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METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

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Abstract: The most advanced form of public relations is represented by scientifically guided processes of solving organizational problems and change processes. This paper discusses some of the methods used to gather quantitative and qualitative information to define the problematic situation as accurately as possible. The primary purpose of research in public relations, like other business functions, is to reduce uncertainty in decision-making. This paper first examines the place of research in various models of public relations. It then explains the first phase in the PR management process - situation analysis - where research activities are particularly emphasized. The second part of the paper focuses on methods, both formal and informal, commonly used in PR practice.

Keywords: PR, Methodology, method, communication

1. Introduction

The most advanced form of public relations is represented by scientifically guided processes of solving organizational problems and change processes. Experts who utilize this type of public relations rely on theoretical frameworks relevant to resolving the given situation (problem). They apply knowledge about society and the behavior of social groups and individuals, using research to resolve problematic situations. PR programs are increasingly based less on intuition, foresight, or personal experience, i.e., the skill of reacting to environmental threats, and more on combining a rational problem-solving approach with proactive strategic planning (Cutlip et al., 2003). An organization implements a public relations program when (1) it needs to carry out a corrective program to resolve a pressing problem (e.g., reducing market share); (2) to implement a specific project; and (3) it aims to strengthen efforts in maintaining or improving its reputation or public support (Wilcox et al., 2006: 151)

Marston presented a problem-solving model in PR over half a century ago, known by the acronym "RACE" (Marston, 1963). Four identified activities chronologically alternate during the process: research, action, communication, and evaluation. The crucial part of the entire process, or the core of public relations, is communication, as the organization's message transmission to specific audiences achieves the ultimate goal of every program: gaining support for goal realization. The chosen communication strategy should enable two-way communication – the organization addresses relevant audiences, but it also listens to them, considering their views, opinions, and perceptions (Penezić, 2023; Vlajković, 2023).

Research emerges as a prerequisite for successful and strategic public relations planning (Vuković, et al., 2023). This paper first examines the place of research in various public relations models. It then elaborates on the first phase in PR management – situation analysis – where research activity is particularly highlighted. The second part of the paper focuses on methods, both formal and informal, commonly used in PR practice.

2. Models of solving problems in public relations

The four-phase problem-solving process, as used in public relations, has the primary purpose of reducing uncertainty when making decisions. Problem-solving in PR occurs through four phases: (1) defining the problem, (2) creating and planning programs, (3) action and communication, and (4) evaluation.

Defining the problem (or opportunity). This stage of the problem-solving process in PR involves examining and monitoring the knowledge, attitudes, opinions, and behaviors of those directly or indirectly related to the organization (or company). This phase is a prerequisite for proceeding to the next steps in the problem-solving process. The fundamental question that must be answered in this phase is: "What is currently happening?"

Planning and program creation. Based on information gathered in the first phase, decisions are made regarding programmatic audiences, general and specific objectives, specific programs, and communication strategies, tactics, and budget. The results of the first phase, obtained from problem research, become part of the organization's policy and program. The fundamental question that must be answered in this phase is: "What needs to be changed (or done) and communicated based on the information collected about the problem?"

Taking action (implementation) and communication. In the third phase, the adopted program is implemented through communication to achieve specific objectives for each audience individually. This is a prerequisite for achieving the overall goal of the program. This phase expects answers to the question: "Who needs to do and say this, when, where, and how?"

Program evaluation. The final stage of the problem-solving process in PR involves evaluating the preparation, implementation, and results of the program. It is common during the implementation of a program to monitor its effectiveness based on feedback. A program may continue or be discontinued in the future, depending on the assessment of its implementation—whether it was effective or not. The question to be answered in the final phase of the problem-solving process is: "How did we do and what were the results?"

The four-phase problem-solving process begins with gathering information to identify the problem in the best possible way. After describing and understanding the problem, the next steps are equally important. In practice, it is not easy to draw a clear line between diagnosis, planning, implementation, and evaluation. The PR management process is essentially continuous, cyclic, and takes place in a dynamic environment. A simplified model of the problem-solving process in PR is presented. In reality, each of these phases consists of a series of steps to be taken.

