

A Three-Year Longitudinal Analysis of Social and Emerging Media Use in Public Relations Practice

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New communications media have had a huge impact on the practice of public relations since the first weblogs, or blogs, appeared more than a dozen years ago. Since then these new communications media have developed into a number of different forms including text, images, audio and video through the development of forums, message boards, photo sharing, podcasts RSS (really simple syndication), search engine marketing, video sharing, Wikis, social networks, professional networks and micro-blogging sites.

Although social and other new communications media are changing the way people and organizations communicate few define social media the same way. Mark Dykeman (2008) says, "Social media are the means for any person to: publish digital creative content; provide and obtain real-time feedback via online discussions, commentary and evaluations; and incorporate changes or corrections to the original content" (p. 1). For example, Joe Marchese (2007) suggests the difference between traditional media such as newspapers, magazines, radio-television and social media "is not the media itself, but the system of discovery, distribution, consumption and conversation surrounding the media." Even though both social and traditional media have the ability to reach small or large audiences, production costs usually are large for what has become a small number of traditional media outlets while social media technologies basically give anyone with access to a computer the ability to reach a potentially global audience at little or no cost.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Pew Research Center (2008) annually tracks the sources Americans use for news and for the first time in 2008 noted more people were getting their news online than from traditional mass media. However, most blend online and traditional sources in their quest for news and information. This Pew study also points out more young people than ever before are reading online versions of traditional news media.

All of this comes at a significant time for traditional news media, especially newspapers. Paid circulation figures for daily newspapers in many large American cities continue to decline to the point where some daily's such as Denver's *Rocky Mountain News* and the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* ceased publication in 2009. Major daily newspapers such as the *Detroit Free Press* and the *Boston Globe* are seriously considering not publishing hard-copy editions

seven days each week. Following a century-long tradition of excellence, the *Christian Science Monitor* stopped publishing as a daily in March 2009 in order to concentrate on publishing a weekly edition and refining its online offerings. According to *Boston Magazine* (2009) the *Monitor's* circulation had slipped 75 percent during the past 40 years.

Similar changes have presented themselves within some of the trade publications that serve the public relations industry. In 2009, *PR Week*, considered by most to be the nation's most dominant public relations trade publication, changed its weekly print edition into an online format, although it does produce a printed magazine each month. Some other public relations trade publications appear to have been impacted recently, including *PR News* which now offers nearly as many public relations short courses and seminars as it does publications.

Each year since 2005, the authors of this article have conducted annual surveys measuring the impact social and other emerging technologies are having on public relations (Wright & Hinson, 2006a, 2006b, 2007a, 2007b, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2008d, 2008e, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2010d, 2011a, 2011b). Results of these studies show that these new communications media have brought dramatic changes to many aspects of the field. Their findings also suggest that the development of various new technologies has significantly empowered a wide variety of strategic publics by giving them dynamic new media many are using to communicate effectively with a variety of internal and external audiences.

A number of recently published books have explored how blogs, social media and other new communications media are changing the way organizations communicate with strategic publics such as employees, customers, stockholders, communities, governments and other stakeholders.

Larry Weber (2007), who has spent most of his professional career building global communications companies including Weber Shandwick Worldwide, suggests the communications world is dramatically moving in a digital direction and those who understand this transformation will communicate much more effectively than those who do not.

Robert Scoble, who authors the nation's most read business blog and runs Microsoft's Channel 9 web site, and Shell Israel, who has more than two decades experience as an expert on communication innovation, provide a road-map showing how blogs are changing the way organizations communicate with important publics, especially customers (Scoble & Israel, 2006).

Brian Reich and Dan Solomon, who both have many unique accomplishments in public relations and advertising, offer tips and suggestions for companies and

individuals to master the new technology in a way that will connect with and keep audiences (Reich & Solomon, 2008).

David Meerman Scott (2008a), an online thought leadership and viral marketing strategist, says, “one of the coolest things about the Web is that when an idea takes off it can propel a brand or a company to seemingly instant fame and fortune” (p. 8).

Scott also points out that although communicating via the Web usually is free – as opposed to purchasing space through traditional advertising – only a small number of public relations practitioners are effectively using blogs and other social media when communicating with their strategic publics.

Furthermore, Scott (2007 & 2008) thinks many of the differences between what he calls the “old” and “new” rules of press releases are important. As he explains, nobody actually saw the old press releases except a few reporters and editors, and the only way members of the general public would learn about the content of a press release was if the media wrote or broadcast a story about it. Scott also points out the way most practitioners measured the effectiveness of a press release were through clippings, the simplest and most basic commodity of output research. Scott’s thesis about today’s “new” press releases focuses on information senders now deliver directly to receivers in various target publics via the Web. He also advocates measurement based upon whether or not the releases change or reinforce attitudes, opinions and behavior – the essence of what supporters of outcome research recommend.

Argenti and Barnes (2009) say new communications media have “changed the rules of the game in every part” of strategic communication. They also claim that over the past decade these new communications vehicles have not only turned upside down everything people knew about communications but also have dramatically changed the business of managing relationships. Findings of the noted *Authentic Enterprise Report* of the Arthur W. Page Society (2007) give the new communications media credit for dramatically changing the ways in which stakeholders are empowered.

