

## **SNSs & PR Professionals: A Case Study of Facebook PR Groups as a Tool for Building Media Rapport**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The research study examined the rising adoption of the new style of media relations through Facebook PR groups by collecting data from 112 practising PR professionals across cadres in Bangalore city via survey and interviewed face-to-face 10 of those PR professionals personally. The findings of the study revealed majority of the PR professionals used Facebook PR groups to get journalist's contact information, to get information on journalists swapping jobs, networking with journalists, procuring media coverage opportunities, career opportunities and to share new story angles. Media movements was the most popularly used Facebook PR group. The study also found, in future, media relations through Facebook PR groups may be replaced by Twitter or WhatsApp.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Facebook, Public Relations, Media Relations, Facebook groups, Social Media, LinkedIn, Twitter, WhatsApp.*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The use of social media has become a basic necessity and an integral part of everybody's life, especially for the urbanites. Also, the various uses of social media are transforming the style of functioning of almost all the professions in the world. The main advantages of using social media for any profession is: Firstly, almost everyone has a social media account either in Facebook, LinkedIn, or Twitter etc; secondly, it's under their true identity with their accurate personal details (profile); thirdly, social media is a very personal space for majority of the social networking users where the communication is generally on a one-on-one aspect; and fourthly, it's a socially rich environment which caters to all kinds of professionals. Even the functioning of the media, their style of writing etc has changed drastically with the invasion of social media. Thus, the overall working style of the public relations (PR) professionals has also transformed from the traditional style to the innovative style of functioning powered by social media. Media relations or good rapport with media are an integral part of PR profession. Media relations can be defined as "the systematic, planned, purposeful and mutually beneficial relationship between journalists in the mass media and public relations practitioners. Its goal is to establish trust, understanding and respect between the two groups." (Supa, 2008) Media relations specifically involve building strong relationships with writers, producers, reporters, and editors who are in a position to write on the company in their articles. Media relations is said to be centred around the symbiotic relationship between a PR practitioner and the media most often being described as a journalist, but also, reporter, editor, producer and writer. The majority of the terms used for 'media' are those which uphold a position of power and, ultimately, could be labelled as gatekeepers in the information supply chain. (Kaul, 2013)

The fast changing media environment and the perpetually developing social media are forcing young PR professionals, who are well versed in technology, to practise media relations through the new age social media, which is emerging as the new style of media relations. With the rapid increase in technological advancements and the new 'avatars' of social media a new style of media relations has evolved which can be termed as "Social Media Relations". That is achieving the purpose of media relations through Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc. The technological advancements are accepted by the journalists and PR professional fraternities. Even senior journalists and reporters agree that the traditional media relations are gradually losing its charm as the newer and easy-to-use approaches are garnering its existence. The whole process of media relations has changed from the traditional style of interpersonal media relations, i.e., meeting a reporter face-to-face, getting introduced by self-introduction or through a common friend's reference or at press clubs, then pitching stories or sending press releases to them and constantly following up via phone or face-to-face meetings and simultaneously maintaining a good rapport. Then pitch stories to the same reporter with some unique story ideas. Today, the whole process has been simplified with the younger PR professionals getting introduced to the journalists on Facebook or Facebook PR groups and then they chat with them to build rapport, then send the press releases & get coverage. Later pitch some unique story ideas and facilitate the interactions to happen over phone or email. Today, social networking helps to build and maintain media relations.

Another method would be inbound media relations, Jeremy Porter, founder & editor of Journalistics and a digital communications strategist specializing in digital marketing, social media, demand generation and online public relations, asserts, "You should regularly share information about your work through your status updates, and you just might find that journalists and bloggers will reach out to you for stories. This approach to inbound media relations is becoming more effective as more journalists and bloggers use social networks to research sources for stories." (Porter, 2010) So, PR professionals should find out, how the journalist prefers to be contacted? Solis says communication professionals should be familiar with the journalist's preferred form of communication, his or her likes and dislikes. Further he adds, "to genuinely approach blogger relations, or media relations, you must first deconstruct the process of the media ecosystem and reprogram yourself to tap into the basic building blocks of what makes good content and sparks conversations. This, in turn, helps define why people should take the time to speak with you." (Solis, 2009)

## II. PURPOSE

The purpose of this research is to explore how Facebook PR groups, that is Facebook groups targeting PR professionals, play an important role in the new style of media relations; how PR professionals and reporters have virtual forums & platforms to discuss and how this trend is enhancing the overall productivity of the new age PR professionals in India. Most of the earlier research works have focused on Facebook in general or media relations through internet and media relations through informal/personal relations. The present study furthers knowledge by expanding the research on media relations through Facebook PR groups. The present study is the first of its kind, as this research tries to study on the adoption of a new style of media relations through Facebook PR groups. The research study used the survey method to collate information from 112 working PR professionals in Bangalore city across cadres. Also, 10 of these PR professionals were interviewed face-to-face to get deeper insights into the topic of research.

