

Profile of Public Relations Practice in Kyrgyzstan: Public Relations Purpose, Mission and Function

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In Kyrgyzstan, public relations evolved after 1991 when Kyrgyzstan became independent country. However it has not been institutionalized yet. There is no agreed definition of public relations and its purpose, mission and function have not yet been determined in the local conditions and needs of the country.

The researchers have not adequately studied public relations in Kyrgyzstan. In order to extend the knowledge about public relations model and profile in Kyrgyzstan, this study aims to explore the practice of public relations in a Central Asian country, Kyrgyzstan.

This research analyzes the practices of public relations in Kyrgyzstan, a culture that has not been adequately studied before. Through the use of a questionnaire instrument, the researcher will survey public relations practitioners in Kyrgyzstan. In the current study, the following research questions are offered: (1) what is the purpose of public relations in Kyrgyzstan; (2) what is the mission of public relations in Kyrgyzstan; (3) what is the function of public relations in Kyrgyzstan; (4) what roles are public relations practitioners in Kyrgyzstan are performing in their organizations; (5) what is the most important skill for public relations practitioners in Kyrgyzstan; (6) what are the relations between public relations and marketing functions in Kyrgyzstan.

The results of this study will extend the knowledge about public relations practices in Kyrgyzstan.

Literature and practice review

Public Relations in Kyrgyzstan

For Kyrgyzstan, public relations are a new developing field of professional activity. The few practitioners do their first tries in the recently emerged market of the country. The practical experience in the area yet is little. The scientific research base is even shallower. Even though public relations field received considerable attention in western academic literature, in Kyrgyzstan it has not been the focus of academic interest. Thus, every study of public relations in the context of Kyrgyz market has a great significance (Lihosherstova, 2007).

The Kyrgyz Republic is one of the five countries of central Asia made independent, in 1991, from the Soviet Union, and found itself right at the forefront of economic reform (Dana, 2000). This shift from planned economies to market economies had furthered the emergence of public relations business in Kyrgyzstan.

Definitely, due to its early development stage, the Kyrgyz public relations model differs to some extent from the Western one. Leo Paul Dana, who has been exploring the change and circumstances in Kyrgyz market, has said that foreigners often fail to realize that transition to a market economy requires more than legislation and infrastructure (Dana, 2000). "Business takes place between people, and the interaction between the parties does not take place in a vacuum, but rather it is part of a social system" (Hakansson, 1982). Leo Paul Dana has implied that

Western theories, which are often implied to Kyrgyz practice, need to be modified by local contexts as environmental contexts differ. Some public relations truisms, accepted in the Western part of the globe, cannot be applicable in Kyrgyzstan, and some of the commonly used techniques in Kyrgyzstan should be revised.

From 2000 to 2008 about 30 agencies appeared in Kyrgyzstan, which position themselves as the providers of advertising or marketing services. Field of their activities range from providing services on placement and production of advertising products, to services in the field of conducting research and consulting. Thus, on the market there has been formed a supply as a result of increase in activity of trade and slow increase of purchase ability of people and increase in prices of food and nonfood products(MCA, 2008).

In the capital city of Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek, there work about 30 companies specialized on BTL (Consumer Promotion, Trade Promotion, Direct Marketing, POSM and In-Store Visual Communications, Event Marketing). There are also companies which work with PR-services (mostly providing PR-services is realized through outsourcing, i.e. attracting journalists from media, although the palette of PR-instruments far beyond of traditional media).

The standard commissions taken by agencies for providing services range between 10 to 30 % of total budget of realized activities. According to the MCA (Marketing Communication Agency) today at the market of Bishkek there is no marketing (advertising) agency of full cycle in its classic presentation. There are agencies of outdoor advertisement which are considered as ordinary advertisement, there are a range of firms that organize promotion and there are a few companies which are able to provide their clients with event and PR services.

In Kyrgyzstan, the companies only begin to understand the importance of PR for the promotion of products and services. PR technologies in Kyrgyzstan have been used since the 1990's. For example, already in 1994 National Bank of Kyrgyzstan successfully organized Open Door Days and educational seminars for journalists. Today the number of the agencies which offer PR-services has been increased dramatically during the last 3-4 years which is related to the increase of business activity in the country when the companies transited from the stage of survival to the stage of development and availability to invest in PR appeared (Temirbekova, 2008).

