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Modern research trends in research and measurement studies in public relations: A second-level analytical study on a sample of scientific, Arab, and foreign journals in the field of public relations and communication

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Abstract

The study aimed to identify the modern research trends in the field of public relations research and the measurement in scientific journals published in Arabic and English literature. The descriptive analytical approach was used, employing the second-level analysis method that is based on reusing data resulting from public relations research that addressed the topic of research and measurement as a process in this field. The analysis provides a valuable source of field data and office information that enables researchers to develop the practice of public relations research and measurement in various institutions. The study concluded with a number of results, the most important of which is that research and measurement in public relations are important topics for both academics and practitioners alike, and still require more effort. In addition, the study showed that there is diversity in public relations measurement studies, without efforts to develop scientific measures that contribute to the advancement of this field.

Keywords: Evaluation, image measurement, measurement in public relations, public relations research, and reputation measurement. Research.

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1. Introduction

Public relations was known in its early days as a complex field that required a combination of creative skills and innovative thinking, as it relied heavily on intuition and guesswork. Decisions were made based on personal experiences and undocumented observations. This approach made it difficult to measure the effectiveness of activities objectively, led to inconsistent results, and made it challenging to determine the extent of the impact of communication programs, media

relations programs, and public relations programs in general. In the twentieth century, public relations practices developed and became based on scientific methods instead of randomness. In the first half of this century, institutions began to use scientific and systematic research methods such as opinion polls and media content analysis. These tools marked the beginning of the transformation of public relations from a mere art to a measurable science. Opinion polls provided data and information about the public's view of institutions, and media content analysis helped measure the impact of media coverage and the effectiveness of media messages. With the development and advancement of the media, it became necessary to adopt more scientific and systematic measurement methods. Practitioners focused more on media content as a primary tool for measuring impact. By utilizing analytical techniques to provide deeper insights into the methods of receiving media messages, despite the expansion in the use of these methods, there was a significant variation in the effectiveness of their implementation. Accordingly, many practitioners were content to talk about the importance of research and measurement without applying accurate methodologies, which led to a lack of theories that contribute to the development of this field. With the emergence of the Internet and social media, a major shift occurred in the field of public relations that added new dimensions to research and measurement, making it easier for practitioners to collect and analyze a lot of information and reach the desired results. Research and measurement are fundamental pillars in modern public relations, as practitioners are required to adopt accurate and data-based measurement methods that help achieve organizational goals by employing scientific methods and methodologies. This recent study focuses on identifying research trends in the field of research and measurement as two processes in public relations, with a focus on the latest publications in Arabic and English scientific journals specializing in the field of public relations in particular and communication in general.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Concept of Research in Public Relations

Research is thorough and systematic investigation aims to discover or add knowledge or facts or general rules. Research is the main to any successful public relations, communications and/or marketing efforts, not only in the business world, but also in the non-profit and government sectors. Without research, those who administer public

Research is the foundation of any successful efforts in the fields of public relations and communication, whether in the public or private sector (profit and non-profit). Public relations practitioners work in unclear conditions if they do not use public relations research in their various activities.

Public relations research is defined as an important method that uses information, opinions, and trends through a common and systematic process to identify facts, truths, or trends related to a particular problem or place [1]

Based on the previous concept, public relations research can exclude a specific section of public relations at the level of opinions and public interaction.

Research in public relations is a precise and organized process through which public relations management seeks to collect and analyze data and information related to public relations and institutional activities with the aim of understanding the needs of the public, Effective and influential public relations, measuring its effects on personal image and its commercial impact.

2.2. Problems Facing Public Relations Research

Al-Kahli spoke about the weak interest in the research process in public relations management compared to other activities such as: (planning, organizing exhibitions, courses, and issuing publications), and the interest of public relations management focused on conducting research to measure the extent of customer satisfaction with the services provided by the institution and evaluating institutional performance [2]. Bossman stated that public relations practitioners often focus on monitoring what is published in the media and analyzing the content. This demonstrates the lack of interest in conducting research in a way that helps achieve the desired goals [3].

2.3. Measurement in Public Relations

Woof-Lindenman defined public relations measurement as "a method of giving a result of a generally accurate nature by comparison with some predetermined criteria."

Mishab defined: "Measurement is taking criteria such as the number of items, collecting ratings, or recording and analyzing comments in interviews." Here, measurement involves two main stages: data collection and analysis.

Although some see measurement as the same as evaluation, it is different. The process of evaluation requires a comprehensive look at the communications efforts as a whole to determine how they contribute to achieving the organization's goals [4].

