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PR 5.0: A Call for Smart PR Management to Overcome the Digital Trust Crisis

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Abstract - Public Relations (PR) is constantly evolving: within the last 60 years, the concept has developed from the post-war period to the current era of digitization, simultaneously leading to a digital crisis of trust. Against this background, this article introduces a versioning of PR 1.0 to 5.0. The stages of PR are applied to outline smart PR's possibilities and current limits. From today's perspective, the best quality contribution digital PR can make in the crisis of trust is to use outstanding trust technologies beyond its dialogic-co-creative competency. Despite this, the digital age has been characterized as an era of a crisis of trust in brands. Therefore, it is time for the reset of PR. PR 5.0 is a digital trust offensive. With its dialogue and co-creative competencies, the current digital transformation plays into the hands of PR management. Hence, PR is conceptually a good way to support companies in their digital-agile worlds. PR 5.0 can contribute to an increasing corporate internal acceptance of PR.

Keywords - PR 5.0, Smart PR, Digitization, Smartness, Trust.

1. Introduction

Public Relations (PR) is constantly evolving: PR as a communication method is probably as old as humanity. Each society had its communication methods to advance its organisations' interests. The term "public relations" is a communication discipline that quickly became differentiated in Western Europe after the Second World War, following developments in the United States. PR has differentiated itself in many areas of activity, such as internal and external communication, integrated communication, reputation management and brand communication. Within the last 60 years, PR has developed from the post-war period to the current era of digitalization, which is currently characterized by developments such as social media communication or digital trust management.

Today, trust management and PR management are theoretically considered a unit. Despite this so-called process of professionalization of PR management, the internet era is also seen as an era of digital trust crisis. Sometimes, the ongoing age of digitization is characterized as an era of lacking trust.

Against this background, this article introduces a versioning of PR. This lends itself to highlighting methodological shifts, trends, and contextual developments. It is asked what the delineation stages of PR are or could look like. The stages of PR are applied to outline the

possibilities and current limits of smart PR against a rising crisis of trust. Thus, it is asked what smart PR is, which stages it compromises and what potential it holds for regaining digital trust. The applied method is literature reflection.

2. PR: Evolving from PR 1.0 to PR 5.0

A versioning debate is taking place in many areas of society: Starting with the shift from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 and the transition from the static to the interactive internet, today there is talk of Industry 4.0 (networking of man and machine), Marketing 4.0 (digitalization of marketing) or Society 4.0 (technical and cultural digitalization). The delineation of versions is inconsistent. In part, social changes, understandings, technical innovations or methods and paradigms are responsible for versioning. Although there is extensive PR history research (e.g. Bentele G, 1997; Cutlip, 1995; Hoy et al., 2007; Schmidt, Rennhak, 2020), versioning PR is in contrast to the structures as in marketing, industry or sociology mentioned above a marginal phenomenon (e.g. Aragón, Domingo, 2014; Breakenridge, 2009; Reynolds 2010). However, versioning PR seems fruitful to highlight important developments such as methodological changes and contextual challenges.

2.1. Versioning of PR Management

PR evolves and operates against the backdrop of the critical history of propaganda. A versioning debate as a



historiography of PR has so far been rather unusual. Central reasons for this are probably that the term “PR” is new, but its aims and methods are as old as humanity itself. Moreover, PR has a situational character. PR works best in fair-weather phases such as house and court reporting. In times of crisis, PR mutates into top management crisis communication and crisis marketing (Lies, 2019b).

Although the versioning debate in PR has so far taken place with some restraint, it is nevertheless occurring. In keeping with the times, they are oriented towards the Industry 4.0 (“networking of human and machines”) debate and, in addition to digitalisation, emphasize, in particular, PR intelligence. “PR 2.0 emerged through analysis of how the Web and multimedia were redefining PR (..)” (Breakenridge, 2009). Research finds that interactivity is crucial in shaping PR 2.0 (Aragón, Domingo, 2014). Direct interaction with influencers and the relevance of data for PR management is at the forefront of PR 2.0, borrowing from the concept of business intelligence or marketing intelligence. Social media PR's popularity and interactivity requirements are sometimes viewed as a new school of PR. “In some ways, social media denotes the upgrade of public relations. Welcome to PR 2.0.” (Reynolds 2010, p. 1) Similar versioning of PR is taking place with the development from Web 1.0 (static internet), Web 2.0 (interactive Web with the growing Social media) to Web 3.0 (semantic Web) (Brown, 2009). Accordingly, PR is also becoming “intelligent” with the semantic Web 3.0. This results, for example, from voice-controlled services that make language a requirement for brands and thus also for PR. Today, voice services are increasingly based on artificial intelligence.

