Public relations no longer on the backburner

Sylvia Geaitani  
University of Western Sydney, Australia

Gwyneth VJ Howell  
University of Western Sydney, Australia

Abstract

Today, audiences and consumers live in a message-saturated society where they are constantly exposed to messages urging the purchase of a particular product or service. As a result, marketers are finding it increasingly difficult to successfully reach their audiences and consumers. This issue is increasing in significance due to the heavy proliferation of media that are causing audiences and consumers to become fragmented. To combat this, marketers must employ public relations in the vanguard of their marketing plans as it is more effective than advertising, marketing's traditional communication tool, in reaching audiences and consumers and persuading them to the purchase path.

In an attempt to validate this, a literature review is conducted to present the theoretical rationale for the study, to explore the practical implications for using public relations ahead of advertising in marketing plans, and to compare and contrast the views of the experts in the subject area in an effort to provide a conceptual framework for the study. A set of research questions is developed to address a number of factors that contribute to the effectiveness of public relations in persuading consumers to purchase a particular product or service. In addition to this, two in-depth interviews were conducted to assist in responding to the research questions and providing further insight into the role that public relations currently assumes within organisations who utilise public relations.

Essentially, it was found that public relations is more effective than advertising as it possesses several overarching and distinct advantages that belittle the presumed supremacy of the latter profession. Therefore,
marketers should review the current position allocated to public relations within marketing plans and shift it towards the vanguard as it is palpable that public relations is effective in combating the current issues faced by marketers.

Key words: public relations, advertising, message saturation, marketing

Introduction

Due to the heavy proliferation of media, consumers are now inundated with messages to persuade them to purchase a particular product or service. On average, ‘each individual is exposed to approximately 237 messages a day with less than a handful of those messages actually remembered by their target audience’ (Ries and Ries 2002, p. 9). As a result, marketers are finding it increasingly difficult to ensure their messages have the desired impact on consumers.

Academics and practitioners suggest that advertising, marketing’s prime communication tool, has lost its effectiveness due to message saturation and increased cynicism amongst consumers. Today, advertising no longer produces the results marketers require. Although exaggerated claims and excessive volumes are contributing factors to the decline in advertising’s effectiveness, credibility is the fundamental issue (Ries and Ries, 2002). As advertising struggles to regain its credibility and audience loyalty, public relations has evolved to be one of the most persuasive tools in the marketing mix. Marketers are increasing public relations budget allocations as its techniques are more effective in reaching consumers and encouraging action, especially in terms of brand building. Public relations is capable of strategically enhancing both the relationships with stakeholders and the organization’s image, thereby leading to a successful attainment of marketing objectives.

In practice marketers still hold the perception that advertising is their most effective communication tool. Research has illustrated that public relations has the capacity to produce better results with less than a tenth of the resources allocated to advertising (Ries and Ries, 2002). In addition, public relations is recognized as highly credible and effective in creating an idea and strongly positioning it within the psyche of the consumer (Wilcox et al., 2000). The traditional role of advertising is floundering in an effort to regain its supremacy as marketing’s most effective communication tool.

Public relations is more effective than advertising in building brand awareness and knowledge, increasing category usage and brand sales, cutting through message clutter, and increasing the credibility of messages; roles once dominated by advertising (Harris, 1991, p.5). ‘Unlike advertising, a well-planned public relations assault can secure businesses with a level of credibility and establish and preserve a formidable market share long after the print ads yellow and the billboards weather and peel’ (Elliott, 1996, p. 15). Exposure on
national television, radio programs or in newspapers, awards marketers with a credibility that is capable of changing attitudes and influencing behaviours (Strenski 1991, p. 25).

Furthermore, consumers are becoming more cynical and distrusting of advertising’s messages and, as a result, are becoming increasingly harder to reach. ‘Consumers look to trusted and independent sources for advice on what to do and confirmation they are doing the right thing. Often they do not accept the advertising message as they used to’ (Common 2002, p. 14). Thus, the strength of public relations within marketing lies in its ability to strategically reach these hard-to-get audiences by nurturing the organisation’s relationships with them.

