PUBLIC RELATIONS IN SCIENCE: POSSIBILITIES FOR BUILDING UP FUTURE'S SCIENCE COMMUNICATION (SCIENCE JOURNALISM)

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Abstract

PUBLIC RELATIONS activity is a vital part of any company's policy on reaching up high-level position in the community. And it mostly appears to be maintaining interests of just one individual or organization and communicates them to the public, also persuades people to think about them always better. But in science, PR management seems quite different working not just for research organizations as its aim is also to popularize science in the public.

And SCIENCE JOURNALISM can be of much extended tools of PR in science on the way of science communication with stories and news items on public understanding of science. This paper tries to expound PR management as a potential structure and basis to build up science journalism in any public. My conclusion is based on the latest one-year results of organizing PR system at the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences (ANAS) started only from May 2013.

Key words: *science communication, science journalism, public understanding of science, public relations, media, report, news*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Public Relation* is a strategic part of managing dissemination between any organization or individual and the public. This field of activity includes spreading stories and reports on public understanding of science, as well as managing conferences, meetings and other kind of events amongst wide people, also investors, partners, employees and other stakeholders.

Even in commercial companies or organizations, public relations require no direct payments[1] and it seems like a really good tool or way whereby the public may be interested in the organization's activity.

Public relations professionals appear as the face of a company or person demonstrating position of the side on some issue to the public by media. Feedback from media or public is of products of public relations that make organization's influence on them. There some people that have influence on organizations or individuals and they are a core source of managing or building up public relations.[2]

Marketing and also social media represent the latest innovations in public relations management and we still will observe this field changing in the future. So, people intending to build up their career on public relations in future will have to think innovatively.

1.2 *Science Journalism* is a field where news media reports about science and technologies, and writes science-based stories on daily life experiences. Science journalists work for creating interaction between public and science, as well as communicating scientists to reach out to other researchers in different parts of the Earth.

[1] Seitel, Fraser P. (2007), The Practice of Public Relations.(10th ed.), Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall

[2] Phillips, David (2006), "Towards relationship management: Public relations at the core of organizational development", Journal of Communication Management (Emerald Group Publishing Limited)

The mission of a science reporter is to render detailed information on researches of scientists to a kind of report or story that the people on the street can understand. Reporters also present the central to communication between science, people and media.

Science journalism is not a specified field being studied into deep of the profession and there are almost no university faculties on the realm. In many cases, scientists develop their research activity into science journalism. And there are also some science-based projects for journalists providing them trainings or seminars focused on specific fields of science to help them better understand their researches.

Anyway, journalists wishing to work for public understanding of science need to have some trainings and seminars.

ANAS, founded in 1935, is the largest science organization of Azerbaijan, Caspian Sea state in the east of the Caucasus. It includes over 40 research institutes and centers with some more offices and buildings across the country outlining all spheres of science and technology. And the central administration office of the academy is the Presidium located in capital Baku.

2. BUILDING UP PUBLIC RELATIONS SYSTEM AS A FUNDAMENTAL BASIS OF SCIENCE JOURNALISM ON ANAS MODEL

With budget cuts even at leading newspapers or magazines, there are fewer science journalists than in late last century. Columbia Journalism Review revealed that there were 95 newspapers having weekly science sections in 1989, but gradually the number reached down to 19 by January 2013.[3]

In 2011, when nanotechnology popped up as one of the emerging science, there were 459 journalists writing about the topic.[4]

The fact that media is cutting science stories and news items seems to have more to do with financial difficulties as writing about science takes much more time and financial expenses. It is worth to remember the fee on science reports and stories as the biggest payment in all media platform.

And it is not understatement that most people, including readers and journalists are reluctant to science news and stories.

Besides all, there is still at least one way that can help not just media outlets but also science journalism itself in any country starting to use opportunities of public relations in science. As most public relations bodies work for just one organization or an individual, this kind of structures in science organizations perform not just research results to their partners, investors or other stakeholders but they also disseminate science's itself for the public, and this point emerges as the only target of the all public relations' platform in science. In the light of this target, all PR professionals acting in science come together on the way to building up science journalism that could develop into better science communications.

