The Perception of Public Relations in Society: A Case Study of Gender Knowledge, Attitudes and Skills in Relationship to Media

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Abstract

The paper reports on an ongoing research study examining the evolution of Public Relations in Jordan and its impact on society. The literature review has identified several factors that may have influenced the evolution of public relations in Jordan, namely: globalisation, gulf investments emergence, market changes, media and economic expansion. The research suggested that several variables may have been affecting the evolution of public relations in Jordan, such as; age, gender, income, social inheritance, education, religion, nationality.

The paper reports on some findings of this research study that examined the range of Public Relations industry policies undertaken in Jordan, and its impact on gender attitudes and skills in relationship to communication. The study examined evidence in areas where differences in knowledge, attitude and skills amongst gender towards public relation perception for media in general and future job in particular prevail. A well-defined questionnaire survey which forms its empirical base was carried out and administered on a random population, mainly university participants to determine whether gender issues and the characteristics associated with male and female oriented areas are recognised in tandem with media. The study findings verified that there are still gender-based differences in the industry towards to communication issues. Findings also indicated clear differences between female and male knowledge, attitudes and skills in relationship to media, with their associated characteristics supporting values marked out in the feminist theory of public relations.

Keywords. Public Relation, Socioeconomic Factors, Gender Issues, Perception

Introduction

Public Relations is moderately new to Jordan, and was originally introduced through advertising companies early 90’s (agencies) as a trivial service for International franchise or companies when required. Lately, it developed into an identified means of corporate communication distinguished from that of advertising, one that represents image rather than sales and with long term remuneration that come together on the organizations existing and future credibility, development and community interaction. Today there are a good number of PR firm/ agencies in Jordan, to name a few: Bidaya Corporate Communications, iRelations, ASDA’A Burson-Marsteller, Polaris and Madison PR. The principal areas that exist now in Jordan revolves around: Brand Promotion, CSR, Content Creation – Press Releases, Press Kits, Company Profiles, and Media Relations. Some of the most current issues that PR profession could be faced in the near future in Jordan are: Global Financial Crisis, Energy, Politics, and Environment. The research will address the correlation between the importance of principal areas of PR Business in Jordan and future outlook.
As it is the case throughout the history of Public Relation's evolution, the introduction of the profession was a result of number internal and external factors, which depend on a number of variables, on the other hand, the introduction of any new external profession or idea, faces several challenges. Through this research, the researcher intends to explore public relations, perceptions in the Jordanian society. For this purpose, the author has focused on the factors such as gender, knowledge, skills and attitudes in relationship to new media. The reason behind taking Jordan here is that it is a relatively young country and has been the hub for foreign investment and political conflict-caused immigration notably for the past fifteen years. Jordan continues to provide asylum for a large number of Palestinians, Syrians, Iraqis, Libyans, and other refugees, despite the substantial strain on national systems and infrastructure.

This pressure has become even more acute over the past two years, as the global financial crisis had an impact on Jordan's economic situation and infrastructure for water, electricity, waste management, education and health care. Moreover, globalization, economic growth, media spread, market change, foreign investment, and change in social structure have created the need for a new smarter way other than commercial promoting and marketing to manage crisis, and introduce new products, services and ideas.

The research highlighted society's perception towards PR in tandem with the previously mentioned factors. This paper will address only Media factor as it is beyond the scope of this paper to address all suggested factors. Consequently, the research, as suggested above, that several variables may have been affecting the evolution of public relations in Jordan. The intention of this pilot survey was to allow widespread comparison of differing aspirations and expectations, next to the fact that Gender variable will be heavily examined, and explored.

