WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE *RELEVANT*? A CASE STUDY OF PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS` ROLES AND SKILLS IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

Raluca-Silvia CIOCHINĂ
PhD student, 1st year
College of Communication and Public Relations
National University of Political Studies and Public Administration
Email: ralucaciochina@yahoo.com

Abstract

Few social media scholars studied implications regarding social media roles and competences public relations practitioners would need to develop and enhance along with their extensive use. This research paper focuses on the changing, chameleonic roles of public relations practitioners and the competences they need to prevail in order to remain relevant in the social media landscape. Specifically, a content analysis of 50 job announcements for social media professionals from UK was conducted, identifying whether the roles proposed by scholars are actually in demand on the current market and what specific KSC (knowledge, skills and social competences) these roles would summon.

Keywords: public relations, roles, social media

Introduction

The concerns of both scholars and communication practitioners have been focused around social media and the opportunities they entail when discussing public relations and corporate communications practices. Brian Solis, a notorious digital analyst, coined the term PR 2.0 (2008), emphasizing that social media do not necessarily suggest a shift in the practice, pertaining only an inspiring role: "PR 2.0 is the understanding and practice that communications is a two-way process and incorporates the tools, principles, strategies and philosophies for reaching, guiding, influencing, and helping people directly in addition to the

traditional cycle of PR influence" (Solis, 2008). Phillips and Young (2009) also suggested that "the established order is under threat" (Phillips & Young, 2009, p. 140) when discussing the impact of social media on corporate strategy. This was consistent with Macnamara`s research in 2010 where practitioners mentioned social media as an additional channel to engage stakeholders, not necessarily changing public relations practices (Macnamara, 2010). These aspects pose a variety of challenges for public relations practices which are now facing a crystallizing process of incorporating online strategies and tactics for a wide typology of publics, on a global scale.

According to statistics from employment website Indeed.com more and more employers are now looking for specialists within the social media field of activity, particularly people who already have expertise on using specific platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook (Socialtimes.com, 2013), proving the fact that the roles are starting to become more specialized. Also, studies indicate that more and more public relations practitioners are investing their time in using social media tools, specifically 25% of the average work day for 35% practitioners (Wright & Hinson, 2013). In this context, considering the fact that more than 50 % of small to medium businesses are now using social media for business related purposes, with Facebook and Twitter being top platforms for communication use and with 70% of brand fan questions on social media not being answered (Creotivo, 2013), there seems to be a strong indication that communication practitioners are facing difficulties in addressing current challenges.

Literature review

1. Social Media Opportunities for Public Relations and Communication Practitioners` Practices

Online communication enthusiasts, both academicians and practitioners, are adopting positive stances regarding the use of social media tools and the opportunities they provide for communicating with internal and external audiences (Solis & Breakenridge, 2009; Curtis et al, 2009; Wright, 2013). Making the profession more "global, strategic, two-way and interactive, symmetrical or dialogical and socially responsible" (Grunig, 2009), social media entail public relations practitioners the opportunity to build and maintain relationships and engage with publics (Cho & Huh, 2007; Waters, Burnett, Lamm & Lucas, 2008; Solis & Breakenridge, 2009; Solis, 2008; Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; McCorkindale, 2010). Coombs (2012) even stressed that communication practitioners "would be engaging in malpractice if

they did not integrate social media into their activities", arguing the potential social media has on crisis management (p. 29).

First studies investigating the use of social media tools and communication technology by public relations practitioners proved that they were quite slower at integrating complex tools such as online social networks and virtual worlds, but more advanced users perceived them to be widely used throughout practice (Eyrich, Padman & Sweetser, 2008). Recent studies, however, indicate high levels of knowledge and skills in using social media (Macnamara, 2011), with practitioners focusing on gathering feedback, engaging stakeholders, listening and building community and relationships, basically applying the two-way communication model of the Excellence theory (Macnamara, 2010, pp. 32-33). Diga and Kelleher (2009) proved that public relations practitioners who used social networking sites and other social media tools perceived their *structural*, *expert* and *prestige* power in a higher degree, thus helping them advance within organizations, increase their expertise and build social capital which can then boost status.

