



FLOWS OF BUSINESS COMMUNICATION – BETWEEN SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE ACTION AND CRISIS PR: THE CASE OF THE PUBLIC COMPANY OFFICIAL GAZETTE OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

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Abstract: *PR activities (Public Relations) have long been a mandatory part of global communication flows, as an important segment of business management. They represent a skillset and a set of processes that can influence the formation of favorable public opinion, thus affecting the realization of broader business objectives, which are more easily achieved with public understanding and support. PR flows form a kind of continuum, and the modern era suggests that they are predominantly framed within two main dimensions: crisis communication and the demonstration of socially responsible business conduct. The main focus of this article lies in this fact, as we seek to demonstrate that most business entities today operate communicatively within these frameworks, striving to maintain a desired public image and, in doing so, ensure business stability. Our main thesis, therefore, arises from this context, as we believe that business stability is conditioned by the public image, which largely depends on the PR success in the domains of crisis communication and the demonstration of socially responsible business practices – PR aspects that we will present in more detail. As a case study, we will use the Public Company Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia and examples of such PR activities in this case, given that it is a company with a broad business scope and public influence. Considering the operations and the public image of this company, the analysis of this case will serve to substantiate our thesis, simultaneously illustrating different situations and effects produced by this entity's PR activities. In this way, the presented results may also be applicable to most other entities.*

Keywords: *Public Relations, Business Communication, Crisis Communication, Corporate Social Responsibility, Public Company Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*

1. INTRODUCTORY NOTES: PR IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

The term PR originates from the English phrase *Public Relations* and denotes a globally accepted term for a set of activities aimed primarily at building good relations between a given subject and its environment. In this way, it directly refers to the overall activities of a subject (organization or individual) directed toward achieving a desired influence on the public and shaping public opinion. "Public relations represent a phenomenon whose roots reach deep into history" [1, p. 55], while "modern public relations, as we know them today, are a product of the late 19th century" [1, p. 55]. Given the complexity of contemporary society and the challenges prevailing in business and market flows, PR activities have become a necessary element of managing every successful organization, primarily aimed at exerting communication influence. Thus, they often decisively impact the achievement of business goals, as well as the positioning of the subject within society (status, identity), helping to establish and maintain mutual trust, communication, and cooperation between the subject and its target groups.

One of the primary tasks of PR actors is therefore the preparation and implementation of activities that will result in better understanding and information exchange among employees (*internal communication*) and the faster adaptation of the organization to surrounding circumstances through various communication aspects (*external communication*). The synchronization of these two dimensions of PR communication (*internal and external*) fundamentally underpins the overall success of PR strategies, as well as the other activities they support. Thus, successful PR means building positive publicity, image, and identity, which correlate with the internal business culture, reflecting the set of values and beliefs shared by employees (if they are aligned, PR is successful).

PR more concretely encompasses a set of activities based on the analysis of the broader socio-business environment, the definition of goals, and, above all, the knowledge and proper selection of the target audience toward which these activities are directed. Their purpose is to gain trust and create favorable opinions. In fact, the realization of business goals proceeds more successfully with public support and understanding, which is why the success of PR activities is necessary. The prerequisite for this success is to get to know “the other side” – primarily to understand and respect its objective interests. In this way, a positive identity of the organization itself is built in the public sphere, which is particularly important for its societal standing and overall business operations over the long term.

Identity is a consequence of achieving understanding between the organization and the public – that is, the way the subject is objectively perceived externally. "Corporate identity is the term most often used to describe the program of communications and changes a company undertakes" [2, p. 13], and it consists of "its history, beliefs and philosophy, the nature of its technology, ownership, people, the personality of its leadership, its ethical and cultural values, and its strategy" [2, p. 13]. Thus, corporate identity is not “a beautification tool,” but “the very essence of an organization's existence” [2, p. 13]. A positive identity, therefore, is the result of positive publicity in the public sphere, which is based on trust between the parties in PR communication.

