

# PUBLIC RELATION PRACTICES IN THE WEB 3.0

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## ABSTRACT

*Hubungan Masyarakat (Humas) adalah sebuah praktik komunikasi yang berdimensi luas dan memiliki banyak rupa salah satunya sebagai seni berkomunikasi. Pada satu sisi, humas dianggap sebagai seni dalam membangun hubungan yang secara unik diposisikan untuk menjembatani komunikasi yang efektif antara pihak organisasi atau perusahaan dengan para publiknya. Di sisi lain, praktik ini mengharuskan para pelakunya mengikuti aturan etika yang berlaku, diantaranya adalah peraturan perusahaan atau organisasi. Salah satu kondisi yang menyebabkan para praktisi Humas untuk kembali mengikuti arus adalah perkembangan teknologi. Web 3.0 jelas memberikan peluang dan tantangan bagi dunia kehumasan. Peluang utama yang ditawarkan oleh web 3.0 adalah semakin “menipisnya” jarak antara perusahaan dan para publiknya. Misalnya saja melalui media social, pihak perusahaan akan semakin mudah untuk berinteraksi dengan publiknya. Kemudian, keberadaan web 3.0 mempermudah para praktisi untuk mengumpulkan data mengenai public sesuai dengan yang ditargetkan. Selanjutnya, dengan data tersebut para praktisi humas mampu merancang kegiatan komunikasi yang kajian publik sesuai dengan targetnya. Sebaliknya, web 3.0 juga menghadirkan tantangan yang tidak sederhana bagi praktisi humas yakni penguasaan teknik aplikasi web 3.0 dan isu mengenai kerahasiaan data dan reputasi. Web 3.0 dengan segala keterbukaan informasi menyebabkan para praktisi harus berhati-hati dalam menggunakan data perusahaan atau publiknya dengan tetap memperhatikan tata etika informasi.*

**Kata Kunci:** Hubungan masyarakat, web 3.0

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## INTRODUCTION

Public relations (PR) field is one of communication practices that entwines multifaceted nature. At one side, it is respected as the art of relationship building which is uniquely positioned to establish effective communication between organizations and the public. The first world assembly of Public Relations Associations (1978), as cited in Heath (2001, p. 192), support this by defining PR practice as “the art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counseling organizational leaders, and implementing planned programs of action, which will serve both the organization and the public interest”. Moreover, PR is also considered as an important part of organization management. Harlow (1976), as cited in Tench & Yeomans (2006 , p. 4), further explains

this by stating that PR is “a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organization and its publics”. On the other hand, PR is also closely related to marketing and advertising tradition (Cropp & Pincus, 2001 ; Lattimore, 2007 ). In short, these dimensions enrich the frame of public relations area.

Following that, public relations field is also showing significant growth in both business and education sphere. According to Corporate Watch UK (2003), public relations “has grown in to a multi-billion dollar industry that has become an integral part of modern business and political life”. For example, this industry has recorded more than 6 billion dollars of global revenues with estimated 1.5 million public relations practitioners worldwide (Coorporate Watch UK, 2003; Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2000 ). In Australia itself, employment level in public relations industry has increased substantially within 10 years. From less than 13,000 people working in this area in 1999, the trend has significantly risen to more than 26,000 people in 2010 (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2011). Besides, statistics also show that public relations subject is a rising spectacle in academic field. It is constantly entitled a place among top three ranks in university enrolment across the globe (Carayol, 2010). In the United States, for instance, there are more than 200 colleges and universities are offering a degree or courses in public relations (Seitel, 2007).

As Irwin Ross (1959), as cited in Newson, Kruckeberg and Turk (2000 ) states that “the public relations field, in all its variety, inventiveness, flamboyance and solemn pretentiousness, can perhaps best be approached, at the outset, by an examination of a representative of its hardiest practitioners”, therefore the purpose of this essay is to present an overview of public relations (PR) field through practical approach. This essay will be divided into five sections. The first section describes a brief background of PR field while the second section provides a general profile of public relations practitioners including their daily routine and prerequisites needed to enter this area. The essay’s third section addresses on organizational structure of PR by using the University of Lampung in Indonesia as an example. The fourth section discusses issue of PR and new social media especially changes that it brings to PR practice. Finally, the last section analysis future of PR practices in terms of the upcoming web 3.0.