## III. FACEBOOK GROUPS FOR PR PROFESSIONALS

Some of the commonly used Facebook groups by PR professionals in India are:

a) *Media Movements*: is one of the largest platforms for the latest developments in the media industry for media professionals. The group believes Media-PR is a symbiotic relationship that depends on each other. Today, this group has 19,785 members. b) *Media List*: is a Facebook group which provides a platform to PR & media professionals to share contacts/lists in a secured manner with each other, within the group. Media List has 16,046 members. c) *Journalist Storyboard (JSB)*: is a community with a clear objective of bridging the communication gap that persists between journalists and PR professionals. With an aim to understand the functioning of journalists and PR professionals across the board, JSB aims to provide support to PR professionals, as well as Journalists to reach out to the right source (PR) for their stories while allowing sources (PR/Media) to reach them without spamming their inbox. Another objective is to equip PR professional's to reach out to Journo's with their pitches, stories, press releases, event invites through this community rather than clogging their mailboxes. Journalist Story Board group has 3,967 members. d) *People for the PRomise foundation for PR*: is a group for all professionals in India or of Indian origin working in PR firms and managing communications functions in-house for organisations. The idea is to meet offline under various chapters and exchange thoughts periodically. Currently, People for the PRomise foundation for PR group has 994 members. e) *Talk Digital/ Digital PR/ Social Media marketing*: With 485 members, this group is for them who want to leverage Social Media for Public Relations success. Professionals can share and learn new gizmos of social media, digitalization etc in the group. f) *Indian PR Forum*: Indian PR Forum is an online community of PR Professionals in India (& beyond) that aims to be one of the most active groups in the PR domain. This group has been founded with the noble intention of bringing together all the professionals from PR and related fields (Social Media/Journalists/Bloggers/ Production/Web Designers/ Content Writers) in the industry together on a common platform to discuss relevant issues, topics and subjects related to the communication industry. It includes new verticals of communication, latest developments in the industry, interesting articles or stories on the industry, job posts, affiliate assist, request for media lists, journalist contacts, PR contacts for brands, new updates on client wins. At present, the Indian PR Forum group has 6, 790 members. g) *Let's Make it Big*: group was created keeping in mind the growing PR & Media Fraternity and its diversity; to make it big with the serious contribution of fellow members. It is the platform for all the developments, movements, activities etc in PR and Media industry and concerning professionals. The group wants to form a strong platform to share, discuss and help each other. Let's Make it Big has 717 members. h) *PR/ Corp Comm/ Journalism Jobs India*: This group is for media professionals in India. PR Agencies, HR Managers, News Publications, Corporate can share their latest job posts for the media industry in the capacity of a Journalist, PR, Corp. Comm. professional or openings for content writer, social media expert and likes. This group has 16, 191 members.

Also there are other Facebook PR groups like: Inside PR, Media Laundry, Media Updates, Delhi Media & PR, PR Freelancers/ PR Entrepreneurs/ PR Associates, Public Relations @ Online, Journalists & PR, PR & Media community, PR4You, Bangalore TV journalists, Chennai Media & PR, etc. Majority of these Facebook PR groups don't allow irrelevant or self promotional posts that are not related to the industry, by warning that the members who post such information will be removed from the group without any notification.

#### **IV. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Many studies have analysed the relationship between PR practitioners and journalists like Cameron, Sallot, & Curtin, 1997; Kopenhagen, Martinson, & Ryan, 1984; Pincus, Rimmer, Rayfield, & Cropp, 1993; Shin & Cameron, 2003b; Shoemaker & Reese, 1991; Tilley and Hollings, 2008; Shaw & White, 2004.

Earlier studies have analysed media relations through internet. Alfonso & Miguel in their research study on Trends in online media relations, analysed 120 corporate websites from Denmark, France, Germany, Norway, Singapore, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States and found that large international companies use Web-based media centres or virtual press rooms to achieve their organizational objectives and to meet journalists' demands for information. Also the study showed that most of these virtual press rooms lacked being complete, easy-to-use and are not updated on a daily basis. (Alfonso & Miguel, 2006) Duke's study on Use of World Wide Web and email in science public relations, found that e-mail is vital in media relations and the Web & e-mail together make it easier to obtain media coverage. Majority of the PR practitioners (86%) believed that the Web has improved their PR work. (Duke, 2001)

