

# **SOCIAL PORTRAIT OF SPECIALIST IN THE FIELD OF COMMUNICATIONS AT RUSSIAN MEGALOPOLIS AS A PROBLEM OF THE HUMAN RESOURCES**

**Irina Britvina**

---

## **Abstract**

The paper contains a description of the social characteristics of the specialists in the field of communication studies in Yekaterinburg. There is the social portrait of European PR-specialist. Its description is in the results of surveys of PR-specialists in Europe carried out by Professor Ansgar Zerfass. The social portrait of Russian experts in the sphere of communications has not been described yet. The author of the article has described the characteristics of specialists in the field of PR and advertising in Yekaterinburg as an example. Interviews were being carried out from 2011 to 2014 in commercial companies, non-profit organizations, in PR-agencies and government bodies. The author compares some of the positions of own survey with the results of PR-specialists surveys in Europe. The team of specialists in the field of communications in Russia is still developing, but is an essential part of the human resources of the country, having a high level of education and a significant part of the youth as its members.

**Key words:** social portrait, specialists in the field of PR and advertising, communications, human resources, interview.

**JEL Code:** J 24, J 44, J 49

---

## **Introduction**

In the global world, the issue of human resources is one of the most pressing. The developed countries compete for the “high quality” skilled migrant workers. Their goal is to overcome the lack of their own workforce and to add to the demographic potential of their countries. Education level, age and qualification are the main features of human resources in any country. In the information society, communications specialists are an important part of human resources. The social portrait of such specialist can be the promising direction in the study of the country human resources quality.

The main purpose of this paper is to prove that specialists in the field of communication have a high education potential, with the majority of them being young people. All this will allow us to state that they are the important part of the workforce in Russia. However, the different approaches to their professional training, the dissimilarities in the functional duties, and the underestimation of the role of women in the field of communication indicate that the situation in Russia has notable differences as compared with the situation in Western countries.

## Literature review

In literature PR and advertising are united under the “Integrated Marketing Communication” approach, which is used in marketing (Seri, Gil-Saura & Ruiz-Molina, 2014; Aghaei, Vahedi, Kahreh & Pirooz, 2014), as well as in training students (Csikosova, Antošova & Čulkova, 2014). Nevertheless, the issues of PR activity and advertising tend to be analyzed separately.

Public Relations is both a profession with its own theory and technologies, and a branch of learning (Bashir & Fedorova, 2014; Austin & Toth, 2011). Its content, stages and development largely depend on historic and cultural features of a region or a country. There is still no unified theoretical approach supported by all scholars (Meadows & Meadows III, 2014). In the PR discourse there is a misbalance between practice-oriented and theory-oriented papers, the former prevailing (approximately 80% to 20% respectively) (Sisco, Collins & Zoch, 2011).

There is also no unified standard for PR education. Serra Celebi (2012) came to the conclusion that the main agenda in improving PR education and training is to choose the unified approach that will allow us to assess the professional level of PR specialists, as well as to train a specialist according to the demand of the PR industry.

On the one hand, these differences in theoretical approaches and respectively in the training of PR and advertising specialists reflect the market demand in every region, and on the other hand, determine the set of their professional qualities. Correspondingly, these factors also affect age and gender of the specialists in the field of communications.

## Method

The social portrait of a European PR-specialist was developed by the team of researchers under professor Ansgar Zerfass. The team conducted the surveys from 2007 till 2015 within the framework of the project

«European Communication Monitor» (ECM) (Verhoeven, Tench, Zerfass, Moreno & Verčič, 2012, 2014).

We have used the data published in the Internet by the group of professor A. Zerfass. 10–14 % of these data were contributed by the respondents from the Eastern European countries. Russia participated only in the surveys of 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015, besides the sampling for Russia doesn't seem to be representative. The surveys of 2014 and 2015 were conducted through interviewing of PR-specialists from the cities of the Ural region. The survey of 2014 involved 71 respondents from Russia, which is obviously not sufficient for developing the portrait of a PR specialist. Advertising specialists did not participate in these surveys.

