

Analysis of Profession Reputation as Possible Indicator of Crisis in Public Relations

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Abstract

The findings of relevant research conducted in European countries, as well as diverse eminent authors of books and handbooks on public relations and reputable communications experts have pointed out the problem of the tainted reputation of public relations. It is precisely these attitudes that were the reason for conducting the research "Perception of the identity, image and reputation of public relations", whose goal was to learn how various groups of people – PR experts, communications students, and adults who do not deal with public relations – perceive the stated profession. The paper presents the key findings and conclusions of the research, providing detailed insight into this issue.

Keywords: public relations, reputation, image, research

1. Introduction

The results of relevant research conducted in over forty European countries showed that numerous PR experts consider that their profession has issues with image and reputation. Similar attitudes have been taken by publics in some European countries (for instance, Great Britain). Considering that in question is a profession dealing with image and reputation, it is possible that such an attitude can instil doubts about the competence of PR experts, and cause suspicion in the efficiency of the profession to manage not only its image, but also the image and reputation of its clients. It is precisely such questions and presumptions, as well as the abovementioned studies that were the reason for conducting the research “Perception of the identity, image and reputation of public relations”, whose aim was to learn how various groups of people perceive the stated profession. The research was conducted among PR experts, communications students, as well as among adults who are not involved in PR.

The aim of the paper is to point out the reputation of and state in PR because the reputation of a profession is not only a set of abstract ideas, but a reflection and indicator of the actual state in the profession – the professionalism of its employees, the effectiveness of its tools and principles, the adaptation to ethical, technological and market requirements, as well as relations and cooperation with diverse stakeholders. This is important for any profession, especially for one whose main objective is looking after the image and reputation of its own clients. Therefore, the essential question is posed – does the tainted reputation of public relations affect client confidence in the professionalism and effectiveness of the profession, its experts, tools and principles?

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the importance of reputation for public relations; Section 3 is devoted to the central problem of the paper – the reputation of public relations; in Section 4, presented are the main goal and hypotheses, described is the methodology and presented are the results of the research “Perception of the identity, image and reputation of public relations”; and the paper ends with a conclusion.

2. Significance of Reputation for PR

To begin with, it is important to understand the significance of reputation for public relations. The Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR), in its definition of public relations, places reputation at the very centre of the profession. “Public Relations is about reputation – the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you. Public Relations is the discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behaviour. It is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics.” (CIPR, n.d.)

According to the mentioned definition, reputation is the essence of public relations. Therefore, it is important to examine how reputation is gained. Reputation is the “totality of value judgements that are formed over time about organisations, brands and people” (Bentele et al., 2005, p. 604), and it is different from image because it is formed by achieving trust and communication among the specific stakeholders of the organisation and in the assessment procedure, and not only through communication measures (Helm, 2007, p. 46). Fombrun (1996, pp. 5-6) explains the process of creating the corporate reputation. This model is applicable to explain the process of creating reputation of anyone or anything including a reputation of any profession.

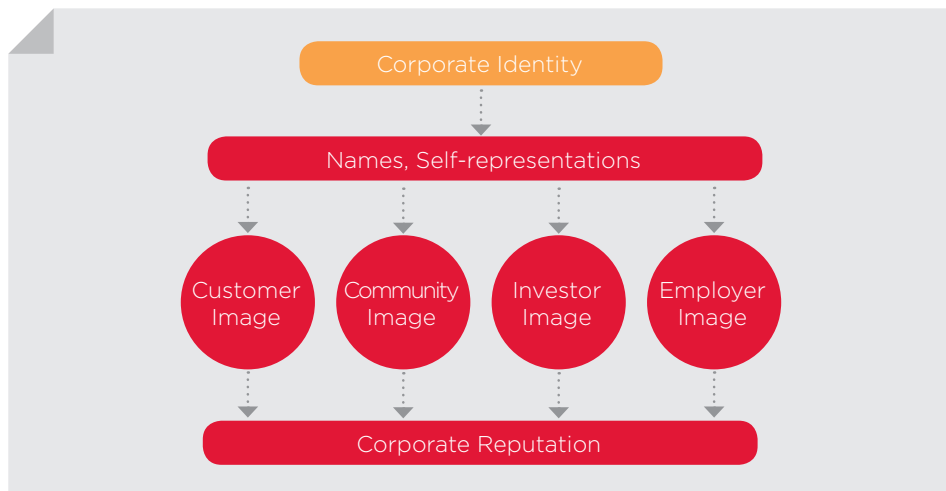


Figure 1. Fombrun's corporate reputation model (Fombrun, 1996, pp. 5-6)

The main point is that many different stakeholders – in this case, clients of communication agencies, media, media representatives, media audience and all other segments of society related to public relations, create their own perception or image of communication experts and agencies, and finally the whole profession. Altogether, the images of different stakeholders create a broader profession perception which we call reputation. Therefore, profession reputation is not something abstract – it is an indicator of the expertise of the profession’s experts, efficiency of the profession’s work principles, methods and tools as well as relations with the key stakeholders. That is why reputation is so important for any profession and especially for the one that looks after reputation. In the case of public relations, the profession’s reputation can be an indicator of how the profession is looking after reputation generally – including clients’ reputation as well. This leads to an important question: what is the reputation of the profession looking after the reputation of its own clients?

3. Reputation of Public Relations

Insights into the reputation of public relations were provided by the comprehensive European study – European Communication Monitor 2011 (Zerfass et al., 2011, pp. 21-26). Participating in the study were 2,209 communications experts from 43 European countries. The results showed that 41% of communications experts consider that public relations is often mentioned in the media in a negative context, and nearly three quarters (73%) claim that this taints the reputation of communications experts and confidence in their expertise.

Some studies showed that the public also, in certain European countries consider the reputation of public relations to be quite poor. Banham (2014) presented the results of a survey by the British portal *PRweek*, in which 1000 respondents participated. The results showed that 66% of Britons consider that public relations is in a reputation crisis, that 78% believe that most *PR campaigns* are *spin*, and that an astounding 72% consider that public relations should not have the status of a profession or occupation.

Even some eminent communications experts spoke about the tarnished reputation of public relations. For instance, speaking about the reputation crisis of public relations was British public relations expert and director of Deliberate PR Benjamin Webb (2013). He described this situation as ironic and paradoxical because in question is precisely a profession concerned

with image and reputation. Webb considers that the reasons for the poor image of public relations in the British public is insufficient knowledge on the stated profession, as well as ingrained stereotypes that link public relations with manipulation and propaganda. Similar reasons for such a public perception were emphasised by some relevant authors like Botan and Hazelton (1989), Kitchen (1997) and Cutlip et al. (2000), who believe that public relations is negatively perceived in the public due to the usual connection to manipulation and deceit. Apart from Great Britain, in other countries too there were those who highlighted this issue. Also highlighting the tainted reputation of public relations was President of the Croatian Public Relations Association (HUOJ) Aleksandra Kolarić (2012). As the main reasons for this, she stated the political scandals in Croatia, in which public relations were mentioned, as well as the media that in these circumstances depicted the entire profession as utterly immoral. The stated studies and opinions of various experts and authors motivated the conducting of the research “Perception of the identity, image and reputation of public relations”, whereby an attempt was made to gain new insights into the image and reputation of public relations.