However, the search for phases is much older than the internet and also occurs in the more recent historical research of PR. Various stages in PR development are found as phases in the history of PR in Germany (Bentele, 1997; Lies, 2019; Lies & Vaih-Baur, 2015; Schmidt & Rennhak, 2020). The following overview shows shifts which characterize the phases of the PR industry:

- PR 1.0 is an initiation era (Schmidt & Rennhak, 2020) and a search for a professional or functional designation (Bentele, 1997) that has not been resolved to date. For example, the professional designation “public relations as relationship management” (Oeckl 1964: 34) as the prototype of PR (post-war debate of PR: 1950 - 1970). It was prepared by public relations pioneers such as Bernays, who characterised the “public relations” method as an “invisible government” that influences its public through multipliers (Bernays 1928/1955). This particular methodical approach to PR is still valid today.
- PR 2.0 means the differentiation of PR into individual disciplines, such as internal communication, brand,

online or event communication, from around the 1980’s onwards. An example is the changing view of branding, which shifted from the market view to applied PR management: “Public relations gives “legs” and life to brand attitudes and the essential brand promise by telling credible stories (...).” (Mikáčová & Gavlaková, 2014: 839) Here, PR is located as a long-term asset. “Relationships” imply focussing on long-term patterns of interaction.” (Smith, 2021)

- PR 3.0 means the professionalization of PR with increasing top management mandates from around the 1990s, e.g. the understanding of PR as relationship and trust management (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998) or reputation management (Hutton et al. 2001). In particular, PR is trust management that aims to develop power and thus social capital as a contribution to corporate success, e.g., with PR as change communications (Lies, 2012). At the same time, criticism of the lack of internal acceptance of PR is increasing. The proportion of PR professionals surveyed who agree that they advise their organizational management/CEO on communicative issues and whose advice is taken into account decreases (2005: 63%; 2018: 47%). At the same time, the proportion of PR professionals who perceive themselves more as the publication organ of their organization is increasing (2005: 25%; 2018: 31%) (Bentele et al. 2018).
- PR 4.0 currently means - as in marketing and branding - the digitalization of communication and the continuing differentiation with blogger relations and social media communication in focus (today) (Kotler et al. 2021)

The ongoing debate behind versioning concerns the delineation of stages. Are the stages marked by historical events, social-economical and/or normative-ethical requirements, evolving PR methods and/or “new media”? The versioning of PR is made even more complex by the development of focal points of applied communication models with the excellence approach of PR: publicity, information, (as-)symmetric communication (Grunig & Hunt). In view of the popularity of social media, the co-creative model was added (Botan & Taylor, 2005), which implies a person-centred dialogue. The excellence model also assigns temporal priorities which invite their application to versioning of PR. Nevertheless, organisations do not constantly select and apply one model but work situationally (Grunig & Grunig, 2008). Therefore, the stages proposed here are characterised by the formative characteristics of the PR industry, which may situationally apply the communications models mentioned.

For all the evolution of PR's fields of action, the fundamentals have not changed - relationship building unites the stages of PR evolution (see tab. 1)

Table 1. The stages and methodical dimensions of public relations

Model/ Stages	Publicity	Information	Asymmetric communication	Symmetric communication (dialogue)	Co-creative communication
PR 1.0 (-1960 th): Initiation and Career Search	<p>Methodology of PR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methodical approach: "The best PR is the kind you do not see" (invisible government), multiplier approach, relationship management • Methodological goals: integrity, trust, power, reputation • Methodological action goals: voluntary self-commitment of stakeholders as a power position of companies. • Methodological instruments: informative and entertaining communication and behavioural instruments 				
PR 2.0 (-1970 th): Individual disciplines					
PR.3.0 (-1990 th): Professionalization					
PR 4.0 (ongoing): People- centeredness and digitalization					
PR 5.0 (Call for): Smart PR					

Source: In a further development of Lies (2019b)

Social media and the importance of reputation and trust ultimately confirm PR management's high relevance. From the perspective of the "old school" of PR 1.0, the evolution to PR 4.0 -management, with its social media and PR-intelligence applications, is a technically driven updating and intensification of the relevance of relationships with stakeholders. This evolution is complemented by stage 5, which would be necessary to counter the current crisis of trust in society, business and brands, which evolves in the digital age. This development becomes detailed below. For this purpose, the digitization, agilization and trust relevance of PR will first be discussed in the following.

