Public Relations in the era of Social Media: How can we deal with the Social Responsibility and the Professsional Ethics? -The case of Algerian Companies in Algeria-

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Abstract

This article presents the main conclusions of recent literature on the challenges posed by new media to public relations. We also aim to understand how public relations professionals use new media technologies in their profession, and whether they respect the code of ethics, even if the company has its own guidelines or not, by considering the case of two different companies in Algeria
Keywords : public relations, professional ethics, new media, social responsibility.

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I- Introduction :

Over the past decade, social media and Internet use have increased significantly. More and more public relations professionals are using social media in their strategic communication plans as tools for communicating with their audiences. In addition to public relations specialists, media and media professionals use social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, to correspond with their stakeholders.

Public relations professionals, however, are charged with maintaining relationships between organizations and audiences, and these relationships are based on an understanding of values. Interpreting and defining common values is an ethical exercise. In order to understand the organizational values and the many and varied public values, research and an ethical vision are required, while respecting social responsibility. Using a moral philosophy model based on duty allows an in-depth analysis of the public's values, so that we can advise organizations in a thoughtful manner. The form of duty-based ethics requires the decision-maker to consider three angles: responsibility to the moral principle and society, maintaining the dignity and respect of all publics, and proceeding with good intentions. By considering potential actions in the social environment through this triangle, greater discipline is introduced through multiple perspectives and better decisions

In light of the growing role of new social media in public relations, PR ethicists face the challenge of applying traditional ethical paradigms to the ever-changing circumstances created by new media. Both public relations professionals and researchers have expressed concern that the emergence of new social media may challenge the norms and values associated with ethical public relations. A further concern is that the rules of the game in public relations and other forms of professional persuasion have changed over the past decade and are less strongly controlled than before by professional training. A third concern is that new media contribute to public fragmentation and that, as a result, some of the usual standards of public communication may no longer apply in a media environment where people no longer perceive themselves as members of an ethical community.

I.1 Statement of the Problem:

In an era of public conversation, ethical decision-making and accurate communications are the priorities of public relations professionals. Now that the public has access to social media for their news and information, the subject of ethics is even more important. Major professional associations provide a Code of Ethics to educate and guide PR professionals on the subject. However, given the changing media landscape and the rapid evolution of technology, the ethics of communications are being

challenged. As a result, we questioned the practice of public relations in Algerian companies and what challenges public relations professionals face, especially when dealing with professional ethics and the social responsibility of public relations professionals and companies towards society.

I.2 Research Questions:

Based on previous discussion, on the importance of social media today, and its effects on the public relations profession, especially when discussing professional ethics in social responsibility first, this paper aims to answer these issues by focusing on the situation of private for-profit enterprises in Algeria. Thus:

1. 1.   Is the company aware of the changes that have affected the public relations profession as a result of the use of social media?
2. Does the company use the code of ethics to protect its business and its public?
3. Do public relations professionals respect professional ethics?

I.3 The aims of study:

Due to the fact that we approach social media in different ways, it becomes an impediment to the control of all kinds of professions and their users.
1.   First, this paper aims to highlight the importance of professional ethics when using social media, this new sphere, this virtual sphere where the company's image can be improved at the same time as it can be destroyed;
2. Whether the different companies mentioned in this study have a table or guideline, and how they experience the challenges of misusing social media;
3. Learn about public relations professionals' interactions with social media;
4.   Explain the challenges of the new media landscape, immediate and interactive;
5.   Present various problem-solving strategies to avoid and resolve ethical challenges in this evolving medium;
6.   The way the principle of social responsibility is respected.

I.4 Research Design and Methodology:

Furthermore, our research used the case study method, which allows a researcher to closely examine the data in a specific context. In most cases, a case study method selects a small geographic area or a very limited number of individuals as subjects for study. The actual core of case studies is to explore and study contemporary phenomena of real life through detailed case studies.

Thus, this document aims to study the case of private companies in two different sectors, all have the same objective to use social media, to build a good image and promote their products or services, to be closer to their audiences, and all this must be attentive when dealing with this virtual sphere.

In order to answer the questions of this article, we analyzed their official Facebook page and their official websites, to understand how the communication

manager treats these new tools, and to consider this step as a descriptive study of their practices in social media. Then we did two interviews with their communication manager to determine how social media had affected their profession, and if professional ethics was respected, even if the company has a code of ethics or not. In-depth interviews have the advantage of finding a great deal of information that can contribute to a researcher's future work.

II-The theoretical framework

In order to analyze our date, it is necessary to have a theoretical basis to give a consistent direction to our study.

