
Descriptive Account of Public Relations Practitioners in Pakistan: Comparative Analysis of Professional Capacity of Public Relations Departments

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This paper portrays a comparative descriptive picture of public relations industry in Pakistan in terms of demographic and specialized characteristics of PR professionals and capacity of public relations departments in the public and private sector organizations. The professional capacity of the PR department is described by exploring professional models and roles. This quantitative study based on data collected through stratified sampling technique finds that majority of public relations departments have good employment strength with professionals of reasonable academic qualification and experience but there is significant gender imbalance. The professional capacity of private sector departments is more appropriate as compare to the public sector.

Keywords: *Public relations, mapping demography in PR, PR professionals in Pakistan, PR departments*

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1. Introduction

Public relations, a growing profession in Pakistan, witnessed a steady growth in the country due to mushroom growth of electronic media during the last two decades. The social media and digital media growth further added to this development. With the incursion of emerging media clutter from the start of this new century, organizations in government and private sector of Pakistan are more interested in hiring public relations professionals to deal with media pressure¹. Though separate and specialized degree programs are not still offered in higher education institutions in Pakistan, but public relations courses are being offered as part of journalism and communication studies curriculum. Mass communication and journalism graduates join public relations industry but having a journalism degree do not ensure all professional skills to enter this challenging profession. As a result, there is dearth of professionals of the field with equipped professional skills².

This article describes the demographic characteristics/variables of PR scholarship in Pakistan in terms of departmental strength of public relations departments, professional credentials of the practitioners, gender, age and their experience. The article also sheds light on the capacity and level of expertise of public relations departments in employing various public relations roles and models³. Descriptive analysis is presented portraying a comparative analysis of public relations practitioners' abilities and departments' professional capacity and efficacy⁴. This paper deals with public relations practitioners' plight and capacity along with the professional capacity of their respective PR departments. The paper focusses on two research questions:

RQ1: How do demographic and professional characteristics differ in PR practitioners working at public and private sectors of Pakistan?

RQ2: How do professional capacity of PR departments differ in public and private sectors of Pakistan?

2. Methods

The results of this study are based on a quantitative survey conducted through Qualtrics. The participants of the survey include professionals working in public relations departments in Pakistani public/government and private/commercial sector organizations including government ministries, universities, autonomous bodies, corporations, industry, non-government organizations, telecommunication, hotels and real estate sectors. The participants are chosen randomly by applying a stratified sampling technique⁵. The data is collected from only in-house public relations departments, however, public relations firms are not included in this study. Descriptive statistics were applied for data analysis.

3.Results and Analysis

3.1. Strength of Public Relations Departments in Pakistan

The strength (employment status) of a PR public relations department describes its capacity to perform various PR tasks especially while making a communication policy and symmetrical communication purposes of the department.

Table 1. *Descriptive Frequencies for Employment Status in PR Depts.*

No of practitioners	Frequency	Percent
One to five	70	69.3
Six to ten	21	20.7
Eleven and above	10	10
Total.	101	100.0

Table 1. construes that most of Pakistani PR departments have one to five professionals at their strength (69.3%). A slight majority of the departments (20.8%) have six to ten professionals for doing professional duties while only a few departments (10%) have eleven or more practitioners to perform professional tasks.

Table 1.1. *Comparative Descriptive Frequencies for Employment Status in PR depts of Pakistan*

Sector	No of Practitioners	Frequency	Percent
Public	One to five	32	62.7
	Six to ten	11	21.6
	Eleven and above	8	15.7
	Total.	51	100.0
Private	One to five	37	74.0
	Six to ten	12	24.0
	Eleven and above	1	2.0
	Total.	50	100.0

Table 1.1. construes that 15.7% (N=8) public sector PR units have eleven or more professional while this percentage is comparatively lower in private sector (2% only). While majority of public relations departments have one to five practitioners in both sectors (Public= 62.7% and Private=74%). Thus, public sector public relations are slightly bigger in terms of employment capacity when we compare them to private sector public PR units/departments.