2.2. PR: Digitalization and Digitality

As just mentioned, the evolution of PR 4.0 is currently leading to digital PR work. "Digitization" initially meant using digital communication tools such as email, social media or mobile media. In addition, social media made it necessary to intensify relationship work. But digitalization continues. Digitalization means the autonomization, flexibilization, and individualization of certain company processes necessitated by digital technologies and innovative business models (Stumpf, 2019). The internal and external PR relevance develops accordingly (e.g. Winkler & Pleil, 2018; Verčič et al., 2015), for example, with platform technologies or the (self-)organization of new digital reference groups and their real-time demands, which lead to a redistribution of power in favor of stakeholders. A technical digitization process also became a cultural requirement (e.g. Bourne, 2022; Santa Soriano & Torres Valdés, 2021; Sheldrake, 2012; Stalder, 2016). These developments are presented in more detail in the following in order to prepare the requirements for PR as an agile

competence and digital stakeholder management (e.g. Li et al., 2021; McCorkindale & DiStaso, 2013; van Ruler, 2015; Winkler & Pleil, 2018):

2.2.1. Digitalization - Internal and External Relevance

For about twenty years, digital communication has evolved from a niche topic to a core topic (Winkler & Pleil, 2018). In fact, PR has been in the process of digitalization since about the 1980s, when desktop publishing as digital media production was seen as the first operational digitalization phase. It led to digital studios in the early 1990s. It made the entire print-ready layout of corporate publishing a core competence of PR agencies and, increasingly, of corporate communications departments. Internally, digital business models, processes, and functions are being established that affect PR just as much as project management (Lies, 2019b). At the same time, internal PR supports such transformation processes with change communications. Externally, digitization impacts the media and digitized public (Verčič et al. 2015).

2.2.2. New Media and Platformization

PR management is primarily equated with media relations, new technologies and platformization. This stage is driven by social media platforms, new digital publics and their power through interaction and networking. Digital platforms emerged with the advent of digitization. Platforms are digital infrastructures which integrate and distribute relevant content, thus enabling interaction with groups. Platforms mediate data (Bourne, 2022) and initiate the emergence of digital publics. Social media platforms are currently the most popular example of the platformization of digital PR.

2.2.3. *New Dialog Groups as Digital PR Competence*

"New school PR" can also mean addressing new dialog groups with the new media: especially with social media, but also with mobile PR. For example, it is becoming increasingly important to identify digital target groups, develop topics and issues, analyse moods, and control digital PR (Santa Soriano & Torres Valdés, 2021). Influencers are the multipliers on the internet who have been competing with traditional journalists since the 2000s. They represent rapidly evolving (and often as rapidly disappearing) "new publics". In this way, there is the possibility of "bringing the public back into public relations" by addressing niche or temporary publics as well (Solis and Breakenridge 2009, p. 31 f.).

2.2.4. *Interaction with "Producers"*

With social media newsrooms, however, PR management also encounters new media competencies that actually go beyond technical knowledge and lead to digital cultural competence. A new requirement in Web 2.0 is the interaction requirements of Web 2.0 users, which must be met with stakeholder-appropriate content. Social media enabled users to provide information themselves (user-generated content) and turned the once passive media user into an active content provider. The media user is also a producer ("producer"). This is where the redistribution of power (see below) and digital citizen journalism originated. The citizen journalist of the past is the influencer of today. This is why "the new PR is about people and relationships - not new tools" (Solis & Breakenridge 2009, p. 35). PR organizes the sociability of its organizations. Sociability in sociology and psychology refers to establishing and maintaining social relationships, which is the core idea of "public relations".

2.2.5. *Real-Time Requirements and Big Data Opportunities*

Real-time requirements exist when time and distance become technical possibilities and thus social requirements in marketing and PR, for example. Real-time PR depends on both cultural and instrumental competencies (Sheldrake, 2012). In PR, this real-time (re)action competence with fields of action such as dialogue and crisis communication, executive communication or issues management is nothing new. It is a conceptual requirement for managing dialogue. It is strengthened by the availability of big data and analytical tools that allow PR management to assess the public's online or behavioural patterns, even in real time (Sommerfeld & Yang, 2018). Here, the agile character of PR management is emphasized, whereas a traditional view emphasizes the long-term view of PR.

2.2.6. *(De-)Convergence of the Media as Digital PR Competence*

With the cross-media real-time competence, the convergence of the media becomes clear simultaneously, i.e. the convergence of telecommunications, print, online, TV, radio, mobile and social media shape PR and marketing in

equal measure. The content of all media genres will be or are already available via an end device. The smartphone represents this development and emphasizes the importance of the digital media competencies of (mobile) PR management. Regarding the evolution of the "segment-to-one", a fragmentation and thus a de-convergence of dialogue groups can be observed (Pleil & Sparviero, 2017), which means a shift in public, e.g. driven by mobile publics.

2.2.7. *Mobile PR and "Segment-to-One" Instead of Mass Media*

With the relatively inexpensive bandwidth now available worldwide, including on mobile devices, the new mass media are interactive, not mass communication instruments like the classic PR media or TV. They can create a new (temporary) public and can create an experience of connectivity for them (Galloway, 2009). This public on the move includes commuters, demonstrators, visitors to trade fairs, etc. From a communications point of view, the term "mass media" is just as wrong as it used to be since information is always disseminated on a topic-related basis, often very locally. Moreover, PR has always been mobile through radio. Nevertheless, the opportunity for individual interaction in "segment-to-one" is new.