PR specialists are hopeful about the future of PR in Kyrgyzstan (Ataol, Turdubaeva, Mombekova 2005).

The Peculiarities of Using PR Technologies in Kyrgyzstan

Companies in Kyrgyzstan except for international organizations and partly foreign companies just started to understand the importance of PR for promotion of products and services. That is why during the work with the representatives of small and average business, PR-agency has to convince the clients that the PR technologies are necessary for them (Temirbekova, 2008).

Today in Kyrgyzstan PR technologies are mostly used by commercial banks, construction companies, mobile phone operators, tobacco companies, producers of drinks and international organizations (Temirbekova, 2008).

In Kyrgyzstan political parties during the elections as a rule, prefer to invite Russian PR specialists who do not take into account local mentality. It is very difficult to say about the existence of successful political PR in Kyrgyzstan (Temirbekova, 2008).

PR agencies in Kyrgyzstan mostly use foreign, in particular Russian experience. However, they are not adapted to local conditions. For example, in Kyrgyzstan the space of

Internet trade is not developed and TV advertisement can be successful only when it comes from the clients who can cover all TV space, or else TV advertisement not always gives a result. As for information agencies, in Kyrgyzstan the articles which come out on news lines considered to be more effective than the advertisement on websites (Temirbekova, 2008).

Using Internet in PR activities is a new development in Kyrgyzstan (Ataol, Turdubaeva, Mombekova, 2005).

The newspaper usage in disseminating ideas arouses a question. Firstly, it is because one of the greatest duties of a public relations practitioner is to tailor and communicate a message. Secondly, newspapers are most employed media by PR practitioners in the country (Ataol, Turdubaeva, Mombekova, 2005).

Lihosherstova, conducted an experiment to find out whether the difference in effectiveness of public relations articles and print advertisements exist and whether factors proposed by western theories matter in Kyrgyz reality and found out that the both publications fail to arouse readers' credibility. However, advertisements produce a greater positive attitude change, as they use clear language and present a straight message (Lihosherstova, 2007).

Local modern practice

The formation of the PR market in Kyrgyzstan taking into the account the mentality of people in Kyrgyzstan, is going very slow. Besides, the market is still not formed yet, it continues its spontaneous development. In Kyrgyzstan there are only a few professional companies who offer PR services. Different groups do PR; these can be advertisement agencies, information agencies and media itself. There are also definite single-specialists who offer their services in this sphere (Tregubova, 2008).

A look at the current state of public relations in Kazakhstan in its interconnection with culture of the Central Asian former Soviet republic offered by Valerie Terry, the independent researcher from London, can contribute dramatically to the understanding of the situation with public relations in Kyrgyzstan, which is also Central Asian former Soviet republic.

Researcher has revealed following distinctive trends: gatekeeping in the country is a "monetary proposition;" journalists expect to be paid for positive mentions of an organization in any article and there is no message quality control; at the same time, "Kazakhstanis are not dummies" and can recognize propaganda (Terry, 2005, p. 34).

The first National Public Relations Conference "PR in Kyrgyzstan: Theory and Practice" held in Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University, particularly, Daniar Amanaliev's, the travel & business shop Kyrgyz Concept representatives' speech has proved that finding of the early mentioned Valerie Terry's research can be applicable to Kyrgyz public relations as well. According to him, any mentioning of organization's name is paid. Publishers provide organizations with price lists, where, for example, a half of the page in editorial section costs about 2,000 of US dollars (Amanaliev, personal communication, 2007).

Mobile operator companies' PR practitioners (SkyMobile, 2007) and even governmental organizations' employees (Ministry of Health & National Bank, 2006) stated that they are forced to pay for article even if there is a newsworthy event, such as charity, sponsorship, annual report or appeal for respect to national money.

Post Soviet practitioners invented kind of new term for paid newspaper stories that is public relations article (PR articles). These publications simulate news or feature stories by means of using third voice, placing in the editorial of topical sections (to get third-party endorsement), rather than in commercial one. The message is latent, rather than straight and

obvious. What's more, editors still have some control over these materials, although radically smaller than it is in the west (Lihosherstova, 2007).

Along with this form of publicity, the advertising still exists here. Moreover, the Kyrgyz practitioners conform to the rules and legislations similar to western ones in their work with advertising. That is the method of identification as a commercial information and true presentation of the product/person/service. That is why Daniar Amanaliev has implied that advertising in Kyrgyzstan gives more objective and useful information (answers the questions what, where and how much), when the journalists, writing the articles, foster more self interests rather than true principles of the profession.