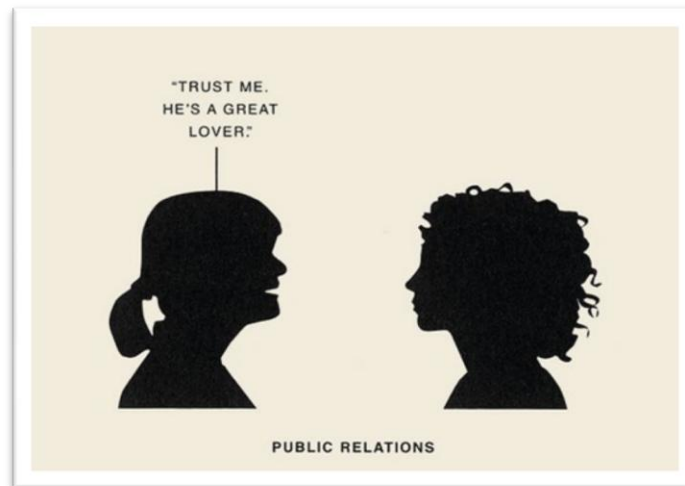
## **A Glance to Traditional Public Relations Practices**

Historically, the term of public relations was introduced in 1927 by Edward Bernays through his article of Crystallizing Public Opinion. Bernays (1927), as cited in Matera & Artigue (2000, p. 12), called public relations as “a vital tool of adjustment, interpretation and integration between individuals, groups and society”. Bernays then was entitled as “the Father of PR” as he combined wide array of social science principles such as anthropology, sociology and psychology to highlight the approach of PR practices. However, it is Ivy Lee who was considered as the “real father of modern public relations”(Seitel, 2007, p. 29) due to his idea of information transparency. Lee was a former Wall Street reporter who believed that “high-powered companies and individuals have a responsibility to inform their publics” (p.31). Since then, the modern PR practice has raised significant development in every sector.

As Henslowe (2003 , p. vii) states that “public relation is not, not it should be, a standalone profession, in isolation from the rest of the business world”, it is understandable that PR as a part of communication practices is closely related to other subjects such as

marketing and advertising. Due to that, Lowe (1986, p. 3) even states that “these professions can overlap and support one another activities”. For example, PR is using persuasive techniques in order to communicate with its publics while marketing and advertising are also implementing the same method. In addition, PR may also utilize advertising to inform its public about a new program. Furthermore, marketing and advertising are also helping PR in drawing the organization’s image. However, there are differences between PR, marketing and advertising although these three practices are correlated to one and another. Advertising, for instance, promotes products or services produced by organizations or companies while PR promotes the company itself. Likewise, marketing is aimed at gaining more profit by satisfying consumers rather than achieving positive image and maintaining good relationship which are main purposes of PR. PR usually has a longer-term planning whilst advertising and marketing implements shorter-term projects only (Lowe, 1986). Pictures from Ivan Raszl (2007) below may help to further illustrate the differences between advertising, PR and marketing.

**Picture 1.**  
**The Differences Between Public Relations and Marketing**



Source: Raszl, 2007

## Getting to Know Public Relations Workforces

As a part of organization, PR practitioner has several important roles which also illustrate its daily activities. There are four main roles of public relations practitioner in organization (Cutlip et al., 2000 ; Kitchen, 2008). They are:

1. Communication technician

This role is considered as initial stage of responsibility for most of PR practitioners. It involves creation of communication materials for organization such as producing news content, organizing events and many more. It also deals with the media.

2. Expert prescriber

In this role PR practitioners are entitled with authority to deal with PR issues. Here, PR practitioners act as experts, whose duties are including defining the PR problems and solutions, developing the program and taking responsibility in its implementations.

3. Communication facilitator.

This third role classifies PR practitioners as “sensitive listeners and information brokers” (Cutlip et al., 2000 , p. 41). In other words, this role requires PR to function as liaisons, interpreters and mediators between organization and its public.

