PR TECHNOLOGIES AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR IMAGE CONSTRUCTION IN MODERN ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the methodological approaches to image formation in contemporary organizations and the significance of Public Relations (PR) technologies in that process. The two principal approaches to image construction — symbolic-emotional and substantive-essentialist — are subjected to comparative analysis. The role of PR technologies in shaping organizational image, together with their systemic and integrative characteristics, is explored in detail. The distinctive features and prospects of image formation under conditions of contemporary digital technologies are also identified. The findings carry both scholarly and practical significance for those engaged in planning and executing PR activities.

Keywords: image, PR technologies, organization, symbolic-emotional approach, substantive-essentialist approach, comparative-analytical approach, communication strategy, public relations, structural transformation, digital technologies.

INTRODUCTION

In the conditions of the contemporary market, the competitiveness and success of organizations depend to a considerable extent on how they are perceived by the public. Image — understood as the holistic representation of an organization in the public consciousness — does not take shape spontaneously; rather, it must be purposefully and deliberately constructed through planned activity. In this process, Public Relations (PR) technologies assume critical importance, since they constitute the most effective instruments for organizing and managing communication between an organization and its various publics.

At present, a large number of organizations continue to misinterpret PR activity as nothing more than a means of creating an outward appearance. In reality, PR technologies are not confined to the cultivation of external visibility and impressions; they constitute a complex, multifaceted undertaking directed simultaneously at improving the internal workings of the organization, communicating its values and objectives to society, and establishing durable, mutually beneficial long-term relationships.

The present article undertakes an in-depth analysis of the methodological foundations of organizational image formation and the role of PR technologies in that process. The aim of the study is to identify the principal approaches to image formation on the basis of a review of contemporary scholarly literature, to examine the factors that determine the effectiveness of PR technologies, and to define the most promising directions for development in this field.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theory and practice of image formation have found expression in the research of numerous foreign and domestic scholars. A review of the literature examined in the course of this study reveals that the concept of image has emerged and developed at the intersection of multiple disciplines — a circumstance that attests to its many-sided and complex nature.

In their research, James Grunig and Todd Hunt identify two fundamentally distinct approaches to image formation: the symbolic-emotional and the substantive-essentialist. «The first approach is oriented primarily toward constructing an «outward image» on the basis of external communications: the focus falls on the organization's visible presentation, its promotional activities, and the cultivation of favorable public reception through managed public relations. Within this approach, primary attention is directed toward the visual and emotional dimensions of image. The second approach, by contrast, is directed toward shaping image through the transformation of internal

substance — here, the organization's genuine internal practices, values, and principles constitute the principal driver of image formation» [7].

The prominent American scholars Wilcox, Cameron, and Olt describe PR activity in their research as «image engineering,» defining it as «a complex undertaking directed toward achieving the most favorable possible reception of the organization» [7]. According to this definition, PR specialists strategically manage, analyze, and disseminate information in order to construct the organization's public profile. «Furthermore, in the view of these scholars, PR technologies ensure two-way communication between the organization and its target audience, affording the organization the ongoing capacity to refine its activities and adapt them to audience expectations. As a result, an effective PR strategy secures the long-term stability of organizational image and contributes to building positive representations of its activities» [6].

Russian scholar V. Mikhailchenko argues that «one of the most important functions of public relations at the present time is the formation of a positive, credible impression of organizational activity across all levels — from the mass consumer to the highest organs of authority — and the provision of opportunities for constructive dialogue. The formation of a positive image and high standing — as a guarantee of mutually beneficial and stable relationships — demands a complex and protracted process involving the creation of a corporate identity, the definition of the organization's socially significant role, and the articulation of its individuality and distinctiveness» [4].

Uzbek researcher U. Islombekov, emphasizing the importance of PR technologies in public administration, writes: «One of the reasons for the widespread application of public relations technologies in the field of state governance is directly bound up with the problem of securing legitimacy» [4]. In his view, PR activity serves

not only the purpose of constructing the organization's external image but equally that of establishing dialogue with society and earning public trust.

Belgian researchers Natalie Dentsche and Amy Gene, drawing on rigorous scholarly inquiry, advance the important proposition that «PR strategies in image formation should be directed not only toward creating an external profile, but toward transforming the genuine activities of the organization — that is, they should serve as a catalyst for internal structural and functional change» [9]. «In their view, it is insufficient to concentrate exclusively on external communications in forming organizational image; the improvement of internal processes and operations is of equal importance. This firmly affirms the dual and mutually reinforcing nature of PR activity» [9].

The comparative-analytical approach represents one of the key methodological foundations of image formation. This approach «is directed toward the strategic construction of one's own image on the basis of a thorough study and analysis of competitors' images, the precise definition of one's market position, and the effective demonstration of competitive advantages. Benchmarking methods find wide application within this approach — that is, the best practices in the field are studied on a systematic basis and put to productive use in the refinement of one's own image» [10].

A. Nazarov holds that «PR is an important factor in ensuring openness and transparency in society. It serves not merely as an instrument for creating a positive image for the organization, but also as a mechanism that encourages a sense of responsibility before society and adherence to ethical principles. This, in turn, creates the conditions under which state bodies improve their services — driven not by external oversight and legal compulsion, but by the reputational consequences of failing to meet public expectations» [11].