The rapid changes in contemporary society dictate the importance of monitoring these developments to prevent potential unpleasant surprises and to provide defense for the subject in relation to emerging events. In this way, a positive public image and a trust-based identity are maintained. For success in this respect – the successful anticipation of potential crises and the easier absorption of external shocks – organizations today undertake various PR steps, which are largely directed toward two especially important segments: **strategies for reacting to crisis situations and the continuous construction of the identity of a socially responsible subject.**

In this article, we shall follow the thesis that the success of contemporary business communication (and, more broadly, business operations), contained within the dimensions of internal and external public relations, is based on the ability to establish synchronised, transparent, and professionally conducted PR activities. These activities, in turn, move dominantly between the efforts to build and demonstrate corporate social responsibility and simultaneously respond successfully to potential crisis situations and their possible consequences. More concretely, we maintain that a well-established status of a socially responsible entity, in synergy with professional PR operations grounded in ethical principles of the profession, provides the best foundation for overcoming crises.

We shall endeavour to demonstrate this through the case study of the Public Enterprise Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia (Serbian Official Gazette/SOG – Službeni glasnik RS/SG, in Serbian) and its PR activities. Since SOG is a specific actor that performs several responsible roles across various sectors of society, and has maintained the status of a socially responsible entity, this perspective is highlighted as particularly important even by SOG's representatives themselves. They emphasize that they strive to "justify, maintain, and enhance the publishing reputation and authority through the highest quality of products and services, reliability, and accuracy in transmitting information, with the goal of preserving and actively nurturing users' trust, strengthening market position, and simultaneously protecting the interests of the broader community." [3] Given this operational framework and the accompanying publicity, SOG provides an example through which various PR operations can be observed in specific, and thus representative situations from our perspective. Therefore, we believe that this analysis will support the thesis presented above.

2. CRISIS COMMUNICATION AND SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE ACTION: THE PRINCIPLE OF FEEDBACK IN PR FRAMEWORKS

2.1. The Certainty of Crises and the Uncertainty of Their Anticipation

"Any organization can be struck by a crisis" [1, p. 81], which is why "it is imperative for every organization to plan for crisis situations and prepare for such cases" [1, p. 55]. A crisis in the socio-business environment of a particular entity can potentially be initiated by one or more events that could consequently harm its reputation and, as a result, its business operations. Shari Veil thus rightly observes that "crisis communication with external publics primarily focuses on threats to reputation brought about by a crisis" [4, p. 2].

The causes of crises can be of various natures, ranging from natural disasters to the dissemination of inaccurate or unfavorable information about an organization. The modes of their manifestation are equally diverse. However, a common denominator in most of these situations is poor business management, which subsequently extends into poor communication management with both external and internal publics, which leading to broader negative consequences.

The public relations process in crisis situations can be viewed “through the following stages:

- Crisis planning,
- Crisis management, and
- Post-crisis public relations management” [1, p. 55].

Thus, the essential aspects of PR operations in this area include identifying, predicting, and preventing potential outcomes – i.e., crisis planning and appropriate actions during the crisis or its aftermath. "A crisis disrupts the sense of continuity, necessitating that important decisions be made under stress and within tight time constraints" [5, p. 68], and such extraordinary circumstances "can jeopardize the functioning, even the very survival of a company" [5, p. 69]. Therefore, it is necessary to have a "**crisis plan**" and a "**crisis team**" for such situations [5, p. 70]. It is certain that every possible crisis situation demands the existence of a pre-formulated strategy, along with the creation and rapid dissemination of necessary information, given that during a crisis the subject is at the center of public attention. Thus, it is crucial to have at least a minimally defined action plan for such moments to prevent or at least mitigate adverse impacts. Additionally, it is essential to have a pre-designated team that can act at such times, following the strategy, and equipped with the necessary authority and expertise. The risk management process "consists of three steps:

1. Risk and hazard identification,
2. Risk and hazard assessment, and
3. Risk and hazard management" [6, p. 113].

The first step is "identifying and determining when and how a problem might arise, requiring a broad view of risks" [6, p. 114], the second involves "analyzing the likelihood of the problem occurring and its consequences," and the third step is "finding the most efficient way to manage them" [6, p. 115]. Thus, it is necessary to "establish a system for reporting incidents, ensuring that all senior organizational team members, including those responsible for public relations (if it is a separate function), are fully informed" [6, p. 85]. This is crucial because it allows at some level of control over how the crisis and its consequences are interpreted within the public. Therefore, the imperative emerges to accept and demonstrate responsibility, offer a solution for resolving the crisis, and assure the public that similar incidents will not recur. The media play an important role during a crisis, as the public relies on them for information when forming opinions, while for the organization itself, they serve as key channels for disseminating messages.