2.2.8. *Redistribution of Power*

The media have always been regarded as the fourth branch of power in the (democratic) state, alongside the legislature (legislative power), the executive (executive power) and the judiciary (enforcement power). In part, the role of the media as a fourth power, which controls the other powers, is disputed (Pürer, 2015). It is less the media as institutions but as "channels generating meaning", which makes them powerful (Freedman, 2015). Accordingly, the growing importance of search engines as the new gatekeepers of information and (mobile) social media is associated with a redistribution of stakeholder power. To deal with this, digitalised and agile PR skills are needed, aimed at managing digitalised relationships in order to maintain trust.

2.2.9. *Digitized PR as Integrated (Marketing-)Communication Management*

The boundaries of disciplines like PR, marketing and branding are shifting and remain, especially regarding objectives (Gesualdi, 2019), but the methods are becoming interlinked. In particular, "content marketing" is a marketing term, but it means the methodology "PR". In this respect, digitization is driving integrated communication. Overall, the digitization of PR has changed media management with its channel diversity and rapid interaction with journalists and influencers compared to the comparatively slow mass media. In this respect, interactions with influencers have expanded and intensified. "Establishing relationships with key journalists, editors, and bloggers remains unchanged and continues to be one of the most important building blocks of PR strategy" (Brokaw & Siedell 2011, p. 2)

2.2.10. *Digitality as the Culture of Digitalization*

Public relations as (digital) internal communication shapes corporate cultures and, thus, digitalization (Wuersch et al. 2022). Based on this development, digitality characterizes the effects of technically driven digitalization on society. The concept of digitality has been increasingly discussed since around the 1990's. Gere (2012) uses digitality to describe a digital culture based on digital networks that promotes networking, collaboration, communication, and participation. Stalder (2016) describes an expansion of culture with hybridization and solidification of the digital. She refers to the new possibilities of constituting and linking human and non-human actors.

Real-time demands, mobile communication, and the evolving recipient becoming an interactive and powerful producer leads to digitization being viewed as change and agile management – in companies as a whole and PR departments in particular.

2.3 *PR: The Digital Transformation as Digital Change Communications*

Digital transformation means profound changes for companies but also for PR management itself (Wiencierz & Röttger, 2021). Due to the current digitalization debate around Industry 4.0, the networking of man and machine, artificial intelligence (AI), Big Data and many other buzzwords, as well as the accelerated introduction of "working from home" during the coronavirus pandemic (since around March 2020), corporate digitalization is experiencing a boost. What specialized agencies offer as "change communications" is now being launched by many companies independently if they want to use the potential of internal communications as change communications for their transformation process.

PR Management as an internal executive and employee communication requires a digital media competence encompassing the entire range of internal communication (Bernhard & Russmann, 2023). The prerequisite for this is a corporate culture that, on the one hand, values the use of digital management tools but, on the other hand, views them critically regarding weaknesses (data protection, anonymization of personal relationships, performance-before-reputation priorities). This leads back to digitality and agile management requirements. Besides, this leads forward to PR being viewed as agile project management.

2.4 *PR: Agile Project Management*

As mentioned above, PR is invested in the long-term, with relationship management and the building of trust and reputation. At the same time, however, PR has an agile component with situational, dialogue, crisis and change competence. PR, as change and agile communication, can contribute to the success of digital transformation (Li et al., 2021).

"Agility" was introduced in the early 1990's. It started as an open process of IT project management. It aims to facilitate acceleration and consider the demands of stakeholders, such as customers or other departments (Zhang & Sharifi, 2000). Today, agility is also discussed beyond the sphere of IT management. "Agile" has become a catch-all term for a range of tools and methods that are more flexible than traditional project management methods. However, agility is not to be confused with actionism. Agility and flexibility are often used synonymously in theory and practice. However, when these terms are differentiated, agility also includes strategy (Prange, 2018). Agility is, therefore, also considered a strategic dynamic capability (Yang & Liu, 2012).

If public relations functions as reputation management, thus ensuring management's scope for action, it must be externally dialogic-interactive and create the conditions with agile management methods (van Ruler, 2015). If, for example, a brand community demanded pandemic-appropriate behavior from its company during the Corona crisis, the responses from the PR department would not be sufficient but would require the adaptation of hygiene concepts or other suitable measures (Lies, 2022b). Hence, PR-relevant decisions must be decentralized. Authority and control over budget and technology must be distributed to PR managers. At the same time, they need access to relevant information to make decision-making processes more agile (Wiencierz & Röttger, 2021). Then, it is important for PR management, just like in all other functional management areas, to apply the spectrum of agile methods. These include, for example, Scrum, Kaizen and others, in order to accelerate management and synchronize the demands of markets and stakeholders.