Consumer information processing

The information processing theory seeks to explain an individual’s cognitive process when exposed to some form of communication (Bettman, 1979). The cognitive process includes the way information is evaluated, used, and stored in memory (Markin, 1974). When an individual is exposed to information, it stimulates the retrieval of memories relevant to the brand, product or organisation (Bettman, 1979). Bettman further identified that individuals have a limited capacity for processing information, and it is necessary for thoughts to be actively associated with objects for long-term memory storage.

Hence, when these associations are reinforced, they become more accessible in the memory.

As the storage of information is considered to be systematic, Bettman (1979) suggested that information about a product would be stored as associations with the product or service in one or more memory locations. Although content regarding consumer’s motivation, ability and opportunity to process information is generally drawn from psychology academics, it is still vital to note how public relations, in comparison to advertising, is the greater and more successful tool in achieving consumer involvement in message content.

The motivation, opportunity and ability to process information play a fundamental role in determining individual’s response to marketing communications. MacInnis et al., define motivation as the ‘desire or readiness to process; opportunity is the extent to which distractions or limited exposure time affect attention; and ability refers to recipients’ skills or proficiencies in interpreting information’ (1991, p.341). Petty and Cacioppo (1981), using the Elaboration Likelihood Model, hypothesised that an individual who is high in processing motivation, opportunity, and ability will, upon exposure to a persuasive message, engage in the purposeful and rational processing of message arguments. Therefore, when an individual is exposed to the message they will have both the desire and necessary skill to interpret the message of the advertisement or the public relations message. Petty and Cacioppo (1981) suggest that an individual intentionally allocates cognitive resources for the purpose of interpretation. However, they also cite that at reduced levels of motivation, opportunity, or
ability, any persuasive effect which emerges is presumably associated with the individual’s liking or disliking of relatively effortlessly processed the peripheral cues of the message (peripheral route to persuasion). Therefore, according to Petty and Cacioppo (1981) an individual will allocate greater effort to the process of attention, comprehension, elaboration and integration (incorporation of message elements into existing schemata; thereby making the information personal) than those responding only to the peripheral cues. MacInnis et al. (1991), describes the role of processing motivation, opportunity and ability in an advertisement exposure setting and identifies distinctive functions of the constructs both prior to exposure and during message processing.

Lord and Putrevu (1993) suggest that there are motivation-based information processing differences between advertising and publicity. Further, the main motivation for exposure to news media is either informational, hedonic or both. The individual is motivated to message exposure to satisfy cognitive, sensory or emotional needs and hence is motivated to process messages. Lord and Putrevu (1993) identified publicity that reaches the individual in the form of news, editorial or feature content as more likely to generate message elaboration. Kisielius and Sternthal (1986) assert that message elaboration does not always ensure accurate comprehension of the message but it can enhance persuasion.

In an experiment conducted by Lord and Putrevu, it was found that when an individual is exposed to information in a number of promotional formats they are processed more thoroughly and recall is higher (1998, p. 15). In addition, the research identified that ‘publicity led to a more intense readership and higher recall than advertisements…as audiences are more receptive to sources high in trustworthiness or expertise than to less credible ones [such as advertising]’ (Lord and Putrevu, 1998, p. 1). This finding supports Cameron’s 1994 experiment, which identified that consumers recognise and remember the message content and source of publicity-driven stories better and for longer than those of advertising (Cameron, 1994, p. 185–207). This reaffirms the claim that publicity is more valuable than advertising in the sense that message recognition and processing memory is higher.

Miniard, Bhatla, Lord and Dickson (1991) discussion of the Elaboration Likelihood Model literature asserts that source credibility is treated as a peripheral cue. Further, Miniard et al. (1991) suggest that in the absence of processing motivation or message elaboration, the perceived credibility of the source may increase the positive attitudinal benefits for a marketing strategy. This is reiterated by Cameron who states that ‘higher source credibility contributes to better memory which, in turn, can contribute to attitude change’ (1994, p. 88). Media sources are perceived as more credible than advertising campaigns due to their nature as a third-party endorsement (Cameron, 1994, p. 185).