There are other ways to describe the problem-solving process in PR, such as the APRV model: analysis - plan - implementation - evaluation (Verčič et al., 2004: 35). These models sometimes include feedback, and problem-solving in PR is seen as an "endless cycle in which six components are connected in chains" (Wilcox et al., 2006: 7). Understanding public relations as a cyclical process, feedback - audience reaction - plays an important role; it leads to program evaluation and thus becomes an essential part of developing future PR projects.

Sheila Crifasi uses the acronym ROSIE, which stands for research, objectives, strategy, implementation, and evaluation of PR programs (Crifasi, 2000: 22). Around the same time, acronyms like RAISE (Kendall, 1997) and ROPES (Kelly, 2000) were proposed. The five-phase ROPES model includes research, objectives, programming, evaluation, and program implementation (stewardship). Finally, a slightly modified RACE model in the form of ROPE was proposed (Hendrix & Hayes, 2012). Although acronyms can be helpful - they aid in memory - they often seem limiting. In this sense, four-phase models are more useful, mirroring marketing practices, they encompass the overall PR management process. An example of such an approach is Ronald Smith's strategic PR planning model, consisting of four phases and nine activities, including formative research (three steps), strategy (three steps), tactics (two steps), and strategic plan evaluation (Smith, 2021: 24). Research pertains to the situation, organization, and audience, while strategy involves setting objectives and tasks, devising actions and appropriate strategies, and developing a communication strategy. Tactics refer to selecting communication tools and implementing the strategic plan.

Public Relations Planning. Problem-solving in PR is a broader concept than "public relations planning," although the differences are not significant. Communication strategies are not usually considered in PR planning. PR planning represents a "continuous effort to establish and maintain a good reputation for the organization in its environment and to establish mutual understanding and trust between the organization and its external and internal publics" (Filipović & Kostić-Stanković, 2014: 227). Systematically, PR planning includes six activities: (1) analysis and description of the problem situation; (2) setting goals and determining strategy; (3) identifying resources needed to achieve goals; (4) developing PR programs; (5) defining tactics to implement PR programs, and (6) monitoring achieved results and measuring outcomes.

Many marketing theorists do not separate situation analysis (internal and external) as a distinct, initial phase of the process but consider it an integral part of PR planning, along with goal setting, strategy and tactic definition, and budget determination (Stanković & Đukić, 2009: 201). Public relations planning sometimes includes eight activities: (1) defining roles and tasks; (2) determining key result areas; (3) identifying and determining key performance indicators; (4) selecting set goals; (5) preparing action plans; (6) determining control methods; (7) communicating, and (8) reaching agreement among all key individuals involved in program implementation regarding clear task delegation and responsibility (Brooks et al., 1988).

Sparling (1994) identifies five steps in the PR planning process: (1) analyzing the current situation, (2) setting goals, (3) defining strategies and tactics, (4) budget determination, and (5) monitoring and evaluating results and measuring achieved effects.

3. Defining the problem - The first stage in the PR management process

Defining a problem usually begins with an organization's assessment that certain business activities are not progressing correctly, leading to stagnation or regression. The pursuit of even better results can be identified as a problem (Dašić, 2023a). These assessments start from the organization's or company's goals. Goals are the basis for identifying existing or potential problems. A clearly defined problem answers the question: What is currently happening? Information related to a specific problem is communicated in the present tense. Describing the situation is based on measurable and specific parameters, requiring answers to the following questions:

What is causing concern?
Where does the problem lie?
When did the problem arise?
Who is involved or affected?
How are they involved or affected?
Why is this important for the organization and its public?