2.5 *PR: Digital Stakeholder, Issues and Crisis Software Solutions*

Before the internet era, PR as relationship management was sometimes an abstract business regarding its impact. PR measurement is a "long and winding road" that is "caught in a deadlock" (Macnamara, 2021, p. 253f.). With the popularity of the internet and particularly social media, followers, shares, likes and posts, and other interaction indicators make it clear on a daily basis where, which topics, and which channels are being driven by which users, influencers, testimonials, journalists, politicians and other multipliers. At the same time, contacts and friends indicate who is networking with whom and to what degree. Stakeholder management, issues management and crisis management can be digitally supported with software in real-time at the push of a button. PR as stakeholder management, from stakeholder identification to PR controlling, can be processed digitally (e.g. McCorkindale & DiStaso, 2013; Kent et al., 2011; Papavasiliou & Gorod, 2022):

2.6. Digital Identification and Evaluation of Stakeholders

Stakeholders appear digitally when they comment positively or negatively on a company, a brand, or products, for example. Posts, shares or likes from social media users or influencers are generally irrelevant as individual cases, so these people only develop relevance for companies when they join together in groups. Stakeholder tools capture this effect by identifying and organizing their contributions. Social media monitoring has become an important digital PR tool for reputation management (McCorkindale & DiStaso, 2013).

2.7. Digital Acceptance Management

Digitalization has also shifted opinion formation to the digital realm (Winkler & Pleil, 2018). This means that media relations work also must be digital to a significant extent.

2.8. Digital Sentiment Analysis

Brands are expected to listen and respond to stakeholder concerns (Freberg, 2019). Social listening has become a new area of PR monitoring. It includes the ability to transform raw conversations into quantitative measures (Rappaport, 2010b). "Data mining techniques can help to accomplish such a goal by extracting or detecting patterns from large databases and predicting customer behaviour." (Fan et al. 2015, p. 29) In order to capture the sentiment towards a company or a brand, constant digital sentiment analysis is fundamentally required. The software can analyse this in real-time by monitoring selected channels, e.g., Facebook, Instagram or Twitter.

2.9. Issues Mapping and Crisis Communication Management

In critical cases, warning functions can be activated so that sentiment analyses become crisis warning radars (van der Meer, 2016). This results in a mapping of issues and stakeholders. The software records the issue which most stakeholders are interested in. At the same time, a ranking of the top issues is created. Depending on the company, these can be stable over the years. But they can also emerge and disappear again in a highly dynamic manner, daily, when a brand presents itself interactively in social media with large communities.

2.10. Digital Competitive Analysis

Comparative analyses with topic comparisons about the competition are also possible depending on the requirements. For example, the Share of Voice (SoV) can be compared, i.e., the proportion of shares, likes, posts, etc., about a particular brand compared to selected competitors in specific media. The SoV is important for capturing the competitive context of media presence (Barger & Labrecque, 2013)

2.11. Digital PR Controlling

Compared to the Web 1.0 phase of the Internet (i.e., the transition from static to interactive Internet), digital

communications controlling has thus been radically simplified: Communication controlling and stakeholder management is actually possible without direct target group surveys. Selected core functions are described below in key points. Dashboards of stakeholder management visualize selected metrics in real-time. The dashboard is a visualization approach borrowed from business. Small data boxes or information graphics of key performance indicators (KPIs) are arranged on a single page to display selected and relevant controlling data, e.g., for sentiment analysis in a digital crisis (Kent et al. 2011).

Many software providers support digital PR as a stakeholder, issues and crisis management. Despite the digital update of the PR and the matured change and agile competencies, the digital crisis of trust evolved. In the following, it will be shown that companies essentially fail in the digital application of PR as trust management.

3. PR 5.0 as Digital Trust Management

As already mentioned, at the latest, since PR 3.0, managing trust is a core competency of it. "Trust is typically considered an important antecedent of relationship-building. In addition, it is an important antecedent of image and reputation management." (Valentini, 2021, p. 85). There is no standardized definition of trust. Trust is discussed and analysed in an interdisciplinary way: economics considers trust as a type of "social cement" or "necessary lubricant". Neither the concept of trust itself nor the processes of trust building are standardized. Often, trust is understood as a state, belief or positive expectation. It is relevant for the organisational, institutional and societal level (Valentini, 2021). Another understanding of trust is a relational, multidimensional, and perceptual construct that is subjective and highly volatile. That is why PR and brand management are designed as long-term processes. Trust is, therefore, often understood not as an attribute of individuals but as a property of relationships between at least two people (Preisendörfer, 1995). It becomes a coordination factor in decision-making processes when trustworthy relationships are chosen first as a risk-reducing factor in decision-making processes (Gilbert, 2010). It impacts motivation within PR at internal communication (organizational level). It is relevant for legitimising institutions, e.g. markets or corporations (institutional level).

