

Tracking Social and Digital Media Use in Public Relations Practice: An Annual Longitudinal Analysis Study

Paper presented to the 19th Annual IPRRC, Coral Gables, Florida, March 4, 2016.

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- This is a report of our 11th annual study examining how social and other digital technologies are impacting public relations practice. Our methodology involves a web-based survey that's part of a longitudinal trend analysis. Our data set includes more than 4,600 respondents since our first published report in 2006; more than 3,700 since we dramatically revised our questionnaire in 2009; and nearly 3,200 since we started asking questions about Facebook and Twitter in 2010.
- Our 2016 analysis is based on 412 usable responses and results show public relations practitioners continue to agree strongly (and more so year after year) that social and other digital media are changing the way public relations is practiced. This impact continues to be much more pronounced for external than internal audiences. Our major finding this year are:
 - The amount of time public relations practitioners are spending working with digital media has increased considerably within the past year. In 2015, 29% of our survey respondents spent more than 25% of their working hours with blogs and social media. In 2016 that percentage increased to 38%.
 - The public relations or communications function is primarily responsible for monitoring and managing digital media communication in 64% of the companies affiliated with this year's 412 respondents. This figure remains relatively unchanged over the past three years.
 - Each year, subjects in this research project are asked how frequently they access a number of social networking, micro-blogging and video sharing sites as part of their work in public relations. Respondents are specifically instructed not to count time spent for personal use.
 - We've been asking this question annually for the past seven years and Facebook has been the most frequently used site every year except 2014. Facebook ranked as the most frequently used of these sites again in 2016 with a mean score of 4.32, a considerable increase in frequency of use over last year when the mean was 4.15.
 - Twitter placed second in this tally in 2016 with a 4.19 mean score. LinkedIn was third at 3.58, YouTube was fourth at 3.48 and Instagram wound up fifth at 3.39.
 - Each year we ask several questions about how research, measurement and evaluation are being used in the digital space. Last year we were excited to report that (for the first time since we started asking these questions in 2009) more than half of the organizations represented by our respondents were measuring what members of various strategic publics have communicated about them via digital media. Unfortunately, in 2016 that measurement use figure fell to 49%.
 - We also ask questions about specific use of public relations research, measurement and evaluation in the digital space. Results show, most of the measurement currently taking place focuses on outputs and content analysis with only about one-quarter of the organizations employing outcome-based methodologies.
- Of this year's respondents, 17% were employed by PR agencies, 16% worked in corporate PR, 13% percent held non-teaching positions in education, 13% came from government, another 20% worked the non-profit PR sector, five percent came from health care and nine percent answered "other" to this question. The 2016 gender breakdown was 68% female and 32% male. In terms of age this year, 13% were younger than 30, 25% were between 30 and 39, 20% fell in the 40-to-49 age category, 23% were 50-to-59 and 10% were 60 or older.

