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Critical Boundaries of Activism in Public Relations in Pakistan: A Comparative Analysis of Effects of Professional Practices

ABSTRACT

This paper explores that how do professional and craft public relations practices affect department level of involvement to deal with the activist pressure in public and private sector organizations in Pakistan. The effects of role and model preferences in Pakistan are discussed in the light of assumptions of excellence theory of public relations. Models preferences are discussed within the parameters of four western models including press a gentry, public information, two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical. Similarly, role preferences are elaborated within two major (manager and technician) and two minor roles (media relations and communication Liaison).

The population of interest are highest ranking public relations practitioners heading public relations departments in public and private sectors organizations in Pakistan. Data is

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collected through a national survey using a random sample of 101 practitioners.

Results support the major assumptions of the excellence theory. Although practitioners are using all four models as per their expertise to involve with the activist pressure but symmetrical communication proved comparatively most effective in dealing with activist pressure in public and private sector organizations in Pakistan.

Introduction

Any group consisting more than one person that has the potential to create effects or impact on any organization is called an activist group. Pressure tactics of activists' groups involve forces like edification, negotiation and persuasion to generate desire effects on organizations. Being an outside stimulus, activists' groups challenge organizational functioning to improve its policies and actions. On the other hand, public relations infrastructures within organizations offer their expertise as inside agents to improve organizational functioning. The corporations and government agencies do not want to surrender their autonomy while negotiating with the activist groups and thus activists' groups pose competitive threats and challenges to organizations in this market economy era (Grunig et al., 2003; Grunig, J., 2008; Grunig, J., & Grunig, L., 1992).

Public relations literature has elaborated different viewpoints about activism and activist pressure. Mostly shared views discuss the reasons behind the existence of

activist groups and the kind of threats they pose to corporations and government agencies. Obligations of public relations practitioners to ensure public interest while dealing with activism within organizations are also widely discussed. Activism as main paradigm of critical public relations and its recognition against mainstream corporate public relations is also one of the most sought subjects (Uysal &Yang, 2013; De Moya & Bravo, 2016).

Public relations set ups within organization employ different models to deal with the forces of activism. Larisa, A. Grunig (2013) examined and analyzed the ability of the four models of the excellence theory while observing the effects of activism in organizations. Her results proposed following assumptions:

a. Organizations feel hostility towards activists' groups and vice versa and similarly both blame media for providing advantage of coverage to the other.

b. Organizations accept the power of activist groups and their reputation is vulnerable to be damaged by the activists' groups.

c. Public relations tools are practiced by both activists' groups and organizations. But organizational engagement with public relations is more obvious and visible as compare to activist groups side.

d. Activist actions directly create pressure on organizational policy making process and there are few organizations those deny outside pressure of any group.

e. Organizations excessively employ Grunig and Hunt (1984) four models of public relations with varying combinations and tendencies to deal with activist groups.

f. Two-way symmetrical models are not the only choice by organizations while dealing with activists' pressure but

organizations employ any of the models as per their need and expertise.

g. Preference of two-way asymmetrical model by practitioners for issue management cannot be taken as a thumb rule as sometimes they rely on one-way models.

h. The results did not provide enough evidence to support or reject the rare position of two-way symmetrical model to be used effectively against pressure groups.

Thus, the relationship between activism and public relations was discussed during the assumptions of two-way symmetrical model in Excellence theory. This theory also discussed the possibilities of using a-symmetrical model when symmetrical communication failed to counter activist's concerns against corporate interests (Grunig et al., 2013; Grunig and Hunt, 1984; Grunig et al., 1995; Grunig et al., 2002; Grunig et al., 2003).

History of activism is rooted in the abolition movement of the 19th century (Heath, Toth & Waymer, 2009). Classical roots of activism in Pakistan can be linked to left wing movement of the decade of seventies (Mubarik, A., 2012). While the contemporary practices of activism are reflected by the Justice Movement at the start of the new millennium (Jammiluddin, Mufti, A., 2011). Coombs & Holladay (2012) elaborated characteristics of activism as main force of critical public relations and its differences from mainstream public relations. Further he threw light on the shift of the field of public relations from profitable to non-profitable status.