Literature Review
In order to fully understand the concept or phenomenon of public relations, the role of gender and attitudes towards it is necessary. Its importance and centrality is evident from the scholarly work done on this topic by feminist inspired scholars. In social relations formation too gender is important. Cailles (2009) testifies that women outnumber men at most agencies, he claims that it’s an industry still dominated by men. Cailles, remains confident that the old-school network, just as it is in the advertising world, still exists in PR. Gender-Role Attitudes has been given a serious attention in research, in measuring the gender-role attitudes a person's gender-role attitudes reflect beliefs about the roles of men and women. Sutton (2009) was of the view that “gender...concerns the psychological, social and cultural differences between males and females. Gender is linked to socially constructed notions of masculinity and femininity; it is not necessary a direct product of an individual’s biological sex.” (p. 601)

Glass Ceiling and Velvet Ghetto
Glass ceiling used politically for describing, “the unseen, yet unreachable barrier that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements” (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995. P.iii) since its initiation, the term has been applied by feminists representing the hurdles the successful females face in their career. However, some have also used it to the obstacles minority men have to face in their career (Frenkiel, 1984; Bollinger, 2008).
It has been highlighted by many scholars that women face discrimination in pay rates as well as promotion policies. They are paid less as compared to men and they are not appointed to top level management seats so the women who reach a certain point in their career and don’t get what they deserve either starts their own business or raise families leaving their career. The concept of Velvet Ghetto is applied to clustering of women in a specific profession and the history revealed that the term was introduced in a 1995 study that showed women clustering in public relations field in America during the period 1970 to 1980. Since then this term has been used to indicate uneven number of women in a specific profession. (Northouse, 2013). The gender roles and attitudes towards public relations have been the topic of research for many research studies. As in every field/profession, gender bias is present in public relations field too. For instance, the women work in public relations sector more than any other field however; their representation on management or leadership side is low. According to Aldoory&Toth, (2002)

Media has become a most influential tool that can leave an impact in our lives by shaping our views about different issues. The media that educates people that lead to social change. So, media itself can be used for changing attitudes towards women and to eliminate gender bias. For instance, we can use it to protect women from violence by educating people. However, the facts and figure reveal that media has also played a role to enhance gender inequality and discrimination because it is in the hands of men. Men dominate in media whether it is commentary, expert pools or hard talk shows. Women are usually assigned to cover topics such as food, family, relationship and fashion while political issues usually are thought to be masculine field. In talk shows too we see more men as guests than women. If we talk about new technology it has been found that the male contribution toward video games developing is 88% compared to the fact that almost 50% gamers are women. Further as mentioned above the number of women on leading jobs or key seats in television and newspapers is very low.

In film production to there is less representation of women in direction and production. In newspapers mostly article writers are male however female writers have also emerged recently. In the film industry too, evidence suggests that women get less recognition for their performance as compared to males. For instance women get fewer nominations in Academy Award compared to men as the ratio of nomination has been 1 and 5. (Elisa, 2015)
Kate Fitch(2010) also pointed out towards the fact that women representations in senior level post in PR is low. Further they do not get recognition for their work nor are their opinions considered legitimate in the academy. Verhoeven (2010) examined the perceptions of public relations professional regarding the efficacy of their decisions and found that male professional were of the view that they are more influential than moving when it comes to strategic decision making in the field of public relations.

Exploring the phenomenon from a feminine perspective Elspeth found that as women have diverse experiences they are more inclined to ethical decision making. She states that this trait of a woman is beneficial both for male and female representative in PR field. She describes that it is the affiliation that reduces gender based differences in an organization. She also pointed to the fact that relationships help in ethical decision making no matter the PR practitioners are male or female. Johnson (2010) discussed the representation of women in film and television in PR roles and its influence on how PR practitioners define themselves. According to Johnson, media has a key influence in shaping minds and educating people
that’s why it is important to explore how females PR practitioners are portrayed in films and television.

There is a negative impact on public perception about women role in public relations when they are negatively portrayed or their role is shown as limited and less important. Though women representation is less and bias exists as regards the recognition of their work and authenticity of their opinions however things have started to change and we can observe improvements. (Elisa, 2015)

According to a report by UNESCO, women representation have increased in the process of decision making as well as key position during the last 10 years. According to the amended electoral law, women quota in political parliament has been increased to 12 which was six earlier. Also, it is encouraging to note that 50% employees in Jordan civil services are women. However, besides these advances women have not reached the appropriate level of recognition, as their representation is low on leadership seats. (Jordan Department of Statistics 2010). In this research, we will be examining how this being reflected and affected by the media in PR. Attitudes as a variable define the kinds of things that are acceptable or appropriate for men but not women and vice versa in the performance and perceptions. For example, people vary in the degree to which they endorse the idea that "women should be just as able to work as equals with men in all businesses and professions," or that "decisions about what is best for a community should largely be in the hands of men." Spence and Helmreich (1978).

