

## Chapter 2

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

The two major communication theories which have guided this particular study to the desired conclusions are the *Gatekeeping* theory and the *Uses and Gratification* theory. While the advent of new media challenges the very role of the mainstream media as the gatekeeper of information to the people, the new media tools are emerging as potent communication platforms because the people are using and adopting them fast and are feeling satisfied by their usage.

The Gatekeeper decides what information should move to group or individual and what information should not. Here, the gatekeepers are the decision makers who decide on how the whole news processing system should work. The gatekeeper is having its own influence like social, cultural, ethical and political. Based on personal or social influences they let the information to the group. Through this process the unwanted, sensible and controversial information is removed by the gate keeper which helps to control the society or a group and letting them in a right path.

In any news medium editor plays a vital role. He has to decide what kind of news items will publish and what should not. Every day the news channel receives various news items from all over the world. The channel has its own ethics and policies and through this the editor decides on the news items for publication or airing. In some cases, few news items are rejected by the editor due to the organization's policy or the news items which are not suitable for publication. ("The Gatekeeping Theory," 2015)

As the above definition suggests, in the sphere of news media, it has been for long that the editor of a mainstream media establishment, decides what content is to be passed on to the reader or the viewer or listener of electronic media. Therefore, the

editor or the media establishment itself has been traditionally the gatekeepers of information.

The Gatekeeping theory was first conceived by German-American social psychologist Kurt Lewin in the year 1943. Gatekeeping can generally be observed at all levels of the media hierarchy — from a reporter deciding which information is to be shared as a story to the editors deciding which stories are to be printed and with what degree of importance. The gatekeeping process may also include the media outlet owners and advertisers as they also have a distinct role in the entire media business.

However, the advent of new media has dramatically changed that practice. Today, celebrities, organisations are sharing their information directly with their target audience through the new media tools such as websites, social media accounts, mobile applications, internet messaging services, blogs and so on. There is no need to approach the mainstream media to disseminate information. This has led to a reverse chain of information sharing where, the traditional media platforms such as newspapers, radio, television etc are using information from these new media channels to create their content.

Since this particular study intends to research how new media tools used in public relations can benefit the Indian public sector and how the employment of these tools has helped the two organisations under study – the Delhi Traffic Police and the University of Delhi, the gatekeeping theory is expected to be of immense relevance in guiding how the gatekeeping parameters are changing with the introduction of these new age tools in the domain of public relations.

The Uses and Gratification theory looks at communication from the point of the user. It analyses how the user derives gratification by using a particular communication medium over others. In case of new media also, the primary reason why it has emerged as a potent public relations tool is that the users have been able to derive great amount of gratification by using them and have contributed to their popularity.

Blumler and Katz's uses and gratification theory suggests that media users play an active role in choosing and using the media. According to them, Users take an active part in the communication process and are goal oriented in their media use. The theorists say that a media user seeks out a media source that best fulfills the needs of

the user. Uses and gratifications theory assumes that the user has alternate choices to satisfy their need. (Blumler & Katz, 1974)

Uses and gratification is often seen as a counter-response to the more deterministic media theories, which assume that media have certain effects. In other words, it qualifies or even overcomes the difficulties involved in the claims that mere media exposure leads to certain behaviors, sometimes without a user's conscious control. Uses and gratifications theory proposes that users/media consumers are actively choosing specific media content according to their needs. If there are any effects, these are consciously or at least actionably intended. (Matei, 2010)

Since the use of new media surrounds the basic premise that the audience now increasingly prefers to receive information directly from the source instead of depending on the mainstream media to share it, the uses and gratification theory gains tremendous importance and relevance. The theory helps the researcher ascertain how new media has been able to satisfy the end user in terms of dissemination of information since the gratification of the target audience is the sole prerogative of every public relations campaign or strategy.

## **2.2 Review of Literature**

Even though the use of new media tools in the sphere of media in general and public relations in particular, are a recent phenomenon, there have been many studies analysing the role and scope of new media in the world of media as a whole.

However, before we proceed towards studying the literature that has been generated to analyse the role of new media in the world of media as well as in public relations, let us take a look at some definitions of the term new media and its usage in relation to the other recently coined term 'social media'.