3.2. PR Professionals' Educational Qualifications

Educational background of the professionals is an important sign of professional maturity of the professional and considered as a criterion to judge professional scene of the profession in any part of the world. This data about qualification of the

practitioners also throughs light on the level of entry requirements to the field in Pakistan.

Table 2. *Descriptive Frequencies for Practitioners' Qualification*

Level of Qualification	Frequency	Percent
BA/BSc	7	6.9
MA/MSc/BS	69	68.3
Higher Research Degree/PhD/MPhil	25	24.8
Total.	101	100.0

Table 2. interprets that a good number of practitioners (25%) have exposure to higher research degrees i.e. M.Phil. or PhD. Similarly, majority of the practitioners have acquired master's degree before entering to the profession. The tradition of having a bachelor's degree is adopted by a minority of practitioners (6.9%).

Table 2.1. *Comparative Descriptive Frequencies for Level of Practitioners' Qualification*

Sector/Level		Frequency	Percent
Public-Sector Organization	BA/BSc	1	2.0
	MA/MSc/BS	33	64.7
	Higher Research Degree/PhD/MPhil	17	33.3
	Total	51	100.0
Private-Sector Organization	BA/BSc	6	12.0
	MA/MSc/BS	36	72.0
	Higher Research Degree/PhD/MPhil	8	16.0
	Total	50	100.0

Table 2.1. interprets that a good number of practitioners in public sector (64.7%) have exposure to higher research degrees i.e. M.Phil. or PhD as compare to private sector (16%). But on the contrary, majority of the practitioners in private sector (72%) have acquired master's degree before entering to the profession as compared to public sector where this majority is comparatively slighter (64.7%). The tradition of having a bachelor's degree is adopted by a minority of PR professionals in both government (2%) and commercial (12%) sectors.

3.2.1. Gender of the Professionals

Gender is an important aspect while exploring feministic perspective in public relations. In a South Asian public relations industry as Pakistan, it becomes more important to explore the status of the industry in terms of female practitioners' frequency in the profession. The data against this variable portrays a pessimistic picture of gender imbalance in Pakistani public relations industry.

Table 3.*Descriptive Frequencies for Gender of the PR professionals*

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male Professionals	79	78.2
Female Professionals	22	21.8
Total	101	100.0

Table 3. reveals that majority of the practitioners working in the field are male (78.2%) which portrays a male dominance in the profession and a gender imbalance in practice. The proportion of the female practitioners is not appropriate (1:3) but not disappointing (21%) as compare to other South Asiannations.

Table 3.1.*Comparative Descriptive Frequencies for Gender*

Gender of Practitioner		Frequency	Percent
Organization Sector			
Public-Sector Organization	Male Professionals	45	88.2
	Female Professionals	6	11.8
	Total	51	100.0
Private-Sector Organization	Male Professionals	34	68.0
	Female Professionals	16	32.0
	Total	50	100.0

Table 3.1 discloses that private sector PR units offer improved opportunities to female practitioners (32% female practitioners) when compared to PR units in public sector (11.8% female practitioners) in Pakistan. But male dominance in the profession can be seen in both public (88.2%) and private sector (68%).

3.3. Age of the Practitioners

The data for this variable was explored to explore diaspora of the public relations industry for future perspectives by analyzing the number of young, mid-career and old veteran practitioners. The future of the industry can be predicted more secured if more young professionals hold high positions in the industry.

Table 4.*Descriptive Frequencies for Age of PR Practitioners*

Age	Frequency	Percent
“20 to 25 years”.	2	2
“26 to 30 years”.	15	14.9
“31 to 35 years”.	37	36
“36 to 40 years”.	32	31.6
“41 and above”.	15	14.9
Total.	101	100.0

Table 4. reveals that majority of the public relations practitioners (68%) are mid-career young professionals.

