

## **An empirical study on measuring the economic value of public relations initiatives**

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### **Abstract**

*This study investigates the economic value of public relations (PR) in organizations, focusing on whether this can be measured and in what ways. The specific activities that comprise PR—and the possible results of these activities—are also examined. In this context, special attention is devoted to the notion of "Return on Investment" (ROI), which becomes a complex and ambiguous term when examined within the field of PR. To address the above issues, an empirical survey was conducted among PR professionals working either in-house (in the PR departments of large companies) or as freelancers (i.e. PR consultants). A slightly different questionnaire was distributed to each group so as to better customize the phrasing of the questions to their individual needs; however, the structure of the two questionnaires was identical, allowing for direct comparisons between their answers. The empirical results indicate that the majority of the respondents strongly believe in the measurement philosophy and are closely involved in measuring PR. In doing so, they make the demonstration of PR value possible. Other benefits they may experience include refining and improving PR programs, assessing the cost-effectiveness of different approaches, and assuring a good return on their investments. The prevailing barriers that hinder their efforts are high costs and lack of time (mostly for consultants) and the uncertainty of intangible assets measurement results (mostly for companies). The respondents also favored the social media as the best way to promote their companies/clients. The companies typically measure PR "as a whole" (with few exceptions), while the consultants may further choose to measure PR "per activity", thus resulting in a more detailed analysis. Discussions with stakeholders proved to be the most popular measurement tool for nearly all PR activities. ROI, despite its ambiguity, is also often selected as a measurement tool, especially when measuring separate PR activities like lobbying, sponsorships, and collaborations.*

**Keywords:** public relations, return on investment, economic value, empirical study, social media, business image

**JEL** classifications: M21, M39

## **1. Introduction**

Public relations (referred to hereafter as PR) is the practice of managing communication between a particular organization and its publics. Broom and Sha (2013) define PR as "the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends". The main objectives of PR are to build the image and reputation of the business and its products or services, to achieve favorable publicity for the business, and to communicate effectively with the stakeholders (Hon, 1998; Paine, 2011).

Several PR activities may be used to call attention to an organization, such as events planning (Smith, 2013), brochures (Springston and Champion, 2004; Smith, 2012), powerful slogans (Newsom et al., 2013), letters and greeting cards distribution (Grunig et al., 2002), qualitative research (Dozier and Repper, 1992), social media (Paine, 2011), collaborations (Grunig, 2000; Woodward, 2000), sponsorships (Cornwell and Maignan, 1998), and lobbying (Toth, 1986).

The PR function mostly contributes to the intangible asset accumulation of reputation, awareness, employee engagement, customer loyalty, goodwill, knowledge acquisition and transfer of this knowledge (Drucker, 1999; Hutton et al., 2001; McCoy and Hargie, 2003). PR contribution may also have a long-term effect or an increase on the financial bottom line of an organization, such as sales, productivity, revenues, profits, and assets (Kim, 2001; Grunig, 2006).

The importance and contribution of PR appear to be crucial for companies which, due to the economic recession, face the challenge of achieving "more with less". In this effort, the PR specialists try to find targeted and cost-effective solutions according to the needs of businesses. However, many are questioning and are unable to demonstrate the economic value of PR and its contribution to financial outcomes (Lee and Yoon, 2010). Theoretically, there are many economic metrics which could resemble this, including Return on Investment (ROI), but in practice few are applicable. The use of the internet and social media, for example, has greatly facilitated the promotion of businesses and has introduced alternative methods of financial evaluation of PR.

The purpose of this paper is multifold: first, to investigate the activities (and their results) applied by professional communicators; second, to illustrate how strong is their belief that measurement is an important part of the PR process; third, to highlight the ways they demonstrate the economic value of these results, the methods, the criteria, and the tools they use; fourth, to identify the barriers to measurement; fifth, to investigate whether ROI is used in practice and under which circumstances is undertaken.

To attain these purposes, two questionnaires with 20 questions each were developed based on previous research, one addressed to PR departments of large companies and the other to PR consultants (referred hereafter as "companies" and "consultants" respectively). 150 PR professionals from Greece—that are closely involved in PR activities—were invited to participate by e-mails and phone calls, and 70 of them (46%) responded to the questionnaire.