“New Media is a 21st Century catchall term used to define all that is related to the internet and the interplay between technology, images and sound. In fact, the definition of new media changes daily, and will continue to do so. New media evolves and morphs continuously. What it will be tomorrow is virtually unpredictable for most of us, but we do know that it will continue to evolve in fast and furious ways.” (Socha and Eber-Schmid, 2012)

Online encyclopedia Wikipedia defines the term 'New Media' as "... a broad term in media studies that emerged in the latter part of the 20th century. For example, new media holds out a possibility of on-demand access to content anytime, anywhere, on any digital device, as well as interactive user feedback, creative participation and community formation around the media content. Another important promise of new media is the "democratization" of the creation, publishing, distribution and consumption of media content. What distinguishes new media from traditional media is the digitizing of content into bits. There is also a dynamic aspect of content production which can be done in real time, but these offerings lack standards and have yet to gain traction." ("New Media," 2011)

However, in the recent times, the terms new media and social media have often been used to explain the same thing. On many occasions, they are also used intermittently for each other. Not all media is social. Media becomes social when you can interact with the content via comments or conversation. While old media was a passive form of entertainment, new media is interactive entertainment or edutainment. Social media, on the other hand requires a conversation between the content creator/s and the audience. Social media is about the people who engage on the platform. If people are connecting through the media, then it is social.

Basically, social media is a subset of new media, but not all new media is social. In order for new media to be considered social, it needs to have an element of interactivity where the audience can contribute, connect or collaborate with the content. On Twitter, the audience can share your content or talk with the content producer. Instagram allows followers to comment on, share and like photos. Blogs can be social and invite conversation in the comments or they can turn comments off and just create new media. Comments, likes and the ability to share content make media social. Other phrases for social media or new media are digital media, interactive media and user generated media. (Michaelian, 2012)

Therefore, from the above studies, we can conclude that social media is an integral part of new media and gives new media an interactive perspective. In this review of literature, we shall look at the impact of both new and social media as tools of public

relations practices. Since many literatures reviewed by us have used the terms new and social media simultaneously, we shall also follow the same pattern. Initially let us analyse the studies that have been conducted to focus on the impact made by new media tools in the world of media as a whole.

Canadian Research Firm, FAD Research, in a study titled, “Changing Media, Changing Roles: New Media Comes of Age” had mentioned about the role of the new media tools in changing the overall media landscape of the world way back in the year 2006.

Media consumption is gravitating towards increased use of interactive platforms that are not tied to a single location or confined to the display of a single type of media. Media programming is being promoted and distributed across a wider array of platforms.

Consumers are headed towards reaching a state of ultramedia, a condition whereby all media is accessible at any time from any location. Media production is no longer a business that occurs in discrete silos as producers need to consider the array of channels open to them to reach an audience. Conducting regulation of the media environment has become increasingly complex (and irrelevant). Traditional media packagers and distributors continue to be disintermediated as producers find new ways to go directly to market. (“Changing Media, Changing Roles,” 2006)

Christine Larabie, in a study titled, “A Reflection on the Role of New Media – From Peer-to-Peer to Protest” also recognises that new media is enabling more participation by the audience. “Participation is also a widely used term, especially in the context of new media technologies that enable peer-to-peer file sharing, and encourage users to actively create and distribute content. This participation is believed to have widened social spheres and revitalized political communication, addressing many problems associated with traditional media.

Similar to the path of preceding technologies, new media has permeated many different social, political, and economic realms, transforming the way we carry out daily life. However, the emergence of new media has given rise to a set of assumptions surrounding technological advancement that overlook historical

dimensions and ways of thinking about new technology. More specifically, the ‘newness’ of new media carries with it a renewed sense of optimism about technology and its ability to drive social change, revive political landscapes, and foster economic prosperity.” (Larabie, 2011)

Researchers also feel that gradually new and traditional media tools are assimilating with each other and contributing positively towards the overall media landscape. For example, during the popular uprisings in many Arab countries in 2011, popularly known as the Arab spring, new media tools played a major role towards ensuring the freedom of speech.

It is increasingly difficult to separate new media from old media. In the Arab Spring, the two reinforced each other. New media must be understood as part of a wider information arena in which new and old media form complex interrelationships.

An extraordinary wave of popular protest swept the Arab world in 2011. Massive popular mobilization brought down long-ruling leaders in Tunisia and Egypt, helped spark bloody struggles in Bahrain, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, and fundamentally reshaped the nature of politics in the region. Internet-based social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube played a visible role in many of these movements, especially for foreign audiences experiencing the turmoil vicariously through real-time Twitter feeds or YouTube videos posted to Facebook pages. (Aday, Farrell, Lynch, Sides and Freelon, 2011)

In countries where the freedom of the press is not guaranteed, new media tools are playing a role in transforming the media scenario. Peruvian freelance journalist Yvette Sierra Praeli, in her paper titled, “New Media and the Freedom of Press” says that new media bypasses government restrictions on freedom of the press in countries like Iran, Cuba and China.

