

# Understanding the Current State of Philippine Public Relations Industry and Practice

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## Abstract

Philippine PR continues to suffer from a negative image. Ironically, while being the purported expert in managing relationships and maintaining a good image for its clients, public relations has not managed to successfully perform its primary function on itself. This article attempts to understand how the Philippine public relations industry and practice achieved its current reputation by charting its history and identifying events and occurrences that might have contributed to its current profile and image.

## Introduction

Public relations is about properly managing relationships and building a good image through goodwill. Although many in the industry might define it like this, very few actually follow it in practice. Instead, public relations has traditionally become identified and treated in the Philippines as a tool rather than a function, and closely associated with the negative side of journalism and media. As a famous journalist once said: "I would like to think of PR as an iceberg. You really only see a portion of it—the more pleasant portion floating in

the sea. The uglier side of it is hidden from the eye. It is beneath the sea" (Locsin as cited in Santos, 1972, p. 5).

Unfortunately, PR is perceived as artificial, superficial, and unreal, and has been described in this manner:

Public relations as a craft is, among other things, the art of cosmetics and deodorants; if you don't look or smell good, leave it to the indefatigable experts to make you look and smell—well, if not something close to your heart's desire, something those restless student agitators won't call unflattering names in their demo placards. The stink may only be imagined by others, but it's disconcerting to have people kind of wince and cower away from you, isn't it? Whether real or fancied, the negative image and odor can cause you enough anxiety in your sensitive soul to warrant divine intervention; denied that, you can go, and rightly so, to the PR professionals" (Brillantes, as cited in de Guzman, R. and Reforma, M. 1988).

But true public relations must go beyond what the eye can see—not mere cosmetics and deodorants, but a real and total overhaul of one's subject if that is needed—to achieve true, not merely superficial relations with one's publics. The next step would be the higher plane that businesses and corporations strive to attain—beyond establishing and maintaining a good image for profit and sales but being essentially honorable. Doing this entails the creation and management of relationships, perceptions, reputation, and image.

Of late, there is a growing appreciation of PR that goes beyond its media relations role. The advertising industry, in particular, has been resorting to PR as a tool to offer "alternative" services to clients, especially since advertising has depreciated in value and cost-efficiency. Marketing departments within corporations have adopted a strategy in business known as consumer PR, otherwise known as

marketing PR, which incorporates the principles and tactics of PR to generate media attention and thereby increase sales and boost profits. Since the demand for more PR-oriented strategies and tactics is growing, and the cost of advertising is rising, the usual clients of advertising agencies are now looking for cheaper and more cost-efficient alternatives.

While Philippine PR practitioners are grateful and pleased with the attention they are receiving, many are also disturbed by an apparent negative backlash on PR created by other professions that claim to know and do public relations.

This study seeks to present a profile of the Philippine public relations industry and practice. It also attempts to understand its current state by looking into its evolution and development.

### Sources of Information on Philippine PR

Much of what is known about the current public relations industry is culled from experience (T. Locsin, personal interview, April 18, 2005), specifically those of PR practitioners and the key publics they deal with, such as media, government, and clients of advertising and marketing firms. Nevertheless, this study found a few major sources of information about the topic.<sup>1</sup> These sources discuss mainly the

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<sup>1</sup>Six books are available to shed light on the topic: Santos (1972), Corteza-Tinsay (1987), R.R. de la Cruz (1992), Santiago (1997 and 2001), and Osorio (2005). Two articles were written in books on international PR and PR in Asia: Sarabia-Panol & Lorenzo-Molo published in Sriramesh (2004), and Jamias, J., Navarro, M., and Tuazon, R. in Culberston, H. and Chen, N. (1996). Other articles were published in international journals: Sarabia-Panol (2000), Nieva (1993 and 1999), Lorenzo-Molo (2004), Virtusio (1998). An article by Esguerra (2004) came out in the *Philippine Journal of Public Relations*. Information on the subject can be gleaned from the following unpublished theses and dissertations: Omais (1992), Reyes (1978), Coloma (2000), Mendoza (1981), Ty (1993), Macayanan (1991), Mañalac (1970), Lorenzo-Molo (2002 and 2006), and Santiago (2004).



history of PR in the Philippines, the misconceptions about it, and the need for public relations education. Very few tackle corporate PR and not one attempts to understand or explain the current state of the industry by looking into its relationship with other professions, particularly marketing and advertising.