This paper is structured as follows. Sections 2-4 present in turn the literature review on measuring and evaluating PR, PR measurement tools, and barriers to PR measurement respectively. Section 5 presents the research methodology and Section 6 reports the results of the empirical survey. Section 7 concludes and presents some recommendations for further research.

## **2. Measuring and evaluating PR**

According to Watson (2012), PR evaluation determines the value or importance of a PR program or effort, usually through appraisal or comparison with a predetermined set of organizational targets. PR evaluation is somewhat more subjective in nature than PR measurement, involving a greater amount of interpretation and judgment calls (Xavier et al., 2005).

Clients want to measure PR programs in order to gain insights that will enable them to refine and improve programs, to assess cost-effectiveness of different approaches, and to assure a good return on these investments (Zerfass, 2005). Professionals have to demonstrate their professional accountability through evaluation. They use many methods to demonstrate their contribution to organizational objectives, yet it is unclear how their attitudes towards evaluation and the reporting of success match real outcomes.

It has been a repeatedly pursued topic by both practitioners and scholars as to whether or not PR can contribute to an organization's bottom line in areas such as increased sales and share price, and what measurement can be used to capture that impact (Lee and Yoon, 2010). How much is PR worth to an organization? How much economic value can PR generate for the organization when the organization invests in PR programs and what are the monetary returns from PR activities (Thorson et al., 2015).

Cutlip et al. (2000) suggest that evaluation needs to reflect different stages and levels in the PR process. These stages include preparation evaluation (i.e. measuring the adequacy of background information, quality, and appropriateness of message preparation), implementation evaluation (i.e. measures of distribution, coverage, reach, and circulation), and impact evaluation (i.e. documents how the objectives of the PR program were achieved). Measuring PR outputs is usually a question of counting, tracking and observing, while for PR outtakes and PR outcomes it is a matter of asking and carrying out extensive review and analysis of what was said and what was done (Thorson et al., 2015).

As important as it can be for an organization to measure PR outputs and outcomes, it is even more important for an organization to measure relationships (Xavier et al., 2004). Academic studies have moved to new areas of research such as measures of relationship value (Hon and Grunig, 1999). According to Grunig (2006), non-financial indicators of value, or intangible assets, are a hot topic in management and accounting circles.

Relationships are the most important of these intangible assets and if we can show that PR create value in addition to financial value, we can then demonstrate the overall ROI of the function. Ehling (1992) shares the same view supporting the transformation of non-monetary values—such as the benefit of good relationships in the organization and society—into monetary values. Scott (2007) emphasizes that the measurement of relationship outcomes in

organizational relationships contributes to organizational effectiveness on both a tactical and strategic level while giving a numeric value to a traditionally vague, qualitative construct.

But always there is a different point of view. According to a previous study from Benchpoint/AMEC (2009), companies that use metrics have no respect for their PR function, since this kind of measurement is usually only the territory of very poor PR people who have trouble impressing upon their clients the value of their work. McCoy (2005) commented that "probably the most common buzzwords in PR in the last ten years have been evaluation and accountability". Pavlik (1987) commented that measuring the effectiveness of PR has proved almost as elusive as finding the Holy Grail.

Many scholars and practitioners mention that there should be standard approaches for evaluating PR activities in order to create a level of measurement consistency across the profession (Macnamara, 2014). Standards are defined as comparative evaluation measurements used to determine the performance of a PR campaign in relation to prior or even competitive programs (Michaelson and Stacks, 2011). Standards are important because they can be used to determine whether or not a communications target is being met or if a practitioner needs to change the course of a campaign to obtain a set objective. Similar to standards are Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which are quantifiable (numeric) measures that enable organizations to show progress over time for each objective (Watson, 2012). Anything can be a KPI and it depends on the objectives and strategy of the PR campaign.

McCoy and Hargie (2003) mentioned that the most common form of PR evaluation practiced is the measurement of audience exposure via the counting of column inches and volume of press clippings as well as radio/television mentions. Media evaluation comprised two evaluation methods: media monitoring and media content analysis. Media monitoring calculates the amount of media coverage achieved by monitoring press clippings and supposed audience exposure. Media content analysis involves the systematic analysis of clippings to assess the reporting of an organization's key messages (Xavier et al., 2005).