When setting (or diagnosing) a problem, solutions are not offered, nor is blame assigned to anyone. Communication should not be taken as an indication of a problem, as in the often-used statement, "What we are facing here is a communication problem." Communication is part of the solution, not the problem. In other words, "communication can be part of the solution, but it is not stated as part of the problem itself" (Katlip et al., 2006: 320).

Analysis of the situation. Unlike the mere framing of a problem, which can be described in a single sentence or paragraph, situational analysis is a much more extensive document. It comprises a diverse set of information about a problem, often referred to as a "book of facts" by public relations practitioners, including the history of the problem, internal and external factors influencing it, etc. (Dašić, 2023b). Situational analysis begins with a preliminary problem statement, continues with the results of situation investigation, and ultimately leads to a more acceptable, or working, definition of the problem.

Situational analysis mainly consists of two parts. The first part involves analyzing internal factors relevant to the identified problem. This part of the analysis focuses on the organization's policies, procedures, and actions related to the problematic situation (Dašić, 2018). Attention is also given to "communication audit." This activity entails systematic monitoring and documentation of an organization's communication.

The purpose of this part of situational analysis is to better understand the communication process between the organization and its target audiences and facilitate the decision-making process.

After thoroughly examining the problematic situation from the organization's perspective, the second part of the analysis is undertaken. It comprehensively evaluates external factors - both positive and negative.

A specific part of the analysis is the "stakeholder analysis." It is, in fact, an analytical process in which all individuals involved in the situation or affected by it in any way are identified. They are in a state of interdependent relationships with the organization, meaning that everything they do, feel, or know has an impact on the organization and vice versa. However, it would be incorrect to consider stakeholders as part of the public towards which the program for solving a particular problematic situation is directed. Finally, determining stakeholders precedes the process of planning a program strategy to ascertain the accuracy of assumptions about them: "who these stakeholders are, what they do, what they know, and how they feel in a given situation, how they are connected and how they influence it, what information they consider important, how they use it, and even how they access it" (Katlip et al., 2006: 322).

Understanding "stakeholders," or knowledge about relevant interest groups, is valuable in that it enables clear prioritization. The order of priorities is defined depending on who is most important for a given problem. Only after that does one resort to, with more or less detail, analyzing internal and external pressures. Various methods are used for this purpose, such as SWOT analysis, PEST analysis, vector analysis, and others.

SWOT Analysis. A detailed analysis of a problematic situation consists of four elements: assessing the strengths (S) of the organization; assessing the weaknesses (W) of the organization; identifying opportunities (O) for the organization to act on, and identifying threats (T) to the organization. Hence, the acronym SWOT is used for this method, and sometimes TOWS.

The purpose of the analysis is, in medical terms, to make a diagnosis so that an appropriate therapy can be prescribed (Cvetković, 2003: 46). Depending on the combination of elements in the SWOT analysis, the organization can choose an appropriate response strategy: "SO," "ST," "WO," or "WT."

PEST Analysis. This type of analysis is used to explore the political and legal (P), economic (E), social (S), and technological (T) aspects of a problem. Through this analysis, it can be determined which of these environmental factors has a direct impact on achieving the organization's objectives. Simultaneously, it can also lead to an understanding of the factor that has the most pronounced impact on the organization. Ultimately, PEST analysis helps identify factors that may become significant for the organization in the future (Cvetković, 2003).

Vector Analysis. This method condenses the results of the situational analysis by identifying all negative factors contributing to or causing the problem and all positive factors facilitating or contributing to its resolution. It assesses the actions of various internal and external forces from the perspective of whether they are negative or positive for the organization.

4. The role of research in public relations management

During the public relations management process, starting from the first phase, research takes a central place. In some cases, public relations experts conduct research themselves, while in others, specialized agencies handle this task. In both cases, public relations professionals must have a basic understanding of research processes and concepts. In other words, the question arises: How can someone explain something to others if they don't understand it themselves?