4. “Perception of the Identity, Image and Reputation of Public Relations” Research

4.1. Goal, Hypotheses and Methodology of Research

The goal of the “Perception of the identity, image and reputation of public relations” research was to find out how various public perceive public relations and how they assess the image and reputation of the stated profession. The research was conducted from 5 May to 15 July 2015, and prior to the conducting of the research, defined were the following hypotheses:

The reputation of public relations is poor;

Public relations has a poor media and public image;

The more familiar people are with public relations, the better they consider the image and reputation of public relations.

The research was conducted on three groups of researchers; the sample consisted of public relations experts (Sample A), communications students (Sample B) and adults who do not have a PR background and are not involved in PR (Sample C). The questionnaire consisted of seven blocks of questions, and it was nearly identical for all three groups of respondents. The

survey, in the *Google docs* format, was completed by all Group A respondents, 30% of Group B respondents (communications students, at Croatian Studies, University of Zagreb) and nearly 80% of Group C respondents. On the other hand, the survey in print form was completed by 70% of Group B respondents (journalism students at the Faculty of Political Science, Public Relations students at Edward Bernays University College, Business Communications Management students at VERN University of Applied Sciences), as all as about 20% of Group C respondents (over 60 years of age).

4.2. Sample A

The first group of respondents consisted of 30 public relations experts from ten communications agencies in Zagreb (Croatia): Media Val, Hauska & Partner Croatia, Millenium Promocija, Komunikacijski laboratorij¹, Unex Communications, Madison Consulting, Indigo komunikacije, LuxLucis, Komunikacijski ured Colić, Laco i Partneri, as well as Dialog Komunikacije. The number of respondents varied from one agency to the next. The smallest number of respondents per agency was one, and the largest, five. The average amount was three respondents per agency. The following figure shows Group A's sex ratio.

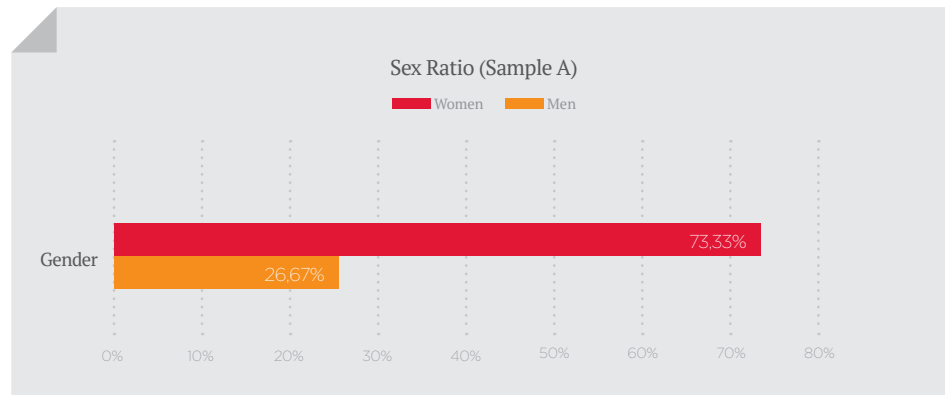


Figure 2. Group A's sex ratio (N=30)

1 At the time this research was conducted, the name of the agency was Abrakadabra integrirane komunikacije. According to the newspaper *Poslovni dnevnik* (Paparella, 2016), in February 2016, the agency changed its name to Komunikacijski laboratorij. In the article it was mentioned that a possible reason for the name change was the off-the-record information that the online platform of Agrokor would be called Abrakadabra. However, also stated in the mentioned article is the explanation provided by Komunikacijski laboratorij that the name change was due exclusively to internal reasons and plans for the future.

The previous figure shows that sample A consists of nearly three-fourth female PR experts and only one-third male PR experts. *The Research on the state and reputation of the PR profession in Croatia* (HUOJ, Ipsos Puls, 2014) showed that, among Croatian communications experts, 72% were women. A larger women's representation in PR is not the case only in Croatia; in most countries, approx. 70% of PR practitioners are women (Edwards, 2006, p. 176; Tkalac Verčić, 2016, p. 39). These data confirm the relevance of Sample A.

It is important to mention that over half of the respondents had from 3 to 9 years of working experience in public relations, nearly a third between 10 and 19, as well as 10% with over 20 years. The average number of years of work experience in PR among the surveyed experts amounted to nine (9.2). When examining the average number of years of experience in PR by sex, the deviations from the group average are quite low. For female PR experts, the average number of years of work experience amounts to nine and a half years (9.59), while that average for their male colleagues amounts to 8 years (8.125). The stated data indicates that experts with significant work experience participated in the research – at the time of the research, 93% of them had 3 or more years of work experience in PR.

4.3. Sample B

When selecting Sample B respondents, the most important criterion was that they were students of a public relations graduate study programme or some related track. Therefore, the aim was to conduct research among students who had already completed a three-year communication science undergraduate study programme, during which they acquired certain knowledge on public relations. Furthermore, the following criterion was that the respondents were doing their studies in Zagreb. Consequently, the research was carried out among students of the only two state faculties from the University of Zagreb, as well as the only two private universities in Zagreb that offered, according to the “PR education” (HUOJ, n.d.) text, graduate study programmes based on public relations at the time the research was carried out. Thereby, the population of Zagreb students in graduate study programmes with a focus on public relations was credibly encompassed. Sample B consisted of 100 undergraduates from the following study programmes and higher education institutions:

30 first and second year students from the Communication Studies university graduate study programme, “Public Relations” track (Croatian Studies, University of Zagreb),

30 second year students from the Journalism university graduate study programme, “Public Relations” track (Faculty of Political Science, University of Zagreb),
 24 first and second year students at the “Public Relations” professional graduate study programme (Edward Bernays University College),
 16 first year students of the “Business Communications Management” specialist graduate study programme (VERN University of Applied Sciences).

Among the surveyed communication science students, there is an even larger share of women (82%) than among PR experts (73%). This is an indicator that the trend of an even greater number of women in public relations could continue in the future. That Sample B is relevant by sex is confirmed by Figure 3, which shows the actual sex ratio at the stated Zagreb higher education institutions.