This paper elaborates how do professional models and roles practices by public relations departments/practitioners effect their level of involvement to deal outside activist pressure. Pakistan is a democracy with weak institutional infrastructures. Although the professional growth of public

relations field is on the rise in Pakistan but still most of the public relations departments within organizational setups have inappropriate professional structures. Due to lacking professional infrastructures of public relations, organizations in Pakistan are more vulnerable to deal with and survive against outside activist pressure. Although the public relations departments involve the outside activist groups to fulfill their organizational objectives but the success rate is not calculated using rational professional scales.

Professional and craft public relations practices are reflected in the light of the excellence theory. The excellences theory discusses the employment of four public relations models and four public relations roles. These four models included Press agentry, public information, two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical. Press agentry and public information models are referred as one-way models while two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical models are referred as symmetrical models (Grunig, J.,1976; Grunig, J.,1984; Grunig, J.,1997; Grunig, J., 2001). These four roles comprised manager, technician, media relations and communication liaison role. Professional public relations means practicing symmetrical models () and craft public relations means practicing one-way models and similarly manager role enactment is professional public relations while technician role enactment is craft public relations (Grunig et el, 2013; Broom & Dozier, 1986; Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2000; Dozier, M., 1984; Dozier & Broom, 1995).

RQ1: How do model usage and role adoption patterns affect departmental level of involvement with the activist group?

RQ2: How do experience and dealing with activist groups (level of activist pressure) differ in public and private sectors?

Methods

The population of interest are highest ranking public relations practitioners heading public relations departments in public and private sectors organizations in Pakistan. Data is collected through a national survey using a random sample. Total analyzable responses collected at the end of the survey were 101. Each model and role construct was made up of four items while activist pressure construct was consisted of eight items. Each item was answered on a five-point Likert scale.

Results and Analysis

RQ1: How do model usage and role adoption patterns affect departmental level of involvement with the activist group?

To explore the theoretical model explaining significant effects of model usage and role adoption patterns on departmental involvement with the activist pressure, one-way between-groups analysis of variance with post-hoc tests was conducted between model/roles constructs and involvement with activist pressure construct. Activist pressure construct was treated as dependent variables while model/ roles constructs were considered as independent variables. The results of the F-test clarified that when organizations/ practitioners employed any model/role, how did it affected their practical concerns and intensity of involvement with the activist group and in other words how successful or failed it proved against different aspects/activities/actions/measures (items) taken to deal with the activist pressure.

To meet the requirements of Anova, all model and role variable were transformed into categorical form using visual binning option in SPSS. All model and roles variables were divided into three categories each. Models variables categories included low or no usage (1. <= 2.97), moderate usage (2 = 2.98 - 3.99) and high usage (3= 4.00+). Similarly, roles variables categories included low or no adoption (1. <= 2.97), moderate adoption (2 = 2.98 - 3.99) and high adoption (3= 4.00+).

The results of one-way analysis of variance concluded that three models including press agentry, public information and two-way asymmetrical models (independent variables) were not significantly affecting PR departmental level of involvement with the activist group. Thus, out of four models, three models were insignificant with the dependent variable of involvement with the activist pressure. PR departmental level of involvement with the activist group was not dependent on the intensity of usage of these models.

The only model that was significantly affecting PR departmental level of involvement with the activist group was two-way symmetrical model. The significance level of two-way symmetrical model (F=3.658, p=.029) with the involvement of the activist group is interpreted in Table 1. There was a statistically significant difference at the p<.05 level in involvement with the activist scores for three categories of two-way symmetrical model usage. The effect size was calculated using eta squared and it was medium (.07). Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test specified that mean score for category 1 (M=3.22, SD=.81) was significantly different from mean score of category 3

(M=3.65, SD=.42). Category 2 (M=3.51, SD= .75) did not differ significantly from either category 1 or 3.

