you approach media persons. Avoid using negative sentences, such as, "I do not suppose the will be of interest to you ...". You could instead say, "I believe this will be of interest to you ..."
- Build close and sustained friendship with the media to help you promote the image of your company and put it in a positive light

Excellent communication is important for good media relations. Communication usually comprises of the seven elements and is known as the 7Cs of communication.

These elements include:

1. Credibility
2. Content
3. Context
4. Clarity
5. Continuity
6. Channels of communication
7. Capability of the audience

Specific Methods for Cultivating the Media

The following three methods can be used to effectively interact with the media:

- Disseminating information using press release
- Using press conferences, press briefings, and press tours
- Creating situations to encourage the media to show interest

Information can be supplied to the media by providing press backgrounder information and press releases about specific events, information profile on specific activities of an organisation such as the growth profile.

The press backgrounder is a simple report which provides data on any event at an organisation. The backgrounder serves as a trustworthy source of information and to which is added additional information on latest developments.

Press release can be defined as “official notes containing sport news, report of an events, developing stories, or announcement of policies”. A good press release must contain the following elements:

- It must be submitted in advance of the deadline
- It should be written in concise, simple and unsophisticated language
- It must show that the subject matter is important

Further detailed information in the form of booklets may be submitted in addition to the press release and your telephone contact should also be supplied to the media for clarification of issues.

Organizing Press Conference

Press conferences are useful PR tools for engaging media persons for the purpose of providing key information, resolving doubts, and informing them about the latest development in the aftermath of an event or crisis.

To organise a press conference, you need to:

- Plan ahead
- Define in unambiguous terms the objectives of the occasion
- Selecting the time and venue which are convenient to the media
- Providing adequate transport and hospitality
- Choose a venue with high standard

The PR personnel has to clarify the objectives of the conference to the media with sufficient information provided to win their confidence. Ideally, participants should avoid using offensive language. The atmosphere should be non-confrontational and witty so that one would enjoy being there. Answers to questions from the media should be delivered tactfully and in the spirit of winning them over to your side of the fence. One way to ensure a very successful press conference is to provide the media with informal background information well in advance of the conference which provides essential details about the issues to be talked about. It is also a good idea to prepare a press kit which contains a press release, company profile, photographs, pens, and introductory publications.

Sometimes several informal press meetings to brief the media on issues in specific disciplines can be arranged to build up a good relationship with them. These occasions present opportunities for the PR practitioner to go into more details about the event or issues and respond to question from the media

personnel.

Press tours are arranged on occasions when you want to show the media something newsworthy or something that is likely to have significant impact on the lives of people. For example, commissioning a new factory or building would be something that will have an important on the community around, so this will be newsworthy. It is the responsibility of the PR department to arrange for transport, accommodation, recreational facilities and other necessities to make the occasion a pleasant experience for the visiting media. Press tours are quite beneficial or effective, because they provide conditions for excellent coverage to enhance the image of the organisation. The effectiveness of media coverage of these tours should be assessed by the PR department.

Evoking and Monitoring Media Response

Having frequent interaction with the media is a step in the right direction and it make for building an enduring cordial relationship which may help swing decisions in your favour and get your feature articles published to portray your organisation in favourable light. Besides frequent interaction, you as PR personnel must constantly monitor media responses by keeping an eye on press comments to pick out peoples opinion about your organisation as these comments could provide feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation.

Such monitoring activity is bound to increase your reputation as a credible person to work with and also help determine the effectiveness of your PR as reflected by the responses given in press comments and also make the media to be more responsive to help with your PR campaign drives.

The diagram below shows the steps the PR person needs to take while developing an effective PR campaign requiring the media to play a major role.



Figure: 8.2

Crisis Management

During emergency situations or crisis periods, the relationship between the PR department and the media may experience some turbulence or strain. It is best to avoid confrontations and to deal tactfully with the media during crisis period. Information emerging from management about the crisis should be

quickly dispatched to the media and suppression of information avoided altogether.

The best arrangement would be to choose one PR person to issue statements on behalf of the company experiencing the crisis. Avoid speculating and guessing damages incurred and refrain from putting blame on anyone prior to the conclusion of investigations. It is important to keep both internal and external stakeholders informed of the latest update on the crisis, including the media. Always show appreciation to the media for covering the crisis when everything has been done and dusted. Figure 10.2 below shows the flowchart for crisis management.