Social media are being utilized on an ever-increasing basis by corporations and other organizations. McCorkindale (2009) reports more than two-thirds (69%) of the current Fortune 2000 companies are using social networking sites. Ruh and Magallon (2009) indicate the U.S. military currently is involved in studying the potential of using social media for some of its internal communication campaigns. Paine (2009a, 2009b, 2009c) points out many organizations now are trying to measure the effectiveness of their social media communication efforts.

Another measure of the growth and development of social media in public relations is the level of social media activity currently displayed by various

professional societies active in the field. In addition to web pages and e-mail communication, social media sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn and others all have pages organized by organizations such as the Institute for Public Relations (IPR), the International Public Relations Association (IPRA), the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), the Council of Public Relations Firms, the Arthur W. Page Society and the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC).

As Kelly (2009) and Eberwein (2010) have both pointed out, the micro-blogging site Twitter frequently is the first source to provide news seekers with information about major news events including the 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai, India; the massive 2010 earthquake in Haiti; and the US Airways flight landing in the Hudson River on January 15, 2009. While he was Editor of *PR Week*, Keith O'Brien (2009), pointed out that "there has been great progress in the use of social media to reach various constituencies."

At a time when current economic conditions are bringing layoffs in many aspects of the public relations industry, *PR Week* (Maul, 2009) claims the future is bright for social media in public relations. According to a survey of 285 public relations practitioners conducted by the Council of Public Relations Firms (2009), most (79%) believe social media will be included more in future public relations campaigns while more than half (59%) think technology is not used enough in public relations campaigns.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Although others have examined the huge impact new communications media are having on the practice of public relations, what is missing is research studying how public relations practitioners actually are using these new media. The three-year trend study of public relations practitioners reported about in this paper provides one of the most extensive examinations of how social media are being implemented in public relations practice. In addition to measuring how social media are being employed in the practice of public relations, this study also explores actual new communications media use by individual public relations practitioners.

This research project also has the potential of enhancing the credibility of scholarly research in public relations because it involves a longitudinal analysis of a larger-than-usual number of subjects. As Dougall (2006) explains, the lack of a significant number of panel and trend studies in the public relations literature does not reflect positively on our field when the public relations body of knowledge is compared with research productivity in the traditional social sciences and other professions.

Additionally, since more than half of the survey research projects in the public relations literature contain reports about studies involving less than 350

respondents, and more than two-thirds of these studies have usable responses from fewer than 250 subjects, the larger-than-usual number of participants in the study at hand – a total of 1,616 respondents during the three years of the research – is a plus for public relations research.

METHOD

Three different large, purposive samples of public relations practitioners from various parts of the world took part in this longitudinal study survey research project in 2009, 2010 and 2011. Invitations to participate by completing the study's web-based questionnaire were extended via e-mail messages to purposive samples collected from membership rosters of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), the Arthur W. Page Society and the International Public Relations Association (IPRA). Additional subjects were gathered from donor, task-force and commission membership lists of the Institute for Public Relations (IPR).

More than a 1,600 (n=1,616) respondents (n=574 in 2009, n=563 and n=479 in 2010) took part in this study by completing web-based questionnaires. Subjects came from many different parts of the world representing a good cross-section of the public relations industry.

Of the 574 respondents in the 2009 study, more (25%) worked with small agencies or consultancies than any other area but corporations (20%) and educational institutions (20%) also were well represented. Large agencies accounted for 10 percent of the respondents while seven percent worked in governmental public relations positions, five percent came from the not-for-profit area, five percent were research providers, one percent worked in health care and seven percent responded "other" when asked what kind of organization they worked for.

Demographic breakdowns of the 563 respondents to the 2010 study had 24 percent working with small agencies or consultancies, 19 percent employed by corporations, 14 percent from educational institutions, 13 percent from the non-profit sector, eight percent from government, six percent from large agencies, five percent from health care and one percent from the research provider category. Nine percent of the 2010 respondents checked "other" in their response to this question.

The 2011 demographics for the 479 respondents included 25 percent working with small agencies or consultancies, 20 percent employed by corporations, 16 percent from educational institutions, 14 percent from the non-profit sector, 10 percent from government, six percent from health care, two percent from large agencies and one percent from the research provider category. Five percent of the 2011 respondents checked "other" in their response to this question.

Responses were nicely distributed across various age categories in all three years. In 2009, 15 percent of the respondents were younger than 30, 25 percent were between 30 and 39, 26 percent were aged 40 to 49, 27 percent were 50 to 59 and seven percent were 60 or older. In the 2010 study 26 percent were younger than 30, 26 percent were between 30 and 39, 24 percent were aged 40 to 49, 20 percent were 50 to 59 and four percent were 60 or older. For the 2011 respondents, 12 percent were younger than 30, 23 percent were between 30 and 39, 28 percent were aged 40 to 49, 26 percent were 50 to 59 and 12 percent were 60 or older.