4. Problem-solving facilitator.

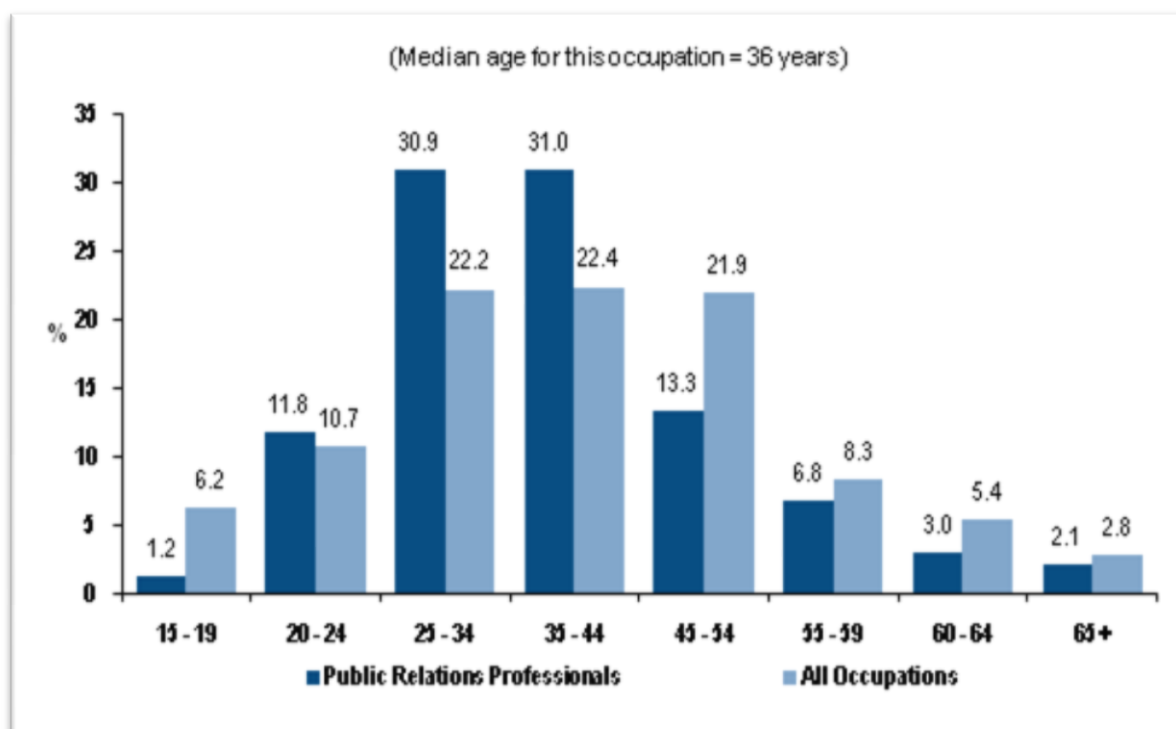
The last role requires PR practitioners to collaborate with other managers to define and solve organizational problems. This role leads PR practitioners to embrace what Broom and Smith (1979), as cited in Cutlip et al (200), called “public relation thinking to management decision making”.

Similarly, Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) also defines fourteen activities that generally related to public relations’ working routine. They are (1) publicity, (2) communication, (3) public affairs, (4) issues management, (5) government relation, (6) financial public relations, (7) community relations, (8) industry relations, (9) minority relations, (10) advertising, (11) press agency, (12) promotion, (13) media relation and (14) propaganda (Newsom et al., 2000 , p. 3). In short, these roles and activities represent that PR practitioners operate an active function through their daily routine.

Today’s public relations practitioners are young and well-educated. A survey conducted by PRSA on its members in 2000 showed that the average age of PR practitioners is 39 years old. PRSA stated this data suggested that PR practitioners are “getting younger than at least last decade” (Lattimore, 2007 , p. 4). Similar fad is also happening in Australia. In 2011, based on its survey, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) reported that around 60 % of PR practitioners are aged 25 to 44 years old with 25.2 % aged 45 years and over. The median age for PR practitioners is 36 years which means 3 years younger than the average age for all occupations. This data also indicates that most of PR practitioners are at productive age of worker.

Likewise, DEEWR also found that around 87.4% of PR practitioners have graduate qualifications compare to 53 % in last 10 years. The main qualification is bachelor or higher degree at 64.8%. While a further 16.2% have an advanced diploma or diploma and 6.4% have a certificate III or IV. The same survey also noted that more than half of public relations practitioners say that their degree programs focused on public relations. Meanwhile others educational background are journalism or communications-related subject with a public relations internship or related work experiences (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2011). In sum, PR practitioners nowadays are equipped with better education and at productive period of working.