Still, paid public relations articles are not a completely untraditional way to communicate the message to the western audiences. There are companies that are able to create the placements anytime they want and it is worth the price. A client can pick the magazines s/he wants to be placed in, they work it out and s/he pays when the placement is complete (Wright, 2005). However, it is far not common practice as the price of such publicity is extremely high. .

"Feature advertising: policies and attitudes in print" study has pointed even more interesting fact. A decade ago, something like Kyrgyz PR articles existed in USA. The authors Glen T. Cameron and John Eric Haley defined "print advertisements that looked like a short feature article in a page of editorial copy" as feature advertising (Cameron & Haley, 1992, p. 47). These simulating editorials content ads precisely corresponded to public relations articles by description. On the time of research (1992), feature ads were running in most media categories with no or unnoticeable identification of material as advertising (Cameron & Haley).

However, Kyrgyz public relations articles are under control of paying organization, as advertising is. Then, print advertising and public relation articles are analogous as this way of payment for ads and PR Articles is identical in Kyrgyzstan (Lihosherstova, 2007).

Advertising copies affect people more than public relations articles, because third party endorsement fails in credibility arousal and because ads use clear, straight, understandable language, when the public relations articles present the message latently, reducing reader comprehension ability (Lihosherstova, 2007).

The results of Lihosherstova's study turned out to be consistent with Leo Paul Dana research of local market, particularly with her idea that some major approaches used in western business are not applicable in Kyrgyz environment due to different contexts (historical, cultural, etc). Indeed, unlike situation described in many public relations studies (Baskin et al., 1997), advertising (Burnett et al., 1999), marketing (Kotler, 1991) books, the Kyrgyz public does not trust a material just because it is published in newspapers verified by editors. Readers are not against the companies' control over the publication because they trust businesses more than mass media. At the same time Kyrgyz people, like Kazakhstanis, in accordance with Valerie Terry 's findings, can recognize propaganda (Terry, 2005).

At the same time, it is important to keep the professional ethics. Several Kyrgyz companies already have a mandate, forbidding media bribery (Asian Universal Bank, Asian Bank of development, etc, 2007).

If in developed countries PR agencies mostly are narrow specialized, in Kyrgyzstan they provide all possible services. Now they are not developed yet: companies guarantee that they can provide all set of services, but as a result it turns out that the work is done not in the highest level which damages the image of PR agencies in Kyrgyzstan (Temirbekova, 2008)..

The most widespread service of PR agencies in Kyrgyzstan today is a consulting. Besides this PR companies work in such directions as the corporate design, adaptation of creative idea to

advertisement carrier, media relations and initiating discussions and debates in print publications on themes which indirectly show the competitive privilege of one company at the market (Temirbekova, 2008)..

The key factors of the success of PR agencies in Kyrgyzstan are the “phenomenon of personality” and “acquired relationships” (Temirbekova, 2008).

For the development of this sphere in the country the main thing is that the clients attained a new qualitative level. Having a small amount of production, it is not rational to apply to PR agency, but if a company widens its network and introduces new product, then it is not possible to do without the help of professionals in the sphere of PR (Temirbekova, 2008).

PR Education in Kyrgyzstan

The reason for the high demand on the educational PR course is the fact that in the country there is a sharp shortage of qualified specialists and managers in the sphere of PR who possess necessary professional and personal competencies (Business Academy, 2008).

During the last years PR activity has been formed into independent profession, the existence and necessity of which not only are not subject to suspicion, but also entrenched conceptually.

In 2000 in Kyrgyzstan appeared the first specialization in PR at the Communication faculty of Kyrgyzstan-Turkey Manas University. The same year journalism faculties of seven other universities included courses on PR in their programs. In 2004 journalism faculties of two main state universities in Bishkek opened specialty in PR.

In 2003 the first Student PR Club was opened under the Department of PR of Communication faculty of Kyrgyzstan-Turkey Manas University.

In 2006 this department organized the First National Conference “PR in Kyrgyzstan: Theory and Practice”.

In 2007 students of journalism faculty at American University in Central Asia opened PR Association of Kyrgyzstan.