The breakdown of respondents by gender in 2009 was 52 percent female and 48 percent male; in 2010 it was 68 percent female and 32 percent male, and in 2011 it was 66 percent female and 44 percent male.

The study's main measuring instrument consisted of a two-pronged, seven-item answer matrix. Subjects were first asked to respond on a five-point, Likert-type scale to questions asking how important each of the seven new communications media items was "in the overall communications and public relations efforts of your organization (or your client's organizations)."

RESULTS

Results displayed in Table 1 show that although search engine marketing was considered to be the most important of the seven media options in 2009, social networks such as Facebook were clearly listed as the most important by respondents in 2010 and 2011 followed, in both years, by micro-blogging sites such as Twitter and video-sharing sites such as YouTube.

As micro-blogging and video-sharing sites dramatically increased in perceived importance in 2010 and 2011, the significance of blogs, podcasts and electronic forums or message boards decreased slightly while search engine marketing remained about the same.

Table 1: Responses to the question: “How important IS each of the following in the overall communications and public relations efforts of your organization (or your client’s organizations)?”

2009						
	Very Unimportant	Somewhat Unimportant	Uncertain	Somewhat Important	Very Important	Mean Score
Blogs	13%	17%	11%	41%	18%	3.35
Electronic Forums or Message Boards	13%	24%	16%	37%	10%	3.06
Podcasts	21%	21%	21%	30%	7%	2.82
Search Engine Marketing	10%	9%	19%	29%	32%	3.62
Social Networks (Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.)	14%	16%	17%	39%	13%	3.21
Micro-Blogging Sites (Twitter, etc.)	22%	19%	25%	26%	8%	2.81
Video Sharing (YouTube, etc.)	16%	13%	18%	38%	14%	3.19

Note: (a) Percentage scores throughout this report might not always total 100% due to rounding. (b) Mean scores throughout this report are based on responses to five-point Likert-type scales where “1” = “Very Unimportant” and “5” = “Very Important.” Consequently, the higher the mean score the greater the perceived importance.

2010						
	Very Unimportant	Somewhat Unimportant	Uncertain	Somewhat Important	Very Important	Mean Score
Blogs	11%	22%	10%	39%	18%	3.31
Electronic Forums or Message Boards	14%	28%	17%	30%	10%	2.94
Podcasts	24%	32%	17%	24%	5%	2.54
Search Engine Marketing	8%	15%	13%	46%	5%	3.61
Social Networks (Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.)	5%	9%	9%	47%	30%	3.89
Micro-Blogging Sites (Twitter, etc.)	8%	15%	12%	42%	23%	3.56
Video Sharing (YouTube, etc.)	9%	13%	13%	43%	22%	3.57

Table 1 (Continued)

	2011					Mean Score
	Very Unimportant	Somewhat Unimportant	Uncertain	Somewhat Important	Very Important	
Blogs	12%	22%	11%	40%	14%	3.22
Electronic Forums or Message Boards	21%	30%	17%	28%	4%	2.64
Podcasts	28%	30%	17%	21%	4%	2.43
Search Engine Marketing	9%	13%	13%	38%	27%	3.61
Social Networks (Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.)	4%	6%	7%	48%	36%	4.06
Micro-Blogging Sites (Twitter, etc.)	7%	10%	11%	46%	26%	3.75
Video Sharing (YouTube, etc.)	6%	10%	13%	46%	25%	3.72

Results displayed in Table 2 show, a substantial amount of statistical significance exists in terms of the displayed mean differences in the perceived importance of each of these seven media between 2009, 2010 and 2011.

Table 2: Mean Analysis ANOVA Comparisons between 2009, 2010 and 2011 for responses to the question: “How important IS each of the following in the overall communications and public relations efforts of your organization (or your client’s organizations)?”

	2009	2010	2011	F =	SIG.
Blogs	3.35	3.31	3.22	2.47	.008
Electronic Forums or Message Boards	3.06	2.94	2.64	3.65	.027
Podcasts	2.82	2.54	2.43	1.39	.046
Search Engine Marketing	3.62	3.61	3.61	2.84	.001
Social Networks (Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.)	3.21	3.89	4.06	3.29	.000
Micro-Blogging Sites (Twitter, etc.)	2.81	3.56	3.75	2.27	.017
Video Sharing (YouTube, etc.)	3.19	3.57	3.72	3.86	.031

Note: Mean scores are based on responses to five-point Likert-type scales where “1” = “Very Unimportant” and “5” = “Very Important.” Consequently, the higher the mean score the greater the perceived importance.

Subjects were then asked how important each of the seven new communications media “should be in the overall communications and public relations efforts of your organization (or your client’s organizations).” Results to this question are displayed in Tables 3 and 4. Results show search engine marketing was perceived as the most important of various new communications media options in 2009 but social networks such as Facebook were ranked the highest in 2010 and 2011. Blogs and search engine marketing both have remained high used at fairly constant levels across all three years while the significance of electronic forms or message boards and podcasts has decreased. Micro-blogs such as Twitter increased dramatically in importance between 2009 and 2010 but have leveled off in importance since then. Video-sharing sites such as YouTube have shown a dramatic increase in perceived importance each year since 2009.