PR agencies or companies hiring PR professionals look for the core competencies of different writing styles and media relations. Few studies on PR have highlighted these core competencies. Studies on writing activities of PR practitioners were studied by Napoli, Taylor, and Powers (1998). Some other research studies focused on media relations, but mainly on the traditional style of media relations through face-to-face meetings and informal relations. Shin, J., & Cameron, G. T. in their study on Informal relations, cited 11 types of informal relations for media relations, they are: unofficial calls, private meetings, regional/alumni relations, press tours, travels for a press club, bargaining advertising to news coverage, exercising power through managers/editors of news bureaus, perks including dinner/drinking, activities for friendship such as golf/climbing, presents and free tickets and bribes. The study indicated that even in a culture where press clubs and interpersonal media relations are the norm, attitudinal differences between PR practitioners and journalists are striking. (Shin & Cameron, 2003a)

Samsup Jo and Yungwook Kim in their research work exploring Media Relations Dimensions in South Korea reiterated the importance of informal relationships in media relations. The study results emphasized the personal influence model of public relations. Also the study stated that personal relationships help in reducing unfavourable media coverage. (Jo & Kim, 2004) Also Cho's research work on the power of public relations in media relations, explored on the varying amounts of power PR practitioners had in their interactions with journalists. The survey found that PR practitioners working for health organizations had expert power in media relations (particularly those working for non-profit organizations) as they have frequent communication with reporters, thus developing close relationships with reporters. (Cho, 2006) Personal relationships also play a vital role in media relations, as Erica Swallow, in her article on the Future of Public Relations and Social Media emphasizes, "No matter which tools PR pros use to connect with media members, the most important factor is the human factor. Public relations and social media are both about creating and fostering relationships. Our PR experts agreed and emphasized the fact that personal relationships will continue to propel the bond between social media and PR." Further in the article, Kelly McAlearney, an account supervisor at Edelman Digital, adds "Regardless of how an announcement is shared – via wire, blog post, tweet, or otherwise – the critical step has historically been, and will remain, the human element. By directly reaching out to key media and influencers with whom we maintain relationships, we're able to ensure their timely awareness of the news." (Swallow, 2010)

Traditional style of media pitching still continues, where the PR professionals pitch story ideas to the journalists; but with the new technology, a new style of pitching called media catching is becoming popular. In media catching, the journalists try to contact many PR practitioners to get specific information for their story ideas e.g. Help-A-Reporter-Out (HARO) website. Richard D. Waters, Natalie T.J. Tindall, & Timothy S. Morton in their study on Media Catching, analyzed the phenomenon of "media catching," a reversal of the traditional media relations' communication patterns. The study conducted a content analysis of 3,106 reporter requests sent through the HARO and media related Twitter updates from HARO founder for 6 months and explored which individuals and media outlets are using media catching to obtain information. The study found that traditional news outlets used Twitter, and new media outlets preferred the LISTSERV technology. (Waters, 2010)

Recently after the invasion of social media, few studies have explored the uses of social media in the PR industry. A research paper by Kelli S. Burns discussed on the popular social media tools used for PR like blogs, RSS, wikis, podcasts, video sharing sites and social networks. The study found that the most popular form of social media used with clients are videos (75%), followed by blogs (50%), social network profiles (50%), and podcasts (41.7%). Not so popular were RSS feeds (25%), wikis (16.7%), and Twitter (0%). Also, the PR practitioners used social media tools in their personal lives, with blogs being the most popular (75%), followed by social network profiles (66.7%), RSS feeds (33.3%), wikis (33.3%), videos (25%), Twitter (16.7%), and podcasts (16.7%). The study concluded that social media offers many opportunities for PR practitioners. (Burns, 2008)

Also, Nina Eyrich, Monica L. Padman and Kaye D. Sweetser in their study on PR practitioners' use of social media tools, revealed that use of technology has made PR professionals' job easier by expediting the circulation of information to reach broader audiences. Social media not only allows public relations practitioners to reach out to and engage their publics in conversation, but also provides an avenue to strengthen media relations. The study found that PR practitioners used 6 of the 18 social media tools listed; the most popular was e-mail followed by intranet, blogs, video conferencing, and podcasts. (Eyrich, 2008) In 2010, Mike Sachoff in an article on more journalists using Facebook and Twitter cites 43 percent of journalists have been pitched through social networks, compared to 31 percent in 2009. (Sachoff, 2010) Porter also states that 70 percent of journalists use social networks to assist in reporting, compared to 41 percent in the previous year. (Porter, 2009) And Greer cites examples of few journalists who have asked PR professionals to pitch him on his Facebook "wall," which is something like their bulletin board. (Greer, 2008) Recently, Vineet Kaul, in his research work on "PR and the Media: Friends or Foes?" concludes, "Though new media has opened up doors for direct interaction between the PR community and its target audience, it is still an area that needs to justify its appropriateness in current PR practice. Perhaps in the future, as the media landscape evolves and print media matures, this relationship will become more opportune." (Kaul, 2013)