Besides, trust is understood as a social institution. According to Luhmann, trust is a social construct related to past-related familiarity. For example, it reduces companies' complexity when initiating market transactions (Luhmann, 2012/2014). Trust is a fundamental construct of any transaction in a society. With the popularity of the internet and social media in particular, a new era of "information warfare" has dawned. Despite similar trust factors in online and offline PR (Zheng & Holtmanns, 2013) and a variety of implemented digital trust technologies (Lies, 2019a), as well

as a maturing digital world that is becoming “smarter” (Davenport & Kirby, 2016), digitalization is increasing a “post-truth era”. Digitalization has led to a crisis of trust.

3.1. Digitization and Digitality as an Environment of (lacking) Trust

Trust is, to some extent, a functional component of digital sovereignty in business, technology, justice, and culture (Friedrichsen & Bisa, 2016). It is considered a central requirement of the network society. Basically, a similar debate about trust can be found in the digital world as well as in the offline world, so that the trust factors of social trust are transferred to digital trust in principle (Zheng & Holtmanns, 2013).

Despite comparable trust-building factors between the offline and online worlds, trust-building with digital PR management has changed: people interact using web-based media, especially notebooks and smartphones, without knowing their transaction partner, and they may interact worldwide. In some cases, interaction is already occurring not only through media but also with media, for example, when digital bots take over individual and group-wide interaction (Riedl, 2021). In terms of information theory, this creates three levels of information: First-hand information is known from the offline world, for example, when customers and salespeople of a brand company interact with each other and can be transferred to the digital world. At the second level, information dissemination occurs as opinion formation through reputation and feedback systems known as word-of-mouth or viral processes. A third level is third-party providers of trust mechanisms such as quality seals or rating agencies, which are also known from the offline world (Daignault et al., 2002). From a trust theory perspective, a lack of personal trust formation, global technical networking and algorithms exacerbate the relevance of the (lack of) trust.

Trust factors are seen in the form of trust signals. They are promoted or hindered by symbols (e.g., quality seals, uniforms) and symptoms (e.g., digital rating portals, customer reviews) (Riegelsberger, 2005). Trust is a multi-complex construct which contributes to digitality. The use of social media platforms such as Facebook is in itself a reputational risk. Central trust carriers can be distinguished in the form of web users (e.g., private individuals, companies, and social media groups) of digital end devices, processes, and networking (Zheng & Holtmanns, 2013).

From a PR perspective, social media are data plantations fed by users themselves with data used to manage public or customer segments (Lies, 2022a). Critically viewed, digital PR as social media communications is part of surveillance capitalism, so social media PR itself poses a reputational risk as an unethical business practice (White & Boatwright, 2020). Moreover, public relations depend on relationships between corporations or their brands and their stakeholders

and not on bots. Thus, automation driven by bots for brand services poses a risk to digital PR management (Galloway & Swiatek, 2018). This indicates some selected challenges for digital trust management, which require both dialogical and digital competencies.

3.2. Digital Trust: The Crisis of Digital Trust Engineering

The digital PR and marketing landscape has established diverse trust-building institutions and processes to enhance trust (Lies, 2019a). Digital quality seals such as Trusted Shops are intended to meet minimum standards with rules such as data security standards. They are supported by further measures such as digital signatures (Wopperer, 2002). Recommendation systems are designed to reduce the complexity of the selection process. They generate personalized predictions about product preferences by filtering consumers' past behaviour and preference statements. However, these very things, synthetic trust mechanisms, invite manipulation. It is estimated that up to one-third of "customer reviews" are fake, leading to artificially generated opinions (Zhuang et al., 2018).

There are incentives to falsify these reviews to promote one's own products or disparage those of competitors. This manipulation represents a growing threat to the trustworthiness of online reviews (Fayazi et al., 2015). The trustworthiness of digital media suffers from data interception, information fraud, privacy spying and other dimensions of trust-damaging behaviour/technologies (Zhang & Gupta, 2018). Moreover, artificial intelligence is a black box. Algorithmic learning methods are inherently non-transparent or explainable (Lockey et al., 2021). Fake news is disinformation, that is, false information spread to deceive (Kshetri & Voas, 2017). "Fake News is created for a variety of reasons; some are purely commercial - for the clicks - and others are highly political - for the propaganda effect." (Hirst, 2017, p. 86) Social media is open and topical. Therefore, creating and spreading misinformation such as rumours, spam, and fake news is easy (Wu et al., 2019). "Fake it till you make it" (Luca & Zervas, 2016). An "influencer industry" has emerged, raising questions regarding its authenticity (Hund, 2023).

Various actors, including state-sponsored ones, use information obtained via social networks as weapons to spread fake news and rumours or generate clickbait as campaigns of targeted manipulation of public opinion on a specific topic - or for or against brands. Actors include digital bots, political organizations as well as corporations, (paid) activists, "true believers" or "useful idiots" (Zannettou et al., 2019). Meanwhile, "crowdturfing" is developing, a counterpart to the possibilities of "crowdsourcing." The term "crowdturfing" derives from "astroturf" campaigns, which are artificially created publics that manipulate search engines and ultimately degrade the quality of online information and threaten the utility of these systems (Lee, 2013).