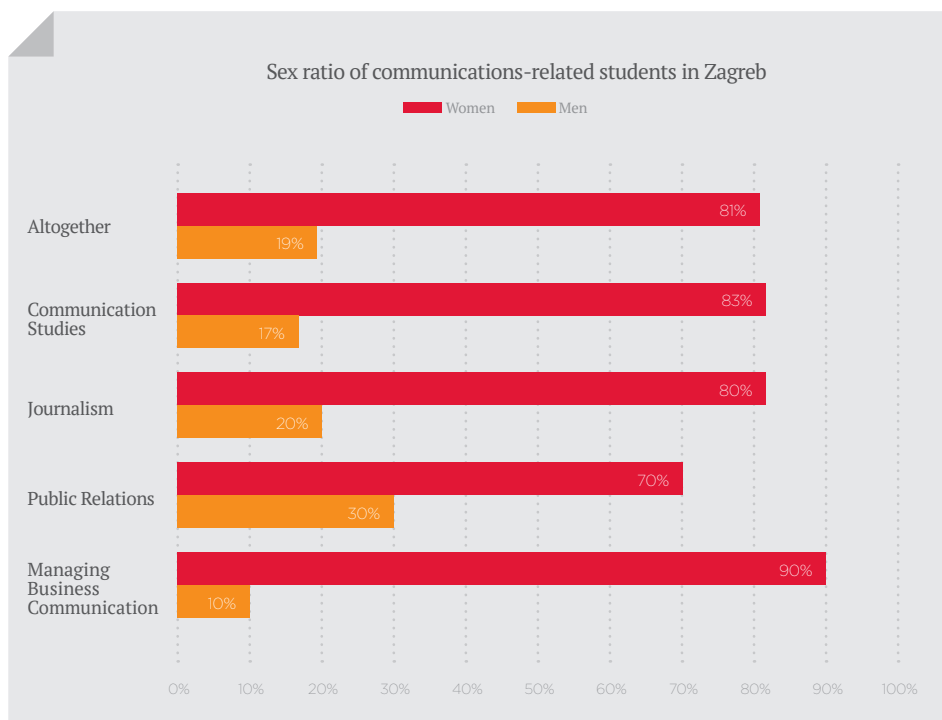


Figure 3. Ratio of communications-related graduate students by sex (Zagreb)² (N=100)

2 Sources: Student Administration of Croatian Studies, University of Zagreb; Chair of Journalism and Public Relations Department, Faculty of Political Science, University of Zagreb, Professor Božo Skoko; Secretariat of Edward Bernays University College; Head of “Business Communications Management” specialist graduate professional study programme, VERN University of Applied Sciences, Professor Ivan Tanta.

4.4. Sample C

Sample C consisted of 100 adult Croatian citizens who were not doing their studies in or working in public relations. Table 1 shows the number and ratio of respondents by age and compares them to data on age structure of adult inhabitants taken from the 2011 *Census of population, households and dwellings* (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2013, p. 11, pp. 21-22).

Table 1. Segmented overview of Sample C by demography (N=100)

Segmented overview of Sample C by demography				
Age groups	Adult population by age group		Group C respondents by age group	
	No. of inhabitants	Share in number of adult inhabitants	No. of respondents	Share of respondents
18 – 25	415 848	12%	12	12%
26 – 34	528 245	15%	15	15%
35 – 44	571 687	16%	17	17%
45 – 60	998 344	29%	32	32%
Over 60	972 910	28%	24	24%
Total	3 487 034	100%	100	100%

Data from Table 1 show sample relevance by age structure. As for ratio according to sex, the sample is also relevant, although there are smaller deviations. According to data from the 2011 *Census on population, households and dwellings* (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2013, p. 11), the share of adult men in the total adult population amounts to 47% and the share of adult women amounts to 53%. In Sample C, there is also a large share of female respondents (59%) compared to male respondents (41%).

4.5. Research Results

4.5.1. PR Image and Reputation

At the beginning of the research, it was important to grasp whether people who are not involved in PR understand what that profession deals with. Group C respondents had to assess how well they understood with what the employees of twelve professions do, of which three were

artistic, three technical, three from the area of the social sciences and three from the area of the natural sciences. Included among the professions from the area of social sciences was public relations. The aim was to learn how well people who do not work in public relations, according to their self-assessment, understand the stated profession compared to the other professions. On the other hand, respondents from groups A and B (communications experts and communications students) had to assess whether people who are not involved in public relations know what that profession is about. Figure 4 shows the answers of groups A and B, and this is followed by Table 2 with answers from Group C.

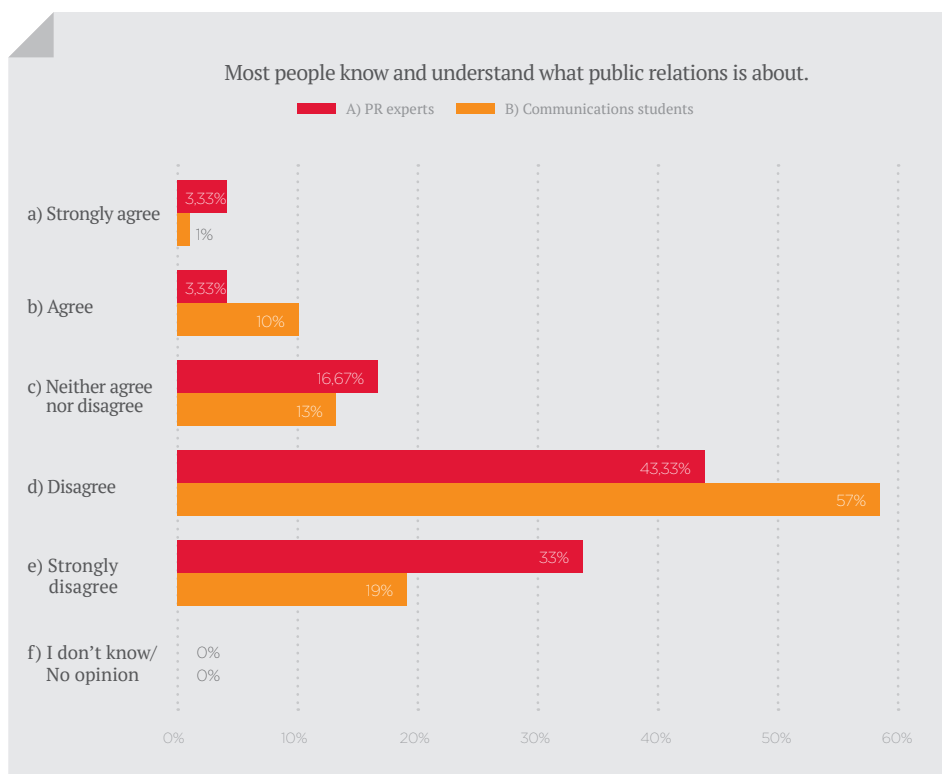


Figure 4. Level of knowledge of publics on public relations – answers of groups A (N=30) and B (N=100)

Figure 4 shows that most PR experts and communications students consider that most people do not know exactly what public relations is about. Table 2 shows the results of respondents

who are not involved in public relations, i.e. their assessment on how much they understand what public relations is about.

Table 2. Understanding various professions – summary overview of answers to Group C (N=100)

Understanding various professions – summary overview of answers to Group C						
	PR expert	Marketing expert	Journalist	Artistic professions*	Technical professions**	Professions from the natural sciences***
Mostly / completely understand	77%	85%	88%	77%	59%	56%

Note. *In the questionnaire: industrial designer, theatrical scenographer, academic painter.

**In the questionnaire: electronics engineer, mechatronics technician, telecommunications technician.

***In the questionnaire: biotechnical engineer, pharmaceutical technician, master's in medical biochemistry.

The previous table shows that respondents assess that they understand public relations equally well as the artistic professions, and better than the technical and biotechnical professions. Nearly 80% of respondents who are not involved in public relations consider that they understand what public relations is about, while most public relations experts and communications students believe the opposite – that most people do not understand exactly what public relations is about.