Thus, the public relations departments/ practitioners with high usage of two-way symmetrical model were more involved with the activist group as compare to public relations departments/ Practitioners with low or no usage of this model. Table 1.1. interpreted the post-hoc comparisons.

Table 1: One-way ANOVA between Involvement with the Activist Group and Two-way Symmetrical Model of Public Relations

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3.531	2	1.765	3.658	.029
Within Groups	47.297	98	.483		
Total	50.827	100			

Table 1.1. Multiple Comparisons for Dependent Variable: Involvement with the activist group
And Independent Variable: Two-way symmetrical model
Tukey HSD

(I) Two-Way Symmetrical Model of Public Relations (Binned)	(J) Two-Way Symmetrical Model of Public Relations (Binned)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound	95% Confidence Interval Upper Bound
1 <= 2.97	2 2.98 - 3.99	-.296	.169	.193	-.699	.107
	3 4.00+	-.428*	.164	.029	-.819	-.036
2 2.98 - 3.99	1 <= 2.97	.296	.169	.193	-.107	.699
	3 4.00+	-.132	.181	.748	-.563	.299
3 4.00+	1 <= 2.97	.428*	.164	.029	.036	.819
	2 2.98 - 3.99	.132	.181	.748	-.299	.563

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

To better explain more involvement of the public relations department with the activist group while high employment of two-way symmetrical model, one-way analysis of variance was conducted between categories of two-way symmetrical model usage (independent variable) and all items of involvement with the activist groups (dependent variables). Out of eight items of the involvement with the activist group, five items were significant at p<.05 level with the usage of two-way symmetrical models. These items included "my organization was successful at reaching its goal" (F= 2.419, p=.041), "my organization researched the activist group in our response to their pressure" (F=4.762, p=.011), "a special program was developed to respond to the activist group" (F=3.679, p=.029), "the activist group had direct involvement in planning our organization's response to them" (F=5.583. P=.005) and "my organization always evaluates its response to activist groups" (F=5.776, p=.004). The effect sizes calculated through eta squared for these five items were small including .02, .04, .03, .05 and .05 respectively.

The post-hoc comparisons calculated through Tukey HSD specified that the mean score of item "my organization was successful at reaching its goal" was significantly different for category 1 (M=3.79, SD= .90) and category 3 (M=4.13, SD=.43). It concluded that public relations departments/ practitioners with high usage of two-way symmetrical model were more significantly successful in accomplishing their organizational goals against activist pressure than those with low or no usage of the model.

The mean score of item "my organization researched the activist group in our response to their pressure" was significantly different for category 1 (M=3.12, SD= 1.29) and category 2(M=3.79, SD=1.07) and category 1(M=3.12, SD= 1.29) and category 3 (M=3.81, SD= .75). It determined that public relations departments/practitioners with moderate and high usage of two-way symmetrical model were more significantly involved in researching activist pressure to better respond than those with low or no usage of the model.

The mean score of item "a special program was developed to respond to the activist group" was significantly different for category 1 (M=3.12, SD= 1.45) and category 3(M=3.87, SD=.67). It determined that public relations departments/practitioners with high usage of two-way symmetrical model were more significantly involved in developing a special program to respond to activist group than those with low or no usage of the model.

The mean score of item "the activist group had direct involvement in planning our organization's response to them" was significantly different for category 1 (M=2.50, SD=1.25) and category 2 (M=3.18, SD=1.06) and category 1(M=2.50, SD=1.25) and category 3(M=3.26, SD=.77).

It determined that public relations departments/ practitioners with moderate and high usage of two-way symmetrical model were more significantly involving the activist group in planning organizational response than those with low or no usage of the model.