ANAS MODEL on this could be a background practice with its large system of public relations departments in all 44 research institutes. This network was established only after the PR department of the Presidium of ANAS was founded in May 2013.[5]

[3] "Remember Newspaper Science Sections? They're Almost All Gone", International Busyness Times website: http://www.ibtimes.com/remember-newspaper-science-sections-theyre-almost-all-gone-1005680

[4] Dudo, A. D., Dunwoody, S., & Scheufele, D. A. (2011). "The emergence of nano news: Tracking thematic trends and changes in U.S. newspaper coverage of nanotechnology". Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly (88): 55–75.

[5] "Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences abolishes some departments", APA news agency website: http://en.apa.az/print/193744

During the last one year, me and my team in the administration office involved almost 50 journalists to the academy as PR professionals. Its mission is to disseminate ANAS research activities and communicate science, as well as scientists to the public.[6]

Science communication and disseminating ANAS are just follow-up attempts coming from some tasks in the National Strategy on Development of Science in 2009-2015 signed by President Ilham Aliyev.[7] (see also[8]). The tasks are related with integration of the Azerbaijan science into the world sphere, communicating scientists with each other, as well as reaching outreaches to educational enterprises. Disseminating both ANAS and science remained as duty on domestic mass media coming from these tasks.[9]

The large network of the ANAS public relation members was developed with trainings on PR policy, settings of preparing news and principles of the activity during the first-ever year of the system. This large team is the most possible unit can be progressing into the birth of science journalism in Azerbaijan for the next some years.

PR department of ANAS Presidium divulges general science and technology in the republic not only by media but also organizing a project called Cool Science that connects to school children even in remote villages where young scientists of the academy show amazing experiences for them.[10] The target is to reach science to all regions of the state, as well as marginalized sides.

Journalists wishing to work for public understanding of science need to have some trainings and seminars that ANAS plans to organize for them with projects, as well as story contests of excellence in science journalism.

Leading organizations in science journalism across Europe and USA provide free online courses just like in the website of the World Federation of Science Journalism.[11] Here reporters can find out some many ideas that could help them to choose their topics, to be focused on their target and to plan story.

[6] "ANAS makes efforts to build up science lournalism in Azerbaijan press release", SIA news agency website: http://sia.az/en/news/social/413506-anas-makes-efforts-to-build-up-science-lournalism-in-azerbaijan-press-release

[7] "President of AR signed order about National Strategy on Science Development in the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2009-2015", ANAS website: http://www.science.gov.az/en/news.php?id=2019

[8] The National Strategy of Science Development, (page – 7. – "muxtəlif tədqiqat sahələrində (təbiət, texnika, texnologiya, humanitar və ictimai elmlər uzrə) calışan alim və mutəxəssislərin elmi fəaliyyətinin əlaqələndirilməsi", PDF file: https://www.google.az/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&sqi=2&ved=0CB0QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.edu.gov.az%2Fupload%2Ffile%2Felm-senedler-01-06-09.pdf&ei=-9KNU6b2Aaai4gTgy4CwCA&usg=AFQjCNF2w3yg9uX2FF5tEwdQwhZTHEosig&sig2=gyvGmdx7JE3cmZCzP0saew&bvm=bv.68191837,d.bGQ

[9] "С целью основания научной журналистики в Азербайджане", Echo newspaper website: http://echo.az/article.php?aid=64251

[10] "НАНА организовала мероприятие для хачмазских школьников", Day.Az news agency website: http://news.day.az/society/487950.html

[11] Free online science journalism course, Lesson - 1 / 1.1 Introduction", World Federation of Science Journalists website http://www.wfsj.org/course/index-e.html\



Pic 1: Logo of World Federation of Science Journalists
that provides free online course on science journalism
Website: http://www.wfsj.org/course/index-e.html



Pic 2: Logo of Knight Science Journalism at
the Massachusetts Institute of Technology that provides fellowship programs
Website: https://ksj.mit.edu

Writing about science, you are only a journalist, but neither a scientist nor teacher. You just use science facts from different parts of the world and present them to audience with a real environment of the target.

And by "watchdog journalism", you work not only for analyzing controversial research issues, but also set up a sheet of researches that can be visited by many scientists and get them contacted to each other.

Science journalism materials are based on research papers of scientists published in scientific journals. In stories or articles, science journalists should assemble many facts from scientists' research results in different parts of the world.