Lord and Putrevu (1993) suggest a number of propositions relating to the information processing capabilities of both advertising and public relations. In forming these propositions, they identified eight properties which compare
Public relations no longer on the backburner

Public relations and advertising and assess their impact on consumer motivation, ability, and opportunity to process information. These eight properties included opportunity for repetition, comprehensibility, intentional exposure, distraction, emotional expressiveness, source credibility, risk reduction potential, and agenda setting (Lord and Putrevu, 1993). Overall, it was found that public relations has a relatively greater information processing advantage over advertising thus it is the promotional tool that should be utilised by marketers rather than remaining neglected.

Public relations has message credibility

This research suggests that public relations, as opposed to advertising, is marketing’s best solution in communicating to a message-saturated society as it has credibility. Albeit it lacks control over message content, timing, delivery, and visual appearance of the message, people are more likely to believe its messages than those of advertising as information gathered from a television program or newspaper article appear as more trustworthy and reliable sources of information.

Considering the media is a strong component of public relations, it is important that managers and senior members of marketing teams devote time to attend media events to build relationships with journalists. Media placement such as a news article or magazine interview provides great exposure for an organisation, its products or services. After all, third-party endorsement is almost impossible to refute due to its high level of credibility. Niederquell asserts that ‘marketers must learn to trust the ability of public relations to cut through message clutter and to create new channels of communication that reach opinion makers and thought leaders’ (1991, pp. 23–24) Moreover, marketers must trust that public relations offers more credible sources and techniques for delivering messages than advertising thus a power that every marketer would be foolish to reject.

Rational for research

To achieve better outcomes in this new and challenging environment, this study explored if an increased use of public relations will achieve more successful marketing outcomes. Whether, the use of public relations will assist marketers to better penetrate message clutter, increase message clarity and credibility, enhance involvement of media, engage influential opinion leaders and trendsetters, and increase consumer loyalty and trust. In particular, through focusing on public relations rather than advertising as the lead tool in marketing strategy, will the results produced exceed the expectations of marketers.
Research questions

In terms of the two marketing tools explored in this study, advertising and public relations, Berger and Mitchell (1989) identified that attitudes formed on the basis of repeat exposure (advertising) to a message are more accessible in memory than those formed from a single exposure (public relations). This does not imply that a single news release cannot generate repeated news coverage, only that repetition of the message is more difficult using public relations than advertising (Lord and Putrevu, 1993). Lord and Putrevu (1993) suggest that there are motivation-based information processing differences between advertising and public relations. Kisielius and Sternthal (1986) suggest that message elaboration does not always ensure accurate comprehension of the message, it can enhance persuasion. Hence, public relations may facilitate attention to elaboration and integration of the messages developed in marketing plans. The suggested influence of public relations in terms of marketing plans will be explored through the following research questions:

- Why are marketers employing public relations ahead of advertising in their marketing plans?
- How effective is public relations in reaching audiences and consumers and driving them to the purchase path?
- How does this research shape the future of marketing, advertising and public relations?

Methodology

Data collection

In in-depth interview is a method of qualitative research that requires minimal participants as interaction can be fairly intense. According to Stacks and Hocking (1999), in-depth interviews are a one on one interpersonal transaction requiring respondents who are willing to have an open discussion regarding a particular subject or issue. The three general types of in-depth interviews include the informal conversational interview, the general interview guide approach, and the standardised open-ended interview (Marshall and Rossman, 1999, p.108). The general interview guide approach was adopted as it allowed the conversation to remain focused, allowed the interviewee to descriptively answer a set of pre-prepared questions, and partially met the aims of the dissertation.

