



THE QUANTIFICATION OF INFORMATION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS ACTIVITIES IN MILITARY OPERATIONS

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Abstract: *In public relations in military operations, the quality and opportunity of the transmitted message are elements that count and that can be quantified, constituting at the same time a leverage for the success of the operation, a means to save human lives, material and patrimony values.*

Keywords: *public relations; quantification; military operations; target groups.*

The first evaluation papers in this domain were published by the Evaluation Commission of the US Institute for Public Relations which elaborated a series of papers referring to the best practices in the evaluation of public relations activities, including a dictionary of terminology specific to evaluations and a set of directions to be followed.

The Institute for Public Relations is a prestigious international institution which, through its specialty commission, has an objective to establish the standards and methods of research and evaluation in public relations.

The bases of the public relations evaluation activity were laid at the European Evaluation Summit of the International Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication that took place on 8-10 June 2011 in Lisbon, the principles of evaluation assumed in Barcelona being adopted and assumed by professional organizations from all over the world.

According to the Barcelona Declaration, the principles of evaluation in the activity of public relations are:

- the importance of defining an objective and a measurement. The objectives must be defined as clearly as possible and they must answer the following questions envisaging a public relations campaign: who, what, when and what impact is expected. We must thus keep in mind that the aim

and the measurement are fundamental aspects of any public relations campaign;

- media are measured both quantitatively and qualitatively. According to this principle, quality can be defined in terms such as positive, negative, neutral. The focus is placed on the way in which the message is transmitted, the reaction of the target audience at the tone of the articles, the credibility of the source, the type of media and, to a lesser extent, the number of published articles;

- the AVE (Advertising Value Equivalence) index does not represent a criterion worthy of consideration, as it does nothing but measure the cost of the media space and not the value of public relations;

- the social media can and must be measured. This principle derives from the first principle and it underlines the need for objectivity and clearly defined results for the social media. At the same time, it widens the area of analysis with polls, web searches etc and it supports the idea that evaluation must concentrate on conversations and communities, and not on simple appearances. It is important to understand the influence and degree of penetration, but the existing sources are not always acceptable, transparent or sufficiently consistent to be reliable; the keys to success are experiment and testing;

- the measurement of the consequences is to be preferred to the measurement of the results because, according to specialists, not all that matters can be counted and not all that can be counted matters. Consequences means changes in behaviour, attitude

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and understanding.

One controversial method of evaluation in the field of public relations is the Advertising Value Equivalency (AVE) method which suggests the fact that the space and time won in the media through public relations is equivalent to the same space and time paid for in the media, bought as advertising. The method is accessible and costs almost nothing, but this thing does not justify the practice as an adequate one. Research showed, for example, that the editorial space and publicity do not have the same value. Publicity is purchased and permits full control by the payer over content, placement and frequency and it is always positive. From the other side, public relations are only half controllable after ceding the materials to the media channel and this can lead to positive, neutral or even negative messages.

Assimilated with publicity, when calculated, the Advertising Value Equivalency (AVE) indicator also serves to determine the PR Value sub-indicator, by multiplying the AVE value (x3), the communication and public relations specialist being considered more credible and more persuasive than traditional publicity.

If in the civil society, the activity of information and public relations is evaluated in order to demonstrate the success and efficiency of a recently conducted public relations campaign, the contribution of the public relations specialist in attaining the communication objective, in order to learn what can be improved in the future campaign and what mistakes not to repeat, as well as in order to obtain a larger budget for future projects, in public relations in the military field the quality and opportunity of the message transmitted are the elements that count and that are quantified.

In military operations, the quantification of the information and public relations activity must be regarded beyond an analytical spirit and the necessity for a quantitative approach. It is the domain in which public relations differ greatly from the civil society, the success of a military operation depending to a significant extent on the results of the public relations structure.

We must not make the mistake according to which the public relations personnel occupy these positions because they can not occupy command positions or other types of positions. The public relations practitioner must be regarded as any

other specialist in the military field (infantry man, chemist, sapper, IT specialist etc).

In full period of recession, in military operations, the quantification of the public relations activity must not be regarded as a way to determine costs, but as leverage for the success of the operation, a way to save human lives, material and patrimony values.

The quantification of the public relations activity in military operations is different according to the type of military operation. From another point of view, given the specificity of the operation, regardless the number of military personnel, if we are in a unit or large unit, the public relations team carries out the same activities. One of the indicators taken into account when evaluating a public relations structure in operations is the media coverage.

Other indicators being considered are the *output*, the *out-take* and the *outcome*, the traffic of information, the number of website visits and the comments generated. If a website was created for a certain structure during an operation, the number of visits should be measured, the way in which the website is mentioned on blogs or, if there is a voting system, the number of votes should be measured.