“Even though internet access is controlled and restricted in these countries, people have found different ways to avoid state control. They use blogs, Twitter, Facebook, Youtube and other social media to express themselves. But they have to find different mechanisms to be able to upload their posts in their own blogs. Practices like writing offline, recording the article in a USB flash drive, and then uploading it in a hotel or

some embassy internet service are common in the island. Some others do the same and then send it by e-mail to some friend abroad who uploads the post”. (Praeli, 2011)

Regarding the use of new media as a tool of public relations, a lot of studies mostly conducted in the United States of America and Europe have focused on the potential of the internet towards revolutionizing public relations. Innumerable efforts have been made to show how internet tools such as blogs, podcasts etc can be very effective public relations tools.

However, in the last five years or so, social media has taken the world of the internet by storm. Today, social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook are redefining the very profession of public relations in many ways. As this is a very recent development, not many studies have exhaustively analysed their potential and scope as a tool of public relations.

Therefore, in this given scenario, let us analyse the literature that has been generated all over the world regarding the importance of new media including the internet as a tool of public relations. Then in the later stages of this chapter, we will also analyse similar studies taken up in India including the studies which are close to my topic of research.

Among the research works that focus on the role of internet in public relations, one interesting study undertaken in the United States in 2007 recognized the huge scope of internet in devising public relations strategies. “The Internet gives public relations practitioners a unique opportunity to collect information, monitor public opinion on issues, and engage in direct dialogue with their publics about a variety of issues”. (McAllister & Taylor, 2007)

Much earlier in 1999, American researcher Lisa Hoggatt of the San Jose State University, in a thesis had also mentioned about the immense potential of new media technology, then perceived only as the internet as a tool of public relations.

New media technology is rapidly evolving the media industry and the practices of mass communications. New media technology is the application of digital (computer) technology to mass communications. In a few short years, two main factors associated with the technology have changed the media landscape. The Internet emerged as a communication medium. Even though the Internet is still in

its infancy, its impact on society, commerce, and the government is already phenomenal. In addition, the interactivity and immediacy inherent in digital technology have changed the models of media production and business for all media. (Hoggatt, 1999)

Slovenian researcher Jaka Lindic had also conducted a similar study in the year 2006 focusing on the importance of the internet as a tool of public relations. “Relations with media and journalists can have a strong influence on the image of an organization among other publics. When using technology in PR with media, the goal should be focused on getting the job done quickly and as easy as possible. This is one of the rare situations where company can simultaneously perform better and at a lower cost. With the use of Internet related technologies, the costs of reaching journalists are much lower than classical ways of communication. But even other publics (customers, employees, suppliers) are not so much dependent on the information from journals and editors as they used to be. They can use different independent communities and mediators. The Internet offers several advantages when compared to the other media such as speed of communication, almost immediate product delivery, interactivity, customization and personalization; it can improve productivity, efficiency and issues management.” (Lindic, 2006)

Lindic in her study lists various tools of the internet through which public relations can be made more effective such as blogs, podcasts, RSS feeds etc. However, since the study was conducted before the revolutionary entry of the social networking sites, it does not have any reference to them.

Kirk Hallahan, a Professor of Mass Communication at the Colorado State University also had recognised the tremendous potential of the internet in the domain of public relations, way back in a study conducted in the year 2004, “It has dramatically changed the way public relations practitioners distribute information, interact with key publics, deal with crises, and manage issues”. (Hallahan, 2004)

Another very insightful study has been conducted on the topic, “Blogosphere and Public Relations” by Porter, Sweetser and Chung, all US based researchers on how the blogs are emerging as an effective medium of public relations gradually. The following are some interesting excerpts from that study, published in the *Emerald Journal of Communication* in 2009.