PR in State and Private Organizations

The aims which are achieved as a result of PR activities in public organizations in Kyrgyzstan are: positioning, informing, building good relations with other organizations, corporate communication, and quality development. The aims which are achieved as a result of PR activities in private organizations in Kyrgyzstan are: positioning, corporate communication, relationships with clients, image development, making profit and building good relations with partners (Ataol, Turdubaeva, Mombekova 2005).

In private companies PR is more close to marketing and advertisement, when in state organizations there are “public relations in its pure form” in its classic understanding. More scaled character of activities in state organizations “directed on the development of relations between socially and politically active groups of people”. Besides, PR specialists in state organizations as opposed to their colleagues from business sphere have administrative resource. As a rule, they do not have problems with media relations. Journalists themselves show interest in them, while the private companies have to use finances in order to attract their attention.

However the activity in state sector is strictly regulated. Here PR specialists are very limited in choosing and taking decisions in particular “they are not free in choosing the information, in methods to present it, in the direction of PR-campaign”. Besides, they have less opportunity for creativity which is conditioned both by schedule of work and limited budget.

Here also there is very narrow sphere of obligations in state organizations. PR specialists fulfill functions not more than of a press secretary. Mostly they are occupied with media relations and organizing special events.

Opposed to the owner-companies of well-known Western brands, big business in Kyrgyzstan is represented mostly by companies in the sphere of wholesale trade, which often develop retail directions. Most of such companies exist more than ten years and felt on themselves the change of economic regime and necessity to survive in market conditions, regulating the market, attracting the specialists and reducing expenses. That is why the lack of contact with final consumer of the product often leads to that all relations of company with external world are done by advertisement, periodically in narrow-specialized media and in some cases by launching a website with minimum information on it.

Political information wars in Kyrgyzstan at the end of 1990's discredited the trust in the industry of PR services, forming negative public opinion towards the concept "PR". However, now we can say about "golden age" of political PR in Kyrgyzstan is coming to the end. According to the evaluations of most specialists working in the sphere of PR, the situation is changing to the better side. PR technologies are taking more civilized forms; the level of their need is increasing in different spheres of business.

Existing advertising and marketing agencies which also offer PR services in Kyrgyzstan can be symbolically divided into 3 types. Agencies of the first type are the ones which think in the category of event. They are specialized in the standard set of PR services; organization of press conferences or round-tables followed by the coverage of the event in necessary media. Such structures sometimes are formed to realize single corporate events and under some special projects. For these agencies, a detailed understanding of strategic and global tasks of the client and the outcome is not very important.

Another type of agencies is more oriented to the sale of coverage (saturation coverage) or the channels of communication. They have good relations with print and TV media and often they can provide good information support in any region of the country.

There is one category of agencies to which only two PR agencies which exist in Kyrgyzstan can be included. They can do everything that must do the standard PR agencies; however they differ from them by principally another approach to the work: they do not start working with client until its business tasks are not transparently formulated.

The Challenges of PR in Kyrgyzstan

The need for the PR specialist as a separate staff entity in companies is minimal. PR mostly is realized by the manager of the company, advertising and marketing manager or press services. In Kyrgyzstan the image of a company is still an unimportant condition for the development and prosperity. PR departments of big companies and international organizations are slowly becoming branched off from advertising and marketing departments into independent structures. This gives an opportunity to have several specialists in the sphere of PR in the staff diversifying their functions.

Another problem is the lack of access of PR specialists to the strategic information of the company and total dependence of actions and decisions on the opinion of top-management. Mostly in crisis situations PR specialists being afraid of the management, answer to the questions of journalists with the cliché phrase: "We do not comment this information" (Kuznetsov, 2005).

The period when it was possible to pass any information to journalists for not too much money ended. Now chief-editors quickly figured out that huge money are passing by their

budgets. That is why they invented such principle of partnership work with their newsmakers as information support. Unconditionally the relation to those companies who signed such an agreement is different than to the companies who did not sign. Analogical scheme: advertiser or not (Kuznetsov, 2005).

Most often PR services of big companies are distanced from the top-management; because of the lack of coordination of information activity PR specialists can not participate in the process of taking important decisions by top-management for business decisions and can not operatively react to information challenges in time (Kuznetsov, 2005)..

One of the main problems of big companies is their closeness for media and public at all. One of the reasons of this is the lack of knowledge about the rules of game, inability to give the information correctly. That is why they say “no comments” during crisis periods (Kuznetsov, 2005)..