As shown in Table 5, a comparison analysis of responses to the questions asking how important various items are and how important they should be across all three years of this trend study reveals that the perceived order of importance of items is fairly similar for what actually is happening as compared to what the study’s respondents believe should be happening. However, mean scores and overall perceived importance for each of the seven new communications media items in all three years are considerably higher when subjects are asked what should be happening in terms of social media and other new communications media use than they are when the question asks what actually is happening.

Tables 3, 4 and 5 display mean differences and analysis between each new communications media item in terms of how important respondents think they should be to their organization’s (or their client organizations) public relations and communications efforts.

Table 3: Responses to the question: “How important SHOULD each of the following BE in these overall communications and public relations efforts of your organization (or your client’s organizations)?”

2009						
	Very Unimportant	Somewhat Unimportant	Uncertain	Somewhat Important	Very Important	Mean Score
Blogs	4%	8%	7%	45%	36%	4.01
Electronic Forums or Message Boards	10%	12%	12%	48%	24%	3.77
Podcasts	5%	11%	20%	43%	21%	3.64
Search Engine Marketing	4%	5%	12%	34%	45%	4.10
Social Networks (Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.)	7%	13%	16%	36%	28%	3.65
Micro-Blogging Sites (Twitter, etc.)	7%	14%	24%	34%	21%	3.48
Video Sharing (YouTube, etc.)	9%	9%	16%	39%	27%	3.67

2010						
	Very Unimportant	Somewhat Unimportant	Uncertain	Somewhat Important	Very Important	Mean Score
Blogs	2%	7%	8%	54%	29%	4.01
Electronic Forums or Message Boards	5%	12%	19%	47%	17%	3.60
Podcasts	6%	14%	25%	44%	12%	3.41
Search Engine Marketing	3%	5%	8%	37%	47%	4.20
Social Networks (Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.)	2%	5%	5%	43%	45%	4.26
Micro-Blogging Sites (Twitter, etc.)	3%	6%	11%	44%	36%	4.05
Video Sharing (YouTube, etc.)	2%	5%	9%	47%	36%	4.10

Table 3 (Continued)

2011						
	Very Unimportant	Somewhat Unimportant	Uncertain	Somewhat Important	Very Important	Mean Score
Blogs	2%	6%	12%	48%	32%	4.00
Electronic Forums or Message Boards	7%	15%	22%	40%	15%	3.41
Podcasts	8%	14%	32%	35%	11%	3.25
Search Engine Marketing	3%	5%	10%	36%	46%	4.17
Social Networks (Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.)	1%	5%	5%	44%	44%	4.26
Micro-Blogging Sites (Twitter, etc.)	2%	6%	8%	46%	38%	4.09
Video Sharing (YouTube, etc.)		3%	10%	44%	43%	4.25

Table 4: Mean Analysis ANOVA Comparisons between 2009 and 2010 for responses to the question: “How important SHOULD each of the following BE in the overall communications and public relations efforts of your organization (or your client’s organizations)?”

	2009	2010	2011	F =	SIG.
Blogs	4.01	4.01	4.00	1.53	.001
Electronic Forums or Message Boards	3.77	3.60	3.41	2.12	.004
Podcasts	3.64	3.41	3.25	1.97	.032
Search Engine Marketing	4.10	4.20	4.17	2.84	.013
Social Networks (Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.)	3.65	4.26	4.26	3.14	.000
Micro-Blogging Sites (Twitter, etc.)	3.48	4.05	4.09	1.47	.000
Video Sharing (YouTube, etc.)	3.67	4.10	4.25	2.38	.023

Note: (a) Mean scores are based on responses to five-point Likert-type scales where “1” = “Very Unimportant” and “5” = “Very Important.” Consequently, the higher the mean score the greater the perceived importance. (b) Mean difference calculations involve subtracting 2009 mean scores from those of 2010.

The gaps reported on in Tables 4 and 5 are momentous and results of ANOVA analysis show these differences are statistically significant (at $p = <.05$) in 12 cases out of 14. Statistical significance is evident on 2009 measures involving blogs, forums or message boards, social networks (such as Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.), micro-blogging sites (such as Twitter) and video sharing sites (such as YouTube). Statistical significance is represented on all of these measures in 2010 and 2011 plus podcasts and search engine marketing

Table 5: Mean t-test analysis of responses to the question asking how important social media are and how important they should be “in your organization (or your client’s organizations).”