Crisis communication has long become a "separate field with its own rules" and "the task of those managing crisis communication is to first target the most important publics and craft messages specifically for them" [7, p. 2]. "Moreover, the fact that organizations and their authorized representatives still manage to make incredible mistakes during crises, despite decades of theoretical development and practical application, is the reason why constant research in this area remains necessary" [7, p. 2]. During the so-called "**golden hour**"¹, those responsible for managing the crisis must first inform the most critical key publics, with other publics addressed afterward, given that an organization's communication during crises is under heightened public scrutiny.

All conclusions and recommendations derived from observing such situations indicate that behavior during a crisis will be remembered for a long time and that larger crises proportionally lead to greater effects on the consciousness of the target public, which will not be willing to forgive significant mistakes made during that period. Thus, it is often asserted that **trust is easily lost and almost impossible to regain after a crisis**, which logically has negative effects on business outcomes as well. In such situations, the priority is to establish communication and trust with the segment of the public most directly affected by the crisis, with the aim of regaining control and minimizing or eliminating potential danger.

Thus, the "two key points of problem management are:

1. Early identification of problems and their potential effects on the organization, and
2. A strategic response designed to mitigate the consequences of the problem or even benefit from it" [8, p. 27].

This essentially means engaging in **dynamic forecasting** [8, p. 27] The goal is to establish control over the flow of information and to create communication that calms publics and mitigates negative effects. Crisis PR therefore involves expressing regret, offering solutions, compensating for damage, and subsequently implementing the necessary changes.

2.2. CSR as a Universal Defensive Strategy and a Generator of Positive Publicity

Given the uncertainty of the circumstances described, as well as possible objective limitations regarding available resources, combined with the overall complexity of modern socio-business flows, building and demonstrating the status of a socially responsible entity has over time become a universal preventive strategy in such a context.

"Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) or corporate philanthropy describes a widely accepted management concept that maintains a balance between economic and social goals and between individual and public interests" [8, p. 90], and "represents a long-term investment in a company's image and rating, as well as a stable foundation and strong support for a positive image and reputation" [8, p. 91]. Today, every organization must therefore be understood as "an institution that engages resources to create profit and benefits for all its stakeholders" [9, p. 142]. As "concerns about the broad impact of business on society have grown, CSR practices have expanded into social, environmental, cultural, and ethical domains," and such responsibility is now seen as "the continuous commitment of corporations to the economic and social development of the communities in which they operate" [9, p. 142].

¹ The first moments following the outbreak of a crisis, when it is crucial to respond in a timely and appropriate manner, in every sense, including within the domain of public relations activities.

CSR, interpreted through the prism of communication influence on a business entity's public image, thus implies not only fulfilling the business and legal obligations but also considering the broader context and proactively addressing the needs of the wider social community. In this way, the building of image and identity is carried out in accordance with a new global model of business behavior – **acting responsibly toward society** – which simultaneously becomes one of the basic resources for constructing public image and identity, and an important safeguard for cushioning the negative consequences when crisis situations arise. Accordingly, the foundations of socially responsible business are "the maximization of long-term contributions to society as a whole and the minimization of negative impacts" [9, p. 92].

PR actors and the activities they propose and implement must "develop a deeper understanding of top management's approach to the development and implementation of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, in order to support the leadership role of the organization, considering how it currently functions within the CSR context" [10, p. 403]. Thus "perhaps the most important area for future research is the process companies follow to develop successful corporate responsibility programs," and these programs today are mostly located within sectors concerned with environmental protection, health, and safety, and are focused on easily understandable sustainability goals [11, p. 54]. Consequently, the field of corporate responsibility is developing into "a more cohesive, unified area of study that will inform corporate programs across all sectors of society" [11, p. 54].

However, it must also be acknowledged that PR activities aimed at portraying socially responsible behavior are often conducted with manipulative intent. It is because PR actors and the entities they represent have long recognized the long-term positive effects of establishing such a status. In such cases, the proclaimed social responsibility efforts are sometimes a diversion from potentially harmful activities, thus aligning with the universal strategic need for crisis prevention. More specifically, this is often carried out through individual PR strategies that support for the common good, typically accompanied by significant financial investments. Meanwhile, in the background, efforts are often made to conceal other activities of a different, often harmful nature toward the very same groups.