These methods, while of great value, need to be viewed as only a first step in the PR measurement and evaluation process. They can measure possible exposure to PR messages and actual press coverage, however, they cannot measure whether target audiences actually saw the messages and their correspondence to them. It should be noted that whatever rules, criteria, and variables are built into a media evaluation, whatever counting approaches are utilized to turn qualitative information into quantitative results, it is important that all of the elements and components involved are clearly defined and explained upfront.

The Barcelona Declaration of Measurement Principles—established at the European Measurement Summit in June 2010—proposed seven principles for measuring PR activity. This statement favors measurement of outcomes, business results, and social media, but rejects Advertising Value Equivalency (AVE) as failing to indicate the value of PR activity (Macnamara, 2014). 150 companies from over 30 countries voted on seven specific principles that finally set a baseline for how to measure PR—what's best, and what's worse. The seven principles adopted in Barcelona are as follows (AMEC, 2010):

- 1 Goal setting and measurement are fundamental aspects of any PR program;
- 2 Measuring the effects on outcomes is preferred to measuring outputs;
- 3 The effect on business results should be measured where possible;
- 4 Media measurement requires quantity and quality;
- 5 AVE is not the value of PR;
- 6 Social media can and should be measured;
- 7 Transparency and replicability are paramount to sound measurement.

Specific criteria for PR measurement include achievement of goals (Grunig, 2006; Paine, 2011), customer satisfaction (Jo et al., 2005), cost-benefit analysis (Megginson et al., 1994), feedback from employees (Young and Post, 1993; Jo et al., 2005), and feedback from journalists (Gregory and Watson, 2008).

### **3. PR measurement tools**

#### **3.1 Return on Investment**

Is ROI a specific financial outcome or can be expressed as an achievement of communication objectives (Lee, 2002)? Basically, any positive ROI shows a positive return in excess of what was invested. The generation of new revenue is only one type of program or campaign ROI. The other one is the use of PR programs or campaigns to reduce costs within an organization, for example by changing employee behaviors in ways that reduce administrative, production and other operational costs (Gregory and Watson, 2008).

ROI is defined in management and marketing literature as an outcome performance measure of financial effectiveness that is concerned with returns on capital employed in business (profit-making) activities (Watson, 2005; Drury, 2007; Moutinho and Southern, 2010). Watson and Zerfass (2011) defined the term ROI as "a ratio of income or earnings divided by the costs that had been applied to generate the income or earnings". For Rachlin (1997), ROI is the culmination of all activities of a company. So, ROI is not calculated at an activity, program, function or unit level; it is calculated as a sum or result of all those contributions. Gregory and Watson (2008) commented that the measurement of reputation and the desire of some practitioners to imply a ROI for PR activities have increased the drive towards the use of business language—and ironically, a single-method evaluation—in distinction to the business itself, which is looking for a multiplicity of evaluative methods.

#### **3.2 Advertising Value Equivalency**

AVE was popularized in the '90s. It is also known as Equivalency Advertising Value (EAV), Advertising Cost Equivalents (ACE), and Advertising Space Equivalents (ASE) (Watson, 2012). AVE is often an issue that is raised in connection with Media Content Analysis studies. Basically, AVE is a means of converting editorial space into advertising costs, by measuring the amount of editorial coverage and then calculating what it would have cost to buy that space if it had been advertising (Lindenmann, 2002).

#### **3.3 Analytics tools**

Businesses regularly take spreadsheets, tracking sales, upcoming orders, stock, expenses, and much more, so that they can successfully see where their business is headed and what changes they need to

implement. Analytics tools are a way to analyze the qualitative and quantitative data from a website and the competition and translate them into outcomes (Paine, 2011; Austin and Pinleton, 2015). Some of the most known analytics tools are Google Analytics, Yahoo Web Analytics, Clicky, Mint, Twitalyzer, Facebook Insights, KISSmetrics, Open Web Analytics, Clicktale, CrazyEgg, Piwik, Cloudflare (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

### **3.4 Polls and Surveys**

Polls are a form of quantitative research and often include demographic or psychographic information. The use of demographic data in PR permits creating contra-intuitive plans of measures for raising of general public's awareness which is more expedient, significant and productive (Phillips, 2001). They can be conducted in several ways like internet-based and mail surveys with the telephone communication being the most popular one. Other ways of contacting people are person to person contact and through questionnaires. Customized surveys can be used in PR. Surveys are one of the most commonly used research instruments, employed for market research, customer satisfaction studies, social trends research and result in public's awareness, knowledge, opinions, and behaviors related to the organization and problem situation (Capriotti and Moreno, 2007; Dozier et al., 2010).