2.4. Obstacles to Measuring Public Relations Programs

[5] Obstacles to measuring public relations programs are considered a stumbling block to the success of these programs. They are represented by the lack of awareness by senior management of the importance of measuring public relations programs, despite the increasing interest among practitioners in this field.

Despite the emergence of new techniques for measuring public relations programs, public relations practitioners still apply unreliable metrics.

[6] Theoretical thinking is considered an essential step before measurement, as it determines the framework within which the phenomenon is measured. Without it, the results will not be accurate or useful to organizations, and this is the aspect that public relations practitioners overlook.

3. Methodology

This study is a descriptive analytical study that relies on the second-level analysis approach. This type of analysis is considered a valuable source of field data and documentary research information. On the other hand, it is known as Data Re-analysis, which uses qualitative analysis of published scientific studies. The current study covered the topic of public relations research and measurement in the period from 2011 to 2023 in both Arabic and English (Public Relations Review, Journal for Communication Sciences in Southern Africa) with the aim of monitoring, describing, and analyzing research trends and identifying the development occurring in theoretical topics and applied practices, according to the visions and ideas of researchers in this field. The reason for choosing the study period is that previous studies before 2010 indicated that research and measurement in public relations would witness remarkable development.

The second level analysis depends on the following steps:

- Comprehensive and in-depth reading of articles related to the research topic, and identifying the main and sub-headings that constitute the study topic.
- Determining the time frame for the analysis process to achieve the study objectives.
- Listing studies and research and classifying them according to the study variables.
- Initial formulation of the information, and re-evaluation.
- Qualitative analysis of the results on progress.
- Drafting the report in its final form, including the descriptive presentation, analysis, and results reached by the study.
- Writing general conclusions according to the analysis of previous studies.

The quantitative analysis of the sample under study is presented according to the following table:

Table 1.

Shows the distribution of the study sample according to the year of publication.

Year of publication	Number of published studies
2011	0
2012	2
2013	1
2014	1
2015	1
2016	1
2017	3
2018	1
2019	3
2020	4
2021	-
2022	4
2023	2
Sum	23

Table 2.

Shows the distribution of the study sample according to the type of magazine under study.

Type	Number of Studies
Arabic	7
Foreign	16
Total	23

Table 3.

Shows the distribution of the study sample according to the publishing entity of the studies under study.

Authority	Number of journals
Egyptian Journal of Public Opinion Research	1
Scientific Journal of Public Relations and Advertising Research	0
.Middle East Journal of Public Relations Research	6
Journal of Mass Media & Communications	5
<i>Journal for Communication Sciences in Southern Africa,</i>	5
<i>. Public relations review,</i>	5
Sum	23

Table 4.

Shows the distribution of the study sample according to the research trends of the studies under study:

Research trends in research and measurement studies in public relations	Number of studies
Studies that addressed the topic of developing public relations research and the reality of practice.	7
Studies that addressed the topic of the reality of measuring public relations programs	13
Topics that focus on setting standards related to various public relations	3

3.1. Analysis of the Results of the Second Level of the Studies Under Study

The scientific heritage was reviewed, which aims to explore the most important theoretical and applied aspects and reach new standards in the field of public relations, and to identify the theoretical approaches and intellectual trends in the field of research as a basic process in relations. The following is a detailed presentation of these axes:

First: Studies that addressed the topic of developing public relations research and the reality of practice.

The study of Al-Yahya [7] addressed the topic of developing the practice of public relations research in Saudi institutions, which revealed that the areas targeted by the departments through the research are; Surveying the opinions of the external public, identifying their impressions about the services provided by the organization, and identifying the mental image of the institution and its reputation. It showed the most obstacles that prevent conducting research in public relations departments are; Preoccupation with routine tasks, and the lack of awareness of the importance of research by the management.

The study Al-Kahki and Wadman Houri [8] addressed the topic of the role of research in developing institutional performance, and concluded that there are several factors that determine the importance of public relations research in this context, the most important of which are: identifying the opinions of the institution's audience, measuring the effectiveness of communication between the institution and its audience, identifying the factors influencing the institution's relationship with its audience and the extent of their impact on planning public relations campaigns and programs.