“The internet is revolutionizing public relations. Research has shown that use of the World Wide Web among communication professionals has increased in the last few years, improving productivity and efficiency, two-way communication, research, and issues communication thereby enhancing management role enactment and perceived decision-making power”. (Porter and Sallot, 2003, 2005)

“Internet provides enormous opportunities for public relations professionals in terms of issues management, relationship management, environmental scanning, story placement and other key professional communications functions” (Porter, Sweetser, Chung, 2009)

US based public relations professional Robin M. Mayhall, in her study titled “Using the internet to communicate your message”, published in the online publishing website [www.hieran.com](http://www.hieran.com) in 2005 also mentions about the tremendous potential of the internet in the sphere of public relations. “For the public relations practitioner, the internet is one of the greatest innovations of all time. Its continually increasing popularity opens up myriad opportunities for improving our ability to practice our profession. The internet facilitates nearly every imaginable form of communication”. (Mayhall, 2005)

Mayhall opines that the internet has also opened up opportunities for greater professional development and research for the public relations practitioners. “Recent years have seen the advent of numerous websites, internet mailing lists, and “e-zines” or electronic newsletters devoted to improving the practice of public relations. Practitioners can find a wide variety of resources for their own education, knowledge development, and professional networking.

A second way that the internet serves public relations practitioners is by providing a boundless source for research information. Practitioners can research their own industry or company, find out more about a competitor, look into a potential client, and generally find information on almost any topic imaginable “. (Mayhall, 2005)

The American public relations professional also acknowledges the capacity of the internet to reach the target audience much more easily and faster than the conventional modes of communication and therefore believes that it has emerged as a major tool to maintain quality media relations. “Once you’ve done your research and

are ready to communicate your message, the internet provides a variety of tools to get your point across. One major application for the internet has proven to be media relations. More and more reporters are starting to do their research online and to accept press releases by e-mail.” (Mayhall, 2005)

Deepti Bhargava, in a thesis submitted to the Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand, titled, “The use of Internet in public relations and its impact on the practice: A New Zealand perspective” also focuses on the beginning of the use of the internet as a tool of public relations and observed: “Studies examining the extent of the Internet’s usage in public relations date back to the late 1990s when an independent Los Angeles based public relations agency called ‘The Bohle Company’ published a report that included results of a survey of 334 American practitioners. The results stated that 95% of the respondents used e-mail extensively (The Bohle Company, 1998) suggesting that e-mail had already become commonplace in the practice”. (Bhargava, 2010)

American public relations expert and author D Breakenridge, in her work, “PR 2.0: New Media, New Tools, New Audiences” marvels on the potential of the internet to keep us connected all the time. “You have the ability to be wired with knowledge from the time you wake up in the morning until the moment you fall asleep at night. There’s your home desktop computer, PDA, work computer, wireless laptop, and Apple iPhone – you can log on just about anywhere, anyplace, to find any piece of obscure information you need”. (Breakenridge, 2008)

In an insightful study on this very topic titled, “Internet technologies and trends transforming public relations”, author P Christ says that, “it has been identified that the most important impact of the Internet on the practice is its phenomenal capability to make any kind of information available almost instantly”. (Christ, 2005)

To analyse the immense capability of the internet as a disseminator of information, G.H Alfonso and S. Smith, in their article, “Crisis communications management on the web: how internet-based technologies are changing the way public relations professionals handle crisis” published in the Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management in 2008 cite the example of the US based company, Kryptonite locks, about which, a small blog called [www.bikeforums.net](http://www.bikeforums.net) published a post stating that one of Kryptonite’s bike locks could be opened using a pen.

Within five days of this post, the news was taken up by a popular blog called 'Engadget'. The news of the faulty locks soon spread all over the Internet and then found its way to the conventional media. Kryptonite initially ignored the blog, but later realized that they had a major crisis to deal with. (Alfonso and Smith, 2008)

Therefore, keeping these possibilities in mind, researchers, very early, in the new millennium had suggested regular monitoring of these internet media so that such crisis situations can be better handled. "It has therefore been suggested that regular monitoring of the Web across various websites, blogs, newsgroups, forums and other social media becomes rudimentary for the early identification of issues so that corrective measures can be taken to avoid a crisis". (Middleberg, 2001).

However, some researchers are also of the opinion that public relations practitioners all over the world have been rather slow in adopting the internet as a potent tool of communication. Studies have suggested that the many benefits of internet like websites, blogs and podcasts have been used by the public relations professionals much later after the professionals of other fields and expertise.

"They wait until the general population has adopted a tool before fully embracing it. Both managers and technicians seem to be taking a "wait and see" attitude toward blogs, much like they did in the early days of the World Wide Web. Building on the work of others, we expect as adoption of such tools become more prevalent and ubiquitous, differences in use will evolve based on roles". (Porter, Sweetser, Chung, 2009)

The entry of the internet had also initially forced the public relations professionals to rethink about the manner in which it, along with advertising is taught in the media institutions all over the world. Some research works have also focussed on this aspect of the role of internet in public relations.

