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## **Market-oriented relations in the digital era: A study of public relations and marketing professionals in Hong Kong**

### **Abstract**

**Introduction and purpose of the study** – Prior literature has highlighted the similarities and differences between the fields of public relations and marketing since the 1990s. Stepping into the digital era, this study revisits the relationship between public relations and marketing by investigating how market-oriented relations performed by professionals affect the perceptions of public relations values, the importance of interactivity, and the benefits of digital media usage in public relations.

**Literature review** – The nature of public relations and marketing have been studied in terms of their contributions to relationships between organizations and their customers or consumers (Huang & Hagan, 2011), as well as the public relations values perceived by public relations and marketing practitioners (Huang, 2012; Huang & Hagan, 2011). In the digital context, professionals' perceptions of both interactivity (Sundar, Kalyanaraman & Brown, 2003) and benefits of digital media usage in public relations (Triantafillidou & Yannas, 2014) are two factors that could affect digital media usage in public relations. This study hence proposes a model of market-oriented relations in the digital era to illustrate how market-oriented relations at the workplace could affect the interrelationships among professionals' perceived public relations values, perceived importance of interactivity, and perceived benefits of digital media usage in public relations.

**Methodology** – An online survey study on 204 professionals who have engaged in coordinating public relations activities in Hong Kong was conducted from July to September

2017. An email invitation to participate in an online survey was sent through professional associations in Hong Kong.

**Results and conclusions** – The results indicate that, no matter in which type of organizations, customers or consumers are still a significant group of stakeholders for professionals who have involved in organizing public relations activities. Structural equation modeling analyses show that the degree of market-oriented relations had significant positive effects on professionals' perceptions of public relations values, the importance of interactivity, and the benefits of digital media usage in public relations. Professionals who contribute more to market-oriented relations favor contingency interactivity more, in which involving target stakeholders in the digital platform is the most important way to establish and maintain relations with stakeholders. On the contrary, professionals who contribute more to market-oriented relations concern less about functional interactivity which focuses on enhancing stakeholders' liking towards the digital platform. Clients' profitability appears to be the most significant perceived benefit of engaging digital media in public relations practices. Despite the insightful research implications, a larger sample size is definitely more favorable in obtaining more robust effects among the variables. Future research may further validate the proposed model in different countries and cultural contexts, as well as extend the investigation of market-oriented relations to other stakeholders, such as suppliers and wholesalers.

**Practical and social implications** – The results provide useful guidelines to practitioners in formulating effective digital media strategies to manage the relationship between the organization and its stakeholders.

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