The next question was identical for all three groups. The purpose of the question was to learn more about the image of public relations. Figure 5 below shows respondents' answers.

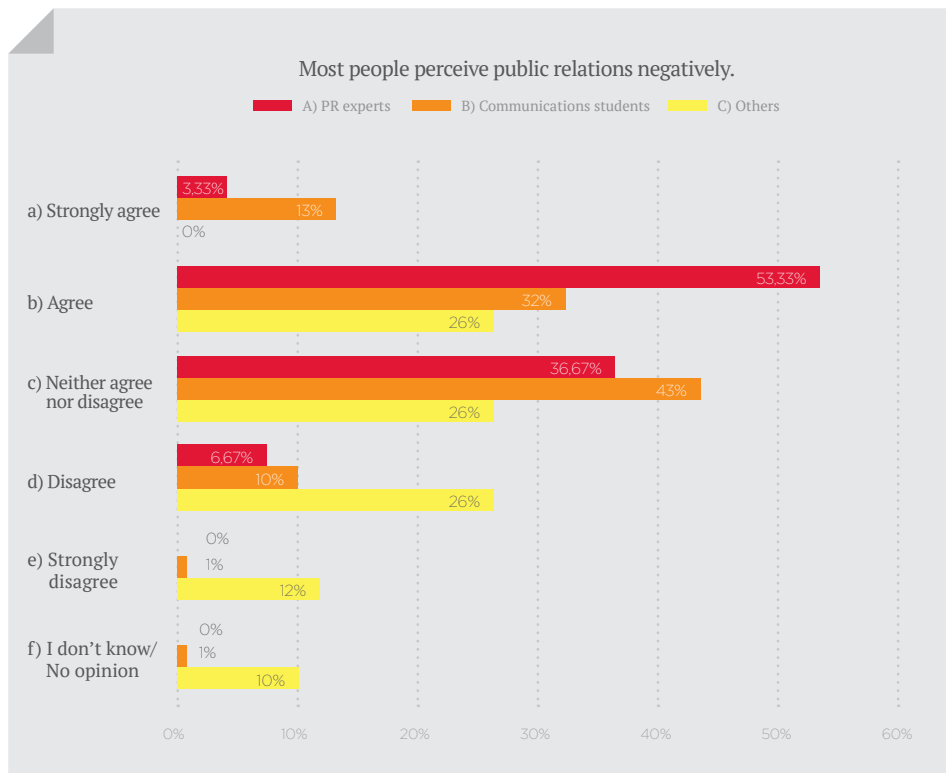


Figure 5. Public image of public relations (A: N=30, B: N=100, C: N=100)

The results showed that the better people were informed of what public relations is about, the more they were convinced that people had a negative opinion about that profession. More than half of the PR experts and a third of communications students mostly agree that people perceive public relations negatively, while only a fourth of the remaining respondents have such an opinion. None of the Group C respondents were fully convinced people perceive public relations negatively, while 10% of students and 3% of public relations experts are convinced of this. A fourth of the respondents from Group C mostly consider that people perceive public relations positively, while another 10% are certain of this. It is interesting that none of the public relations experts were fully convinced that people perceive their profession negatively. Although PR experts and students proved to be more critical than the other respondents

concerning this question; a good share of them (37% of PR experts and 43% of PR students) considers that most people do not perceive the state of the profession negatively or positively. According to the results, public relations has a mediocre public image.

With the following question, an attempt was made to determine whether dominant among respondents was the opinion that public relations has negative connotations in the mass media. The results are shown in Figure 6.

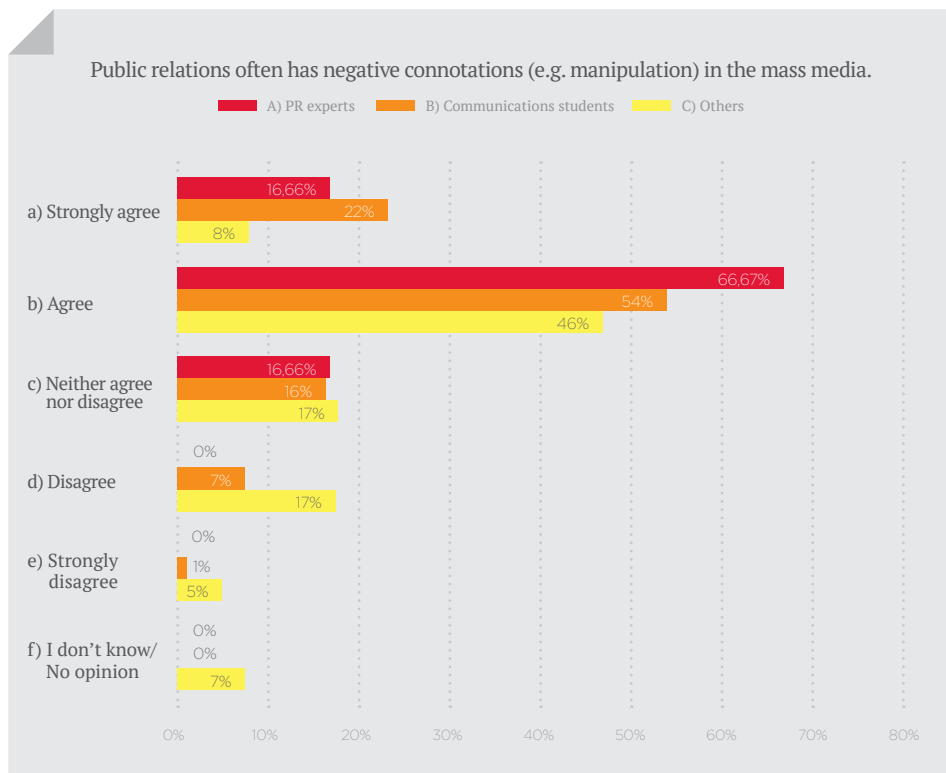


Figure 6. Image of PR in media (A: N=30, B: N=100, C: N=100)

This question showed that the more familiar respondents were with public relations the more negative they considered the image of public relations. The results showed that over 80% of communications experts, three-fourths of communication students and over half of the remaining respondents mostly or fully agree that negative terms, such as manipulation,

are often linked to public relations. The fact that most respondents from all three groups agreed with the stated claim can clearly point that the public relations image in the media is truly poor.

The aim of the next question was to learn what, in the opinion of respondents, is the reputation of public relations. Reputation is a broader term than image – it is the result of the images of multiple publics (for instance, media, clients, PR experts, employees of other professions etc.). Figure 7 shows respondents’ opinions on this.