A study on public relations in Bosnia-Herzegovina by Kent, Taylor, and Turcilo (2006) reveals a recurring theme as regards the relationship between public relations and marketing—“a debate that extends to almost all nations of the world” (p.11) in light of the function’s increasing popularity. With the continued development of integrated marketing communications (IMC) worldwide and its rising popularity in the Philippines, turf issues between PR and marketing have become inevitable. The close relationship between media and PR makes it necessary to understand the current state of the local PR industry and its impact on related industries.

#### *Method of the Study*

This study is a descriptive one, which applies qualitative methods collected from both secondary and primary data. Since PR in the Philippines is not regulated and there are no data on ratings of agencies from which the study could have chosen informants, primary data were gathered from practitioners considered leaders among their peers. Key criteria were membership in at least one Filipino PR association and at least five years of experience in the field. Nineteen public relations practitioners from PR agencies and corporations were asked to submit their profiles and to answer a survey questionnaire. Later, they were subjected to personal in-depth interviews. Tables 1 and 2 present the profiles of the agency and in-house corporate PR respondents in the study. Most of the respondents were heads of PR agencies or PR departments of some of the country’s biggest corporations. Four key informants who have much knowledge and experience of the idiosyncrasies of Philippine PR were also asked to shed light on



specific aspects of the industry. These were: 1) the owner of one of the country's largest newspaper chains; 2) a former media person turned academician; 3) a researcher who has studied the relationship between PR and media; and 4) a former media owner and practitioner who is now a senator.

The author conducted the interviews individually in English, with each interview lasting for about two hours. Interviewees were asked open-ended questions about the image and reputation of the Philippine PR industry and its problems. They were also asked to assess the general status of the industry.

Table 1. Public relations agency respondents (2005)

Agency	Position of interviewee	Year agency was founded	Number of regular employees	PR practitioners among employees
Buensalido & Associates	President & CEO	1983	15	7
EON	Managing Director	1998	22	17
FS Roman & Associates	President		10	3
Strategic Edge Incorporated	VP & Partner	1996	18	13
Corporate Image Dimensions	Chairman	1990	80	30
Perceptions	Chairman & President	1987	35	14
CAPRI	President	1993	12	8
Fleishman	General Manager	1997	5	4
Interlink	President & General Manager	1974	3	2
Virtusio Public Relations Inc.	Chairman	1989	10	5
Outsource PR	President	2002	7	5

Table 2. In-house corporate PR respondents (2005)

Company	Position of interviewee	Year PR Dept. was Founded	Number of employees in the department
GMA Network News	Head, Corporate Affairs	No record	19
San Miguel Corporation (SMC)	Advocacy Officer	1966	50
ABS-CBN Foundation	Head of the PR Department	1989	7
IBM	Communications Manager	No record	3
Globe Telecom	Head, Public Relations	1974	10
Manila Electric Company	VP & Director of Corporate Communication	1960	18
Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas	Public Relations Consultant	No record	51
Total	Manager for Corporate Affairs	1988	4
Coca-Cola Export	Consultant, Media Relations, Public Affairs and Communications	No record	4
Pfizer	Director of Corporate Affairs	1998	5

*A Current Profile of the Philippine Public Relations Industry*

Although the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) reports hundreds of registered public relations firms, only 175 are recognized PR firms, that is, accredited members of private PR associations. Of this number, only 23 are PR agencies.

*The Agencies*

At present, the Philippines has six categories of public relations agencies:

- 1) full-service, stand-alone public relations agencies;
- 2) sister companies or partners of advertising agencies;
- 3) public relations departments within advertising agencies;
- 4) numerous one to two-man PR operations;
- 5) lifestyle and events-focused public relations operations; and
- 6) crisis PR experts and pure publicists who often tread on the dark side of the practice

Table 3 presents the categories of public relations agencies and examples of agencies under each category. Most of the more prominent PR agencies are full-service, stand-alone agencies. PR agencies that evolved from advertising, and PR departments from within advertising agencies, follow closely. Now becoming popular are lifestyle and events-focused PR agencies.