2009					
	How Important Are These Media in Your Orgs. PR Efforts	How Important Should They Be	Mean Difference	t =	SIG.
Blogs	3.35	4.01	-.66	5.62	.000
Forums or Message Boards	3.06	3.77	-.71	4.34	.001
Podcasts	2.82	3.64	-.82	1.49	.192
Search Engine Marketing	3.62	4.10	-.48	2.12	.064
Social Networks (Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.)	3.21	3.65	-.44	6.06	.000
Micro-Blogging Sites (Twitter, etc.)	2.81	3.48	-.67	5.90	.000
Video Sharing (YouTube, etc.)	3.19	3.67	-.48	2.97	.013

2010					
	How Important Are These Media in Your Orgs. PR Efforts	How Important Should They Be	Mean Difference	t =	SIG.
Blogs	3.31	4.01	-.70	3.43	.001
Forums or Message Boards	2.94	3.60	-.66	2.37	.000
Podcasts	2.54	3.41	-.87	3.91	.032
Search Engine Marketing	3.61	4.20	-.69	4.17	.013
Social Networks (Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.)	3.89	4.26	-.37	5.03	.004
Micro-Blogging Sites (Twitter, etc.)	3.56	4.05	-.49	4.78	.000
Video Sharing (YouTube, etc.)	3.57	4.10	-.53	2.21	.008

Table 5 (Continued)

2011					
	How Important Are These Media in Your Orgs.PR Efforts	How Important Should They Be	Mean Difference	t =	SIG.
Blogs	3.22	4.00	-.78	2.73	.007
Forums or Message Boards	2.64	3.41	-.77	2.14	.018
Podcasts	2.43	3.25	-.82	2.89	.041
Search Engine Marketing	3.61	4.17	-.56	3.82	.032
Social Networks (Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.)	4.06	4.26	-.20	1.14	.002
Micro-Blogging Sites (Twitter, etc.)	3.75	4.09	-.34	2.36	.000
Video Sharing (YouTube, etc.)	3.72	4.25	-.53	3.17	.012

Note: (a) Mean scores are based on responses to five-point Likert-type scales where “1” = “Very Unimportant” and “5” = “Very Important.” Consequently, the higher the mean score the greater the perceived importance. (b) Mean difference calculations involve subtracting mean scores from the “how important (specific social media) are” questions from mean scores from the items measuring how important each of the social media should be in an organization’s communications and public relations efforts.

Analysis reported in Table 5 reveals respondents in all three years of this trend study perceive that meaningful gaps exist when measuring differences between what is happening and what should be happening in terms of all of the social media use in public relations practice.

In each year of this research the frequency of personal use by respondents of traditional and social media was measured. Subjects were first asked, “How frequently do you personally use each of the following as information sources for news about what’s happening on the local, regional and international news scene.” Results over all three years, as shown in Table 6, suggest public relations practitioners make much greater use of traditional news media sources such as newspapers, magazines, radio and television than the general public. At a time when reports suggest the news environment is changing for many news consumers, and when audiences for traditional news sources are steadily declining (Pew, 2008), public relations practitioners (or at least those who responded to this survey) continue to make steady use of traditional news sources.

Table 6: Responses to the question: “How frequently do you personally use each of the following as information sources for news about what’s happening on the local, regional, national and international news scene?”

2009						
	Very Infrequently	Somewhat Infrequently	Neither Frequently nor Infrequently	Somewhat Frequently	Very Frequently	Mean Score
Blogs	16%	14%	12%	32%	26%	3.38
Forums or Message Boards	19%	26%	24%	24%	7%	2.73
Social Networks (Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.)	20%	14%	14%	26%	26%	3.24
Micro-Blogging Sites (Twitter, etc.)	34%	17%	18%	17%	15%	2.65
Video Sharing (YouTube, etc.)	18%	22%	22%	25%	12%	2.76
Wikis	12%	26%	23%	16%	23%	3.11
Newspapers	9%	4%	1%	16%	69%	4.30
Magazines	6%	8%	7%	27%	52%	4.11
Radio News	9%	11%	9%	23%	48%	3.90
Television News	9%	9%	7%	29%	46%	3.95

Table 6 (Continued)

2010						
	Very Infrequently	Somewhat Infrequently	Neither Frequently nor Infrequently	Somewhat Frequently	Very Frequently	Mean Score
Blogs	14%	14%	19%	32%	21%	3.31
Forums or Message Boards	27%	23%	23%	22%	4%	2.53
Social Networks (Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.)	7%	9%	11%	30%	43%	3.92
Micro-Blogging Sites (Twitter, etc.)	15%	12%	12%	26%	35%	3.56
Video Sharing (YouTube, etc.)	12%	19%	22%	35%	12%	3.17
Wikis	24%	20%	24%	26%	7%	2.74
Newspapers	1%	5%	5%	34%	55%	4.36
Magazines	2%	10%	12%	43%	33%	3.95
Radio News	5%	11%	12%	34%	39%	3.91
Television News	4%	10%	9%	35%	43%	4.03

Table 6 (Continued)

	2011					Mean Score
	Very Infrequently	Somewhat Infrequently	Neither Frequently nor Infrequently	Somewhat Frequently	Very Frequently	
Blogs	13%	15%	17%	33%	22%	3.38
Forums or Message Boards	34%	21%	23%	16%	6%	2.37
Social Networks (Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.)	6%	10%	10%	26%	47%	3.99
Micro-Blogging Sites (Twitter, etc.)	15%	12%	11%	25%	37%	3.56
Video Sharing (YouTube, etc.)	12%	21%	22%	34%	12%	3.13
Wikis	25%	21%	24%	25%	6%	2.66
Newspapers	3%	5%	7%	29%	57%	4.33
Magazines	3%	8%	13%	41%	35%	3.98
Radio News	6%	10%	12%	31%	41%	3.91
Television News	7%	10%	11%	27%	44%	3.92

Note: Mean scores for the three tables in this section are based on responses to five-point Likert-type scales where “1” = “Very Infrequently” and “5” = “Very Frequently.” Consequently, the higher the mean score the more the medium was used.