Thus, one can assume that there is no reliable data about the social characteristics of Russian specialists in the sphere of communications. Moreover, the social portrait of PR- specialists working in the different regions of Russia does not exist either.

In 2011–2012 the author of this paper carried out the survey of 250 PR practitioners and 150 advertising practitioners, with the aim to find the answers to the above questions, to study the changes in the market as well at the status and responsibilities of communications majors. Thus, 400 practitioners in the sphere of communications who work in business, not-for-profit organizations and government bodies have been polled. Of these 24.3 % were top-level executives, 34.3 % were mid-level executives and 41.4 % were entry-level practitioners. The survey of 2014 involved 212 PR-specialists from Yekaterinburg. The results were used to conduct the comparative analysis and to determine characteristics of the specialists in the field of communications in Yekaterinburg.

## **Results**

This subject matter is urgent also because public relations and advertising are one of the most recent and quickly developing spheres of professional activity, taking into consideration the fact that the advertising market in BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China) is growing faster than in the other regions of the world. According to experts, at the beginning of the twenty-first century Russia is thought to be one of the leading countries with respect to the advertising market growth rate, the advertising expenses being increased by more than 20 % (O'Leary, 2008). The market demand, the need for advertising and the PR departments in business, not-for-profit, federal and municipal organizations, the increasing number of consulting, advertising and PR agencies – all of these facilitated the growing number of practitioners in PR and advertising. The successful development of this market highly relies on the social characteristics of the specialists operating there.

The professional force of PR practitioners in the Urals came into being at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century together with the development of the market economy and the system of professional PR training. The majors in “Public Relations” and “Advertising” are relatively new for the system of Russian higher education. The Ural State University named after A. M. Gorky (Yekaterinburg), which is one of the leading universities in Russia, (now Ural Federal University named after the first president of Russia B. N. Yeltsin, UrFU) was one of the first to provide this training back in 1998. These two professions (“Public Relations” and “Advertising”) are interconnected and deeply involved into the market trends, and the university system of professional training could not but respond to the modern market demand. Since 2011 Russia has been implementing the new training standard at the bachelor’s degree level for the major “Advertising and Public Relations”, according to which these two professions are integrated. This generally corresponds to the labor market demand in Russia. However, the European universities and colleges do not integrate the above professions. It is this specific character that accounts for the necessity to study all the aspects of the developing of specialists in the sphere of communications as the professional force.

This agenda has many aspects: the issues of training of PR and advertising majors; the characteristics of the current potential of PR and advertising practitioners; the labor market demand; the sensitivity of the higher professional education system to the modern market demand.

The data obtained show that two thirds of those working in communications are women, and only one third are men (29.8 %), which is characteristic for both PR and advertising. The data on the gender structure of Russian students majoring in “Advertising and Public Relation” show that this men-to-women ratio is present at the university stage and is apparently in conformity with the demands of the Russian labor market. According to professor Ansgar Zerfass, the European PR sphere does not show such difference, 58 % being women and 42 % being men (as of 2013 survey in 43 European countries) (Verhoeven, Tench, Zerfass, Moreno & Verčič, 2014).

In the Western countries the proportion of women among advertising specialists is relatively high. They comprise about 49% of all work-force in advertising in Britain. According to some data more than a half of all workers of advertising departments in the USA and Spain are women. In general, women account for 20.3% of the staff of advertising departments all over the world. (Windels & Mallia, 2015).

Considering the data we received, the potential of women working in communications is underestimated. The ratio of management to employee labor with men and women engaged in communications in Yekaterinburg is the following: one third of the men interviewed are top managers, while the respective figure for women is 12.4% only. In general, the majority of men are top and mid-level managers (63.8 %), while the majority of women (86.6 %) are mid-level managers and non-executive employees.

**Tab. 1: The correlation between gender and position of PR-specialists (in %)**

Position	Gender		
	Male	Female	Total
Top managers	29.3	12.4	16.4
Mid-level managers	34.5	33.9	34.0
Non-executive employees	34.5	52.7	48.4
No answer	1.7	1.1	1.2
Total:	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: author's own data.