Although research processes vary from situation to situation, they share a common characteristic. The goal of every research endeavor is a deeper understanding of a specific social phenomenon or process. The choice of approach and methods depends on the problem itself, the researcher's skills and preferences, and the availability of resources. Before formulating a research program, it is necessary to find answers to questions such as:

What is the problem?
What kind of information is needed?
How will the research results be used?
Which specific public (or publics) need to be researched?
Will the organization conduct the research or seek outside assistance?
How will the data obtained from the research be analyzed, published, or applied?
Are the results urgently needed or not?
How much funding will be allocated for the research?

Based on the answers to the specified questions, public relations experts can gain an understanding of the breadth and nature of the necessary research. In certain situations (for example, when quick information is needed), only informal research may be conducted, significantly reducing costs. On the other hand, research can be based on the application of scientific methods when, for instance, determining a political candidate's current position in public opinion polls. Public relations departments are estimated to spend around three to five percent of their budget on research, although some experts argue that this figure should be ten percent.

Research for public relations purposes brings various benefits, such as:

gaining credibility with leadership,
defining policy and segmenting the public,
formulating strategy,

verifying decision correctness,
helping leadership stay informed,
preventing crisis situations,
monitoring competition,
influencing public opinion,
gaining publicity, and
evaluating success (Wilcox, 2010: 129-131).

There are different divisions of methods and research techniques. Research is most commonly divided into qualitative and quantitative. Quantitative research primarily relies on numbers and statistical methods. This research style is based on numerical measurements of specific aspects of the researched phenomenon. By abstracting individual cases, a general description or confirmation of hypotheses is achieved, with measurement and analysis methods designed so that other researchers can easily replicate them.

Quantification refers to measurement, statistical processing, and formal mathematical treatment. Examples of the application of quantitative techniques in the field of public relations include telephone surveys, mail surveys, intercept interviews in shopping centers, individual interviews, and panel studies.

On the other hand, qualitative research encompasses a wide range of approaches that typically do not use numerical measurements. Research of this style is focused on one (case study) or a small number of cases (comparative method) when, for example, intensive interviews or comprehensive ("in-depth") analysis of historical material related to the studied phenomenon are used. In practice, observation techniques and focus groups also find wide application in public relations research.

From the perspective of public relations, this section considers the division of methods into formal and informal (Katlip et al., 2006: 325). These authors draw a line between formal and informal methods in the practice of public relations. The mentioned research techniques differ in terms of sample selection method, sample size, and the level of generality of the obtained results.

4.1 Informal mehods

The advantage of informal methods in public relations research is most evident in identifying and examining problematic situations, as well as in preliminary testing of research and program strategies. The drawback of these methods is the insufficient representativeness of the samples used in these studies. This issue is addressed through the application of formal methods, i.e., methods specific to researching social phenomena and processes.

Numerous informal methods are used in public relations: (1) personal contacts, (2) key sources of information, (3) focus groups and social forums, (4) advisory committees and boards, (5) ombudsman, (6) telephone helplines, (7) mail analysis, (8) online sources, and (9) field reports (Katlip et al., 2006).

Focus Groups. Focus groups present a good alternative to personal interviews or face-to-face conversations. These groups typically consist of eight to twelve individuals representing the target audience, such as employees, consumers, or community residents. The technique involves a trained moderator using non-directive interviewing to encourage group members to freely discuss the topic or react honestly to suggested messages. The interview is usually conducted in a conference room, and the discussion, which typically lasts one to two hours, has an informal tone.

By definition, a focus group represents an informal research procedure that yields qualitative information instead of raw data. The results cannot be summarized in percentages or projected onto the entire population. Nevertheless, focus groups are useful because they help organizations structure messages or, at another level, formulate hypotheses and questions in quantitative research (Wilcox et al., 2006: 137).

This technique is frequently used in advertising, marketing, and public relations when determining the attitudes and motivations of relevant target audiences. Focus groups also aid in formulating or testing messages and communication strategies before launching the overall campaign.