Table 7: Mean Analysis ANOVA Comparisons between 2009, 2010 and 2011 for responses to the question: “How frequently do you personally use each of the following as information sources for news about what’s happening on the local, regional, national and international scene?”

	2009	2010	2011	F =	SIG.
Blogs	3.38	3.31	3.38	4.12	.000
Forums or Message Boards	2.73	2.53	2.37	1.63	.032
Social Networks (Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.)	3.24	3.92	3.99	1.72	.000
Micro-Blogging Sites (Twitter, etc.)	2.65	3.56	3.56	4.51	.000
Video Sharing (YouTube, etc.)	2.76	3.17	3.13	2.73	.004
Wikis	3.11	2.74	2.66	3.63	.021
Newspapers	4.30	4.36	4.33	1.82	.000
Magazines	4.11	3.95	3.98	3.31	.000
Radio News	3.90	3.91	3.91	4.19	.001
Television News	3.95	4.03	3.92	2.34	.000

Note: (a) Mean scores are based on responses to five-point Likert-type scales where “1” = “Very Infrequent” and “5” = “Very Frequent.” Consequently, the higher the mean score the more the medium was used. (b) Mean difference calculations involve subtracting mean scores from 2009 from the mean scores of 2010.

As the mean scores on Tables 6 and 7 indicate, the public relations practitioners who responded to the 2009 study get most of their news from newspapers followed by magazines, television news and radio news. Although newspapers remained the most frequently used news source during 2010 and 2011, magazine and Wiki use declined somewhat over the next two years when significant increases were noted in terms of the use of social networks, video sharing sites and micro-blogs. The use of blogs, forums or message boards and radio remained relatively constant during the three years of this study. Although the use of television news increased dramatically between 2009 and 2010 it decreased significantly in 2011. As Table 7 indicates, a good number of these differences were statistically significant at $p < .05$.

Subjects in all three years also were asked how frequently they personally used the same list of information sources “for news about what’s happening in the field of public relations and communications.” Results displayed in Tables 8 and 9 show considerable increases in the use of social networks and micro-blogging sites in both 2010 and 2011. Relatively speaking, the use of blogs, forums or message boards, video sharing, newspapers and magazines remained the same over the three-year period. Slight decreases were noted in the use of radio and television news.

Table 8: Responses to the question: “How frequently do you personally use each of the following as information sources for news about what’s happening in the field of public relations and communications?”

2009						
	Very Infrequently	Somewhat Infrequently	Neither Frequently nor Infrequently	Somewhat Frequently	Very Frequently	Mean Score
Blogs	16%	12%	13%	29%	30%	3.45
Forums or Message Boards	23%	19%	24%	26%	8%	2.77
Social Networks (Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.)	29%	13%	19%	25%	14%	2.57
Micro-Blogging Sites (Twitter, etc.)	38%	14%	17%	14%	17%	2.58
Video Sharing (YouTube, etc.)	39%	19%	23%	11%	9%	2.35
Wikis	33%	19%	23%	16%	9%	2.49
Newspapers	15%	17%	17%	26%	25%	3.29
Magazines	8%	11%	13%	35%	33%	3.74
Radio News	34%	18%	19%	12%	16%	2.55
Television News	34%	16%	19%	15%	16%	2.48

Table 8 (Continued)

2010						
	Very Infrequently	Somewhat Infrequently	Neither Frequently nor Infrequently	Somewhat Frequently	Very Frequently	Mean Score
Blogs	8%	12%	15%	37%	28%	3.64
Forums or Message Boards	24%	20%	23%	25%	8%	2.72
Social Networks (Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.)	12%	17%	19%	28%	23%	3.34
Micro-Blogging Sites (Twitter, etc.)	18%	14%	18%	23%	28%	3.29
Video Sharing (YouTube, etc.)	30%	25%	22%	16%	7%	2.44
Wikis	39%	23%	23%	14%	3%	2.19
Newspapers	16%	19%	20%	28%	18%	3.13
Magazines	6%	8%	16%	46%	23%	3.71
Radio News	42%	19%	18%	12%	9%	2.29
Television News	40%	18%	18%	15%	9%	2.35

Table 8 (Continued)

2011						
	Very Infrequently	Somewhat Infrequently	Neither Frequently nor Infrequently	Somewhat Frequently	Very Frequently	Mean Score
Blogs	7%	10%	15%	41%	28%	3.73
Forums or Message Boards	25%	21%	26%	23%	5%	2.62
Social Networks (Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.)	13%	15%	19%	31%	22%	3.34
Micro-Blogging Sites (Twitter, etc.)	17%	15%	15%	27%	26%	3.29
Video Sharing (YouTube, etc.)	29%	29%	24%	15%	4%	2.37
Wikis	39%	28%	20%	10%	2%	2.08
Newspapers	18%	14%	21%	34%	13%	2.10
Magazines	8%	8%	18%	47%	20%	3.63
Radio News	45%	19%	16%	15%	5%	2.17
Television News	42%	18%	17%	15%	7%	2.26

Table 9: Mean Analysis ANOVA Comparisons between 2009 and 2010 for responses to the question: “How frequently do you personally use each of the following as information sources for news about what’s happening in the field of public relations and communications”?