Ataol et. al. analyzed public relations model in Kyrgyzstan and argued that PR in Kyrgyzstan is on the way of becoming a profession and the positions of PR specialists in organizations are diverse and rich (Ataol, Turdubaeva, Mombekova 2005). This analysis provided some preliminary information about public relations practice in Kyrgyzstan.

As in any rapidly-evolving sector, there are also challenges as new practices meet tradition. Since the industry is so young, media relations is still the core of most public relations work in Kyrgyzstan. The CEOs have not understood the importance of PR yet, which sometimes makes it difficult to conduct high-level corporate and crisis management campaigns.

Clients still approach agencies first for help with media relations, but are increasingly stepping up their activity to include marketing communications and events, and then corporate communications. The offices of global corporations and international organizations are much larger buyers of communications expertise than local companies, who tend to rely on their own personal relationships with journalists, forged through money and entertaining.

The market tendency of outsourcing development in PR in Kyrgyzstan is being formed not for the benefit of PR agencies. It is not a secret that big clients for whom the perfect communication policy is one of the main components of the cost of actives define the weather on the market of business PR. This market has its own rules and principles of work. Big companies form their own PR structures first of all because in most situations they are not satisfied with the quality of work of PR agencies in Kyrgyzstan. Especially the leaders of sectoral markets which develop long-term reputation projects and oriented on high technological western standards of business, including the issues of disclosure and spread of information in the environment of international investors. PR programs of such companies are directed at forming perfect image and because of the difficulty of the task and the given level of quality; it is not possible for one local PR-agency to realize them. Moreover it is still difficult for big clients to be orientated on the market of supply, because the market has not formed the objective criteria of success of agencies yet, and it is not possible to estimate the effectiveness of PR services if not to consider as a result the number of mentioning on media.

Another challenge in Kyrgyzstan is that there are still misconceptions as to what PR is all about. PR is synonymous with organizing events and entertainment and there is much to be done to change the image of the industry.

In the job announcement published in newspapers in 2004 the following skills were required for the position of PR specialist in Kyrgyzstan: To know the rules of (protocol) organizing events (meetings, seminars, celebrations etc.), of hosting foreign and local

delegations, building relationships with print media and radio and to possess PR technologies (Ataol, Turdubaeva, Mombekova, 2005).

“Modern” or “western” public relations practice has only been used in Kyrgyzstan since 2000. In the 1990’s Kyrgyzstan experienced political and economic changes that “paved the way for this western concept and profession”. The concept of public relations in Kyrgyzstan has not revealed its value to companies yet. The western approach to public relations has not been spread to the country and is now only begun to grow in the universities.

The teaching of public relations started out in Kyrgyzstan formally in 2000. Public relations courses started in 2005. Consulting agencies conducted one week courses where PR specialists from Russia tutored their colleagues in Kyrgyzstan. There were organized 4 trainings until 2009 in Kyrgyzstan. These trainings offered instruction on subjects such as the technologies of media relations, methods of preparing the materials which attract the attention of journalists and for publication of which there is no need to pay, how to write press release, how to prepare short and effective self presentation, and develop marketing and PR campaigns and how to become a PR-agent, also the PR-technologies developed by classic of American management Ron Habbard.

Universities in Kyrgyzstan are educating students for the PR profession apart from practice. They have theoretical knowledge about PR in Western countries which are not adapted to the realities of Kyrgyzstan.

Research Methods

Sampling

The purposive sampling method was used. Private companies, international organizations, public foundations and state organizations which have PR departments and two PR agencies (there are only two PR agencies in Kyrgyzstan) were selected as a sampling of the research. Total 64 questionnaires were sent by email to top 64 organizations (Akipress Industry Rating) have been selected to represent companies with in-house PR setups. In addition 2 interviews were conducted with the managers of two PR agencies. In each organization, one public relations practitioner served as the representative of the organization/agency and filled out the questionnaire. Two respondents did not want to fill out the questionnaire referring to the confidentiality of the answers to the questions of questionnaire.

Three days after the questionnaires were mailed to participants, a reminder message was sent by email to those who did not answer to the first message. With close follow-up interpersonal communication, the total number of questionnaires collected was 32 (%58 response rate). Out of 64 questionnaires 9 were rejected because of the secrecy of company information. They said that they can not answer the questions of questionnaire because it was company secret information.

Data Collection

The questionnaire which consisted of 5 parts was developed and used in order to analyze the profile of PR in Kyrgyzstan.