Social media requirements also include transparency, disclosure, honesty, ethics and measurement on behalf of communication practitioners (Macnamara, 2010). Specifically, public relations people have the right tools to "create rich content and engage others to add richness in a symbiotic process" (Phillips & Young, 2009, p. 57).

A longitudinal analysis on the use of social media in public relations practice in US over the past 7 years (Wright & Hinson, 2013) demonstrated that practitioners are increasingly adopting these online channels in order to reach and engage their internal and external publics, suggesting an improvement in terms of accuracy and trust, with a strong impact on organizational transparency and ethical culture. Facebook and LinkedIn are still top channels in practioners` usage of online media platforms for overall communication in achieving organizational purposes, followed by Twitter, SEM (search engine marketing), YouTube, blogs, electronic forums and podcasts (Wright & Hinson, 2013).

2. Social Media Challenges for Public Relations and Communication Practitioners`
Practices

Nevertheless, there are some inconsistencies regarding the perceived usefulness of social media tools and platforms and claims of usage (Macnamara, 2010; Kent & Taylor, 2010). Scholars investigating social media potential and actual empirical data on opportunities they leverage, mention a likely reactivity of practitioners when responding to questionnaires and surveys (Macnamara, 2010). In fact, Macnamara (2010) found that Australian practitioners used social media for marketing, brand promotion and sales, which

suggested one-way communication practices. Furthermore, in terms of measurement, few practitioners were focused on evaluating social media activities (Macnamara, 2010) and challenges were also identified in terms of quick responsiveness, comment authorisation for government organizations, speculating clear objectives and loss of control (Macnamara, 2010, p. 33).

Concerning engagement and relationship-building strategies, studies proved that corporations fail to use social media, specifically social networks, to its fullest potential (McCorkindale, 2010; Cho & Huh, 2007). Most corporations already use social media as part of their communication strategy, but showed high levels of unresponsiveness and indications of *sanitizing* posts (McCorkindale, 2010).

Turning over control and increasing transparency levels are forcing a shift in the mindsets of public relations and communication practitioners. Whereas, technically speaking, the illusion of control was never consistent with reality (Grunig, 2009) and was acknowledged by practitioners (Macnamara, 2011), the power of free expression shifts towards open, accessible social media where transparency is the ruler. As such, organizations became more *porous* (Philips & Young, 2009, p. 45), especially with regards to information leakages. Furthermore, "the context in which an organization is seen online is mostly not under the control of the organization" (p. 65). This lack of control pressures practitioners who are compelled to join the conversation with publics (Phillips & Brabham, 2011). Phillips and Brabham (2011) propose the *participant-curator model* which "redefines the notion of control because it concerns the iterative construction of the organization-in-progress, dependent on an ongoing negotiation of messages and meaning created by publics (…) strategically curated by a PR practitioner" (p. 683). In fact, Botan and Taylor argued ever since 2004 that one of the most striking trends in public relations was the movement from a functionalist perspective to a co-creational, public focused one, when publics become co-creators of meaning (Botan & Taylor, 2004). This surrender of control is determining practitioners to become information controllers, encouraging publics to get involved in the brands` content creation, thus developing engaging and monitoring skills.

Closely related to control and transparency, the need for *social media governance*, which highlights the risks for organizations` reputation and security, by encouraging guidelines and policies for employees, is imperative. Studies show that most organizations lack insightful, accurate monitorization of social media activities (Zerfass, Fink & Linke, 2011; Macnamara, 2011). In fact, in their 2012 study, Zerfass, Verhoeven, Tench, Moreno &

Vercic found that social media governance structures are missing from most communication departments in Europe.

Creating and implementing social media policies cover both risks and opportunities, however (Ekachai & Brinker, 2012). Between leveraging employee involvement on social media as advocates and letting go of control throughout this process, public relations practitioners must take into account ethical and legal implications such as intellectual property, copyright, disclosure of affiliation and confidential information (Ekachai & Brinker, 2012). In fact, greater concerns refer to image and reputation, obscenity or confrontational language (Ekachai & Brinker, 2012). Guidelines for ethical online behaviour on social media include accuracy, respect for others, transparency and honesty (Ekachai & Brinker, 2012).