	2009	2010	2011	F =	SIG.
Blogs	3.45	3.64	3.73	3.63	.001
Forums or Message Boards	2.77	2.72	2.62	1.17	.007
Social Networks (Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.)	2.57	3.34	3.34	3.32	.000
Micro-Blogging Sites (Twitter, etc.)	2.58	3.29	3.29	2.47	.000
Video Sharing (YouTube, etc.)	2.35	2.44	2.37	1.33	.000
Wikis	2.49	2.19	2.08	4.54	.043
Newspapers	3.29	3.13	3.10	2.28	.000
Magazines	3.74	3.71	3.63	2.92	.000
Radio News	2.55	2.29	2.17	1.84	.000
Television News	2.48	2.35	2.26	2.49	.000

Note: (a) Mean scores are based on responses to five-point Likert-type scales where “1” = “Very Infrequent” and “5” = “Very Frequent.” Consequently, the higher the mean score the more the medium was used. (b) Mean difference calculations involve subtracting mean scores from 2009 from the mean scores of 2010.

Although the question was not asked in 2009, the 2010 and 2011 respondents were queried regarding their use of traditional news media sources in an attempt to discover if public relations practitioners were receiving information from print and broadcast or online versions of these news media. Results displayed in Table 10 show online versions of newspapers, magazines and newsletters are used more frequently by public relations practitioners than print editions. However, the use of broadcast editions of radio and television news was much more pronounced than online versions of radio and television news reports.

Table 10: Responses to the question: “We are interested in knowing if your use of traditional news media sources involves print/broadcast or online versions? Please tell us by answering the questions below.”

2010						
How frequently do you . . .	Never	Infrequently	Neither Frequently nor Infrequently	Frequently	Very Frequently	Mean Score
Read print editions of newspapers, magazines and newsletters.	3%	16%	12%	33%	37%	3.86
Read online versions of newspapers, magazines and newsletters.	0%	3%	6%	34%	57%	4.44
View or listen to broadcast editions of radio and television news.	3%	11%	11%	33%	42%	3.98
Receive information from online versions of radio and television news reports.	7%	17%	17%	31%	23%	3.40

Table 10 (Continued)

2011						
How frequently do you . . .	Never	Infrequently	Neither Frequently nor Infrequently	Frequently	Very Frequently	Mean Score
Read print editions of newspapers, magazines and newsletters.	2%	16%	13%	29%	40%	3.89
Read online versions of newspapers, magazines and newsletters.		5%	6%	37%	52%	4.36
View or listen to broadcast editions of radio and television news.	5%	11%	12%	29%	43%	3.94
Receive information from online versions of radio and television news reports.	8%	22%	19%	30%	21%	3.33

Subjects in 2010 and 2011 also were asked how frequently they accessed a variety of social networking, micro-blogging and video sharing sites.

Table 11: Responses to the question: “Please tell us how frequently you access each of the following social networking, micro-blogging and video sharing sites?”

2010						
	Never	Infrequently	Neither Frequently nor Infrequently	Frequently	Very Frequently	Mean Score
Facebook	4%	6%	7%	21%	62%	4.31
LinkedIn	8%	15%	22%	37%	18%	3.44
My Space	72%	21%	15%	1%	1%	1.38
Twitter	12%	15%	12%	23%	38%	3.58
YouTube	4%	18%	28%	38%	12%	3.35

2011						
	Never	Infrequently	Neither Frequently nor Infrequently	Frequently	Very Frequently	Mean Score
Facebook	3%	8%	7%	21%	61%	4.30
LinkedIn	4%	12%	23%	39%	22%	3.63
My Space	84%	13%	2%	0%	0%	1.19
Twitter	12%	18%	13%	22%	36%	3.52
YouTube	3%	18%	29%	40%	10%	3.36

Results displayed in Table 11 indicate that Facebook was used the most frequently with 83 percent of the respondents saying they accessed that social networking site “very frequently” or “somewhat frequently” in 2010 and 82 percent answering that same way in 2011. As mean scores in Table 10 show, the micro-blogging site Twitter was the next most frequently used site in 2010 followed by social networking site LinkedIn and video sharing outlet YouTube. As Table 11 indicates, the use of LinkedIn increased considerably into second place in 2011 when usage scores for all other sites remained about the same.

Demographic Differences

A variety of analyses were conducted on data sets from all three years in an attempt to check for demographic differences based upon age, gender, geographical location and the kind of organization respondents worked for.