Table 3. Categories of PR agencies

Type of Consultancy	Examples
Full service stand-alone PR agency	Buensalido & Associates, Outsource PR, Perceptions, Virtusio, EON, Strategic Edge, Fleishman-Hillard
Agencies that resulted from advertising branching out into PR	CAPRI, CID
PR within advertising agencies as a department	O & M PR Worldwide Manila, Leo Burnett Manila, DDB
One to two-man operations	Interlink, Marbella International Business Consultancy
Lifestyle and Events-focused PR	Visions and Expressions, Tim Yap, Pepper Teehankee
Crisis PR and publicists	The late Bubby Dacer



### *The Practitioners*

The background of Philippine public relations practitioners illustrates the strong influence of journalism, advertising, and marketing. Although they may come from a variety of industries and disciplines, they generally fall under one of the following categories:

*Industry practitioners who were former newsmen.* Almost all of the founding fathers and veterans in Philippine PR were either journalism graduates or former newsmen. As former newsmen, they are “usually good friends of the editors” (T. Locsin, personal interview, April 18, 2005) or may themselves still be practicing newsmen. On the darker side, however, some are also known to influence the printing or suppression of stories. PR association members often refer to them as publicists.

*Practitioners who did not come from media or study journalism.* They are those who come from a variety of disciplines but have spent most of their lives in business, marketing or advertising. Younger and newer PR professionals, the more recent ones have had considerable background in events management.

*The spin-doctors and demolition men.* Not much has been said or studied about this side of the profession and no one quite knows just how small or big this group is, especially since they often operate in secrecy.

### *Movers and Shakers of Philippine Public Relations*

The recognized figures in the world of Philippine PR can be divided into four categories:

- 1) the gurus, such as Joe Carpio and Pete Teodoro;

- 2) the First Generation Veterans, such as Max Edralin, Oscar Villadolid, Virgilio Pantaleon and Carlos Agatep;
- 3) the Second Generation Veterans, such as Rene Nieva and Romeo Virtusio; and
- 4) the Emerging Veterans and Practitioners, such as Ramon Osorio, Cossette Romero, Dante Velasco and Milen de Quiros (Lorenzo-Molo, 2006).

While the first two groups are composed mostly of in-house corporate PR office practitioners with journalism and media backgrounds, the third and fourth groups mostly comprise agency practitioners who espouse various philosophies and approaches to doing PR. First Generation Veterans comprise distinguished former presidents of the PRSP, hailing mostly from corporate PR practice and, like the gurus, were former journalists. Second Generation Veterans are purebred practitioners who believe in the enormity of PR's roles and responsibilities as the heart and soul of any business entity. The Emerging Veterans, on the other hand, are a mixed group, known more for their agencies and not their specific personalities.

Practitioners from advertising and events management approach PR as short-term and almost immediate, and attempt to relate it directly to the bottom-line. They look at PR as non-traditional advertising, often referring to sponsorships and events as "below-the-line", as opposed to what they believe to be traditional, or "above-the-line." Others who come from a variety of backgrounds think much like the Second Generation Veterans, and are committed to promoting the all-encompassing role of PR as not just tactics and publicity but strategies and plans for specific goals and purposes.

*The PR Associations*

Four major private public relations associations for corporations exist in the Philippines today: the Public Relations Society of the Philippines (PRSP), the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), the International Public Relations Association (IPRA), and the Philippine Association of Public Relations Counselors (PAPRC) (Lorenzo-Molo, 2006).

Of the four, the PRSP is the oldest, biggest, most popular and prestigious. Members of the three other associations came from it. It is likewise home to all PR gurus and most of the first- and second-generation veterans. Unfortunately, it is also the most controversial, marred with intrigue and often chaotic disputes among members. Although it claims to pursue very good ideals and sound mission, vision and programs for the further development of the PR industry, it often does not seem to deliver on its promise. In fact, some respondents of the study who were former and current PRSP members believe that the association is inept at implementing and practicing the many ideals they speak of.

Although the IABC has become the closest and best alternative to the PRSP, it is said to be a replica of the latter. Like the PRSP, its claims are commendable in theory, but it lacks the will to impose sanctions properly and the regulations to actualize its ideals. But it has no record of violations against any PR code of conduct. Its founders, board of directors, and members are former or current PRSP members.

The IPRA seems to come closest to an authentically concerned industry association. Its greatest weakness, however, is size, having less than 20 members. This is due primarily to the strictness in membership; unlike the PRSP and the IABC, applications are not welcome since acceptance is based on nomination. IPRA is home to many of the first and second generation veterans, i.e. Romeo Virtusio (of Virtusio Public Relations Inc. [VPRI], one of the major players responsible for the annual PR Summit, a conference where industry



practitioners come together and discuss issues and topics surrounding the PR discipline and business), and Rene Nieva of Perceptions.

