

public relations – past year exam papers essay sample

[Business](#), [Company](#)



1. Crises are often categorised as being either ‘python’ or ‘cobra’ events, requiring different PR approaches to handle them. Choose one of each type of crisis to describe and illustrate the differences. Go on to describe ideal PR strategies for anticipating and handling each, critically evaluating common mistakes made in practice, providing additional examples where you can.
2. Modern companies are expected to have a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategy: define CSR, debate why this is important, and whether most companies do this well. Describe what approaches you think are important for modern day CSR, and why a boundary spanning approach is important, using examples to illustrate your answer.
3. Investor relations is one of the highest paid disciplines in PR: debate why it is so important to modern business, describing both the requirements of the routine calendar of investor relations activities, and one off events that require PR input. Critically evaluate the roles of investor relations in an era of stricter regulations and changing media.
4. Almost every organisation wants a social media strategy – but should every organisation have one? Debate the role of social media in public relations, giving examples of organisations that do this well and others that do not, describing the pitfalls of social media for modern businesses and other organisations. Debate how social media strategies relate to your strategies across other media, old and new, using examples throughout.
5. Private lobbying has a poor reputation in the UK, with Public Affairs practitioners concerned for their industry image. Debate why private

lobbying is sometimes seen as damaging to democracy, while considering why it is important that business gets the chance to lobby government.

Contrast this to public lobbying, comparing the tactics, cost and aims of public lobbying to those of private lobbying.

6. International PR is becoming increasingly important as the number of global organisations grows and the internet breaks down barriers between nations. Describe the key PR challenges for a multinational corporation, and debate whether a single global strategy is appropriate or whether campaigns should be localised. Describe the key pitfalls of international PR and how to avoid these.

7. Media relations is a core PR discipline, with a focus on ‘earning’ space in both traditional and new media. Discuss the key aspects of ‘newsworthiness’, and the various techniques that media relations specialists use to earn space. Go on to describe the press release and press relations are used to communicate these: how do these vary when communicating with press journalists and bloggers?

8. B2B PR is an area of specialism for many agencies that develop deep knowledge in their clients’ markets. Describe why this depth of knowledge is important, and how and why thought leadership is used in B2B PR. Go on to compare and contrast the B2B and B2C decision-making processes, using this to illustrate where the PR strategies differ.

2012

1. Discuss the role of financial PR and investor relations in Kraft’s hostile

takeover of Cadbury, and describe how this could develop as Kraft establishes on-going investor relations with its new shareholders. Critically evaluate the roles of investor relations and financial PR in modern business in light of modern current regulations and changing media.(25 marks)

2. Forrester analyst Sucharita Mulpuru suggests marketing on Facebook is like “ trying to sell stuff to people while they’re hanging out with their friends at the bar”. Debate the role of social media in consumer PR, comparing its use and credibility versus traditional media. Critically evaluate the characteristics of consumer campaigns that are successful in social media, and describe how that success would be evaluated.(25 marks)

3. As profits fall, Tesco are reviewing their internal relations programme to reassure staff and maintain service standards. Recommend internal relations tactics for the brand, using models to categorise what kind of company Tesco is and what approach they should adopt. Go on to critically evaluate why internal relations is widely considered to be the most important PR discipline. (25 marks)

4. Activism against corporations is at an all-time high, yet street protests and violent acts against business are relatively rare. Describe how activism has changed over the last decade, analysing the merit of direct action versus alternative strategies. Go on to evaluate how companies can respond to these changing protest strategies. (25 marks)

5. Identification and prioritisation of stakeholders is one of the first tasks in PR planning. Critically evaluate the value of stakeholder analysis as part of

the planning process. Compare and contrast the tools available and, in doing so, discuss differences between audiences, stakeholders and publics, using examples to illustrate your answer. (25 marks)

6. Key PR theorists and practitioners argue that public relations should occupy a 'boundary spanning' role within modern organisations, increasingly creating PR or corporate affairs roles at board level. Describe what is meant by this term, comparing to alternative practices, and debate why this may be increasingly important, providing examples. (25 marks)