Analysis over both years found that the greatest number of statistically significant differences presented themselves when ANOVAs were performed comparing mean scores based upon age. Younger respondents were considerably more likely than older ones to not only advocate greater use of social media in public relations but also to use social media and other Internet-based technologies in their daily searches for news and information. T-tests comparing responses from

female and male subjects also revealed a good number of similar significant differences. However, since the study's women respondents tended to be younger than their male counterparts, it is difficult to tell if these differences are based more upon age or gender. Although some statistical significance materialized when ANOVA analyses were performed based upon geography or the kind of organization subjects worked for, the actual mean differences in both of the study's two years were minimal and no apparent patterns were evident.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This three-year longitudinal analysis trend study of a large number of public relations practitioners (Total n=1,616; n=574 in 2009; n=563 in 2010; n=479 in 2011) found that the use of social and other emerging communications media has continued to increase each year. This has provided unique opportunities not only for those who practice public relations but also for a wide variety of strategic publics who have been given dynamic new communication vehicles many are using effectively with a variety of internal and external strategic audiences. New communications media – and particularly blogs, micro-blogs and social media networks – are providing unique new ways for organizations to communicate with strategic publics such as employees, customers, stockholders, communities, governments and other stakeholders.

Results of this three-year study also discovered that those who practice public relations consider the social networking site Facebook to be the most important new communications medium for public relations messages in 2010 and 2011, replacing search engine marketing that was considered the most important in 2009. Respondents to the three annual surveys reported about in this article said they used Facebook more frequently than any of the other new communications media for public relations message distribution with 83 percent in 2010 and 82 percent in 2011 saying they access that social networking site “very frequently” or “somewhat frequently.” The micro-blogging site Twitter was the next most frequently used new media site in 2010 but it was replaced by social networking site LinkedIn in 2011.

This research study also found dramatic increases in public relations use of micro-blogging sites such as Twitter and video sharing sites such as YouTube between 2009 and 2010 and in the use of social networking site LinkedIn between 2010 and 2011. Meanwhile the importance of blogs, search engine marketing and electronic forums or message boards remained relatively similar across all three years of the study and the importance of podcasts decreased slightly.

In addition to asking which new communications media actually are being used in public relations practice, this study also asked respondents which of these new media they thought should be used. Results show huge gaps between how much every aspect of new communications media is being used and how much public

relations people recommend they be used. Subjects in this three-year study were first asked to compare and contrast how important seven new communications media (blogs, electronic forums or message boards, podcasts, search engine marketing, social networks, micro-blogging sites and video sharing options) are in their organization's public relations efforts. Then they were asked how important each of these new communications media should be. Mean comparisons clearly show that the current use of these new communications doesn't come close to matching how important public relations practitioners say these new communications vehicles should be. The mean scores and overall perceived importance for each of these seven new communications media in 2009, 2010 and 2011 are considerably higher when subjects are asked what should be happening in terms of social and other new communications media use than they are when the question asks what is actually happening.

The study also measured the frequency of personal use by respondents of traditional news media and new communications media. Subjects were first asked how frequently they personally used various sources for local, regional and international news. In all three years, the majority said they get most of their news from newspapers. It is clear that newspaper use by public relations practitioners is far greater than that of the general public.

Subjects in both years also were asked how frequently they personally used the same list of information sources "for news about what's happening in the field of public relations and communications." Results showed considerable increases in the use of social networks and micro-blogging sites as well as moderate increase in the use of blogs and a small increase in video sharing use. Moderate decreases were reported in terms of the use of television and radio news and blogs with minimal decreases reported in terms of newspapers and electronic forums or message boards.

Although the question was not asked in 2009, the 2010 and 2011 respondents were queried regarding their use of traditional news media sources in an attempt to determine if this involved print and broadcast or online versions of these media. Results from both years are relatively similar and suggest online versions of newspapers, magazines and newsletters are used more frequently than print editions, but the use broadcast editions of radio and television news was much more pronounced than online versions of radio and television news reports.

Subjects in 2010 and 2011 also were asked how frequently they accessed a variety of social networking, micro-blogging and video sharing sites. Findings indicate that Facebook was used the most frequently with 83 percent of the respondents in 2010 and 82 percent in 2011 saying they frequently accessed that social networking site. The micro-blogging site Twitter was the next most frequently used site in 2010 followed by social networking site LinkedIn and video

sharing outlet YouTube. LinkedIn replaced Twitter as the second most frequently used site in 2011.

Subjects 2009, 2010 and 2011 were asked how frequently they personally used the same list of information sources “for news about what’s happening in the field of public relations and communications.” Results show blogs and magazines are used more frequently for information about what’s happening in public relations or communications than they were for sources of general news. Public relations people who responded to this survey in 2009 ranked blogs as their second most frequently used source for professional information after magazines. Blog use for information about what’s happening in the field of public relations and communications increased dramatically in 2010 where it was the most use source and the use of blogs increased even more in 2011 when it continued to retain the most-used ranking.

In all three years of this longitudinal study, differences based upon demographics found younger respondents were more likely to recommend using social media in public relations. They also were more likely to use social media and other Internet-based technologies in their daily pursuit of news and information.

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