The PAPRC is new to the world of PR associations but has already found its place on the PR map because the founder is probably the only remaining advocate of formal PR education, and its members are respected first or second generation veterans. However, it is not well known to many and has not accomplished much since it does not have regular programs for professional development.

Clearly, PR associations in the country lack a “true, cohesive, strong, unified organization” (C. Romero, personal interview, April 22, 2005). Specifically, these associations must deal with the following problems and issues:

- 1) the absence of a unified code of ethics;
- 2) the need for better governance and elections;
- 3) the problematic internal set-up of PR associations that does not distinguish agency practitioners from in-house practitioners; and
- 4) the quality of their members.

### *Award-Giving Bodies*

The Philippine public relations industry has two award-giving bodies: the Public Relations Society of the Philippines’ (PRSP’s) Anvil and, more recently, the International Association of Business Communicators’ (IABC’s) Gold Quill. Of the two, the Anvil is dubbed as more prestigious (C. Arce, personal interview, March 9, 2005; C. Romero, April 22, 2005). For many veterans in the industry, it is an institution (L. Morales, personal interview, 5 May 2005); but it has not been without controversy and criticism. Practitioners have had much to say about the way the Anvil is conducted, specifically as regards the ethics behind the choice of winners. Those disappointed with the Anvil instead see hope and potential in the Gold Quill (A. Gonzalez-Marquez, personal interview, April 4, 2005).

### *PR Education*

From the very start, public relations practitioners functioned on self-study or from the experience of older professionals (M. Edralin, *personal interview, March 10, 2005*). From 1975–76, the PRSP crafted and implemented a Bachelor's degree in Public Relations in three schools—Arellano University, Saint Paul College, and Santa Isabel College. Unfortunately, the program no longer operates. It would have provided structure and training to future PR professionals but it lasted only two decades, producing graduates who are not even counted among the more distinguished professionals of today. Current and future PR practitioners continue to learn through self-study, by attending professional development seminars and conferences organized by PR associations, or through other disciplines like marketing and communication which offer PR as a subject. Others who come from marketing, events management, and advertising rely on their personal interpretation of PR, based on their professional background and experience (Santiago, 2001).

### *Corporate PR*

From its formal conception to the present, corporations have dominated public relations practice in the Philippines. Apparently, it was the more prominent and reputable of media men, father of Philippine PR, Joe Carpio, who ventured into corporate PR, which is probably why the field has developed more professionally than the PR agency practice. Carpio, for instance, pioneered the practice of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) when he organized and established the Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP), which played a significant role in giving the public a more balanced perspective of capitalist business (Edralin, 2005). Established against the violence-ridden First Quarter Storm (1971), where capitalism was branded as evil and exploitative of the poor, the group behind PBSP rallied over 70 big corporations to join up and commit 1% of

profit after tax to improve the environment and alleviate poverty. This is one classic case of public relations single-handedly working at establishing goodwill for corporations and at the same time boosting the image of PR practitioners themselves. This is probably why there are more in-house corporate practitioners in the country today, as Table 4 illustrates. Table 5, on the other hand, reflects the status of public relations within the corporate setup. A comparison of corporate PR in 2004 and 1970 shows that while in-house PR is perceived to be significant enough to be established as an independent, vital and regular function of a corporation, independent PR agency businesses do not seem to enjoy as much prestige.

Table 4. Composition of practitioners in public relations associations

Where they Practice	PRSP	IABC	IPRA	PAPRC
Corporations	49	49	5	6
PR Agency	16	18	6	5
Free-lance Consultants	2	0	2	14
Others: retired, PIA, political staff	3	0	0	0
Total	70	67	13	25

Table 5. Status of public relations in corporations

Status of Office	1970	2004
As an independent section, unit, department/ division	60%	81%
Section within a department (i.e. marketing, advertising/ extension of CEO's office	10%	19%
No response/ unknown	30%	0

Sources: *Corporate Public Relations Practices: A Survey by Renato Esguerra in the Philippine Journal of Public Relations March 2004*; *Philippine Association of Public Relations Counselors, Inc. (PAPRC)*; and *Corporate Public Relations in the Philippines by Ramon Mañalac 1970: Bureau of Small Business, Ateneo de Manila University*.