### **3.5 Discussions with stakeholders**

A stakeholder is a party that has an interest in an enterprise or a project. The primary stakeholders in a typical corporation are its investors, employees, customers, and suppliers. However, the modern theory goes beyond this conventional notion to embrace additional stakeholders such as the community, government, and trade associations. Freeman (1984) says that a stakeholder is "any group or individual who is affected by or can affect the achievement of an organization's objectives". The role of relationships in the planning and evaluation of PR programs is important; PR professionals have to use the discussions with stakeholders as a tool, in order to identify their needs for measurement (Waters et al., 2009).

### **3.6 Press clippings**

Quantifying the economic value of news clippings presents a quantitative measurement of the outputs only (i.e. the process of PR publicity), and not of the outcomes (i.e. sales results). A clip is an article, broadcast story, or online message that mentions the company or product (Phillips, 2001). This is the most basic form of content analysis. With this system, relevant articles are collected and typically sorted chronologically or by date. The analysis generally consists of a summary listing the publications and dates of publication as well as the total article count. Typically, these clips are bound together in chronological volumes (Thorson et al., 2015). The analysis contains no insights, discussion of or interpretation of the coverage and is dependent on the recipient of the report to draw judgments about the actual content (McCoy and Hargie, 2003).

## **4. Barriers to PR measurement**

### **4.1 Cost**

The demand from professionals in the PR industry to demonstrate the economic contribution of their work to the financial outcomes of the whole operation is growing (Theaker and Yaxley, 2012). But this kind of demonstration requires appropriate training of professionals to acquire knowledge and techniques in order to use the tools that are needed to demonstrate their value. This implies that companies should spend some money on this training, which due to financial circumstances, many avoid doing (Xavier et al., 2004).

### **4.2 Lack of time**

The use of evaluation techniques to improve programs or to judge the effects of current activities is considered to be as important as proving value. The aim of professionals to present data on which they would be judged, prevent them from acting pro-actively to improve or to refine campaigns. In this effort, therefore, they prefer to devote their time to the efficient performance of their work (Pohl and Vandeventer, 2001; Xavier et al., 2004).

### **4.3 Lack of expertise**

The lack of knowledge and expertise in research techniques forces practitioners not to use them, but concentrate on technician skills. The vast majority of PR practitioners are trained in arts and humanities and come from backgrounds in journalism, media and social studies, design, film, and so on. There are few accountants, engineers, sales-marketing executives and the occasional scientists in PR, but these are comparatively rare. The solution is not that PR practitioners have to become accountants or learn statistics. But an ability to use measurement methods which can generate numeric data and present results in numbers, charts, graphs, and tables is an important skill for any PR practitioner (Cutlip et al., 2000, Kelly 2001).

### **4.4 Uncertainty of measurement results**

This barrier could be interpreted as a combination of the inability to measure intangible assets and the lack of expertise. Part of the measurement problem stems from issues related to validity. Furthermore, even if budget and time are available, evaluation is not possible if objectives are vague and imprecise or if practitioners do not understand research methodologies available.

### **4.5 Lack of administrative support**

In many cases, there is a lack of administrative support in PR campaigns in terms of inadequate budget. As many academics and professionals have observed, there is a preference for the administration to invest their budget in marketing or advertising campaigns rather than to support the PR departments. This is the view that many have, that the economic value of PR cannot be measured, so there is no need to advocate an effort like this. This way, PR practitioners do not have the opportunity to rise into the manager roles and in the participation of decision-making. This could give them access to budgets for measurement and evaluation, thus creating

programs and campaigns that could enhance their personal standing and meet the objectives of their clients (Xavier et al., 2004).

#### **4.6 Inability to measure intangible assets**

It is easier to measure outputs than outcomes in a PR campaign. The contribution of intangible assets to financial performance is more difficult to quantify than the contribution of tangible assets (Lev, 2001). The communications industry is trying to quantify outcomes that are difficult to quantify. Human interactions, relationships, feelings, attitudes, loyalties, perceptions, and engagement do not yield easily to numeric quantification (Macnamara, 2014). Attitudes could be goodwill, support, or the intention to buy. Other intangible assets that should be mentioned are awareness of a product or service, perceptions such as reputation and brand attribute, engagement, trust and behavior in terms of buying, joining, voting, advocacy, and so on (Xavier et al., 2004).