2.3. PR Ethics as a Prerequisite for Maintaining a Positive Image

The ethicality of PR approaches (of all planned and implemented activities within an organisation's PR segment) occupies a central position within the business processes previously described. It stands as the only guarantee for maintaining a balance between correct conduct in various complex circumstances (including crisis) and the demonstration of socially responsible behaviour. Practice, of course, often contradicts this ideal when PR actors and management overlook the importance of such an ethical perspective in their professional conduct. The consequences of such neglect, however, best illustrate the significance of ethics, revealing the damage caused by errors in this regard.

PR practice also demonstrates that reacting to situations and information that may potentially harm an organisation's public image often requires outward communication. In reality, "the processes of communication control and public perception occur simultaneously" [2, p. 84]. This dynamic arises from the two dimensions of PR communication (internal and external), requiring synchronous action along two specific lines. In such situations, the synergy between internal and external communication becomes most evident, reflecting the ethical conduct of the subject entity. If satisfactory, this synergy can contribute to building and maintaining a positive public image; if not, it may significantly exacerbate already unfavourable circumstances, exposing communication noise to the target audience, which will easily detect such issues. Thus, the organisational culture and identity of the entity are projected outward.

Accordingly, as St. John and Pearson [12] emphasise, encouraging widespread ethical discussion within an organisation can help it mitigate concerns that may contribute to the emergence of crises. Simultaneously, the importance of adhering to professional standards during PR activities becomes clear – prioritising the ethics of the profession rather than the interests of employers or clients.

This, however, is often neglected, resulting in the PR industry frequently being assigned an a priori negative connotation. Organisations must, therefore, behave in accordance with moral principles based on truthfulness, justice, and trust if they seek long-term business success and societal acceptance. In line with this, there exist three distinct levels of morality that form the ethical framework guiding PR actors' decision-making, especially during crises:

- the level of individual morality,
- the level of organizational morality (i.e., the values of the organization being represented), and
- the broader social morality influencing the environment in which the organization operates.

By examining these three dimensions and their frequent conflicts, one can most easily discern the mistakes made during PR activities and the causes of certain negative outcomes they subsequently engender.

3. THE CASE OF THE OFFICIAL GAZETTE OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA (SOG): CIRCUMSTANCES AND DIMENSIONS OF OPERATION

3.1. Challenges of Broader Socio-Business Operations

When discussing the example of the SOG, which is the main focus of our analysis, it is essential to highlight several details that must be considered, both in relation to the public relations (PR) activities of this company and the status and publicity surrounding it. These factors must be taken into account when interpreting its activities.

As this entity is a significant actor in our society and political system, performing a range of important roles, it is worth noting the observation that 'many forms of PR occur in proximity to money, and the pressures motivated by political, military, party, private, or other partial interests are not insignificant' [5, p. 242]. Therefore, it is necessary to emphasize that SOG is an entity engaged in a variety of heterogeneously oriented activities across highly responsible domains. Among these are, for example, publishing official gazettes, producing scientific literature, providing printing services, and operating retail outlets, all of which collectively frame the company's overall activities, role, and perception as an important entity within the broader societal context. This position inevitably impacts numerous challenges and complex processes within which PR activities occur, necessitating their organization across multiple channels.

Furthermore, it must be considered that SOG is **a state-owned enterprise**, which directly influences its functional framework, business capacity, and available resources. It also affects how the company is largely perceived through a broader societal lens, shaped by general impressions of the current state of society and the policies that dictate the processes within it. This fact, for instance, also affects the selection of managerial staff, which in turn creates a broader context for all business activities within SOG, including those in the PR domain. This shapes the public image of SOG. Specifically, it influences the fact that managerial staff are continuously selected based on their ability to generate publicity of a certain type (with different connotations), given their parallel professional engagements and the already established public perception of these individuals, particularly considering that many of them are also political figures. As a result, the effects of their parallel activities are transferred to the overall publicity of SG, even though these processes and effects may not originate directly from the company's environment or have a direct connection to it.

However, it is in this manner that many of their business decisions, including those related to managing SG, are often formed, as well as decisions within the realm of PR that accompany SOG's activities. This is a particularly important. Considering the specificities of this enterprise's operations described above, we can conclude that it is an entity whose actors often do not function with the minimum level of autonomy required for making adequate business decisions (and by extension, those regarding communication management). Simultaneously, the effects of broader societal events are transferred to individual management decisions and the behavior of key actors, and thus to the enterprise as a whole.