7. The Tesco 'horse burger' crisis dominated the news in early 2013. Define whether this was a 'python' or 'cobra' event and, therefore, what crisis management strategies should have been used. Critically evaluate Tesco's response, describing best practice and providing suggestions for an ideal response, comparing to examples from other brands. (25 marks)

8. B2B PR is one of the largest sectors in the industry, requiring specialist knowledge and tools. Compare and contrast the B2B and B2C customer decision-making processes, justifying the different PR strategies, media and tactics that are commonly used. Use Boeing's Dreamliner and a consumer product of your choice as examples. (25 marks)

2011

1. The evaluation of PR campaigns is difficult given the 'hidden' nature of PR. However, PR specialists such as Max Wright assert that it is "essential to [PR's] long-term well-being". Describe and evaluate key PR evaluation tools,

critically analysing the role of evaluation in PR and the barriers to it. What do you predict for the future of PR evaluation over the next decade?

2. Crises are often categorised as being either ‘python’ or ‘cobra’ events, requiring different PR approaches to handle them. Describe each type of crisis, giving examples. Go on to describe ideal PR strategies for each, critically evaluating common mistakes made in practice.

3. Press releases sent as faxes or emails have been an essential PR tool for many decades, but this is changing in light of new media. Critically evaluate the role of the press release in PR: what makes a good press release, what is its role relative to the media and PR strategies as a whole, and how has this changed with the emergence of new media?

4. Löwenberg (2005) suggested that corporate reputation is built both overtly and covertly, with overt reputation management being only the tip of the iceberg. Describe how a corporation can use PR to manage both overt and covert reputation amongst key stakeholders. Go on to debate how the internet has impacted upon the overt and particularly covert reputations of corporations and how PR specialists can help manage this.

5. Fitzpatrick & Bronstein (2006) see PR professionals as “...bound to serve the public interest” as well as the special interests of their clients and employers. Describe the potential professional and ethical roles of PR operatives, in particular debating how achievable honesty and integrity are in the profession. Go on to discuss how PR’s reputation is suffering as a result and suggest what could be done to improve it.

6. Long-term planning is key to implementing successful PR strategies.

Evaluate why planning is so important, describing commonly used models.

Go on to critically evaluate how useful these are in PR practice, choosing one model and debating advantages and potential barriers to its use in real world situations.

7. International PR is a growing discipline as companies become increasingly globalised. Describe the key challenges for a corporation considering an international PR strategy, and debate whether a single global strategy is appropriate or whether campaigns should be localised. Critically evaluate the usefulness of western PR theory elsewhere in the world.

8. The costs of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) have been debated during recession by companies and investors, yet CSR remains key to PR strategies. Giving examples, describe why companies continue to engage in CSR, and critically evaluate the merits of reactive versus proactive CSR. Go on to predict the likely future for CSR strategies.

2010

1. According to PR Week, “ BAA boss Colin Matthews somehow survived thanks to the sacrifice of his annual bonus, the announcement of heavy investment in new snow-clearing equipment and doubtless some very good media advice from his...comms specialists” after snow brought Heathrow airport to a standstill in December 2010. Discuss what aspects of crisis management this demonstrates, before describing and justifying what

should have been done to anticipate and handle the event from a PR perspective, providing examples.

2. In January 2010, the investment banking firm Goldman Sachs announced that some executives would cap their pay and bonuses at £1 million, attempting to show restraint in times of recession. Critique this tactic, then suggest and evaluate alternative corporate communications strategies to improve the corporation's reputation.

3. In an environment of great competition, PR suffered less than other marketing disciplines during recession. Critically evaluate why this may be, focusing on consumer PR and the modern consumer environment, and using examples of common consumer PR strategies to illustrate your argument.

4. Danny Rogers of PR Week reviewed 2010 as a year in which PR organisations struggled to get a grip on social media, which he saw as both threat and opportunity to PR, and a 'sphere of comms...in its infancy, with few established answers and tools as yet'. Critically evaluate these aspects of social media, debating its potential role in PR, its relationship to traditional media, and issues for PR professionals in adopting and evaluating social media.

