



# Trends in Global Communication 2015

Views on the development of the profession from the perspective  
of navos partner agencies

PR is constantly changing and being shaped by its many actors and stakeholders. Traditional PR is now being complemented by a wide range of new methods and strategies including social media, employer branding, evidence-based PR and integrated communication strategies.

Societal changes have had an impact on the toolboxes of PR agencies and will continue to do so in the future. In particular, the way people use media and its availability have considerably changed. In order to identify which trends are having a real impact on today's PR industry, we have asked our international partner agencies about the latest most important developments and challenges in their respective countries. We asked questions about the developments and backlogs in the PR industry, the most efficient and result-driven tools for successful PR, and how changing media landscapes are affecting the daily work of our partners. Here are the results.



### I. (Social) media relations remains a relevant tool for PR in all industry sectors

Generally speaking, **media relations is still considered a relevant and trustworthy tool for successful PR** despite fast-paced changes in the sector. Indeed, the PR industry has evolved beyond pure media relations, and clients have found new ways to communicate with their different audiences and stakeholders. In more mature markets such as Denmark and the US, communication strategies have become even more tailored and personalized to individual clients and stakeholders. The fragmentation of media outlets has forced PR companies to readapt their media strategies. In Europe, print media is increasingly becoming a premium product for a limited number of people – rather than a mass medium – and is being replaced by online portals. These changes create communication opportunities such as more editorial and content creation. But it also means that PR agencies are finding that the downsized media

newsrooms now have less journalistic expertise available. Moreover, it is also becoming more difficult to find relevant media outlets for the purpose of placing messages.

Regardless of national differences in PR markets, **the digital revolution has affected all clients and has considerably increased the relevance of social media.** Indeed, “the PR sector is constantly responding to the changing behaviours of consumers and target audiences,” says Elin Twigge, Deputy Managing Director at PLMR. Owing to the rapidity with which news is transmitted, the PR sector has been forced to become more transparent and accountable. The digital revolution has also enabled clients to create their own media channels and impact public opinion through digital campaigns, which in turn has increased the focus on stakeholder relations as part of communication strategies. Particularly in Europe and the US, **new digital tools have dramatically impacted the way businesses and organizations interact with their stakeholders**, and vice versa. However, digital platforms are also starting to gain importance for PR in relatively new markets such as the UAE and Russia. Communication agencies now need to adapt their entire strategies – and in particular their crisis management – to these new digital developments.

**But it is not only the way people use media that has changed. New political and legislative frameworks are affecting the PR industry in many ways.** In Argentina, for instance, a new media law entered into force two years ago. In Poland and Spain, similar legislative developments have also modified the media landscape. In Russia, a new media law is going to reduce the shares of foreign owners in media outlets, which will also lead to significant changes in media outlets – and thus for the PR sector:

### II. Cross-border stakeholder relations have gained importance

**Increased public scrutiny of the work of so-called “lobbyists”** means that agencies offering PR measures and, in particular PA services, are under pressure to not only perform well for their clients, but to also ensure that they respect codes of conducts in order not to harm their own industry. Indeed, the development and professionalization of the role and status of “**trusted communication advisors**” is seen as a priority for most communication specialists. Moreover, closer public scrutiny also means that **more legislative regulation is to be expected** in Europe during the next few years. PR is subjected to less public scrutiny in markets such as Russia and the UAE.

This had led to the **emergence of integrated PR approaches**, especially for media relations. Instead of focusing on PR or PA, most agencies now merge both approaches into

what is known as “stakeholder relations”. Michael Trinskaer from the Danish partner agency Aspekta explains: *“In Denmark, this integrated approach to stakeholder relations now makes up the core of our client services.”* Moreover, **reputation management** has become more relevant to a large array of industry sectors. However, nowadays **actions often speak louder than words**. Trust as a basis for communications is particularly being challenged in Germany, where **dialogue between stakeholders** has become even more important.