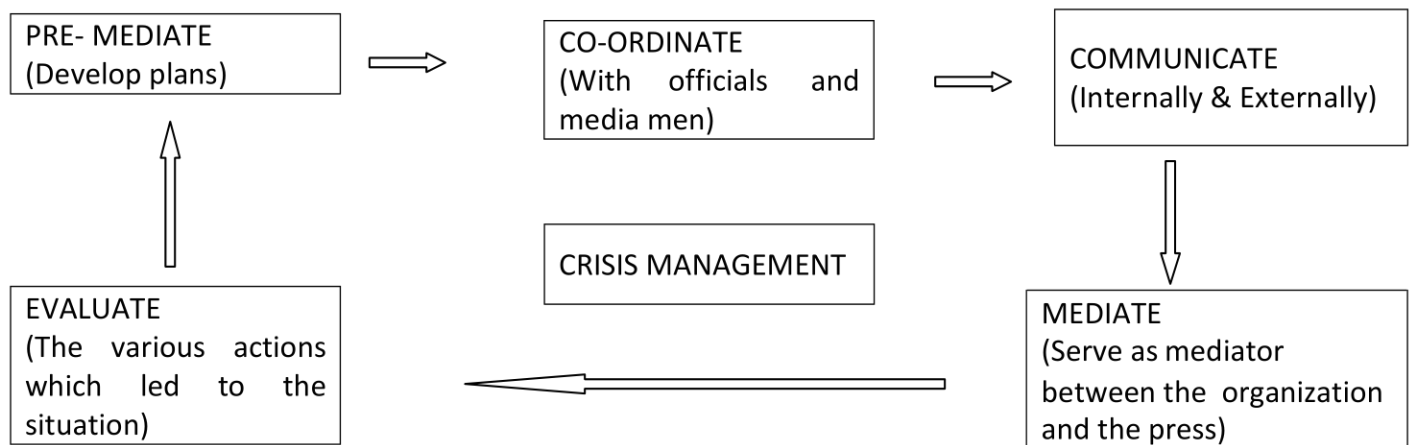


Figure 8.3

Choice of Media

Up until now, we have been identifying different types of media for undertaking PR activities and learning how to build effective relationships with the media. We shall now turn our attention to steps you need to take in order to select the most suitable media or medium for your PR campaigns.

The golden rule is to use a wide combination of media (multimedia) when you need to communicate issues of national importance and use just a few media when the subject matter is for a limited group of people. In either case, the right medium should be used to convey a particular piece of information to enhance the reputation of your organisation.

Print Media

We have already discussed newspapers as an example of print media, which has been widely used to convey information to the masses. We would now focus on magazines. Magazines could be used to highlight policies and projects of your organisation. There are a variety of magazines available which are produced by editor and a team of writers, so you need to choose the appropriate type for your PR activities. Choosing the right type of magazine requires:

- Sound judgement
- Good illustrative perception or ability
- Accurate information
- Extensive research material

Sometimes, you may wish to make contact with the editor or the media through press parties for you to interact with them to establish good rapport and also discuss ideas about publishing features. The media may also get in touch with the PR department to request for materials or advertisement for publication. These are mouth-watering opportunities to grab for your publicity campaigns for your company using feature articles when the media approach you.

Other forms of print media include house journals useful for providing background information on policy directions and the expectations of management. This information is usually appreciated by both employees and the media.

Electronic Media

Even though broadcasting is an effective mass media tool, there is still a wide gap between broadcasting and printing medium due to people's biased preference for print media. Radio is one of such broadcasting media. It involves using words and sounds to communicate with listeners. The most effective way to deploy radio is through frequent news broadcast and press releases. Press releases for radio should contain:

- Meticulous and precise details-written in a conversational style
- Accurate and factual information
- An objective, crisp report with emphasis on the theme
- Not too many figures and statistics

Dispatching messages via radio is best accomplished using the conversational style of speech and should be informal and concise as well. The radio team has to be cultivated by the PR personnel. The radio team include the following people:

- Programme Manager
- Writers
- News Manager
- Directors
- Producers
- Announcers

Due to the code of regulation for radio broadcasting, management of the radio medium restrict the use of many of private companies and are mostly interested in feature articles or information which do not publicize a company. Commercial channels should be used for PR activities instead. Programs sponsored with entertainment value are the favourite of the listening public.

Motion Picture

The PR practitioner may also suggest to management to use the film-medium to enhance the image of the organisation. The prerequisite for successful deployment is for the PR practitioner to learn the ins and outs of film-making for him/her to be an effective participant in making the film or movie. The

practitioner must also know the people who are involved in the film-making process. People such as:

- The Producer
- Director
- Screen - play writer
- Director
- Cameraman, Editor, Sound Recording specialist, and other crew members

The first thing to do when embarking on a film-making programme is to contact a producer to determine his suitability and availability for the job. Next, you should contact a screen-writer to talk about the objectives and plans. Your organisation's management must approve the script before you hire the services of a director to do the filming. The director should be given the freedom to put his creativity to work on the film. The overall goal is to project your organisation in a positive light in the eyes of the viewers. Another key to successful film-making is to maintain good media relations by making quick payments. Also, make sure your objectives are clear from the outset and your organisation's policies are readily understandable to guide the film-making process.

The best strategy for successful film-making is to have a script otherwise you may end up on the losing side. This requires following the following steps:

- Having a good concept which is clear to all
- Treatment (should be conducive to your organisation)
- Image scenario (should be impressive to watch)

The goals must be very clear to aid in selection of the right cast and preparing other aspects of the film setup. PR personnel are advised to be part of the editing team to guide them in keeping with the expectations of the PR programme. This can easily be achieved when the PR practitioner builds or develops a good relationship with the film crew.

Distribution: proper distribution of the film should be undertaken to fulfil the overall objectives of the PR campaign. Films having educational value or of national interest may enjoy more airtime from film departments of broadcasting companies.

Slide films: Slide films have the advantage of being a cheap mode of communicating with different publics. It is generally made up of strips of film consisting of a sequence of frames and accompanied sometimes by sound.

Traditional Media

Traditional media can be used to promote PR activities and build strong ties with media people. Exhibitions and fairs attract a large crowd of people and naturally the media would not want to be excluded from such large gathering of people. The PR personnel organises a press preview to enlighten the press people before the event begins. The press is also given the opportunity to ask questions to clarify any misunderstanding. Photographs are also supplied to the media in addition to a brief write-up.

Media Related Professional Bodies

The professional PR should have in-depth knowledge about influential PR and advertising agencies which have extensive resources and are capable of reaching the global audience. Some of these agencies may include press agencies, feature agencies, and professional advertising agencies, etc. The PR practitioner must also have understanding of how these professional bodies function.

Further Reading:

- ✓ *Modern Media Relations for Nonprofits: Creating an Effective PR Strategy for Today's World, (2017), By Peter Panepento, Antionette G. Kerr*
- ✓ *Media Relations: Issues and Strategies, (2018), By Jane Johnston*