3.2. SG and PR Activities

Given the described coordinates of SOG's operations and, therefore, its communication, it is necessary to approach the planning and execution of PR activities with careful consideration. It is crucial, as well as their potential outcomes, and taking into account the potentially influencing factors within the socio-political framework in which this entity operates. This domain is often a limiting factor in the construction and maintenance of a positive public image. This is especially true when the effects of crises from the broader societal context or negative individual publicity spill over into SOG's framework, affecting its communication. Consequently, this undoubtedly complicates the task, regardless of the skills of PR professionals within SOG, often making it predetermined (limited) in terms of the valid practice requirements.

Based on numerous recognitions and ongoing publicity, we argue that we can start with the observation that SG mostly maintains a positive image and identity in the public eye. These have primarily been built on the responsible fulfillment of its cultural mission, but also on the supporting communication activities that have undoubtedly helped make this segment recognized in such a way, despite the various crises that have not spared the company. This also serves as a proof of the general suggestion that crises are inevitable and that one must always be ready for an appropriate response.

In the case of SOG, balancing between the need to maintain the status of an important socially responsible entity and the various crises that inevitably arise – either from SOG's own environment or as a result of the influence wielded by managerial staff and their parallel activities, or even from the broader socio processes in which the enterprise functions – requires an approach to each individual PR campaign and strategy.

For this reason, we will present a specific borderline situation in which the public image could have been damaged, but this was prevented thanks to the professional PR engagement, the generally positive status, and the specific circumstances that generated it. This illustrates the validity of the thesis that a crisis always lurks 'around the corner,' even when all professionally necessary steps have been taken.

On the other hand, the peculiarities of SOG influence the fact that its PR professionals are often not afforded with the opportunity to act professionally, which is structured in inadequate internal communication and a lack of information and defined strategies for action in challenging circumstances. In such cases, their role is primarily reduced to delays, inaction, or improvisations, where they are trying to fulfill their role in such situations.

Finally, we will present a situation that significantly shook SOG's identity and status, accompanied by this type of PR response from the entity. Thus, we aim to show how PR processes generally function, highlighting the positive effects in cases where PR activities are successfully executed, as well as the opposite situations.

In that way, we will present examples situated between two communication flows, occurring when the effects of external circumstances overwhelm the capacity for adequate PR planning and execution. The focus will be on several such cases that occurred over the past decade and a half, which significantly influenced the formation of the public's perception of SOG. These will be briefly scanned through previously discussed dominant PR lenses (*crisis PR and CSR activities*), partially tracking their treatment in the media and public discourse, as well as the effects subsequently reflected in changes in business operations and management.

We aim to present several different situations and cases where the business communication of this enterprise is realized, dictating broader consequences for it. From those where, thanks to predominantly positive business-communication processes, SOG preserved the status of a socially responsible entity and a positive identity, helping maintain a positive public image even in crisis situations, to those that reveal the complexities of communication in circumstances that inevitably accompany the functioning of such organizations, and finally to those where poor management also spills over into the realm of business communication, leading to negative publicity and damage to the business results.

3.2.1. SOG and PR Activities: *Success as a Key Resource for Good PR*

In several past decades, the SOG has represented an enterprise in Serbia (and the wider region) that has built its identity primarily on its strong engagement in the fields of culture and publishing. This is particularly true regarding the publishing of scientific and professional literature, although publishing official gazettes remains its primary activity. In addition, SOG possesses a rich network of bookstores, one of the busiest printing facilities in the region, and it has initiated and supported numerous activities within the broader social framework – from areas directly related to its domain (culture, science, publishing) to broader initiatives, including humanitarian efforts.

Much of this can be explored in more detail on the company's website [13] or through simple searches of media sources [14]. Within this operational context, numerous material proofs of success are evident, alongside the challenges SG faces. Perhaps the best confirmation of its achievements lies in the collection of prestigious awards received over the years – awards given to SG's authors, editors, publications, and to SG itself for the initiatives it led or participated in [15], and its socially responsible activities [16]. Among such recognitions are highly notable ones, including the **"Publisher of the Year"** awards (e.g., 2006, 2007, 2015, and 2018 at the *International Book Fair in Belgrade*), and the **Award for the publishing house with the most professional relationship with the media** (2012 at the same event), as well as many other accolades. Additionally, SG received the **Sretenje Order, Second Degree** for outstanding merits in publishing laws and regulations, and the **"Belgrade Victor"**, annual award for business achievements in 2016, awarded by the Chamber of Commerce of Serbia [17].