**Indian Studies:** There are not many Indian studies in this area of research, only few generic PR studies with a minor part of the research focusing on media relations were found. Nilanjana Bardhan and Krishnamurthy Sriramesh in their study on Public Relations in India, stated, media relations through the use of the personal influence models turned out to be the most common public relations activity. The human and interpersonal aspects of the relationship between public relations professional and journalists are accorded high value. Frequent press visits, get-togethers and even interactions that may cross the professional line are considered appropriate in Indian public relations. Also, the study stated, PR through personal contact is the most effective means of communication. Although reliance on the media is necessary for communicating public relations messages, interpersonal relationships with key influencers are considered equally important. The study found that, media relation was the primary focus of the public relations efforts of all the organizations. (Bardhan & Sriramesh, 2006) Another study by Seow Ting Lee and Mallika Hemant Desai studied on the media relations in 296 NGOs from India in their research on media relations in non-governmental organizations. The study found that "an organization's dialogic orientation has a positive impact on media relations knowledge and strategy but not on the action dimension that focuses on providing information subsidies to journalists." (Lee & Desai, 2014) The present study is the first of its kind, as this research study primarily focuses on only one specific aspect of PR, namely media relations through Facebook PR groups. The invasion of social media has given immense scope for media relations; thus, the study on media relations through social media is gaining prominence.

## V. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- RQ1: Do PR professionals use Facebook PR groups for media relations?
- RQ2: Which are the most frequently used Facebook PR groups?
- RQ3: How do Facebook PR groups help in media relations?
- RQ4: Can Facebook PR groups be misused?
- RQ5: Are 'Facebook PR groups' better than 'LinkedIn groups'?
- RQ6: What is the future of Facebook PR groups in India?

## VI. METHODOLOGY

The present study needs concrete information and viewpoints from PR professionals with practical experience; hence, personal interview and descriptive survey methods were determined as the best research tools to collect data. The descriptive survey method was used to collate data for the in-depth study, as it is the most effective way to collect information across regions by saving time and money. Also survey method shows the true dynamics of the study as the PR professionals participating are assured of their confidentiality, thus encouraging them to share accurate and true responses to the questionnaire. The descriptive survey method was

backed by face-to-face interviews to gain deeper insights into the topic of research. A multi-page questionnaire with both open-ended and close-ended questions was prepared based on the research questions cited above. The close-ended questions used Likert scale which ranged in a 5 point scale from ‘Never’ to ‘Always’. The respondents had to tick any one of the following 5 options, namely, Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often or Always. The multi-page questionnaire was sent via e-mail randomly to 150 practising PR professionals across cadres in Bangalore, of which 112 duly filled questionnaires were received back. Among the 112 PR professionals who participated in the survey, 10 PR professionals were personally interviewed face-to-face to gather more substantial information.

## VII. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

**Demographic Profile:** Gender wise the sample included 53% (n=60) males and 47% (n=52) females. And, age group wise, more than half of the respondents (n=68, 60%) were between the age group of 26-30 years, 20% (n=22) were between the age group of 20-25 years, and another 20% (n=22) were above 30 years. The sample had many post graduates who participated in the survey, thus 67% (n=75) of the respondents had a post graduate degree, 20% (n=22) had completed their PG diploma, while 13% (n=15) had their Bachelors degree. Designation wise the sample included 6.67% (n=7) Senior Managers, 8% (n=9) Directors, 19% (n=22) Account Executives, 20% (n=22) Senior Account Executives and Managers each and the rest were Assistant Account Executives & Assistant Managers with 13.33% (n=15) each.

**Internet & Facebook usage :** Majority of the respondents (33.04%, n=37) spent 1-3 hours on browsing the Web per day, 40.18% (n=45) browse for 3-5 hours, while 26.79% (n=30) spend 5-8 hours on surfing the web per day, as represented in Fig. 1.

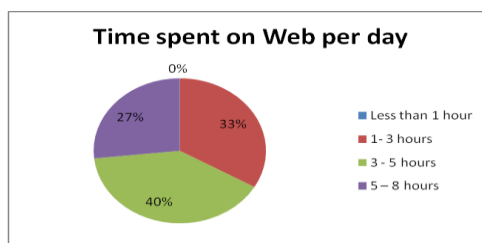


Figure 1: Time spent on the Web per day

Majority of the respondents 73.21% (n=82) accessed internet on their mobile or smart phones. Also, majority of the respondents 66.96% (n=75) spent less than an hour on Facebook per day, while the rest 33.04% (n=37) spent 1-3 hours, as portrayed in Fig. 2.