The study Huang and Zhang [9] aimed to review public relations research in organizations from 2000 to 2010. Thirteen experimental studies were analyzed within the data set under study, where a scale was developed to measure the relationship of organizations with the public through trust, satisfaction, and commitment. The results showed that the relationship between public relations and social responsibility is affected by dealing with others and favoritism

The study Buhmann, et al. [10] aimed to evaluate the impact of Habermas's critical theory of communicative action in public relations research, and found that the use of Habermas has grown significantly, especially in the last decade. Three main thematic research groups influenced by Habermas' theory were discovered: public relations and the public sphere, dialogical relations between stakeholders, and public relations and communication ethics. Through them, topics such as transparency, accountability and legitimacy, corporate social responsibility communication, and reputation were analyzed.

The study Al Neaimi, et al. [1] aimed to highlight the importance of public relations research in organizations in the United Arab Emirates. It revealed that many public relations departments pay attention to research, but this field still needs more awareness and development in the future. Research is considered an essential and pivotal element for achieving the success of public relations programs and providing accurate information about organizations and the public.

The study Anani-Bossman and Tella [3] aimed to identify the extent to which public relations practitioners in Ghana use research in their daily activities. Many claimed that the value of what a practitioner does is only gained through research, measurement and evaluation. The study reveals that the practice of research in public relations is more of a theory than a practical application. In addition, the obstacles facing public relations practitioners in conducting research are; small numbers of practitioners in the department, insufficient funds, and lack of time.

3.2. Studies That Addressed the Realistic Topic of Measuring Public Relations Programs

The new study by Al-Jaid and Ahmed [11] aimed to identify the use of measuring and evaluating public relations management programs in business incubators and accelerators at Saudi universities. The study concluded with the importance of public relations departments' participation in Saudi universities in effective management of the organizational structure, the weakness of programs, and consequently the diversity of programs in public relations management, thanks to public relations in business incubators and accelerators in Saudi Arabia in producing media content and managing the social media accounts of incubators and accelerators in Saudi Arabia.

The study of Bin Saidan [12] aimed to measure the reputation of universities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its impact on the QS ranking, focusing on Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University as a model. It concluded that the university focused on six basic criteria as the foundations for building a university reputation scale, namely: organizational performance, quality of services, innovation methodology, leadership practices, governance procedures, and citizenship activities (community responsibility programs), which reflect the university's ability to achieve excellence in its internal management, improve its academic and administrative services, implement effective leadership practices, ensure its commitment to sound governance procedures, and contribute effectively to community activities. It also showed that Princess Nourah University achieved a prestigious reputation due to some indicators such as academic reputation, employment, and international research relations.

Huang and Zhang [9] aimed to examine the metrics that describe the relationships between organizations and their publics, particularly stakeholders. Identifying new theoretical and empirical research areas, the study worked to link theoretical research with practical practice. It concluded that the relationships between organizations and stakeholders now require a theoretical explanation and the adoption of new approaches to studying this communication in the digital context,

whether in large or small data sets. It also concluded that the digital relationships between organizations and stakeholders differ significantly in their conception from the common meanings in the fields of marketing and public relations.

Cherry, et al. [13] used FinBERT as an advanced tool to measure corporate impression management during crises, and explored the differences between the crisis environment and the pre-crisis environment in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study presented preliminary results of an ongoing study using FinBERT to analyze sentiment, with the aim of uncovering potential impression management strategies in corporate communication reports. It found that there are two types of behaviors that managers may exhibit while practicing impression management and analyzed the strategies used within each behavior, namely; concealment and reason. Concealment is defined as hiding negative outcomes or highlighting positive outcomes for the organization, while reason is the discrepancy in pure sentiment.

The study Woldearegay, et al. [14] aimed to develop a hybrid scale to measure organizational communication satisfaction by measuring communication satisfaction in civil service organizations in Addis Ababa through examining the seven dimensions of validity, namely; content validity, construct validity, factor validity, reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and canonical validity. All of them were found to be adequate, indicating improvement in measuring communication satisfaction. In addition, "communication satisfaction occurs when ideas are exchanged in an environment characterized by trust, respect, support, honesty, and constructive feedback (mutual understanding)".

Likely and Watson [15] examined the history of public relations research and measurement. It was concluded that the beginning of research and measurement was services provided by public relations departments to analyze the media.

The study Meng and Berger [16] aimed to enhance understanding of the challenges facing the measurement process in strategic communication practice. It concluded that organizations rely heavily on monitoring and analyzing social media, and most public relations practitioners agreed that measuring the value of public relations efforts is complex, especially in terms of operation and implementation.

The study Buhmann, et al. [17] addressed the topic of evaluating and measuring communication in public relations management, and focused on recent developments in this field. It concluded that there has been significant progress in the issues of evaluating and measuring communication, while at the same time some areas still need more work. Although practitioners appreciate the importance of evaluation and measurement, their actual application remains limited in some organizations and agencies.