Accordingly, the development of trust in brands and PR suffers: "Despite the massive expansion of mainly technical and legal control systems in recent years, (...) user trust has not increased at the same rate." (Petrovic et al. 2003, p. 53f.) The digital age is called the "post-truth-era" and is characterised by disintegrating trust (Valentini, 2021). The Havas Group identifies an all-time low in brand trust. Only 47 percent of respondents consider brands trustworthy (Havas Group, 2021). KPMG (2020) also sees a decline in brand trust through the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is centrally driven by personal (in)security. An increasingly cynical consumer, product recalls, or corporate interests being placed above consumer needs or poor services are only selected examples of the drivers of this development (Lantieri & Chiagouris, 2009).

In the last ten years, search engines, traditional media and social media have suffered a loss of trust. Only the owned media have maintained their trust level. "News sources fail to fix their trust problems." (Edelman, 2022, p. 7) A modern crisis of trust in a digital society can be stated (Ryan, 2019). Reputation is also in free fall (van Dyck, 2014).

3.3. *Smartness for Autonomous Relationship Management*

The trust crisis means a call for smart PR management and the potential for increasing internal acceptance of PR 3.0. When the smartphone is interpreted as a symbol of smart management, "smart" means intelligent, networked, and autonomous management with recourse to digital systems (Tomiyaama T. et al. 2019). In this context, Big Data, artificial intelligence, and real-time analytics improve smartness as decision quality by ideally delegating the control of decisions completely to machines (Fleisch, E., Christ, O., & Dierkes, M. 2005). For digitization to lead to smartness, a four-stage process is outlined (Davenport & Kirby, 2016):

3.3.1. *Stage 1*

The first stage focuses on supporting management in decision-making. Business intelligence and big data analytics are used accordingly by collecting, evaluating, interpreting, and visualizing data to make decisions. Artificial intelligence supports brand management in segmentation, targeting, and brand positioning, for example (Huang & Rust, 2021). Social listening and sentiment analysis are popular examples of this stage. Hence, big data and PR management are designed to become reputation intelligence (McKie & Heath, 2016).

3.3.2. *Stage 2*

Here, automated decision-making takes place in structured contexts. Within PR, examples for this stage are still rare – and risky for reputation. As already mentioned, relations require human-like interactions, which are not easy

to digitize. Nevertheless, this is already taking place to manage relations within the crisis. Tools can help to understand the evolution of crisis communication and how to manage the flow of communication (van der Meer, 2016). Also, in marketing, examples can be found, for example, with programmatic advertising, which is also relevant for PR regarding brand-appropriate advertising. The research field of brand safety, i.e., the open questions about the brand-appropriate payout of advertising, also shows the early stage of smartness. It is not yet able to recognize the extent to which certain media are brand-appropriate or not. Nevertheless, PR controlling and sentiment analysis are already practiced (Galloway & Swiatek 2018). This is where automated relationship maintenance evolves.

3.3.3. *Stage 3*

Context awareness and (self-)learning capabilities exist here. Social media mining, for example, enables corporate brand management to recognize the context in real-time in times of online firestorms. Thus, AI also supports crisis communications with automated tools. They are used to identify crises and recommend appropriate organisational responses (Bourne, 2022). Travel providers such as Kayak, for example, currently advertise that their offers will indicate whether the summer holiday will be more expensive or cheaper with price trends for the coming days. Another area of research is data-driven logo design for brand development, which typically evolves as optimized logos (Dew et al. 2021).

3.3.4. *Stage 4*

This stage is fiction so far. It is characterized by self-awareness and the ability to make independent decisions. Artificial Intelligence and Big Data enable the self-learning synthesis of return-optimizing performance marketing and experience-optimizing customer values. For example, they would have to intervene automatically in production, purchasing or logistics if purpose-oriented brand management envisages the implementation of green brand goals. This would be the precondition for behavioural branding with automatized critical green stakeholder debates within social media. Also, blockchain technologies which decide autonomously to exclude opinion-manipulating bots belong to this stage. These examples mean idealized smart PR to maintain relationships and digital trust.

The current status of smartisation shows that digitization and smartisation are different. The digital trust crisis showcases this. Smartness today depends on both digitized systems and digitality, i.e., a culture that positively influences digitalization and is influenced by it. This emphasizes the contemporary meaning of PR 5.0 for digital relationship management, which applies smart PR technologies.