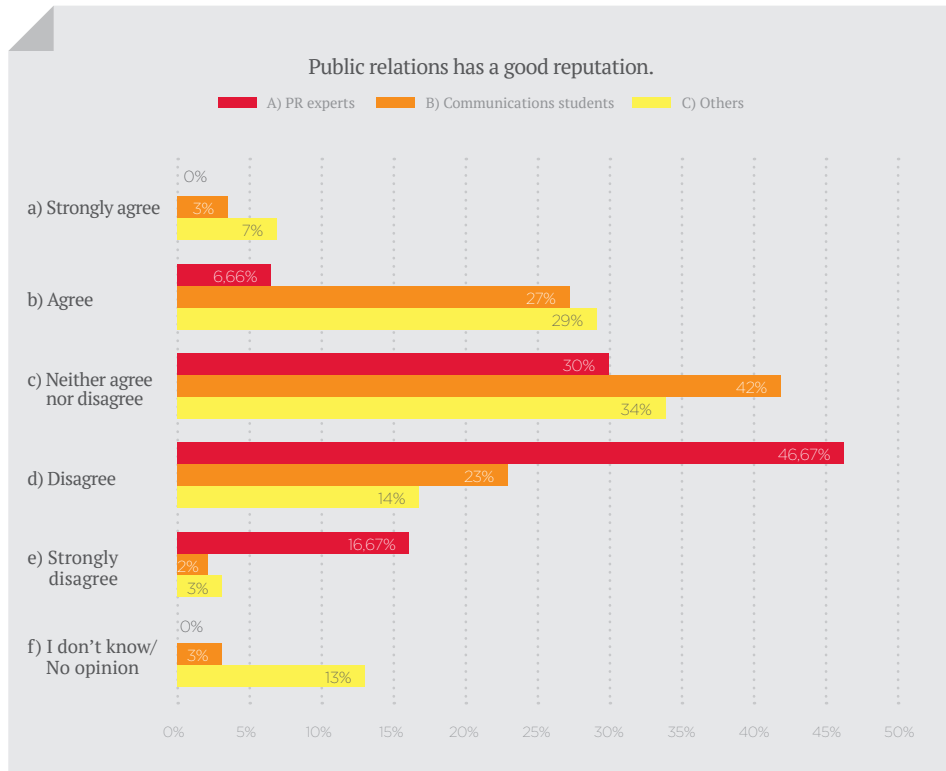


Figure 7. Reputation of public relations (A: N=30, B: N=100, C: N=100)

The answers showed that public relations experts were most critical towards the reputation of its profession. Nearly half consider that public relations does not have a good reputation, while 17% were convinced of this. Besides, none of the PR experts claim that the reputation of the PR profession is truly good. Communications students were divided on this question.

The largest share of students (42%) considers that the reputation of PR is neither good nor bad. The majority of Group C respondents (a third) have the same opinion, while over a fourth mostly considers that public relations has a good reputation.

The results of this block of questions point to the following conclusions. In the opinion of most respondents of all three groups, the image of public relations in the media is negative. Over half of the respondents from all three groups consider that the media often associate negative terms such as manipulation with public relations. On the other hand, the public image of the profession is, nevertheless, still better than its image in the media. The results show that the public image of public relations is mediocre. However, most PR experts do not share this opinion. They are much more critical when talking about the image and reputation of their profession. This series of questions showed that the more respondents are familiar with public relations, the worse they consider its image and reputation.

When in question is the importance of the profession's reputation, the majority of respondents from all three groups mostly or fully agree that reputation bears a certain importance and influence. The results have shown that, for most people, the reputation of the profession they work in is important. Besides, it was shown that the majority of respondents consider that a profession's reputation affects the social status of the individual, the interest and confidence of clients, as well as the development of the profession in the future.

Secondly, also determined were differences in the opinions of the various groups of respondents. PR experts attributed the greatest importance to reputation and its influence. Communications students see somewhat less importance of reputation, while the least importance of reputation is seen by respondents who are not involved in public relations. Nevertheless, the majority of respondents who are not involved in public relations consider the reputation of their own profession to be important, and recognise its impact both on their social status, as well as on client confidence and the development of the profession.

Since the reputation of the profession affects the social status and image of the individual, it is interesting to examine how people perceive PR experts. In the only open-type question in the entire questionnaire, respondents were asked to write the associations that come to mind when thinking about PR experts. The respondents from all three groups provided similar answers, so their answers were divided into eight categories. Table 3 shows the respondents' answers from all groups, and the number in the brackets next to each answer marks its frequency³, i.e. how many times it was repeated.

³ Note: in Group A there were 30 respondents, while in Group B and Group C there were 100. Therefore, the numbers indicating frequency of answers in the various groups are not completely comparable.

Table 3. Associations related to PR experts – answers by group (A: N=30, B: N=100, C: N=100)

9. Associations related to PR experts – answers by group			
Category of answers	A) PR experts	B) Communications students	C) Other
a) Communication and rhetoric	Communicativeness (3), communication (2), communication skills (2), rhetoric (2), eloquence (2), communication management, crisis communications, strategic communications, presenting, literacy	Eloquence (7), Communicativeness (4), good communicator (3), representative (2), crisis communication	Communicativeness (16), communication (13), spokesperson/spokesmanship (8), eloquence (7), speaking/oration (5), rhetoric (5), good speaker (4), presenting, blabber, diplomatic expression, public appearance, foreign languages
b) Media	Media (2), close with journalists, media relations, media presence	Media (10), informing (2), informed (2), social media, journalism, information, press conference	Media (11), informed(ness) (8), journalism (2), information (2), TV (2), statements/press conferences (2), publicity (2), informing, public awareness
c) Characteristics and skills of PR experts	Professionalism (3), creativity (3), accuracy (2), responsibility (2), education, motivation, operability, proactive, conviviality, extrovertedness, literacy	Creativity (7), ability (4), resourcefulness (4), speed (4), responsibility (2), education (2), organiser(2), knowledge, trust, respect, workaholic, adept, stable, versatile, intelligent, skilled	Convincing (8), resourceful (6), expertise (6), professionalism (4), speed/dynamics (4), education (3), literacy (2), creativity (2), agility, liveliness, tact, responsibility, likeability
d) Manipulation	Fiction-monger (2), “devil’s advocate”, <i>spin doctor</i> , a fad, devaluation	Manipulation (7), <i>spin/spin doctor</i> (6), half-truths (2), liar (2), persuading (2), persuasion, power, lobbyist, bending the truth	Manipulation (3), <i>spin</i> (2), deception, scandal, distrust, fictitious, propagandist, deception, concealment, mass psychology
e) Related disciplines	Marketing (1)	Marketing, sales	Marketing (3), sales (2), economics
f) Tasks / areas of public relations	Consulting (4), care for reputation (4) image (2), strategic planning and reasoning, dialogue, solving problems	Administration (7), management (4), reputation (4), image (2), <i>brand</i> , projects, events, <i>press clipping</i>	Organisation (3), planning (2), political campaigns
g) Job characteristics	Speed, stress, 24 hours per day, multidisciplinary	Stress (4), speed (4), challenge, dynamic	Dynamic (2), speed (2), stress, speed, meetings
h) Other	-	Corporations (4), politics (3), PR (3), agency, company, crisis	Politics (8), good looks, show business, culture, famous people

On the basis of the results, it can be concluded that, although there are also negative associations, dominating are positive ones. This points to the image of PR experts as being positive.