5. Greenpeace was one of the first activist organisations to learn the value of PR, but debate rages about how closely they should work with business. Discuss why PR is so valuable to activist organisations and how this has

changed over the last decade, before critically evaluating the issues around activist organisations working with business to resolve conflict.

6. Early in the twentieth century, PR practitioners were expected to defend their client in the face of ‘ muckrakers’ i. e. journalists seeking to expose the truth of bad corporate practice. Describe the pressures upon modern day PR professionals, and critically evaluate how their role has evolved – considering ethical and professional standards.

7. LinkedIn will be the first social networking company to float (make shares available to investors on the stock exchanges) this year. Discuss how financial PR will play a role in building up to this event, and how this will develop as the company establishes ongoing investor relations. Critically evaluate the role financial PR in modern business.

8. A large, multinational company is planning to launch a new toy aimed at young children aged 7-9 in the UK in time for Christmas 2011: they want it to be considered THE toy of 2012. Focussing on the planning stages, compare and contrast the various models available to help develop a strategic approach to launch and roll out of the campaign, using the example to illustrate your answer. Critically evaluate how these would impact upon the final campaign, creating better PR practice.

2009

1. “ With some notable exceptions, public relations...collectively have made little contribution to the discussion, often...decrying marketing encroachment and imperialism (Lauzen, 1991), when, in fact, a case can be

made that public relations is also engaging in imperialism as it moves into areas (special events, trade shows, brand equity, etc.) that many view as marketing territory”. This quote, from Hutton’s 1996 article, refers to the ongoing debate about the relationship between PR and marketing, and which should be the dominant discipline: critically evaluate the main standpoints on this debate and the impact it might have upon the development of the PR discipline. Illustrate your answer with examples where possible.

2. One of the key roles of Public Relations is to handle media relations on behalf of the client, often mediated through press releases which many consider to be the main PR tool. Critically evaluate the role of the press release in PR: what makes a good press release, what is its role relative to the media and PR strategies as a whole, and what other aspects of PR strategy are important in media relations?

3. According to Ed Williams, Head of Communications at the BBC, ‘ If you screw up, admit it’ – the question is at what point do you admit to error? Using examples, critically evaluate organisations’ responses to various types of crises and the use of proactive versus reactive strategies. Under what circumstances would you advise proactively admitting to error, and would you ever advise a client to conceal error?

4. In October 2009, Max Wright asserted that “ Campaign evaluation isn’t sexy and never will be. But it’s become...essential to [PR’s] long-term well-being...” yet a PR Week survey earlier this decade showed that 42% of respondents spent less than 2% of their budget on evaluation and 21% spent

nothing. Suggest why Max Wright may be right and critically analyse the role of evaluation in PR and the barriers to practical evaluation of PR campaigns. What do you predict for the future of PR evaluation over the next decade?

5. Over the last year Tiger Woods, John Terry and Ashley Cole are examples of celebrities who have suffered personal publicity crises that have impacted upon their celebrity endorsement and sponsorship deals for brands such as Gillette. Given the risks inherent in such associations is sponsorship really as valuable as it seems to consumer PR? Consider this, and critically evaluate alternative routes for engaging in effective consumer PR.

6. The rise of the internet has been acknowledged as an important factor in the rise of activism over the last two decades on issues such as climate change and fathers' rights. Critically evaluate how and why these changes have occurred, and any other factors that have contributed to activism. How have corporations responded to this change in the power relations between themselves and activists, and what does this mean for the future of PR?

7. "As advocates and counsellors, public relations professionals serve diverse special interests of businesses, nonprofits and governments. As professionals, they are also bound to serve the public interest" (Fitzpatrick & Bronstein, 2006). Critically evaluate the possible roles of public relations professionals with respect to their clients/employers and the general public, and reflect upon how these have evolved over the history of PR. What role would you personally advocate for PR professionals in the modern industry and how could this be enforced?

8. This spring, David Cameron claimed that “ secret corporate lobbying...has tainted our politics for too long. We all know how it works. The lunches, the hospitality, the quiet word in your ear, the ex-ministers and ex-advisers for hire, helping big business find the right way to get its way”. Critically compare the current private and public lobbying systems and their role in democracy, and suggest and evaluate measures that could be taken to improve existing lobbying practice.