Online Sources. Literature search (the most commonly used form of informal research in public relations) is increasingly based on analyzing material available within the organization (archival research) or the library collection (books, academic journals, and professional publications) and more on retrieving information from various databases containing a vast amount of data. The use of online networks has significantly increased in recent years.

Not only do they provide the same services as commercial online databases, but they also enable users to send emails, participate in chat groups on specific topics, leave messages on computer bulletins, and have unrestricted access to documents on the Internet, including the World Wide Web, which contains thousands of pages of individuals and organizations (Wilcox et al., 2006: 134).

For public relations practitioners, the internet represents a powerful tool for research. Online search engines have become the primary means of finding information on practically any topic on the internet, i.e., the World Wide Web.

4.2 Formal methods

The purpose of formal methods (or empirical research techniques) is to gather accurate data. The scientific nature of formal methods lies in their design for collecting data from representative samples. Every research, including in public relations, starts with a research goal, followed by an appropriate selection of formal methods.

Data are collected from primary and secondary sources. Data from secondary sources are useful both in finding necessary information to solve problems and in better understanding and explaining the research question. Most research projects begin with a thorough review of relevant literature, especially previous results achieved in the specific field. The first step in this activity is identifying relevant secondary sources (books, journals, proceedings from scientific conferences, etc.), while the second phase involves evaluating the usefulness of the content present in the collected sources. Sometimes, secondary sources provide enough information to resolve the research question. Hence, every research should start with data collection from secondary sources. If secondary data offer scant material for problem analysis, then primary data collection should continue.

In the field of public relations, gathering information from secondary sources often involves searching online databases. Content analysis also has widespread use in collecting secondary data

Content Analysis. This method represents a particular form of quantitative empirical research aimed at determining the presence of specific ideas, conceptual trends, their proponents and opponents, and most often, the predominant discourse in a particular area of social life. Content analysis includes elements of qualitative research as well, given that every content analysis must begin with clear category identification.

This research procedure can be relatively informal or quite scientific in terms of random sampling and establishing specific topic categories. It is often applied to articles containing news about an organization. At a basic level, a researcher can collect clippings of news articles in a notebook and measure the column size in newspapers dedicated to news about the organization (Wilcox et al., 2006: 135).

Through content analysis, one can describe, understand, and even predict the phenomenon being studied. However, there is a common division of content analysis methods into those that primarily aim at description (so-called manifest content analysis) and those focused on interpretation, namely the interpretation of the observed phenomenon (semiotic content analysis), where assigning meaning to observed phenomena is the primary task.

Factual material (specific terms, words, sentences, themes, visual content, etc.) is drawn from various sources such as books, journals, reports, minutes, internal analyses. Content analysis can also be applied to letters and phone calls. This method provides valuable feedback on issues related to the organization's policies and services. Specifically, the pattern of letters and phone calls can indicate a problem.

Survey. Survey, as one of the methods for collecting primary data, represents a systematic investigation of a population. Surveys can be conducted using various measurement instruments - surveys, interviews, or tests. In public relations practice, surveys are most commonly used. The goal of each survey is to obtain scientifically relevant information that can be used to analyze attitudes, opinions, beliefs, convictions, and value systems. Information gathered through the survey process enables the acquisition of new knowledge about the research problem by describing it (which is the most common case), understanding it, and if possible, establishing causal relationships and connections. This last aspect is the goal of every research, with scientific research, understood in a purely positivist sense, also implying the ability to predict future occurrences and processes related to the investigated phenomenon.

Survey types vary depending on (1) their purpose, (2) the method of contacting respondents, and (3) the time period during which they are conducted.

Purpose of Surveys. In terms of purpose, surveys are used to describe or explain the researched phenomenon. Descriptive surveys document certain states of public opinion, behavior, or characteristics of the population at a specific point in time. Public opinion polls, for example, provide information about the current state of people's attitudes on a particular issue. Descriptive surveys are often used in business studies to understand employee behavior regarding motivation, job satisfaction, or disciplinary actions. Analytical surveys aim to delve into the characteristics of relationships between variables.