3. Public relations and communications practitioners` roles, responsibilities and potential skills

In 1992, Dozier provided a simple dichotomy-based typology, suggesting there are two primary types of public relations functions: *managers* and *technicians*, the latter being an implementation, executive role and the former being a more strategic, decision-making role, entailing higher levels of responsibility. Predominantly, public relations practitioners primarily performing technician roles were proven to spend more time on written communication than managers (Kelleher, 2001; Johnston, 2009). In relation to this, studies show there are no differences between the use of social networking sites by technicians and managers (Diga & Kelleher, 2009).

When discussing knowledge and skill sets, *writing skills*, *good attitude*, the *ability to communicate publicly* and *initiative* used to be top rated competencies back in 2006 (Turk, 2006), with understanding of business practices, *critical thinking* and problem solving skills being problematic for entry level positions. For more advanced roles, *research skills*, *global perspective* and experience with a variety of cultures were difficult to find when assessing experienced professionals (Turk, 2006). In the past recent years, studies showed that there is a gap between *desired skills outcome* and *present skills outcome* of students and job applicants within the public relations domain (Kim & Johnson, 2011; DiStaso, 2009). In fact, essential skills such as *writing skills*, *critical thinking, problem solving skills*, and *understanding business practices* are a problematic amongst entry level applicants in US, while research, listening, cultural experience posed issues for advanced level practitioners (DiStaso, 2009). Increased knowledge and understanding of social media are essential for building a social media strategy (Macnamara, 2011).

Strategic and critical thinking are now becoming increasingly relevant for public relations education and practice (Kim & Johnson, 2011), with theoretical and practical knowledge being acquired through education. As few organizations were proved to embrace a strategic approach with clear objectives and evaluation of results (Macnamara, 2011), this could be a major drawback from becoming successful in the social media environment. As an example, analyzing German organizations engaging in social media communication practices, Zerfass, Fink & Linke (2011) found that strategic implications for social media communications, like *managerial commitment* and a *participative corporate culture* were present in only one third of the organizations.

In fact, public relations individuals are entering the workforce with increased knowledge and practice of technology and two-way communication ability, the function of communication technician being perceived as basic (Kim & Johnson, 2011). Successful practitioners, on the other hand, need critical and strategic thinking, adaptability to digital and social media changes, listening and multitasking skills, the ability to "assess the environment and apply the assessment to predicting the organization`s well being" (p. 462).

A positive attitude, predictability, ability to interpret the environment, technology skills with high emphasis on social media skills, specifically in using platforms like Facebook and Twitter, with the responsibility of updating and monitoring content (Kim & Johnson, 2011) were also reported. Measuring ROI (return on investment) for public relations activities hasn`t been acknowledged, nor accepted by academicians yet, as a single formula can`t be applied within the public relations field (Watson, 2011), but measuring and evaluating social media activities are still important (Mcnamara, 2011).

Breakenridge (2012) distinguished 8 essential roles for public relations practitioners managing social media activities: *policymaker*, *internal collaboration generator*, *technology tester*, *communications organizer*, *pre-crisis doctor*, *relationship analyzer*, *reputation task force member* and *master of metrics*. These complex roles are defining in building a competent, savvy new media professional who is looking to comply with the new governing rules coming from online publics and communities, rather than the other way around. The focus on technological awareness (Breakenridge, 2012) is consistent with the expertise public relations practitioners must prove before entering such a role within an organization (Kim & Johnson, 2011). These "hybrid professionals" (Breakenridge, 2012) need to be skilled in other business areas as well, such as finance and marketing, proving creative and analytical abilities for problem solving (Toth & Briones, 2013).

Breakenridge`s role "the internal collaboration generator" is consonant to Phillips and Young`s (2009) perspective on the importance and challenges public relations practitioners are also facing internally, in terms of "managing internal relationships (…), optimizing the environment for empowerment, availability of platforms for communication and awareness of threats and opportunities available through using different channels for communication" (p. 142). This statement supports the necessity of social media governance which needs to include relevant guidelines, policies and training for employees according to the organizations` structure, mission and objectives. Furthermore, constant collaboration with HR, legal, financial, sales, marketing and IT departments is essential when developing and implementing online communications throughout the overall strategy (Argenti & Barnes, 2009; Kim & Johnson, 2011).