### **5. Methodology**

The present study adopted an empirical research method using two questionnaires, addressed to both companies and consultants. Questionnaires assist in gathering information for further analyses as the respondents face the same standardized questions and format. This kind of measurement is accurate and guarantees the collection of comparable data. So, using identical questions for evaluation allowed for exploring the gap between the opinions of the two groups. A combination of the inferential research method (to accurately portray the characteristics of relevant groups) and the statistical hypothesis testing (as it can justify conclusions regardless of the existence of scientific theories) was used. The questionnaires consist of four parts: demographics (i.e. gender, age, level of education, work experience, etc.); objectives, critical success factors and media used for PR activities; kind of measurement, criteria, and barriers to measurement; ROI.

From a convenient sample of 150 PR professionals, 70 questionnaires were returned (i.e. 38 companies and 32 consultants), resulting in a response rate of 46%. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, chi-square, independent samples t-test, and one-way ANOVA.

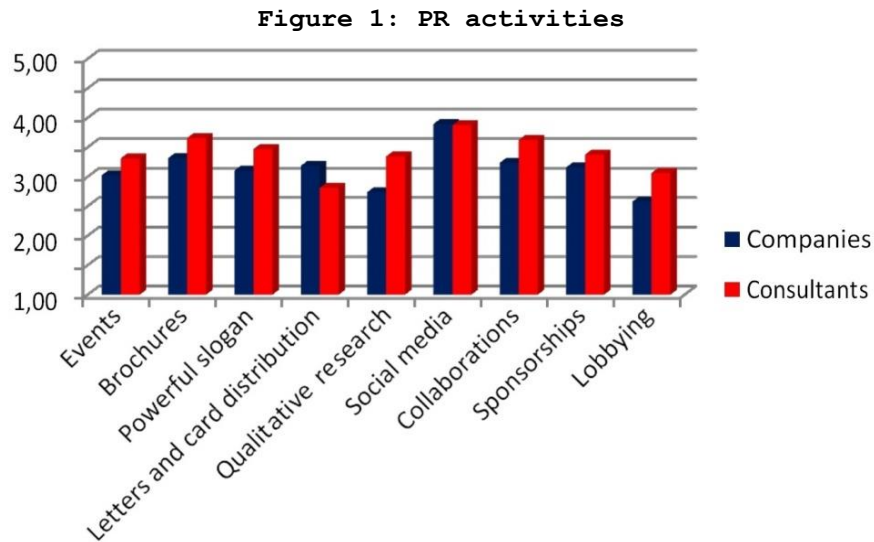
Demographic information of the final sample showed that 58% were male and 42% female. The 50% of the respondents belong to the 26-35 age group while 46% are older and 4% are younger. With regard to education, those who hold a master's degree is the majority (43%), followed by those who hold a university degree (39%) and a Ph.D. (9%). The other 9% had a lower educational level. Regarding their work experience, the results show that the 30% has previous experience in the PR sector from 1 to 5 years, another 30% from 6 to 10 years, 23% from 11 to 15 years, and the remaining 17% for more than 15 years. About the company's size, the 30% has 1 to 10 employees, the 31% from 11 to 50, the 16% from 51 to 100, the 12% from 101 to 250 and the 11% more than 250 employees. The 42% of the companies have a separate PR department and the rest 58% does not. The 22% of the consultants target customers of large-sized companies, the 14% target small-sized companies and the rest 64% target both groups.