Surveys that aim to explain the researched phenomenon are not limited to collecting purely descriptive data but also conduct measurements of variables whose relationships can be analyzed. For example, a survey can assess the level of purchasing a product and the degree of association linking increased sales to a recently conducted advertising campaign for that product.

Surveying is the most popular method for collecting data in business studies, and the main types of questionnaires (as already highlighted in the introduction of this section) used are descriptive and/or analytical questionnaires. After determining the research question and clearly defining the purpose of the study, the type of survey to be conducted is determined: analytical or descriptive. Different surveys lead to various problems and questions, so there is a need for different types of planning.

Data collection through surveying techniques is done through surveys (questionnaires) and conducted interviews. The main methods for administering a survey are through mail, telephone interviews, face-to-face interviews, group surveys of respondents, and, more recently, over the internet. Mixed and multiple survey methods can also be applied. The former refers to a situation where respondents have multiple ways of answering, while the latter allows individual sample members to respond in specific ways (e.g., by phone or via the internet). Generally, three factors crucially influence the choice of survey method: sample size (target group or random sample), questionnaire content (simple or complex), and survey cost. In most cases, the third factor is of least importance unless it involves a face-to-face interview.

Mail Surveying. Conducting a survey by sending questionnaires through mail requires a predefined sample of respondents. Respondents are asked to complete the questionnaire independently and return it in a pre-addressed envelope. In this case, incentives are usually provided to encourage respondents to complete and return the questionnaires. Such incentives can be in the form of money, gifts, or participation in a prize draw. The rate of returned responses represents a measure of respondent cooperation. Cooperation can be increased by providing gre-ater personalization by the researcher, i.e., providing a series of significant information from the project organizer's past. Experience shows that respondents read information of this nature.

Low respondent response rates remain the biggest problem with mail surveys.

A questionnaire sent by a commercial company to the general public typically has a response rate of 1 to 2 percent. If the survey pertains to issues of importance to the general public, the response rate can range from 5 to 20 percent. A much higher response rate is obtained when an organization sends a questionnaire to its members. In this case, the response rate can be from 30 to 80 percent (Wilcox et al., 2006: 143).

Postal questionnaires must be self-explanatory, easy to follow, and brief. They are suitable because they can cover broader geographic areas and reach respondents who live in remote areas that would be difficult or costly to reach or send an interviewer to. Such surveys also ensure complete anonymity, making it more likely that respondents will answer more truthfully to sensitive questions. However, a weakness is that the researcher has no control over how the respondent completes the survey. Namely, the researcher cannot be sure whether the respondent filled out the questionnaire alone or with the help of another person. Postal surveys are also characterized by the slowest respondent response, and there is no control over how quickly respondents answer.

Telephone Interviewing. Conducting surveys through telephone interviews involves trained individuals conducting interviews with randomly selected respondents from the phone directory. Some telephone surveys are conducted with pre-selected respondents who are unlikely to respond to a mail-delivered questionnaire or are difficult to access for face-to-face interviews. This primarily includes politicians, business people, and journalists.

Unlike mail surveys, telephone conversations allow greater control over respondents, and much higher response rates are obtained. If the questionnaire is well-designed and the telephone interviewers are well-trained, the response rate can range from 80 to 90 percent.

Since telephone surveys must be short, telephone interviewing is not a suitable method for collecting data for more in-depth ('deep') research. There are also limitations regarding the types of questions that can be asked. For example, questions with multiple-choice answers are not suitable for telephone surveys.

The advantage of telephone interviewing lies in the personal nature of the phone call, effective communication, and its cost-effectiveness compared to face-to-face interviews. Experience shows that many people are willing to spend up to 45 minutes on a phone conversation, whereas at their doorstep, for example, they do not want to stand for more than 5 to 10 minutes and are reluctant to let strangers into their homes.