Among the non-executive employees working in communications women prevail (83.1 % are women and 16.9 % are men). In Yekaterinburg the situation is the same for the specialists in advertising. European researchers have also noted gender disparity in the sphere of communications (ECM, 2013), however, in the European countries the situation is not so acute.

The majority of respondents (72 %) are beyond 34 years of age and can be referred to as young people. Specialists above 45 years of age comprise only 12 % of people working in communications. This tendency is characteristic for the PR practitioners in Yekaterinburg, though the research team of professor Ansgar Zerfass found that the average age for the European counterparts is 40.9 (Verhoeven, Tench, Zerfass, Moreno & Verčič, 2014).

Communications jobs require the high level of education. When the survey was conducted 86 % of respondents were either studying for their degree or have already graduated. The number of respondents with a degree could be even higher, because 14 % of the participants polled did not give any answer about their education level. However, not all those working in communications have communications majors. Only one-fifth of respondents (21.2 %) majored in PR and advertising, while 18.1 % majored in management and marketing. Many respondents majored as teachers, journalists, philologists, economists, accountants, engineers and designers. Only 12.3 % of top-level executives in the field of PR have a degree in Public Relations, the corresponding figure for top-level executives in the field of advertising is 5.3 %. More than one-third of the respondents polled think that they need professional re-training or refresher

training (37.2 %). It is interesting to note that PR practitioners need the refresher training more than the advertising practitioners (48.5 % and 22 % correspondingly). Approximately half of the top-level executives in the field of PR think they need professional re-training (47.7 %). In comparison, the figure for top-level executives in advertising is 42.4 %.

As far as PR practitioners' education in Europe is concerned, the data are quite different. According to the survey conducted by the team led by professor Ansgar Zerfass, all specialists working in the field of PR have a corresponding major in communications; moreover, an academic degree (BA, MA or PhD) is absent only with 7.2 % of respondents. Besides, 76 % of the European PR practitioners are the members of professional associations (ECM, 2013); however, only 11.5 % of PR practitioners polled in Yekaterinburg are the members of professional associations.

The sphere of communications in Russia is rapidly developing, including the human resource potential. Only 14 % of respondents polled in Yekaterinburg have had employment in this sphere for more than 10 years. In contrast, 58.3 % of European PR practitioners have more than 10-year experience of employment in this sphere (ECM, 2013). The vast majority of respondents from Yekaterinburg work in this sphere for less than 5 years (69.2 %), whereas 12.2 % – for less than a year.

During the last 10 years the number of PR and advertising agencies in Yekaterinburg is steadily growing; thus, the length of service in a particular place is less than in the sphere of communications in general. Only 8.5 % of respondents stated that their present employment is more than 10 years, whereas 18.9 % of respondents stated it is less than one year.

**Tab. 2: Length of service (in %)**

Work experience in the trade	Communications sphere	Present employment
More than 10 years	14	8.5
Less than 5 years	69.2	74.3
Less than 1 year	12.2	18.9

Source: author's own data.

The data evaluation shows that there is rather high horizontal mobility in communications, which is not surprising in view of the high growth rate in this sphere and the fact that the majority of workers are young adults. There is probably the intensive vertical mobility as well, which could also result in

changing jobs and workplaces. One can draw such conclusion because the job satisfaction according to the respondents polled is high. It means that the reason for changing jobs could probably be the career advancement connected potentially with the higher salaries.

In spite of the fact that European and Yekaterinburg PR practitioners have different social characteristics, their job satisfaction is approximately the same: 69.2 % for Europe and 67.5 % for Yekaterinburg (ECM, 2011). On the whole the respondents working in the sphere of communications in Yekaterinburg explain their job satisfaction with the opportunity to solve interesting problems (57.1 %). For 34.9 % it is also important that the executives value their efforts, 23.4 % think that the positive feedback from their customers is important. The high status of this occupation also has certain significance (18.6 %). 16.9 % of respondents report job satisfaction because of the promotion perspectives. Other factors which the respondents mention to explain their job satisfaction are: good labor conditions and competitive salary (31.4 %), flexible working hours (28.9 %) and labor safety (19.7 %).