## 6. Results

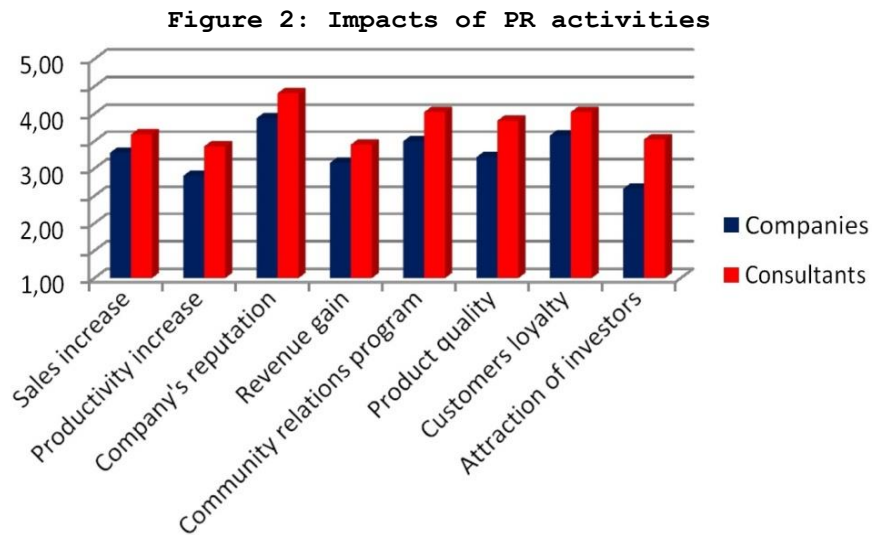
### 6.1 PR activities

As regards PR activities implementation, social media seem to be the most favorable activity for both companies and consultants. The respective results for the other activities are presented in Figure 1.



Testing the research hypothesis that the type of business affects PR activities implementation, the result was negative ( $t=-1.274$ ;  $p>0.1$ ). Consultants only seem to use more qualitative research than companies ( $t=-1.839$ ;  $p<0.1$ ). Work experience also seems to not affect PR activities implementation ( $F=2.043$ ;  $p>0.1$ ). However, it is interesting to note that respondents with more than ten years of work experience appear to use three individual activities more than those with less work experience, namely events planning ( $F=2.396$ ;  $p<0.1$ ), social media ( $F=4.897$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), and collaborations ( $F=2.357$ ;  $p<0.1$ ).

As regards the impacts of PR activities, it seems that the most significant impact is increasing companies' reputation. The results for all impacts appear in Figure 2.

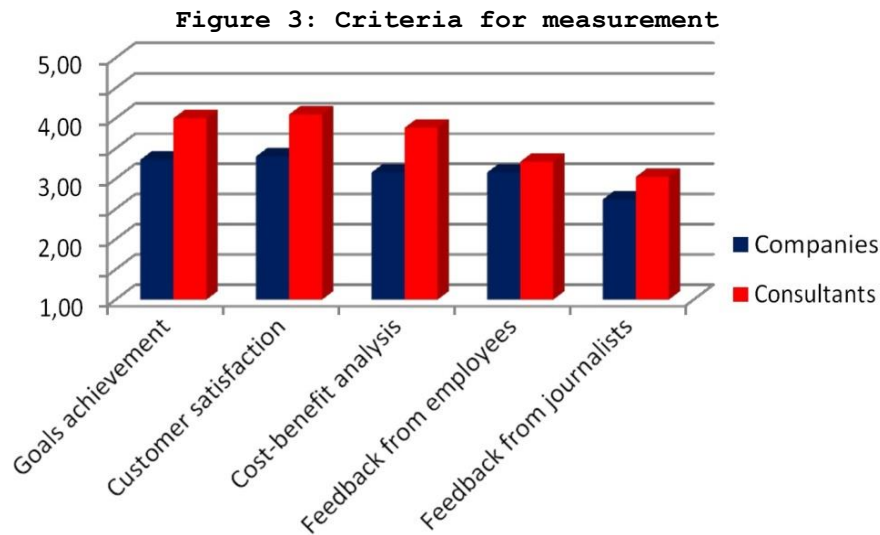


Testing the research hypothesis that the type of business affects the impacts perceived from PR, it seems that consultants indeed evaluate all impacts higher than the companies ( $t=-2,659$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). This is particularly evident on four individual benefits: attraction of investors ( $t=-3.528$ ;  $p<0.01$ ), product quality ( $t=-2.623$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), community relations programs ( $t=-2.011$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), and productivity increase ( $t=-2.208$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). Conversely, work experience does not seem to relate to the impacts of PR activities ( $F=1.231$ ;  $p>0.1$ ).

Next, we examined the utilization of social media in order to promote companies. Facebook proved to be the top selected social media by far for both groups of participants. Twitter and LinkedIn are also used mainly by consultants and much less by companies. As far as the media utilization is concerned, the internet is the most effective one and radio is the less effective.

