



UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF PUBLICITY IN PUBLIC RELATIONS: A SYNOPTIC REVIEW

OBERIRI DESTINY APUKE

Department of Mass Communication, Taraba State University, PMB 1167 Jalingo, Nigeria.

Corresponding Email: apukedestiny@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper explicates what publicity is, types of publicity, disadvantages and advantages of publicity. The study demonstrates that publicity implies communication about a product or organization by the placing of news about it in the media without paying for time and space directly. Additionally, the study revealed online and offline publicity as the major type of publicity, and that publicity helps businesses build credibility and brand awareness. However, the timing of the publicity is not always completely under the control of the marketer. Unless the press thinks the information has very high news value, the timing of the press release is entirely up to the media if it gets released at all.

Keywords: Publicity, online and offline publicity, credibility, strategy

Introduction and background

What is publicity

A major element of public relations is publicity. It implies communication about a product or organization by the placing of news about it in the media without paying for time and space directly. Publicity in its simplest form is the means of conveying information to the general public through the media. It is the movement of information to the general public from the media (Mersham, Theunissen, & Peart, 2009). The information being publicized could be news, awareness about a product and service, etc. It is the process of creating awareness of new products and services. One important factor to consider in publicity is your target audience (Aula, 2010).

Depending on the type of product or service being publicized, certain categories of people may be the target audience. For example, if the product is for babies, nursing mothers, and pregnant women will likely be the target audience. According to Ehrenberg, Barnard, Kennedy, and Bloom (2002), the means of getting publicity are through print media (newspapers, journals, magazines, etc.), television; radio; email; websites; and social media like Facebook, Twitter, and blogs. Other means of publicity are public speech, seminars, and workshops. Other means of publicity are staging events, building associations, and doing other things depending upon the type of business the company is in, that the public would be genuinely interested in knowing about. The means of publicity to adopt usually depends on the kind of information to be publicized, financial resources and target audience (Toth, 2009).

Thus a public relations practitioner should understand his audience, identify the proper media that suits them and then make appropriate use of that media. The better media chose the better result obtained. Therefore, publicity has only one purpose to get certain information across to as many people as possible within the shortest time frame (Aula, 2010). Ahluwalia, Burn rant, and Unnava (2000) remarked that for a company to record any sale on their products or services, their prospective customers have to be aware of those products and services, and they also have to know the attached benefits. It should be noted that publicity is communication and communication is a two-way transaction. Publicity is not complete without getting feedback from the recipients of the required information. So, another part of publicity is providing means or platform for sending feedback or any other form of response from those who got the message being disseminated.

Publicity stories have to be interesting, timely and relevant (Monga & John, 2008). Boring stories that have no merit will take you nowhere and could have a detrimental fact on your business by causing people to lose interest and stop listening. Effective publicity goes beyond news releases, and while news releases can help with search engine marketing, you'll need a bigger and more strategic public relations program to get you the results that you desire. In conclusion, publicity is an inevitable part of public relations. No matter how good your product or company is, without effective publicity, you will just be “winking in the dark.”

Different Types of Publicity

According to Aula, (2010), there are two major types of publicity in this digital age, which is offline publicity and online publicity. Offline publicity is done without the internet. Offline publicity includes print media (magazines, journals, newsletters, daily newspapers, postcards, bills, fliers, banners); television; radio; and giant billboards, public speech, seminars, workshops, staging events, and building associations. On the other hand, online publicity is the one done through an internet-based platform. Some online publicity techniques are email marketing, web page pop-ups, blogs, websites, Facebook publicity, Twitter publicity and referral links/ad banners.

Advantages and Disadvantages of publicity

As recorded in Toth, (2009); Aula, (2010) and Mersham, et al. (2009) below are some of the advantages of disadvantages of publicity.

Advantages of publicity

- Publicity helps businesses build credibility and brand awareness
- Publicity is the low-cost or no-cost option. In other words, it's a cost-effective strategy, but only if you create newsworthy stories
- Publicity positions your business and the principals of that businesses as experts in your industry.
- Publicity helps your business to stand out and be noticed.
- Publicity can help in the development of partnerships and strategic alliances.
- Publicity builds your credibility and propels you into a competitive position.

Disadvantages of publicity

Two major problems arise from the use of publicity: timing and accuracy.

- Timing: Timing of the publicity is not always completely under the control of the marketer. Unless the press thinks the information has very high news value, the timing of the press release is entirely up to the media—if it gets released at all. Thus, the information may be released earlier than desired or too late to make an impact.
- Accuracy: A major way to get publicity is the press release. Unfortunately, the information sometimes gets lost in translation—that is, it is not always reported the way the provider wishes it to be. As a result, inaccurate information, omissions, or other errors may result. Sometimes when you see a publicity piece that was written on the basis of a press release, you wonder if the two are even on the same topic. Thus in publicity, there is a loss of control of content, which is there is no way of ensuring that the viewpoint of the company is reflected in the published article.
- Lack of control over how your releases will be used, and frustration over the low percentage of releases that are taken up by the media.

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