Table 1.2: One-way ANOVA between Involvement with the Activist Group items and Two-way Symmetrical Model of Public Relations

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
"My organization has received tremendous pressure from outside activist groups	Between Groups	2.656	2	1.328	1.302	.277
	Within Groups	99.978	98	1.020		
	Total	102.634	100			
The activist group was successful at reaching their goal."	Between Groups	.168	2	.084	.077	.926
	Within Groups	107.000	98	1.092		
	Total	107.168	100			
"My organization was successful at reaching its goal."	Between Groups	2.727	2	1.363	2.419	.041
	Within Groups	55.234	98	.564		
	Total	57.960	100			
"The entire organization, including senior management and other employees, was involved in the response to the activist group."	Between Groups	2.088	2	1.044	.897	.411
	Within Groups	114.070	98	1.164		
	Total	116.158	100			
"My organization researched the activist group in our response to their pressure."	Between Groups	11.270	2	5.635	4.762	.011
	Within Groups	115.958	98	1.183		
	Total	127.228	100			
"A special program was developed to respond to the activist group."	Between Groups	10.276	2	5.138	3.679	.029
	Within Groups	136.853	98	1.396		
	Total	147.129	100			
"The activist group had direct involvement in planning our organization's response to them."	Between Groups	12.824	2	6.412	5.583	.005
	Within Groups	112.543	98	1.148		
	Total	125.366	100			
"My organization always evaluates its response to activist groups."	Between Groups	12.780	2	6.390	5.776	.004
	Within Groups	108.408	98	1.106		
	Total	121.188	100			

The mean score of item "my organization always evaluates its response to activist groups" was significantly different for category 1(M=3.19, SD=1.23) and category 3 (M=4.03, SD=.60). It determined that public relations departments/ practitioners with high usage of two-way symmetrical model were more significantly involved in evaluating their response to activist pressure than those with low or no usage of the model.

The results of one-way analysis of variance also concluded that three roles including technician, manager and media relations roles (independent variables) were not significantly affecting PR departmental level of involvement with the activist group. Thus, out of four roles, three roles were insignificant with the dependent variable of involvement with the activist pressure. PR departmental level of involvement with the activist group was not dependent on the intensity of engagement of these roles.

Table 1.3: One-way ANOVA between Involvement with the Activist Group and Communication Liaison Role of Public Relations

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	5.343	2	2.672	5.757	.004
Within Groups	45.484	98	.464		
Total	50.827	100			

Table 1.3. interpreted that communication liaison role was significant (F=5.757, p=.004) with the involvement with the activist group. There was a statistically significant difference at the p<.005 level in involvement with the activist scores for three categories of communication liaison role adoption. The effect size was calculated using eta squared and it was large (.1). Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey

HSD test specified that mean score for category 1 (M=2.93, SD= .54) was significantly different from mean score of category 3 (M=3.59, SD= .76). Category 2 (M=3.39, SD= .59) did not differ significantly from either category 1 or 3.

Thus, the public relations departments/ practitioners with high adoption of communication liaison role were more involved with the activist group as compare to public relations departments/Practitioners with low or no adoption of this role. Table 1.4. interpreted the post-hoc comparisons.

Table 1.4: Multiple Comparisons between Dependent Variable: Involvement with the activist group and Independent Variable: Communication Liaison Role *Tukey HSD*

(I) Communication Liaison Role of Public Relations (Binned)	(J) Communication Liaison Role of Public Relations (Binned)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1 <= 2.97	2 2.98 - 3.99	-.46563	.21318	.079	-.9730	.0417
	3 4.00+	-.66991*	.19884	.003	-1.1431	-.1967
2 2.98 - 3.99	1 <= 2.97	.46563	.21318	.079	-.0417	.9730
	3 4.00+	-.20428	.15198	.374	-.5660	.1574
3 4.00+	1 <= 2.97	.66991*	.19884	.003	.1967	1.1431
	2 2.98 - 3.99	.20428	.15198	.374	-.1574	.5660

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

To better explain more involvement of the public relations department with the activist group while high adoption of communication liaison role, one-way analysis of variance was conducted between categories of communication liaison role (independent variable) and all items of involvement with the activist groups (dependent variables). Out of eight items of the involvement with the activist group, four items were significant at p<.05 level with the adoption of communication liaison role. These items included "my organization researched the activist

group in our response to their pressure" (F=6.070, p=.003), "a special program was developed to respond to the activist group" (F=15.127, p=.000), "the activist group had direct involvement in planning our organization's response to them" (F=3.459, p=.035) and "my organization always evaluates its response to activist groups" (F=10.471, p=.000). The effect sizes calculated through eta squared for three items were large including .10, .20 and .17 respectively. The effect size for item "the activist group had direct involvement in planning our organization's response to them" was medium (.06).