Part I. Demographic Characteristics of PR specialists

Part II. Characteristics of PR departments/branches of organizations

Part III. Professional Activities of PR specialists

Part IV. Peculiarities of activity in local market of PR services
Part V. PR education in Kyrgyzstan

Results

Demographic Characteristics of PR specialists

The demographic characteristics of PR specialists were evaluated by 8 questions about gender, age, place of work, position, work experience, education, additional education and the need to take additional education.

The data is based on responses from 32 participants. Fifty-nine (59%) participants are female. Thirty-seven (37%) participants are male. One participant did not indicate the gender. The average age of participants is between 26-30 years old. Seven (22%) participants work at marketing departments of companies. Five (16%) participants work at PR departments of public organizations. Four (13%) participants work at PR departments of private companies. Three (10%) participants work at consulting agencies. Two (7%) participants work at PR departments of state organizations. Ten (31%) participants work as PR specialists under different departments of organization. Respondents' titles include director (31%), department manager (25%), specialists (19%), assistant (7%) and the other titles. Thirteen (41%) participants have been working at this department for 1-3 years. Nine participants (29%) have been working at this department for less than one year. Seven participants (22%) have been working at this department for more than 5 years.

Nine (28%) participants have higher education in economy, six (19%) participants in journalism, two (6%) participants in public relations and the remaining have higher education in fields such as sociology, political sciences, history, pedagogy, technical, etc. Seventeen (54%) participants do not have additional education in public relations; eleven (35%) participants have taken additional training courses in public relations. Three (10%) of them are taking courses. Twenty-three (72%) participants would like to take the course of increasing qualification in the field of public relations.

Characteristics of PR departments/branches of organizations

Characteristics of PR departments/branches of organizations were evaluated by the questions concerning the place of PR department in organizational chart, how long exists PR department, the number of staff in the department, the task of PR department, how PR and marketing are related, the functional obligations/duties of PR specialists, the function of PR department, the level of participation of PR specialists in developing marketing strategy of the organization, the change in the amount of marketing budget and its PR part in particular, who is responsible for the formation and control of PR budget, the necessity to conduct researches during the realization of PR projects, who conducts the researches.

PR departments in most organizations (44%) are under other departments. Twelve (38%) participants answered that PR department in their organization "is an independent department and is under CEO"; six (19%) participants answered that PR department "is under marketing branch of organization". PR departments of most organizations have been existing for *more than five years*. The number of staff in the PR department is 1-3 (57%) and more than five (16%).

The most important tasks of PR department are *to form public opinion about organization, to form and support positive image of organization and to promote organization and its products and services*. PR specialists were asked how PR and marketing are related.

Fifteen (47%) participants answered that PR is an independent field of activity; twelve (38%) participants said that PR is one of elements of marketing complex. The functions of PR and marketing are not separated in most organizations (63%); they are separated only in eight organizations (25%). The functional obligations/duties of PR specialists are *reputation management, client relations management and working out key messages*.

The main functions of PR department are *media relations, building relations with publics, government relations, taking part at conference, exhibitions and forums and organizing sponsorship and charitable works*. The level of participation of PR specialists in developing marketing strategy of the organization is *high* in most organizations (41%) and *average* in about one-third (29%) of organizations. The amount of marketing budget and its PR part in particular during the last year “has been increased at some level” in most organizations (29%). In most organizations (41%) the manager of organization, in twelve organizations (38%) the manager of PR department is responsible for the formation and control of PR budget.

PR specialists were asked their opinion concerning the necessity to conduct researches during the realization of PR projects. Most of them (57%) answered that “research is necessary” and about more than one-third of participants (35%) answered that “research is necessary only in definite stages of work”. In more than half of organizations (57%) own specialists conduct the researches, only five organizations (16%) give it to specialized research agencies.

Professional Activities of PR specialists

The professional activities of PR specialists were measured by the questions concerning previous work experience, the reason for working in the sphere of PR, the field of their competency/obligations, the main three auditory with whom they communicate mostly, three media they cooperate mostly, methods of media relations they use most often, their critiques towards media, additional methods they use in order to attract the media, membership at PR associations, sources of information about PR, skills and knowledge they need mostly, knowledge about the international PR market, PR activities of which countries they want to get information, difficulties they face during professional activities, what disturbs them during their work, the criteria of professionalism in the sphere of PR.