While public relations in the SMC started with a staff of 22 and grew to 100 in the 1970s (Reyes, 1978), most PR offices start and remain small. The situation was not much different three decades ago, when PR offices in the Philippines had a staff of five, at the most. This has probably been the case since PR has always been mostly internal in corporations and the oft-loaded and heaviest of departments has always been marketing because of its direct relation to the bottom-line. Since PR is not directly related, its responsibilities are less, the workforce smaller. The same argument can be used to deny the importance of a corporate PR department or division; otherwise, investing in greater manpower should not be a problem. However, PR is supposed to be larger in scope as it touches almost every aspect of a corporation. In this case, two possibilities happen:

1. the PR department has a small-to-medium-sized staff that is strategically positioned to supervise, guide, and manage the activities of various departments within a corporation (particularly that of marketing); or
2. it has a staff as big as that of marketing so that it may be able to craft and implement its scope of responsibility.

Table 6 presents a comparison of the general size of corporate public relations staff in 1970 and in 2004.

Table 6. Size of public relations staff<sup>2</sup>

Approximate Number of Staff	1970	2004
5	30%	48.94%
10	40%	25.53%
20	0	7.26%
30	10%	0
40	0	0
50	0	2%

Sources: *Corporate Public Relations Practices: A Survey by Renato Esguerra in the Philippine Journal of Public Relations March 2004*; *Philippine Association of Public Relations Counselors, Inc. (PAPRC)*; and *Corporate Public Relations in the Philippines by Ramon Mañalac 1970: Bureau of Small Business, Ateneo de Manila University*

Owing to the increasing load of responsibilities given to in-house PR, outsourcing certain services has come to be an option. This is where public relations agencies step in (Esguerra, 2004). Table 7 lists client respondents and their sources of PR services. All respondents said that they rely heavily on their internal PR departments and free-lance consultants. For those that employ advertising agencies, a big number have opted to retain the services of the advertising agency for PR activities. Due to the growing responsibilities of in-house PR, the need to outsource PR services from agencies has become inevitable.

The rise in consumer PR or what is more universally known as marketing PR and the use of non-traditional media may explain why PR is now viewed as important, and sometimes more important, than advertising. This finding may further support the hypothesis that the notion of PR being less important than other related functions and industries might have come from advertising and marketing, as informants of this study have implied. If this is the case, then corporations may not be experiencing authentic PR, since advertising agencies tend to think of PR as a support function. Thus, PR's cost

<sup>2</sup>Figures are not even. The 1970 and 2004 data come from two different studies.

effectiveness has not been properly maximized; and corporations have perhaps, not even begun to experience just how cost-effective PR is.

Table 7. Client respondents' sources of PR services

<b>Client Respondents</b>	<b>Source of PR Services</b>
1. ABS-CBN Foundation	in-house PR
2. Central Bank	in-house PR and free-lance PR consultants
3. Coca Cola Export	in-house PR and free-lance consultants
4. Globe Telecom	in-house PR and free-lance consultants
5. GMA Network News	in-house PR; past: Buensalido & Associates
6. IBM Philippines	internal PR; past: O&M PR, Fleishman-Hillard and free-lance PR consultants
7. MERALCO	in-house PR
8. Pfizer	internal PR in tandem with PR agencies Perceptions and EON; past: CAPRI, Lexington and German & Associates
9. San Miguel Corp.	in-house PR
10. Total Philippines	internal PR in tandem with EON; past: Full Circle Communications (FCC)

### *Understanding the Current Reputation of the Philippine PR Industry*

The Philippine PR industry's current reputation did not develop overnight. The evolution of the industry as illustrated in PR history, led to its current reputation and status. Its media relations function, for instance, is due to its long history with the journalism profession, thus making publicity one of its more popular functions. (It is often tagged as PR's only function.) It was "understood as media relations" (M. Edralin, personal interview, March 10, 2005) which explains the influx of journalists to the profession. And since the journalism profession itself has been suffering from a negative image, it is not surprising how it could spill over to PR.

Another reason for PR's current reputation is its long history with Philippine politics, which like media, has always had an image problem. Public relations "evolved from government trying to communicate with



the public” (B. Bagaman, personal interview, March 30, 2005). The function traces its roots to politics and propaganda from the time Jose Rizal went to Spain to campaign for the Filipino cause (Sarabia-Panol & Lorenzo-Molo as cited in Sriramesh, 2004), to the establishment and circulation of the Propaganda Movement’s organ *La Solidaridad* (Schumacher, 1997), to Emilio Aguinaldo’s campaign for foreign powers to recognize Philippine independence through the propaganda machine, the *Hong Kong Committee* (Agoncillo, 1990), to various other campaigns that the history of Philippine politics witnessed.