"The significance of the Internet has also caused scholars to question whether advertising and public relations curricula are keeping pace". (Gustafson and Thomsen 1996; Rust and Oliver 1994)

"Considering that media education is intended to produce graduates who are critical thinkers and have practical skills (AEJMC 1996), academic programmes in advertising and public relations are faced with the task of teaching students how to

use the Internet as a persuasive communication vehicle. In fact, preparing students to work with and understand the Internet is an important industry issue facing advertising education”. (Murphy et al. 2001)

“The integration between the Internet and education curricula has begun, and the need to have a thorough understanding of this process has emerged”. (Siu and Chau 1998)

Research has also shown that public relations practitioners who embrace new technologies such as blogging are perceived within organisations as having more power, in that they are willing to be leaders in the industry and use new tools to better reach target publics (Porter, Sweetser Trammell, Chung, & Kim, 2007).

Regarding the use of new media tools such as social networking sites, the number of studies conducted is comparatively lesser than studies focusing only on the role of the internet as a tool of public relations. However, there many blogs and online journals have shed light on this new aspect of public relations.

An analysis sheds considerable light on the potential of social networking sites, particularly Twitter. Twitter can do so much more than help you “push” messages and content. When used effectively as tool for listening and monitoring, Twitter can be a lens through which you can observe the flow of information and culture. You can not only receive information, you’ll also perceive where information came from, where it’s going, and where it might go tomorrow. This perception will help inform all sorts of communications activities: writing subject lines for constituent emails, pitching reporters, creating content that will reach your audiences, identifying new potential donors or customers, sounding really smart in meetings, etc. (Gordon, 2011)

This essay by John Gordon, the Vice President of Digital cell, Hugh McMullen also exhibits the continuous maturity and development of the new media practices since 2007 when the study by McAlister and Taylor was undertaken as then Mc Alister and Taylor had only focused on the potential of the internet as a whole and not social media.

American public relations professional James L. Horton, in an article titled “PR and Social Media” writes that “Newspapers are withering. Network television has watched audiences decline. Radio is splintered. Magazines are shrinking. Meanwhile,

there are millions of bloggers and Facebook users, Twitterers and texters and Linked-in businesspeople. As reporters disappear from traditional media, PR practitioners are forced to consider and to use social media”. (Horton, 2009)

Focusing on the challenges that public relations practitioners face while using social media, Horton writes, “Social media present challenges, not the least because they break down traditional categories of audiences – employees, customers, share holders. The public and universal nature of social media means all audiences can read communications intended for any one audience. One can no longer compartmentalize audiences and messages. Matrices of targets and themes have become a blob with undefined connections and gaps”.

“It takes less and less time for one to publish on social media. With a service like Twitter or internet messaging, it is a matter of seconds – the time it takes to type or speak. Social media can be – and often are – live”. (Horton, 2009)

Many studies globally have mentioned in details about the benefits of social media in the sphere of public relations. Brad Smith, in an article titled “Why Social Media is the new public relations” published in the Fixcourse newsletter opines, “Social media dramatically lowers the cost of customer acquisition, and increases the lifetime value of a customer exponentially”.

“It also has the added bonus of being inherently viral, which means that when you reach a certain point, your customers will do your marketing for you. Each new customer will bring one or two customers of their own, simply through recommendations.”

“One of the biggest advantages of social media is that it allows you to have a two-way discussion with people. This helps you to create a bond, and makes sure they remain happy customers,” he further mentions. (Smith, 2011)

Smith’s article also asserts that after the advent of social media, it is very difficult for public relations to remain aloof and continue without adopting any new social media tools in its functioning. “The problem with traditional PR is that the world today is too fragmented. People simply have too many choices”. (Smith, 2011)

The terrain of public relations practice is also shifting with new media bringing about substantial increases in stakeholder strength through facilitating communication within stakeholder groups and between different stakeholder groups. (Van der Merwe, Pitt & Abratt, 2005)

Anyone with a computer linked to the Internet has the ability to publish information for potential global consumption and it is clear that the internet 'is revolutionising many aspects of public relations research and practice'. (Taylor & Kent 2006)

Stressing on the challenges that these new media tools are posing to the profession of public relations, Melanie James from the University of Newcastle, Australia observes, New technologies are being developed and updated continuously and in themselves pose challenges for public relations professionals in terms of keeping abreast of not only what is available but also of what is being planned for release in the future. Many large scale public relations projects such as national public information campaigns or major international events have long lead times, and plans made a couple of years out from an event may need to be revisited several times to accommodate trends in usage of new technologies among key publics. (James, 2009)

The terrain of public relations practice is also shifting with new media bringing about substantial increases in stakeholder strength through facilitating communication within stakeholder groups and between different stakeholder groups (Van der Merwe, Pitt & Abratt, 2005).