In addition to the generic types of interviews that exist, there are five types of more specialised interviewing styles that a researcher can adopt to better achieve their aims. These include ethnographic interviewing, phenomenological interviewing, elite interviewing, focus group interviewing, and interviewing children (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). An elite interviewing style was
adopted as it focused on a particular type of interviewee. Marshall and Rossman define an ‘elite’ individual as one ‘considered to be influential, prominent, and/or well-informed person in an organisation or community [and] are selected for interviews on the basis of their expertise in areas relevant to the research’ (1999, p. 113). An elite interviewing style was also employed for the purpose of gaining information from the interviewees that would be deemed valuable to the empirical status of the proposition and the developed research questions.

Two ‘elite’ participants were recruited to participate in the in-depth interview. This was sufficient to receive meaningful data that provided partial answers to the research questions and partially achieved the aims of the thesis. It was also logical and judicious to engage only two persons as an in-depth interview is generally intense and requires a fair investment of time to analyse and record the data retrieved. Incidentally, the research did not aim to quantify or create and maintain statistical data. Rather, the in-depth interview instrument was used to provoke discussion with the participants surrounding the key research questions that eventually assisted in achieving the aims of the thesis.

Further, it is imperative to distinguish between the questions asked during the in-depth interview and the research questions as they can be deceivingly perceived as sharing a relationship. This is a common misconception, however, it is not practical as the two assume entirely different yet, at the same time, complementary roles. According to Maxwell, ‘research questions formulate what you want to understand [whereas] interview questions are what you ask people in order to gain that understanding’ (1996, p. 74). Therefore, it was imperative that the research questions served to create and maintain a framework for research while the interview questions served as part of the in-depth interview instrument utilised to gain answers to the research questions.

Essentially, the individually conducted interviews with a marketer and public relations practitioner sought to provide partial answers to the research questions set out for the dissertation while contributing to the discussion surrounding its key points and issues. In summation, the interviews aimed to establish a link between the research uncovered in theory and how that applied in the real world of public relations.

Data analysis

Data retrieved from the in-depth interview was analysed in the form of content analysis. The major advantages of content analysis include its ability to objectively and reliably describe a message or collection of messages, its ability to provide both logical and statistical bases for understanding how messages are created, and its ability to focus on the messages or themes produced thus acting as a bridging tool between both formal and informal methods of data analysis (Stacks, 2002, p. 108).
Content analyses was conducted on two significant levels, both were incorporated to ensure that analysis is balanced and complete. The first is known as manifest content where the items under analysis are blatantly obvious and lie on the surface of the content being analysed (Stacks and Hocking, 1999; Stacks, 2002). The second is recognised as latent content where attention is focused on the underlying meanings of the communication or messages being analysed (Stacks and Hocking, 1999; Stacks, 2002).

To begin analysis, recordings of both interviews were listened to carefully before compiling the transcripts. Notably, the content from each interview was analysed collectively once both interviews had been conducted in order to avoid the first interview reading bias the second one. Once the transcripts had been compiled, notes and memos were taken in order to begin categorising the themes and issues addressed by both interviewees. Subsequently, units of analysis were defined to identify the factors that will be counted and categorised. Most research utilise five units of analysis including word or symbol, character, measurement, item, and theme (Stacks, 2002, pp. 110–111). Once the units of analysis were selected accordingly, they were placed into categories that fulfilled the validity and reliability essential in analysis. In determining the validity and reliability of the category system, it was necessary to create categories that were clearly defined and met the requirements of a content analysis. A systematic category system was devised and then employed.

Results

RQ 1: Why should marketers employ public relations ahead of advertising in their marketing plans?

In current marketing practice, public relations typically receives limited budget allocations whilst advertising is allocated an exponential amount. In the six months leading to June 2005, advertising expenditure in Australia reached $4.5 billion with increased spending evident in newspapers, magazines, radio, outdoor, cinema, television, and online advertising (Advertising Federation of Australia 2005, p. 2). In the context of world advertising expenditure, $244 billion a year is spent in the United States. Hong Kong, Portugal, Hungary, Greece, and the Czech Republic are other countries who also rely on advertising as the key marketing activity. The United States remains a leader, however, accounting for approximately 44 per cent of the world’s total advertising expenditures (Ries and Ries 2002, pp. 8–7).

