Training for Media and Public Relations: Challenges of the Modernization Era

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Abstract: The article analyzes the key tasks of training specialists in the field of communication. The authors consider the results of research in the professional environment and among students, analyze the possibilities of digital technologies in the development of the specialty. The result of the article is a comprehensive model of digital resource aimed at improving the quality of information interaction between public relations and media communications, expanding the knowledge and skills of communicators, the formation of an information base and professional community for the development of specialists in the field of communications, increasing the efficiency of their activities, increasing public importance and relevance of the profession in the new conditions of the digital economy.

Key words: digital economy, media communications, public relations, educational environment, digital resource, communication code, professional communications.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the process of transition to a digital economy, communications have not only retained their importance, but have also become the basis for the development of a range of professional competencies that aspire to recognition in the professions of the future. Communications, as a type of active interaction between objects, implies an unconditional exchange of information. But who should become a creator, mediator and communicator in the digital economy? Klaus Schwab, a Swiss economist, founder and president of the World Economic Forum in Davos, stated the need for rapid changes that would change not only the labor market, but also the format of activity itself, transform the approach to the time and space of professional interaction. [1], [2]. Based on the analysis of the professional and creative development of students and graduates of the Advertising and Public Relations department of Peter the Great Polytechnic University in a survey conducted in 2018-2019 [3], as well as the views of the expert community "#prsph"[4], the following trends can be noted in the field of modern communication:

1. Transformation of the communication space in the conditions of modernization of all spheres of activity
2. Digitalization of the communication space and creation of new interaction tools
3. Expanding the multitasking of communication activities while increasing and detailing the requirements for highly specialized niches
4. Crisis of mono-professions in the field of communication activities
5. The need to develop new approaches to training future media professionals based on the current requirements of the state, business and society
6. Synthesis of competences and disciplines in the field of communications
In this regard, the most important issue for understanding the future development of the professional community in Russia is the key views analysis of target audiences on the problem of formation of a new approach to training new specialists in the digital economy.

The key problem, according to the authors of the study, is also the lack of a common "communication code" – terminological and cultural space, on the basis of which a communication model of experience transfer from modern specialists to students undergoing training in the field of media communications and public relations can be built.

The hypothesis of the research is the following statement: despite all the opportunities provided by modern electronic resources and the information society, in the presence of common professional goals, objectives and interests, media and public relations specialists do not have professional specialized resources for knowledge exchange. This hinders not only the professional development of specialists in the new market conditions, where the "long life learning" paradigm is becoming more and more evident, but also the formation of an effective professional community, as well as the development of unified standards of professional activity and socialization of new personnel [5].

In general, the formation of a communicative culture and competence of specialists in the field of public relations technologies presupposes a comprehensive and systematic knowledge, both humanities and natural sciences. That is why one of the urgent tasks of modern higher education is to introduce the fundamentals of the communication theory into the educational standard of the complex of disciplines of the communication cycle.

Creating a model of a holistic, dynamic, but controversial world puts forward increased requirements for information support of future specialists at all stages of a career, starting with the process of acquiring competencies, knowledge and skills in the course of training. It can be noted that digital technologies allow us to look at the issue of knowledge acquisition in a new way, including through self-educational and group practices. Teleconferences, web forums, social and industry networks, professional specialised e-tourism, media (online and offline) and digital libraries complement the opportunities for immersion in the profession. They also contribute to the self-organization of professional communities, scale, and time savings, and provide effective feedback.

The aim of the study is to analyze the need to create a platform for researchers and students in the field of media communications and public relations. The analysis of the data obtained in the course of the study will enable the development and creation of a platform model and criteria for selecting the content needed to fill this resource.

The modern professional community in the field of public relations and media communications is characterized by a peculiar division of professional corporate culture into desired and real one, and channels for exchange of professional information and skills into formal and informal ones. An additional factor is the systemic gap between the knowledge, skills and abilities of professionals trained at universities and the requirements of senior colleagues and employers. In order to formulate communications within the professional community through the proposed resource project, the following questions should be answered (Table 1).

| Question                        | Answer                                                                 | Answer characteristic                                                                 |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| What is the target audience of the project | A group of individuals with characteristics set at the start of the project: demographic, social, professional | Gender, age, length of service, level of education, position, specialization, geographical origin |
| What needs the project closes   | Information gap between the theoretical block and practical activities | List of the main problems that the project should solve                                  |
The integration of Russia into the global post-industrial society, the state’s goals to preserve and increase the influence of our country at the world level, to increase non-resource exports and create innovative products in all sectors indicate a new level of need for high-quality, systematic and systematic communication with various target audiences: within the business environment, within the framework of social initiatives, between the state and business [6].