A study of Australasian organizations from the public and private sector reported a significant risk in exposure (Macnamara, 2011) and the need for social media governance, which implies writing and developing social media guidelines and policies, tools for monitoring communication, training programs, key performance indicators for measuring social web activities. Public relations practitioners and corporate communication are responsible for social media in their organization, but they are focused on controlling the environment and central "instead of decentralizing communication to organizational ambassadors and evangelists cultivated and managed within effective governance frameworks and enabled by support such as training" (p.55).

For professionals to address the challenges of the dynamics of a global setting where social media are becoming the most useful tools for engaging with publics everywhere, it is primordial for public relation practitioners to be prepared and build capabilities to face these challenges. Thus, "every public relations professional must have a multicultural and global perspective in order to be effective" (Shriramesh & Vercic, 2003, p. xxv) and engage different cultures and individuals. In this sense, *flexibility* and *adaptability* in a global communications environment (Breakenridge, 2012; Sriramesh & Vercic, 2009) are key capabilities.

Research questions

The focus of this research is investigating the key roles, responsibilities and potential skills and social competences needed by public relations and communication practitioners in the social media landscape. Specifically, the paper is *looking to identify what are the main roles and skills required by employers when they consider hiring a public relations or*

communication practitioner engaging in social media activities for their organization. According to the literature review and Breakenridge`s (2012) classification, eight new roles and practices for public relations practitioners who are incorporating social media into their organizational communication have emerged. The research questions are:

R1: What are the main *practices (roles and responsibilities)* required by for-profit organizations when recruiting public relations and communication practitioners dealing with social media activities?

R2: What are the competences (knowledge, skills and social abilities) needed by public relations and communications practitioners for coping with the aforementioned practices?

Methodology

For public relations and communication practitioners in Europe, *digital skills* to use technologies for internal and external communication are reported in a low degree (Zerfass et al., 2012), but they perceive training as useful when discussing professional development. Social networking sites, video sharing sites and blogs are the most used social media tools by public relations practitioners in US, Europe, Australasia (Wright & Hinson, 2013; Zerfass et al., 2011; Macnamara, 2011), with policy and guidelines being barely implemented (Zerfass et al, 2011; Macnamara, 2011). Specifically communication practitioners from Northern Europe perceive online communities, online videos, mobile applications, microblogs and blogs to be the most important tools (Zerfass et al., 2012).

In the UK, moderate levels of digital skills were found (Zerfass et al., 2012). 74% reported high capabilities for planning, followed by managing information and relationships, strategic positioning and leading people and groups (p. 93). The UK public relations profession is second to the US (Gregory, 2011), only 42% of practitioners being involved in digital public relations functions. Most valued competencies for the private sector in UK are: strategic view, leading and supporting, understanding others, maintaining a positive outlook, decision making, networking, research and analysis, writing and editing skills (Gregory, 2011).

Against this background, this research investigates 50 job descriptions for public relations and communications practitioners dealing with social media activities. For the purpose of the research, a convenience sample was chosen from the Chartered Institute of Public Relations, a professional body for public relations practitioners in the United Kingdom, which has doubled in terms of membership figures in the past 10 years (CIPR, 2013).

For collecting and interpreting data, a content analysis of the job descriptions was conducted, by accessing each page which provided more details regarding the position. Positions varied from entry level and advanced (midlevel) to senior ones. The content categories were developed based on Breakenridge`s (2012) book on the new practices for public relations professionals which have emerged with the rise of social media, acting as a guideline for communication practitioners who are looking to engage in the digital era. Although research has been conducted on the use and the potential of social media tools for public relations practice, no scholar has investigated so far whether the mentioned practices, including new roles and responsibilities are required by organizations when hiring a social media communication practitioner.