4.5.2. Attractiveness of PR as a Profession

The attractiveness of PR as a profession was another topic encompassed by the research. The results indicate that public relations is a desirable profession. A high 80% of PR experts are mostly or completely satisfied with work in the profession. Nearly just as many communications students would like to work in public relations. More accurately, slightly over half of communications students (52%) fully agree that they would like to work in public relations, while a fourth (27%) for the most part agrees with this. About a tenth (11%) of students neither accept nor reject the possibility of working in public relations, while 5% for the most part, and 4% would not like to work at all in public relations. These results indicate that a significant majority of communications students would like to work in public relations, and nearly a fourth of respondents who are not involved in public relations claim that they have considered, more or less, of working in the stated profession. Therefore, this would indicate that in question is a desirable profession. The satisfaction of communication experts is shown in Figure 8.

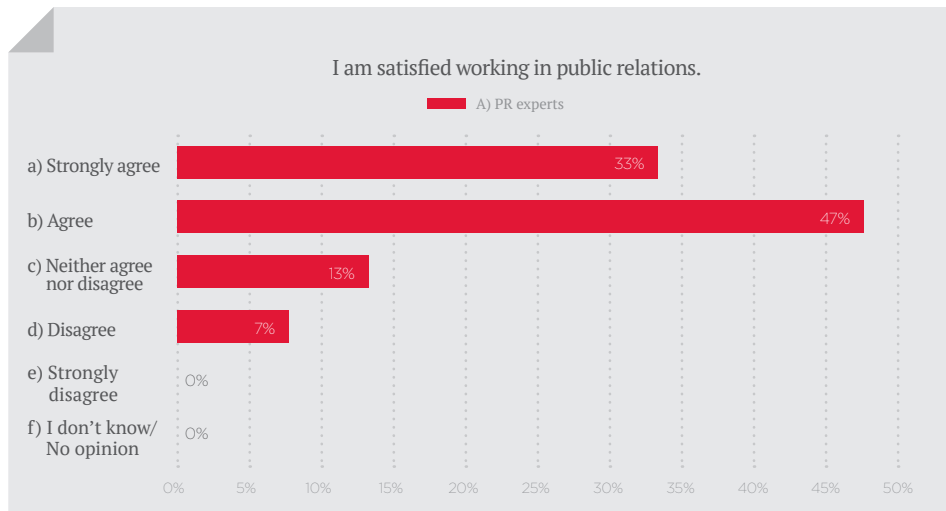


Figure 8. Satisfaction with working in public relations (N=30)

Further results showed the perception of public relations. A high 93% of PR experts for the most part or fully agree that their job is interesting and creative. Over 80% of communications students mostly or fully agree that public relations is creative, and nearly 90% think it is an interesting job. As is logical to expect, respondents who are not involved in public relations consider this profession less interesting than the first two groups of respondents. Nevertheless, more than half of them mostly or fully agree that public relations is a creative (54%) and interesting (66%) job.

It was learned that the respondents of all three groups consider public relations a stressful and difficult job. Ninety percent of communication experts and 87% of communications students mostly or fully agree that public relations is a stressful job, and 70% of the first and 73% of the second consider it a difficult job. Nearly 70% of respondents who are not involved in public relations mostly or fully agree that it is a stressful profession, while only 5% of respondents think differently. Furthermore, an astounding 93% of PR experts emphasised that their job requires overtime work, and this opinion was shared by most respondents in the other two groups.

Nearly half of the PR experts (47%) consider that they have a well-paid job, while something over a third believes that their profession is neither well nor poorly paid. On the other hand, none of the PR experts fully agreed that their profession was very well paid. Furthermore, 10% of experts consider that it is not a well-paid profession, and 3% claim that it is absolutely not well paid. Approx. 85% of PR experts and students, and about 60% of the remaining respondents mostly or fully agree that public relations requires high expertise and enables career development.

Furthermore, the social benefits of public relations is mostly recognised by communications students. Seventy percent of them mostly or fully agree that public relations is a socially useful profession, and such an opinion is shared by 57% of communications experts and 57% of Group C respondents. Approximately 40% of PR experts, a fourth of communications students, and a fifth of the remaining respondents consider that public relations is neither a socially useful nor a socially useless profession. Only rare respondents consider that public relations is not socially useful. There were respondents with such an opinion in Group C (13%). A high 93% of communications experts, 68% of communications students, and 50% of the remaining respondents mostly or fully agree that public relations is necessary for the development and functioning of the entire economic system, and only a small number of respondents think opposite - 11% in Group C and 7% of communications students.

4.5.3. Competence and Education

The question of competence was intended for communications experts and students. Their answers are shown in Figure 9.

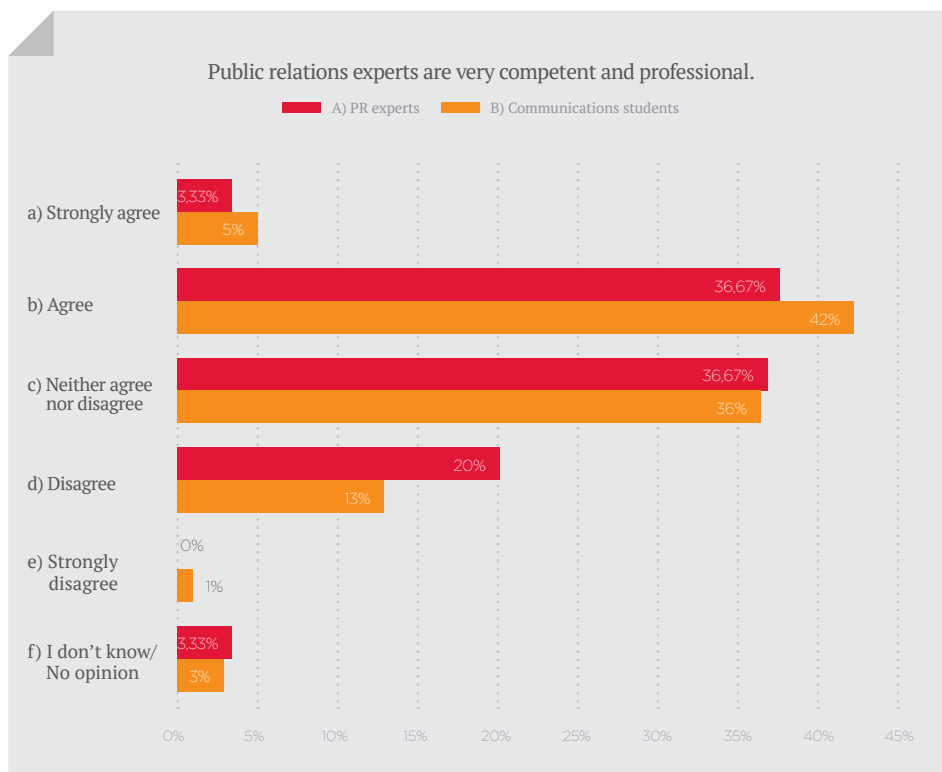


Figure 9. Competence of PR experts (A: N=30, B: N=100)

The results showed that PR experts and communications students similarly assess the level of competence of PR experts. Respondents to a larger extent consider public relations experts competent than incompetent. There are practically no respondents that consider PR experts as not being competent at all, but also there are few respondents who are fully convinced in their high level of competence. More than a third of respondents in both groups consider that PR experts are neither competent nor incompetent.