Officially, however, public relations began in 1949, when investment and business activity in the country had practically come to a halt. After recovering from World War II, the country needed to restore a more favorable business climate for investors to come in (Corteza-Tinsay, 1987). Thus, government and business leaders worked together to form the Philippine Association. Led by then Ambassador to the United States Carlos P. Romulo and industrialist Andres Soriano of San Miguel Corporation (SMC), a public information campaign, funded by the contributions of the membership committee of the Association, began in the United States, then the largest investor in the Philippines. Orchestrated by Joe Carpio, the father of Philippine public relations (Corteza-Tinsay, 1987; Santiago, 2001) in coordination with PR expert George Peabody, president of a New York PR firm whose clients included the Soriano-controlled SMC, the situation was soon reversed and foreign investments started pouring in (Corteza-Tinsay, 1987). Still, the profession did not enjoy good standing in those early days, and PR’s continued relations with both government and media further plunged the function into turmoil in terms of image.

Most of those who went into the practice were journalists. PR practitioner “Toto” Olivera of the Philippine Long Distance Company (PLDT) was himself the founder of the Philippine News Service after retiring as Press Secretary following the defeat of Elpidio Quirino, the country’s sixth president. Before joining government,

Ferdinand Marcos' Press Secretary Jose Aspiras was also a journalist. PR was thought of and believed to be publicity and media relations as "successful journalists were thought to make ideal PR men because they knew how newspapers worked and had a built-in network of friends in media" (M. Edralin, personal interview, March 10, 2005). It was during this time that PR was said to have been "institutionalized" (Florentino-Hofileña, 1998, p. 8), especially during the presidency of Ramon Magsaysay, who massaged the egos of newspapermen while his press secretary took care of their financial needs.

Fortunately, PR also began to be identified as a business and management function. In 1966, Andres Soriano asked Carpio to organize the PR Department of SMC (Nieva, 1999) which set the pace for PR in the Philippines. It was from this department that most PR professionals were trained and later either became senior PR practitioners in top companies or established their own PR firms. Thus, public relations began the climb to prominence with PR men becoming vice presidents in major corporations (M. Edralin, personal interview, March 10, 2005). In 1957, the PRSP was founded with Carpio as its first president (Corteza-Tinsay, 1987). In the 1950s, although PR seemed to be more known as "publicity and propaganda" (owing to its roots in government), it had successfully positioned itself near the top, managing and creating full programs of action and not just spewing propaganda spiels and press releases. Multinational and local firms started to employ the skills of PR professionals (R. Nieva, personal interview, March 11, 2005). Veteran advertising and PR practitioner Louie Morales attributed this fact to Carpio himself for installing PR as a "must-have function or department in a corporation" (personal interview, May 5, 2005).

After the Marcos dictatorship was toppled in 1986, monopolies were dismantled. Economic recovery was a pressing concern and companies were cautious about spending their resources (B. Bagaman, March 30, 2005). Owing to growing competition, many companies owned by Marcos cronies had to rely more on marketing tactics. The



role of PR then became recognized and sought after. Before 1986, getting an edge over competition was based on one's "connections" rather than on how good a product was or how well it was promoted. This only contributed to unethical practices as illustrated by its activities in the 1950s. Aspects of Philippine culture such as *pakiusap* (asking for favors) and *utang na loob* (sense of gratitude)—good customs badly practiced—only made the situation worse. It seemed that the change in government also ushered in a change in culture, a change in the image of PR, and a full realization of its true purpose and function.

The stigma of being associated with dubious journalistic practices was difficult to shed. PR was establishing its role and function in business with the tainted image and background that it inherited. Moreover, it had to thrive in a business environment where marketing was prominent, and advertising was favored as its promotions arm. And because it entered as a service provider to an advertising-dominated world well supported by marketing, it became almost inevitable to compare PR's nature and progress with that of advertising's.

Unlike the advertising industry that is clearly foreign even in name and origin, the local PR agency business is almost entirely Filipino-owned and operated. Currently, only eight PR multinationals have set up office in the country. Of this number only two, Fleishman and Hillard and Weber Schandwick operate independently as PR multinationals. Others, such as Burson Marsteller, Edelman, and Hill & Knowlton are mere affiliates of local PR firms, Strategic Edge, EON and Creative Point International. Table 8 presents multinational public relations agencies that either have an office or maintain some presence in the local scene. The absence of many of the big multinationals could only mean that the public relations industry in the country might still be in its infancy (A. Gonzales-Marquez, personal interview, April 4, 2005). This might also explain the negative state of the industry, which lacks the structure and professional experience that multinationals might have to offer.