With the development of digital technology, the range of skills that are required for modern communicators from the very first steps in the profession is expanding. In accordance with the Federal State Educational Standard of Higher Professional Education in the field of “Advertising and Public Relations” [7], “the field of professional activity of graduates who have mastered the undergraduate program includes communication processes in interpersonal, social, political, economic, cultural, educational and scientific fields; techniques and technologies of mass, business and personal communications; technologies and techniques for promoting the competitive properties of goods, services, commercial companies, non-profit and public organizations, government bodies and institutions, their positioning in a market environment; public opinion”. A wide range of competencies, we emphasize – both professional and managerial – is required already at the basic level of mastering the profession: from undergraduate graduates [8].

According to paragraph 4.4 of the Federal State standard, “A graduate who has mastered the undergraduate program, in accordance with the type (s) of professional activity, which the undergraduate program is oriented, should be ready to solve the following professional tasks: organizational and management activities:
  • participation in the management, planning and organization of work of advertising services and public relations services of the company and organization;
participation in the formation of effective internal communications, the creation of a favorable psychological climate in the team;

**Project Activities:**
- participation in the design of programs and individual events in the field of advertising and public relations, providing tools and methods for implementing projects, participation in organizing the work of project teams;
- preparation of design and related documentation (feasibility study, terms of reference, business plan, creative brief, agreement, contract, contract);

**Communication Activities:**
- participation in the creation of an effective communication infrastructure of the organization, ensuring internal and external communication, including with state bodies, public organizations, commercial structures, the media;
- participation in the formation and maintenance of corporate culture;

**Promotional Activities:**
- development, preparation for release, production and distribution of advertising products, including text and graphic, working and presentation materials in the framework of traditional and modern means of advertising;
- market research and forecasting and analytical activity;
- participation in the organization and conduct of marketing and sociological research;
- writing analytical reports, reviews and forecasts;

**Information Technology Activities:**
- participation in the development, preparation for the production, production and distribution of promotional products, including text and graphic, working and presentation materials;
- participation in the preparation of the project and related documentation related to advertising campaigns and individual events (feasibility study, terms of reference, business plan, creative brief, agreement, contract, contract);
- participation in the design and technological support of ongoing projects”.

But the need for continuous training, development of competencies, the development of new technological tools, a cross-functional approach to their development are tasks that are no less important for mature specialists [9].

The structure of intra-community interactions is becoming increasingly complex, having a direct impact on the formation of the professional discourse of communicators. The term “communicator” is increasingly replacing the classic “PR specialist,” “journalist,” and “marketer.” This rethinking, as authors think, will help to more clearly define the responsibilities, competencies and capabilities of communicators, as well as the value of their work: creating and managing a communication space to solve a wide range of tasks that require interaction between different parties, whether the brand and its consumers or the state and its citizens.

Moreover, the communicative space in which the communicator operates is highly dynamic, and its nature is increasingly synthetic. Following the changes in the social, technological and informational spheres is becoming increasingly difficult. The principles of cross-functionality, laid down in a professional standard, correlate with the real requirements that the market imposes on the communicator: quickly understand global and industry trends, be able to analyze information, proactively approach the construction of a communication system, manage it taking into account the external and internal context (public or corporate). However, there is a flip side: a fuzzy understanding of the communicator’s role in the modern economy and society, the unstated value that the communicator creates from the target audiences’ point of view forms a distorted idea of the profession, both from the side of the employers’ requirements for communication specialists, and from the side of payment for their labor.

The development of a professional communicator is impossible without studying the humanitarian and technical fields: from philosophy, psychology, sociology and linguistics to political science, marketing and management. Relating to the sphere of social interactions, communication is a synthesis of information, communication, organizational and activity technologies, where the object of influence is a person – individual or collective. Modern technologies take this interaction to a new level at once according to
several criteria: efficiency, breadth of coverage, the possibility of analysis, scenario modeling and strategic
design.