Often related to competence is the question of education. The question of education was intended for all groups of respondents. The aim was to find out whether respondents believe that a tertiary education in communication studies is necessary for working in public relations. Respondents' responses are provided in Figure 10.

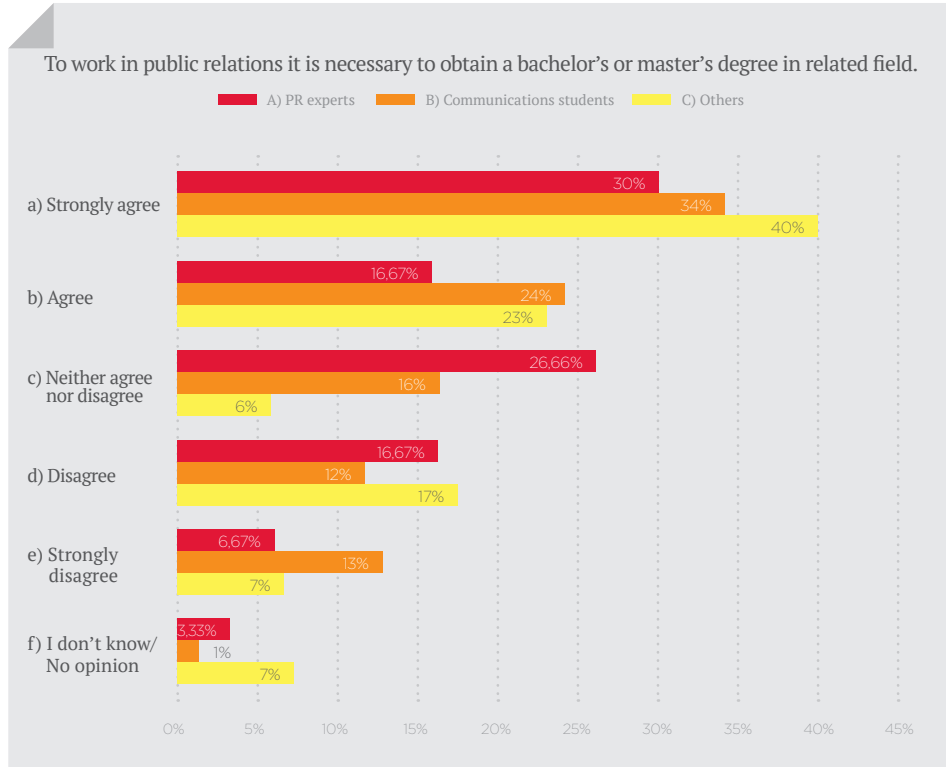


Figure 10. Necessity of tertiary education for working in public relations (A: N=30, B: N=100, C: N=100)

Over half of the communications students and Group C respondents, as well as nearly half of the communications experts consider that tertiary education in communications is necessary for working in public relations. The stated education is considered necessary to the largest extent by respondents who are not involved in public relations (63%), and to the lowest extent, although still in a significant number, public relations experts (47%). The results show that respondents who are less familiar with public relations consider tertiary education in communications more necessary for working in this profession.

With the following question, an attempt was made to determine which knowledge, skills and abilities are most necessary for working in public relations. Respondents had to choose three of a possible ten options, whereby respondents had the possibility in the tenth option to write their own answer. Table 4 shows respondents' answers.

Table 4. The most required knowledge, abilities and skills for working in public relations (A: N=50, B: N=100, C: N=100)

10. The most required knowledge, abilities and skills for working in public relations			
Order of answers from least to most selected	A) PR experts	B) Communications students	C) Other
1st place	Strategic planning	Strategic planning	Rhetorical exercises
2nd place	Critical thinking	Rhetorical exercises	Ability to persuade
3rd place	Noticing and preventing crisis situations	Ability to persuade	Reputation management
4th place	Organisation and management of business projects	Noticing and preventing crisis situations	Noticing and preventing crisis situations
5th place	Rhetorical skills / Reputation management / Ability to persuade	Critical thinking	Strategic planning
6th place	Writing communications to the media	Organisation and management of business projects	Critical thinking
7th place	Organisation of business in corporations /Other*	Reputation management	Writing communications to the media
8th place	-	Writing communications to the media	Organisation and management of business projects
9th place	-	Organisation of business in corporations	Organisation of business in corporations
10th place	-	Other*: creativity, innovation	I don't know
11th place	-		Other*: demagogy

Note. *Answers that were not offered; respondents provided them themselves.

It was shown that the more respondents were familiar with public relations, the more they considered managerial knowledge, abilities and skills to be important. This is proven by the answers given by public relations experts, who assigned managerial skills to the first four places, and nearly 87% of them placed strategic planning as one of the three most important

skills. In the opinion of PR experts, rhetorical and communications skills were only ranked fifth in terms of importance.

On the other hand, the less respondents understand what public relations is concerned with, the more they consider rhetorical and communications skills more important for working in this profession. In this manner, respondents from Group C highlighted rhetorical skills and persuasion skills as the most important skills for PR experts, while communications students gave it a small advantage over managerial skills (1st and 4th place) compared to rhetorical and communications skills (2nd and 3rd place).

With the following question, an attempt was made to learn what characteristics in the opinion of respondents were most necessary to work in public relations. Respondents, as in the previous question, chose three out of ten options. Their answers are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. The most important characteristics for working in public relations (A: N=30, B: N=100, C: N=100)

11. The most important characteristics for working in public relations			
Order of answers from least to most selected	A) PR experts	B) Communication science students	C) Other
1st place	Competence	Communicativeness	Communicativeness
2nd place	Communicativeness	Informedness	Persuasiveness
3rd place	IT and language literacy / Informedness	Competence / Persuasiveness	Informedness
4th place	Persuasiveness	IT and language literacy	Competence
5th place	Determination	Determination	IT and language literacy
6th place	Social responsibility	Leadership	Determination
7th place	Leadership / Other*: resistance to stress, responsibility	Social responsibility	Honesty
8th place	Honesty	Honesty	Social responsibility
9th place	-	Other*: audacity and courage	I don't know
10th place	-	-	Leadership
11th place	-	-	Other*: -

The most relevant group for this question were PR experts, and they emphasised competence as the most important characteristic for working in their own profession. Also worth highlighting

is communicativeness, which is, in the opinion of all three groups of respondents, one of the most important characteristics for working in public relations.

4.5.4. Ethical Standards

The level of ethical standards and their implementation in practice are very important for any profession. Consequently, the intention of the following question was to learn how often, according to respondents, PR experts face ethical problems. Their answers are shown in Figure 11.