The output indicator rather represents the result of the information and public relations activity than the reaction of the audience. The number of appearances in written and audio-visual media is monitored and quantified, the weight of a message and the audience attained. More complex analyses look to the relation between positive and negative articles, exposure in the editorial space (front page appearances or broadcasts at hours of maximum audience), as well as the efficiency in reaching target groups.

The *outtake* indicator measures the degree in which the target audience understood, perceived and retained the message. Significant difference can appear here depending on the type of operation, the states involved and the forces and means participating in the operation.

The level of the outcome is reached when the information and public relations personnel / structure succeeds in changing the opinions, attitude and behaviour of the target audience. This thing means a lot in military operations. If we take as an example a post-conflict military operation, through a deliberative discourse, in which the



public relations specialist of the military structure in charge of the operation succeeds to induce among the target audience a certain opinion or decision, this thing can shorten the duration of the military operation and reinstate peace, with all the benefits deriving from this.

The information and public relations activity of a military structure usually have immediate effects, which can often be seen with the naked eye. These effects are the degree of attention and exposure given to the respective military structure, the manner in which the public opinion, the society as a whole, perceives the respective structure and its activities, the operations that it plans and execute. It can also be evaluated through the number of citations of the public relations specialists, the way in which he/she and the command of the military unit behave during media events (press conferences, press briefings etc), attendance at events, appearance, content and aspect of press materials (brochures, magazines).

In my opinion, the most important event that must be held in mind in view of the quantification of public relations activities is represented by the measurement of their results. It can thus be seen whether the target groups received, understood and retained the transmitted message and also whether the communication materials and messages that were distributed led in any way to changes in opinion, attitude and/or behaviour.

For military structures, the objectives and missions to be accomplished during operations are of primary importance. The public relations products must be regarded as means to accomplish the mission. As I have previously shown, the information and public relations structures have their own contribution during operations.

If in the civil environment the measurement of public relation results requires sophisticated data collection and processing instruments and techniques, in the military environment, mainly during military operations, successfully carrying out the missions of the operation also represents the success of the public relations activity. In general, this means the limitation to the maximum of the loss of human lives, especially from among the civil population, a desirable image of the military structure, especially its commanders, through political neutrality and the elimination of propaganda of any kind and, last but not least, the

assurance of a continuous flow of public information for the personnel of the structures participating in the operation and for their family members.

All these do not necessarily require quantitative, qualitative or attitude inquiries and analyses. From another perspective, the objectives and results of public relations activities during operations, and in general as well, are, in my opinion, worthless unless they continue the objectives of the military structure, of the organization in which the information and public relations structure / personnel functions. It is thus very important that the objectives and missions of public relations structures be integrated in the general objectives of the public relations structures and the public relations specialists participate both in the planning phase and in the execution phase of military operations.

It is very important that the process of quantification of the public relations activity takes place for the entire duration of the military campaign or operation, and not only at the end. Thus, we can avoid the allocation of resources where results do not match expectations. For example, if we planned a series of public events during the campaign, and on the first events we did not manage to attract the desired number of participants, it is time for a change in strategy.

The characteristics given by the socio-cultural environment of the theatre of operations, as well as the specificity of the military operation, will put their mark both on the public relations techniques and means used, and also one the quantification of the results of this activity. In the system of alliances and partnerships determined by the current geopolitical environment, the structures of the Romanian Armed Forces operate in a multinational environment together with the forces of other NATO and EU member countries and in close cooperation with national, international, governmental and non-governmental organizations.

The growing number of civilians in these organizations determines the necessity to integrate and coordinate civil and military activities in order to attain the unity of purpose and action in an area of operations. Knowing and respecting cultural identity, specific to the areas of operations where the multinational forces operate, represent an essential condition for ensuring the success of any mission.

From another perspective, military operations



are conducted not only in order to defeat the enemy, but also to implement peace. In military operations in which weapons are used to impose peace, in my opinion, the attitude and approach of the information and public relations structures must be a pro-active one and a persuasive one toward the target audience, thus facilitating the successful accomplishment of the designated mission.

In order to obtain relevance and value for organizations, the information and public relations personnel must be capable of demonstrating the impact of public relations and of proving their value in organizations.

In conclusion, the quantification of the information and public relations activity in military operations is not and must not be regarded as a process of evaluation on the basis of standard parameters. It constitutes a process through which we obtain data, information whose valorization, in the military field, leads to the protection of the civil population in a conflict area, the success of a military operation, the protection of the reputation of a force structure and its leader.

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