The research undertaken indicated that public relations should be implemented ahead of advertising as the latter has lost its effectiveness. This is due to increased cynicism and apathy amongst audiences and consumers and can no longer produce the results marketers have come to expect (Hallahan, 1999). Although exaggerated claims and excessive volumes are also contributing factors to the decline in advertising’s effectiveness, credibility is the fundamental
issue (Ries and Ries 2002, p. 73). According to Cameron (1994), low levels of 
credibility are attributed to low levels of certain dimensions of trustworthiness. 
Personal gain, intent to persuade, and bias of source are three dimensions of 
trustworthiness that have been found to be lower for advertising than for public 
relations (Cameron, 1994). Advertising is viewed as ‘a biased message paid for 
by a company with a selfish interest in what the consumer consumes’ (Ries and 
Ries 2002, p. 5). As advertising struggles to regain its credibility and audience 
loyalty, public relations has taken over the wheel in driving marketing plans 
towards success. Unlike advertising, public relations offers marketing initiatives 
an overwhelming amount of message credibility that ultimately leads to positive 
consumer perceptions and attitudes. Public relations techniques such as media 
releases, community events, opinions of influencers, and sponsorship are some 
of the ways public relations practitioners achieve message credibility.

Marketers should also employ public relations ahead of advertising 
due to its ability to influence and endorse both customer purchase and loyalty 
through its use of influential figures and influential media, ultimately resulting in 
a significant increase in sales. In the annual Public Relations Generally Accepted 
Practices (GAP) study conducted by the University of Southern California’s 
Strategic Public Relations Center, respondents indicated that ‘their CEOs 
believed that public relations is the number one contributor to organisational 
success, ahead of functions such as marketing, finance, legal, sales, and others’ 
(Weiner 2006, p. 24). Also, among the Fortune 1000 companies, ‘public relations 
is the only corporate function to have increased in value to the organisation in 
each year since the GAP study was initiated in 2002’ (Weiner 2006, p. 25). 
These responses support the research undertaken in this study that the potential 
and value of public relations is becoming recognised by some of the largest 
companies who are, arguably, seeking improved and effective ways to reach 
their target audiences. Therefore, advertising no longer possesses the level of 
power and influence that marketers and senior management once attributed to 
it.

Public relations, as opposed to advertising, allows marketers to create, 
maintain, and manage the relationships between an organisation and its consumers 
and stakeholders. In particular, communication is central to a functioning 
relationship, therefore organisations that foster the two-way symmetric model 
of communication are more than likely to retain customers and increase their 
value. Unlike advertising, the provision of a feedback channel in public relations 
allows stakeholders to communicate with an organisation, thus creating a group-
to-group line of communication.

Therefore, it is suggested that marketers should place public relations 
ahead of advertising in their marketing plans as it fares exceptionally well 
without the assistance of advertising which clearly does not possess the skills or 
qualities to supersede the specialisations and effectiveness of public relations. 
In essence, public relations has not only taken over the traditional activities
of advertising but has introduced a number of its own dimensions that are exceptionally capable of achieving marketing objectives and confirming their position within marketing plans.

RQ 2: How effective is public relations in persuading audiences and consumers to consider purchase of a product or service?

Marketers should not only view public relations as being effective in delivering results efficiently and economically, influencing brand loyalty and consumer trust, influencing purchase decisions, utilising influential figures and media, utilising various media channels, and building stakeholder relationships, but as being more effective in conveying messages than advertising.

To measure how effective public relations is in reaching audiences and consumers and driving them to the purchase path, a comparison must be made with advertising since academics generally compare the two communication tools when assessing brand information processing (c.f. Lord and Putrevu, 1993; Cameron, 1994; MacInnis et al., 1991). A set of properties will be identified from Lord and Putrevu (1993), to differentiate the abilities of advertising and public relations in effectively processing consumer motivation, opportunity, and ability; one way of establishing the effectiveness of public relations in reaching audiences and consumers and driving them to the purchase path.