Participants were asked in which field they worked before. Nine (28%) participants worked as journalists before. Four (12%) participants worked as university teachers, the remaining worked as press secretary, interpreter, program coordinator etc.

The reason for working in the sphere of PR was evaluated by asking the question “What first of all attracts you in this profession?”. *Creativity* was the first reason, *communicating with many people* was the second reason and *intelligent character of activity* was the third reason for working as a PR specialist.

The field of their competency/obligations is first of all *media relations*, secondly *corporate communications*, and thirdly *creative works*. And *client relationships* also were one of their spheres of competency.

PR specialists were asked to write down main three auditory with whom they communicate mostly. The main auditory with whom they communicate mostly are *clients, partners and journalists*. They were also asked to write down three media they cooperate mostly. Out of media they cooperate mostly with *newspapers, television and information agencies*.

PR specialists were asked to indicate the methods of media relations they use most often. They answered, *preparing texts, press releases and messages, organizing interviews, press*

conferences and briefings, placing information about company on media for money and for free and daily media monitoring.

PR specialists were asked whether they had critiques towards media. Eleven (35%) participants said that they do not have any critique towards media. Ten (32%) participants criticized media by saying that they *distort materials and they are uncompetitive*, seven (22%) participants indicated to the *extortion and rejection to publicize materials without money*. PR specialists were asked which additional methods they use in order to attract the media. They answered that they use such methods *as information support of their website, personal meetings with journalists and help journalists to write materials*.

Most of PR specialists (88%) does not have membership at PR associations. The sources of information about PR for them are *internet, personal communication with colleagues and business print media*. The skills and knowledge they need mostly are *PR technologies* (44%), *experience* (22%) and *theoretical knowledge about PR* (13%). They were asked whether they had knowledge about the international PR market. Twenty (63%) participants answered that they *know a little bit about the history of PR and the current situation in PR market abroad*. PR specialists were asked PR activities of which countries they want to get information. Most of them (82%) answered that they want to get information about PR activities in *Russia*. As second country they indicated to *Western European countries*. The difficulties they face during professional activities are *low level of understanding the meaning of PR by employers, lack of unified criteria of evaluating the activities of PR specialists* and low level of their qualification. They were asked what disturbs them during their work. They answered that *the low level of professionalism of media, journalists' perception that PR is advertising and the necessity to pay it and lack of understanding the meaning of PR by clients*.

The criteria of professionalism in the sphere of PR are *ability to communicate, creativity of thinking and activeness and mobility*.

Peculiarities of activity in local market of PR services

Peculiarities of activity in local market of PR services were evaluated by the following questions: important changes happened during 5-10 years in the market of PR services in Kyrgyzstan, main advantages of the market of PR services in Kyrgyzstan, main shortcomings of the market of PR services in Kyrgyzstan, the difference of methods and technologies of work used by local and foreign PR- specialists, the level of qualification of PR specialists in Kyrgyzstan, the conditions to form unified market of PR services in Kyrgyzstan, future tendencies in the sphere of PR in Kyrgyzstan and the future PR directions in the next 3-5 years in Kyrgyzstan.

PR specialists were asked their opinions concerning the current situation of market of PR services in Kyrgyzstan. More than half of them (60%) answered that “PR market in Kyrgyzstan is just being developed”, about one-fourth of them think that “the first stage of its development is ended” and only four of them (13%) answered that “there is no PR market in Kyrgyzstan. It should be built”. They were asked what are the most important changes happened during 5-10 years in the market of PR services in Kyrgyzstan, to which most of them (60%) answered, “The level of understanding the meaning and necessity of PR both by the clients and public”.

The main advantages of the market of PR services in Kyrgyzstan are “its active development and increasing demand for PR services” and “lack of competency in the market”. The main shortcomings of the market of PR services in Kyrgyzstan are “lack of adequate

understanding of clients about PR” and “PR specialists are isolated, by not participating in the life of international and regional PR community”.

PR specialists were asked their opinions concerning the difference of methods and technologies of work used by local and foreign PR specialists. Most of them (72%) answered that they differ by justifying it with the following opinion “environment in Kyrgyzstan is less prepared for Western methods” (44%) and “Western methods are more formalized than ours. Here in Kyrgyzstan we rely more on intuition, but they rely more on methodology”. PR specialists were asked to evaluate the level of qualification of PR specialists in Kyrgyzstan between 1 and 10; the given average level is 3.43. They justified their answers by indicating at “they are less creative” and “they show low results”.

