# The Utilization of New Media in Online Public Relations Activities in Public Universities

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Online PR usage among organizations is growing tremendously. Organizations are now building and maintaining social media public pages to build relationships with the online audience and to enhance interest in their organizations. However, against this background the perceptions, practices and knowledge of online PR among Jordanian PR practitioners remain unclear and have not been widely studied qualitatively. Thus, this study will investigate the utilization of online PR using a sample of PR practitioners who have recently begun using social media in Jordanian public universities. Thus, using a qualitative approach, this study will seek an understanding of the concept of "online PR" by PR practitioners, investigate the utilization of online PR activities in Jordan, seek to gain an understanding of the antecedent factors influencing the practice of the online PR concept by practitioners in public universities and explore the level of ICT literacy among PR practitioners in public universities. This study however, will focus only on the 10 PR managers in 10 universities
KEYWORDS: Online PR, social media, new media, PR practitioners, utilization, universities, Jordan

## INTRODUCTION

Public Relations (PR) plays a vital role in any organization. It supports an organization's activities while reinforcing the image of a good institution. Ahmad and Ismail (2015) believed that PR aspires to maintain a beneficial mutual and long-term relationship between organizations and its keys public through balancing the interest of each party. Moreover, Tu (2017) affirmed that PR knowing and using brand/reputation guidelines may be best able to manage or mollify stakeholders. Also, Vosoghpour and Jafari (2016) agreed that PR is a center of communication inside and outside the institution. As known, the Internet has changed the world and especially the practices of PR (Brown, Sikes, & Willmott,2013; McCorkindale, 2010; Robson & James, 2013; Wright & Hinson, 2013; Zerfass, Verhoeven, Tench, Moreno, & Verčič, 2011). The Internet has become a critical tool for PR because the Internet is vital for a majority of people

(Petrovici, 2014). Therefore, PR today moved quickly to use ICT various Internet sites, and these sites, with all their strengths and weaknesses, are managed by PR (Vosoghpour & Jafari, 2016). According to TU (2017), the challenge today for PR to be influential rests in adjusting to the constant drum of news from social media in the Internet and mobile applications. Simultaneously, Smith (2013) has argued that social media enable the development of a relationship between marketing and PR by enabling a greater capacity for interaction and the cultivation of relationships.

In fact, the usage of social media is important in all sectors including higher education. Such concepts as PR, marketing based on relationships, prosumer and social media are essential for communication processes at higher education facilities as well as image management in relationship to both the external and internal environments (Koszembar-Wiklik, 2016). Kelleher and Sweetser (2012) asserted

that university applicants, students and recent alumni are likely to overlap demographically with Generation-Y publics who are often assumed to be the most prevalent users of social media such as Facebook, YouTube, Wikipedia, and blogs. Therefore, university communicators span the boundaries between the student communities assumed to have already adopted social media and the university professionals feeling the gravity of the choices they must make regarding new media (Kelleher & Sweetser, 2012).

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

Jordan came in first rank globally in terms of social media users at a 90% rate According to the Pew Research Centre (Jordan Comes in First on Social Media, 2016), and this shows the importance of using the Internet among the Jordanian population. Eight types of social media that are the most frequent used in Jordan include WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Google+, Snapchat and LinkedIn (Arab Social Media Report, 2015). According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), a total of 53% of the Jordanian population had access to the Internet by the end of 2015, up from 27% five years earlier. Furthermore, national figures from the Telecommunications Regulation Commission (TRC) estimated that about 7.9 million Jordanians had access to the Internet, resulting in a penetration rate of 83% by the end of 2015 (About Jordan, 2016: Freedom on the Net, 2016; Social Media in Jordan, 2016).

The Jordanian government has endeavored to introduce Internet technology and ICT in all sectors including the education sector (Jordan Investment Commission, 2018; Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, 2017) in order to meet the demand of higher education services that expects to include 100,000 international students by 2020. This growing is expected to contribute around JD 929

(approx. £833 million) to the Jordanian economy (Farinha, Gouveia, & Nunes, 2015). However, the lack of utilization of Internet technology, especially social media such as tools for PR in organizations, especially in institutions of higher education, may hamper this development. In addition, the lack of utilization may hamper the further development of the ICT sector, which was the third highest contributor to Jordan's GDP in 2015; contributing over 14% with more than 400 companies in telecom, IT, business outsourcing, mobile and online content (Doing Business in Jordan, 2014).

According to the Global Information Technology report 2016 (WEF), Jordan is ranked 32th among the 139 countries listed in the Quality of Educational System ratings, 47th in the availability of latest technologies, and 47th in the capacity for innovation (Jordan Investment Commission, 2018). Jordanian infrastructure is very strong in the field of information and communication technology, and the value of tenders issued by the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology during 2017 was about 20 million dinars, while it was about 7 million dinars in 2016 (Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, 2017). The Jordanian government is also working to train university staff in using technology and creating effective communication channels with current and potential clients/service users. which is considered as an important role that should be performed by PR departments (Bsharah, Gasaymeh, & Abdelrahman, 2014; Koszembar-Wiklik, 2016).While the Jordanian government is working to improve all sectors and to direct them towards technology, including the education sector, unfortunately, the adoption and usage of ICT in the teaching- and learning-process is quite low among users in higher education institutions in Jordan (Khasawneh, 2012, as cited in Al-Shboul, Al-Saideh, & Al-Labadi, 2017). Consequently, both the non-utilization or proper utilization in this

technology by universities may cause significant losses in the government budget.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the problem statement discussed earlier, the main research questions for this study are: 1) how PR practitioner utilize online PR as a tool to communicate with their audience and 2) what factors effect this use?

### The Theory of the Diffusion of Innovation

The basic questions related to the theory of innovation address how, why, when, who, where and at what rate innovative ideas and technologies spread in a social system (Wani & Ali, 2015). Moreover, this theory specially addresses individuals as the unit of analysis (Young, 2017). These innovations allow PR practitioners to target their publics directly without the intervention of editors and reporters who can act as both gatekeepers and censors of information (Savery, 2005). Furthermore, the Diffusion of Innovations Theory address the idea that innovations can diffuse from organization to organization through interorganizational networks, much in the same way that innovations diffuse across individual social systems (Rogers, 2003). Furthermore, many scholars and researchers have used the diffusion of innovation theory to explore how and why PR practitioners use online PR in their organizations and their impacts on improving and developing relationships between an organization and its internal and external audiences (Alasfor, 2016; Al-Shohaib, Al-Kandari, & Abdulrahim, 2009; Al-Shohaib, Frederick, Jamal Al-Kandari, & Dorsher, 2010; Inya, 2017; Liptak, 2012; Moran, 2014; Moreno, Navarro, Tench, & Zerfass, 2015; Young, 2017). According to these scientists, this theory is best suited to the impact of Internet technology on the performance of individuals working in an organization and how Internet technology contributed to the development of their work.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study is expected to be provided solutions to the decision makers in the universities in order to improve the practice of PR in its communication with the public and the achievement of other goals such as improving the reputation, mental image and promote itself through those effective tools that are accessible to all and in contrast to traditional tools of PR. In the same time, the findings of this study are expected to provide guidance for improving PR practitioner's practices in Jordan, especially in universities.

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