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

On the basis of the scholarly literature surveyed above, it is possible to identify the methodological foundations of image formation and the distinctive characteristics of PR technologies. The methodological approaches employed in image formation may be grouped into the following categories:

1. The Symbolic-Emotional Approach is among the most widely employed methods of image formation, achieved through the organization's external profile, visual elements, advertising, and informational materials. Within this approach, primary attention is directed toward shaping the emotional and aesthetic impressions of the audience. The symbolic-emotional approach affords the possibility of rapidly reorienting the organization's image and producing a strong effect on the audience; however, an image built exclusively on external appearance may prove incapable of sustaining itself over the long term.

2. The Substantive-Essentialist Approach is directed toward creating image through the improvement of the organization's genuine internal activities — its quality indicators, professional standards, and production processes. This approach is grounded in the organization's practical results and internal substance, and it serves the purpose of forming a durable, credible image. An image built on substantive-essentialist foundations is stable and trustworthy, precisely because it rests upon the organization's real achievements and accomplishments.

3. The Comparative-Analytical Approach is grounded in the study of competitors' activities in the marketplace, the analysis of their image strategies, and the construction of one's own image through the assimilation of best industry practices. This approach enables the organization to define its position in the market accurately, to develop a distinctive image that differentiates it from competitors, and to identify effective ways of attracting its target audience. An image formed as a result of the comparative-analytical approach is responsive to market demands and enhances the organization's competitiveness.

4. The Situational Approach is directed toward adapting image strategy in accordance with circumstances, applying different tactics in different conditions, and responding promptly to changes in the market environment. This approach affords the organization flexibility and adaptability in image management, and it demonstrates particular value in crisis situations or at times of unforeseen change. An image strategy created within the situational framework allows for rapid adaptation to shifts in the external environment and enhances the effectiveness of image management.

5. The Integrative Approach rests on the rational combination of all the foregoing approaches, encompassing both the external and internal dimensions of image. It covers every aspect of the organization's activity — from visual identity to internal operations — and produces a coherent, unified image strategy. An image created through the integrative approach is the most complete and well-rounded of all, precisely because it reflects every facet of the organization.

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PR technologies serve as the principal instrument through which each of these methodological approaches is translated from theory into practice. It would be a mistake to regard PR as a single, uniform tool; rather, it is a cluster of interrelated activities that, when deployed with care and consistency, give the organization meaningful influence over how it is perceived. Contemporary PR activity is distinguished by several defining characteristics, each of which merits closer examination.

The first of these is **strategic planning**. Any PR effort that is not anchored to the organization's broader strategic direction risks being reactive, inconsistent, and ultimately self-defeating. This means that before specific tactics are selected or campaigns are launched, those responsible for PR must have a clear picture of where the organization is headed, what it stands for, and what kind of public standing it aspires to build. From that foundation, concrete image-formation plans can be developed plans that carry defined objectives, realistic timelines, and built-in mechanisms for periodic review. Without this evaluative loop, even well-crafted plans become rigid and unresponsive to the changing environment in which organizations operate.

The second characteristic is a **comprehensive approach to all dimensions of image**. PR activity cannot be confined to press releases or promotional campaigns alone; it must reach into every arena in which the organization's identity is expressed or perceived. This encompasses visual identity — the logos, colors, and design language through which the organization makes itself recognizable as well as the broader communication strategy that governs how messages are framed and delivered. It extends equally to the internal corporate culture, which, whether or not it is explicitly managed, leaves its mark on the image the organization projects outward.

Public relations in the narrower sense, together with crisis management, round out this comprehensive picture. When any one of these dimensions is neglected, gaps appear in the organization's image that are difficult to repair after the fact.

Third, **two-way communication with the target audience** is not an optional refinement but a structural requirement of effective PR strategy. An organization that broadcasts its messages without listening — that treats its audience as a passive recipient rather than an active interlocutor — is, in effect, working blind. Genuine dialogue involves soliciting audience views through surveys, public consultations, and social media monitoring; it involves taking those views seriously and allowing them to shape organizational decisions; and it involves closing the feedback loop by communicating openly about how audience input has been received and acted upon. Organizations that invest in this kind of sustained, attentive communication tend to build far more resilient reputations than those that treat audience engagement as a one-directional exercise.

Fourth, **adherence to ethical principles** is a condition that underlies the other three rather than standing alongside them as a separate feature. The correspondence of publicly communicated information with actual organizational reality is not merely a matter of legal compliance; it is the foundation upon which trust is built and on which it depends. Transparency and openness — the willingness to acknowledge difficulties as well as successes, to provide accurate information even when it is uncomfortable — distinguish organizations with genuinely strong images from those whose public profile is a thin veneer over a less flattering reality. When that veneer is stripped away, as it almost inevitably is in time, the reputational damage tends to be severe and lasting.