Regarding the unrivaled potential of public relations in the virtual world, well known public relations think tank, PR News Wire says, "Online public relations promises faster, more effective PR by driving online visibility of your press release to thousands of media Web sites and blogs. But the most successful online public relations practitioners don't just distribute press releases and wait for the phone to ring. They take the time up front to develop thoughtful communications strategies and tactics that make their messages stand out – and the rules are still evolving.

To be sure, online public relations is fast becoming a cornerstone of strong PR strategy that includes an understanding of Search Engine Optimization, social media, and communicating with bloggers. PR Newswire's Knowledge Center offers practical

advice and thought leadership on this important aspect of public relations.” (PR News Wire Knowledge Centre)

Indian public relations professional Varghese Thomas, in an article titled, “How is Social Media Evolving PR” also writes about the manner in which new media is changing the profession of public relations. “In the early days, the internet consisted of one-way communications in the form of static websites and two-way communication through email. Over the past several years, the internet has grown to the most premiere medium for two-way or multi-way conversations which changed the dynamics of Public Relations (PR). Just a few of examples include social interaction through Facebook, tagging in Technorati or Digg, and micro-blogging sites like Twitter.

Let’s take a step back and see how PR used to operate. Old timers in the PR industry woke up most mornings to craft a press release and then left it to the mailroom boys to send it out to editors. To hasten the process, fax machines were used. Towards the late 1990s e-mail became an alternative delivery method. The press release went as an attachment. The smarter set began to create landing pages for journalists on their websites that had announcements and releases, downloadable pictures and logos. How cool was that?

Today’s PR professionals wake up to an entirely different scenario. There’s social media to contend with. It’s not just broadcast; its multi-media, images, tags, keywords, links, listening to your target audience and engaging them in conversations. Press releases must still go out. Journalists must continue to be on the PR professional’s A-list. But all that is turning into Old School PR. Even traditional websites now include user-generated content options like ratings, comments, forums and reviews. These sites have been enthusiastically accepted by the public, while search engines have recently begun to share real-time news and Twitter results about many hot topics. Cumulatively, this type of multi-way online communication is referred to as social media.” (Thomas, 2012)

Researchers also feel that the advent of new media technologies are threatening to cut into the traditional activities of the field of public relations also and therefore, the professionals of this sphere must guard against it. For example, the information technology professionals of an organisation may be asked to look into or maintain

social media accounts of that organisation, which is essentially a public relations exercise meant to foster or maintain the brand position of the organisation or product.

There is a clear threat in some quarters to the domain of public relations from other specialist areas within organisations as new media technologies cut across disciplines. The public relations terrain may seem more attractive, and be more prone to invasion from those outside the profession, if a perception develops that the area is now more technology-driven and less about ‘touchy - feely’ communication or traditional media. Evidence indicates that it is imperative that public relations practitioners and educators embrace the full potential of new media if they are to overcome such a threat. (James, 2009)

Social media website [www.maximisesocialmedia.com](http://www.maximisesocialmedia.com), claims that an overwhelming majority of public relations practitioners today use the social media for their professional requirements. “A recent survey found that an eye-opening 80% of public relations professionals routinely use social media to cultivate media relationships, share important company news and solicit feedback. Perhaps even more importantly, clients and business affiliations are turning to social media as a primary source of news and information about products, services or other updates of interest.” (“The Importance of Social Media in Public Relations,” 2012)

However, the United States based site, in an article titled, “The Importance of Social Media in Public Relations” also opines that the social media marketing firms that have emerged in the recent times tend to ignore the sector of public relations as there is very little inside knowledge available about profession. “The majority of social media marketing firms and management companies also fail to appreciate the importance of this single, solitary segment of PR. Of course, they aren’t to blame. Without inside knowledge of the PR industry, it’s easy to overlook.” (“The Importance of Social Media in Public Relations,” 2012)

The website also assesses periodically the effectiveness and popularity of the social networking sites as tools of public relations activities. “In order of importance, the following social media sites will maximize your exposure:

Twitter – 35 percent: Many people might be surprised to see Twitter top the list of preferred social media sites but the super quick nature with a leading headline is an



intuitive time-saver. Remember, content creation is one of the most important but time-consuming aspects of every marketing method so it's not surprising that writers are always searching for a great story that requires minimal time.