Table 4.1. Comparative Descriptive Frequencies for Age of the Practitioners

Age of the Practitioners		Frequency	Percent
Organization Sector			
Public-Sector	“26 to 30 years”.	8	15
Organization	“31 to 35 years”.	19	37
	“36 to 40 years”.	16	31.3
	“41 and above”.	8	15.7
	Total.	51	100.0
Private-Sector	“20 to 25 years”.	2	4
Organization	“26 to 30 years”.	8	15.6
	“31 to 35 years”.	17	33
	“36 to 40 years”.	15	29
	“41 and above”.	8	16.0
	Total.	50	100.0

Table 4.1. reveals that the number of mid-career young professional is slightly better in public sector when compared to private sector.

3.4. Experience of PR Professionals

The experience of the professionals is also an important characteristic to understand the maturity level of a public relations industry. Data collected against this variable disclosed that ten years of experience is considered as a benchmark in Pakistani public relations industry to be considered for high management jobs in PR.

Table 5. Descriptive Frequencies for Experience of PR Professionals

Experience	Frequency	Percent
One to ten years	59	58.4
Eleven to twenty years	41	40.6
Twenty-one years and above	1	1.0
Total	101	100.0

Table 5. reveals that majority of the practitioners (98%) working at high positions (managers or head of PR departments) have ten to twenty years of experience in the field.

Table 5.1. *Comparative Descriptive Frequencies for Experience of the PR Professionals*

Organization Sector	Experience	Frequency	Percent
Public-Sector Organization	One to ten years	31	60.8
	Eleven to twenty years	20	39.2
	Total	51	100.0
Private-Sector Organization	One to ten years	28	56.0
	Eleven to twenty years	21	42.0
	Twenty-one years and above	1	2.0
	Total	50	100.0

Table 5.1. discloses that a good majority (Public=60% and Private= 28%) of PR professionals in Pakistan possesses one to ten years of professional experience in the field. It means that most of the public sector PR professionals heading PR departments have at least 10 years of service in the field. On the other hand, the percentage of the practitioners holding eleven to twenty years of experience is slightly high among private sector professionals (42%) and comparatively low among public sector professionals (39%). There are very minimum examples of practitioners with more than 20 years of experience in both sectors PR departments.

3.5. Professional Capacity of Public Relations Departments

Professional capacity of a public relations department is described through the lens of its capacity to employ various professional models and roles of public relations. These professional roles and professional models are explained in the “Excellence theory of public relations”. Excellence theory throws light on symmetrical and craft models of public relations as well as elaborates the difference between manager and technician roles on a professional continuum.

3.5.1. Departmental Expertise in Models

Excellence theory discusses four models of public relations to evaluate professional expertise of a public relations department. These models are divided into craft (Press agency, Public information) and professional public relations (Symmetrical models). Four constructs of models were adopted by placing three to four concepts/items for each model. The data revealed a comparative picture of different PR departments capacity/expertise level in applying/employing professional practices⁶.

Table 6. *Descriptive Statistics for Departmental Expertise of Public Relations Models in Pakistan*

	N	Mean	SD
Departmental Expertise/Press Agency Model items: $\alpha=.741$	101	4.01	.60
“Departmental Expertise” of Public Information Model items: $\alpha=.712$	101	4.06	.46
“Departmental Expertise” of Two-Way Asymmetrical Model items: $\alpha=.862$	101	2.74	1.06
“Departmental Expertise” of Two-Way Symmetrical Model items: $\alpha=.937$	101	3.04	1.04

Table 6. interprets the general professional capacity of Pakistani public relations departments is employing professional practices in terms of various professional and craft models. The conclusive mean scores against all four models revealed that public relations departments in Pakistan have more capacity to practice craft public relations (Press agency $M=4.01$, Public information $M=4.06$) as compare to their capacity to practice professional public relations (Two-way asymmetrical $M=2.74$, Two-way symmetrical $M= 3.04$). But any how they have reason able professional capacity to employ professional practices⁷.