II .1 What is public relations?

There are many definitions when it comes to defining the word "public relations". According to the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), "public relations" is a strategic communication prosses that builds mutually benefical relationships between organazations and their publics , this definition is simple and straightforward, showing the basic concept of the practice and how it is as a strategic communication process (Rashid & Ahmad, 2014).

From a layman's perspective, public relations is a strategic communication technique where any individual, company, or business builds a long-term beneficial relationship with internal & external stakeholders. External stakeholders are your clients, potential customers, and people who have invested in your company's project(s) – so much so to the extent of having a say in the overall processes. Internal stakeholders are usually people in the senior management who have some kind of influence over ongoing projects. Regardless of whatever the affected parties may be, it is the role of a public relations agency to draft a specialized communication plan.   This plan should ideally consist of different functions of public relations with direct and indirect mediums to relay information, build relationships, and impact business scalability from time to time. (What Are the Functions of Public Relations?)

II.2 What is social media ?

One of the first definitions of the term 'social media' was provided by Kaplan and Haenlein in 2010: Social media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content. According to them, Web 2.0 platforms such as blogs and wikis formed the base for social media by enabling all internet users to collaboratively and continuously modify content and applications. This new way of using the internet empowered the user to create and then share their own content online with others, changing the communication from one-way publishing by single users to two-way conversations between multiple users (Martens, 2020, p. 1).

A more recent definition described social media as "networked database platforms that combine public with personal communication" (Meikle, 2016, p. 6).Meikle (2016) called social media a convergence of the three key advancements in online communication during the 2000s: the user-generated content of Web 2.0, the

connection of personal databases via networking services and the round-the-clock connectivity and communication through mobile devices. Or as Breakenridge (2008) put it simply, social media is "anything that uses the Internet to facilitate conversation between people" " (Meikle, 2016, p. 6).

In sum, social media changed communication systems from one-way, one-to-many to two-way, many-to-many communications, transforming consumers from passive observers to active content creators. Communication on social media was therefore considered a dialogue consisting of listening and engaging (Martens, 2020, p. 1)

II .3 Ethical Responsibilities for the PR Professional

. *Ethics*

Before trying to understand definitions, we must realize that ethics is a challenge for human beings on a daily basis. We all seek to satisfy our desires, but ethics makes us think twice before considering our personal interests. Potter Stewart said, "[e]thics is knowing the difference between what you have a right to do and what is right to do (potter, 2012).

This explanation may lead us to a series of in-depth reflections and discussions, but the main point to remember is that we should always strive to do what is right. Webster's Dictionary defines ethics as "the discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation. " (ethics, 2012) This broad definition covers a broad array of situations. Ethics is in our relationships, our jobs and our daily decisions. Personally I believe ethics isn't what we could do, it is what we should do. As a student of public relations, ethics is in my present and future. I often critique myself on my interactions with others, and attempt to learn from them so that I can be ethically accommodating in the future (Brautović & Brkan, 2009).

. *Morals*

Some consider ethics to be the quality of our decisions based on our actions, and while this isn't always a sure way of judging ethics. Professionals in any field look for qualified individuals to represent a certain aspect of their organization, and sometimes all they have time to observe is the things we say and do (Bowen, 2013)

In this era of public conversation, ethical decision-making and accurate communications are priorities for public relations professionals. As the public has access to social media for their news and information, the subject of ethics is even more important. The major professional associations provide a Code of Ethics to educate and guide PR professionals on the subject. However, with the shifting media landscape and technology advancing rapidly, communications ethics are challenged (Bowen, 2013).

.*Social responsibility*

Social responsibility provides a kind of ethical framework for achieving organizational goals. It means „ensuring commotional success in ways that honor ethical values and respect people, communities and environment"10. In other words, social responsibility means operating a business that meets or exceeds both legal and ethical expectations that has for certain kind of industry, but what is considered fulfilling in one country doesn't mean it would work in another (Hove, 2013).

This model recognizes the interdependency of persons in society—of persons as communal beings. Alos, Corporations have a responsibility to the societies in which they operate and from which they profit. They have obligations of good citizenship in contributing positively to the social, political, environmental, and economic health of society. So, the focus of this model is "on responsibilities rather than on rights" (Hove, 2013).