In the last couple of years, there has been a clear trend towards more **in-house communication departments** handling myriads of communication disciplines. For the agencies, this is both a blessing and a curse: on the one hand there are more natural points of contact for working with the clients, but on the other hand it also means that there is less reliance on PR agencies. In addition, **the PR market has become more fragmented** with the emergence of more specialized agencies, especially in Europe. As a result, PR agencies now face **increased competition**. Despite this, Anja Schlicht, Managing Director at navos, emphasizes that most clients want to have one responsible agency as a point of contact that is able to handle all communication disciplines – at least in Germany.

### III. It's a people's business – with high professional standards and fresh ideas

Finally, our survey shows that people are considered the **most efficient PR instrument**. Without the right ideas, strategies and communication plans, no PR instrument is really efficient. *“Stepping out of the corporate mindset and becoming more human in order to create strategies that will resonate with those they are aimed at is the key”* says Paola Rodriguez, account director at H&K Argentina. In Norway, achieving a balance between keeping in mind the customer's business goals while having the courage to advise clients to push through innovative ideas and occasionally make costly decisions is seen as the most successful “recipe”. In addition, the balance also needs to be kept between delivering serious PR with good standards, while having innovative “fresh” ideas adapted to specific stakeholders. Finally, it is crucial to remember that there is no “one-fits-all” method for assessing the outcomes of PR strategies. The efficiency of PR instruments will therefore remain hard to measure.

### IV. Local disparities in the PR profession

Despite many similarities in the global communication trends, the survey findings revealed **regional disparities**. Whereas communications in the US have become overshadowed by digital marketing, the Russian PR industry

faces very different challenges. Indeed, the latter is poorly structured and lacks transparency despite continued growth. Contrary to many other markets where corporate clients prevail, government organizations have greater relevance for Russian PR agencies. *“Due to the current political and economic situation, the PR industry anticipates difficult times ahead,”* says Kseniya Trifonova, business development director at Mikhailov & Partners in Moscow.

In addition, there are no general tendencies regarding **the PR industry's reputation**. Whereas PR is widely accepted and even respected in countries such as the US, agencies in Poland and Russia are still struggling to establish themselves as communication professionals, as opposed to organizations used by government officials and politicians to enhance their reputations. In Poland, PR is still seen as a cheaper alternative for expensive commercial campaigns, as well as a remedy for sales failures. In Spain, the prestige and recognition of PR has increased considerably in the last few years. From what was once vaguely known as “business communications”, PR has emerged as a valued and well accepted concept, even in the media sector. In Germany, PR is largely accepted, but is still struggling to shed its poor reputation, especially in regards to PA. In the Middle East, PR is a relatively new trend, which means that it is seldom used strategically.

### V. PR gaining relevance globally

**PR was recently declared dead. However, despite struggling with a poor reputation in some countries, PR still plays an important role** and is embracing new trends. The industry has been professionalized, with university degrees in PR reflecting the constant demand for qualified communication specialists. In Scandinavia, PA and marketing communications are driving the PR industry's growth and are increasingly recognized as important management tools that can deliver a positive impact for businesses. CSR, long established in other markets, is seen as an important trend in Spain. In Germany, **professionals are beginning to tire of standard PR measures**. Traditional product PR and press relations are becoming less relevant, whereby PR is now moving into the digital world, where new opportunities for storytelling are arising.

Finally, **new formats for direct dialogue and participation are developing in Europe**, involving more face-to-face dialogue with stakeholders. Changes in the media landscape affect PR to a large extent, but are also offering new opportunities. Above all, **honesty, transparency and high standards are priorities for the European and US PR markets in order to avoid crisis situations and reputation disasters**, both for the clients and the agencies themselves. **In the long run, trust-building remains the most important factor that will allow PR measures to be successful.**

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With a strong network of partner agencies in Europe and worldwide, navos ensures that our clients get the best expertise. We believe that for successful communication, clients need to thoroughly understand local market specificities. navos stands for a contemporary and efficient approach for successful communications.