Interviewing in Person. Face-to-face interviews can be conducted in a research institution, on the street, at the respondent's workplace, or in their home. There are two main types of interviews: structured (where the wording of questions and the order in which they are asked remain unchanged in each case) and unstructured, which is essentially similar to an informal conversation. Data from structured interviews are usually considered more important and reliable. The interviewer must identify potential respondents based on so-called 'filter questions' to determine whether the selected individuals truly belong to the target group being studied for a specific phenomenon. Filter questions must be brief because it is common for most people to show some aversion to researchers during such contacts.

A personal interview is undoubtedly the most expensive form of research as it requires trained staff and travel. A trained interviewer is expected to interview eight to ten people during a day, and there are also transportation costs. Therefore, various variants of unstructured interviews are increasingly being applied, such as the 'intercept' interview.

Many public relations agencies, in an effort to explore public opinion and attitudes, conduct short conversations (from two to five minutes) with people in shopping centers or at meetings. This type of research is called an intercept interview because people are literally intercepted in public places to express their opinions on a topic. Although this form of interview is not scientific as it does not use statistical sampling methods, it can help an organization gain insight into existing opinions or convey key messages.

Group Surveying. Group surveying is a procedure that combines aspects of mail surveys and interviews. It is conducted simultaneously with an entire group of pre-selected respondents who, in the presence of an interviewer, complete a questionnaire. The location of the questionnaire can be a research institution, a hotel conference room, a classroom, etc.

Timing of the Surveys. Surveys can be conducted at a single point in time or can be repeated over time. In the first case, it is a cross-sectional survey. The second case refers to longitudinal research.

The first type of research is most commonly applied because it provides insights into public opinion, knowledge, understanding, or behavior at a given time. Cross-sectional surveys mainly contain descriptive records, but they can also analyze relationships between variables, thus understanding the nature of the relationship between variables; for example, the correlation between media exposure and behavior.

Longitudinal studies are much less frequently conducted. As mentioned earlier, surveys of this type involve obtaining data at different points in time. This data can be obtained from the same group of respondents or from different respondents. Longitudinal studies are divided into trend studies, cohort studies, and panel studies.

Trend Studies. These studies are the most common type of longitudinal research in the media field. The sample in trend studies consists of different groups of people from the same population at different times. This form of analysis is often used during elections. The sample of respondents is surveyed before, during, and at the end of the election campaign to determine their voting intentions and attitudes towards candidates and their programs. Such studies reveal short-term and long-term regularities in public opinion and behavior. They can indicate changes in behavior over time and correlate these changes with specific media events and changes in respondents' attitudes towards the media.

Researchers in trend studies can either generalize their own results or use data from secondary sources originally designed for other purposes. When using secondary data sources, it is important that data from different time periods always come from the same source and that there is as much consistency as possible in the questions asked at different times. Any differences in question formulation or fluctuations in sample composition make the data non-comparable, thus invalidating the trend study.

Cohort Studies. A cohort is any group of individuals connected in some way or who have experienced a significant life event during a given period. If that life event, for example, is birth, then it is referred to as a birth cohort. Cohorts can be identified in terms of education (for example, all children starting school at the age of 6 at a given location), marital status, etc. Any study involving measuring the characteristics of one or more cohorts in two or more different time periods constitutes a cohort analysis. Cohort analysis aims to identify cohort effects. In other words, it determines whether changes in the dependent variable are due to aging or if they are present because the sample members belong to the same cohort.

Let's assume that a sample of respondents composed of five-year-old children watches TV for two hours every day, while a group of eight-year-olds watches TV for four hours a day. Are these differences in TV viewing time due to the age of the children or are they conditioned by other differences between these two samples? One way to find an explanation would be to track these two groups over the next three years and pay attention to whether five-year-olds, as they approach their eighth birthday, spend more time watching TV. If they do, then it can be concluded that these are age-related phenomena.