II.4 Public relations and ethics:
These values are what every public relations worker should use to help make good decisions and maintain professional behavior:
. *Honesty*
This means providing accurate and truthful information. When communicating with the public on behalf of a company or organization, it's crucial that public relations professionals are honest. (Whiting, 2021)
. *Advocacy*
Since a public relations professional works as an advocate for the public, it is important to provide the public with pertinent information so that people can make informed decisions. For instance, when presenting information to the public, it's important to provide views from different sides and/or people, as well as all of the relevant facts. (Whiting, 2021).
. *Expertise*
This means doing research and using critical thinking in order to maintain credibility as an expert and a trusting relationship between the company and the public. In order to communicate accurate information, public relations professionals must do their homework. (Whiting, 2021)
. *Independence*
This simply means that public relations professionals take responsibility for their own actions when representing a company or organization. After all, accountability is essential to ethics. (Whiting, 2021)
. *Loyalty*
A public relations employee should respect and maintain loyalty to the company for which he or she is working. That allows the employer to rest assured that the public relations professional is working in the best interest of the company. (Whiting, 2021)
. *Fairness*
Everyone has their own views and opinions. As an individual working in public relations, it's important to respect all of those different views and opinions. It's also important to remain fair to all of those you work for and with, so that each person feels free to express their thoughts. (Whiting, 2021)

II.5 How public relations uses social media?
Social media has transformed the way reporters collect and report information, the way public relations practitioners provide news, the way audiences collect information, and the nature of interaction between audiences and organizations."Using social media as a part of a public relations campaign is commonplace, and digital

specialty firms. Social media sites such as blogs, microblogs, video sharing sites, electronic forums, and other forms of interactive websites are used to maintain relationships with publics. Digital media provide rapidly breaking information, and digital forums are commonly used for product placement, advertising and promotion, celebrity endorsements, and news updates" (Public Relations in the Digital Age: An Interview with Dr. Tom Kelleher, 2017).

Although the legal ramifications have been explored there are few ethical guidelines to govern the arena of social media. General ethical principles of public relations still apply, but social media combines many fast moving, irretractable, and often unfamiliar forms of communication, and therefore requiring more detailed guidance. The contested terrain between public relations, advertising, marketing, and, to some extent journalism, have also been blurred in the digital realm. Richard Edelman, CEO of Edelman Digital Public Relations, wrote in a blog post. (Public Relations in the Digital Age: An Interview with Dr. Tom Kelleher, 2017).

In urging the public relations industry to consider digital media as "an unmatched opportunity" to create engagement, Edelman, widely considered an industry leader in digital engagement, recognizes how convergence has changed the industry. industry. However, it is not so obvious how to manage social media and digital engagement campaigns in an ethical manner. While the classic cases are widely debated among convergence experts, guidelines are being developed. (Public Relations in the Digital Age: An Interview with Dr. Tom Kelleher, 2017).

II.6 Ethical issues in the employment of online and social media by PR professionals:

Ethical issues concerning online media and social media appear in all aspects of journalism and public relations. Among the most relevant issues are the following:

Identify trends and opportunities

Most people associate PR pros on social media with crisis comms, but the social sphere also offers a great opportunity for some research and behind-the-scenes work (McCarthy, 2019).

Make announcements

Nothing spreads quicker than information on Twitter – not even wildfire. So why not use this to your advantage? PR professionals who are in the know use Twitter and other social platforms to announce awards, product launches and company updates (McCarthy, 2019).

Keep an eye on competitors

Ever heard of social listening before? Well, you should have! It's the process of finding insights within social media conversations. Social listening tools give PR professionals the power to understand public perception — before it becomes a #trending topic (McCarthy, 2019).

Find influencers

Influencer marketing is undoubtedly one of the biggest trends of the year. Influencers, be it nano, micro, or macro, offer brands a voice they could never use on

their own. Social media influencers offer brands a dedicated digital following that they can tap into to promote offerings and build reputations (McCarthy, 2019).

React to negative publicity

Social media is the first port of call when it comes to negative claims and brand reactions. Social platforms are usually the first places that people look for customer reviews and complaints along with brand responses (McCarthy, 2019).

- Full disclosure of information, Free flow of information ,Truthfulness in reporting;
- Invasion of privacy;
- Intrusive messages;
- Defamation of character;
- Use of unauthorized or irrelevant images;
- Conflicts of interest;
- Anonymity in sources identified only as invented tags;
- Irresponsible and harsh comments;
- Using online sources without verification;
- Impartiality;
- Behavioral targeting;
- Accountability;
- Employees disclosing employer information via social media;
- False and misleading use of comments;
- Posting fake information regarding competitors;
- Posting positive comments for one's own organization, leading readers to believe they come from real customers. (L.Daugherty)

All of the above issues present the importance of our study, as well as the companies selected for our study respect or apply these rules or suggestions.