3.4. PR 5.0: Zero Trust

Digitalization and digitality are increasing the pressure for PR 5.0 to become an era of digital trust management. If trust is an important target dimension of PR, digitalization as a “post-truth” era also means a digital PR management crisis. A reset and remarkable enhancement of digital trust management is required, for which smart PR technologies can serve. Digital trust addresses digital risk across data, cloud, artificial intelligence, data analytics, and risk culture (McKinsey, 2022). Digital trust is based on at least three pillars to revitalize trust within (digital) relationships:

- Digital technologies make companies resilient to cyber attacks, radically reducing the risks of data theft and digital kidnapping.
- Digital technologies that preclude external abuse, such as blockchains.
- Digitality that culturally secures corporate data and IT governance.

One conceptual approach to revitalize trust is the "zero trust architecture": In a zero trust architecture, digitization is treated as hostile. Confidence has to be gained through the authentication, verification and authorization of users, devices and services. "Zero Trust" follows the principle: "Never trust, always verify." (Wylde, 2021, p. 1) Zero trust views identity as the start of the verification process. Trust flows from identity, device state and context (Wylde, 2021). Zero trust is viewed as a reset of digital trust management driven in an era of PR 5.0.

Higher security is seen in decentralized applications, so blockchain technology is widely analysed and discussed as a trusted technology (Boukis, 2019). Blockchain technologies, in practice, provide an opportunity to develop relationships between people personally unknown to each other (Sannikova &Kharitonova, 2019) and establish a tangible strategy to regain trust. Blockchain technologies are currently among the most popular in this regard. Blockchains are sometimes referred to as "trust machines" (Ogilvy, Consulting 2022). Blockchain is based on a peer-to-peer architecture. Data is distributed to all nodes in the network. In this way, information becomes virtually unassailable, as it is no longer in the hands of a single operator but distributed to all participants in the network. At the same time, decentralization ensures the immutability of the blockchain, which is considered tamper-proof. This would be an approach to prevent fake accounts (Freni et al., 2020). Digital rumours in social media are just one development that a blockchain-based trust development counteracts (Chen et al., 2018). Also, brand safety is already an area of research to avoid automated placement in undesirable brand environments. A blockchain-based notary service for social media would contribute to data integrity (Song et al., 2015). In part, blockchains are conceived as trust repair ("trust

repair theories") as they attempt to compensate for the incentives of illegitimate and illicit digitality. Trust technologies are supposed to regain a trustworthy digital environment (see tab.)

Table 2. Selected contributions of smart PR. Sources

PR field of action	Smart Improvements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data protection 	The secure handling on the part of companies with personal data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fake accounts • Fake news • Fake relationships 	Social media users who post content must log into a blockchain. The blockchain can track every post (which may be anonymous for the users)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsletter/ Advertising: 	Users register via opt-in for newsletters/advertisements that interest them. From then on, they will only receive these advertisements.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand safety 	Only certified digital media have access to advertising auction platforms, ensuring a brand-appropriate environment for the automated placement of advertising.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainability 	Many brands have the problem that they do not know in detail whether selected suppliers meet sustainability standards. A blockchain with certified and verified suppliers makes it easier for companies and their customers to select and establish sustainably producing supply chains.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supply chain 	The traceability of the supply chain up to and including its sources so that the stakeholders receive verified and non-manipulable information about the origin and processing of a particular product.

Sources: Cision (2019), Urbach (2020).

4. Conclusion: PR 5.0 as a Reset of Digitalized Reputation and Trust Management

This contribution asks (1) what the delineation of PR stages could be and (2) what smart PR is. As mentioned in the introduction, PR is constantly evolving. The phases PR 1.0 to 4.0 have been marked by the impact of characteristics from the PR industry. From today's perspective, the best quality contribution digital PR can make in the crisis of trust is to use outstanding trust technologies beyond its dialogic-co-creative competency. Despite this, the digital age has been characterised as an era of a crisis of trust in brands.

Therefore, it is time for the reset of PR. PR 5.0 means digital relationship management, which applies highly developed smart PR technologies. PR 5.0 is a digital trust offensive. With its dialogue and co-creative competencies, the current digital transformation plays into the hands of PR management. Hence, PR is conceptually a good way to support companies in their digital-agile worlds.

PR 5.0 can contribute to an increasing corporate internal acceptance of PR. It relies on a resilient top management mandate, accompanied by integrated trust management based on digital technologies with the highest security standards. This digital reset phase would bring the PR 5.0 debate back to its starting point: back to protecting the initial requirements of trust and reputation management, bringing inspiration through authentic brands which become used to

operating with agility. Agility is today and has always been an important PR competence if it constantly incorporates stakeholder demands as a dialogic-interactive communication function. At first glance, PR seems to be anything but agile. Neither relationship management nor trust and reputation management are designed for speed or flexibility.

On the contrary, relationship building is closely tied to trust building, which takes time. This first glance is deceptive, however, because the technical real-time potential has led to social real-time expectations and requirements, especially for digital brands. Response times are an indicator of trust. The conversation dynamics are not contradictory but a precondition for sustainable relations. Moreover, the forming of opinions has always been dynamic.

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