The first issue is identified as opportunity for repetition. This provides a greater advantage to advertising as the only limit to the number of times an advertisement can be run is usually budget constraint and occasionally prime time space (Lord and Putrevu, 1993). Opportunity for repetition enhances accessibility as consumers are more than likely to have previously encountered the advertisement (Lord and Putrevu, 1993). Although advertising is more effective in obtaining repeated message exposure to consumers than public relations, it does not necessarily guarantee that a consumer has been persuaded or mobilised to the purchase path.

The second issue is comprehensibility of messages in such a way that ‘it engenders, reinforces, or modifies one’s beliefs relative to the topic of communication [implying] that the consumer is interpreting the message at some level’ (Lord and Putrevu, 1993, p. 65). Again, advertising brandishes an advantage over public relations as it has almost complete control of message content which facilitates comprehensibility (Lord and Putrevu, 1993); however, a consumer may not interpret the message as the advertiser intended nor is comprehensibility the sole agent of persuasion.

Lord and Putrevu suggest that intentional exposure is one of the key aspects where public relations is more influential than advertising (1993). They identified informational (to make better purchase decisions, to build a bank of information for future use) and hedonic (experience fun and pleasure) motivations for consumer information search (Lord and Putrevu, 1993). When a consumer
is seeking to satisfy either one or both motivations, they intentionally search for information which results in message elaboration and enhances persuasion (Lord and Putrevu, 1993). Essentially, consumers expose themselves to public relations messages with the intention of satisfying their cognitive, sensory, or emotional needs, thus public relations is effective in ‘reaching the consumer in a state of elevated involvement without having to rely on such strategies [as design and innovation] to induce a desired level of message-relevant cognition’ (Lord and Putrevu, 1993).

Distraction is identified as a property which hinders the information processing of advertisements as there are ‘many distracters that exist in the media environment—both from the relevant medium’s program or editorial content and advertising clutter’ (Lord and Putrevu, 1993). Also, consumers do not willingly allocate their attention to advertisements therefore they do not have a vested interest in the message content when they are incidentally exposed to them (Lord and Putrevu, 1993:69). However, distraction is not an impeding factor on a consumer’s ability to process public relations messages as the information is generally sought and willingly paid attention to.

Finally, emotional expressiveness differentiates the abilities and effectiveness of public relations and advertising in reaching audiences and consumers (Lord and Putrevu, 1993). Through its control of message content and use of artistic features, advertising is at an advantage to arouse a strong affective response from the viewer whereas arousal through public relations messages remain to the discretion of journalists (Lord and Putrevu, 1993). However, the affective response produced by public relations messages featured in the media evoke a stronger affective response than those of advertising as messages are elaborated causing information processing to be stimulated.

Source credibility is an enormous advantage for public relations and contributes greatly to its effectiveness in reaching audiences and consumers and driving them to the purchase path. Therefore, even if the motivation, opportunity, and ability to process a message is low, audiences and consumers will still form a perception of credibility in relation to the message if the source is credible.

Furthermore, public relations facilitates risk reduction for marketers (Lord and Putrevu, 1993). Considering its messages and sources are already perceived as credible, audiences and consumers require minimal justification of the accuracy and legitimacy of the content within, leading them to make risky purchase or informational decisions (Howell and Miller, 2006). This property conveys the influence that public relations possesses in effortlessly persuading audiences and consumers to the purchase path.

The research undertaken identified that advertising offers some advantages over public relations, it is apparent that the latter is especially effective in stimulating high levels of information processing that influence a consumer’s motivation, opportunity, and ability to process information that may or may not be relative to their current needs or wants. In addition to this, public
relations messages wield greater value and recall than advertisements that can potentially lead to attitude and perception change. Therefore, public relations is highly effective in persuading audiences and consumers to consider purchase of a product or service.

RQ 3: How does this research shape the future of public relations?