Table 8. Multinational public relations agency presence in the country

<b>Multinational Agency</b>	<b>Local Agency</b>	<b>Status/ Arrangement</b>
1. Burson Marsteller	Strategic Edge	Affiliate
2. Weber Schandwick Worldwide Inc.	none	Multinational
3. Fleishman-Hillard (Singapore office extension)	None	Multinational
4. Edelman	EON	Affiliate
5. Ketchum Newscan	Corporate Image Dimensions (CID)	Affiliate
6. Hoffman Agency	Dominguez Marketing Communications	Affiliate
7. Hill & Knowlton	Creative Point International & Dominguez Marketing Communications	Affiliate
8. Euro RSCG	Agatep & Associates	Affiliate

It is ironic that Pete Teodoro, founder of Philprom, the very first advertising agency in the country, was primarily a public relations man (de la Cruz, 1992). Although public relations before the new millennium was not as popular as advertising, a number of well known advertising professionals decided to establish or branch out into PR agency work as early as the 1980s. There were very few PR agencies then, but the demand was growing. This was why veteran PR practitioner Jocelyn Buensalido of Buensalido & Associates decided to put up her agency (personal interview, April 20, 2005). And because many PR practitioners had come from media, they did what they knew best: to write a good story. Thus, PR's focus was to generate goodwill and maintain a good image through expensive publicity (B. Bagaman, personal interview, March 30, 2005). This is why even among corporations and businesses, PR continues to be viewed as media relations. Unfortunately, the definition of what exactly is a good story continues to be misconstrued and abused, and the race for generating column inches persists, further relegating PR into its popular media relations function.

*Problems and Challenges*

Although PR owes its beginnings and development to journalists and other professionals who ventured into the field, its long-time relations with these very entities (media, government, marketing, and advertising) have had negative consequences on the profession, among which are:

- 1) the lack of professionalism and ethics due to a predominantly publicity-based practice that looks on PR as a tool for political or financial gain;
- 2) bad public relations done usually in the name of crisis PR by media men who have entered the trade with pure profit in mind;
- 3) unethical and corrupt practices which PR has inevitably had to resort to due to the apparent nature of media;
- 4) the lack of qualified practitioners as a result of the absence of formal PR education and the growing interest among those in media and advertising to partake in the PR success by claiming to know and do PR;
- 5) the false notions that both PR practitioners and clients have of the PR function and its status as a profession due to the same reasons above; and
- 6) the notion that PR is just like marketing and advertising and is thus, measured against the benchmark of marketing and advertising.

All respondents in this study are unanimous that PR is rapidly becoming a primary function and tool of business. But with this come vast opportunities, as well as new challenges. For one, the phenomenon

of consumer or marketing PR, where PR tools and strategies are used to boost profit and sales, may further popularize PR as a tool rather than a function. Although PR agencies are pleased with the amount of business they are gaining from this phenomenon, second-generation veterans fear a narrowing of the concept, where PR might end up as service arm to marketing or even advertising. Advertising agencies branching out into public relations due to difficulties in reaching consumers through the traditional mass media also endanger the application of the PR concept. As one big multinational PR practitioner admitted, “We create events for product announcement to generate more media attention” (R. Burgos, personal interview, May 6, 2005).

While it is good that PR is now a more likely activity of corporations and businesses, unfortunately, the manner in which it is practiced often undermines basic PR concepts in favor of advertising. The relatively new field of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC), which requires the integration of various disciplines such as marketing, advertising, and PR to ensure business success may have both positive and negative repercussions on PR. For instance, the proliferation of advertorials—advertisements that are paid for but made to look like human interest stories under the lifestyle pages of newspapers—arouses suspicion and further blurs the line between newsworthy stories and advertising. One big newspaper chain confirmed that advertisers take advantage of their million-peso advertising placements in publications to dictate the way stories are published. Clients trade ads for media space, using their status as long-time and big-paying advertisers to get PR “favours.” With the print media reaching the end of its lifecycle and TV still the primary medium of the times, “there’s so much more pressure on newspapers to make a profit” (Florentino-Hofileña, personal interview, April 25, 2005). A publication’s lifestyle section, in particular, gets more advertising (Prieto-Romualdez, personal interview, May 16, 2005), not necessarily according to its traditional definition, but in terms of publicity and exposure. Nowadays, consumers may find it harder to distinguish the fine line between true journalism and plain advertising. This could be an updated tweak on the old-style



“publicity” or the *payola* (bribe) of the 70s. While it was then done clandestinely, the practice has evolved into a new form and has even been “legitimized.” Again, we recall how PR earned its negative image from such functions.