All this leads the communicator to the need for continuous professional development in several
areas at once:

- skills / competencies (including management, planning, analysis skills),
- knowledge (updationandaddition),
- soft skills (cross-cultural and interpersonal interactions, critical thinking, quick adaptation to
changes, teamwork and leadership skills).

“The analysis of innovative activities in the field of Public Relations allows us to highlight socially
significant communicative skills: orientational, information-analytical, prognostic, polemic, visual-
presentational, creative, reflective. Public relations as a technology for the implementation of interaction in
society includes the development of communicative skills that are adequate for the innovative activities of
future specialists in communicative and problematic situations, activating the corporate-role nature of
educational and cognitive activities”[10].

Knowledge of innovative ways of interaction, the ability to work with a wide range of tools and
communication channels, flexibly combine them and evaluate the effect are key characteristics of a
professional communicator. However, the amount of knowledge is constantly growing, and given the
intensity of his work, the communicator often faces the need to learn new information or a tool as soon as
possible.

And here we faced a fundamental problem of the XXI century – the diffic ulty of validating
knowledge. For the above reasons, scientific institutions cease to be "the ultimate truth." The availability
of knowledge and their multidimensionality has led to the fact that the criterion of knowledge itself is
substantially blurred. With regard to the practical activities of the communicator, this means that it is very
difficult to choose really useful material for self-education, quick development of a new field or solving a
specific problem. Especially for young professionals who still cannot sufficiently use critical thinking and
their own experience. “Over the last two decades, public relations scholarship has extended into other
arenas, drawing on perspectives from new scholarly fields (e.g. digital media and network theory, political
economy, cultural studies, institutional theory), but also extending its purchase on critical theory that was
already in play (e.g. feminism, critical race theory, sociology of media, organizational
communication)”[11].

In this situation, the creation of a professional specialized resource and the scientific community
on its basis seems to be one of the effective solutions to resolve the problem of the professional development
of communicators in both practical and scientific fields of activity. The nesessivity to create such a resource
was discussed, in particular, at the first Communication Forsyth of the professional community #prspb,
held in April 2019. This idea can be implemented in the format of the PRwiki project, on which the authors
of the article as part of the working group work.

2. MATERIALS AND RESULTS

In order to confirm the justification for the need to create the PRwiki information resource from
05/20/19 to 06/30/2019, a sociological study was conducted on an online platform in two segments:
members of the professional community #prspb and students, studying in the field of Advertising and Public
Relations in St. Petersburg Polytechnic University from 1 to 4 courses undergraduate. In the survey
“PRwiki and new knowledge: how, when and where to study professional” 87 respondents took part, which
made up a sample of 10% of the total number of the survey target audience (Table 2).

Table 2
Criteria for assessing communicative effectiveness in relation to the survey

| Criteria                                                                 | Details                                                                 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Mass character                                                        |                                                                         |
| 2. Completeness of answers                                               |                                                                         |
| 3. Number of answers to additional questions                              |                                                                         |
| 4. Relevance of the target audience                                      |                                                                         |
| 5. Publication of results                                                 |                                                                         |
| 6. Projective KPI                                                         |                                                                         |
| Generalization and transfer of professional experience, skills and abilities, corporate culture from specialists in a specific subject area or related fields to other specialists or students |                                                                         |

As a result of the study, it turned out that 28% of respondents with experience in the profession up to 3 years and 25% of respondents with experience of more than 5 years note a lack of professional knowledge. The reasons indicated are the high dynamics of changes in the market of communication services and the emergence of new technologies in the field of advertising and PR, and, as a result, the need for permanently independent expansion of knowledge in professional fields.

Figure 1. Work experience in the field of communications

The survey also showed that for the vast majority of respondents (83.9%), reading is the main way to obtain, and most importantly, to assimilate information.

Figure 2. The preferred format for obtaining information.
Among other sources of information, the survey participants identified trainings, master classes, lectures, professional meetings (meet-ups), online training (e-learning).

The need for a modern communications specialist to study areas of knowledge that are not part of the classical concept of PR is due to the diversity of employers' requirements for the specialist's competencies for a position related to communication activities.