Participants were asked their opinions concerning the conditions to form unified market of PR services in Kyrgyzstan. More than half of them (57%) think that there are no conditions to form unified market of PR services in Kyrgyzstan. About half of the participants (44%) think that the future tendencies in the sphere of PR in Kyrgyzstan are “development of PR specialists’ qualifications” and “appearance of freelancers of high qualification”. PR specialists were asked their opinions about how will develop market of PR services in Kyrgyzstan in the next 3-5 years. About half of the participants think that “there will not be important changes” and justified it with “it depends on economic and social changes, and there is no change now.” The participants were asked their opinions about the future PR directions in the next 3-5 years in Kyrgyzstan. More than half of them (60%) think that business PR will be the future direction, and reputation management and interaction with government structures were indicated equally, about 16%.

PR Education in Kyrgyzstan

The respondents were asked for their opinions about the quality of PR education in Kyrgyzstan, the necessity to have special education for a PR specialist and the necessity to give academic degree in the sphere of PR.

About half of the participants (41%) think that it is enough to have education in related spheres, only about one-third of participants think that PR education is compulsory. More than half of PR specialists (54%) think that the quality of PR education in universities of Kyrgyzstan is low and more than one-third of participants (35%) think that “PR is a science and academic degrees in the sphere of PR should be given” and about one-third of participants (32%) think that “there is no necessity to give academic degrees, PR is not a science”.

Conclusion

By collecting empirical data in Kyrgyzstan, this exploratory study has provided information about public relations practices in a culture which has not been adequately studied before. The significance of this study is that it discusses various contemporary research issues, including the roles that public relations practitioners perform in Kyrgyzstan, the most important skills for public relations practitioners, the relationship between public relations and marketing, peculiarities of public relations activities in local market and public relations education in Kyrgyzstan.

Public Relations Purpose

The first research question of this study asks what the purpose of public relations in Kyrgyzstan is. Previous literature (Ataol, Turdubaeva, Mombekova 2005) suggested that the

aims which are achieved as a result of PR activities in public organizations in Kyrgyzstan are: *positioning, informing, building good relations with other organizations, corporate communication, and quality development*. The aims which are achieved as a result of PR activities in private organizations in Kyrgyzstan are: *positioning, corporate communication, relationships with clients, image development, making profit and building good relations with partners* (Ataol, Turdubaeva, Mombekova 2005).

As a result of current study the functional obligations/duties of PR specialists are *reputation management, client relations management and working out key messages*.

Public Relations Mission

The second research question asks what the mission of Public Relation in Kyrgyzstan?

As a result of current study the mission of PR department is *to form public opinion about organization, to form and support positive image of organization and to promote organization and its products and services*.

Public Relations Function

The third research question asks what the function of public relations in Kyrgyzstan is.

The main functions of PR department are *media relations, building relations with publics, government relations, taking part at conference, exhibitions and forums and organizing sponsorship and charitable works*.

Practitioners' Roles

The fourth research question asks what roles public relations practitioners in Kyrgyzstan perform in their organizations.

The field of their competency/obligations is first of all *media relations*, secondly *corporate communications*, and thirdly *creative works*. And *client relationships* also were one of their spheres of competency.

Most Important Skills

The fifth research question asks what the most important skills are for public relations practitioners in Kyrgyzstan.

The criteria of professionalism in the sphere of PR are *ability to communicate, creativity of thinking and activeness and mobility*.

Relations between Public Relations and Marketing Functions

The last research question of this study asks what the relationships between public relations and marketing in Kyrgyzstan.

PR specialists were asked how PR and marketing are related. Fifteen (47%) participants answered that PR is an independent field of activity; twelve (38%) participants think that PR is one of elements of marketing complex. The functions of PR and marketing are not separated in most organizations (63%); they are separated only in eight organizations (25%).

Because of its broad research scope, this study has built a profile of public relations in Kyrgyzstan and extended the knowledge about public relations in post Soviet country

Kyrgyzstan. However this study has limitations. The major limitation of this study is that all of the organizations surveyed in this study are located in the capital city of Kyrgyzstan, because all major organizations which have public relations departments or specialists are located in Bishkek. Future studies may discover what roles public relations practitioners perform in smaller organization outside the capital city of Kyrgyzstan and compare the results with the results of this current study.

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