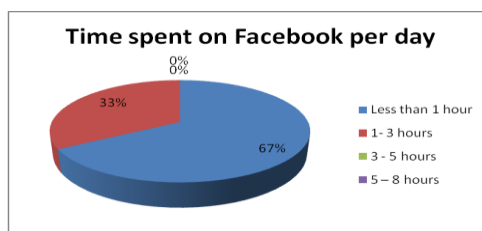


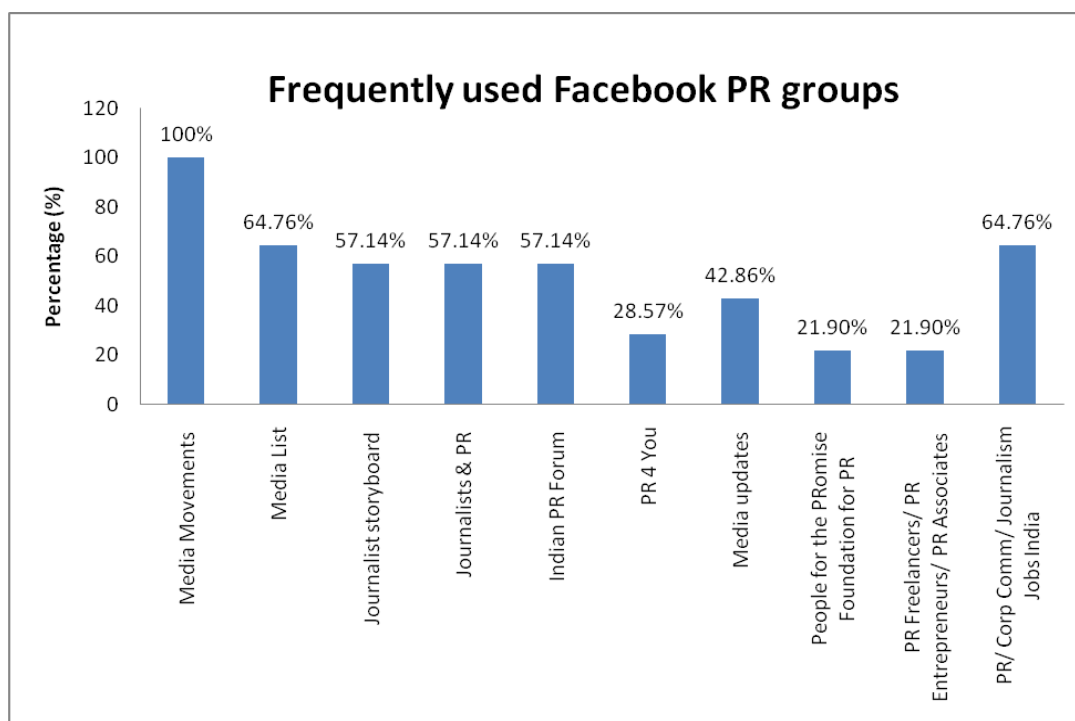
Figure 2: Time spent on Facebook per day

### Are Facebook PR groups used for media relations?

Though the style of media relations has changed over a period of time, yet it is the integral part of PR, as discussed above. Majority of the PR professionals in this tech savvy world use Facebook PR groups for media relations. More than 93.75% (n=105) of the respondents used Facebook PR groups for media relations, while only 6.25% (n=7) claimed they didn't use it for the same. PR professionals claimed that with the advent of social media, especially using Facebook for personal reasons has made people almost addictive to Facebook, thus Facebook PR groups which are also accessed from Facebook, gives easy access to media relations. A senior PR professional claims, “Since, we have access to Facebook on our smart phones today, I keep checking Facebook status updates and feeds frequently, which indirectly helps me to do media relations as I get story opportunities from Facebook PR groups via feeds on my Facebook account instantly.” This result clearly indicates that today's PR professionals are tech savvy and use social networking sites like Facebook especially

Facebook PR groups for enhancing their professional skills and to help ease their PR job. Also with the advent of smart phones, the PR professionals are hooked on to it, round the clock.

**Frequently used Facebook PR groups :** Among the 93.75% (n=105) respondents who used Facebook PR groups, all the PR professionals visited Media Movements (n=105, 100%) frequently, compared to PR/ Corp Comm/ Journalism Jobs India and media list with 64.76% (n=68); followed by Journalist Story board, Journalists & PR, India PR Forum with 57.14% (n=60) each. While 42.86% (n=45) visited Media Updates, 28.57% (n=30) visited PR4You and 21.90% (n=23) each visited People for the Promise Foundation for PR and PR Freelancers/ PR Entrepreneurs/ PR Associates. (See Fig. 3)



**Figure 3:** Frequently used Facebook PR groups

A senior manager in a leading PR agency says, “Media movements and media lists are really useful and we check it frequently as we get the updated media lists, journalists contacts and their career movements within seconds.” Another senior executive adds, “Media Movements is my favourite Facebook PR group because it is easy to post information and members of that forum are really helpful.” An Assistant manager also claimed, “Media Movements helped me to get many opportunities for my clients.” A director of a leading PR agency justifies, “Media Movements is by far the best Facebook PR group I have come across as it allows both journalists and PR professionals to share their story angles.” Also, another Manager, from a Tech focussed PR agency stated, “Many times I have found my clients to be the right fit for the story angles shared by journalists on the Facebook PR group - media movements.”