The constantly changing landscape of marketing will cause the traditional role of public relations to change in the near future due primarily to the ongoing proliferation and advancement of the media which, in effect, will make advertising less effective in reaching target audiences and public relations more effective in leading marketing plans. The research conducted has led to a number of factors that will not only shape the future of public relations as a profession but identify the areas in which it will evolve into marketing’s prime communication tool.

Some of the factors accounting for the increasing need of public relations include product proliferation, product commoditisation, decreasing brand loyalty, price sensitivity, increasing consumer demand and message clutter, rising costs and the need for accountability (Weiner, 2005). There is also increased fragmentation amongst audiences and increased levels of consumer apathy and cynicism.

Marketers are highly aware that they exist within a period where communication is imperative and the need for break-through communication techniques is high. In addition, they have reason to fret as their key communication tool, advertising, is clearly struggling to overcome this challenge. Coincidentally, many are beginning to notice the potential and ability of public relations in communicating in such a highly volatile environment and succeeding in surpassing the aforementioned obstacles.

This study found that public relations as a profession has a high chance of survival as it exploits various and innovative ways of communicating with audiences and consumers. The increasing need to form relationships with audiences and consumers will expand the role of public relations and possibly provide it with a secure future. Currently, audiences and consumers share an impersonal relationship with an organisation due to advertising’s one directional, top-down approach in communication. Public relations, however, exploits the two-way symmetric model, as described earlier, to allow for messages to travel from an organisation to their intended audiences and consumers and then back to the organisation through a feedback channel. In particular, public relations has the ability to communicate with audiences and consumers who are often ignored by organisations as they are not highly visible. Taaffe supports this notion by stating that the future of public relations is promising due to its ability to understand the conversation, to formulate the context for communication, to define the desired outcome, and to execute that outcome across multiple audiences and multiple channels (personal communication, 7 March 2006).
Therefore, it is sensible to assume that this factor partially shapes the future of public relations within the ever-changing communications environment.

Conversely, this research not only shapes the future of public relations from an external perspective but also from an internal perspective. Marketers will need to become more aware of the constantly changing communication environment that confronts their advertising messages and begin trusting the capabilities of public relations. A number of factors can be attributed to marketers' tentativeness to accept public relations as a functional and rewarding communication tool. Some of these factors include a lack of understanding of the profession; unrealised potential; difficulty to evaluate compared to advertising; and requires too much staff and time (Harris 1991, p. 5).

Additionally, there are a number of both internal and external concerns identified that require tackling in order for public relations to progress into the future as both a profession and highly effective communication tool. These concerns include internationalism, competition and specialisation, personnel development and recruiting, strategic expertise, relationship with advertising and marketing communications, evaluation of public relations' effectiveness, and adoption of new technology.

Essentially, this research shapes the future of public relations as it identifies issues of concern and areas of improvement. The factors mentioned and discussed convey the changing communication environment and the implications associated with it. It is clear that public relations is on the appropriate path to a promising future that will witness its well-deserved expansion and repositioning within marketing plans.

Conclusion

Due to the heavy proliferation of messages that audiences and consumers are exposed to daily, advertising, marketing's key communication tool has lost its effectiveness and can no longer produce the results marketers have come to expect. Operating in such an over-communicated environment, professions such as marketing are finding it increasingly difficult to communicate to a message-resistant society. This dilemma has worsened in the last decade or so as people have become more aware of the media's manipulating techniques and advertising's monotonous routine.

Public relations, as opposed to advertising, is marketing's best solution in communicating to this message-saturated society. Although public relations does have some disadvantages, such as lack of control over message content and visual appearance, it does have some overarching advantages, such as source and message credibility. In addition to this, public relations has the capacity to improve media involvement, provide successful delivery of targeted messages, influence opinion leaders and trendsetters, break through message clutter, and deliver techniques efficiently and economically.
While the future of public relations appears both optimistic and opportune, it will not be brought to fruition until marketers expand their current narrow view of public relations. Whichever direction it might assume, it appears impossible to deny that, from the research conducted, the position of public relations is to no longer be on the backburner of marketing plans but at the forefront.

References