Facebook – 30 percent: Journalists and writers alike are only human so not surprisingly, use Facebook in droves. Make it easy to cultivate great connections by creating a “go to” page just for photo's, story ideas, facts or other items of interest.

LinkedIn – 23 percent: LinkedIn might seem like the most natural fit but often PR pro's are searching for something a bit out of the ordinary. The conservative and somewhat traditional nature of LinkedIn is the exact reason it falls to third place among many writers. However, don't dare neglect this useful site especially when releasing a traditional PR piece.” (“The Importance of Social Media in Public Relations,” 2012)

Focusing on the increasing use of social media as a marketing and communication tool in India, Indian social media monitoring blog, [www.socialsamosa.com](http://www.socialsamosa.com) asserts that the country's corporates are now using social media more and more as its an easy yet effective way to reach the target audience.

With the growing acceptance of the social media space in India, brands have accepted social media as an important part of their marketing communication strategies.

Social media in the recent past has played an important role in helping brands to reach out to their audience in the most effective way for both existing and prospective customers. Especially Facebook with 61 million users in India itself has the maximum reach, as it's the most understood and used platforms.

Facebook today is a platform used by brands to engage with their audience and build a personal connects with their audience. The engagement on social media works in similar lines to that of human relationships. Most brands are highly active online during the festive season and telecom brands lead the chart of being the most active brands on social media during this period. (“Vodafone India: Most Engaging Facebook Page for October, 2012,” 2012)

Another important aspect of social or new media as tools of public relations is that their effectiveness or popularity can be conveniently assessed, therefore, facilitating the easy redrawing of strategies if required. Sites such as [www.indiadigitalreview.com](http://www.indiadigitalreview.com) take up such studies in a neutral manner periodically. Corporate also have their own internal assessment mechanisms to analyse the outcomes of their social media campaigns.

[www.socialsamosa.com](http://www.socialsamosa.com) refers to one such study conducted by India Digital Review regarding the social media campaign of telecom major Vodafone involving characters called Zoozoos. “Vodafone Zoozoos currently rank first in terms of people engagement on the brand page in a review by Indian Digital Review. The rating is calculated based on the metric called People Talking About (PTA) which uses data like number of page likes, posts, post likes, comments on a post, shares, RSVP to events, mentions of a page, tags, check-ins etc from the past seven days”. (“Vodafone India: Most Engaging Facebook Page for October, 2012,” 2012)

Rakesh Kumar, from the same website, has studied the social media activities of ecommerce portal [www.flipkart.com](http://www.flipkart.com), which has tremendously revolutionised the online business sector in the country. Commenting on its Facebook page, he writes, “Customer service is again at focus here. The team handling the page tries to resolve every complaint that is posted on their timeline asap. There’s also a well laid out Custom Tab just for Support. It’s a helpful tab where customers can come and mention their grievances, share ideas and affirm their love for Flipkart. And it is fairly active indeed.

But one special mention goes to the team behind their cover photos. Every time there’s something a celebrity, it is reflected in their cover photos. From birthdays, to seasons to festivals, they have a brilliant creative team that comes up with some of the best cover photos on Facebook.” (Kumar, 2012)

The social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Linkdin have communities dedicated to the public relations practitioners of India. Media movements, Public Relations India are examples of a few such communities on Facebook. Media Mimansa, a journal on Mass Communication brought out by the Makhan Lal Chaturvedi University, Bhopal also features some in-depth articles on new media from time to time.

www.indiaprblog.com is another website which has some interesting case studies on PR practices submitted by PR professionals. On the use of digital media, one such post says, “Often for our clients, we most of the time try to integrate digital support to PR and marketing activities. It appears that to pull off really big digital campaigns, it is now time for the other way round. Big bang digital idea, which has its heart on the web, is executed well online and supported by offline mass media, and of course, it is supported by mobile phone marketing as well. For instance, a simple online contest can grow many folds when we add in an element of receiving the entries through SMS or voice calls.” (Ningthoujam, 2009).

In a well-researched article on the Financial Express in 2009, Lakshmipathy Bhatt wrote, “In a first of its kind, TataSky has experimented with a Twitter-enabled advertising banner to promote Tata Sky Active. Tata Motors successfully created hype and garnered test drive bookings prior to the launch of Indigo Manza through a social media campaign. There are several other brands using the digital medium as a critical part of their marketing mix. These are exciting times in the digital advertising space”. (Bhatt, 2009) This clearly shows that digital media, which is almost another name for new media, today is an integral part of the overall marketing strategies of the Indian corporate world.