**Facebook PR groups aid media relations:** According to Fig. 4 & TABLE 1, 14.29% (n=16) always use and 28.57% (n=32) of the PR professionals often use Facebook PR groups to get journalist’s contact information, and 35.71% (n=40) use it sometimes; hence, it can be deduced that majority of the PR professionals use Facebook PR groups to get journalist’s contact information. A senior PR executive adds, “I had posted an enquiry for a journalist in Facebook media movements forum and got instant response from the journalist himself. Now, we are good friends and are in touch for other client stories too.”

Majority of the PR professionals used Facebook PR groups to get information on journalists swapping jobs; 28.57% (n=32) of the PR professionals use it often, 35.71% (n=40) use it sometimes, and 14.29% (n=16) always use it for the same. The members of these Facebook PR groups posted information on journalists swapping jobs, etc for informing their fellow PR members. Most of the PR professionals used Facebook PR groups for networking with Journalists. 28.57% (n=32) of the professionals often used it, 42.85% (n=48)

sometimes used and 7.14% (n=8) always used Facebook PR groups for networking with Journalists. These Facebook PR groups helped PR professionals to network with journalists in other cities.

Another important use of Facebook PR groups was for procuring media coverage opportunities. With 35.71% (n=40) of the PR professionals often using Facebook to explore new story opportunities, 28.57% (n=32) using it sometimes, proves that Facebook PR groups are the best platforms for getting media coverage opportunities. In Facebook PR groups, a journalist posts his requirements for a particular story, then the PR professionals directly contact the journalist and the story is done, (also it can be vice-versa). Hence, it is a win-win situation for both the professionals. A senior manager from a reputed PR agency adds, “I have cracked so many stories using the lead from these Facebook groups.”

Job offers/career opportunities in Facebook PR groups was used sometimes by 35.71% (n=40) and often by 21.43% (n=24) of PR professionals. These Facebook PR groups help in posting information on vacancies available in different media organizations thus helping the professionals swap jobs. Nearly half of the PR professionals’ surveyed use Facebook PR groups to share new story angles. 42.86% (n=48) of the PR professionals used Facebook PR groups often to share new story angles, while 21.43% (n=24) always used it and 14.29% (n=16) sometimes used it for the same. Facebook PR groups are platforms where PR professionals can post their story angles for any journalists to pick it.