On the bright side, corporations, not necessarily members of the PBSP, are now allotting budgets to CSR activities because they realize that one needs to be perceived as ethical and socially responsible in order to survive (R. Nieva, personal interview, March 11, 2005). In the past, corporate communication and publicity were the focus, but “this time, the order is to be visible in the communities” (J. Campos, personal interview, March 15, 2005). This is why foundations related to bigger and more known and established corporations have sprouted, and donations from big corporations to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have become popular (Adversario, 2001). The increasing recognition of CSR has led the Gold Quill to create a category for such campaigns (C. Romero, personal interview, April 22, 2005). With CSR, PR can possibly win back its soul and true identity. Unfortunately, this same opportunity to raise the value and good image of the profession may also further legitimize and even celebrate false truths and the questionable intentions of clients. The likelihood of the latter may become more apparent with the involvement of marketing and advertising which tend to view CSR as a more subtle but effective and credible tactic to reach consumers. Many public relations practitioners, however, believe this view to be rather narrow and exceedingly flawed.

### *Discussion and Conclusions*

Although related industries such as media, marketing, and advertising have greatly contributed to the continued growth and development of the Philippine public relations industry, the same relations have also led to many of PR’s greatest problems.

While PR's association with journalism and media through its publicity function may have given it the notoriety of being unprofessional, unethical, and deceitful, the same function has opened new opportunities for it. Being now more directly related to the bottom-line, PR is incorporated into marketing plans to achieve commercial objectives. While this has also made the profession vulnerable as an extra and support tool not only for marketing but also for advertising, it has also increased the value of PR as a function to increase sales and boost profits. Likewise, PR is believed powerful enough to make news, generate publicity, and even mold and direct public opinion.

Using PR's profit-generating potential, however, may undermine the essence of the profession, which is that of properly managing relationships and building a good image for its clients through goodwill. It is therefore crucial to return to the original, authentic and honest concept of PR even as profit-making objectives form part of the picture. Although both marketing and advertising can help increase PR's value as a business function and tool, PR should exert the same powerful influence on them, realizing that goodwill will inevitably translate to good business, and that an authentically good business is one that is responsible and spreads goodwill. Otherwise, the negative potential of PR from media, marketing, and advertising through consumer PR, lifestyle PR and CSR will devastate the very definition and concept of maintaining good public relations; and the damage that the same entities caused PR in the past may be nothing compared to what is yet to come if all the negative potentials of the strategies such industries propose win out.

While threats and challenges due to media, marketing, and advertising continue to beset the Philippine PR industry, the same threats can be turned into opportunities depending on the PR industry's reaction and response. The existing PR associations seem to have failed in their effort to professionalize the field and correct all the misconceptions about industry practices, as the very problems and controversies they are trying to correct hound them internally. At



best, these associations have created a venue for practitioners to come together and mingle.

Despite its vulnerability to encroachment by media, marketing, advertising (and now even by events management), PR has somehow been assimilated and subsumed into these industries. Consequently, the practice has become schizophrenic, transitory, provisional, and often makeshift. It is not surprising then that false, confusing and conflicting notions of PR continue to linger.

Once it hurdles these challenges, PR will come out as a stronger and more effective alternative to mass media advertising as it will be able to meet both corporate goals and marketing plans. It will be a newsmaker and a news surveyor through its publicity and events function through lifestyle PR. Going beyond buying and selling, it can obtain a true working knowledge of a company's soul and existence. In so doing, it will ensure the authentic practice of CSR and inject a more holistic and honest approach to marketing through IMC. This will happen, however, only if PR is allowed to maintain and make known the true meaning, concept, and consequences of creating and maintaining good public relations. And this can also only happen if PR begins to attract more than just a few good men. PR practitioners themselves have to be professional, honest, do what is right, practice good ethics, and genuinely live the true essence of goodwill to influence clients for the good. It is the only way for goodwill to authentically spill over to its clients. Otherwise, the result is what the current industry continues to suffer from.



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