Research in Public Relations
At the end of the lecture we must:

- Be able to explain what research is and its importance to Public Relations
- Have an understanding of the types of research and the different research methods used in PR
- Have an understanding of how research can be used in planning, monitoring and evaluation of PR efforts
Public relations is a process which comprises of four main steps:

- Research, programming/planning, implementation/communication and evaluation (RACE or RPIE formula)

All these steps are crucial for the success of a PR campaign.

Before any PR program can be undertaken, information must be gathered and interpreted to facilitate the mapping out of effective communication programs.

Research is seen as an integral part of the PR process. It is the basis upon which one can develop and evaluate a PR campaign.
What is Research?
It is the controlled, objective and systematic gathering of information for the purpose of describing and understanding.

Two main concepts in research: **validity and reliability**

- **Validity**: achieved when research measures what it purports to measure
- **Reliability**: achieved when very similar results are obtained when a study is repeated.

Measure what you claim to measure and do it so well that others can repeat your work.

Research is a tool that is involved virtually in every phase of communication programs.
Importance

* Research in PR:
  * Makes communication two-way (engages PR in a dialogue with publics)
  * Makes PR activities strategic (key to the design and execution of PR activities)
  * Aids the formulation of specific and targeted messages
  * Allows PR to show results, impact and to refocus PR efforts
  * Supports identification of issues and ways of problem solving and preventing crises
  * Creates or inform organizational policy
  * Helps build and maintain long-term relations (provides information required to understand the needs of publics)
Determining the scope for research

* Different types of research can be used to accomplish an organization's objectives
* What type of research to use really depends on the subject and situation
* Time and budget also are important determinants of the type of research that an organization chooses to use
Before deciding on the type of research to use, the following questions must be answered:

* What is the problem/opportunity?
* What kind of information is needed?
* How will the results of the research be used?
* What specific public(s) should be researched?
* Should the organization do the research in-house or hire an outside consultant?
* How soon will the results be needed?
* How much will the research cost?

Answering these questions will help the PR practitioner to determine the extent and nature of research needed.
Research techniques

- Different means or ways of gathering data
- Primary research and secondary research
- Primary research use new and original information that is generated through a research project and directed to answer specific questions.
- Research methods: in-depth interviews, focus groups, surveys and observation of behavior
Secondary research

Involves analysing data of any sort that was originally collected by someone else

Archival research- this is regarded as a process of researching organizational materials

Research to establish how an organization communicates to its internal and external publics
Library and online databases—academic journals and trade publications and numerous databases provide access to information.

- One can use online databases to: research facts to support a proposed project,
- locate an expert who can provide advice on an issue or a possible strategy,
- learn about the demographics and attitudes of target publics

The world wide web—internet is another tool for research that PR practitioners can use.

- It provides search engines for finding information
- Google, google scholar, google groups
Types of research

* Categorize research in two ways: formal and informal research

* We also categorize research in two: Quantitative and qualitative research
Informal research:

- research generally conducted without agreed-upon rules and procedures that would enable someone to replicate the study
- Results used for description and not prediction
Formal Research

* Research that is systematic and planned.
* Ensures it addresses the elements of a research process
  * State the problem
  * Select a manageable and measurable portion of the problem
  * Establish definitions to be used in the measurement
  * Conduct a search in published literature for studies similar in subject or research approach
  * Develop a hypothesis
  * Identify the research design (population of study and then sampling)
  * Obtain the data (data collection method); Analyze the data
  * Interpret the data to make inferences and generalizations; Communicate or report the findings.
Qualitative research affords the researcher rich insights and understanding of a situation or target public. It does not use numerical data.

Quantitative research gives the researcher greater ability to generalize to large populations and relies heavily on numerical data.
# Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualitative</th>
<th>Quantitative</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uses open ended questions</td>
<td>Uses closed ended questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploratory in nature</td>
<td>descriptive in nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usually valid but can be unreliable</td>
<td>Usually valid and reliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely projectable to large audiences</td>
<td>Usually projectable to large audiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses non-random sample (purposive/snow ball technique)</td>
<td>Uses random samples (systemic sampling)</td>
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Qualitative research techniques

* **Interviews**
  * Conducting interviews with people to understand public opinion and attitudes
  * Intercept interviews (also called convenience polls): literally intercepting people in public places and asking their opinion

* What would be the limitation of this method: highly unreliable and limited in the amount of information you can get

* **In-depth interviews**: used to get more information

* In-depth interviewing is called purposive sampling
Focus groups: interviewing a group of people who have an experience with a particular phenomenon
Consists of 8-12 people and they must represent the characteristics of the target audiences
Used to help identify attitudes and motivations of important publics

Ethnography- observation of individual or group behavior

Copy testing: selecting a representative of the target audience to read or view a campaign in its draft form before it is mass produced
Ultimately you want to communicate effectively- provide messages that audiences can understand
Quantitative Research

* Survey - this is another method of collecting data from a target audience

* Types of surveys: questionnaires (words are important)

* Mailed questionnaires

* Telephone surveys

* Email or web-survey
Areas of focus

* Public Relations research focuses on basically three (3) aspects of PR procedures

1. **Client or organization**: purpose is to obtain data or facts about an organization. Knowledge about the organization is important in the design of PR activities
   * Understanding the nature of the business (profit/non-profit)
   * Understand the mission, goals and priorities
   * Understanding the problem
   * Financial status of an organization
   * Importance of corporate image
Some organizations have information systems officers/librarians (manage flow of information generated by the organization)

- Some organizations keep records and files (sources of data/facts about the organization)
- Records must be kept in a logical, well-organized and easily retrievable form
- Records kept include information:
  - About the organization
  - About personnel - biographies
  - On-going organizational activities
2. **Opportunity or problem:** understanding or determining the need for a PR activity at a particular time
   - It could be as a result of an opportunity (pro-active PR)
   - It could be as a result of a crisis in an organization (reactive PR)

3. **Audiences/publics to be targeted:** conducting research to understand the audience or publics
   - Focus or identify publics to be targeted
   - Obtain useful data – data that will inform how best to communicate with the targeted publics
   - Use appropriate research procedures to process and compile data
Class discussion

1. What is the difference between qualitative and quantitative research
1. Discuss the characteristics of the following research methods:

- Individual questionnaire
- Group questionnaire
- Postal questionnaire
- Telephone questionnaire
- Focus groups
- Individual interviews
- Content analysis; Observations; Informal discussions
Reference list

* Newsom, D. et al (2010). *This is PR: The Realities of Public Relations*. (10\textsuperscript{th} Ed). USA: Wadsworth Publishing