II.7 How can PR practioners benefit of social media?

Develop Relationships with the Media and Influencers:

By interacting with journalists, media outlets, and influencers on social media, you extend the professional relationship beyond the press release pitch. This increases the chances of gaining media coverage with the right outlets. (Fanaras, 2017)

Facilitate the Brand Message through Content Distribution:

Distributing original and branded content to a targeted audience is a tried and true social media tactic. In addition, it allows public relations teams to strategically facilitate the brand message online. By having control of the type of content shared, and the copywriting within the post, PR pros ensure the proper brand message is sent each time (Fanaras, 2017)

Incorporate Social Sharing into Press Releases:

A simple, yet effective way to integrate social media into a public relations campaign is by adding social sharing capabilities to press releases. This allows readers and media outlets to distribute your intended message online in seconds. (Fanaras, 2017)

Create and Leverage Campaign Hashtags:

Hashtags, while initially used to follow conversations online, can be a strategic tool for public relations objectives. By creating and leveraging specific campaign hashtags on social media platforms (Fanaras, 2017)

Real-Time Crisis Management:

Public relations professionals are responsible for extinguishing all online crises that may lead to a negative brand reputation (Fanaras, 2017)

III- Results and discussion :

After the description of their use of social media, we will discuss this data, the results of the interviews done with the communications managers in Djezzy and Fadiplait companies.

- **Djezzy:** private telecommunication company in Algeria
- **Fadiplait:** private company in the production of cheese in Algeria.

As we mentioned above we do interviews with the communications managers in Djezzy and Fadiplait.

- **Mr. Aissa Boucha**, communication manager of the company Fadiplait, the interview was conducted on 12th October 2017.
- **Mr. Nourdine Hakem**, press relations manager for Djezzy, the interview was conducted on 15th October 2017.

We will discuss the results of these interviews on the light of the study's questions

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.The change that touched the PR profession because of the social media uses

Both Djezzy and Fadiplait companies use social media, especially Facebook and official websites, to present their company and to be in contact with different companies and different audiences. They recognize that these new tools have helped them do their jobs faster, so in less time and effort, it also introduces new ways of doing advertising and marketing. To practice and respect social responsibility, they must answer enormous questions in a short time, and to prepare topics professionally, this means that the communication manager must be attentive in this digital age.

Another problem is that of "anonymous" audiences, and for Mr. Aissa Boucha, Fadiplait Company's communications manager, it does not represent a threat to the company. He said that there are new tools offered by these social media which allow the public to be managed in a good and professional way. Mr. Nourdine Hakem, Djezzy's press relations manager confirms the same idea that the contact between the company and the public must be more serious and official to overcome all kinds of misunderstandings or troubles.

On the other hand, as we know, credibility and transparency are the two main things that must be respected in any sphere and in any enterprise, Mr. Aissa said that if they lack these two principles, they are the losers, because in the era of the communication revolution, any lack of credibility could be known and exposed easily. On the contrary, he found it difficult to protect credibility and transparency, the main cause being that he cannot always confirm the accuracy of the information

But it still presents a good area to face the competition, adopting the advantages of the social media sphere.

As public relations professionals must respect the privacy of the public, the privacy of public relations professionals must also be respected, but for both companies, they have not had problems between using their own social networks and those of the company, they do not confuse between them and the company has not exerted pressure on this point.

.The code of ethics to protect their company and audiences

Unlike Fadiplait, Djezzy has its own code of ethics that must be respected by public relations professionals or the communications manager. For them, it is an important tool to manage the virtual sphere well, and it is so easy to create a code of ethics and put it into practice when using social media.

.PR practitioners and the respect of the professional ethics?

Mr. Aissa and Mr. Nourdine respect professional ethics, even if there is a code or not, for them, any profession must be treated with ethics and conscience. For example, they did not neglect negative comments and responded. Furthermore, they only delete comments that have no relationship with the company, or that affect public morality.

And to serve social responsibility, they try to answer all the questions of the public, to give them the right information, to give them the right to be informed.

IV- Conclusion:

It is undeniable that social media exist and are used in public relations for many different purposes, such as communicating with stakeholders, promoting events, helping during crises and, to some extent, corresponding with the media. The use of social media has many advantages, but it can serve the company better if this use is conducted with a code of ethics, so the company have to hire the right people in the right places, this social media must be the profession of community manager who will be obliged to deal with stakeholders in an ethical manner, while facilitating the achievement of social responsibility.

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