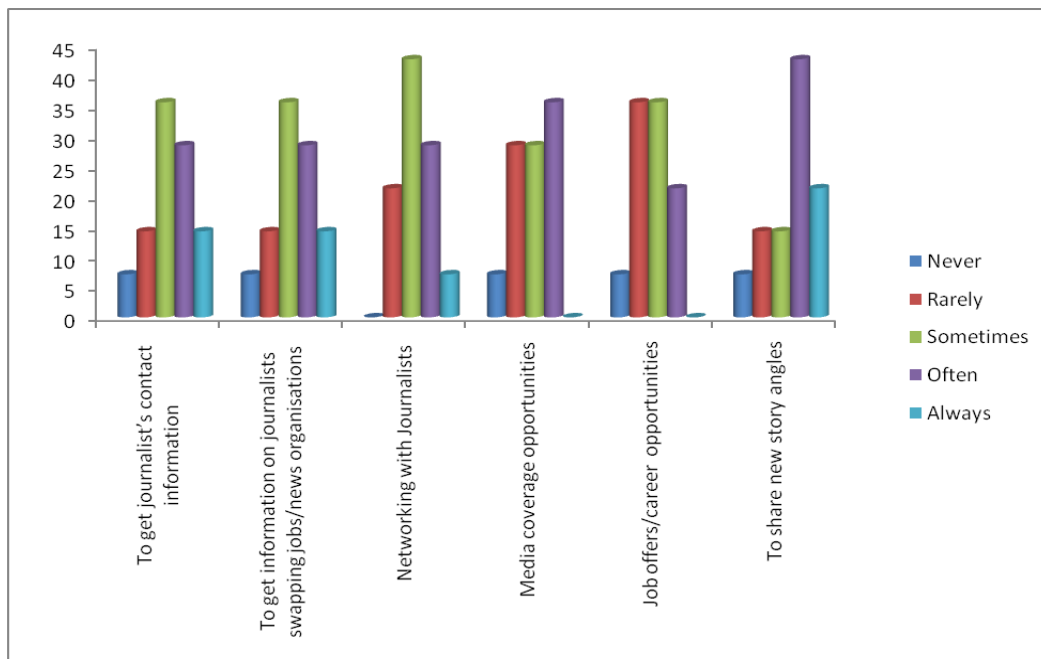


Figure 4: Different uses of Facebook PR groups in media relations

Table 1: Different uses of Facebook PR groups in media relations

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	N	Mean	SD
To get journalist’s contact information	7.14 (8)	14.28 (16)	35.71(40)	28.57 (32)	14.28 (16)	112	3.29	0.92
To get information on journalists swapping jobs/news organisations	7.14 (8)	14.28 (16)	35.71 (40)	28.57 (32)	14.28 (16)	112	3.29	0.93
Networking with Journalists	0	21.42 (24)	42.85 (48)	28.57 (32)	7.14 (8)	112	3.21	0.93
Media coverage opportunities	7.14 (8)	28.57 (32)	28.57 (32)	35.71 (40)	0	112	2.93	0.94
Job offers/career opportunities	7.14 (8)	35.71 (40)	35.71 (40)	21.42 (24)	0	112	2.71	0.94
To share new story angles	7.14 (8)	14.28 (16)	14.28 (16)	42.85 (48)	21.42 (24)	112	3.57	0.92

As seen from TABLE 1, the mean scores clearly indicate that majority of the PR professionals use Facebook PR groups to get journalist's contact information (3.29), to get information on journalists swapping jobs (3.29), networking with Journalists (3.21), procuring media coverage opportunities (2.93), for Job offers/career opportunities (2.71) and to share new story angles (3.57). Thus, it can be deduced that 'sharing new story angles' was the top priority.

More than half of the PR professionals surveyed, that is 7.14% (n=8) always posted, 21.43% (n=24) often posted and 28.57% (n=32) sometimes, posted their requirements on Facebook PR groups. The PR professionals requirements posted on Facebook PR groups ranged from contact information of a particular journalist, to sharing story angles with journalists, exchanging media lists, etc. Majority of the PR professionals who posted on Facebook PR groups were often satisfied (35.71%, n=40) and few were always satisfied (14.29%, n=16) and 28.57% (n=32) were sometimes satisfied with the kind of responses they got for their postings on Facebook PR groups. An assistant executive from a leading PR agency cites, "Facebook PR group - 'Media Movements' is where media professionals and PR professionals interact for numerous story opportunities. I have been fortunate to get few stories done with the help of this Facebook forum." Another senior manager, shares a fruitful experience, "I got the media list of Chandigarh through a Facebook PR group and also got three interactions fixed by using the same."

**Misuse of Facebook PR groups:** Some of the PR professionals felt Facebook PR groups haven't been misused, while several others felt it has been misused. One of the budding PR professionals felt Facebook PR groups are exploited to promote their own products via ads or promoting their personal web pages. Another Senior PR executive claims he has seen fake profiles posting media opportunities that didn't exist in reality, obscene comments and ego clashes on Facebook PR groups. Facebook PR groups are used for their company/product promotions by few members.

**Facebook PR groups' vs. 'LinkedIn groups' :** Like Facebook PR groups there are similar discussion forums in LinkedIn. Some of the LinkedIn PR groups are: Indian PR Forum, Indian Journalists, Media movements, Media professionals, Network of PR professionals, PR, PR case studies Forum, PR Daily, PR Professionals, PR Professionals Network, PRinIndia, Public Relations Professionals, Tech PR, Corporate Communication, etc.

Majority of the PR professionals surveyed claimed that Facebook PR groups were better than LinkedIn groups, as Facebook was more interactive and most of the time people are online on Facebook, hence easy access to Facebook PR groups too. A senior account executive states the difference among the 2 groups as, "LinkedIn groups are not so active and open with story pitching. It's more to do with connecting, but Facebook PR groups are more interactive and fast." Another Account Executive adds, "Facebook PR groups are much more vibrant and active when compared to LinkedIn groups." And an assistant manager cites, "Facebook PR groups are more user-friendly and interactive, unlike LinkedIn groups." LinkedIn is more professional and can be used to connect but not to share personal thoughts, whereas Facebook PR groups gives an opportunity to share personal insights on a particular topic to a wider audience. A director of a PR agency concludes, "Facebook is more interactive, widely used and since everyone uses it for personal reasons there is no reason to open LinkedIn again."

**Future of Facebook PR groups:** Majority of the PR professionals asserted that the future of Facebook PR groups in India seems bright and positive. While some PR professionals felt it should be localised as one of the assistant manager felt that, "in future Facebook PR groups would be more localised." And, a senior account executive cited, "Facebook PR groups will become more useful way to connect with journalists in the same city and other cities."