In the this pilot project, gender attitudes were measured of data collection with a modified version of an Gender Attitudes, perception, trust, knowledge and skills. The designed questionnaire requires respondents to indicate whether they believe men and women in general perceive PR and media differently in regards to jobs, education, and day-to-day activities. On the other hand, research as such indicated that public relations is a female-dominated profession, with up to 70 percent of the profession numerically are females in some European countries, the research will also examine this theory, yet the analysis will beyond the scope of this paper. Comparatively in literature, few women advance to senior level roles while male practitioners occupy the senior positions and female practitioners occupy the junior and middle-level positions.

It has been debated that these have led to a profession that is divided along gender lines, with women dominating in education (up to 90% female PR undergraduate students. Brenda Wrigley, a US researcher, identified through an in-depth study of women PR practitioners what she inferred as a “negotiated resignation” towards the so-called ‘glass ceiling effect’ whereby invisible barriers are encountered by women who aspire to top jobs, even though a clear pathway appears to exist. Yeomans, (2014) argued that "the less visible cultural and social processes, including how gender itself is performed during everyday interactions, that serve to reinforce the status quo."

It is clearly identified that there is a gender gap that has led to considerable pay differentials between the sexes. This paper will shed light on some areas revolving around this concept, in an attempt to find some answers related to the extent of gender gap in Jordan.

**Research Methodology**
"The Perception of Public Relations in Society" pilot survey is based on data collected from 220 questionnaire responses conducted online between April and May, 2015. A voluntary random stratified sample was drawn from all walks of life and nationalities in Jordan. The survey originally intended to cover a larger numbers of populations in Jordan. It was shared via one of the most social media utility ‘facebook’ targeting Jordanian University students, and sent via E-mail to Middle East University staff and Professors. As the "The Perception of Public Relations in Society" is part of PhD thesis research work, consequently it is an ongoing pilot survey, in which an additional numbers of participants are expected to participate in summer 2015

Survey Design
The survey is divided into three sections: A) General information and Demographics. B) Public Relations, Media and Society. C) PR work environment and Organizational polices. It had a set of ten (10) questions with several sub questions focused on public relation and its relation to media in tandem with Gender issues. Due to the sample being one of convenience, results may not represent the Jordanian population in a statistically accurate manner.

Results and Discussion
General Information and Demographics
The majority of whom responded were Males (140) (65.7%), with Females (73) forming (24.3%) (Figure1); the majority of that age group was between 18 to 24 years. It may indicate that this age group is simply either more or responsive for future online surveys, is indeed eager to provide good feedback on PR issues, and should be considered a good target group for future research. All respondents were born after January 1945, are university participants, degree educated, and in fulltime employment. More than three-quarters (85.9%) has a bachelor or higher degree, (40.8%) work in an organizations or in middle and senior management, while 53.8 percent are still participants (Figure 2) The following 6 nationalities living in Jordan are covered by the research. Unless indicated otherwise, 220 questionnaire were completed by; Jordanian, Palestinian, Syrian, Iraqi, Libyan, Yamani and other nationalities.

The research sample was representative of "The Perception of Public Relations in Society" survey in terms of gender, age, and work (Figure 2), level of study, nationality, financial
situation, and social status. The analysis at this stage of the research employed simple controls because this study seeks to understand the relationship between PR and Media in tandem with Gender experiences without making predictions or describing complicated causal relationships.

B) Public Relations, Media and Society
Because, the list of PR involvements and current related issues should not be exhaustively long; surveys must remain brief and focused for people to respond. It is intended at this point to pursue the same online research as disciplines exploring further issues to perform complex analyses, yet the researcher sought to make this study readable and easily applied to practice. Social, cultural, and economic causes are interesting and important and were thus explored; some other areas of politics were too complex and beyond the scope of this study yet were touched upon.