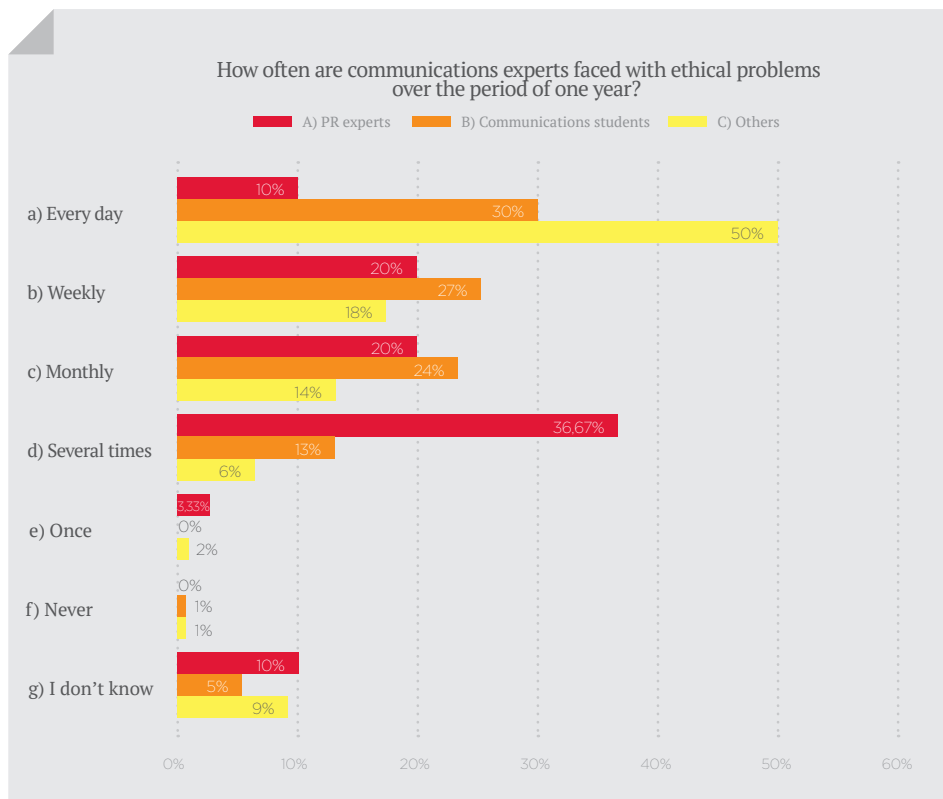


Figure 11. Frequency of ethical problems in public relations (A: N=30, B: N=100, C: N=100)

The results show that the largest number of PR experts (37%) considers that ethical problems arise in their profession several times annually. One fifth of them believe that ethical problems

arise on a weekly basis, and another fifth once annually. Only 10% of them believe that this occurs daily. That PR experts are faced on a daily basis with ethical problems is believed by the majority of respondents from the remaining two groups – exactly half of Group C respondents and nearly a third of communications students. It is interesting that there are practically no respondents who think that public relations do not have ethical problems. Moreover, the answers showed that the less respondents were familiar with public relations the more they considered ethical problems as more frequently present in public relations.

The aim of the following question was to learn to what extent PR experts, in the opinion of the respondents, follow the ethical standards. Figure 12 shows the answers of respondents to this question.

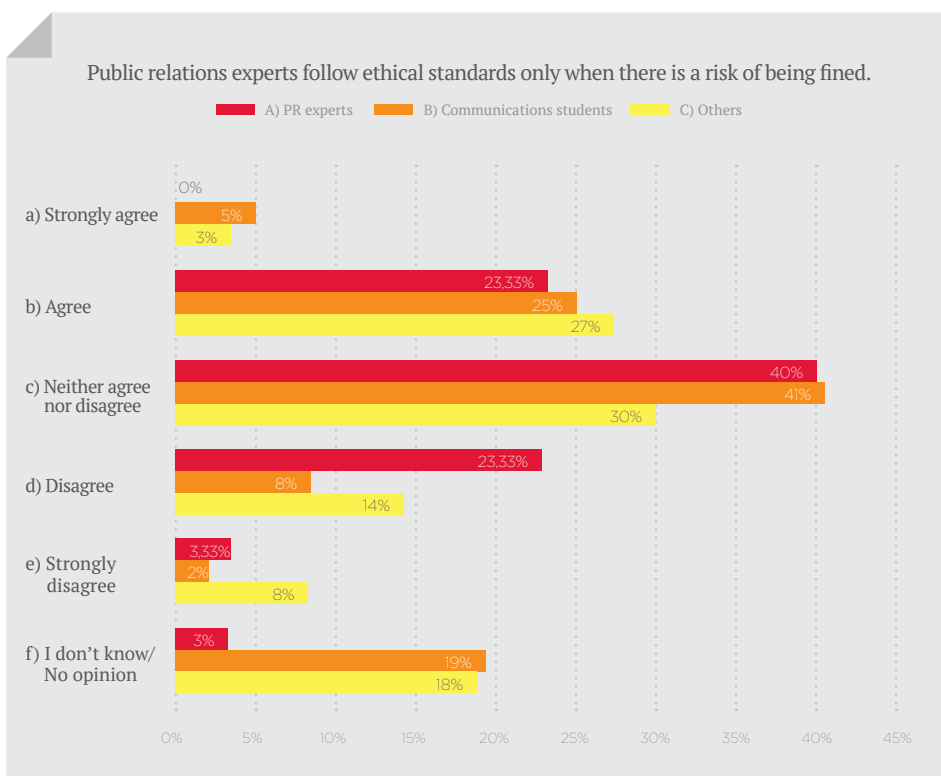


Figure 12. Level of compliance to ethical standards of the profession (A: N=50, B: N=100, C: N=100)

The results show that the majority of respondents in all three groups neither agree nor disagree with the claim stated in the question. Furthermore, a large portion of respondents (nearly a fifth of communications students and Group C respondents) do not know to what extent PR experts follow ethical standards in practice. Respondents' opinions are quite divided, although dominating is the neutral position. It is possible that respondents mostly selected neutral answers because the question was related to all PR experts, whereby any claim that points to compliance or non-compliance to ethical standards would be somewhat generalising.

5. Conclusion

The results of the “Perception of the identity, image and reputation of public relations” research showed that the image of public relations is poor, while public image and reputation are mediocre. The image of PR experts proved to be better, and we can assess it as moderately positive. As the research was conducted among various groups of respondents – PR experts, communications students and adults not involved in public relations – it was established how various publics perceive public relations. It was shown that the more familiar people are with public relations, the poorer they consider the profession's image and reputation.

Finally, we can ask ourselves: if a profession has a mediocre reputation, can it offer its clients something better? Of course, the profession is not completely homogenous; it is formed by numerous, more or less, independent subjects such as agencies and experts, however, any form that tarnishes its reputation or confidence in its effectiveness can have an effect on a series of factors that harm the entire profession, as well as the people working in it. The reason for this is the fact that the reputation of the profession is not something abstract, but rather it is a reflection and an indication of the real state in the profession – the competence of its employees, the effectiveness of its tools and principles, the adaptation to ethical, technological and market requirements, as well as the relationships and cooperation with various stakeholders.

So, these are the factors that shape the reputation of the profession and determine its development in the future. Now, when those factors are clearly identified, they can be used as relevant guidelines for the development of the profession. Although such guidelines may seem relatively simple and general, they are very practical because they require the constant

raising of professional standards as well as personal responsibility in everyday work. All this proves that reputation is not only important for a profession whose main task is to look after the image and reputation of its own clients, but also for every other profession.

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