An assistant manager sums it up as, "We have got a great start in terms of PR groups in Facebook. I feel that this will continue to scale and many new initiatives will arise out of it. At the end of the day, it is the way forward for the future. I feel that groups should not be restricted to just Facebook, instead, they should initiate more conversations and create a synergy between offline and online communication strategy that can help in the future."

On the other side, few PR professionals feel that media relations through Facebook PR groups may be replaced by Twitter or WhatsApp. One of the PR agency managers argued that "Facebook is a fad and is dying out, as people prefer WhatsApp." Also, a PR agency Director adds, "today, journalists prefer Twitter or WhatsApp."



## **VIII. MAJOR FINDINGS**

The following are the major findings of the study:

1. Majority of the PR professionals (93.75%) use Facebook PR groups for media relations.
2. The most frequently and regularly used Facebook PR group for media relations was Media Movements.
3. Majority of the PR professionals use Facebook PR groups to get journalist's contact information, to get information on journalists swapping jobs, networking with Journalists, procuring media coverage opportunities, Job offers/career opportunities and to share new story angles.
4. Almost half of the PR professionals surveyed, posted their requirements on Facebook PR groups and majority of them were often satisfied with the responses they received.
5. Some of the PR professionals felt Facebook PR groups have been misused or exploited to promote their own products via ads or promoting their personal web pages.
6. Majority of the PR professionals claimed Facebook PR groups were better than LinkedIn groups.
7. Most of the PR professionals asserted that the future of Facebook PR groups in India seems bright and positive.
8. On the other side, few PR professionals felt that, in future, media relations through Facebook PR groups may be replaced by Twitter or WhatsApp.

## **IX. CONCLUSION**

The findings of the study clearly shows that today's PR professionals are tech savvy and use social networking sites like Facebook especially Facebook PR groups for media relations. With Facebook being ranked as the world's number 1 social networking site, today's young and dynamic PR professionals prefer using Facebook in their personal lives as well as their professional life, as they are hooked on to Facebook 24/7 with unlimited internet connectivity on smart phones at competitive rates. There are many Facebook PR groups available. The present study found that majority of the PR professionals use the Facebook PR group - Media Movements for media relations. Compared to other Facebook PR groups, Media Movements group leads the way with 19,785 active members.

With too many Facebook PR groups competing to get more number of active members for their respective groups, it is difficult for the PR professionals to choose which Facebook PR group to post their definitive requirements and hence end up posting on multiple Facebook PR groups, which becomes a tedious process to follow up. It is time for the Facebook PR groups to stick to their target audience and goals, also better to specialize in a particular region or sector. Facebook PR groups need to be localized with groups on Bangalore chapters so that PR professionals can get in touch directly with journalists in Bangalore. Also there is a need for more vertical specific PR groups like Tech PR groups, Lifestyle PR groups, Real Estate PR groups, Healthcare PR groups etc.

Lately, Facebook PR groups have become an assisting handy tool for the new age PR professionals to get journalist's contact information, to get information on journalists swapping jobs, networking with Journalists, procuring new media coverage opportunities, Job offers/career opportunities and to share new story angles. Facebook PR groups also have their set of cons, and have been misused. Especially these groups have been misused for promoting products, ads, personal web pages, etc. Hence, it is time for the Facebook group administrators' to become strict and regulate the groups in such a way that their Facebook PR group's purpose and credibility is not lost due to few individual's personal gains. Also, Facebook PR groups have to check the credentials of its members prior to granting membership to avoid fake profiles posting media requirements which doesn't exist in reality. The vernacular press in India still doesn't use social media; hence they don't prefer Facebook or Facebook PR groups for media relations and prefer the traditional style of media relations through phone or face-to-face meeting.

The future use of Facebook PR groups in India seems lucrative, but with the invasion of the newer technologies the competition has increased, as few of the PR professionals and journalists now prefer media relations through Twitter or WhatsApp.

## **IX. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

This research study has tried to review the new style of media relations, the vast use of Facebook PR groups for media relations, most frequently used Facebook PR groups by PR professionals in Bangalore, India, misuse of Facebook PR groups, comparison of Facebook PR groups with LinkedIn groups and future of Facebook PR groups.

This study also has its limitations, which might influence the generalizability of its findings. The sample was limited to only Bangalore city; hence the results cannot be generalized across India. Thus, future

research study can be conducted on a large number of PR professionals and the study can be conducted across India or the world. Also, future studies can study on broader aspects like Facebook for public relations, comparative analysis of Facebook PR groups with WhatsApp or Twitter, Using WhatsApp, Twitter, or LinkedIn for media relations.

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