The study Watson [18] aimed to shed light on the development of public relations measurement and evaluation over more than a century. It revealed that the development of measurement and evaluation parallels the development of public relations as an emerging communication practice.

A study Babst, et al. [19] addressed the issue of measuring the effectiveness of Out-of-home advertisers campaigns in South Africa. It concluded that there is a lack of effective evaluation methods to measure the effectiveness of Out-of-home media in achieving stated communication objectives, and confirmed that the development of reliable metrics is still in its early stages, in addition to the use of methods such as brand tracking, survey research, and interviews.

The study Meng and Berger [16] aimed to discover ways to measure the effectiveness of internal communication of organizations and link it to business performance by senior communication officials. It concluded that most communication officials should adopt the criterion of enhancing employee engagement and changing their behaviors to improve the measurement of internal communication.

Buhmann and Ingenhoff [20] a study to develop a new model for changes in building or shaping the image of the state, as a goal in international and liberal public relations to test it. The most prominent results concluded that the creation of the formation of the Brazilian image is affected by the different dimensions of each of the functional, stereotypical and aesthetic image. It also clarified the method of working the Portuguese image Cosette the basic influence of the mental image on dealing in particular.

The study Diab [21] seeks to determine the extent of knowledge of practitioners and advertising and marketing communications officials in companies about methods of measuring traditional advertising campaigns, as it concluded that there are several indicators, including: the number of followers of the company's account on social media sites, the extent of admiration for the company's advertisements on social media sites, and the rate of clicks achieved by the advertisement via the Internet.

3.3. The Most Important Research Conclusions - A Critical Overview of the Study's Most Prominent Findings

Results of the second-level analysis of the studies under analysis

Through this research, the scholarly heritage concerned with studying modern research trends in public relations research and measurement studies during the period 2011-2023 AD was reviewed. The aim was to identify the most important issues addressed by these studies and to identify the theoretical approaches and intellectual orientations from which they were based.

The following are the most prominent findings that can be presented in a critical manner, highlighting the recent trends in public relations research and measurement:

Regarding the nature of the research paths addressed by these studies, it has been shown that research and measurement are important components of public relations and corporate communications. The predominant focus of the studies was on the reality of research practice in organizations, its importance, and the objectives and tools used. The studies also did not address how research and its tools are developed in public relations practice, the ethics of conducting public relations research, how to transition from traditional tools and methods to digital ones and methods, or the applications of artificial intelligence. This is despite the fact that research helps identify public views of organizations, their impressions, satisfaction,

and corporate reputation, which are among the most important objectives of public relations. Research also helps shape future communication activities of organizations and lead to better decisions and improved results.

In the field of public relations measurement, it differs from the field of scientific research. Studies have generally been diverse, addressing various topics and examining diversity measures. However, most have focused solely on studying previously established standards. It has been concluded that applying different standardized standards to public relations communications teams is important, as it provides clarity on the application of various communication and administrative approaches applied by public relations departments across various entities. It also contributes to measuring specific standards in the organization's future public relations directives and strategies to achieve the objectives of public relations departments, as well as the strategic objectives and goals of senior management.

3.4. The Study Concluded with the Following Key Findings

- Research and measurement in public relations are topics that have attracted the attention of some academics and practitioners alike and still require further efforts.
- There is a scarcity of studies addressing this research topic compared to studies addressing measurement in public relations.
- The study showed that quantitative methods strategic decisions and mitigating problems.
- The study showed that quantitative methods are the most widely used in public relations research.
- The study demonstrated a greater awareness of traditional measurement methods compared to digital methods when measuring the effectiveness of public relations programs.
- Regarding the intensity of research interest, it became clear that the majority of studies focused on the scales developed by scholars in the field of public relations.
- There is a paucity of studies conducted in Arabic compared to those conducted in English.
- Key recommendations:
 - -Public relations practitioners and specialists should advocate for research and measurement.
 - -Experts, academics, and researchers in this field should develop modern, digital metrics that help measure the effectiveness of public relations programs.
- It is imperative that diversity and public relations professionals develop effective personal research tools or methods in order to activate and enhance public relations.

3.5. Suggested Studies

1. Study the reality of measurement in the Arab world compared to the reality in Western organizations
2. Study the effectiveness of measurement in evaluating public relations programs.
3. Study research and measurement, reality, practice and future outlook.

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