**Picture 4.**  
**Age profile of PR Practitioners in Australia**



Source: Deewr, 2011

According to Smith (2006, p. 3), PR is “one of the most female-intensive industries”. It is understandable then if female practitioners outnumber male in this field. In 1987, PRSA recorded that almost 48 % of its membership belong to female practitioners with 51 % of the public relations workforce around the globe were female’s share (Hunt & Thompson, 1988). Two decades later, similar pattern still exists. Lattimore (2007 ) notes that more than 7 in 10 of the practitioners were female. Likewise, the latest statistics from DEEWR show that female practitioners occupy more than 47 % of public relations employment share in Australia compare to male practitioners with less than 30 % (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2011). Hunts and Thompson (1988) argue that this unequal gender proportion is related to economic reason. According to their survey, female practitioners were generally paid “30 % less than the lowest salary of their male counterpart with the same degree” (p. 49). However, Bates (1983), as cited in Hunt and Thompson (1988), claims that educational background plays the key role. According to Bates, female seems to have better academic background. Recent data from the United State National Center for Education Statistics, supports this argument by showing that from 4,475 students received a Bachelor’s Degree in Public Relations in the 2008–2009 academic year, there were only 869 male students among them. (Public Relations Society of America, 2011). Hence, female is still believed as the major participant in PR practice.

According to Martson (1968), as cited in Wright and Turk (2006, p. 574), there are a number of characteristics that distinguish PR profession from other occupation. They were: “a defined area of competence, an organized body of knowledge, self-consciousness whose competence of entrances determined by controlled access, continuing education, support for research, aid in education of competent replacements and independence”. Therefore, there are several perquisites needed in order to enter this field of practice. To begin with,

education is important capitals to enter the PR world. As. Paluszek (2000) explains that when “some new professions are being born, the university becomes the chief port of entry for these professions. In fact a profession gains its identity by making the university the port of entry” (p.6). This is reasonable since academic sphere forms solid bases for future practitioners. A survey on 41 PR practitioners show that most of them believe that education especially in university provided them with mental conceptualisation of PR practice and “it has served them well” (Hon, 2006 , p. 8). By implementing public relations theory into practice “had helped their career progression” due to more and better job opportunities, respect and credibility from colleagues and more rapid rise from technician to management rank (p. 9).

The United States Occupational Information Network (2010) listed some of skills that needed by PR practitioners and might be obtained through education as below.

**Table 1.**  
**Skills Needed for PR Practitioners**

<b>Skill</b>	<b>Description</b>
Speaking	Talking to others to convey information effectively.
Active Listening	Giving full attention to what other people are saying, taking time to understand the points being made, asking questions as appropriate, and not interrupting at inappropriate times.
Critical Thinking	Using logic and reasoning to identify the strengths and weaknesses of alternative solutions, conclusions or approaches to problems.
Reading Comprehension	Understanding written sentences and paragraphs in work related documents.
Writing	Communicating effectively in writing as appropriate for the needs of the audience.
Coordination	Adjusting actions in relation to others' actions.
Social Perceptiveness	Being aware of others' reactions and understanding why they react as they do.
Time Management	Managing one's own time and the time of others.
Complex Problem Solving	Identifying complex problems and reviewing related information to develop and evaluate options and implement solutions.
Judgment and Decision Making	Considering the relative costs and benefits of potential actions to choose the most appropriate one.

Source: The United States Occupational Information Network (2010)

However, having merely a degree on PR course does not necessarily mean that future practitioners will enter the PR world easily. Mercer (2006) suggests that future practitioners must also engage themselves to some activities such as internship, seminars or membership to PR organizations in order to complement their educational pursue. By taking internship program, following related seminars as well as joining PR organizations, future

practitioners will be provided with what Van Leuven (1989, p. 36) called “touch with the bottom-line realities of the modern business world”. Talking with other PR people about their experiences, successes and failures are always important. Exchanging ideas, project or even small talk is an important activity. Moreover, through these kinds of activities, future practitioners will also be able to acquire one of essential channels for their entrance in PR world, the industry contact. As public relations is not a direct-mail business, a successful networking that involves personal connections and legwork is believed to have important rules to path the career. This is also a great method to stay in touch with employers who are looking for solid hires or peers who may know of potential PR leads to share with future practitioners. In addition, possessing contacts and information and being able to be contacted are key factors on success in public relations and will add value to future practitioners performance (Hook, 2011). To sum it up, experiences obtained from communication-related activities may also support future practitioners to enter the PR industry.