The study found that 59.8% of respondents consider as necessary to study the construction of creative concepts for their professional development, for 58.6% of respondents the skill of representing the brand in social networks is important, and for 52.9% – the development of promotion strategies (for this question each respondent could give up to 3 answer options).

In the question about key areas that PR specialists consider important for their professional growth, the following most frequent answers were highlighted:
1. project management;
2. SMM, SERM;
3. development of strategies.

Respondents note that there is a lot of information on the above topics, but it is not structured. Therefore, it is very difficult to understand what is worth studying and what is not, especially for young specialists due to lack of experience.

Figure 4. Directions in the field of communications, identified by respondents as priority for personal professional development.

For more than 50% of respondents, business conferences and scientific events are a source for acquiring new knowledge and opportunities to communicate in a professional and scientific environment. So, 60.9% of respondents attend professional conferences on the topic of PR and communications. The following events were included in the list of popular events among prspb participants over the past year:
- Specialized conferences of universities (St. Petersburg State University, Polytechnic University, Higher School of Economics, ITMO);
- Days of PR RASO;
- Digitale;
- Digital Spring;
- Professional community meetings #prspb

To the question “What helps to gain new knowledge, which tools do you use, where do you find time?” Many respondents answered that in order to save time, they read or listen to relevant materials on the move: on the way to work or school, while doing household chores, sports and etc.

Respondents also noted the effectiveness, assessed by the time, quality and practicality of knowledge obtained in the study of other people's experience, successful cases and automation tools.

The results of the study confirmed the hypothesis of the need to create PRwiki - a single professional information resource for communications professionals. The project team has already developed a prototype of the project’s web resource structure, formulated topics, and prepared texts for publication on the resource page. However, to achieve this goal, the project team has to solve a number of important tasks:
1. determination of the criteria for evaluating information,
2. copyright compliance,
3. the implementation of moderation,
4. the choice of a technological platform for a future resource,
5. development of principles for forming an expert community, etc.

3. DISCUSSION

The dynamic process of the world economy transformation, in which the trends of globalization and digitalization are especially significant, is changing the requirements for communication at all levels. The distinction between b2c and b2b is erased, new forms of interaction between citizens and the state arise (non-profit organizations, volunteer projects, reform initiatives), and traditional models of interpersonal interaction change. The industry 4.0 paradigm[12], in which the world economy is developing today, has enforced tensions between society and entrepreneurs - in particular, business is making more and more serious complaints about the quality of graduate’s skills and competencies (according to the Higher School of Economics, 83% of surveyed employers give this assessment). The employer's investments in the adaptation of a new employee, including in the field of corporate communications, can be described with the following formula:

\[(\text{Payroll} + \text{taxes} + \text{organizational expenses}) \times 12 \text{ months}].\]

The second important factor in the transformation of the profession as a communicator is a change in the media space: crisis in traditional media, the emergence of new media formats (websites, social networks, instant messengers), their mass availability. The task of involving the target audience in communication is complicated by the fact that communication becomes omnichannel, and the communicator is required to be able to form optimal communication strategies for fulfilling the assigned tasks. With the digitalization of the economy and public relations, the importance of communication as a tool for management and marketing, public opinion management, and feedback is being strengthened. Issues of compliance of educational practices with the requirements of the time are considered in a number of articles of the communication profile [13], [14].

Institutionalization of the industry requires not only high-quality processing and systematization of large amounts of data, but also the search for ways of interaction of all interested parties, their integration and cooperation in the network space. Russia is actively moving along the path of development and application of Internet technologies for organizing professional communications for present and future specialists in the field of public relations, advertising, marketing, etc.

Network space is changing the way students and industry professionals interact in a dynamic communication environment. Today, a number of products are already in place that are designed to support communities of practice. Their main goal is not only to increase the value of professional discussions, but also to inform all participants about different opinions, offering a common platform for the exchange of ideas. So, over the past decade, a number of resources important for the industry have appeared, including the Pressfeed portal and the Deadline.media resource, similar in functionality, the Mediabitch portal, Martekh IT marketing club, St. Petersburg Community of PR Professionals #prspb and others.

In this regard, the problems of professionalization and training of modern communication specialists are being updated. Professional requirements for young professionals undergo constant transformation. Crisis phenomena in the Russian and world economies, in connection with which the promotion of products and services is carried out in conditions of growing competition and a lack of resources, determine the constant need for highly qualified PR specialists [15].