There are no things for magazines to do with interview that is focused only on one scientist's result and have no other research facts to be linked to. And it is better to make oppositional interview as it adds spice to the material.[12] In another point of view, science journalism materials also make up fields of controversial science facts where both interested public and scientists can drive out better understanding of things.

[12] Free online science journalism course, Lesson-3 / 3.4 – "Consider your interview type", World Federation of Science Journalists website: http://www.wfsj.org/course/index-e.html

Magazines' editorial staffs accept only informative manuscripts that will provide new facts for readers, as well as scientists searching in relevant realms of science. Such materials mostly appear to be central to many researchers to concentrate their efforts and helps them to create collaborations. Here the journalist comes out as one point of a triangle between scientists and readers.

Science journalism bear on itself most of bests in all journalism profession. Most interesting, most important, having most of readers, demanding most of responsibility from journaalist, taking most of time to write story and earning most of fees are those materials that are prepared based on scientific researches and facts. For example, when we say "having most of readers" about science journalism materials, it seems as an evident with Science Magazine, Scientific American, NewsScientist, National Geographic, Discovery, Animal Planet and other world-wide known magazines or TV channels. Every sections of the public can be interested in materials presented by these media outlets.

Someone can be not interested in one of the fields like policy, economics, sports, crime and entertainment reports in media outlets. But science based materials attract everyone, even housewives and workers.

In Europe and USA, science journalism materials are paid even more than 2,000 dollars that is really worth to the precise researches, at times, taking even several months.

2.1 *Earthquake*, 5,8 magnitude, in Hajigabul district close to capital Baku on 10 February 2014,[13] gave the next power to the mass of miswriting reports on further shake predictions in most media outlets of Azerbaijan. There appeared much more misunderstanding reports on earthquake predictions for Azerbaijan, which led to some troubles in the public.[14]

But in fact, some scientists from Azerbaijan, USA and Russia writing their research conclusions about the geodynamic situation in the Caucasus in different articles suggest some seismic risks for Baku and Caspian Sea, but they do not predict any quakes for any determined places.[15]

If those miswriting journalists read those scientific details, the public would have understood that no scientist can predict exact date of quake in any places.

But although earthquake is still unpredictable, some many scientific resources show that geodynamic processes are highly active in the Caucasus.[16] Actually, many seismology scientists in the world cut their earthquake prediction researches and they just study geodynamic pressure and hazards. There are even such suggestions that unsuccessful predictions can lead to extended economic damages with evacuations, clearing some areas, involving rescue teams and etc.[17]

But it is better media to write and educate people what to do before earthquake and also during shakes. Unfortunately, media outlets misreporting about environment are mostly those who write not basing on science and many times their reader public suffer from lack of educational news items. And this emerges again as a fact of importance of science journalism.

[13] "5.80-magnitude earthquake strikes off Azerbaijan", SIA news agency website: http://sia.az/en/news/event/392707-580-magnitude-earthquake-strikes-off-azerbaijan
[14] "Earthquake predictions in Azerbaijan 'groundless': ANAS", AZERNEWS website: http://www.azernews.az/azerbaijan/64512.html
[15] "Seismic Hazards in Azerbaijan Informed by Geodesy", Results, UNAVCO website: http://unavco.org/science/snapshots/human-dimensions/2013/kadirov.html
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[17] "Attempts to predict earthquakes may do more harm than good", The Guardian magazine website: http://www.theguardian.com/science/blog/2012/may/30/attempts-predict-earthquakes-harm-good

3. CONCLUSION

Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences is at the very beginning of the way to founding science journalism in the country. Ending the first stage, we built up public relations network that is going to be a team of sophisticated journalists amongst the vast mass media of Azerbaijan. So we have a team and have also media outlet just like the magazine called "Elm və həyat" (Science and Life) as an internal body of ANAS structure. It is well-known publication being sold really well since 1961 in Soviet time.[18]

Now what the team need is only to improve mental resources by science journalism trainings and seminars that are going to be organized by ANAS Presidium for the closing future. We aim to provide science journalism boot camps not only our team, but also for other media members in Azerbaijan involving some professionals from Europe or America.



Pic 3: ANAS's team of science journalists at the event on science journalism



Pic 4: Said Huseynov, talking about science journalism at the event for the team.

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[18] About "Elm və həyat" magazine in Wikipedia: http://az.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elm_və_həyat_(jurnal)

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