Therefore, eight practices were operationalized by the presence or absence of the roles or responsibilities described in the job announcement. For the first practice, *PR policy maker*, presence of social media governance responsibilities were identified, such as developing policies, training, guidelines for both internal and external use; the second practice, The *Internal Collaboration Generator,* was measured by the presence of roles involving *integration* and *collaboration* with other departments (such as advertising, marketing, HR, IT, legal, sales); the third practice, *PR Technology Tester*, was measured by distinguishing strategic technology usage and testing of new platforms/tools; *The Communications Organizer* was measured by the presence of responsibilities which referred to developing, creating and curating content on various social media channels; *The Pre-Crisis Doctor* was measured by the presence of roles which implied building crisis plans and identifying potential levels of crises escalation; *The Relationship Analyzer* was recognized through indicators suggesting the need for analysing publics and the ways they interact through online communities; *The Reputation Task Force Member* was denoted by the presence of reputation management responsibilities, tracking, monitoring and immediacy of response; and the *Master of the Metrics*, measured by the presence of accountability roles, more specifically setting metrics and clear objectives.

For analyzing and operationalizing skills and capabilities, the KSC (knowledge, skills and social competences) framework for learning outcomes was used (Winerton, Delamare & Stringfellow, 2005). As there are a series of approaches and understanding of the framework for European member states, for the purposes of this research we are referring only to the UK approach. Therefore, in the UK context, "competence is generally understood as the ability to demonstrate in a work context the necessary skills (functional competeces), usually with appropriate underpinning knowledge (cognitive competences) and sometimes appropriate

social competences (behavioural and attitudinal competences)" (p. 41). Competences were identified based on the literature review, being measured by their presence throughout the job description (coded as 0 for their absence and 1 for their presence). The following skills were examined: *critical, analytical, strategic thinking*; *negotiation skills*; *research and planning skils*; *content/copywriting skills*; *accountability/measurement and tracking skills*; *ability to handle issues and crisis communication online*; *management and leadership skills*; *digital and technological skills*; *SEO (search engine optimization)* and *SEM (search engine marketing) experience*; *SMM (social media marketing) experience*; *creativity and innovation*. In terms of required knowledge, we observed the presence of the following features: *passion for information and research*, *understanding global cultural contexts*, *awareness of online developments*, and for social competences, the researchers analyzed *the presence of professional and ethical behaviour* and the *ability to build relationships and liaise with other people using new digital technologies.*

Results

R1: What are the main practices (roles and responsibilities) required by for-profit organizations when recruiting public relations and communication practitioners dealing with social media activities?

For identifying the most frequent practices and job roles, a frequency analysis was conducted. As a result, UK employers seem to be hiring for advanced, senior positions (86%) with high levels of expertise on behalf of communication practitioners.

In order to observe possible relationships between practices, Spearman correlations were conducted between the operationalized variables. *Relationship analyser* practices seem to be significantly correlated with *task force member* (*r=0.621, ρ<.01)* and also with *communications organizer* (*r=0.315, ρ<.05).* This proves that the presence of *task force member* practices is likely to include *relationship analyser* roles, and responsibilities for relationship analyser imply communication practices The latter is positively related with *master of metrics* (*r=0.302, ρ<.05)* meaning that practitioners need to be prepared in developing and curating content, but should also engage in measuring their content activities as they are interconnected.

Although most positions corresponded to senior levels, *PR policy maker* accounted only for 17 job descriptions, demonstrating low levels of interest in finding public relations and communication practitioners who`s responsibilities would imply social media governance. In regards to *internal collaboration generator* role, 20 announcements referred

to the need for communication and coordination between the public relations practitioner and other departments within the organization (advertising, marketing, IT, HR etc). As expected, the *communication organizer* responsibilities were the most required (50). *Relationship analyser, master of metrics, reputation task force member* and *technology tester* roles were also identified in more than half of the job announcements (Table 1), but responsibilities which involved building and planning a potential plan for crisis management on social media were barely present (*pre-crises doctor*: 4).

Practices/Roles	Presence of roles in job announcements (n=53)
PR Policy Maker	17
Internal Collaboration Generator	20
PR Technology Tester	37
Communication Organizer	50
Pre-Crisis Doctor	4
Relationship Analyser	33
Reputation Task Force Member	29
Master of Metrics	32

Table 1 Presence of job roles for public relations and communications practitioners in job announcements

R2: What are the competences (knowledge, skills and social competences) needed by public relations and communications practitioners for coping with the aforementioned practices?