Thus, although it cannot be denied that there have been situations where SG did not receive exclusively positive public reactions (some will be discussed later), it is justified to conclude that this subject has successfully capitalized on its business resources and directed its PR activities toward maintaining a predominantly positive public image and identity.

3.2.2. SOG and PR Activities: *Scope of PR Actors' Influence*

As we previously noted and announced, this article will also address certain crisis situations in which SOG's activities did not result exclusively in positive outcomes. Among these situations, there were cases where SOG and its employees, including management, had little influence over the emergence of unfavorable circumstances – but thanks to the organization's established identity, they managed to mitigate more serious negative effects – as well as cases where poor management, and more often mismanagement (possibly due to incompetence), exacerbated the crisis effects.

Among the former cases, we can highlight the event from April 2015, when SG decided to help ease tensions in the society ahead of the football game between Crvena Zvezda and Partizan. The idea was to capitalize on the publicity surrounding this sporting event and simultaneously demonstrate (and monetize) its potential through a socially responsible initiative. Namely, the plan was to send a message of peace to both fan groups by organizing the launch of the book *Derby, My Derby (Derbi, moj derbi, in Serbian)*, co-authored by Božo Koprivica (a Partizan supporter), and Vule Žurić (a Red Star fan) – intended to demonstrate that healthy sports rivalry could be nurtured.

The event was held at a hotel in downtown Belgrade, with speakers including the two authors and four domestic football legends – Nenad Bjeković and Momčilo Vukotić (Partizan), and Dušan Savić and Vladimir Petrović Pižon (Red Star). It attracted considerable media and public attention [18, pp. 311-312]. Despite thorough planning and solid technical preparation, just minutes after the beginning, following opening remarks by Koprivica (seen as offensive by Red Star supporters), Petrović reacted angrily and left the event. Although the discussion continued, media coverage and public perception were irreversibly altered, completely overshadowing the original intention [19]. Thus, the crisis was generated by an event that could neither have been predicted. The intended effect, unfortunately, was not achieved – media focused almost exclusively on the failed attempt to ease rivalries rather than on the positive aspects.

From a PR perspective – which is especially important here – the organizer's initial idea was effectively nullified. However, thanks to dominant media tendencies toward sensationalism not directly targeting the organizers or the book, SOG's public image was not significantly damaged. This positive outcome was largely due to SOG's internal communication efforts and proactive external engagement with the media and key stakeholders (e.g., the football clubs Red Star and Partizan), mitigating possible negative consequences for SOG's publicity.

This case demonstrates that even professionally conceived and executed activities can encounter unpredictable crises arising from the broader environment, carrying risks regarding loss of control over events and their interpretation. Moreover, considering the organizer's original intentions – demonstrating CSR – it is evident that such PR strategies always simultaneously aim to generate positive publicity for the actor initiating them. In this case, prior reputation and professional PR operations allowed SOG to overcome the crisis with minimal consequences.

3.2.3. SOG and PR Activities: *Consequences of PR Confusion - When PR Principles Are Neglected*

As previously illustrated, SOG has undoubtedly achieved many successes and enjoyed positive reactions from its target and broader public. However, this does not mean there have been no setbacks, including several instances that continue to provoke negative associations with the company. Here, we will mention only those cases that had especially long-lasting effects and threatened to significantly damage SOG's status and business reputation, reaching mainstream media and public discourse. Some examples include:

- Controversies surrounding the publication or promotion of certain editions,
- Allegations of nepotism during hiring processes [20],
- Scandals regarding the destruction of books (particularly huge case in media) [21],
- And notably, the **theft of exam tests** for high school enrollment, which arguably had the most prolonged negative impact – as the so-called "**Bra Theft Affair**" [22].