Fifth, **the use of digital technologies** has become indispensable to contemporary PR work, not as a supplementary channel but as a primary arena of image formation and management. Social networks, online platforms, and a continuously expanding range of digital communication tools give organizations the

capacity to engage with large and geographically dispersed audiences in ways that were simply not available a generation ago. Content can be created and distributed rapidly, in formats ranging from long-form written material to short video clips, interactive graphics, and real-time commentary. The organization's image can be projected, reinforced, and if necessary corrected, with a speed and precision that traditional PR methods cannot match. At the same time, these same characteristics make the digital environment demanding: audiences are attentive, expectations of responsiveness are high, and the distance between a poor communication decision and a public relations crisis is considerably shorter than it once was.

Taken together, these features suggest several factors that must be kept firmly in view when PR activity is employed as the central instrument of image formation. The organization's distinctive identity — its particular characteristics, operational objectives, and the values it genuinely holds — must be articulated with precision before any outward-facing strategy is formulated, since these elements are the raw material from which a credible image is made. External and internal communications must be brought into alignment; an organization that presents one face to the public and operates according to a different set of principles internally will sooner or later find the contradiction exposed. The opportunities offered by contemporary digital technologies should be embraced and used productively, though this must not come at the cost of neglecting the traditional PR methods that continue to carry weight with certain audiences and in certain contexts. The PR strategy should be revisited regularly — not merely when things appear to be going wrong — and refined in light of what the ongoing evaluation reveals. And throughout the entire process, commitment to ethical standards must remain constant, functioning less as an external constraint than as an organizing principle that holds the whole strategy together.

Where digital technologies specifically are concerned, their implications for PR practice deserve sustained attention. The capacity to form, manage, and consolidate

organizational image across social networks, blogs, forums, video platforms, and other online spaces is an opportunity of considerable significance, but it is one that rewards careful, deliberate use rather than high-volume, low-focus activity. The success of a PR strategy in the digital environment rests above all on the thoughtful planning of content — understanding what the target audience is looking for, what forms of communication are most likely to reach and engage them, and how material should be timed and distributed to achieve the intended effect. Creating content that is genuinely tailored to the audience, rather than generic in character, is what distinguishes organizations that use digital channels effectively from those that are merely present on them. And it is the consistent, purposeful use of interactive communication — responding, engaging, acknowledging — that transforms a digital presence from a broadcasting operation into something closer to an ongoing conversation, which is ultimately what sustained image management in the digital age requires.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the research and analysis conducted, the following conclusions may be drawn:

First, the process of image formation is complex and many-sided; its effectiveness depends on the correct selection and skilful application of the methodological approaches and PR technologies brought to bear. For contemporary organizations, it is advisable to employ a rational combination of the symbolic-emotional, substantive-essentialist, comparative-analytical, situational, and integrative approaches in shaping their image.

Second, PR technologies are of vital importance not only for creating the organization's external image, but equally for improving its internal workings, establishing two-way communication with the audience, and building enduring, trust-based relationships.

Third, contemporary digital technologies create new possibilities for the conduct of PR activity; however, success in this field requires the thoughtful integration of traditional PR methods with digital technologies, the strategic planning of content, and the maintenance of continuous dialogue with the audience.

Fourth, ethical principles and social responsibility play a significant role in image formation. A PR strategy grounded in transparency, openness, and truthfulness secures the organization's long-term, sustainable image.

Building on the foregoing conclusions, the following recommendations may be advanced:

Organizations developing image formation strategies ought to adopt a comprehensive approach — one that attends to both external and internal image simultaneously and ensures that the two are brought into alignment. Treating these dimensions as separable concerns, or subordinating one entirely to the other, undermines the coherence of the image that eventually takes shape in the public mind.

PR activity should be integrated with the organization's broader strategic objectives. This means that image-formation plans cannot be drawn up in isolation; they must be derived from and measured against the organization's overall direction and aspirations. Regular evaluation and, where necessary, recalibration of these plans is not a bureaucratic formality but a practical necessity.

Digital technologies represent a significant resource that organizations should exploit more fully. Social networks, online platforms, and multimedia content open channels of communication that, used thoughtfully, can substantially strengthen an image strategy. That said, digital tools should complement rather than displace conventional PR methods, which continue to carry weight with audiences that either lack digital access or simply prefer other forms of engagement.

Sustaining genuine two-way communication with the audience is not optional; it is the mechanism through which an organization remains responsive to the evolving

expectations and concerns of those it seeks to reach. Listening systematically to one's audience — and visibly acting on what one hears — is itself one of the most powerful image-building acts available to any organization.

In all PR activity, strict adherence to ethical norms is non-negotiable. The accuracy of information presented to the public, the principles of transparency and openness — these are not merely reputational assets to be deployed strategically; they are the moral foundations upon which any credible and lasting image must rest.

Finally, the professional development of PR specialists must receive sustained attention. Keeping them current with new technologies and evolving methods, and creating the conditions necessary for continuous improvement of the organization's image formation strategy, is an investment with returns that compound over time.

The implementation of these recommendations in practice will contribute to raising the effectiveness of image formation in contemporary organizations, to making fuller use of PR technologies, and — as a consequence — to securing the long-term competitiveness of those organizations.

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