With seniority levels increasing, data shows that employers also have increasing expectations in critical and strategic thinking($r=0.452$, $\rho<.01$), negotiation skills ($r=0.279$, $\rho<.05$), research and planning skills ($r=0.271$, $\rho=.05$), creativity and innovation ($r=0.347$, $\rho<.01$) and, as predicted, management and leadership skills ($r=0.382$, $\rho<.0$) as positive correlations suggest.

The figures from Table 2 reveal that the most important functional skills are *research and planning*, *content development and curating*, *creativity and innovation, critical and strategic thinking*, *management and leadership* and *digital skills.* This finding is consistent with Gregory`s (2011) findings, as in UK competencies such as strategy development, planning, content writing and research are most valued. On the other hand, although having a global perspective and cultural background, education or general understanding is important

for a communications practitioner managing online activities on a social, from the results it is apparent that employers do not stress upon this aspect as much as they ought to (half of the job announcements presented global knowledge and cultural understanding as a requirement). Having passion for information and research and being updated on online developments are key components, however, this finding being consistent with Breakenridge`s (2012) contention that public relations need to constantly investigate and test the latest trends in digital media.

Taking into account data on social competences, we can observe that the ability to build relationships is important to half of the employers, while ethical and professional behaviour requirements seem to be almost inexistent (4 out of 53 job announcements mention this capability).

The *policy maker role* correlates positively with critical and strategic thinking *(r=0.386; ρ<.0),* negotiation skills *(r=0.446; ρ<.01),* and crisis communication skills *(r=0.275; ρ<.0). Internal collaboration generator*, on the other hand, seems to be the only role significantly correlated with content and copywriting skills *(r=0.276; ρ<.0).* Table 3 also shows that *the technology tester* role is positively correlated to crisis management skills *(r=0.277;ρ<.05)* and digital skills *(r=0.773 ρ<.01)*, the *communication organizer role* and online development knowledge are interrelated *(r=0.479;ρ<.01),* the *pre-crisis doctor role* shows a relationship with crisis communication skills *(r=0.678; ρ<.01).* According to data from Table 3, relationship analyser role seems to be the only role significantly correlated to 4 skills: critical and strategic thinking, research and planning, accountability and online development knowledge. *Reputation task force member* is related to research and planning, accountability and online development skills, while *the master of metrics* positively correlates only with accountability skills *(r=0.316 ρ<.05).*

(Table 2 inserted here)

KSC (knowledge, skills and social competences) for public relations practitioners operating on social media	Presence of KSCs on job announcements
Critical & strategic thinking	36
Negotiation skills	18
Research & planning skills	44
Content development & curating skills (copywriting)	43
Accountability skills	28

Issue & crisis management skills	8
Management & leadership skills	38
Digital & technical skills	38
SEO & SEM	4
Social Media Marketing	3
Creativity & innovation	42
Passion for information & research	39
Global perspective & cultural knowledge	27
Awareness of online developments (social media in particular)	42
Ability to build relationships	25
Professional and ethical behaviour	3

Table 2 Frequency table of competences (knowledge, skills and social competences)

(Table 3 inserted here)

	Critical & strategic thinking	Negotiation skills	Research & Planning	Content/copywriting skills	Accountability skills	Crisis communication	Management skills	Digital skills	SEO &SEM skills	SMM skills	Creativiy & Innovation	Information & research	Global/cultural understanding	Knowledge of online developments	Build relationship	Professional and ethical behaviour
PR Policy Maker	$r=0.386$ $p<.01$	$r=0.446$ $p<.01$	–	–	–	$r=0.275$ $p<.05$	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Internal Collaborator generator	–	–	–	$r=0.276$ $p<.05$	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
PR Technology tester	–	–	–	–	–	$r=0.277$ $p<.05$	–	$r=0.773$ $p<.01$	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Comms Organizer	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	$r=0.479$ $p<.01$	–	–
Pre-crisis doctor	–	–	–	–	–	$r=0.678$ $p<.01$	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Relationship Analyzer	$r=0.299$ $p<.05$	–	$r=0.374$ $p<.01$	–	$r=0.512$ $p<.01$	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	$r=0.273$ $p<.05$	–	–