This last event occurred in June 2013. In preparation for the entrance exams, following usual practice, the tests were printed at SOG's printing facility. However, few days before the exams, information surfaced that these tests were being sold in Belgrade. This prompted investigations by authorities and intense media interest. It was soon established that a worker from SOG's printing house was allegedly responsible, having smuggled test copies hidden in her bra, which were subsequently reproduced and sold [23].

Throughout this period, the media and authorities were highly focused on SOG's response. SOG's management formed a crisis committee, but subsequent crisis communication actions were poorly coordinated. Specifically:

- Internal communication within SOG was severely lacking. Employees – including PR staff – were deliberately left uninformed and without guidance on how to respond to persistent media inquiries.
- External communication unfolded chaotically, without a clear strategy or adherence to professional crisis management standards.

Van der Wagen and Carlos [6] remind us that "the task of public relations is to manage the organization's image and events in the minds of the public and audience." Simultaneously, organizations must "reevaluate their corporate values and fulfill their social responsibilities" [24, p. 109]. In SOG's case, PR professionals lacked clear instructions or authority to act independently, leading to an unspoken strategy of **silence and avoidance** – even as media interest intensified. This left media to construct narratives independently, often to the company's detriment.

"Today's corporate reality demands that organizations manage not only financial outcomes but also CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) and ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) indicators" [25, p. 482]. The appearances of SOG representatives in this case were mostly reduced to individual improvisations and pre-agreed activities by the top management (insufficiently considered from a PR perspective), which, it seems, only further worsened the situation, leading the pendulum of public interpretation in an even worse direction [22]. At the time and even today, the impression (both within SOG and outside of it) has been that the SOG management lacked adequate insight into what had actually happened, and that due to the external influences (socio-political factors), they were unsure of how and to what extent they could act autonomously. As a result, the canons of PR communication practice in such cases were completely neglected, which dictate that quick action must be taken, responsibility must be accepted, regret must be expressed, a solution must be offered, and the public must be reassured that similar incidents will not recur.

The stigma from these events, due to all the aforementioned, caused by failing to act in accordance with PR principles and ethics, acquired a prolonged effect, and the control over the communication flow and interpretation of the events by the SOG was practically nonexistent. The epilogue, at least in the legal-formal sense, came later. The accused SOG employee confessed to the crime and was sentenced the following year [26]. However, immeasurable damage was done to the status and identity of SOG. It also affected the company's operations, which lost the contract for printing tests after this case. The confusion and poor communication in this case led to the incident being dubbed somewhat pejoratively as the "**Bra Scandal**", a term coined by one of the confused statements from the then director of SOG.

This association still remains in the public's mind when referring to the SOG, overshadowing many positive activities and results that the company had achieved both at that time and later. In this case, which had much larger dimensions

and a greater public impact than the previously described one, the difference, as we can see, was in the poor actions in the domain of PR activities, as there was no clear plan and transparent internal communication, while externally, there was improvisation and individual actions. This generated a high level of negative publicity, the consequences of which were multifaceted and reflected negatively on the company.

CONCLUISON

A brief overview of the field of activity, the general characteristics of the environment in which the analyzed entity operates, as well as specific characteristic situations it has faced, confirms the thesis we started with. Namely, the case study confirms the long-established conclusion that "the consequences of ignoring community relations issues can be harmful" [27, p. 26], as well as the importance of "transparent, impartial, and sincere internal communication, which should not merely serve to advocate management's positions" for the realization of effective outcomes [28, p. 108].

Specifically, the analyzed examples demonstrate the importance of "identifying problems and providing thorough explanations for them "alongside the effort to gain favor and understanding by acknowledging the difficulties faced by an organization and clarifying what can be done to resolve them" [27, p. 27]. For this to be achievable, management must "listen" to public relations input, understanding that "corporate social responsibility (CSR) can enhance reputation and create a positive company image," and that to use these tools effectively, it is "necessary to engage experts with appropriate competencies" [29, p. 74].

All this becomes evident, as "building and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics that surround it is defined as the moral and ethical foundation of this profession," upon which "organizational success or failure also depends" [8, p. 11]. Thus, it is important to conclude that correct behavior implies "actions undertaken in accordance with the generally accepted moral values of a society" [8, p. 141].

In situations where this alone is not sufficient, the organization's and its employees' commitment to ethical action must prevail, as this remains the only tangible guarantee for successfully overcoming crises, maintaining a positive public image, and ensuring long-term business stability.

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