Table 6.1. *Comparative Descriptive Statistics for Departmental Expertise of PR Models*

Organization Sector	N	Mean	SD
Public Sector			
DE/Press Agency Model	51	4.02	.56
DE/Public Information Model	51	4.11	.41
DE/Two-Way Asymmetrical Model	51	1.88	.46
DE/Two-Way Symmetrical Model	51	2.16	.47
Private Sector			
DE/Press Agency Model	50	3.99	.64
DE/Public Information Model	50	4.00	.49
Organiz ation			
DE/Two-Way Asymmetrical Model	50	3.61	.73
DE/Two-Way Symmetrical Model	50	3.94	.58

Table 6.1 interprets the comparative professional capacity of Pakistani public relations departments is employing professional practices in terms of various professional and craft models. The conclusive mean scores against all four models revealed that public relations departments in public sector organizations in Pakistan have more capacity to practice craft public relations (*Press agency* $M=4.02$, *Public information* $M=4.11$) as compare to public relations departments in private sector organizations (*Press agency* $M=3.99$, *Public information* $M=4.00$). But contrary to this private sector public relations departments have

more professional capacity to employ professional models (*Two-way asymmetrical* $M=3.61$, *Two-way symmetrical* $M= 3.93$) as compare to public sector PR departments (*Two-way asymmetrical* $M=1.88$, *Two-way symmetrical* $M=2.16$)⁸.

3.5.2. Departmental Expertise in Roles

Table 7. *Departmental Expertise of Technician and Manager Roles*

	N	Mean	SD
“Departmental Expertise” of Technician Role $\alpha=.893$	101	3.80	.77
“Departmental Expertise” of Manager Role $\alpha=.906$	101	3.66	.75

Table 7. interprets the general professional capacity of Pakistani public relations departments is employing professional practices in terms of various PR roles i.e. Technician and Manager. The conclusive mean scores against two roles revealed that public relations departments in Pakistan have more capacity to practice/employ technician role ($M=3.80$) as compare to their capacity to practice/employ manager role ($M=3.66$) But any how they have reasonable professional capacity to employ both roles⁹.

Table 7.1. *Technician and Manager Roles between Public and Private Sectors in Pakistan*

Organization Sector		N	Mean	SD
Public Sector	“Departmental Expertise” of Technician Role	51	3.67	.86
	“Departmental Expertise” of Manager Role	51	3.39	.87
Private Sector	“Departmental Expertise” of Technician Role	50	3.95	.65
	“Departmental Expertise” of Manager Role	50	3.94	.47

Table 7.1 interprets the comparative professional capacity of Pakistani public relations departments is employing professional practices in terms of two PR roles. The conclusive mean scores against two roles revealed that public relations departments in public sector organizations in Pakistan have less capacity to practice both roles (Technician role $M=3.67$, Manager Role $M=3.39$) as compare to public relations departments in private sector organizations (Technician role $M=3.95$, Manager Role $M=3.94$)¹⁰.

4. Conclusion

The results of this paper conclude that most of the Pakistani PR departments have one to five professionals at their strength having majority of male practitioners holding a master’s degree and an experience of one to twenty years. Majority of these professionals are mid-career practitioners having thirty to forty years of age. Comparatively, public sector PR departments have more professionals at their

strength with more exposure to advanced research degrees. Female practitioners' ratio is more in private sector and the number of mid-career young professional is slightly larger in public sector (72%) when compared to private sector (63%). The numeral of the practitioners with eleven to twenty years' experience is also somewhat more in private sector ($n=21, 42\%$) when compared to public sector ($n=20, 39.2\%$)¹¹.

When it comes to professional capacity of the public relations departments, public relations departments in Pakistan have more capacity to practice craft public relations as compare to their capacity to practice professional public relations. Similarly, public relations departments in Pakistan have more capacity to practice/employ technician roles as compare to their capacity to practice/employ manager role. But on the other hand, a comparative descriptive picture reveals that public relations departments in public sector organizations in Pakistan have more capacity to practice craft public relations as compare to public relations departments in private sector organizations. But contrary to this private sector public relations departments have more professional capacity to employ professional models as compare to public sector PR departments. Similarly, public relations departments in public sector organizations in Pakistan have less capacity to practice both roles as compare to public relations departments in private sector organizations¹².

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