Reputation Task Force Member	-	-	r=0.396 p<.01	-	r=0.659 p<.01	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	r=0.376 p<.01	-	-
Master of Metrics	-	-	-	-	r=0.316 p<.05	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Table 3 Positive relationships between variables (new public relations responsibilities for social media and potential skills required for fulfilling the roles)

Limitations

This research can be considered a pilot study for investigating the roles and potential skills required by employers looking for public relations and communication practitioners dealing with social media. The results may not be entirely significant, thus a larger sample is needed for further academic investigations. Although this study used content analysis, quantitative research can be restrictive for the research questions which were launched. This is why future studies must engage in qualitative research and investigate through face to face interviews what are the main requirements they have from public relations and communication practitioners for managing social media within the private sector.

Furthermore, considering the fact job descriptions and announcements may not have been created by human relations practitioners, it is possible that roles, responsibilities and skills could be missing and, as such, could interfere with the relevance and accuracy of the results of this research.

Also, education was not subject of this research paper, but in UK employers value university education, internships, on the job training and public relations communications qualifications (Zerfass et al, 2012, p. 104). Thus, if job announcements pertain the idea of specialized qualifications which can develop relevant learning outcomes, many competences can be inclusive of what they already studied, and do not need to be mentioned redundantly.

Discussion

Findings from this study could suggest that organizations haven`t increased focus on social media governance activities and practices, which is consistent with Zerfass et al. (2011) research which proved that social media policy and guidelines were barely being implemented. Moreover, this research proved that *digital skills* are among the most needed for public relations functions, showing a relevant connection with the *technology tester role.* As recent research (Zerfass, 2012) reported low levels of digital skills for communication

practitioners in Europe, it is critical to start placing more emphasis on these capabilities. The data also seem to suggest that *policy maker* role is not necessarily primordial for organizations seeking to hire public relations and communication practitioners for their social media practices, a finding which is inconsistent with Macnamara (2011) research that posits the increasing need for social media governance (policy, guidelines and training).

Results also demonstrate that ethical and professional features of public relations practices continue to be left out. Moreover, figures show that the *pre-crisis doctor role* is not considered to be a top priority, although transparency and lack of control when dealing with online publics are unanimously acknowledged by both practitioners and academicians in the public relations field.

Studies have also been conducted on how students "are socialized in their understanding of the value and power of social media in the practice of public relations" (Taylor & Kent, 2010). As Kent and Taylor (2010) argue, there needs to be a balance between presenting both advantages and disadvantages of social media, and students "should learn about the limitations of social media so that they can make strategic choices in tactics" (p. 213). Nevertheless, most studies are focused on the potential social media has on building and maintaining relationships with their publics. Having this in mind, most practitioners could potentially be focused on the *ability to build relationships* as a predominant, implicit capability a public relations practitioner should have. On the other hand, this study shows that employers do not place much emphasis on this skill, perhaps as they are more focused on delivering and curating content, rather than genuinely interacting with publics and engaging in dialogic communication. Moreover, a pilot study investigating the relationship between *emotional intelligence* and public relations roles (Dodd, 2011) found that higher emotional intelligence levels were identified in practitioners performing manager roles, rather than technician roles. This finding could encourage future training and curricula based on developing emotional intelligence levels for public relations and communication practitioners starting with licence studies.

Conclusion

The arising new practices for public relations practitioners engaging in social media activities can be challenging for entry level, midlevel and more advanced positions. Being exposed to constant digital and technological changes can be regarded as an opportunity as well as a constant pressure to adapt and integrate with the new medium. Their ability to interpret abounding data and give them strategic significance in order to develop future

programs adapted to public preferences, needs, worries and values becomes of uttermost importance. Furthermore, this monitoring role goes beyond involvement in communities and social groups where discussions on specific themes take place, but actual investigation on potential influencers who can contribute to the reputational capital of the organization. This research paper focused on some of the roles that social media has brought upon public relations practitioners and the need of developing relevant skills in order to fulfil these roles. By identifying these skills and their pertaining roles, future educational programs can be developed in order to adapt public relations practice to the current realities.

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