

# Chapter 14

## Digital Transformation in Public Relations: Horizons and Frontiers

**Safak Elike**

*Yozgat Bozok Universitesi, Turkey*

### ABSTRACT

*The aim of this study is to address the digital transformation in the field of public relations in all its dimensions, to discuss the positive and negative effects of digitalization on public relations practices, and to introduce public relations methods appropriate to new digital communication practices. In this context, the study will discuss both how traditional public relations practices benefit from digital spaces and tools, in other words the interaction between the traditional and the new, and how they differ from each other. It will be focused on how digitalization transforms the target audience of public relations practices and the communication practices of the target audience, and will address all aspects of digital spaces and tools and new public relations methods appropriate to the new needs of the new target audience.*

### INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to address the digital transformation in the field of public relations in all its dimensions.

To discuss the positive and negative effects of digitalization on public relations practices and to introduce public relations methods appropriate to new digital communication practices.

With this study, we will try to see the gates that digital transformation has opened to us in public relations field and try to enter through these gates. The limitations of digitalization of public relations as well as the possibilities offered are the subject of this study.

In this context, the study will discuss both how traditional public relations practices benefit from digital spaces and tools, in other words the interaction between the traditional and the new, and how they differ from each other. It will be focused on how digitalization transforms the target audience of public relations practices and the communication practices of the target audience, and will address all

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aspects of digital spaces and tools and new public relations methods appropriate to the new needs of the new target audience.

In this study, which aims to address and discuss the effects of digitalization in the field of public relations in all its dimensions, the discussion will be conducted in a critical approach that does not exclude the effects of digitalization in relation to the negative consequences of individual and social life, which also leads to limitations in public relations practices. In addition, this study adopts a perspective that seeks to combine traditional and new approaches and enrich the field with their interaction by distancing itself from technological deterministic approaches that declare the death of traditional public relations methods and declare only the dominance of digital methods in the field, seeing digital PR as “PR’s only future”.

## **BACKGROUND**

Digital technologies change all social practices and transform the communication field almost entirely. According to data from We are social and Hootsuite on January 2019, there are 5 billion 112 million mobile phones, 4 billion 388 million unique internet users in the world, of which 3 billion 256 million use social media via their mobile devices. Moreover, the number of people using social media via their mobile devices increases by 10 percent every year, which is 297 million people. These data show that social and individual communication practices are dramatically digitized. Relations between individuals, social groups and institutions are now taking place in new areas and new forms of digital technologies.

It is unthinkable that the field of public relations and advertising remains out of this shift while all areas such as journalism, television and cinema are rapidly transforming. Today, when everyone is constantly online with their portable computers and smart phones, and the channels of access to information they need are rapidly developing and becoming complicated, digital technologies are also rapidly transforming the field of Public Relations.

Public relations has radically changed with digitalization. Digital media and technologies contribute to PR practices. Researchers are trying to understand this change. Public relations practitioners also make great efforts to understand the new requirements of the field and to implement more effective PR practices. Therefore, a rich climate of research and discussion has emerged around the subject. When you write to the Google search engine “the impact of new media on public relations” in October 2019, it produces over 3 billion 190 million results. When you write to Google, “the impact of new media on advertising”, more than 886 million results are listed. These numbers provide a picture of the extent to which digitalization has an impact on public relations. Digitalization is highly debated in the field. Because the effect is enormous.

There are over 440 million blogs in the world, although it is difficult to know the exact number.<sup>1</sup> And there are over 1.5 billion websites on the world wide web today. Of these, nearly 200 million are active. According to Hootsuite and We Are Social data again, as of January 2019, there were almost 4.39 billion internet users. In 2019 more than half of the world’s population uses the internet (53%). Another research says more than half of all Internet users have joined a social network, social networks have become the number one platform for creating and sharing content and nearly 75 percent of all Internet users have read a blog. More and more companies are using the possibilities offered by the Internet to reach their target audience.

Again according to hootsuite 2019 data:

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