### **Web 3.0 and The Future of Public Relations**

The phenomenon of Web 2.0 applications for instance Facebook, Twitter and YouTube has become foremost discussion around the globe. Since their first introduction, these new social media have successfully attracted millions of users, many of whom have integrated these sites into their daily practices and transformed them from a situation of information scarcity to one of information abundance. Facebook for example, as the site gets more popular, claims that it has more than 500 million active users and 50% of users log on to this site everyday (Facebook, 2011), while Twitter records nearly 100 million tweets written per day with 175 million registered users since its first launch in 2006 (Solis, 2009). Hence, new social media as Web 2.0 applications has been brought into world’s attention due to its remarkable usage in the society.

Obviously, PR industry cannot ignore the existence new social media. Breakenridge (2008, as cited in Macnamara, 2010, p. 3) even points out that the availability and abundant usage of new social media in the society have “evolved public relations into PR 2.0”. In fact, new social media as part of web 2.0 applications has triggered changes in PR world. First, new social media with its ability to establish an interactive and multilateral communications has facilitated PR practitioners with opportunities to interact with their stakeholders in a new way. Compare to old media such as television and printed media, new social media has induced what Jenkins (2006, as cited in Macnamara, 2010, p.3) called “participatory culture”. Sollis (2008) further supports this by claiming that new social media has shifted the way PR communicates with its stakeholder. From “monologue to dialogue”, from “a relatively static page that transmits information one-way to a platform for collaboration, coordination and interaction”. Secondly, new social media provides different approaches of seeing the roles of public relations. As stated by Cropp and Pincus (2001 ) that the adaptive nature of PR practitioners enforces them to be responsive to their changing environment, it is then understandable if new social media affects PR’s roles in organization. Lattimore (2007 , p. 381) suggests PR practitioners’ transformation from “media craft person to communication planner” as one of the evolving changes. It means that rather than producing specific product or programs by using only their set of traditional abilities, such as writing, speaking and interpersonal skills, today’s PR practitioners are forced to “know how to use every medium most effectively and creatively”. In short, new social media delivers remarkable effects to today’s PR practice.

The upcoming presence of Web 3.0 starts to yield buzz among PR practitioners. Some see it as transformation of major websites into web services which will expose their information to their users (Hempel, 2009; Iskold, 2007 ; Nations, 2011). Others consider Web. 3.0 as modification of how websites are created and the way its users interact with them (Hempel, 2009; Keen, 2008; Nations, 2011). Strickland (2011) defines Web 3.0 as search engine that works not only to find the information that we need but also “interpret the context” of our request. Related to that, Web 3.0 as new emerging tools will likely shape the future of PR practice. Gain (2011) even states that web 3.0 will impact the practice in such way that “PR will be even more important to an organization”. It is understandable since the upcoming Web 3.0 will provide PR practitioners with a giant database that will support its program. For example, Web 3.0 will be able to assist PR practitioners in collecting specified data related to its target audiences. In addition, Web 3.0 will also enable PR practitioners to create specified and relevant communication content for its audiences. Hence, the upcoming Web 3.0 holds future promises for PR practitioners in implementing their tasks.

However, the upcoming presence of Web. 3.0 will also encompass several considerations for PR practitioners in the future. There are at least two main challenges that need to take into account by PR practitioners. First, if Web 3.0 is to be embrace, PR practitioners will need more technical skills in related area. As pointed out by Leyden (2011, as cited in Brandon, 2011) that most of PR practitioners are not equipped with technical skills, therefore PR practitioners need to attain more specified skills, such as computer programming ability, in order to maximise the use of Web 3.0. The second challenge will be the issues of privacy and reputation (Macnamara, 2010). For example, as Web 3.0 will derive information from all websites, PR practitioners will need to pay extra attention in using the data. Having people’s data without their permission will likely lead PR practitioners to “public criticism and crises affecting the public image and reputation of organization”. Therefore, it will be essential for PR practitioners to take privacy into thoroughly consideration before using Web 3.0. To sum it up, aside from its potential opportunities, Web 3.0 also boasts some future considerations.

## **CONCLUSION**

In summary, public relations is one of communication practices that shows notable growth in business world. Consequently, most of today’s PR practitioners are more prepared with related educational qualifications as well as supporting skills. At the same time, public relations plays significant roles within organization structure due to PR’s aims of creating and maintaining mutual relationship between organization and its stakeholders. Therefore, public relations practitioners always need to be aware with latest change in their surrounding including the issue of new social media and upcoming presence Web 3.0.

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