A genuine interest in PR and was noted among all respondents. Since this was an online survey, extra care by participants was considered; the researchers spent extra time making sure participants took the survey. It was an outstanding team effort and work. The responses in answering the questionnaires were also regarded as a positive sign amongst participants, to assist understanding the new challenges of media and PR. The study recognized that; Performance vary between gender, where females (52.5%) are more likely to say that they have enhanced their outlook and performance by the impact of public relation and media departments operating in Jordan, while men have been equally affected (47.5%).
Result 1: Evidence of Gender Gap in PR and Media: the survey has made some strong observations in regards to gender gap between men and women surrounding perception and outlook.

Result 2: When asked about the extent of which media and PR agencies has influenced the development of participants especially when it comes to their attitudes around skills (performance), aspirations, knowledge, performance, willingness to improve, confidences (trust) the qualities that define leaders and leading organizations, and directional change by the desirability of specific industry sectors such as media and PR.

Males are somewhat more likely than females to seek change in their attitude around skills (57.1 percent vs. 42.9 percent).

Result 3: In a finding that may mimic the concept of the glass-ceiling debate, that gap reduces significantly to 0 points when participants asked how likely they see the impact on their willingness to improve, males and females scored equally. These gaps reflect how well participants feel affected by current practices in PR and media agencies in Jordan.

Participants were asked to rate how strong their various technical, analytical, and skills. Females rated themselves on similarity with males generally in knowledge, and higher than males in directional change, indicating a strong belief amongst women to improve (professionalism, communication, etc.).
Result 4: When participants were asked to rate their skills, a significant gender gap emerged (Figure 6).

The relationship between Awareness of PR role and both Gender and Education:

When participants were asked whether or they have sought understanding and of the public relation agencies role or PR in society. Answers by males were 85% an excellent extent rate, vs. 15% of female. It's important to mention that the highest percentage discrepancies amongst this criteria when education was compared with PR awareness role, was clear that the culture of PR is evolving more interest in market trends needs for making its way to affect education in Jordan. More statistical analysis will be submitted in future papers in that regard in an attempt to substantiate this argument.

There was a positive association between owning education and level of awareness amongst most population

This clearly identifies the positive factors of education may play a big role in raising awareness amongst society.
Figure 7 (left) Media & PR agencies influence on development of participant: The relationship between Gender and attitudes around skills, aspiration, knowledge, performance:

While males and females both consider the overall contribution to the development of the study factors emphasize some level of Improvement, they place different levels and inconsistency of emphasis on a number of factors. More than half of females (74.0 percent) highlighted developing their attitudes around skills as high in relation to Media and PR, as opposed to 56 percent of males. Females (74.1 percent) more strongly associate having a “significant knowledge based behavior” with PR and Media agencies than do males (58.3 percent). Males, on the other hand, take slightly similar note of an organization’s impact to create and enhance their performance level and (60 percent vs. 69 percent for males).
Figure 8 (left)
Media & PR agencies influence on development of participant: The relationship between Gender and willingness to improve, Confidences and directional change:

In light of those findings, it’s not surprising that when asked to highlight the impact of willingness to improve as a reason to media agencies integration and influence in society, females would place more emphasis on improvement and development (80% vs. 60% for males) and their trust (confidences).

Development was almost similar (67% vs 62%). Females also would seek almost similar goals and their own personal and directional change (60% vs. 52% for males (Figure 16).

Conclusion
The most significant findings of this study are:

1. The majority of respondents were male (143) (65.3%) vs. (67) (34.7%) female. Despite the fact that as it is everywhere, females’ employment rate in PR is higher than males’.
2. The study found traditional trends in PR practice in connection with conventional thinking; some highlighted results were mainly concentrated in the lack of PR improvement in society and practice amongst PR agencies. Which directly affects PR perception leading to challenges facing PR agencies.
3. A good tendency amongst Gender in Jordan to get involved in PR research. Responses from participant were higher than anticipated and still on the rise, indicating a much more serious involvement amongst gender in the future.
4. PR agencies have not effectively introduced PR policies into the society in the last few years compared with PR integration worldwide. Noting that publics seem well aware of the media, and referring to responses, it is widely used. Then PR professionals/agencies failed utilizing media channels to manage its image among the Jordanian society.
5. The study has revealed weakness in PR policies and awareness
6. Future studies needed, to investigate this important issue, and look into means and methods to improve PR practice, awareness, and image in Jordan.
References
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