Cohort analysis is a flexible technique that can show whether changes in attitudes or behavior are influenced by aging or other social and cultural factors. However, the main drawback of this technique is that specific effects of age, cohort, and the period in which the analysis was conducted are not suitable for complete statistical data processing. Differences between groups examined at different times may be more a function of changes in the nature of the sample being studied rather than the effect of elapsed time. Controlling for the effects of such factors can be challenging, especially if the researcher uses data from secondary sources over which they have no control.

Panel Studies. This type of research is used to measure certain characteristics of the same sample of respondents at different points in time. Panel studies can reveal information about both differential and overall changes in the dependent variable. Panel studies can be conducted through mail surveys, telephone interviews, or face-to-face interviews. Television stations, advertising agencies, and large companies use panel studies to monitor changes in consumer behavior. This technique can indicate changes in attitudes and behaviors that might otherwise go unnoticed using other research methods.

Depending on the study's purpose, researchers may use either a continuous panel, consisting of members who regularly report specific attitudes and behaviors, or an interval panel, whose members agree to complete a certain number of questionnaires or other instruments (e.g., diaries) only when information is needed. Panel studies provide data suitable for sophisticated statistical analysis, and researchers can identify cause-and-effect relationships.

Panel studies come with certain challenges. Selecting members for panel groups is difficult because pe-ople are generally reluctant to participate in repeated surveys. Panel erosion occurs when panel membership changes over time due to individuals dropping out. This is known as "sample mortality." This attrition undermines the panel's continuous representativeness. Another drawback is the panelists' ability to approach each new survey during the entire study period as if previous surveys had not existed, known as "sensitization." These problems are challenging to avoid, leading to changes in respondents' answers as a function of previous interviews.

Compared to the classical experimental approach, surveys and interviews with respondents represent a type of research that can be conducted in the field. Such surveys can be useful both at the beginning of research and in the advanced stages of work on a research problem. These surveys extract information from people under real conditions in the context of everyday life.

The most significant difference between surveys and interviews lies in cost. Comprehensive surveys involving hundreds of respondents would be much more expensive if interviews were chosen as the measurement instrument. Interviews, on the other hand, are more flexible compared to surveys. Interviews are considered more suitable for qualitative research, while surveys are suitable for quantitative research styles.

5. Conclusion

This paper has considered only some of the methods used to collect quantitative and qualitative information to define the problem situation as precisely as possible. Research is closely related to the first phase of public relations management, namely situation analysis.

However, research is not only necessary for the implementation of the first phase of public relations management. Research methods are also used to monitor programs and evaluate program success. Research essentially functions as a management function in public relations. The primary purpose of research in public relations, like other business functions, is to reduce uncertainty in decision-making.

In PR practice, despite the immense importance of research for various areas of this business function, insufficient attention is paid to project planning. This can be attributed to various reasons. Sometimes employers or clients believe that research is not necessary, and in some situations, PR employees do not know how to create and conduct a research plan. Research methods, therefore, when it comes to academic education of PR professionals, should become a mandatory part of the curriculum.

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METODOLOGIJA I METODI ISTRAŽIVANJA U ODNOSIMA S JAVNOŠĆU

Sažetak: Najnapredniji oblik odnosa s javnošću predstavljen je naučno vođenim procesima rešavanja organizacionih problema i procesima promena. Ovaj rad razmatra neke od metoda koje se koriste za prikupljanje kvantitativnih i kvalitativnih informacija radi što preciznijeg definisanja problemske situacije. Primarna svrha istraživanja u odnosima s javnošću, kao i u drugim poslovnim funkcijama, jeste smanjenje neizvesnosti u donošenju odluka. Rad prvo ispituje mesto istraživanja u različitim modelima odnosa s javnošću. Zatim objašnjava prvu fazu procesa upravljanja odnosima s javnošću - analizu situacije - gde se istraživačke aktivnosti posebno ističu. Drugi deo rada fokusira se na metode, kako formalne tako i neformalne, koje se često koriste u praksi odnosa s javnošću.

Ključne reči: OSJ, Metodologija, metoda, komunikacija