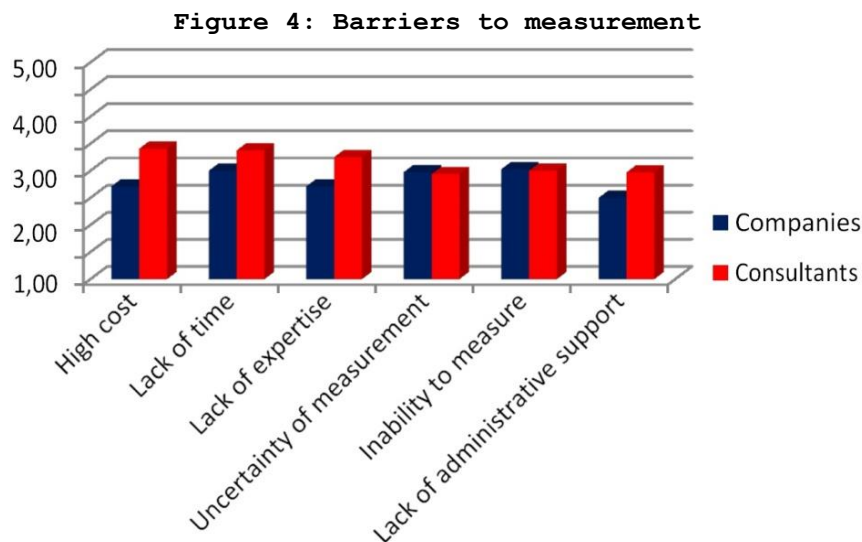
## 6.2 PR measurement

The research results indicate that the majority of the respondents see the economic value measurement of PR initiatives as very important (39%) or moderately important (20%). A noteworthy 14% of the respondents even see this measurement as absolutely essential. As regards the criteria participants use to measure the economic value of PR, the prevailing criteria for both groups are customer satisfaction and goals achievement, as depicted in Figure 3.



Turning to the barriers to the measurement of PR value, the highest barrier was observed for the inability to measure intangible assets (for companies) and for the high cost of measurement (for consultants). The results for all barriers appear in Figure 4.

Note that the consultants face more barriers to the measurement of PR activities than companies do ( $t=-1.739$ ;  $p<0.1$ ). This is particularly evident on two individual barriers: high cost ( $t=-3.209$ ;  $p<0.05$ ); and lack of expertise ( $t=-2.050$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). On the contrary, the respondents' work experience does not affect the perceived barriers to the measurement of PR activities ( $F=1.060$ ;  $p>0.1$ ).



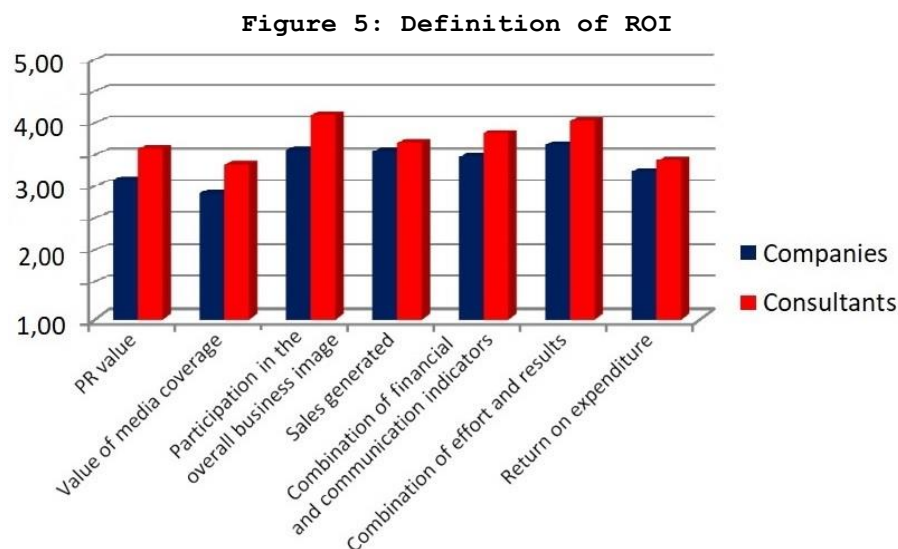
The majority of the participants (70% of the companies and 55% of the consultants) measure PR "as a whole". They mostly choose discussions with stakeholders as the best tool to evaluate PR, followed by analytics tools and online surveys. No significant differences were found between the two groups (i.e. companies and consultants) on their preferences on evaluation tools (including ROI:  $\chi^2=2.443$ ;  $p>0.1$ ).