The post-hoc comparisons calculated through Tukey HSD specified that the mean score of item "my organization researched the activist group in our response to their pressure" was significantly different for category 1 (M=2.67, SD=1.05) and category 2(M=3.50, SD=1.14) and category 1(M=2.67, SD=1.05) and category 3 (M=3.76, SD=1.04). It was determined that public relations departments/ practitioners with moderate and high adoption of communication liaison role were more significantly involved in researching activist pressure to better respond than those with low or no adoption of this role.

The mean score of item "a special program was developed to respond to the activist group" was significantly different for category 1 (M=2.13, SD=.92) and category 2(M=3.44, SD=1.24) and category 1 (M=2.13, SD=.92) and category 3(M=3.85, SD=1.00). It was determined that public relations departments/practitioners with moderate and high adoption of communication liaison role were more significantly involved in developing a special program to respond to activist group than those with low or no adoption of this role. The mean score of item "the activist group had direct involvement in planning our organization's response to them" was significantly different for category 1 (M=2.40, SD=1.12) and category 3(M=3.17, SD=1.16). It was determined that public relations departments/practitioners with moderate and high employment of communication liaison role were more significantly involving the activist

group in planning organizational response than those with low or no adoption of this role.

The mean score of item "my organization always evaluates its response to activist groups" was significantly different for category 1(M=2.47, SD=1.36) and category 2 (M=3.53, SD=1.08) and category 1(M=2.47, SD=1.36) and category 3(M=3.81, SD=.85).

Table 1.5: One-way ANOVA between Involvement with the Activist Group Items and Communication Liaison Role of Public Relations

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
"My organization has received tremendous pressure from outside activist groups."	Between Groups	.525	2	.263	.252	.778
	Within Groups	102.108	98	1.042		
	Total	102.634	100			
"The activist group was successful at reaching their goal."	Between Groups	1.479	2	.740	.686	.506
	Within Groups	105.689	98	1.078		
	Total	107.168	100			
"My organization was successful at reaching its goal."	Between Groups	.579	2	.289	.494	.611
	Within Groups	57.381	98	.586		
	Total	57.960	100			
"The entire organization, including senior management and other employees, was involved in the response to the activist group."	Between Groups	.121	2	.061	.051	.950
	Within Groups	116.037	98	1.184		
	Total	116.158	100			
"My organization researched the activist group in our response to their pressure."	Between Groups	14.024	2	7.012	6.070	.003
	Within Groups	113.204	98	1.155		
	Total	127.228	100			
"A special program was developed to respond to the activist group."	Between Groups	34.706	2	17.353	15.127	.000
	Within Groups	112.423	98	1.147		
	Total	147.129	100			
"The activist group had direct involvement in planning our organization's response to them."	Between Groups	8.266	2	4.133	3.459	.035
	Within Groups	117.100	98	1.195		
	Total	125.366	100			
"My organization always evaluates its response to activist groups."	Between Groups	21.338	2	10.669	10.471	.000
	Within Groups	99.850	98	1.019		
	Total	121.188	100			

It was determined that public relations departments/ practitioners with moderate and high adoption of communication liaison role were more significantly involved in evaluating their response to activist pressure than those with low or no adoption of this role.

RQ2: How do experience and dealing with activist groups (level of activist pressure) differ in public and private sectors?