## Conclusion

The results of the survey have shown that the social portrait of the of a specialist in the sphere of communications in Yekaterinburg includes first of all being a young adult with no major in communications, though the level of education is high. Besides, the length of service at a particular place (organization) is short. But if one considers the employment in the sphere of communications in general, this figure becomes higher. These data imply that the professional force of the specialists working in the sphere of communications has not taken the final shape yet, and is still developing. The important factors influencing it are labor market demands and the changes taking place in the system of higher, secondary and vocational education.

Thus, the specialists in the field of communications are an important part of human resources of Russia in general and Yekaterinburg in particular. The improvement of their training and re-training, the development of market in general and services in particular, will facilitate the leveling of the work-force characteristics in this field in Russia and in the Western countries.

## References

Aghaei M., Vahedi E., Safari Kahreh M., & Pirooz M. (2014). An examination of the relationship between Services Marketing Mix and Brand Equity Dimensions. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 109, 865–869.

Austin, L.L., & Toth E.L. (2011). Exploring ethics education in global public relations curricula: Analysis of international curricula descriptions and interviews with public relations educators. *Public Relations Review*, 37, 506–512.

Bashir, M., & Fedorova, M. (2014). Conglomeration among the top American public relations agencies: A case study. *Public Relations Review*, 40, 762–771.

Bıçakçı, A. B., & Hürmeriç, P. (2013). Milestones in Turkish public relations history. *Public Relations Review*, 39, 91–100.

Celebi, S. (2012). An Exploratory Investigation of Public Relations Education and Profession through the Lenses of Undergraduate PR Students. *Public Relations Journal Vol. 6, No. 3*. <http://www.prsa.org/Intelligence/PRJournal/Documents/2012Celebi.pdf>.

Csikósova A., Antošova M., & Čulkova K. (2014). Strategy in Direct and Interactive Marketing and Integrated Marketing Communications. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 116, 1615–1619.

Fitch, K. (2014). Professionalisation and public relations education: Industry accreditation of Australian university courses in the early 1990s. *Public Relations Review*, 40, 623–631.

Half G., & Gregory A. (2014). Toward an historically informed Asian model of public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 40, 397–407.

Meadows, C., & Meadows III, C.W. (2014). The history of academic research in public relations: Tracking research trends over nearly four decades. *Public Relations Review*, 40, 871–873.

O'Leary, N. (2008). The Rise of BRIC. *Adweek*. February 4. Retrieved from <http://gtmarket.ru/laboratory/expertize/2008/1756>.

Seri M., Gil-Saura I., & Ruiz-Molina M. E. (2014). How can integrated marketing communications and advanced technology influence the creation of customer-based brand equity? Evidence from the hospitality industry. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 39, 144–156.

Sisco, H.F., Collins, E.L., & Zoch, L. M. (2011). Breadth or depth? A content analysis of the use of public relations theory. *Public Relations Review*, 37, 145–150.

Verhoeven, P., Tench R., Zerfass, A., Moreno A., & Verčič D. (2012). How European PR practitioners handle digital and social media. *Public Relations Review*, 38, 162–164.

Verhoeven, P., Tench, R., Zerfass, A., Moreno, A., & Verčič D. (2014). Crisis? What crisis? How European professionals handle crises and crisis communication. *Public Relations Review*, 40, 107–109.

Windels, K., & Mallia, K. (2015). How being female impacts learning and career growth in advertising creative departments. *Employee Relations, Vol. 37, Is. 1*, 122–140. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/ER-02-2014-0011>.

**Contact**

Irina Britvina

Ural Federal University named after the first President of Russia B. N. Yeltsin

St. Mira 19, Yekaterinburg, Russia

[irinabritvina@yandex.ru](mailto:irinabritvina@yandex.ru)