The key task today is to bridge the gap between theory and practice through the convergence of the educational and professional environments. Not only fundamental changes are required in the structure of the educational process itself, but also enhanced interaction between universities and industry and expert communities in solving educational, scientific and applied problems [16].

In Russia, the profession of a communicator or public relations specialist is at the stage of transition from pre-professional to professional status[17]. The task of the modern educational process is to provide this industry with an up-to-date and demanded base of knowledge, skills. Vocational training should include not only teaching the technical aspects of the profession, but also cultivating a wide range of interdisciplinary knowledge based on the skills of critical thinking and creative application. In the context of globalization, modern public relations specialists need to be prepared to solve problems related not only to interaction with domestic audiences, but also to communication with representatives of different...
countries and cultures, which necessitates the possession of professional information that is relevant to
global and global trends.

Professionalization largely determines the competitiveness of the national labor market, creating
additional competitive advantages, accumulating development potential and preventing crises in the
modern complex sphere of labor relations [18].

Despite the fact that today professionalization as a process lasts throughout life, the “student stage”
is especially important, during which the young man achieves self-actualization, forms professional self-
awareness, motivation to master a profession [19]. Additional relevance to the formation of new and active
strategies for the formation of integrated educational technologies is given by the requirements for
educational programs of related and other areas of education that require knowledge of public relations[20].

4. CONCLUSION

In recent years, the management of education and training has changed significantly under the
influence of electronic technology. The economic success of countries directly depends on the quality of
their training systems, and the most effective factor in production is capital, expressed by knowledge, which
is largely formed by the education system. Knowledge management in the scientific and professional
community requires an integrated and balanced approach using modern network tools and technologies,
improving the organizational structure, creating an atmosphere of openness and trust, constant and
systematic updating of all sections of the resource.

The feature and advantage of the new information product, developed by the authors of the project
of the PRwiki web platform, is the possibility of its constant modification and transformation in the
conditions of rapidly changing professional paradigms. PRwiki is a universal online resource that combines
the fundamental and modern works of foreign and domestic scientists, researchers, practitioners, analytical
studies, expert opinions of practitioners in the field of communications, as well as feedback mechanisms
with the audience.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the creation of such a corporate network resource is a process
in which intellectual and technological resources must be integrated. This factor leads to a high level of
risks that are both organizational and technological in nature. Such risks can concern both the project as a
whole, regardless of its subject area, and its individual stages. Possible risks at the stage of organization
and planning include: the novelty of the project, differences in the views of actors on the goals and
objectives of the resource, lack of material and technical support, fuzzy separation of responsibilities within
the project group, insufficient qualifications of participants, etc. Throughout the process, a risk management
plan is needed at each stage, which should be periodically updated. Monitoring and analytics of attendance
is required, which will ensure timely response to problems and challenges, helps to identify new risks in
the framework of this project activity.

Future research areas within the framework of the PRwiki project may be associated with the
creation of a portrait of a professional communicator based on a web platform, taking into account general
professional and universal competencies (knowledge, skills), as well as the development of career guidance
programs for all types and areas of training.

There are the results of a study in a professional communicator environment conducted by the PRwiki project:

- Communication professionals lack quality and reliable knowledge of modern communication
technologies and tools.
- The profession of the communicator itself is in a state of transformation caused by social and
  technological changes.
- The communicator’s functionality expands due to tasks previously performed by related specialists
  (marketers, analysts, sociologists, referents, event managers, HR managers)
- Competition in the field of communications is developing not only between people, but also
  between man and machine.

These trends do not yet find a sufficient response in the education system, as a result of which the
employer incurs additional costs for the adaptation of a new employee for at least 6-12 months.

The survey participants noted that they are interested in self-education, replenishment of
knowledge, however, they selectively relate to the channels for obtaining information. In connection with
the growing “information noise”, critical thinking and the availability of knowledge, the value of which is confirmed by the professional expert community, is becoming increasingly important for the communicator.

Thus, the first study within the framework of the PRwiki project confirmed the validity of the working hypothesis of the project that such a resource is in demand by the professional community and solves priority tasks: continuing education, competitiveness in the labor market, accumulation of best practices for application and development.

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