The results of the independent sample T-test concluded that the volume of activist pressure and intensity of experiences with it remains same across public and private sector organizations in Pakistan. The scores of activist pressure resulted in no significant differences for public-sector organizations (M=3.40, SD=.82) and private-sector organizations (M=3.46, SD=.60; t (91.436) = -.374, p=.709 (two-tailed) in Pakistan.

Table 2: Independent Sample T-Test for Level of Activist Pressure and Organizational Sector (Public/Private)

Equal variances not assumed	N	Mean	SD	T	Df	Sig (2-tailed)
	101	-.05	.14	-.374	91.436	.709

Discussion and Conclusion

Activists pose similar kind of threats to public and private sector organizations in Pakistan. Public relations departments also have to absorb similar amount of activist pressure. Response from majority (72%) of the PR departments reflected that activists' groups pose tremendous pressure on these departments. Likewise, majority of the departments (89%)

believed that their success rate is better to attain their organizational objectives against activists' goals. Only a less number of departments (21%) were of the view that activist's groups remain successful to achieve their goals. Slightly, more half number of departments (59%) were of the view that "entire organization, including senior management and other employees, remain involved in dealing with activist group". Similarly, more than half number of the departments (59%) replied that "our organization investigates the activist group in our response to their pressure". Fifty-eight % of the departments answered that "they develop a special program against activist pressure". Thirty-one % of the departments responded that "the activist group has direct involvement in planning our organization's response to them". Fifty-five % of the departments responded that "they always evaluate their response to activist groups".

To counter pressure from outside activists' groups, Grunig and Hunt's (1992) four models are employed by PR departments in Pakistan. Out of four models, three models (press agentry, public information and two-way asymmetrical) are insignificant with the involvement of public relations department with activist group. Thus, variations in the usage of these models do not affect the level of involvement with the activist pressure.

The only model that produces significant effects on the level of involvement with the activist pressure is two-way symmetrical model. Two-way symmetrical model is considered the most efficient against activist pressure. high usage of two-way symmetrical model to deal with the activist pressure results in more success of organizational objectives while low or no usage results in less and no success. Thus, PR departments employing two-way symmetrical model are

significantly more successful in dealing with the activists' groups than PR departments with less or no employment of this model. PR departments employing two-way symmetrical model are significantly more successful because they generate significantly more research based activities to identify and tackle activist group, produce and implement significantly more research oriented programs, involve with the activists group in a more significantly direct way and evaluate their response significantly more rationally than PR departments with less or no employment of two-way symmetrical model.

It can be concluded that employment of two-way symmetrical model by PR departments in Pakistan to deal with activist pressure is major justification behind their success to gain their objectives against activism. But employment of one-way models by PR departments in Pakistan to deal with the activist pressure becomes a reason for failure against activist pressure. Results indicate that activist pressure can be effectively dealt by applying two-way symmetrical model and in other words activist pressure acts as a stimulus to force organization to employ excellent public relations (Grunig, 2013).

The results of this paper can be related with Larisa, A. Grunig (2013) assumptions. Activists groups can potentially damage organizational reputation and prestige of organizations in Pakistan by poisoning public opinion against them.

Activist activities have a direct effect on organizational image in Pakistan and there are few organizations those do not feel difficulty in facing outside pressure of any group. Organizations in public and private sectors in Pakistan do employ Grunig and Hunt (1984) four models of public

relations with varying combinations and tendencies to deal with activist groups. Two-way symmetrical models are not the preferred choice of organizations in Pakistan to counter activists pressure but they prefer use any of the models as per their need and expertise.

The results of this paper also contributed that the only significant role in organizations in Pakistan that is efficient and effective in dealing with the activist pressure is communication liaison role. More intensive employment of communication liaison role by public PR departments secure more effective results against activist pressure than low or no engagement of this. The justifications for this compatible effectiveness are more departmental involvement in research based tasks, more implementation of specific programs, more proactive planning about activist groups and more proactive evaluation of departmental action before implementation against activist group targeting. The results also concluded that technician, manager and media relations roles are potentially insignificant for countering the activist pressure. The PR departmental effectiveness is not dependent on the high or low engagement with these roles.

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