For those participants who measure PR "per activity", the prevailing measurement tool is the discussions with stakeholders for the majority of separate activities (e.g. collaborations 56%, events 55%, distribution of brochures 52% etc.). The results are significantly differentiated only in the case of social media, where the majority selected analytics tools as the most useful measurement tool (60%).

Again the two groups largely agree on their degree of measurement and the selection of measurement tools per activity. The only exception is the activity of lobbying, which was measured by the majority of the consultants (using mostly discussions with stakeholders and ROI), while it was measured only by a small minority of the companies ( $\chi^2=10.501$ ;  $p<0.05$ ).

### 6.3 ROI

The last part of the questionnaire investigates the definitions of ROI that participants give in regard to PR measurement. As depicted in Figure 5, the prevailing definitions of ROI are "participation in the overall business image" (comes first for consultants and second for companies) and "combination of effort and results" (comes first for companies and second for consultants). Other popular definitions for both groups are "combination of financial and communication indicators" and "sales generated". The least favoured definition for both groups is the "value for media coverage". It is also interesting to notice that ROI does not seem to be perceived as equal to "PR value" or "return on expenditure".



## 7. Conclusion

The findings of this study provide an interesting insight into the importance of the economic measurement of PR initiatives. In this crucial question, the majority of respondents consider this measurement as very important. The significance of measurement lies in the gain of insights that enable companies and consultants to refine and improve programs, to assess cost-effectiveness of different approaches and to assure a good return on their investments. But the most important for respondents is that PR measurement makes the demonstration of PR value possible.

PR indeed adds value. While many companies take this as a given, it is not fully appreciated because PR does not translate well to the bottom line. So, measurement is a good way to prove that PR creates awareness, engagement, changes in attitudes or purchase behaviors and that has real, measurable impact on the achievement of strategic organizational goals. But here come the barriers to measurement for the companies. Their inability to measure intangible assets means that outcomes from a PR campaign do not yield easily to numeric quantification. Also, the uncertainty of measurement results, which is the second most serious barrier for companies, reveals the lack of knowledge and expertise on research and measurement techniques. Regarding consultants, high cost and lack of time are the major barriers to measurement, complementing a previous survey of communications measurement by Benchpoint/AMEC (2009).

As regards the PR activities preferred by the participants, the answers were shaped positively by both groups in the evaluation of the internet and social media as the best way to promote their companies/clients. The most popular among social media is, by far, Facebook. This is mainly because they can easily connect with thousands of people who could be turned easily to future customers. The finding that consultants use much more Twitter and LinkedIn than companies is worth to mention. An explanation that can be given is that these two tools are characterized as more professional (especially LinkedIn) and consultants can discover a very different audience than they already reach through Facebook (such as journalists, editors, and bloggers) in order to introduce and promote their clients. Significant differences in other PR activities between the two groups are observed in qualitative research and lobbying, which seem to be more important for consultants than for companies.

Another interesting finding is that an overwhelming majority of companies measure PR "as a whole", while the proportion of consultants who measure PR "as a whole" is equally high as the proportion of those who measure PR "per activity". According to participants who prefer "per activity" measurement, discussions with stakeholders is the measurement tool they use for most activities (i.e. events planning, distribution of brochures, the creation of powerful slogans, qualitative research, collaborations, sponsorships, and lobbying). On the other hand, analytics tools are most appropriate when they evaluate social media.

The fact that consultants evaluate the impact of their PR activities with almost an absolute degree of success compared to those of companies reflects their confidence in their experience, knowledge, and skills as professional communicators. The majority of companies believe that the enhancement of reputation is the most significant impact of their activities and consultants concur with them, with community relations programs and customers loyalty coming next.

Finally, when it comes to ROI, the way its meaning is interpreted by each kind of participants is different. For companies ROI is mostly the combination of their efforts and results; for consultants, it is an indicator for the participation in the overall business image. ROI is the third most preferable tool for respondents who measure PR "as a whole" and also get high rates for measuring separate activities like lobbying, sponsorships, and collaborations.

The above conclusions are subject to certain limitations, most notably the small size of the sample. The replication of this study in future research under different settings (e.g. in countries that

hold more advanced views on PR) would provide deeper insights into the subject.

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