Commenting about the potential of social media and public relations, eminent public relations expert Deirdre Breakenridge says, Public Relations expert India will experience a great deal of growth in the area of PR and social media, as the Internet and technology continue to become more essential to businesses. We have already seen heavy usage of social media participation on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. PR professionals in India will be required to expand their knowledge, skills and communications practices as consumers and business come to rely more on social media communities to deliver communications and to engage with the public. Although PR doesn’t own social media, because it is proliferating worldwide, we need to be able to breakdown the communication opportunities for our brands, and also be able to counsel and measure results. (“A Conversation with PR 2.0 Guru Diedre Breakenridge,” 2012)

Donald K Wright, a fellow from the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) and his associate Michelle Drifka Hinson, write in a study, that new media tools,

especially social media have a huge potential in the sphere of public relations, as the social networking sites have often been found to have broken various important news events in the recent times.

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

Wright and Hinson also mention about a survey that claims that social media tools have a very bright future in the domain of public relations. "At a time when current economic conditions are bringing layoffs in many aspects of the public relations industry, PR Week (Maul, 2009) claims the future is bright for social media in public relations. According to a survey of 285 public relations practitioners conducted by the Council of Public Relations Firms (2009), most (79%) believe social media will be included more in future public relations campaigns while more than half (59%) think technology is not used enough in public relations campaigns." (Wright and Hinson, 2010)

Many researchers also feel that social media creates more opportunities for the upholding of the freedom of press. "New media hold great potential as a resource for press freedom and freedom of expression. They serve as a platform for dialogue across borders and allow for innovative approaches to the distribution and acquisition of knowledge. These qualities are vital to press freedom. But they may be undercut by attempts to regulate and censor both access and content.

We must first secure a full understanding on the challenges that new media face with respect to press freedom. As the impact of new media increases, so do regulation techniques that limit the free flow of information? New media are subjected to restrictions such as Internet censorship that would not be accepted in traditional media. Violations of freedom of expression are growing, and the need to discuss how to prevent undesired side effects of new regulation has

become urgent. We must emphasize that free media, which are essential in upholding democratic societies, should not be hindered. Such an understanding must in turn be met with concrete efforts to affirm the place of new media alongside traditional media. (Schmidt, 2010)

Purcell, in his study says that new media has the capacity to alert the people about a certain event or piece of news even though, they may finally have to rely on the other modes of media to get the details. “Social networks act as alert systems for the most engaged news consumers”. (Purcell, 2010)

Sardar, in his discourse has opined that the corporate houses must accept and integrate social media in the e-mail era. By accepting three simple steps that is, assess, influence and evolve while incorporating social media, different industries can facilitate free social media publicity. (Sardar, 2010)

There have been many studies which have tried to analyse the paradigm shift that new media is bringing in the sphere of journalism. Now, the journalist is not the only disseminator of news to the society. There are many other alternative media to do that. “The venerable profession of journalism finds itself at a rare moment in history where, for the first time, its hegemony as gatekeeper of the news is threatened by not just new technology and competitors but, potentially, by the audience it serves. Armed with easy-to-use Web publishing tools, always-on connections and increasingly powerful mobile devices, the online audience has the means to become an active participant in the creation and dissemination of news and information” (Bowman and Willis, 2003)

“The public is clearly part of the news process now. Participation comes more through sharing than through contributing news themselves.” (Purcell, 2010)

“Journalists, analysts and A-list bloggers, although still important, are now only about 40% of your influencers. The other 60% are probably unknown to you”. (Falkow, 2009)

The researcher here has also tried to find out if there has been any study regarding the present role, impact and potential of new media tools in the public relation activities in the government run departments and undertakings of India. However, it was found

that there has not been any such study. Therefore, it is very vital to take up a detailed research study towards this direction.

The government establishments, both run by India's central and state governments, are today suffering from credibility crisis. They are seen by the public at large as inefficient and corrupt entities which are not concerned about the well being of the people. Air India, the country's state run carrier is an example where the people clearly prefer to travel by private airlines when they have the option. Yet, we find that the public relations, publicity or corporate communication cells of these departments and undertakings prefer to use only conventional and age old public relation techniques in their activities. By analysing the new media techniques implemented by two prestigious Delhi based government departments – the Delhi Police and Delhi University, this study endeavors to show that adoption of new and innovative techniques can go a long way in building stable and reliable brands even within the public sector.

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